

# 1917

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

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## *Imperialist Crimes & Machinations* **Middle East Upheaval**

The strategic defeats suffered by the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq have strengthened the position of Iran's ruling theocrats, who have gained an important ally in Shia-dominated Iraq on their eastern border, while increasing their influence in Afghanistan to the west. Alarmed at

this development, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other U.S. clients among the Persian Gulf emirates are engaged in a concerted effort to roll back Iran by providing funding and logistical support to jihadi insurgencies in Syria (a key Iranian ally), as well as in Iraq and Lebanon. Washington's other cronies

LA TIMES



**U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton salutes Libyan 'revolution,' October 2011**

in the Middle East, including the rulers of Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Israel, are broadly supportive of the Saudi-led efforts.

American policy in the region is ambivalent, dislocated and frequently incoherent, mixing bellicose threats with diplomatic negotiations with both Syria and Iran. Chastened by the economic and political fallout from its earlier failures, Washington seeks to supplement the application of raw military power with political alliances and maneuvers. Undoubtedly, this is related to the "intervention fatigue" gripping the majority of Americans, who oppose expensive neocolonial wars abroad while living standards decline at home.

After nearly intervening in Syria's civil war in August 2013, the U.S. pulled back as part of a Russian-brokered deal in exchange for the Baathist government agreeing to turn over its chemical weapons. This was followed up with an interim accord with Tehran to negotiate conditions for the future development of Iran's civilian nuclear power program. American policy on Iran and Syria remains conflicted—and there is a real debate within the U.S. ruling class between those advocating direct military intervention, and others who fear the considerable risks associated with such an assault and see substantial benefits in arriving at an arrangement with Iran. Robert Gates, who served as defense secretary in both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, has publicly stated that in his view an attack on Iran could "prove catastrophic, haunting us for generations in that part of the world" (*Virginian-Pilot*, 4 October 2012).

*The following is an edited and expanded version of a talk given by Tom Riley at an IBT public meeting in Toronto on 4 October 2013.*

It's been a month of dramatic developments in the Middle East. What looked like a near-certain American intervention in Syria's civil war a few weeks ago, seems to have turned into a U.S.-Russian brokered deal to rid the country of chemical weapons. The rationale for the projected U.S. attack was the claim that the Syrian government had used sarin gas in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus on 21 August [2013]. The "rebels," who had suffered a series of reversals at the hands of the regime, stood to gain a great deal from an American military intervention, and there is some evidence they may actually have been responsible for the gas attack.<sup>1</sup>

While it is not clear what really happened in Ghouta, it is obvious that the hue and cry over chemical weapons was essentially a cover for military intervention to prop up Assad's opponents. It is also obvious that opposition by an overwhelming majority of Americans to any new military adventures in the Middle East was an important factor in Obama's decision to call off the threatened bombing campaign. Despite frantic efforts by the corporate media propaganda apparatus to create fear of another tin-pot "Hitler," the needle of popular opinion did not budge. As Abraham Lincoln once observed, "you can't fool all the people all the time."

There is now talk of a possible thaw in U.S.-Iranian relations for the first time in 35 years (since the 1978-79 Islamic Revolution that toppled Shah Reza Pahlavi, a key American ally). But despite a few conciliatory phrases, in his 25 September [2013] remarks at the UN, Obama bluntly asserted: "The United States of America is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure our

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## 1917

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# Human Emancipation & the Materialist Conception of History

## Communism & Ecology



NO CREDIT

Reprinted below is the text of an IBT presentation to a panel discussion on capital, history and ecology held by the Platypus group at York University, Toronto, on 15 January.

The struggle for human emancipation in the “Anthropocene,” the geologic epoch distinguished by the impact of civilization on the natural environment, is inextricably bound up with the project of establishing an egalitarian and ecologically sustainable economic order. In seeking to understand the evolution of human society and the possibility of realizing this new order, i.e., communism, Marx developed the materialist conception of history.

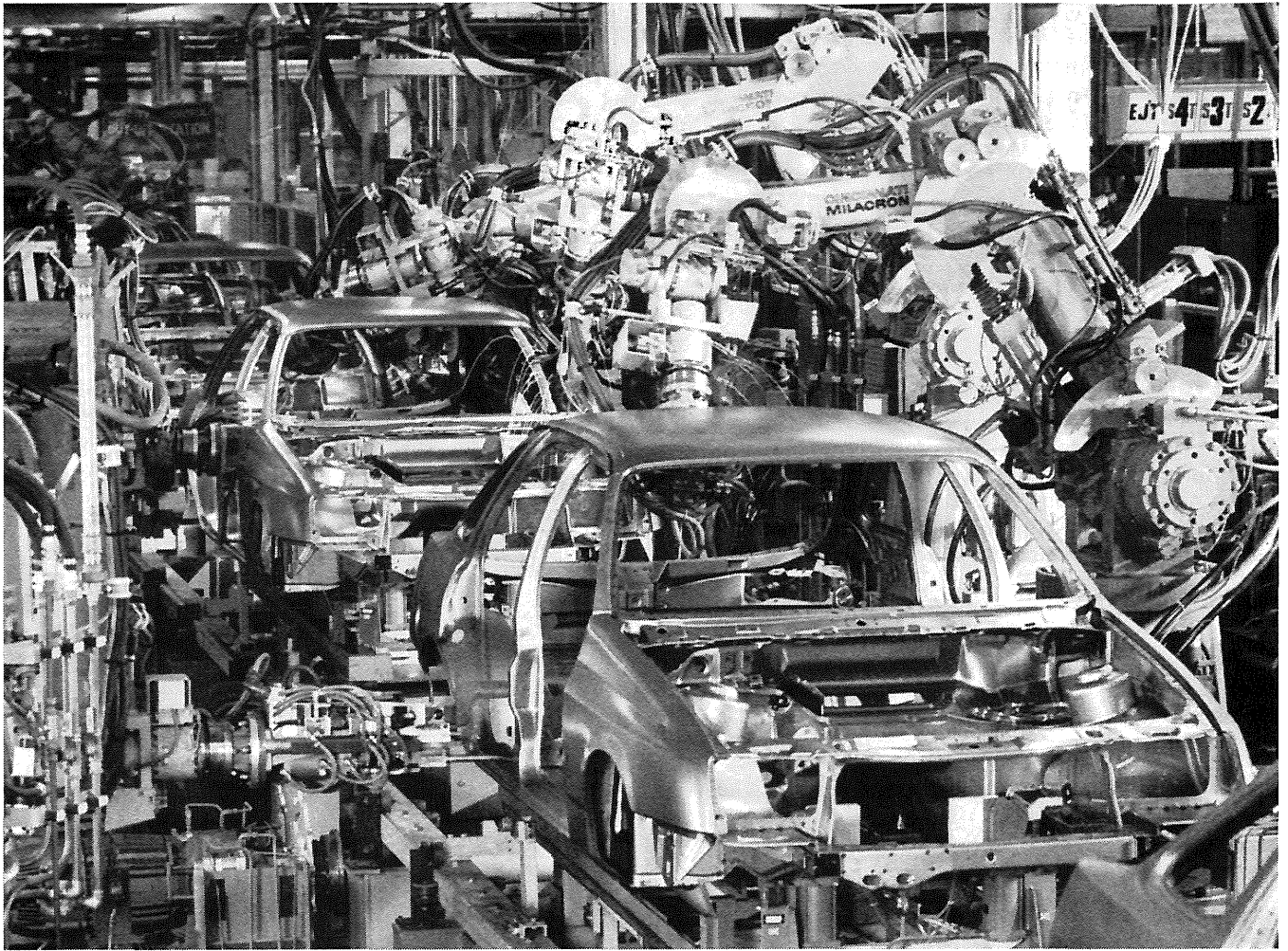
Marx did not engage in a moralistic denunciation of exploitation and human bondage in the abstract. Oppression is as old as class-divided society itself, and its historical origins have been addressed by theologians and idealist philosophers—but until Marx, no one was able to explain the material and social foundations of the appearance, persistence and eventual disappearance of class divisions.

Key to the materialist conception of history, and the practical project of transcending class society, is the concept of the *forces of production*. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and

Engels observed that humanity, at a certain stage in its evolution, began to *produce* its means of subsistence. Other animals do this to a limited extent, but production has fundamentally shaped our species.

Production is essentially the transformation of natural objects by human activity into useful things, aka use-values, or “wealth.” As such, it can be considered a process of “material exchange” or conversion occurring *within* nature. Momentum is generated in the first instance through the dialectical antagonism between the two sides of the exchange, i.e., humanity and the rest of nature. In his useful (albeit flawed) book, *Marx’s Ecology*, John Bellamy Foster correctly stresses the centrality of this concept of material exchange—or human-nature “metabolism”—to Marx’s materialism, and cites his important observation in *Capital* that “Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature.”

The “metabolic” conversion of matter by human labor requires means of production. Combined with technique, labor power and forms of organization, these means of



KEYSTONE—HULTON ARCHIVE—GETTY IMAGES

### Capitalist mode of production: enormous technical capacity & profound social irrationality

production are the basis of Marx's concept of the productive forces, i.e., human capacities to transform nature. The speed, efficiency, form and purpose of the metabolic conversion, as well as its ultimate sustainability, are dependent on the complex interplay of the forces and social relations of production that together constitute historically distinct modes of production.

The history of the progress of human civilization, Marx argued in 1859, can be traced in the development of the forces of production through successive modes of production. "Primitive communism," humanity's initial mode of production, was essentially egalitarian in structure and its distribution of social wealth. But this was an "equality of poverty," because the "primitive" productive forces yielded little more than basic subsistence, and humans therefore remained hostage to the vagaries of nature.

While the causes of the transition to class society remain obscure, it is clear that the material foundation of class division—with the attendant gender inequality and other forms of servitude—was the development of productive forces to the point that it was possible for a tiny privileged section of the population to exist without directly participating in production.

Henceforth the drive to enhance labor productivity—or to increase the efficiency of the human-nature metabolism—was mediated by non-egalitarian social relations.

Beyond the need to "master" the forces of nature in order to protect the community from predators and other dangers, a social imperative to develop the productive forces had also been introduced insofar as the ruling stratum sought to increase its wealth at the expense of the laboring majority, the "direct producers." While this social imperative was deforming (and frequently counterproductive), the historically changing class-based logics of surplus appropriation nonetheless led to the progressive, if non-linear, augmentation of human capacities through what Marx described as the "Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production."

Capitalism, more than any previous class-divided mode of production, has enormously accelerated the development of the material forces of production, but it has done so not to expand the quantities of use-values, but in order to maximize profit—with complete disregard for "wealth," including the natural environment. Foster, following Marx, argues that the logic of capitalism (which is essentially anarchic and led by "blind" economic forces operating "behind the backs" of human beings) is detached from the material-human world on which it ultimately rests—leading to metabolic or ecological "rifts" through the same social process that Marx described as the self-alienation of labor.

Capitalism has taken alienation, exploitation and inequal-

ity to unprecedented heights while providing humanity for the first time with the possibility of eliminating these scourges through a fundamental reorganization of the social relations of production. In Marx's words, capitalism has "create[d] the material conditions for the solution" of social antagonisms. While widening ecological rifts to an extremely dangerous extent, and thereby imperiling the very foundations of human existence, capitalism has also "created the material conditions" to repair those rifts, if the bourgeois mode of production can be eliminated before it destroys the environmental preconditions for human life on Earth.

## Ecology, 'Growth' & the Transition to Communism

Marxism provides a guide for the historical transformation of society through struggling for changes that both initiate the transition to communism and anticipate its early stages. In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx brilliantly sketches a transitional period between capitalism and the lower phase of communism, which Lenin and others characterized as "socialism," during which society will still be "economically, morally and intellectually... stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges." Nevertheless, the collective ownership of the means of production will represent a fundamental transformation in the economic foundations of society, vastly enhancing humanity's capacity to control nature.

Capitalism is enormously wasteful, all the more so in the epoch of its decline, with an increasing proportion of human activity devoted to financial speculation, marketing, military expenditures and other irrational overheads that the "free market" requires. The reorganization of economic activity on the basis of a rational plan would immediately increase efficiency, reduce waste and dramatically improve the lives, and tap the energy and ability, of the billions of human beings whom capitalism has consigned to hopeless poverty and privation.

Marx projected that the continuing development of the socialist mode of production would ultimately result in full communism—i.e., a classless, stateless order—in which society will "inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" Yet as Marx explains in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, this will only happen "after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly." The further *growth* of the productive forces is required to establish the material basis for the transition to communism. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels explain that to transcend the alienation of class society, the "development of productive forces... is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it *want* is merely made general, and with *destitution* the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced."


Many self-styled Marxists (including Foster) advocate a "steady-state economy," and some even echo petty-bourgeois environmentalist calls for "de-growth." These perspectives are premised on the notion that the ecological destruction wrought by capitalism is a product of growth *per se*, rather than the consequence of the pursuit of profit

maximization and the anarchic character of production under capitalism. Like Foster, many socialist groups tailor their treatment of sustainable development to the anti-technological and anti-growth prejudices of the green activists they seek to recruit.

Capitalism has of course developed the productive forces without regard for ensuring the well-being of our species and its ability to co-exist with the natural environment. But even some of the more dangerous technologies and practices (such as nuclear fission) might be adapted to contribute to humane, sustainable development in a rationally planned economy in which the "associated producers" factor in the environmental effects of particular technologies in their decision-making.

Anti-growth advocates generally reject the expansion of productive capacity on essentially moral grounds. Some environmentalists even favor a return to more primitive economic models and propose that the population of the advanced capitalist countries lower their standard of living while those in the "developing" world should curb their expectations. Such notions are both reactionary and utopian, and have nothing in common with Marxism, which holds that only through the further development of the productive forces will it be possible to eliminate class contradictions and the unregulated, destructive interaction of humanity and nature.

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx described communism as "the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the



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individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution."

### **Proletarian Centrality & Revolutionary Organization**

The historical agency for communist transformation is the proletariat—"a class with *radical chains*." In order to liberate itself from these chains, Marx observed, the working class has no choice but to collectivize private property and reorder the relations of production in an egalitarian and democratic manner. Insofar as there is an identity between communism and environmentally sustainable development, a political project capable of effectively addressing ecological crises must have as its goal the seizure of power by the working class and the imposition of what Marx called "*the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*."

Yet many present-day admirers of Marx, and virtually all green activists, view this perspective as hopelessly naïve, if not outdated or even dangerous. While more pro-working class environmentalists sometimes put forward hazy calls for labor to take up the cause of sustainable growth, others are indifferent or even hostile toward working people, whom they disdain as myopic conspicuous consumers interested in maintaining the polluting factories, mines, refineries, etc., in which they work. What is necessary is an approach that links strategies to redress environmental crises and the growth of social inequality on the one hand to a perspective of the socialist reorganization of society on the other.

This requires organization—a revolutionary party capa-

ble of leading the working class and other oppressed layers to fight for state power. Building such a party must center on winning mass support for a revolutionary *program*, i.e., a set of demands that constitute a basis of practical struggle to guide the spontaneous movements of the workers and oppressed in the direction of overturning the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and creating a new type of state based on democratic working-class institutions.

It has to be acknowledged that, with very few exceptions, even the best exponents of the Marxist tradition have paid relatively scant attention to environmental problems. In recent years the scope of ecological catastrophe has become obvious with an unambiguous consensus within the scientific community on the implications of anthropogenic climate change. Yet some self-described Marxists continue to downplay the dangers out of a misguided desire not to adapt politically to petty-bourgeois environmentalism.

Unlike mainstream climate activists, Marxists reject the idea that capitalism can be incrementally transformed into an eco-friendly system. This is not to say that revolutionaries should be indifferent to particular instances of ecological degradation—it is necessary to be actively involved in struggles to resist corporate destruction of the environment. Yet the chief responsibility of Marxists is to attempt to popularize the understanding that such destruction is a manifestation of the profound irrationality of the capitalist mode of production.

The necessity of the revolutionary transformation of society through working-class revolution has never been more urgent. Marxism offers the only realistic chance our species has for survival, because, in the end, the problems of human freedom and sustainable economic development are inseparably intertwined: both require the expropriation of the expropriators and the creation of a rationally-planned socialist economy on a world scale. ■

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# Middle East...

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core interests in the region [Middle East]." The "core interests" were also spelled out: "We will ensure the free flow of energy from the region to the world." The concern about "freely flowing" energy has not prevented the U.S. from imposing harsh sanctions to choke off Iranian oil exports, because by "free flow" Obama meant under the control of the "Free World," i.e., American oil corporations.

## Middle East Oil: 'Stupendous Source of Strategic Power'

The political situation in the Middle East is both complicated and somewhat fluid. There are many players, all pursuing different agendas, and their alignments shift as events develop. It can be very confusing for anyone expecting to find a simple, straight line, narrative. But by taking a long view of developments and "following the money," an underlying pattern can be discerned.

Ever since the successful commercial application of the internal combustion engine over a century ago, the history of the Middle East has been shaped by the struggle of foreign powers to assert their "right" to exploit the region's vast energy resources. In carving up the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Britain and France took care to draw the borders of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon across communal lines so that it would be easier to "divide and rule" their colonial subjects. A decade-and-a-half later, in 1933, the creation of Aramco (the Arabian-American Oil Company), in a deal between a consortium of American oil corporations and the Saudi monarchy, marked the arrival of the U.S. as a significant player in the region.

At the dawn of the "American Century" after World War II, a U.S. State Department strategist described Middle East petroleum as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history" (cited in Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*). This aptly encapsulated both sides of the equation—not only is the oil wealth of the Middle East an enormous "material prize" in itself, but the ability of British and U.S. imperialists to control access to it has long conveyed a "stupendous" strategic advantage over potential rivals, particularly Japan and Germany.

American Middle East policy in the 1950s and 60s, which was shaped by the Cold War competition with the Soviet degenerated workers' state, frequently involved the suppression of popular left-nationalist movements. The natural allies of the "Free World" in the region tended to be conservative monarchies and traditionalist Islamists. As a rule, the U.S. only assumed an "anti-colonial" stance in relation to "liberating" British and French possessions.

In 1951, when Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq nationalized the holdings of Anglo-Iranian Oil (today British Petroleum—BP), Washington warned London not to intervene. Mossadeq soon fell out of favor, however, by refusing access to U.S. oil corporations. "Regime change" usually requires local allies, and Ayatollah Seyyed Abolqassem Kashani, who was aligned with the Devotees of Islam (an underground group opposed to Mossadeq's modernization program), played a key role in the successful 1953 coup organized by the CIA, which restored the rule of the Pahlavi monarchy.<sup>2</sup> Once Mossadeq was deposed, the nationalizations were reversed, but instead of restoring a British monopoly, 40 percent of Iran's oil was assigned to U.S. corporations.<sup>3</sup>

This coup had been preceded by a less successful intervention in Syria four years earlier. The 1949 Syrian coup, which was the CIA's first attempt at "regime change" intervention, was occasioned by resistance to Aramco's plans to ship Saudi oil to the Mediterranean via a "Trans-Arabian Pipeline." The governments of Jordan and Lebanon had signed on, but the Syrians balked. According to Douglas Little, declassified U.S. records show that "beginning on November 30, 1948, [CIA operative Stephen] Meade met secretly with [Syrian Army Chief of Staff] Colonel [Husni] Zaim at least six times to discuss the 'possibility (of an) army supported dictatorship'" ("Cold War and Covert Action," *Middle East Journal*, Winter 1990).

Zaim seized power in March 1949 and managed to approve

1 In April 2013, Carla Del Ponte, a former chief prosecutor at two international criminal law tribunals and a member of a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into allegations of earlier chemical weapons use in Syria, reported on returning from that country: "I was a little bit stupefied by the first indications we got... they were about the use of nerve gas by the opposition" (BBC News, 6 May 2013). The next month, Turkish police arrested a group of people working on behalf of two Syrian rebel groups (the Al Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham Brigades), six of whom were subsequently indicted for "seeking to buy materials that could be used to produce highly toxic sarin gas" (*LA Times*, 13 September 2013).

German intelligence reported that Assad had personally "blocked numerous requests from his military commanders to use chemical weapons against regime opponents in recent months" (*Guardian*, 9 September 2013). Even the CIA-connected Stratfor think-tank observed that it made no sense for the government to carry out such an attack on the very day that UN inspectors were arriving in Syria.

On 10 September 2013, military.com, a website run by Admiral Terry "T" McCrear (who had been both Chief of Naval Information and a member of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff), posted the following from MintPress News:

"The report, based on interviews with residents and rebels in Ghouta, a Damascus suburb where hundreds have allegedly died from sarin exposure on Aug. 21, quoted locals who said the chemical was released accidentally by rebels who acquired it from Saudi Arabia.

"The father of one rebel said his son and 12 others died inside a tunnel they were using to store weapons, including some described as 'tube-like' and others looking like a 'huge gas bottle.'"

2 There is a certain historical irony in the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been mentored by Kashani (his godfather) during the CIA-directed campaign against Mossadeq, and continued working alongside the Devotees of Islam and its successors, eventually emerged as the leader of a mass reactionary movement that deposed the pro-American Shah and reversed his modernizing "White Revolution."

3 By the late 1970s, the model for imperial control of the Middle East had evolved from old fashioned colonialism (where imperialist corporations held title to the assets outright) to a "neocolonial" model. The Saudis and other Gulf monarchies had nominally "nationalized" their oil holdings—and received a substantial cut of the immense profits—but the imperialist multinationals were in charge of production, which meant that the U.S. and its allies effectively controlled the Middle East and its resources.

Aramco's pipeline and ban the Syrian Communist Party before he himself was overthrown a few months later. This was the first of several unsuccessful U.S. attempts to install a more pliable regime in Damascus, the net effect of which was to push Syria into an increasingly tight alliance with the USSR. During the 1960s, the Soviets helped train the Baathist military and security cadres under Hafez al-Assad (Bashir's father), and Russia remains Syria's main international political ally to this day.

Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1978-79, which caught the U.S. by surprise, not only removed the Shah—an important American client and regional enforcer—but also expropriated the holdings of the U.S. oil corporations. Reversing the Islamic Revolution has been a top priority for Washington policy-makers ever since. American hostility to the Assad regime, supposedly motivated by humanitarian concern for Syrian civilians and outrage at the purported use of chemical weapons, in fact derives primarily from Syria's strategic value to the Islamic Republic of Iran as a regional ally and land bridge to Hezbollah, the Shia resistance movement that dominates Lebanese political life.

During the 1980s, the U.S. and its allies armed and financed Saddam Hussein's eight-year war with Iran. America (and Britain) supplied Iraq with the ingredients for chemical weapons, which were used first against the Iranians, and subsequently against rebellious Kurds in Northern Iraq. Years later the cynical imperialist spin masters rationalized the invasion of Iraq as necessitated by the use of the very "weapons of mass destruction" they had earlier supplied.<sup>4</sup>

### 'Responsibility to Protect'

In the aftermath of World War II, a few hundred senior Nazis were tried in Nuremberg for war crimes—specifically for "aggression," i.e., launching unprovoked attacks on other countries. In the judgment condemning some of Hitler's more prominent henchmen to hang, this offense was described as "the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."

This was duly incorporated as a fundamental in the charter of the United Nations. But today the "supreme international crime" of unprovoked aggression against a sovereign state has been redefined by the ideologues of imperialism who now assert that a supposed "responsibility to protect" (RtoP) must take precedence. Ironically enough, this is the very principle invoked by Hitler in 1938 to justify the annexation of the Sudetenland, the first step

in the takeover of Czechoslovakia. "RtoP" provides a conveniently open-ended justification for imperialist powers whacking weaker states when it suits them, although of course this "responsibility" is invoked very selectively. The outrage expressed by Western politicians over the fate of Syrian or Iranian dissidents does not extend to Palestinian victims of Israeli apartheid, or Shia demonstrators gunned down in Bahrain, or female rape victims in Saudi Arabia punished for being "immodest."

The "RtoP" doctrine is a reassertion of the traditional imperialist "right to plunder" where and when they choose. It is a direct consequence of the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers' state which, throughout the Cold War, acted as a powerful global counterweight to imperialism. The triumph of capitalist counterrevolution, which resulted in plummeting life expectancy and living standards in the former Soviet bloc, facilitated growing inequality in the "advanced" capitalist countries and opened the door for a wave of attacks on "rogue" neocolonial regimes previously aligned with the USSR. The first of these was the 1991 "Desert Storm" invasion of Iraq.

In 2007, former NATO Supreme Commander General Wesley Clark gave a speech in which he recalled a 1991 conversation with Paul Wolfowitz (then U.S. undersecretary of defense), who drew the following lesson from "Desert Storm":

"We learned that we can use our military in the region, in the Middle East, and the Soviets won't stop us.' He said, 'And we've got about five or ten years to clean up those old Soviet client regimes—Syria, Iran, Iraq—before the next great superpower comes along to challenge us.'"

—[www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=TY2DKzastu8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=TY2DKzastu8)

By 2001, the "clean up" list had grown to seven, as Clark recounted in his 2003 book, *Winning Modern Wars*:

"As I went back through the Pentagon in November 2001, one of the senior military staff officers had time for a chat. Yes, we were still on track for going against Iraq, he said. But there was more. This was being discussed as part of a five-year campaign plan, he said, and there were a total of seven countries, beginning with Iraq, then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Iran, Somalia and Sudan."

So far, two countries on the list (Iraq and Libya) have been subjected to the horrors of "humanitarian" imperialist military intervention. In both cases their social and economic infrastructures have been seriously damaged with devastating consequences for millions of civilians. Syria,

<sup>4</sup> The role of the Pentagon in providing chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein's regime has been well established:

"As documented in 2002 by *Washington Post* reporter Michael Dobbs, the Reagan administration knew full well it was selling materials to Iraq that was [sic] being used for the manufacture of chemical weapons, and that Iraq was using such weapons, but U.S. officials were more concerned about whether Iran would win rather than how Iraq might eke out a victory."

"In 1988, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein ordered chemical weapons attacks against Kurdish resistance forces, but the relationship with Iraq at the time was deemed too important to rupture over the matter. The United States did not even

impose sanctions.

"Without much apparent irony, two decades later Rumsfeld and other members of the then George W. Bush administration repeatedly cited Hussein's use of chemical weapons against [his] own people as a justification for invading Iraq."

—*Washington Post*, 4 September 2013

<sup>5</sup> In an interview with the *Daily Beast* (6 September 2013) Wolfowitz supported Obama's projected bombing campaign on the grounds that it would improve America's leverage in the region because the rebel cause "has more sympathy across the Arab world than even the Arab-Israeli issue....We should support Israel, but we pay a price for it. We should be supporting the Syrian opposition, but we would not pay a price for it; we would be rewarded for it."





KARAM AL-MASRI—AFP PHOTO

### Jihadist Al-Nusra Front calling for Islamic state in Syria, Aleppo, 25 October 2013

which has been in the Pentagon's crosshairs since at least 1991, was supposed to be the third in the series.<sup>5</sup>

In 2006, when Israel invaded Lebanon in a failed attempt to smash Hezbollah, the *Jerusalem Post* (30 July 2006) reported that Tel Aviv was "receiving indications from the US that America would be interested in seeing Israel attack Syria." The Israelis, who already had their hands full, rejected the idea, and some described it as "nuts." In fact, after retreating from Lebanon, Israel's ministers of internal security and defense proposed peace talks with Syria. This was not received well in Washington:

"when Israeli officials asked Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice about pursuing exploratory talks with Syria, her answer, according to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, was, 'don't even think about it'."

—*Foreign Policy in Focus*, 1 May 2007

The Israeli ruling class, which generally favors a U.S. military attack on Iran, is far less enthusiastic about overturning Assad, as it could well turn Syria into a "center of global jihad," as Aviv Kochavi, head of Israeli military intelligence, put it (*Haaretz*, 24 July 2013). Michael Morell, the retiring deputy director of the CIA, expressed similar concerns, and in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* (6 August 2013) "warned that Syria's volatile mix of al Qaeda extremism and civil war now poses the greatest threat to U.S. national security."

### 2007: U.S. 'Redirection' in Iraq

"Al Qaeda extremism" began in the early 1980s as a joint enterprise by Washington and Riyadh to train, equip and transport a foreign legion of *jihadis* to fight the Soviets and their left-nationalist allies in Afghanistan. Among the original recruits to this venture was a wealthy young Saudi named Osama bin Laden—al Qaeda's future leader.

The 2003 conquest of Iraq was aimed at establishing direct American military control of the Middle East. It was a risky undertaking, and of course, it backfired in a rather spectacular fashion. Having destroyed the only Arab military in the region that could go toe-to-toe with Iran—the chief obstacle to U.S. domination of the Middle East—Pentagon strategists presumed that Iraq's Shia majority, long oppressed by Saddam Hussein's Sunni-based regime, would greet the invaders as liberators and eagerly enlist as foot soldiers. Instead, Iraq's Shia leadership chose rapprochement with the neighboring Iranian Islamic Republic.

From 2003 to 2006, the U.S. occupation faced furious and effective military resistance from the Sunnis—both secular-nationalist Baathists and Islamist *jihadis*. They were also confronted by important elements of the Shia majority—in particular the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, a militant cleric whose vision of an "Islamic Democracy" did not include collaboration with the occupiers. In April

2004, when U.S. Marines assaulted Fallujah, the center of Sunni resistance, Sadr's "Mahdi Army" engaged occupation forces in the south while other Shia militants travelled to Falluja to aid the Sunni fighters. This solidarity across communal lines dismayed American field commanders, who had banked on a strategy of "divide and rule":

"The Falluja situation represents an emerging level of Shiite-Sunni cooperation unheard of in the year-old occupation and maybe even the modern history of Iraq.... When American soldiers invaded the country a year ago, preventing a civil war between Shiites, who make up the majority, and Sunnis, who used to hold all the power, was one of the Bush administration's chief concerns.

"But now that the resistance is heating up, spreading from town to town, the Sunnis and Shiites are drawing together. American military leaders say they have been watching closely.

"The danger is we believe there is a linkage that may be occurring at the very lowest levels between the Sunni and Shi'a," Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of the occupation forces, said today. "We have to work very hard to ensure that it remains at the tactical level."

—*New York Times*, 8 April 2004

After several years of unsuccessful attempts to overcome stubborn Sunni resistance, U.S. strategists, alarmed by growing Iranian influence in the region, executed an abrupt U-turn, as veteran American journalist Seymour Hersh described:

"To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the Administration has cooperated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shiite organization that is backed by Iran. The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.

"One contradictory aspect of the new strategy is that, in Iraq, most of the insurgent violence directed at the American military has come from Sunni forces, and not from Shiites. But, from the Administration's perspective, the most profound—and unintended—strategic consequence of the Iraq war is the empowerment of Iran."

—*New Yorker*, 5 March 2007

6 Hersh's account is broadly corroborated by "Unfolding the Future of the Long War—Motivations, Prospects, and Implications for the U.S. Army," a 2008 study commissioned by the U.S. Army from the RAND Corporation. A subsection entitled, "Divide and Rule," touched on the potential opportunities posed by sectarian divisions: "U.S. leaders could also choose to capitalize on the 'Sustained Shia-Sunni Conflict' trajectory by taking the side of the conservative Sunni regimes against Shiite empowerment movements in the Muslim world." A few pages later there is a discussion of how the role of the military would vary, depending on whether the objective was to stoke, or tamp down, Sunni/Shiite communalist hostilities:

"If the United States attempts to exploit the conflict to avoid having to confront a united Islamic world (possibly a very unwise strategy), then there will be little role for the Army. The exception would be the FID [foreign internal defense]

The Saudis were entrusted with arranging many of the practical details of the turn. This provided "plausible deniability" for both the Pentagon and the holy warriors, neither of whom could afford to be seen as collaborating with the other.<sup>6</sup>

As usual, Washington was assisted in its clandestine efforts against Tehran and Damascus by its faithful British sidekick. In June 2013, Roland Dumas, the former foreign minister of France, told French television viewers that he had been informed in 2009 that Britain was training Syrian fighters:

"I went to England almost two years before the start of hostilities in Syria. I was there by chance on another business, not at all for Syria. British officials, some of whom are friends of mine, they confessed while trying to persuade me that preparations for something were underway in Syria. This was in England, not in the U.S. Britain was preparing gunmen to invade Syria....

"I just need to say that this operation goes way back. It was prepared, conceived and planned....for the purpose of overthrowing the Syrian government."

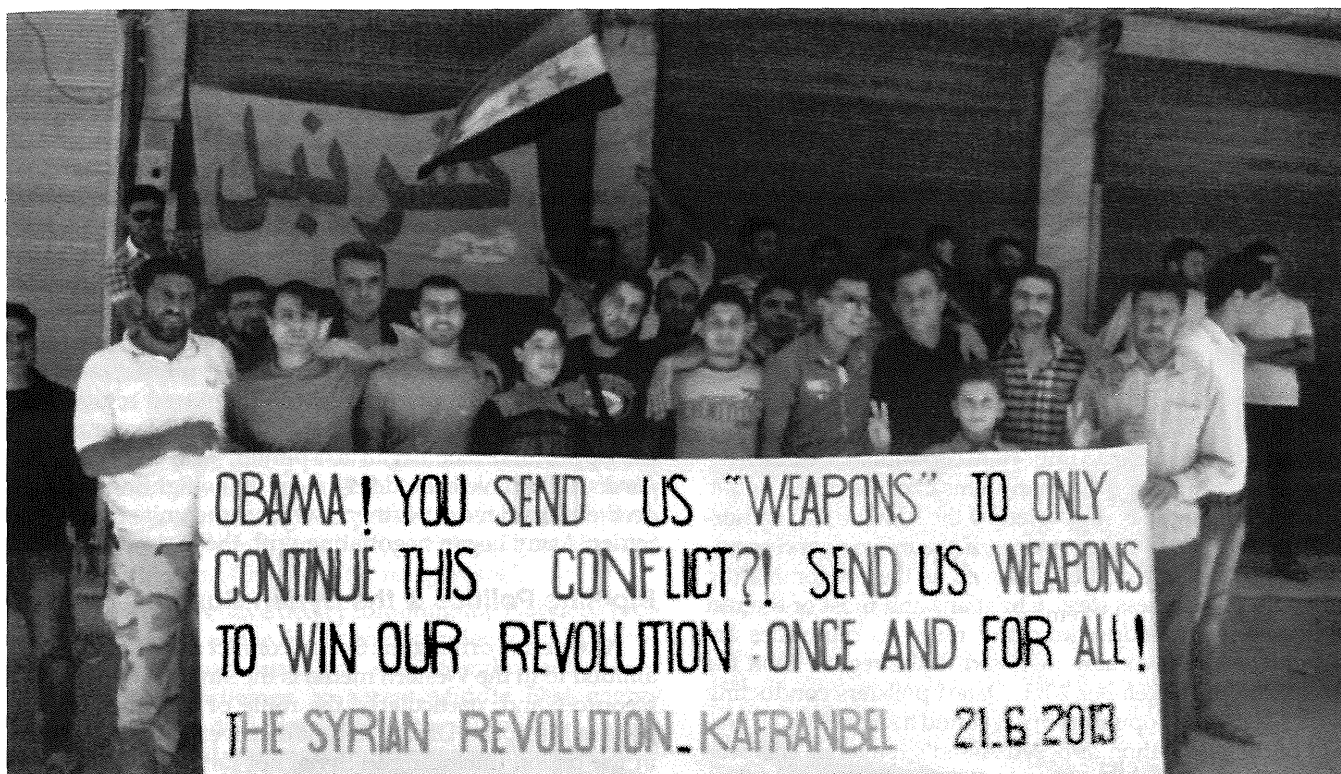
—[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeyRwFHR8WY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeyRwFHR8WY)

## Syria's Civil War

Syria's civil war, which has now raged for two and a half years, commenced with the Assad regime's heavy-handed repression of young demonstrators seeking to emulate their peers in Tunisia and Egypt, where the 2011 "Arab Spring" protests brought down pro-Western dictators. Similar protests occurred across the region, yet the corporate media exhibited little curiosity about why non-violent political demonstrations only morphed into protracted bloody conflicts in countries on the Pentagon's "regime change" list. The initial responses to the protests in Libya and Syria were more restrained than in Bahrain, the Gulf kingdom that is home to the U.S. Fifth Fleet. In all cases, demonstrators were gunned down and organizers were rounded up by the security services to be tortured or murdered—but that is just business as usual in neocolonial dictatorships. The Western media paid a great deal more attention to such behavior in some countries than in others. In Syria, the Baathist leadership was repeatedly denounced for "massacring their own people." Peter Certo, editor of the U.S. journal *Foreign Policy In Focus*, commented:

missions to train host nation security forces with the possible insertion of advisers, but this might be handled by other agencies. The United States may also seek to end the conflict through peacekeeping operations. Here there would be a substantial role for the Army.

"A third option would be to take sides in the conflict, possibly supporting authoritative Sunni governments against a continuingly hostile Iran. The level of U.S. involvement would dictate the type of operations requirement by the Army, which might, at the higher end, require the Army to provide troop lift, logistical support, and other types of aid, or direct involvement in the conflict, which may look partly like an insurgency and partly like conventional war. At the latter level, the U.S. Army would call upon rapid precision strike systems and would have to balance aggressive operations with an IO [information operation] campaign."



NO CREDIT

### 'Legitimate revolutionaries' ask U.S. imperialist chieftain for more support

"The Assad regime is surely brutal, but make no mistake: this is a civil war, not a one-sided slaughter. Earlier this summer, the [anti-regime] Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated that 43 percent of the 100,000 Syrians thought to have died in this conflict were fighting for Assad, surpassing estimates for both noncombatants and anti-regime forces."

—6 September 2013

The bourgeois press has also routinely ignored the fact that the roots of the current conflict in Syria go back at least half a century. During the 1960s, mass protests by the Muslim Brotherhood challenged the "atheist" Baathist regime and its "socialist" policies, particularly the separation of mosque and state. By the late 1970s this had devolved into a guerrilla war by Islamist *mujahedin* fighters against the Syrian military (and their Soviet advisers). Ultimately the rebellion was brutally crushed (between six and twenty thousand civilians were killed in the rebel stronghold of Hama

in 1982). The Brotherhood was driven underground and its leaders forced into exile until the "Arab Spring" of 2011,<sup>7</sup> when they reappeared as the core of the largely expatriate, and explicitly pro-imperialist, "Syrian National Council" (SNC). The SNC was supported by the U.S. and its "Friends of Syria" (composed of Turkey, various Gulf state monarchies and former colonial powers).<sup>8</sup>

In Syria, as in Libya, most of the funding and logistical support for the Islamist insurgents has been coordinated with U.S. regional allies, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, with Turkey helping.<sup>9</sup> Russia is backing the regime with munitions and political support. Assad has also had significant assistance from Shia allies in Iraq and Iran, as well as Lebanon's Hezbollah. Yet despite substantial foreign involvement, the current Syrian conflict remains essentially a power struggle between the Baathist regime and a mélange of oppositional formations within which Islamist groupings have gradually gained ascendance.

<sup>7</sup> In his 2007 piece in the *New Yorker* cited above, Seymour Hersh reported a December 2006 discussion with Walid Jumblatt, leader of Lebanon's Druze minority and a sworn enemy of both Hezbollah and its Syrian Baathist allies:

"Jumblatt then told me that he had met with Vice-President Cheney in Washington last fall to discuss, among other issues, the possibility of undermining Assad. He and his colleagues advised Cheney that, if the United States does try to move against Syria, members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood would be 'the ones to talk to,' Jumblatt said."

<sup>8</sup> The "Friends of Syria" front was modelled on the "Friends of Libya" set up in 2011 to help organize and legitimate NATO's "humanitarian" bombing of that unfortunate country.

<sup>9</sup> The 25 March 2013 *New York Times* reported:

"With help from the C.I.A., Arab governments and Turkey have sharply increased their military aid to Syria's opposition fighters in recent months, expanding a secret airlift of arms and equipment for the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, according to air traffic data, interviews with officials in several countries and the accounts of rebel commanders.

"The airlift, which began on a small scale in early 2012 and continued intermittently through last fall, expanded into a steady and much heavier flow late last year, the data shows. It has grown to include more than 160 military cargo flights by Jordanian, Saudi and Qatari military-style cargo planes landing at Esenboga Airport near Ankara, and, to a lesser degree, at other Turkish and Jordanian airports."

Today only a "small minority" of the roughly 100,000 rebel fighters are secular:

"The new study by IHS Jane's, a defence consultancy, estimates there are around 10,000 jihadists—who would include foreign fighters—fighting for powerful factions linked to al-Qaeda.

"Another 30,000 to 35,000 are hardline Islamists who share much of the outlook of the jihadists, but are focused purely on the Syrian war rather than a wider international struggle.

"There are also at least a further 30,000 moderates belonging to groups that have an Islamic character, meaning only a small minority of the rebels are linked to secular or purely nationalist groups."

—*Telegraph* (London), 15 September 2013

Syria's civil war has an important communalist element—rural Sunnis and those in urban slums back the rebels, while the Baathist regime is supported by the Alawite Shia minority (from which most key cadres of the military and security apparatus are recruited), as well as the predominantly urban Sunni business class. Christians and most of the rest of Syria's twenty-odd ethnic and religious minorities are generally more favorably disposed to the regime than the opposition. In December 2011, Qatari pollsters conducting Syria's last public opinion survey found a surprising 55 percent of the population opposed Assad's removal. This was less a reflection of support for the Baathist dictatorship than fear that a Sunni Islamist regime would be worse.

Many of the secular groups that participated in the original March 2011 demonstrations were aligned with the National Coordinating Committee for Democratic Change (NCC), rather than the SNC. The NCC, which seems to have been largely eclipsed by the civil war, was chiefly distinguished from the SNC both by its adamant opposition to any foreign military intervention and its policy of seeking concessions from the Baathist state through negotiations, rather than military confrontation.

The March 2012 conference of the "Friends of Syria" in Istanbul pronounced the SNC to be the "legitimate" representative of the Syrian people, but this did not change the fact that it had no popular base. Seven months later, the "Friends of Syria" held another conference, at the behest of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The purpose of this event, which was held in Qatar, was to try to stitch together a more viable puppet:

"Mrs. Clinton said she had been heavily involved in planning the meeting, including recommending individuals and organizations to include in any new leadership structure.

"We've made it clear that the S.N.C. can no longer be viewed as the visible leader of the opposition,' Mrs. Clinton said, referring to the Syrian National Council. It can participate, she added, 'but that opposition must include people from inside Syria and others who have a legitimate voice that needs to be heard.'"

"From the beginning, the council was seen as a prime vehicle for the long-exiled Muslim Brotherhood, backed by Turkey, and Mrs. Clinton said it was not inclusive enough and too accommodating of extremists.

"There needs to be an opposition leadership structure that is dedicated to representing and protecting all Syrians,' she said. 'And we also need an opposition that will

be on record strongly resisting the efforts by extremists to hijack the Syrian revolution.'"

—*New York Times*, 1 November 2012

The idea of the U.S. State Department issuing certificates of revolutionary legitimacy is positively grotesque. But Clinton's concerns about Islamists "hijacking the Syrian revolution" are echoed by many self-proclaimed Marxist organizations internationally that have downplayed the role of the *jihadis* while, for the past several years, insisting that some sort of "revolutionary process" was underway.

The State Department's rebranded SNC, the "National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces," is of course just as much an imperialist puppet, and just as irrelevant as its predecessor. As the Assad regime and its allies gained the upper hand militarily last summer, the opposition bloc began to splinter, with the hard core *jihadis*, who have been doing most of the fighting, turning on their less devout partners, while some units of the Free Syrian Army began negotiating with the regime.

## Pipeline Politics & the Syrian Conflict

A key issue driving the Syrian conflict that is rarely even alluded to in the Western media is the struggle over energy resources and, particularly, the route of pipelines to supply the European Union. Recent discoveries of natural gas in the region (including in Syria, not far from the Russian naval installation at Tartus) have sharpened the competition. The most significant is the gigantic South Pars field beneath the Persian Gulf between Qatar and Iran. Plans to construct a pipeline (known as the Nabucco or Turkey-Austria pipeline) to carry Iraqi gas from Turkey via Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary to Austria for distribution to other EU destinations were shelved when the U.S. lost control of Baghdad. This was not merely a commercial venture—it was also aimed at reducing European dependence on Russian energy. Now there is a proposal to revive the Nabucco project to ship Qatari gas from the South Pars field. The hitch is that it is necessary to go through Syria. India's Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA) reported:

"In 2009, during the Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Thani's visit to Turkey, it was agreed to build a pipeline and link it up with the Nabucco in Turkey. It is to originate in Qatar and move through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria reaching Turkey. The European markets would share the resource with an insatiable Turkey."

—"The Great Gas Game Over Syria," Gulshan Dietl, 9 September 2013

But the Assad regime refused to cooperate:

"In 2009—the same year former French foreign minister Dumas alleges the British began planning operations in Syria—Assad refused to sign a proposed agreement with Qatar that would run a pipeline from the latter's North field, contiguous with Iran's South Pars field, through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and on to Turkey, with a view to supply European markets—albeit crucially bypassing Russia. Assad's rationale was 'to protect the interests of [his] Russian ally, which is Europe's top supplier of natural gas.' "Instead, the following year, Assad pursued negotiations for an alternative \$10 billion pipeline plan with Iran, across Iraq to Syria, that would also potentially allow Iran to supply gas to Europe from its South Pars field shared with Qatar. The

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the project was signed in July 2012—just as Syria’s civil war was spreading to Damascus and Aleppo—and earlier this year Iraq signed a framework agreement for construction of the gas pipelines. “The Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline plan was a ‘direct slap in the face’ to Qatar’s plans.”

—*Guardian*, 30 August 2013

The projected pipeline (to be constructed with the participation of Russian energy giant Gazprom) would be considerably cheaper to build than its Nabucco rival, because it takes a shorter route through much less difficult terrain (Turkey is extremely mountainous). As the IDSA study noted, the viability of either pipeline depends on the outcome of the Syrian conflict:

“Even though the Syrian route makes sense in normal situation [sic], the political circumstances are totally unfavourable at present. Both Syria and Iran are under sanctions eliminating the possibility of external funding. The civil war in Syria rules out pipeline construction over a long stretch of area for many years.”

U.S. strategists have been promoting the Nabucco project as a way to free the EU from dependence on Moscow, but some European capitalists are not enthusiastic about paying U.S. middlemen to access Middle East energy when they could deal directly with the suppliers.

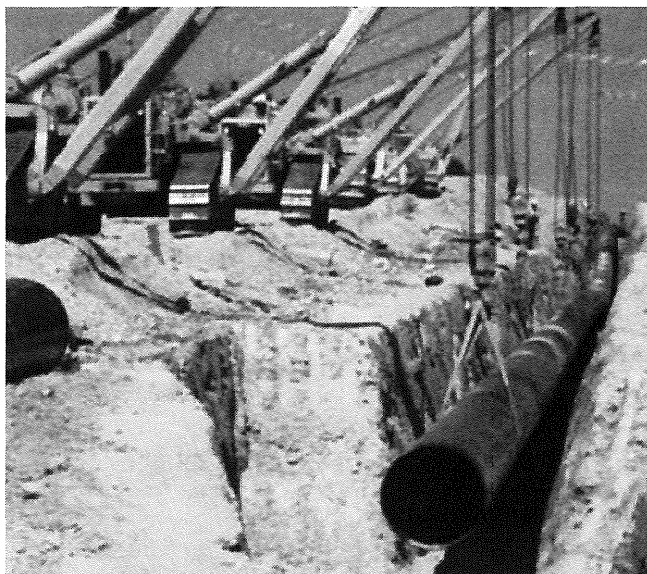
The Syrian civil war has significant geopolitical implications. The EU already gets a quarter of its natural gas from Russia; if the projected pipeline from Iran were to come online, U.S. corporations would be squeezed out. Closer economic integration between Germany and Russia (with its links to Iran, Iraq and Syria) could conceivably result in a major shift in the balance of power in Eurasia.

The tendency of the German press to report facts about the Syrian conflict judged “not fit to print” by the corporate media in North America reflects Berlin’s independence from Washington. In 2003, German imperialism opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and in 2011 it joined Russia and China in abstaining on the UN Security Council’s endorsement of NATO bombing Libya. Berlin is still onside with Washington on most questions, as the U.S., while declining, remains the global hegemon.

## Leninism & Imperialist Interventions

Marxists act as the historical memory of the working class and oppressed. Over the past few hundred years there have been countless interventions by “advanced” capitalist powers into more backward countries. They are invariably described as altruistically motivated—to share the benefits of civilization, or to save souls, or, these days, to liberate the victims of a murderous regime. But beneath the “humanitarian” cover stories, imperialist powers are always pursuing their own economic and geopolitical agendas. This is why, in every case, *without exception*, revolutionaries side militarily with *any* indigenous elements in neocolonial countries resisting imperialist intervention—regardless of how reactionary they may be.

When Islamic Jihad blew up the barracks of U.S. Marines and French Foreign Legion “peacekeepers” in Beirut in 1983, we characterized this as a defensible blow against colonial occupation. We took the view that imperialist garrisons need to be removed “by any means necessary,” which would not exclude truck bombs. This position



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### Nabucco pipeline project in trouble

was sharply counterposed to the mainstream reformist left, as well as to the left-talking pseudo-revolutionaries of the Spartacist League, who expressed concern about the fate of the imperialist gunmen.

In the current Syrian conflict, revolutionaries have no side. There is, at least as yet, no direct military imperialist intervention, and working people have no reason to favor the victory of either the brutal Baathist dictatorship or the various pro-imperialist dissidents and theocratic reactionaries on the other side. Much of the left is in a state of denial about the character of Assad’s opposition and talk as if the “rebels,” despite a few rough edges, represent some sort of innately “revolutionary” dynamic. Most of these same people held approximately the same view of the 2011 oppositionists to Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi who were supported by the imperialist powers (see “Libya and the Left,” 1917 No. 34). Qaddafi’s forces were ground down by NATO’s “humanitarian” bombing campaign, which destroyed much of Libya’s social and economic infrastructure and produced a nightmarish descent into chaos and destitution. When the imperialists intervened in Libya, Marxists sided militarily with the regime against the terror-bombers and their proxies—while remaining intransigently politically opposed to the Qaddafi dictatorship. Today, we unconditionally defend Iran and Syria against imperialist military intervention—without in any way supporting the rule of the ayatollahs in Tehran or the Baathist butchers in Damascus. There is nothing new or original in this position—it is a policy that was clearly spelled out almost a century ago by the Communist International in its revolutionary period under Lenin and Trotsky.

### Permanent Revolution & the Middle East

Despite living in countries possessing the majority of the planet’s known deposits of oil and natural gas—extremely valuable and essential commodities in today’s economy—the peoples of the Middle East, along with their counterparts in other “underdeveloped” countries, are condemned to lives of misery and endless oppression



AAMIR QURESHI

**Aleppo, February 2013: Secular oppositionists have adopted old Syrian flag as their symbol**

through the logic of profit maximization that animates global capitalism. There are pockets of advanced industry—particularly in the largely foreign-controlled energy sector, but also in Turkish auto factories and Egyptian textile mills—but the region is, on the whole, characterized by poverty, unemployment and economic backwardness. This is what Leon Trotsky termed “combined and uneven development,” with modern means of production existing side-by-side with rural-based peasant production virtually unchanged for centuries.

The central proposition of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution is that the path of economic development for semi-colonial, or dependent, capitalist countries blocked by imperialist domination can only be opened through social revolution:

“With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.”

—*The Permanent Revolution*, 1931

This perspective was flatly counterposed to that advanced by the bureaucratic faction identified with Joseph Stalin, who, in 1925, proposed that the duty of revolutionaries in colonial and semi-colonial countries was to forge a “revolutionary bloc” with the supposedly “progressive” wing of the capitalists:

“In such countries as Egypt or China, where the national *bourgeoisie* is already split into a revolutionary party and a compromising party, but where the compromising section of the *bourgeoisie* cannot yet become *welded* with imperialism...the Communists must pass from the policy of a united national front to the policy of a revolutionary bloc of the workers and petty *bourgeoisie*. In such countries this bloc may assume the form of a single party of workers and peasants like the Kuomintang...”

—quoted in Walter Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*

Stalin’s policy of “unity” with the bourgeoisie resulted in the decapitation of the Chinese Communist Party two years later at the hands of the “single party of workers and peasants” to which the Kremlin had ordered its adherents to swear loyalty. This same policy produced similar results in the Middle East.

For decades the Soviet degenerated workers’ state provided a counterweight that set limits to the predations of the U.S. and other imperialists in the Middle East. Along with the central role played by indigenous Communist militants in the struggle against colonialism, this meant that by the 1950s, Moscow-aligned parties in a number of strategic Middle Eastern countries had won a mass working-class base and a significant following among oppressed national and religious minorities. The parasitic, counterrevolutionary Stalinist ruling caste in the Kremlin cynically abused this trust in the vain hope of securing long-term “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism. When a series of potentially revolutionary opportunities arose in

Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Iran, the CPs, acting on the direct instructions of the Kremlin, sought to divert powerful working-class upsurges into support for “anti-imperialist” bourgeois nationalists like Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser or Iran’s Mohammad Mossadeq. In each case, once order was restored, the petty-bourgeois bonapartist “lesser evils” turned on the left and workers’ movement.

The disastrous consequences of subordination to “progressive” Arab nationalist strongmen discredited Marxism (with which Stalinism was mistakenly identified) and paved the way for the upsurge of communalism and religious reaction we are seeing today across the Middle East. In the eyes of millions of victims of global capitalism, the Islamic *ihadis* appear to be the only serious opposition to oppressive dictatorships and their imperial overlords.

Stalinist betrayals have been paralleled by the willingness of most ostensibly Trotskyist tendencies to ascribe an “objectively progressive dynamic” to whatever is currently popular. In the 1970s, this meant prostration before Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution and support to the CIA-organized Afghan *mujahedin* as “freedom fighters.” More recently, these same political currents have hailed Egypt’s reactionary Muslim Brotherhood, the disparate Syrian rebels and NATO’s Libyan proxies as “revolutionaries.”

The absence of anything even roughly approximating a revolutionary leadership does not mean that the logic of the class struggle has ceased to operate. The capitalist media played the role of young people connecting via social media in the 2011 Tahrir Square protests that dramatically toppled Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, a key imperialist agent in the Middle East. But in fact these events were decisively conditioned by seven years of workers’ struggles against rising food prices, grotesque social inequality and a venal and corrupt regime:

“During the first four years of the current strike wave [2004–08], more than 1,900 strikes took place and an estimated 1.7 million workers were involved.

“As one worker in a fertiliser company put it, the effect of going on strike was to convince the employer ‘that they had a company with human beings working in it. In the past, they dealt with us as if we were not human.’ “The strikes began in the clothing and textile sector, and moved on to building workers, transport workers, food processing workers, even the workers on the Cairo metro. The biggest and most important took place back in 2006 at Misr Spinning and Weaving, a company that employs some 25,000 workers.”

—*Guardian*, 10 February 2011

In 2008 the Misr workers led a revolt in the industrial city of Mahala against the Mubarak dictatorship’s IMF-approved austerity program:

“Security forces put down the uprising in two days, leaving at least three dead and hundreds detained and tortured. The scenes from what became known as the ‘Mahala intifada’ could have constituted a dress rehearsal for what happened in 2011, with protesters taking down Mubarak’s posters, battling the police troops in the streets, and challenging the symbols of the much-hated National Democratic party. Soon after, a similar revolt took place in the city of el-Borollos, north of the Nile delta.”

—*Guardian*, 2 March 2011

Fear of a renewed upsurge of these struggles on a far broader

scale is why the Egyptian military opted to depose Mubarak, rather than violently suppress the Tahrir protests.

## The Necessity of Revolutionary Leadership

In Egypt and across the region, what is required is the creation of a leadership within the working class with a program that links the immediate felt needs of the masses for food, shelter and stable employment with the necessity to expropriate capitalist property—both foreign and domestic. The working class has both the historic interest and the social power (through its central role in the production and distribution of commodities) to overturn the system of production for profit.

A revolutionary breakthrough in one Middle Eastern country would be met with enormous enthusiasm by working people throughout the Muslim world. A victorious working class in one country would seek to galvanize this support by declaring its commitment to establishing a Socialist Federation of the Middle East, and by taking immediate steps to undo decades of imperialist “divide and rule” communal strife by ensuring the complete equality of all nationalities and religions. A revolutionary workers’ party must champion the struggle for full and equal rights for women, LGBT people and all national and religious minorities, while also standing for the total separation of state functions from any kind of religious affiliation. Only through the rule of a class-conscious proletariat is it possible to imagine the equitable resolution of the many intractable historic grievances and conflicts within the complex mosaic of peoples of the region—Kurds, Turks, Shia, Sunnis, Druze, Maronites, Copts, Palestinians and Israeli Jews, among others.

The current attacks on wages, pensions, social services and democratic rights in the imperialist heartlands point to the common objective interests of the overwhelming majority of humanity in both the developed and backward countries in overturning the system of exploitation and oppression known as capitalism. However powerful and omnipotent the global predators may seem, the commonality of interests of their victims underlies the reality that, in a strategic sense, the position of the exploiters is far from secure. The accumulation and intensification of social stresses in the capitalist world economy increases the likelihood of a serious outbreak of social struggle in one region resonating with other links in the global chain, including, eventually, even traditionally politically backward layers upon whose unquestioning submission the stability of the whole edifice rests. The Obama administration was unable to sell the idea of attacking Syria to the American people, who are, in the aggregate, certainly among the most politically backward of any major imperialist country.

The key to unleashing a mass revolt against the threat to human civilization posed by the irrational and destructive system of production for profit lies in the creation of a new, insurgent leadership within the international workers’ movement—a Leninist vanguard armed with a program that can focus the anger and energy of the hundreds of millions of victims of global capitalism into effective revolutionary action. The International Bolshevik Tendency seeks to participate in the struggle to create such an instrument—a reforged Fourth International, capable of resolving the historical crisis of proletarian leadership and opening the road to the wholesale reconstruction of the global economy on the basis of collectivized property and economic planning to satisfy human needs rather than maximize private profit. ■

# Socialist Action & the 'Syrian Revolution'

## Déjà vu All Over Again

Most of the international left has responded to the civil war in Syria in much the same fashion as they did to the conflict in Libya in 2011. In that case, organizations such as the International Socialist Tendency (IST), the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) and the British Workers Power group—to name only a few—initially hailed the bourgeois-led uprising against Muammar Qaddafi's dictatorship as a popular "revolution." Gradually they adopted more guarded formulations, and ultimately complained that reactionaries had hijacked the "revolution."

In Syria, as in Libya, mass opposition to the dictatorship was rapidly hegemonized by dissident elements of the ruling elites and Islamist reactionaries. In both cases, the imperialists played up the atrocities (real and invented) of the government while ignoring or downplaying crimes committed by the insurgents to whom they were providing logistical and political support. The excited self-delusions of the various leftists who insisted on seeing these armed revolts as proto-socialist "revolutions" served only to disorient and confuse those who took them seriously.

The Libyan uprising was initiated by the Transitional National Council (TNC), whose leaders included individuals with longstanding connections to the CIA. The rebel fighters—largely consisting of Islamists and members of disaffected tribes—played only a relatively minor role in the conflict. The decisive blows against Qaddafi's military and security apparatus were struck by NATO bombers. This awkward fact was ignored by leftist apologists of the supposed "revolution," who celebrated Qaddafi's defeat, while simultaneously criticizing the imperialist military intervention that put the insurgents in power (see "Libya & the Left," 1917 No.34).

Of all the tendencies that hailed the TNC-led "revolution," only Socialist Action (SA—the U.S. affiliate of the United Secretariat) substantially modified its position when the pro-imperialist character of the rebels could no longer be denied. While not explicitly repudiating its original position (and thereby avoiding the necessity of explaining how it was arrived at in the first place), the shift was obvious in a statement published just after Tripoli fell to TNC/NATO forces:

"Imperialism's defeat in any confrontation with oppressed nations weakens its capacity for future interventions and opens the door wider for others to follow suit. While revolutionary socialists have every right and obligation to criticize and oppose dictatorships everywhere, these criticisms are subordinate to the defeat of imperialist intervention and war. Revolutionaries are not neutral in such confrontations. We are always for the defeat of the imperialist intervener and would-be colonizer."

—"Imperialist Victory Is No Gain for Libyan People,"  
2 September 2011

The article, by SA's leader Jeff Mackler, stopped short of advocating military support to Qaddafi's fighters against the imperialists and their proxies, but it did acknowledge that with the TNC's ascension to power, "we are com-

pelled to recognize the tragic truth that a severe defeat has been inflicted on the Libyan people."

This was more than the CWI, IST, IMT et al were capable of, but it did not represent a repudiation of the objectivist methodology which led to interpreting an insurrection by disaffected bourgeois elements as an unfolding revolution. While Socialist Action and its political antecedents have a long history of "optimistic" misrepresentations that end in political embarrassment, its leaders prefer not to account for the past but instead move on to the next big thing. Two weeks prior to Mackler's characterization of the Libyan TNC's victory as a "severe defeat" for the masses, an SA speaker in New York was proclaiming: "Long Live the Syrian Revolution!" ("Victory to the Syrian People's Uprising! US/NATO, Hands Off!," 21 August 2011).

In a subsequent statement, Socialist Action indicated that it was aware of some important parallels between Syria and Libya:

"as in all the other Arab revolts, the U.S. is encouraging its allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, etc.) to encourage Muslim Brotherhood and salafi involvement in the uprising so as to have more pliable clients should Syrian President Bashar al-Assad fall."

—"Syria uprising is critical to continuing Arab revolt," 7 September 2011

SA praised those Syrian protesters who rejected calls for imperialist intervention:

"And fortunately, that movement in the streets is maintaining its opposition to intervention. On Aug. 29 [2011] the Local Coordinating Committees [LCCs] in Syria posted a statement on their Facebook page criticizing calls for foreign intervention made by more conservative elements in the Syrian opposition after the taking of Tripoli by NATO."

—*Ibid.*

Under a subhead entitled, "Class forces in the Syrian revolution," SA outlined the unambiguously bourgeois program of the LCCs (yet failed to draw the obvious conclusion):

"Like most players in the Syrian rebellion, the LCCs have generally limited themselves to calling for political reform, democratic elections, a revised constitution, etc. A clearly delineated social program addressing the very inequality and exploitation that helped spark the revolt has yet to be produced.

"But what is key is that all accounts depict the LCCs as a widespread, genuinely grassroots phenomenon, in which thousands of youth have initiated, organized, and coordinated protests in every major city and town in the country."

—*Ibid.*

This is the same impulse that earlier led SA to embrace the Libyan "revolution"—the notion that a mass movement directed against an oppressive regime must somehow have an innately progressive dynamic. The SA statement noted that the most prominent leader of the LCCs was explicitly advocating a cross-class (i.e., bourgeois) bloc:

"Unfortunately, a completely different class perspective on





LUKE VARGAS—TRNS

Syrian National Council leaders meet John Kerry in New York, July 2013. Burhan Ghalyoun, LCC head, second from left

the revolt's prospects is expressed by Burhan Ghalyoun, the most widely quoted leader of the opposition inside Syria (as opposed to those living outside the country). He said in an interview reprinted in *jadaliyya.com* that he believes what will be decisive for the revolt is the coming over of 'businessmen, professionals, manufacturers, and economists'—sectors that are seeking 'stability'."

—*Ibid.*

A 26 February 2012 statement by SA's Political Committee proclaimed: "We support the self-organization of the Syrian masses and encourage the revolutionary elements of the mass movement to build and strengthen organs of mass mobilization and decision-making." Yet they could cite no evidence of "revolutionary elements" in or around the LCCs having any impact.

In the same statement, SA's leadership called for the creation of "self-defense squads for the revolution" to "prevent the consolidation of the 'Free Syrian Army' (FSA) as a tool of imperialism, a goal being earnestly pursued by traitorous high-ranking officers in cahoots with the U.S. government." No such squads materialized, but SA nonetheless continued to support the "revolution" while characterizing the FSA and its political affiliate, the Syrian National Council (SNC), as "pro-imperialist."

Like other ostensibly Marxist tendencies that portrayed the bourgeois opposition to Assad as "revolutionary," SA drew a distinction between the overtly pro-imperialist SNC/FSA and the "grassroots" LCCs. Readers of *Socialist Action* might be surprised to learn that not only were the LCCs affiliated to the SNC, but that, from August 2011 to June 2012, their leading figure, Burhan Ghalyoun, was also president of the SNC. When Ghalyoun was pressured to step down from this position, the LCCs threatened to pull out:

"The Local Co-ordination Committees (LCC), a network of activists inside and outside Syria, warned the SNC it was drifting away from the spirit of the country's revolution and threatened to suspend its membership.

"We have seen nothing in the past months except political incompetence in the SNC and a total lack of consensus between its vision and that of the revolutionaries,"

the LCC said."

—Associated Press, 17 May 2012

While the LCCs initially opposed imperialist intervention, they have since reconsidered, and on 1 September 2013 released a statement advocating a large-scale U.S. military strike:

"A limited strike to merely warn Assad today will lead to nothing but his increase in violence, as well as to his complete confidence that no one would prevent him from killing."

"Any strike to the regime must aim to paralyze, with care and precision, its Air Forces, artillery, and rockets....As well as being accompanied with continued coordination and enough support to the Syrian opposition, the political and the armed, in order to allow them to organize and develop...."

—[syrianfreedom1s.tumblr.com](http://syrianfreedom1s.tumblr.com)

This is precisely the attitude the Libyan TNC took toward NATO's air war against Qaddafi. In a statement issued two days after the LCC declaration, Socialist Action denounced the threatened U.S. attack while not only ignoring the LCCs' overtly pro-imperialist position, but continuing to tout them as a potential soviet-type formation:

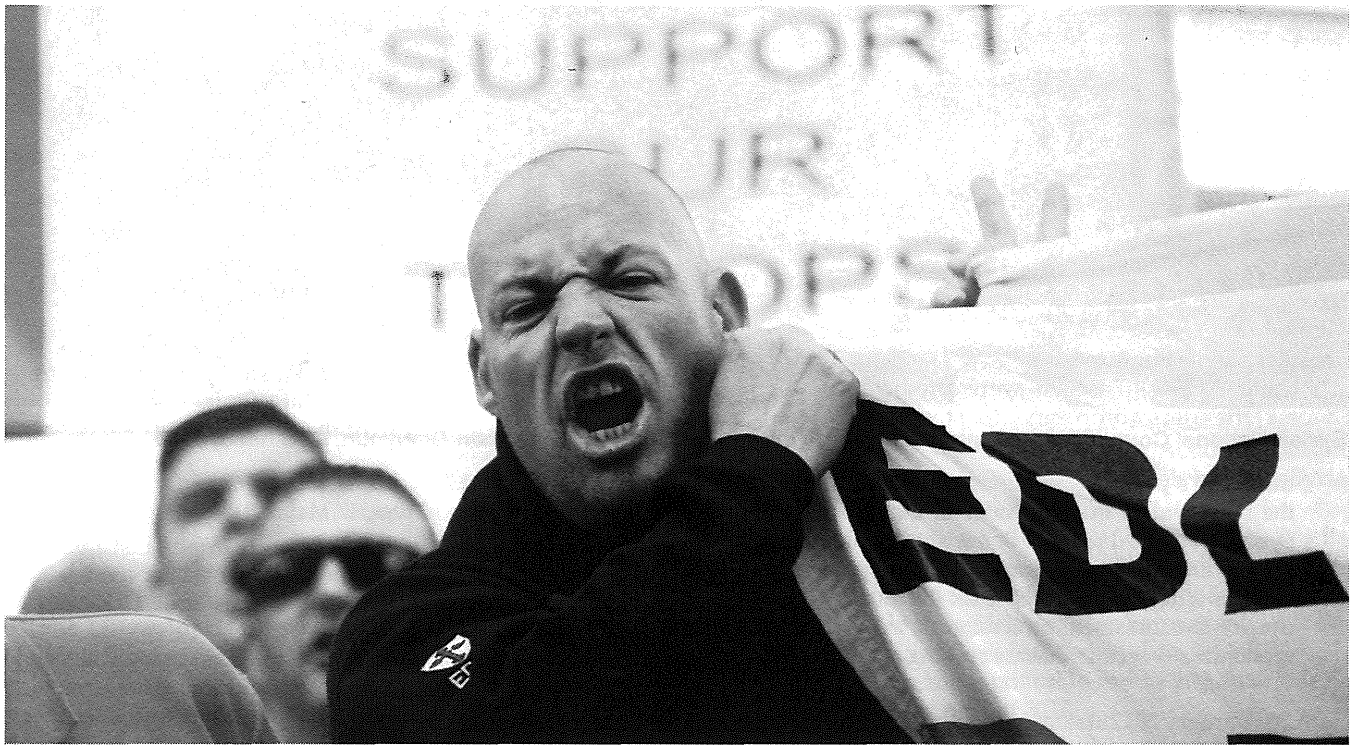
"Today these forces, organized largely in Local Coordinating Committees that provide a modicum of defense and significant vital social services to Syria's beleaguered people, if they prove capable of sinking deep roots into the entire population, can become central to any working-class challenge to Assad's power, or that of any other tyrant who might follow."

—"U.S. Hands Off Syria!," 3 September 2013

The LCCs have not, by all accounts, lacked roots in the localities where they operate, nor can Ghalyoun et al be accused of trying to misrepresent their program. The LCC leadership has no particular problem with production for profit or imperialist intervention: their goal is to rid Syria of Assad, not capitalism. There is therefore no reason to expect the LCCs to transform themselves into an agency of genuinely revolutionary struggle. The socialist potential of the LCCs, like the "Syrian Revolution" which they supposedly embody, is a fantasy touted by fake Marxists who refuse to call things by their right names. ■

# Fascists Surge, Reformists Mourn

## On the Killing of Private Rigby



THE JOURNAL.CO.UK

### 2013: English Defence League thugs march in South Shields

*The following originally appeared on 3 June 2013 on bolshevik.org.*

On bank holiday Monday at the end of May [2013], several hundred anti-fascists, including members of the IBT, watched in frustration from behind a wall of cops as an English Defence League (EDL) demonstration (at least twice as large) marched unhindered through the heart of central London, where fascists rarely venture. Only a month earlier, in Brighton, we participated in the disruption of the annual far right 'March for England' on St. George's day. It is an ominous sign that the EDL, which had been losing members and influence after suffering a series of defeats across the country, was suddenly able to mobilise over 1,000 supporters in London and twice that number in Newcastle two days earlier, as well as making an appearance (albeit with mixed results) in towns across the country the following weekend. We were also at Westminster on 1 June [2013], as the declining BNP was met with more successful opposition, although they were protected by a clearly pre-planned police operation that arrested over 50 anti-fascists.

The surge in support for the EDL was sparked by the killing of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich on 22 May [2013] by two men citing retribution for British army attacks on Muslims abroad. Fascists and other racists have seized on the murder to step up violent assaults on Muslims:

'As participants in an English Defence League (EDL) march in Whitehall were recorded giving Nazi-style salutes, Faith Matters, which monitors anti-Muslim hatred, said the number of incidents in the past six days had risen to 193, includ-

ing ten assaults on mosques. The figure compares to a total of 642 incidents in the previous 12 months—meaning the last week has seen a 15-fold increase on last year's average of 12 attacks per week.'

—*Independent*, 28 May 2013

Rigby, a soldier in Britain's imperialist army, has been treated in the bourgeois media (and even by much of the left) as an innocent civilian. Politicians have whipped up patriotism and paranoia about 'terrorism', while attempting to distance themselves from the rise in fascist support. The hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and its media lackeys is ultimately an expression of the requirements of British imperialism. In April [2013] the brutal stabbing of 75-year-old Mohammed Saleem, whose family had received threatening letters from the EDL, received far less media coverage than the Woolwich incident.

London mayor Boris Johnson and others have absurdly denied that Rigby's killing had anything to do with British intervention in the Middle East, despite the statement of one of the perpetrators, Michael Adebolajo, at the scene: 'The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers' (*Telegraph*, 24 May 2013).

Marxists do not advocate attacking individual soldiers in response to imperialist atrocities, but the charges of 'terrorism' must be seen in the context of Rigby's own willing role in those crimes. He served a tour of duty as a machine gunner in Afghanistan, where the British army has been responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians. It was recently

revealed that the Ministry of Defence intends to obstruct investigations of unlawful killings by British occupation forces in Iraq between 2003 and 2008.

Islamic reaction has been fuelled by British/US/NATO aggression in the Middle East and North Africa. While we endorse neither the ideology nor the methods of Rigby's executioners, we do solidarise with the victims of imperialist occupation. We call for class-struggle resistance to the military adventures of 'our' rulers, including strikes against the production and shipment of arms. Every victory won by the British army in the Middle East will embolden the ruling class to commit further crimes abroad, which is why Marxists call for the *defeat* of British imperialism.

Since Rigby's killing, public support for the military has risen, and there has been a dramatic spike in donations to the charity Help for Heroes. This support for 'our boys' is echoed by those on the left who downplay the significance of the fact that Rigby was a professional soldier, not a civilian, mirroring the horror expressed by the bourgeois press that sometimes chickens come home to roost.

Unite Against Fascism were predictably among the worst offenders, proposing to start the demonstration against the BNP 'with a minute's silence in memory of Lee Rigby' ([uaf.org.uk](http://uaf.org.uk), 31 May 2013), but others were not so different. Workers Power suggests that it was somehow worse that women witnessed the event:

'This is a horrific act, committed in front of ordinary civilians, women and children. We sympathise with the family of the victim and those traumatised by witnessing such appalling scenes.'

—workerspower.co.uk, May 2013

Left Unity's Kate Hudson takes an approach tinged with pacifism and religion:

'We deplore the brutal murder of an unarmed British soldier in Woolwich yesterday. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family. Acts of violent retribution against individuals can never be justified as a response to the crimes of states and governments.'

—leftunity.org, 23 May 2013

The Socialist Party equates the attack on Rigby with indiscriminate attacks on civilians:

'The Socialist Party completely condemns this attack just as we condemned 7/7, 9/11, and all similar attacks aimed at indiscriminate slaughter. The victim of this latest killing, while one individual rather than many, appears to have been selected possibly only because of the "help for heroes" t-shirt he was wearing.'

—Socialist, 29 May 2013

While class-conscious workers take no satisfaction in Rigby's death, we do not mourn a man who, according to his own family, wanted to be a soldier all his life. As a volunteer defender of British imperialism, he was in a very different category than the civilians killed by the 7/7 London bombings of 2005. The sympathy expressed for Rigby by various self-proclaimed revolutionary organisations is paralleled by their refusal to side militarily with the victims of imperialist attacks (see 'Libya and the Left', 1917 No. 34).

During periods of economic crisis and high unemployment, the army often succeeds in recruiting heavily among the working class, targeting schools and deprived communities—sometimes described by the left as 'economic conscription'. But those who volunteer for the army are not part of the workers' movement. At the time of his death,

Rigby was working as an army recruiter, signing up cannon fodder for the bosses.

Rigby's death has provided reactionaries with a pretext for advocating increased state repression, as demonstrated by Theresa May's proposed ban on internet access for 'extremists'. Such laws will inevitably be used against whichever 'enemy within' the authorities decide to target—today Islamic fundamentalists, tomorrow the left and trade unionists. Marxists, by contrast, seek to defend democratic freedoms and to extend full citizenship rights to all residents, regardless of their religious beliefs or immigration status.

Divisions and the absence of revolutionary perspective in the anti-fascist movement—particularly the pernicious role of the SWP front, Unite Against Fascism (UAF), which often seeks to avoid direct confrontation and willingly cooperates with the police—has made it easier for the EDL to grow. It is necessary to crush the fascists while they are still relatively small—by uniting the left, immigrants, and particularly trade unionists in militant mobilisations to physically prevent the EDL, BNP and their ilk from spreading venomous hatred. Westminster also illustrated the potential for increased state repression against anti-fascist protests. We call for the dropping of charges against all arrested anti-fascists.

To imagine that the agencies of the capitalist state can be relied on to prevent fascist attacks is a dangerous illusion. In the final analysis, the *raison d'être* of fascism is to provide bourgeois shock troops in times of crisis, supplementing the army and police. The fight against fascism—like the fight to resist austerity attacks that contribute to the sense of hopelessness and despair that fuels the growth of the far right—requires determined action by all those oppressed by capitalist rule. Ultimately, bourgeois reaction can only be defeated by uprooting the social system that produces it, and that requires the creation of a revolutionary workers' party, capable of leading the working class to power. ■

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# CWI Debates Falling Rate of Profit Marxism vs. Keynesianism

*The following is an edited version of a presentation at an IBT fringe meeting at the Socialist Party's "Socialism 2013" event, London, 3 November 2013.*

Only a few months ago the current global economic crisis entered into its fifth—some may even say sixth—year. Yet the origins of the crisis are still being disputed amongst Marxist economists and the broader left. This is not an academic question: only by understanding the roots of the crisis can the workers' movement successfully fight its effects.

Marx, who spent decades analysing the capitalist mode of production, concluded that the origins of capitalism's periodic crises lie in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Marx observed that a capitalist economy is driven by the imperative to maximise profit—i.e., the continuous reproduction and realisation of self-expanding value. Capitalism is a system characterised by generalised commodity production in which the labour power of the working class also takes the form of a commodity. Value finds its expression in prices and money. According to Marx, only productive labour power (which is exchanged for 'variable capital') can create new value—while 'constant capital' (machinery and other overheads necessary to the production process) merely transfers value to the commodities produced. Human labour power is the only commodity that can produce more value than the cost of its own reproduction.

Under capitalism, workers do not own the means of production. Workers, who are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive, receive wages which represent only a portion of the value they produce, and the rest, after deducting the cost of replacing the constant capital consumed in the production cycle, and other necessary overheads, goes to the capitalist in the form of profit. Capitalist enterprises are constantly competing with each other for market share, i.e., to expand their share of the aggregate profit. Prices oscillate around the values of commodities, which are determined by the socially necessary cost of their reproduction—the average social labour time expended in their production. Those firms which can produce a given commodity more cheaply, i.e., with less socially necessary labour time, will tend to increase their market share (and profits) by underselling competitors, who must attempt to catch up or face bankruptcy.

Capitalist enterprises are constantly forced to improve and replace their machinery, while also pressing their workers to increase productivity. Machinery that lowers production costs by displacing human labour (the only source of new value) reduces the aggregate amount of surplus value relative to the value of total investments. Technology-based improvements in productivity therefore tend to lower the overall rate of profit—calculated as the ratio between surplus value and the mass of capital advanced. Marx described the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as 'in every respect the most important law of modern political economy' (*Grundrisse*, Notebook VII).

This tendency has been empirically documented by researchers, including Marxist economist Murray Smith, who have shown that, while productivity in the core impe-

rialist countries rose from the 1950s onwards, the profit rate has exhibited a generally downward trajectory.

Of course there is no simple linear decline of the profit rate—it is a tendency, not a constant. Marx discussed various factors that can offset the decline at any given moment, such as investing abroad, reducing wages below the cost of reproducing labour power, increasing the exploitation of the working class, financial speculation, and so on. However, these variables can only counteract the tendency to a certain degree—they cannot permanently reverse it.

## How is the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall Linked to the Current Crisis?

The current crisis is far worse than a smaller cyclical one. It is of similar proportions to the one that began in 1929. Reformist 'leftists' push the idea that it results from the greed of the capitalist class. Had the evil Con-Dem coalition never been elected—although some consider Labour to be equally bad—there would be no austerity and working people could afford to buy more products, thus raising demand and reigniting economic growth. The underlying theoretical assumption is what Marxists have long dubbed 'under-consumptionism'. According to this model every economic crisis is fundamentally caused by the inability of the working class to purchase what it has produced. Declining wages, pensions and benefits are often depicted as triggers.

Under-consumptionism is associated with economic theorist John Maynard Keynes, who was alarmed by what he saw as the danger of potential socialist revolution arising from the collapse in 1929. In the 1960s, some economists unsuccessfully attempted to meld Keynes' views with those of Marx. However, unlike Marx, Keynes believed that capitalist crises could be minimalised, if not eliminated entirely, by vigorously expanding public-sector spending as soon as growth began to slow.

Let's say for a moment that the Labour left was in power with control of state institutions and funds. Where would the money for new social reforms come from? If we exclude printing money, it would come from raising taxes either on the working class (thereby lowering demand) or on the capitalists, who would respond by shifting their enterprises to countries with lower tax rates. This is exactly what the big banks have threatened whenever the question of a transaction tax or cutting bankers' bonuses is raised. But even if successfully implemented, increased taxes on corporations would translate into higher operating costs and further depress profitability. Since investments are made on the basis of projected future rates of return, the result would be to further exacerbate the problem.

Capitalist enterprises are driven to reinvest, rather than hoard, their wealth. If capital cannot be thrown back into the cycle of production and distribution because of a lack of profitable investment opportunities, the economy seizes up. A lot of businesses in the EU modernise by borrowing from financial markets in hope that profits from the

expanded production cycle will cover repayments. But if markets become saturated, sales slump and profits are not realised. Corporations that cannot service their debt are forced out of business. The money lent to them is gone, and the bank has to assume responsibility for the defaulted debt. If bankers begin to fear that loans to manufacturers may not be repaid, they tighten credit and call in outstanding loans, which can force many companies out of business. This chain of events, which has occurred in many countries during the last few years, is typical of capitalist crises. According to Marx, such crises, which are caused by the falling rate of profit, can only be overcome by the destruction of a sufficient quantity of capital to restore the conditions of profitable accumulation.

## Socialist Party Debates the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall

This brings me to the current debate within the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). The leadership, represented by Peter Taaffe and Lynn Walsh, hold that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is only one of many factors explaining the current crisis. They cite data provided by a French supporter of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International indicating that the rate of profit rose beginning in 1983. It is true that there was a moderate improvement between 1983 and 2005 in the United States, resulting from neo-liberal attacks on working-class living standards and opening the former deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe for capitalist exploitation. But profitability never returned to the levels seen during the post-war boom, and from 2005 it turned sharply downward. Taaffe explains the crisis as one of over-accumulation, by which he means that the redistribution of wealth from workers to capitalists obstructed further investment opportunities. Taaffe imagines that the fact that corporations are sitting on profits accumulated in the past somehow demonstrates that there is no problem with profitability today. He suggests that stagnation under capitalism could be overcome if socialists took over, nationalised all banks and invested the vast funds that are lying fallow.

The CWI opposition, led by Bruce Wallace, points to the centrality of falling rates of return on investment, and correctly asserts that capitalist crises are only resolved by massive destruction of capital. They agree that the banks are holding a lot of nominal assets, but argue that these are balanced by high levels of outstanding bank and consumer debt. Wallace and his comrades do not deny that counter-tendencies, largely due to the neo-liberal offensive, buoyed profitability for a time. And they correctly note that downplaying the tendency of the rate of profit to fall leads to neo-Keynesian conclusions like Taaffe's notion that the nationalisation of the banks could potentially resolve the crisis without breaking the capitalist framework. As the opposition aptly observes, 'The idea proposed by the CWI leadership, that it is just a question of seizing control of this mythical reservoir of capital and investing it is, in our opinion, politically dangerous'.

## Transitional Demands and the Fight Against the Bourgeois State

In 'The Causes of Capitalist Crisis: Reply to Andrew Kliman' (20 September 2013) Taaffe asserts that the 'Socialist Party ... has consistently argued against

Keynesian ideas as a long-term solution to the problems of capitalism'. However, in the near to medium-term, Taaffe proposes to dress up Keynesian policies with snippets from Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*: 'We have argued in a transitional manner for an increase in government expenditure in order to boost housing, education, workers' share of income, etc. We have also demanded nationalisation of the banks and the finance sector'.

Taaffe attempts to give his Keynesian approach a radical spin:

'A programme to provide jobs and stimulate growth would require the mobilisation of the working class.

'Moreover, increased taxation in itself will not be sufficient to develop the economy.... The banks and finance houses would have to be nationalised (not bailed out and propped up at public expense), and run under democratic workers' control and management.'

—citing *Socialism Today*, No.161, September 2012

He also claims:

'When transitional demands are put forward and particularly when they are adopted by a mass movement—of which we have some experience in the poll tax struggle and in the mighty battle in Liverpool between 1983 and 1987—they can act as a bridge from the present level of consciousness and lead, hopefully, to a socialist consciousness.'

It is instructive to look at the 'mighty battle in Liverpool' that the CWI leadership considers to have been such an exemplary application of transitional demands. In reality, Militant, the SP's forerunner, did more to demoralise than mobilise the working class, by failing to advance policies that could act as a bridge, not simply to an abstract socialist consciousness, but to the realisation through struggle that the capitalist system itself is an obstacle to meeting the essential material needs of the working class, and must therefore be destroyed.

Militant, buried within the Labour Party, won a majority on Liverpool City Council in the mid-1980s. They used this position to launch a massive programme of building public housing at a time when the reactionary Thatcher government was intent on containing public debt on a national level. Thatcher's policies, like those being pursued by the capitalist class today, were aimed at increasing profitability. Taaffe acknowledges that British capitalists had experienced a sharp decline in the rate of profit from the late 1960s. When Thatcher threatened to stop funding the Council, Militant countered by sending redundancy letters to thousands of public-sector workers, hoping that this would increase class consciousness by showing that building more public housing was not compatible with capitalism. Instead of raising the level of class consciousness among public-sector workers, Militant's tactic alienated them, because they believed that redundancy notices meant what they usually mean. Some leading Militant supporters have admitted that it was a 'miscalculation' to play games with workers' jobs and lives—but apparently Taaffe takes the view that this debacle should be held up as a model. In fact, the net effect of Militant's fake 'transitional' action was to lower the level of political consciousness and discredit the 'far left'.

In the current economic climate, it is certainly true that a working-class mobilisation on a significant scale would be required to win a meaningful expansion of public works. The capitalists would have to fear they were losing

control before they would consider any such measures. Yet Taaffe isn't even serious about a militant mobilisation to win concessions—he only proposes a 24-hour general strike, a symbolic action rather than a real bid to assert the ability of the working class to bring the economy to a screeching halt. A token, time-limited strike would be guaranteed to win nothing from the bosses and do nothing to bridge the chasm separating workers' current reformist illusions from the historic necessity for a social revolution to expropriate the capitalists and seize state power.

In 1983, while still deep within the Labour Party, Taaffe spun a utopian fantasy of a 'socialist and democratic' reform of British capitalism:

'If the next Labour government introduced an Enabling Bill into Parliament to nationalise the 200 monopolies, banks and insurance companies which control 80 to 85 per cent of the economy, a decisive blow would be struck against the 196 directors of these firms who are the real government of Britain. By the economic power they wield, they dictate the course to be followed by both Tory and Labour governments. They would be compensated for the nationalisation of their assets on the basis of "proven need." Such a step, backed up by the power of the labour movement outside parliament, would allow the introduction of a socialist and democratic plan of production to be worked out and implemented by committees of trade unions, the shop stewards, housewives and small businessmen.'

—'The state: a warning to the Labour movement', 1983

The CWI leadership no longer pretends that the Labour Party is capable of carrying out such measures, but it still pushes the absurd notion that as soon as a socialist party—or should I say The Socialist Party?—wins a general election, a socialist transformation can be carried out through parliamentary reforms.

In his 1983 document, Taaffe did stipulate that workers would have to support such a government with constant mobilisations—but workers' mobilisations have their limits when confronted by the repressive state apparatus sworn to protect the system of capitalist exploitation and its beneficiaries. Taaffe mentioned the brutal repression unleashed by the Chilean military's 1973 coup that overthrew Salvador Allende's popular-front government, but entirely sidestepped the whole issue of preparing the workers' movement to counter the violence of the exploiters.

Trotsky could have been talking about the CWI leaders when, in his 1925 book, *Where is Britain Going?*, he warned that:

'It is futile to lull the masses to sleep from day to day with prattling about peaceful, painless, parliamentary, democratic transitions to socialism and then, at the first serious punch delivered at one's nose, to call upon the masses for armed resistance. This is the best method for facilitating the destruction of the proletariat by the powers of reaction. In order to be capable of offering revolutionary resistance, the masses must be prepared for such action mentally, materially and by organisation. They must understand the inevitability of a more and more savage class struggle, and its transformation, at a certain stage, into civil war.'

Marx, Lenin and Trotsky were very clear that an egalitarian, democratically-planned economy could only be created by a successful socialist revolution which destroyed the capitalist state apparatus and replaced it by the rule of workers'

councils. Trotsky, in sharp contrast to Taaffe, argued that 'we cannot adapt the program to the backward mentality of the workers, the mentality, the mood is a secondary factor—the prime factor is the objective situation' ('Discussions With Trotsky: On the Transitional Program', 7 June 1938). Many of the best trade-union militants in Britain today are paralysed by parliamentary illusions—the idea that a 'socialist' government that won a parliamentary majority could legislate an end to capitalist oppression, eradicate poverty and inequality and ensure a jolly life for all. Trotsky refused to pander to such illusions and instead insisted that the duty of revolutionaries is to find ways to show workers engaged in limited defensive struggles that the only way they can guarantee a secure and comfortable future for themselves and their children is through overthrowing capitalism and establishing in its place a new social system based on collective social ownership and rational planning.

Marx's insight regarding the social implications of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall illuminates the roots of the current economic crisis and the endless human tragedies it generates. While we largely agree with Bruce Wallace's observations regarding the shortcomings of the economic analysis of the SP leadership, we note that a mere critique of the CWI leadership's current economic analysis hardly explains why Taaffe considers Wallace et al to be 'ultra-lefts'. On some level Taaffe appears to grasp that a serious critique of his Keynesian conceptions implies a break with the CWI's fundamentally social-democratic attitude to the essential question of state and revolution. CWI supporters who are serious about building a genuinely revolutionary workers' international must prepare to broaden their critique of the mistaken economic analysis of Taaffe and Co. to include a rejection of the reformist political programme that underlies it. ■

**Marxism vs.  
'Militant' Reformism**

*The CWI's Kautskyan Caricature of Trotskyism*

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# Bad Politics & Bureaucratic Cover-Ups Cliffites in Crisis



SWP supporters participate in London 'slut walk,' June 2011

*The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Britain's largest left group, has been undergoing what its central figure, Alex Callinicos, recently described as an "acute internal crisis" which three national conferences held in the course of 2013 were unable to resolve. The crisis, which has resulted in a continued exodus of members (particularly youth), initially erupted at the group's annual conference in January 2013 when the Central Committee nearly lost a vote to endorse its handling of allegations against a leading male SWPer who was accused of sexually assaulting a young female member. The refusal of nearly half the cadre to rubberstamp their leadership's actions was unprecedented in an organization that has historically marginalized or driven out dissidents.*

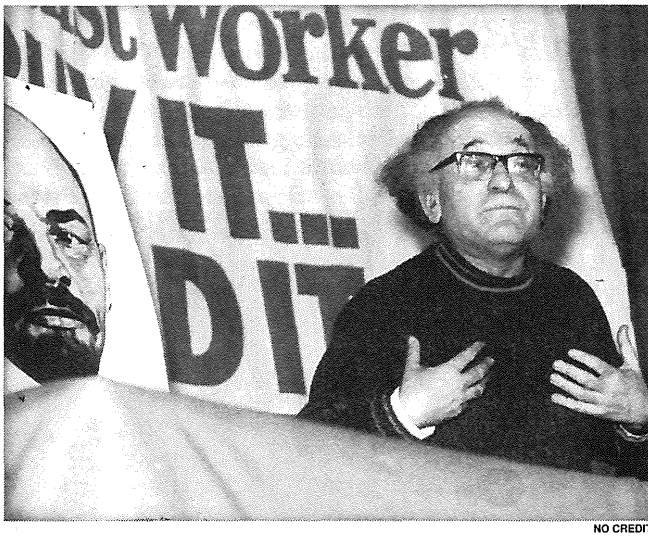
*The following IBT statement was originally released in February 2013.*

The current convulsions wracking the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), resulting from anger at the leadership's handling of rape allegations against a senior party member, 'Comrade Delta', threaten to seriously damage the Tony

Cliff franchise. The Central Committee's attempts to contain the anger generated by their 'Disputes Committee' report with organisational heavy-handedness seems only to have fuelled the fire, with the open revolt headed by Richard Seymour appearing to have substantial support among the group's core cadre.

Many outside and inside the SWP seem to think that this is a problem that can be fixed by organisational means—a new conference, a new leadership, more bulletins and broader factional rights. There is no doubt that the internal practices of the SWP are far removed from those of Lenin and Trotsky, but 'more democracy' will not fix the political problems that have given rise to bad organisational practices.

The roots of the current crisis lie in the entire political history of the Cliff tendency, which has been consistent only in its willingness to adapt its politics to those it seeks to influence and recruit. The International Socialists originated in the early 1950s, when Tony Cliff and his supporters



SWP founder-leader Tony Cliff circa 1967

broke with the Trotskyist movement by refusing to defend the North Korean and Chinese deformed workers' states in the Korean War—a conflict in which British, American and other imperialists sought to 'roll back' Stalinist insurgents in Asia (see 'Tony Cliff's Family Tree', 1917 No.6). In the 1960s, after the emergence of a radicalised New Left, Cliff flipped once again and backed the Vietnamese Stalinists against the US and its allies and puppets.

Since then the Cliffite political tradition has been marked by an endless series of capitulations and adaptations, all driven by a desire to cash in on prevailing popular moods. One recent example was the decision to bury the SWP's position on the right of women to abortion in order to cement a bloc with George Galloway in Respect (see 'Cliffites, Clerics & Class Collaboration', 1917 No.28). A decade ago their Stop the War Coalition (StWC) mobilised thousands, occasionally millions, but did nothing to raise socialist consciousness because it was built on the basis of pacifist slogans in pursuit of an alliance with bourgeois liberals, not as a means of popularising the call for defeating imperialism in Iraq and Afghanistan (see 'Imperialist War & Socialist Pretenders', 1917 No.25). Last year [2012] in Egypt, the SWP called for votes to the Muslim Brotherhood, who, when victorious, turned around and physically attacked the left (see 'Cliffites Vote for Muslim Brotherhood', 1917 No.35).

The internal regime of the SWP ultimately derives from its profound political instability. Despite many 'educational' on the history of Marxism and a wide variety of questions, the SWP has failed to develop and politicise its membership. In the SWP, 'Marxism' means an annual political event in London—not a guide to action. In making their rapid twists and turns with Respect, StWC, etc., the SWP leadership has openly flouted the core propositions of the class politics they profess to uphold. The reason they have been free to do so is that much of the membership does not understand (and some do not agree with) the logic of Marxism—and, in any case, do not have much say in determining the policies of their organisation.

## Democratic Centralism

The organisational practices of the SWP have nothing to do with those of the Bolshevik Party under Lenin, and can-

not be described as democratic centralist. What passes for 'Leninism' in the SWP may well lead many to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but democratic centralism is the necessary organisational framework for a revolutionary combat party. Centralism is required for effective action and democracy is essential to politicise the group and ensure that members understand the programme, as well as being a mechanism to challenge decisions of the leadership, correct its mistakes and, when necessary, replace it.

With the SWP leadership strongly discouraging discussion on the findings of their Disputes Committee regarding the rape allegation, and bureaucratically declaring 'the case is closed', dissidents have taken the discussion outside the party. Some observers welcome this as being a good thing in principle. In this case it seems to be necessary, but in a healthy revolutionary organisation, internal debate is the most effective way to arrive at correct decisions regarding the inevitable problems that arise in political life. To open such discussions to the public is to invite those who are not obligated to carry out the decisions reached (as well as reformists, cranks, confusionists and trolls) to gum up the works. This is not, as anti-Leninists contend, a means of shutting down programmatic debate, but rather raising the level of debate inside and outside the revolutionary organisation.

## Rape and Bourgeois Justice

We do not, and cannot, know what happened between comrades 'W' and 'Delta'. As a 'tribune of the oppressed' a revolutionary organisation is duty-bound to take accusations of sexual violence seriously. A Marxist organisation must have a means of investigating complaints by one member against another. Any investigating body must be comprised of reputable comrades who are as impartial as possible, and all parties to the dispute must have adequate representation and support of their choice.

Revolutionaries do not call on the police to intervene in disputes within the workers' movement. A member who was found guilty of rape or crimes of comparable seriousness would be automatically expelled from the organisation. We recognise that under capitalism, individuals often have no other recourse than to use the bourgeois justice system, but in no case do revolutionaries call on the agencies of the class enemy to sort out problems within the socialist movement.

## Revolutionary Struggle

There are many SWP members who may be disgusted and demoralised by the current state of their organisation and retreat from active politics. For those wanting to move forward, it is necessary to go beyond a fight for a more democratic SWP and address the organisation's liquidationist history of Labour Party entrism, economism in the trade unions and adaptation to everything from feminism to Islamic reaction. The SWP leadership's disregard for the core of working-class politics led to building cross-class blocs like Respect, and offering political support to reactionary bourgeois political formations like the Muslim Brotherhood. The 'IS tradition' must be politically rejected in its entirety. An authentically Marxist vanguard can only be built on the revolutionary tradition of the Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky—only this sort of party can actually solve the problems of the oppressed and exploited. ■



# Anti-Communism, Nationalism & Religious Obscurantism

## Polish Proletariat: 'Class in Itself'



AP PHOTO—ALIK KEPLICZ

### Solidarnosc marches in Warsaw, 14 September 2013

*The following is an eyewitness report on a major trade-union demonstration that took place in Warsaw last September.*

Saturday was the culmination of four days of trade-union meetings and demonstrations in Warsaw organized by the three largest unions: Solidarnosc, OPZZ (All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions, the successor to the old state union federation under Stalinism, and generally in political alliance with the SLD—Union of the Democratic Left, successor to the former Stalinist ruling party in Poland whose parliamentary support hovers around 10 percent) and FZZ (Trade Union Forum), the smallest and least nationally visible of the three. Solidarnosc is a unitary union, the other two are federations.

On Saturday, the three unions marched from different parts of Warsaw to converge at a central point and then continued together past the president's palace to the Old Town for a mass rally. Estimates of total numbers vary from anywhere between 100,000 and 200,000, which makes it the largest union demonstration since 1989. This was an all-Poland event in which the provinces were disproportionately represented due to the almost total erosion of industry in the Warsaw area since the capitalist counterrevolution. This made it easier for the bourgeois press to mount an insolent assault on the unions for essentially organizing a mass provincial outing to the capital with apparently no other aim than to disturb the peace and quiet of Warsaw—which is doing very well thank you—and has no need for anachronistic, selfish and corrupt trade unions.

### Getting Past Solidarnosc

Beginning in the south of Warsaw on Saturday morning, and intending to get to the OPZZ march (which came

in from the west), required getting through the masses of Solidarnosc as they converged from different directions. They, like the other unions, were disciplined, marching in groups according to factories, mines, hospitals, etc. (unionization outside of the traditional sectors is negligible), and the police were (unusually) almost invisible. Solidarnosc members were marching under their union banners with few national flags and almost no banners with slogans. They were the working-class rank-and-file of the movement determined to show the government that they still counted. This was not the Solidarnosc of religious or political pilgrimages, but the trade union, and it was impressive. An old lady next to me at one point, waving a small Polish flag, said "so many of them, such power" with tears in her eyes. Of course the periphery was solidly right-wing with nationalist and ultra-Catholic newspapers and leaflets being distributed (not by the marchers), and I did see a small (fewer than ten) group of fascists dressed in black and carrying Celtic crosses being led into the demo by a Solidarnosc steward. No leftists of any shade would have dared to openly march here or distribute materials.

### Reaching the OPZZ

After getting to the west of the city center from where the OPZZ contingent was marching, I started to see familiar faces. The OPZZ march was also huge and made up of the rank-and-file but it seemed more subdued than Solidarnosc. Perhaps this was due to the fact that many in Solidarnosc have illusions that if the right-wing PiS (Law and Justice Party) wins the next election and "real patriots" take over the government, as happened in Hungary, then capitalism can be made to work for them, finally. OPZZ

members can have no such illusions, and they know a PiS victory will mean another bout of anti-communist witch-hunts and patriotic and religious fervor which will be directed at any forces deemed to be left, including OPZZ. Like a mirror image of Solidarnosc, the periphery of the OPZZ march was left-wing, not right. Of course not as well-financed, so no free newspapers....

### Sectarianism & Anti-Communism

I came to the place where the "Anti-capitalist Bloc" was to join the OPZZ march—there were perhaps 150 people, and in contrast to the union's march, they were heavily policed with intrusive filming, which is usual. They were chanting slogans such as "Fight, fight capitalism, fight, fight," but the cops would not let them join the march. The trade unionists were neither carrying placards with slogans nor were they chanting. The Anti-capitalist Bloc was made up mainly of anarcho-syndicalists with a few other groups mixed in, and at the rear was a small contingent from the Polish Communist Party (KPP), a small Stalinist outfit. OPZZ marchers and stewards gave signs of solidarity with the Anti-capitalist Bloc, e.g., shaking hands with its organizers, and the police allowed the bloc to start moving into the demo.

At this point, however, one of the Anti-capitalist Bloc organizers stood in the way of the KPP and when the police intervened he told them the KPP were not part of the bloc, and so the police then held them back. Thus the KPP, with a huge red banner, were separated off from the bloc and left at the side. I expressed my solidarity to the KPP woman leader against the sectarianism and police collaborationism of the anarcho-syndicalists, and was joined in this by a Polish Spartacist. The KPP woman said that it had been agreed they could join the Anti-capitalist Bloc if they did not bring their hammer and sickle banner, which they accordingly had left at home, but to no avail.

The Spartacist said that Socialist Alternative [SA—section of the Committee for a Workers' International], who had decided to march with the miners in the demo rather than separately in a bloc, would soon be coming by. SA/CWI had a red banner calling for a general strike (a call raised that day only by the OPZZ left periphery) and were known to have opposed the KPP's ejection by other left groups from the 1 May parade in Wroclaw this year. I went over to the CWI comrades and told them what had happened and suggested the KPP could come in with them. The action of the Anti-capitalist Bloc was not only disgraceful, it was also dangerous for the KPP people as just the word "communist" in Poland, regardless of who claims the name, risks repression from the state and physical attacks from the right. While the KPP was waiting at the side of the march, I actually saw one union demonstrator spit at the KPP banner and others reacted with ridicule or aggression. Remember this was OPZZ, not Solidarnosc!

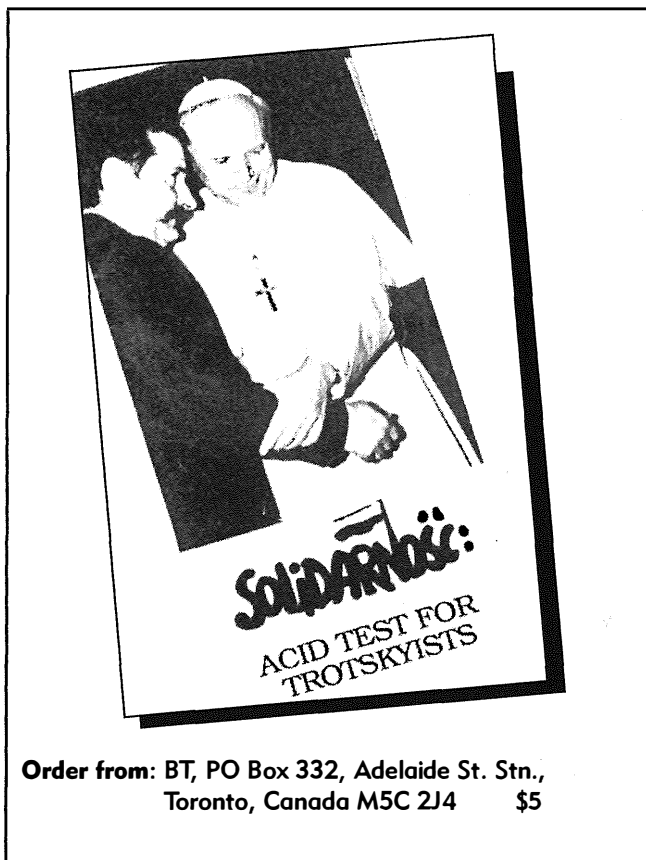
The CWI indicated they would have no objection, but there were just a few of them and they were themselves guests of the miners. I conveyed this to the KPP and they managed to join on, but after a few minutes the miners became very unhappy with their presence and told them to leave, which they did, their banner furled. Anti-communism is a key ideological mainstay of the Polish capitalist state and as such permeates many aspects of public life including the education system. Many leftists feel under pressure to prove that they are not tainted by communism. Perhaps this

explains, though it cannot justify, the anarcho-syndicalists' ejection of the KPP from the Anti-capitalist Bloc.

It is interesting to note that despite the allergic reaction that the overwhelming majority of Poles have to words such as communist or Bolshevik, there is considerable support for martial law under Jaruzelski in 1981. This is generally not, however, on the basis of opposition to capitalist restoration, but as a lesser evil—"the suppression of Solidarnosc was inevitable given the political realities of the time, so it was just a question of whether our troops would do it, or the Soviets." The SLD also embraces this approach. Public discussion of the events of December 1981 flares up every year around the anniversary of the declaration of martial law, and it is ironic that most ostensible revolutionaries line up with the right in condemning the suppression of Solidarnosc's counterrevolutionary leadership.

### Tens of Thousands Came, and Went...Nowhere

As the march continued, it became clear that it was going nowhere. With no slogans and no demands this had turned out to be (almost) what the capitalist press had claimed: a provincial outing to the capital. When we arrived at Zygmunt's Column there was just empty talk from the union tops and plenty of nationalist and religious paraphernalia to buy. This mass of people with an anti-capitalist consciousness and a Bolshevik leadership would be more than enough to overthrow the system, representing as they do the mood of huge discontent throughout Poland. But without consciousness and leadership this energy will be dissipated as it has been before. Most on the Polish non-Stalinist left are outright hostile to Leninism. There is much to be done. ■



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# Clerical Reaction & Women's Oppression

## The Struggle for Abortion Rights in Ireland

The following statement was originally distributed in September 2013.

Responding to national and international protests over Savita Halappanavar's tragic death from septicaemia after she was denied an abortion, the Irish government passed the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act on 30 July 2013. Halappanavar's death, along with this new "X-Case legislation", has reinvigorated the pro-choice movement and placed the question of women's rights in the forefront of Irish politics.

The new legislation is extremely restrictive, relaxing the total ban on legal abortions only in cases where the woman's life is at risk. The decision about abortion is still not in the hands of the woman herself, but the doctors who determine whether her life is in danger. The law thus codifies an explicitly anti-choice position and was correctly opposed by many abortion rights activists.

Only a handful of women will benefit from this legislation and it would almost certainly not have saved the life of Savita Halappanavar. Her death illustrates that those who are opposed to the availability of abortion are not "pro-life." Without the right to safe, legal abortions, thousands of women every year are still forced to travel to Britain and the continent to terminate their pregnancies. The hundreds, perhaps thousands, of women who self-administer the RU 486 "abortion pill" at home in Ireland are still considered criminals, along with anyone who helps them.

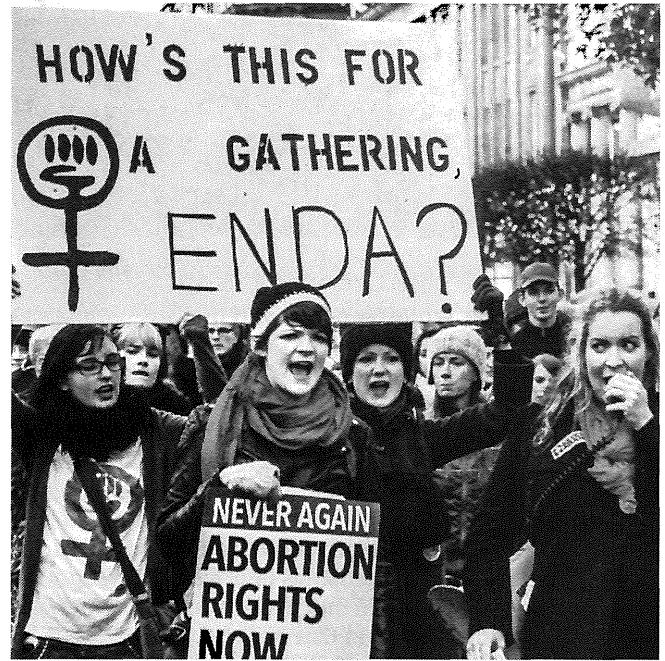
### The Right to Choose Means Free Abortion on Demand

Abortion is illegal in Ireland under section 40.3.3 of the Constitution:

"The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."

In the wake of the X-Case legislation, there is talk of a campaign to repeal section 40.3.3. This should be supported, but it is clearly not enough. There are differences over the alternative—from restricting abortion to cases of rape, incest, fatal foetal abnormality or a threat to the woman's health, to a pro-choice position of free, safe and legal abortion on demand. The "right to choose" can only mean that the pregnant woman herself decides whether or not to have an abortion, with no conditions attached. We need a campaign that calls for nothing less than abortion on demand and for the provision of facilities to make this a reality.

Such a campaign would collaborate where possible with those seeking constitutional change, but it is also necessary to build a militant challenge to the existing legal restric-



Dublin, 17 November 2012: thousands march in memory of Savita Halappanavar

tions. The thousands of Irish women who need abortions every year cannot afford to wait for a promise of future change to the law. The pro-choice movement needs to be actively involved in maximising women's options right now, despite the legal restrictions—distributing information on how to procure and safely use the abortion pill and supporting women travelling to have abortions. Harsh bans on abortion don't actually lower abortion rates, they in fact encourage unsafe practices, which result in the deaths of some 47,000 women each year across the globe. The threat of up to 14 years imprisonment for taking the abortion pill can only discourage women who have complications from seeking medical help. We should aim to establish a semi-underground network, based around sympathetic medical professionals, which could provide support and medical care for women in need of assistance. The greater the access to abortion for women who need it, the less viable the repressive legislation becomes, and the greater the momentum to repeal it altogether.

### The Right to Choose and the Irish State

Legal change will not come about through lobbying TDs [members of the Irish parliament] but through mass political mobilisation. Neither Fine Gael nor the Labour Party is willing to call a referendum to change the Constitution. The main opposition party, Fianna Fáil, is even more back-



**Nuns outside polling station, 2002 Irish abortion referendum**

ward on the issue, while Sinn Fein and the Greens support abortion only if a woman's life is threatened.

The capitalist parties reflect the prejudices of the church and the misogynist state, but they are also well aware that polls regularly indicate that around 35% of the population supports the right to choose, although close to 80% believe that abortion should be allowed when the woman's health is in danger and nearly 90% when there is a threat to the woman's life. Some in the pro-choice camp argue that we should therefore limit our demands until a majority supports free abortion on demand. On the contrary, our task as fighters for women's rights is to build that majority, to convince Irish workers and the oppressed that the struggle for reproductive freedom and abortion is integral to the fight against all oppression. Irish women will never have equal rights while they are denied access to free, safe and legal abortion.

Ireland's misogynist culture has been manifested in various ways historically, from the symphysiotomy procedures imposed on many women during childbirth, to the abuse that occurred in the Magdalene Laundries and "mother and baby homes." The Constitution has enshrined the oppression of women since the consolidation of the state in the 1930s. Article 41.2 stipulates that women's primary social role is motherhood:

"1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

"2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home."

This still stands despite the reality that over 50% of Irish mothers are employed and the hypocrisy over the concern for motherhood is shown by continued cuts to child benefit and social welfare for lone parents. Until 1973 women in the Civil Service faced mandatory retirement on marriage. Only in 1994 was the right to divorce allowed in Ireland, four years after marital rape was criminalised. Not until 2005 was there a successful conviction for this crime that affects so many women ([www.rcni.ie/18-november-2005.aspx](http://www.rcni.ie/18-november-2005.aspx)). Nearly 8,000 women received support from Domestic Violence Support Services in Ireland in 2011 ([\[Factsheet-nov2012-Online.pdf\]\(#\)\), while many thousands of other incidents of domestic violence went unreported.](http://www.safeireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/Safe-Ireland-</a></p>
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## The Right to Choose and Women's Liberation

The Constitution "recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society" (Article 41.1.1) and "the necessary basis of social order" (Article 41.1.2). The subjugation of women under capitalism is rooted in their central role in the family as unpaid providers of the domestic services necessary for the maintenance of society. The Rape Crisis Network notes that "most sexual violence in Ireland is... committed in the family home, by male members of the family and male relatives, within the institution of the family" ([www.rcni.ie/18-november-2005.aspx](http://www.rcni.ie/18-november-2005.aspx)). The family also functions as an atomised unit, providing an ideal conveyor belt for the state's and church's backward and regressive ideas.

An essential bulwark of women's oppression in Ireland is the Catholic Church, which campaigned against the new abortion law as being "too liberal." It opposes contraception as well as "abortion, abortifacient pills and devices, the abortion pill and the morning-after pill, destructive embryo and embryonic stem cell research, genetic engineering, euthanasia, etc." (<http://www.catholicbishops.ie/2007/10/05/theme-day-life-pastoral-letter-blessed-fruit-womb/>, [5 October 2007]).

The Church still runs 90% of the country's primary schools. To oppose the attempts of religious reactionaries to poison the minds of youth with socially backward superstition, it is necessary to fight for the total separation of church and state and a completely secular education system. As well as championing free and universal access to contraceptives and free abortion on demand, we should also demand the right to immediate divorce at the request of either partner, funding for women's refuges, extended parental leave for either parent at full pay, full employment at good wages, free quality healthcare (including care for the disabled), 24-hour childcare and decent affordable housing for all.

The oppression of women can only be ended when the domestic services traditionally performed within the nuclear family (childcare, housework, food preparation, etc.) are socialised. This in turn requires the overthrow of capitalist rule by the workers' movement and the constructing of a new non-exploitative economic order that can provide the material foundation for human relations based on true equality and respect.

A workers' revolution that expropriates capitalist property and can open the door to a socialist future requires an organisation that can provide political leadership to all of capitalism's victims with a programme capable of liberating them. The Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, which led the Russian working class to power in October 1917 and immediately began to lay the material basis for the emancipation of women, provides a model of such an organisation. They legalised divorce and homosexuality, organised collective laundries, canteens and childcare, and undertook to free women from lives of domestic drudgery—gains that were tragically reversed as the revolution degenerated under Stalin. A revolutionary organisation of the same type as the Bolshevik Party must be created in Ireland today, one that participates in the day-to-day struggles of working people and the oppressed and is based on a programme of establishing an Irish workers' republic within a socialist federation of Europe and ending capitalism and exploitation for good. ■

# Equality...

*continued from page 32*

of course, love under chivalry was always outside marriage, and about either unfulfilled yearning, or unadulterated adultery. Marriage was about power and property, and love was counterposed to it.

If love penetrated the ruling classes during the age of chivalry, it had a pre-history, which is largely unwritten. Before chivalry, love was confined to the lower orders. Citizens of Athens and Rome did not love their wives, though they may have been infatuated with a slave-girl or a boyfriend. But servants and shepherd boys, whose lives went mostly unrecorded because they didn't matter, were able to love each other, and love intensely. Although the record is sparse, traces are inevitably left in song and verse.

We live in a cynical age, and intelligent people are not supposed to believe in love. However, in hints and traces, and also in anthropological studies of pre-class societies, we can see that patches, incidents or explosions of love have formed in most of the different kinds of social arrangements our species has tried out. We can see that love is sometimes capable of great heroism against the predominating institutions of society. And we can see that love has been most widespread where power, status and property are weakest. Indeed, what I want to argue here is that love can appear in many environments, and has extraordinary potential for social disruption, but if love is to transcend the exceptional and episodic, and if there is to be a generalized freedom to love, then class society must be dismantled.

Of course, the spontaneity and diverse forms of love—its passion and sheer joy—do not sit easily beside the authority and hierarchy necessary to run a class society. So marriage has become a tool for the *organization* of love. Love is a danger, and marriage is put into service for its moderation and debasement, and to render it uniform.

So heterosexual marriage is the standard, against which all other relationships are measured. Parental expectations, housing policy and architecture, family law, and popular music all tend to push toward a marriage-like form. To the extent that a relationship is in the nature of a marriage—a heterosexual marriage—it is judged successful.

And so we have the modern nuclear family under capitalism as an instrument for the mass organization of domestic tasks and reproduction, and for disciplined training of the workforce. The ideal wherein love and marriage are combined has a dual function—of bureaucratizing and routinizing love to render it socially harmless, and of spicing up marriage to make it acceptable.

This is not to say, of course, that there is no real love in the world today—indeed many get a taste of genuine love, and some get a full serving, but the commercial mass-media love industry and the attempts to tie love to the institution of marriage have profoundly misshapen it. The pursuit of love is combined with a pursuit of money, power and fame, and the experience of love is twisted by crass commercialism, showy weddings, and the legal and social controls that define marriage.

Nor is this to say that marriage at an individual level is



JORDAN MOSS

## July 2011: Karen Cofield and Gwendolyn Williams get married at Bronx County Courthouse

necessarily a betrayal of love. Each of us must make their way as best they can in this broken world, and marriage helps many negotiate a path. But as a cultural institution, marriage is fundamentally conservative.

And so we come to the struggle for same-sex marriage rights, which has emerged with remarkable historical speed on a global basis very recently. When I was a younger man fighting for homosexual law reform in the 1985-86 campaign, gay marriage was not something we thought of as a possibility to be considered.

In the context of the way marriage is carried out, its social role and its debasement of love, it is frankly not surprising that radical queers looked on this movement with great suspicion. Why would we want to buy into the process whereby the creative, disruptive, passionate power of love was tamed to fit the conservative straightjacket of marriage?

But marriage will not be transcended by maintaining the limitations and constraints on it, but by opening it up, and by freeing it of the compulsions which surround it—compulsions which are ideological, legal and material.

So of course, most of us took a deep breath, and supported the marriage reform. We supported it quite simply because legal prohibition is not an instrument of liberation. Many of us don't want to join the army or the police force, or to become a truck driver, or adopt children. But we want the same rights to do those things as anyone else. The point about the fight for the right to get married was not that we were advocating that all of us queer people should actually get married, but that we should be allowed to get married.

While there were some attractions in the argument that we want the right to be different, not merely to be the same as the majority, the truth is that the fight against oppression (whether sexual, religious, national or economic) is always a fight for equal rights, the right to be the same. Separate but equal, is not equal. Where Muslims or atheists do not have the same rights as Christians, they are pushed to make their beliefs about religion invisible. Where queers do not have



**Satirical print circa 1590: young wife surrenders chastity belt key to husband (with asses' ears). Old woman behind bed has spare key for wife during husband's absence. Cat and mouse, lower left, suggest: 'When the cat's away, the mice will play.'**

the same rights as straights, they are pushed to make their queerness invisible. It is only through winning the right to be the same that we really gain the freedom to be different.

So we supported the campaign for equal marriage rights. But it was hardly an earth-shattering episode, and although our little victory in that campaign was quite satisfying, mostly because we don't get to experience very many victories, it was not exactly a turning point in history. The campaign was an occasion for some highly reversible mass consciousness-raising, and possibly laid some groundwork for the more important struggle to protect queer kids from bullying in high schools. But the objective and concrete achievement of this campaign was actually just a tiny logical extension of bourgeois democratic rights, which will have very little impact on our real lives. At the end of the day, it was not a big deal.

When the celebrations died down, queer and trans people still faced discrimination and oppression in families and schools and workplaces, as we always knew we would. In my counseling practice I still see heteronormativity pushing people to the brink of death. I see very high levels of stress and addiction among queers. I see the Independent Youth Benefit denied to adolescents

who have nothing—no family, no accommodation, no job [though it is routinely given to youth who are not queer or trans who are cut off from financial support by family breakdown]. There are in fact extraordinary levels of unemployment among young queers right now. I still see health professionals refusing to take seriously the problem of queer and trans suicidality, and gay boys bullied at school, and trans teenagers kicked out of their homes.

It sometimes feels like we're in a battleground, and in the context of the trauma that surrounds us, and the lesser, but still urgent, practical needs, our imaginings of a future utopia of polymorphous perversity seem a bit indulgent. We might want a world where the privileges of monogamy are dismantled, where there is a culture of celebrating diversity and a universal validation of relationships with many different shapes. But right now what we have to concern ourselves with is that almost all queer and trans kids grow up in fear of bullying at school, and a significant number want to kill themselves because they have been kicked out of home with no resources.

What I want to argue is that we should not separate, but rather we should link, the struggle for immediate needs

and the struggle for a more profound liberation. Indeed it is only in the struggle to meet immediate needs that we can lay a path to profound change and a fundamentally better society.

To take the example of housing: it is clear that an abundance and a variety of subsidized housing would be an enormous step in meeting immediate needs—helping counter the effects of poverty and taking a lot of the sting out of family transphobia and homophobia. If even modest housing were immediately accessible, it would take much of the stress and conflict out of adolescent coming-out crises. There are depressions that would lift, and suicides that would not happen.

In fact, it's not just queer and trans adolescents who need access to accommodation separate from their parents. Most families with adolescents at certain points need more housing options. And as well as addressing the immediate needs of adolescents, good accommodation options would also address the needs of married people when their marriages were in trouble, or they were merely needing a little space. Whether it is a question of domestic violence, irritations about the relatives visiting, or a new sexual configuration disturbing the equilibrium of the household, access to housing would remove one of the most important constraints that too often turn a marriage into a prison.

When there are children, one of the compulsions that ties the couple together and makes it difficult to escape a marriage even though it has passed its use-by date, is the expense of setting up accommodation that allows genuine co-parenting. People are forced to stay in the marital home in order to keep connected to their children or, in leaving the marriage, they also leave most of the parenting to *one* of the former partners, usually the mother. Decent accommodation options for families that are coming apart would remove another of the compulsions that shape marriage.

So while certainly it is true that family law, fairy tales and Hollywood are important forces shaping and maintaining the institution of marriage, actually it is too often simply the absence of an alternative place to live, or even to stay temporarily, that keeps a given marriage going, or determines its shape.

As with housing, so with decent free childcare, which is another thing we should be fighting for. It would remove another set of compulsions that keep in place the marriage system and gender inequality. A program to remove those largely economic compulsions and see what people make of their lives without them seems a far more sensible way of approaching the world of the future than to try to imagine in advance how it will look, because that is something we simply cannot know.

We cannot know the future of marriage, but we can fight for the removal of the constraints on domestic relationships. If there were true material security, which would of course include guaranteed access to well-paying jobs, the compulsions that today hold marriage and the currently prevailing family system in place would be removed. With material security can come enormous sexual freedom and diversity of domestic arrangements.

Of course, we are told that the system simply cannot pay for full employment, easily accessible decent housing and childcare, and I guess that the people who say this to us know their system and that they are right. This system

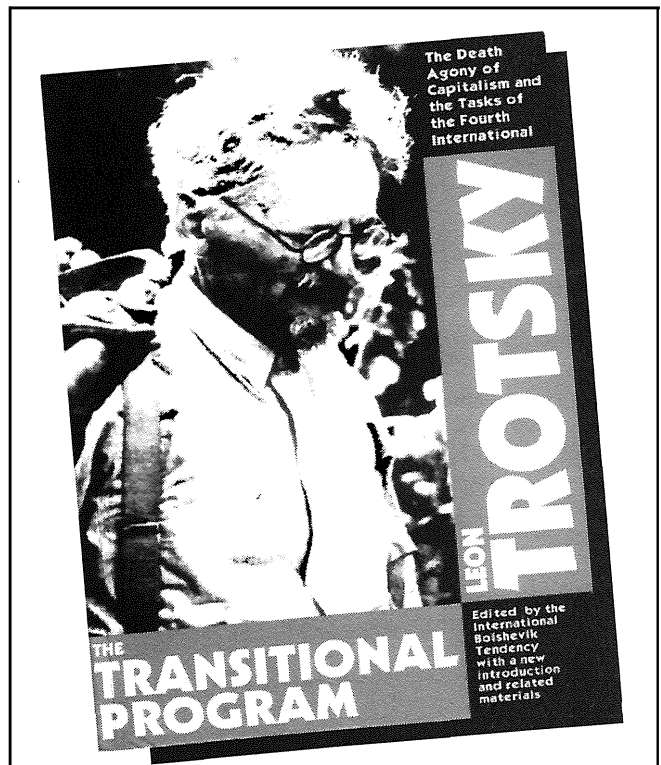
can't pay for these things. So much the worse for the system. Throw it away.

And so the struggle for domestic freedom is indivisible from the struggle for socialism. The running costs of the capitalist system are simply too high. There is an awful lot of corruption and freeloading involved in running capitalism, and also an awful lot of paperwork, all of which eats up human lives without giving anything back. And then there is the human effort wasted in financial shenanigans, and whole industries that add very little to the sum total of human happiness—banking and insurance and advertising. Capitalism is profoundly wasteful.

But the resources exist. There is a study on the basis of data for the year 2000 by the United Nations World Institute for Development Economic Research. It reports that the three richest individuals in the world possessed more financial assets than the lowest 48 nations combined. It reports that the richest one percent in the world owned 40 percent of global assets.

So the program for a world beyond marriage must be a program that addresses the obscene inefficiency and inequality of the capitalist system. Only a program of socialism can create the conditions for transcending marriage.

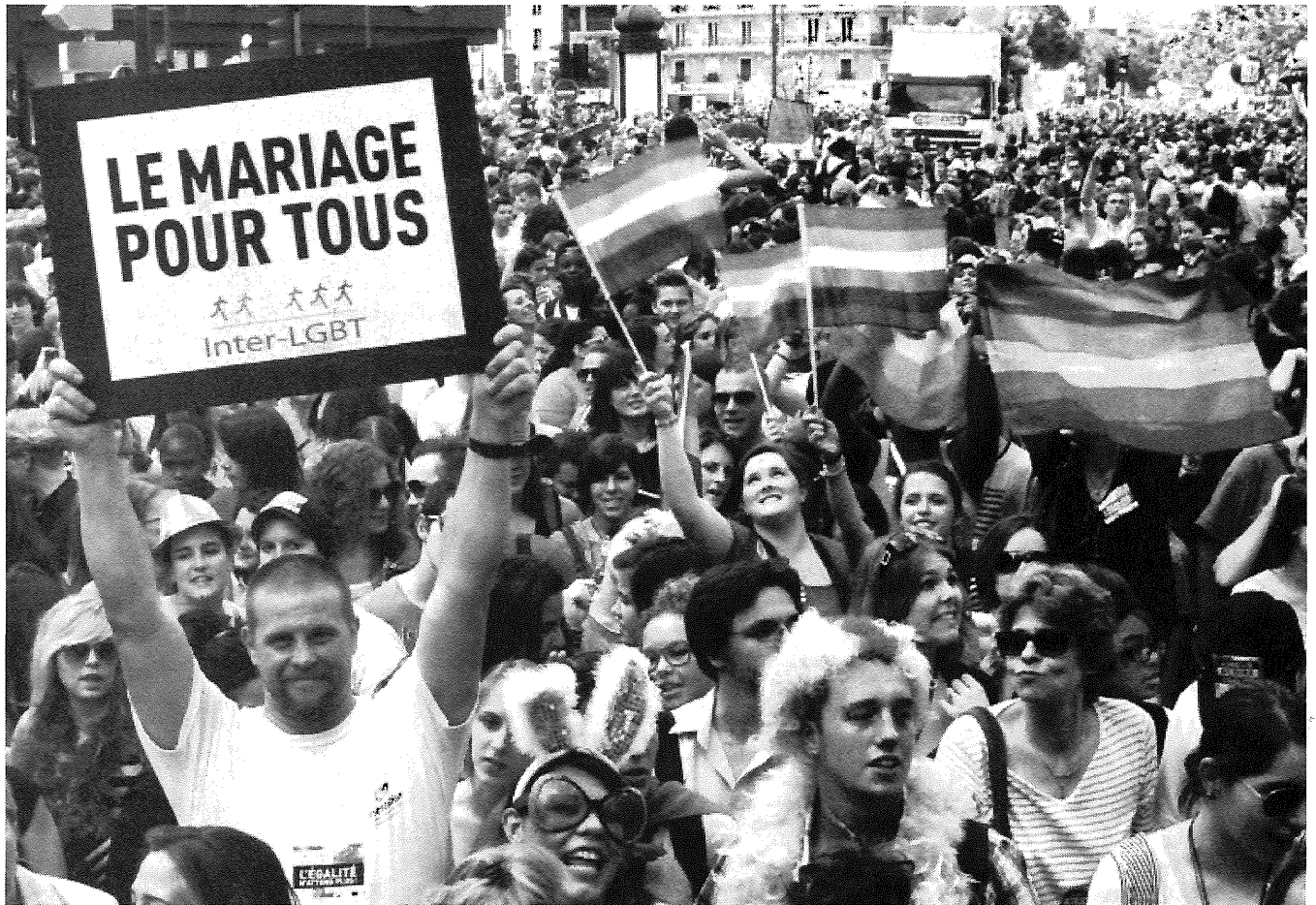
Exactly how will we live under socialism? We cannot know. We cannot know what will replace our current marriage and family arrangements. But we can suspect that when issues of material security are behind us, people's personal preferences will trump any considerations of family pressure or popular prejudice. And we can expect that our domestic arrangements will be extremely diverse. ■



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# Capitalism, Queers & Equality

## Love & Marriage



NO CREDIT

### Participants in Paris Gay Pride event oppose homophobic hysteria over marriage equality

*In April 2013, New Zealand finally legalized marriage for same-sex couples. There was considerable discussion among left-wing queer and trans activists about whether marriage equality should be supported as a democratic right, or opposed on the grounds that marriage is a bourgeois institution. In October 2013, the Queer Avengers organized a conference in Wellington entitled "Beyond Marriage" where this issue, among others, was discussed. Reprinted below is a speech given at the conference by Bill Logan, a leader of the successful 1985-86 struggle to decriminalize homosexuality in New Zealand and a supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency.*

Like most of us, I'm far more interested in love than marriage, but I want to consider the connections and antagonisms between love and marriage today. I don't want to attempt a precise definition of love here, but I don't merely mean deep caring for our fellow humans, or close friendship, or filial affection, or warm companionship. All those are great things, and often in the world we live in today, they are our best sources of personal security. But what we are talking of here is passionate, spontaneous, sexual love.

Now, in this sense, love and marriage both have long histories in Western culture, going back thousands of years, but they are almost entirely separate histories. Love and marriage have quite simply had nothing to do with each other. Even the *fiction* that love and marriage should somehow be combined is rather recent, and rather unevenly applied. Marriage has always been about status and property. Even in the last two hundred years, when marriage has attempted to appropriate love for its own purposes, it is a debased, deformed kind of love that marriage has sought to incorporate—a love where the perfect match involves celebrity, power and money, and where your grandmother tells you it is as easy to fall in love with a rich woman as with a poor one. The ideal marriage requires you to love a millionaire, a film star, or preferably a prince—all of whom are probably pretty unlovable.

The Pet Shop Boys [a British electronic pop duo] are not exactly right that love is a bourgeois construct—it would be more true to say that love is a feudal construct, because the modern ideology of love is primarily shaped in the ideals of the knightly chivalry of the Middle Ages. And,

*continued on page 29*