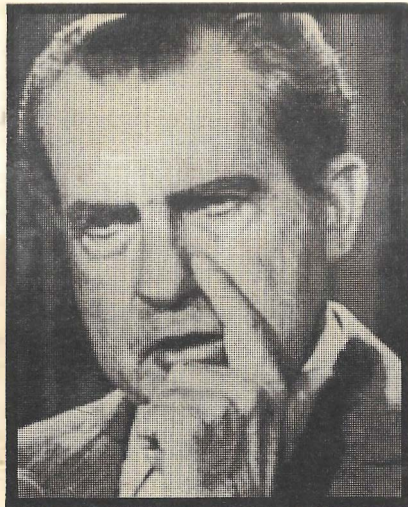




1970: Killings at Kent State



1974: Nixon resigns



1971: China enters UN (United Nations/Photo by Saw Lwin)

Looking back at an eventful decade



1975: U.S. flees Saigon



1973: Wounded Knee



1970: Chicano Moratorium rebellion

By Carl Davidson

The 1970s was a decade of vast changes for the American people. The world situation, the conditions of daily life, even the way people think of themselves—all appear so different today that the world of 1970 seems to be a part of a remote and distant past.

The first years of the decade of the 1970s, for instance, were still dominated by the Vietnam war and the struggle against it. In fact, 1970 began with Nixon ordering the invasion of Cambodia. What followed was unprecedented in American history: five million students went on strike for a month and nearly one million people marched on a single day.

The 1970s were thus ushered in with the vast majority of the American people—70% or more—turning against the war policy of their own government while the war was still being desperately fought. It took five more bitter years of struggle, both on the battlefields of Indochina and in the streets at home, until the last U.S. embassy official had to flee Saigon ignominiously clinging to a helicopter. Still the earlier tidal shift in public opinion that took place in 1970 had played a decisive role, not only in ending the war, but in shaping U.S. foreign policy options for many years to come.

Indochina is still a battlefield as the decade of the 1980s begins. There is considerable irony, however, in the vast change in the role of the principle combatants.

In 1970, for instance, representatives of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, with the assistance of China, held a summit conference pledging their unity and solidarity in the fight for national independence. But by 1980, the Le Duan clique in Vietnam had ordered pogroms against Chinese and other minorities, attacked China, turned Laos into its colony and invaded Kampuchea—all at the instigation of the Soviet Union. China counter-attacked Vietnam and worked to build a united front of the ASEAN countries to oppose Vietnam's drive for regional hegemony.

If this description of events in Indochina had been advanced in 1970 as a prediction of things to come by 1980, it would have been dismissed as something out of an Alice-in-Wonderland-type fantasy. Yet, in retrospect, it could have been forecast as a possibility even then. The key elements were all present, at least as tendencies, even if we were not fully aware of them.

The first of these elements was the overall decline of U.S. power and influence in the world. In the 1960s, by way of contrast, U.S. imperialism hardly flinched at invading the Dominican Republic even though it was already bogged down in Vietnam. Pentagon strategists even bragged of fighting two and a half wars at once.

By the early 1970s, however, the defeats suffered by the U.S. in Indochina began to reveal just how devastating they were. Not only had the vast majority of the third world turned against the U.S., but Washington's alliances in Western Europe were also breaking up.

By 1973 the Arab countries had employed the oil weapon against Zionism. OPEC and the energy crisis became household terms, as the ability of the U.S. to plunder the Mideast was severely restricted. China also emerged as a more powerful force in the international arena. Having regained its UN seat in 1971, China sent Deng Xiaoping to New York in 1974 to put forward China's view of the three worlds.

The national liberation movements were also taking their toll on some of Washington's closest allies. In 1974, an anti-fascist coup overthrew the hated dictatorship in Portugal.

In 1975 the dam broke. Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola—one after the other in rapid succession threw out their colonial oppressors. Nor was that the end of it. 1976 saw the Soweto uprising in Azania. In 1979, the Somoza regime fell in Nicaragua; the shah fled Iran; and now, on the eve of 1980, Zimbabwe appears closer to victory.

To be sure, the decline of the U.S. and the rise of the

third world in the 1970s has not been without its twists and turns. 1973, for instance, saw the bloody, U.S. instigated coup in Chile against the Popular Unity government of Allende. And more recently, the Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel has helped the Carter administration sow divisions in the Arab world and gain new advantages for the U.S.

But this is a counter-current to the main trend of U.S. decline. While U.S. imperialism remains a vicious and dangerous enemy of the world's people, its present position was aptly described by Mao Zedong as that of a man desperately trying to use ten fingers to capture and hold down ten fleas.

The advances of the third world and the defeats of the U.S., however, are only one component of an overview of the 1970s. The second element, especially important today, is the rise of Soviet social-imperialism and its offensive rivalry with the U.S. for world hegemony.

The Soviet Union's drive for hegemony throughout the 1970s had its precursor in 1968, when it sent its troops to occupy Czechoslovakia. The following year it attacked China's border areas. In the early 1970s, it instigated India to attack and help dismember Pakistan and, when Sihanouk was ousted by Lon Nol in Cambodia, the Soviets stood by Lon Nol to the end.

Thus the Soviet Union's hostility to the revolutionary forces of Democratic Kampuchea has a long history. There were other seeds of the current lineup in Indochina and the world also in evidence then, although their significance was not fully noted at the time. China, for instance, condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, while Cuba and Vietnam supported it. Likewise, when the Soviets attacked China's borders, Vietnam chose to remain silent while Cuba declared it would stand with the Soviet Union in any conflict.

In this way, the stage was set for the Soviet Union to make greater and greater use of Cuba and Vietnam as its

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proxies and pawns as the decade progressed. The curtain went up quickly, when the Soviet Union in 1975 took advantage of conflicts among the Angolan groups which had fought the Portuguese to provoke a civil war. The Soviets massively armed one side, with Cuba sending a contingent of troops. South Africa in turn attacked across Angola's southern border, while Cuba surged in again with the tens of thousands of troops which still occupy Angola today.

While the 1970s opened with the third world guerrillas fighting U.S. soldiers, the 1980s are beginning on a different note that reveals the decline of one superpower and the rise of the other. Soviet and Cuban forces are engaged against Eritrean liberation fighters, Soviet troops have just massively invaded Afghanistan to fight Islamic guerrillas, and Vietnam is trying to exterminate the forces of Democratic Kampuchea. The U.S. ruling class, for its part, is deeply divided over how to respond to this situation.

Both superpowers, in any case, have used the 1970s to massively increase their armaments. Despite the talk of detente and SALT agreements, war preparations have surged forward, with the Soviet Union making the greatest headway. In fact, a good case could be made that future historians will view the 1970s as the decade where World War III actually began in earnest.

Throughout the 1970s, China has stood as a bulwark against superpower hegemonism and the danger of war. Still, even there great changes have taken place. 1976 saw the deaths of both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, two great revolutionary leaders of our time. Within weeks of Mao's death, Hua Guofeng quickly smashed the counter-revolutionary attempted coup of the gang of four.

What unfolded was a new emphasis on socialist modernization and a correction of past abuses pepe-

trated by the gang. In foreign affairs, China continued the fight initiated by Mao and Zhou against hegemonism and in defense of world peace.

These dramatic developments in the international situation, however, were not the only features of the 1970s to radically alter the American people's conceptions of themselves and the world. The decade also saw basic changes in how they perceived their own government and other institutions of capitalist rule.

"Opinion polls show," states the Dec. 8 issue of *The Nation*, "that far from being complacent, all groups of Americans have grown increasingly distrustful and critical of the powers that be. A Harris survey found that between 1966 and 1976, public confidence in those who run the major corporations declined from 55% to 16%. Confidence in religious, military and other institutions showed similar drops.

"Fifty-five percent of the respondents in a Peter Hart poll," the article continues, "believe that both the Democratic and Republican parties favor big business over the average worker. . . . By 72% to 20% they judge that too much is being spent on wars and defense. By 80% to 13% they feel the tax system is set up to favor the rich at the expense of the average person."

What the 1970s contributed to this awakening class consciousness was best symbolized by a key political scandal: Watergate. It, too, was a phenomenon unprecedented in American history. For the first time, a U.S. president was forced to resign rather than face impeachment by the Congress. The vice-president was ousted earlier, and a good chunk of the top White House staff and the cabinet faced prison sentences. What made the experience even more wrenching was the fact that Nixon had just soundly defeated McGovern and been re-elected by one of the largest majorities in history.

It was a mandate, however, that proved to be a mile wide and an inch deep. Once the sordid details of the

Nixon administration's corruption and fascistic methods were revealed in the Watergate tapes, Nixon's base of support quickly evaporated.

The Watergate crisis brought all the hidden contradictions and inner workings of the American political system to the surface. Previously many Americans would readily agree that there was considerable corruption and favoritism toward the rich at various government levels. At the same time, however, many also had held a naive faith that the basic institutions of government in Washington, especially the presidency, managed to stay above all this, at least to an acceptable degree.

The Watergate affair shattered these illusions. And contrary to claims that Nixon's defeat proved the system could correct its shortcomings, the old faith was not restored. As Mother Goose might put it, after Humpty Dumpty's great fall, all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put him back together again.

"There's a great deal of cynicism, alienation and lack of confidence," said sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset in a Jan. 7 U.S. News and World Report article on the 1970s. "Reading this in poll after poll, you'd almost think that this is a country ripe for revolution or, at least, for a revival of the 1960s."

"We've got a much more brittle system today," Lipset adds. "There's less belief in the idea that, come what may, it's the greatest system in the world. If a 1930s-scale depression were to hit us, which I don't believe will happen, I think it would have a more dramatic impact. It would create more protest movements, radicalism and organized discontent today, probably, than occurred in the 1930s."

Regardless of Lipset's belief that a depression is not in the cards, the 1980s are beginning the same way as the 1970s—with a major recession on the way. And the 1970s had set a new record of steady double-digit inflation combined with vast unemployment, despite a

partial recovery by the last part of the decade.

It would be a mistake, however, to ignore the flexibility U.S. capitalism displayed in the 1970s. Some workers—in auto and steel in particular—were able to improve their economic status over the decade, while others—welfare recipients, garment workers, the elderly—had their incomes drastically cut. The ruling class was able to make use of these differences and others to set one group of people against another.

The level of mass struggle during the 1970s, of course, cannot compare with the high tide of rebellion that shook the U.S. in the late 1960s. And after the huge antiwar protests of 1970-1971, there is no doubt that the wave of spontaneous struggle went into an ebb phase.

Strike statistics from the U.S. Labor Department tell a key part of the story. In 1970, 3,305,000 workers fought 5,716 strikes. But with the exception of 1974, these battles steadily declined until they were cut in half in both numbers and duration by 1978. Last year's level was the lowest in nearly two decades, although 1979 has seen a slight upturn.

Yet the same statistics show another side of the situation as well. In the midst of the recession in 1974, some 6,074 strikes were waged, the highest number recorded since the end of World War II.

The point is that it would be a mistake to view the 1970s simply as a period of stagnation and decline in mass struggle and social change. Not only did the working class persist in fighting new highs in unemployment and inflation—prices have doubled from 1970 to 1980—but whole new sections of the population opened up arenas of struggle.

The greatest change and impact has been in the status of women. The 1970s began with the first big women's demonstration in decades—60,000 marched in New York City demanding the right to childcare, abortions and passage of the ERA. By 1978, 100,000 marched on Washington for the ERA, but the eight years in between

had seen American women in their millions drastically change their view of themselves and their role in society.

One important result of both the women's struggle and the economic situation was the large-scale entry of women into the labor market. In 1970, little more than 40% of women held jobs outside the home. But by 1980 that minority was over 50%—a majority, an economic development that affected marriage, child-bearing, family life and women's status generally.

Nonetheless, women's inequality and oppression persisted throughout the 1970s even if its forms were changed. More women now faced exploitation and discrimination on the job, childcare became a critical problem, abortion rights were being counter-attacked and virulent forms of pornography were being promoted more openly and widely than ever before.

The 1970s also saw new developments in the Afro-American people's situation and struggle. On the one hand, Blacks were elected as mayors in several major cities, including Newark, Detroit and Los Angeles in the North and Atlanta and Birmingham in the South. On the other hand, the income gap between Blacks and whites widened and dozens of Black youth were gunned down in the streets. Major battles for school integration were fought in Boston, Louisville and other cities.

This intensification of national oppression, which included an upsurge in Ku Klux Klan activity in the late 1970s, is now being met with new forms of organization and resistance. This includes groups like the United League in Mississippi and the Black United Fronts in New York City and Philadelphia, as well as the multinational coalitions that fought the Bakke and Weber decisions. Given the growing dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party and other old-line reformist groups among the Black masses, these developments have opened up new prospects for the fight for political power and self-determination in the 1980s.

The struggles of other minority nationalities also

marked the 1970s. Beginning with the 20,000-strong Chicano Moratorium in 1970, the Chicano people developed an important electoral struggle in Texas, land struggles in Colorado and other battles throughout the Southwest. In 1974, nearly 20,000 Puerto Ricans rallied at Madison Square Garden for the independence of Puerto Rico, while 1977 saw the Humboldt Park rebellion against police brutality in Chicago. Undocumented workers, especially Mexicanos, waged unprecedented struggles for unionization and other democratic rights.

Native Americans staged the dramatic armed action at Wounded Knee in 1973 which shook America with their cry for basic treaty and human rights. In 1978, Indians marched the length of the country in the Longest Walk.

The late 1970s also saw the emergence of an entirely new arena of struggle—the anti-nuke movement. Other important movements unfolded in the 1970s; truckers, farmers, the handicapped, the elderly, veterans and others all got organized in new ways to make their voices heard.

All these struggles show that the 1970s was hardly a silent decade of self-indulgence, as it is being portrayed in the mass media. Instead, a whole new generation of revolutionary activists with a wide variety of experience has been brought forward. The 1970s, in fact, saw the birth of a new communist movement and, in June 1977, the formation of the CPML.

The start of a new decade sees this movement beginning to develop in depth. As this survey of the 1970s shows, it faces enormous tasks and responsibilities. But the decade is beginning with our forces far more prepared than they were in 1970. The result is that the prospects for socialism becoming a powerful force in American political life in the 1980s look very good indeed.