

# Capitalists fiddle around while the world burns



By CARL SACK

At the time of this writing, Hurricane Nate has just plowed through the eastern United States, the 14<sup>th</sup> named storm of what is on track to be the most costly Atlantic hurricane season on record. Wildfires have scorched millions of acres across the western U.S. and Canada, darkening the skies with smoke from the Pacific Coast to as far east as upstate New York. This year's monsoon season has seen unprecedented flooding in Asia, killing more than 1200 people and displacing over 40 million from their homes.

Are these disasters natural, or do they point to the threats posed by late capitalism to society and to the very Earth itself?

If one refuses to accept such disasters as random "acts of God" and admits that such disasters are growing more frequent and severe and impacting more people, then it is important to understand the dynamics at work and how socialists should respond. These disasters are united by at least two trends: the heating of the atmosphere by greenhouse gases from the extraction and burning of fossil fuels, and the failure of the capitalist state to adequately plan

for foreseeable disasters or address human needs in their aftermath.

The existence of human-caused climate change is now beyond dispute even by some of the most ardent backers of oil, gas, and coal extraction. The Trump administration's muzzling of the EPA and other federal agencies cannot change the facts—the world is on track for the worst-case climate scenario envisioned by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, one that would warm the planet 4-8 degrees Celsius by the end of the century.

Even the two-degree rise targeted by the toothless Paris Climate Accord would spell displacement for millions in low-lying coastal areas. At six degrees, climate models tell us, large areas of the planet would become uninhabitable due to roasting temperatures alone, never mind storms, fires, diseases, famine, or sea-level rise.

The physics behind global warming's impact on extreme weather is straightforward. A warmer atmosphere can hold more water vapor, which causes more evaporation. Warmer oceans contribute to that evaporation. Greater evaporation rates dry out the land faster, contributing to droughts if the dominant

(Above) Raging wildfires in northern California have caused many casualties. Five years of drought in the western U.S., fed by climate change, has primed the area for fires.

weather patterns move moisture elsewhere.

The water vapor in the atmosphere holds energy; when it condenses into liquid water, it releases that energy, causing storms. The more water vapor condenses, the more energy there is, and the stronger the storms. The result is a cycle of drought and deluge. Some areas experience more frequent and extreme droughts than historically, while others get more frequent and extreme deluge.

### Drought in the West; flooding in the East

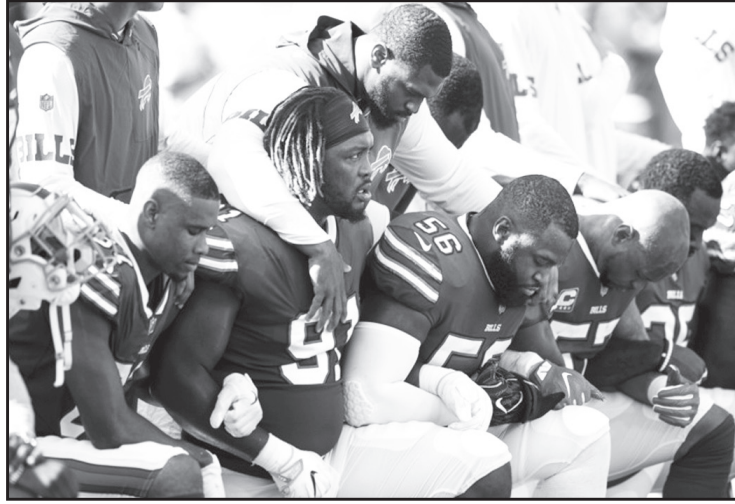
In the U.S. West, drought is being called the "new normal" by scientists. After five years of intense drought, the snowpack of the Sierra Nevada last winter was one of the biggest on record—causing flooding as it melted. But farther north, drought lingered and intensified, causing one of the most active fire seasons on record. Overall, the Western fire season

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# Trump riled by NFL player protests

By ERNIE GOTTA

Brett Carlsen / Getty Images



President Trump has gone apoplectic about professional athletes taking a knee during the National Anthem in order to protest racial injustice and police brutality against Black people. Trump had this to say at an Alabama rally on Sept. 22: "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired!'"

For weeks, the Trump administration has pursued its attack on NFL players. Vice President Pence, in a maneuver that had been pre-arranged with Trump, walked out of a Colts-49er game when some players kneeled.

What was the response? On the first weekend after Trump's demand that kneeling players be fired, the Pittsburgh Steelers refused to take the field during the anthem. Many of the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots took a knee. National Anthem singers at two separate games, Meghan Linsey and Rico Lavelle, took a knee while performing.

The Oakland Athletics' Bruce Maxwell was the first baseball player to take a knee. Basketball star Steph Curry refused to attend the White House celebration for the NBA Champion Golden State Warriors. The new cast of "Star Trek: Discovery" knelt on their premiere night.

The list goes on. The expressions of solidarity have been incredible. Despite his absence on the field due to the league's refusal to hire him, the NFL Player's Union awarded Colin Kaepernick with the Week One MVP for his charity work. Kaepernick initiated the antiracist protest in August 2016. He has defiantly stated, "I'm not going to stand up to show pride in a flag that oppresses Black people and people of color." Recently, Kaepernick donated \$25,000 in the fight for the rights of immigrant youth affected by DACA.

It is likely that the NFL owners are scrambling to find a way around slumping popularity to maintain their profit

margins. Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones originally loathed the kneeling protests, yet he linked arms with his players and took a knee before the national anthem during Monday Night Football on Sept. 25. The spectacular photo-op was a perfect way to begin blurring the lines between the original intent of Kaepernick's protest and the owners' self-interest.

League ratings continue to fall. The NFL boycott and player protest is working. Broadcasting stocks took a nosedive last month, a fall of between 1% and 8%. Trump attributed the low ratings to "new league rules" that penalize excessively hard tackles. This hyper-masculine explanation defies all scientific evidence of increased brain trauma among current and retired players. Recent discovery of one of the most severe case of Stage 3 Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) was found during an autopsy of Aaron Hernandez, who committed suicide while awaiting trial for murder charges.

Many fans are sick and tired of injustice. They want to stand in solidarity with Kaepernick. What does it mean for the working class when the president calls for the best-paid workers to be fired for their political beliefs?

He is signaling to employers everywhere that it is open season to fire workers for expressing their own unique ideas.

On Oct. 10, Trump demanded that NFL teams whose players refuse to stand be denied "massive tax breaks," and some NFL officials began to buckle. On Oct. 11, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell sent a letter to the owners of all 32 teams stating that players should stand for the anthem. But when Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, in an abrupt change of heart, said a day earlier that he would bench any player who did not stand, Local 100 of the United Labor Unions in Texas filed a complaint against the team, stating that Jones's order violated the National Labor Relations Act.

Is it unrealistic to consider an NFL player strike? The deepening political consciousness of professional athletes is opening an interesting arena in the class struggle. This includes a solidarity letter to Kaepernick penned by military veterans: "However you choose to use your voice, please do so with an understanding that many veterans do not condemn the protest of activists like Jackie Robinson, Colin Kaepernick and everyday Americans seeking justice. Indeed, we see no higher form of patriotism."

The U.S. government pays millions to NFL owners to convene patriotic displays during games. It can be argued that the Pittsburgh Steelers' not appearing on field during the "Star Spangled Banner" was a type of brief work stoppage or wildcat strike. The patriotic illusion is not successfully created when the players are not standing and saluting the flag.

Workers everywhere are getting a real lesson that the U.S. flag really represents police brutality, war, and the bosses' profits. What could a player strike accomplish? It could quickly resolve Kaepernick's status on the NFL owners' blacklist and put an end to harassment by Trump and the bosses. A player strike could also build confidence in the working class and serve as an example of the power of mass collective struggle against the bosses. ■

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By JEFF MACKLER

When U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told a National Security Council meeting last week, from which President Trump had departed, that his boss was a “fucking moron,” it’s likely that Tillerson, who has refused to deny his characterization, was not referring literally to any diminished mental capacity of the president. After all, any billionaire who can accumulate a fortune in real estate and gambling casinos, socially associate with the ruling-class elite, including the Clintons, and appear on his own reality TV show is likely to be within the “normal” range of human intelligence.

A few days later, another Republican higher up, Bob Corker, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee told *The New York Times* that Trump was treating his presidency like a “reality TV show ... like he was doing ‘The Apprentice’ or something.” Unrestrained, Corker added, “He concerns me. He would have to concern anyone who cares about our nation.”

Corker said that Trump’s “recklessness threatens World War III.” In an Oct. 8 public exchange of denunciatory tweets, Corker revealed a not so hidden aspect of the Trump presidency. “It’s a shame that the White House has become an adult day care center,” he stated, “Someone has obviously missed their shift this morning.”

Paraphrasing Corker, *The Times* interviewer continued, “Mr. Trump poses such an acute risk that a coterie of senior administrative officials must protect him from his own instincts.” And finally from Corker: “I know for a fact that every single day in the White House, it’s a situation of trying to contain him.”

Corker and Tillerson tell us that “something is rotten in Denmark.” Tillerson is the former and still likely the shadow CEO of one of the world’s largest corporations, Exxon Mobil; Senator Corker leads the congressional committee that oversees U.S. foreign policy. Both would prefer that the embarrassing Trumpist rhetorical rot be coated with a veneer of civility—for appearances sake, at least.

The ever-lengthening chain of White House and other top officials dismissed by Trump for overt corruption, lying, or simply publicly disagreeing with their boss tells us that despite his being daily coached by top ruling-class figures, he is unaccustomed to playing the role of coy diplomat that his predecessor mastered with aplomb. In this sense, his betters see him as a moron—but for lack of tact only. They think he is a moron for saying openly what he and they really believe, and, above all, for pursuing with a crude club rather than a silk glove the central objectives of a crisis-ridden capitalist class.

#### Bipartisan military spending

The military budget is a prime example. Trump demanded a 10 percent or \$54 billion increase, a modest figure in comparison to his predecessors. Yet Congress upped the figure by some \$37 billion, with a nearly 90 percent bipartisan vote. For both political wings of the ruling class, military spending is a two-sided bonanza. Monopoly control in the military-industrial complex almost guarantees an annual trillion dollars in expenditures at top profit rates on the one hand. Meanwhile, the same bipartisan Congress lends its support to endless wars wherein U.S. weapons of mass destruction are rained down and “used up” on poor nations and peoples around the world. War and weapons are good for profits, indeed—an endless demand on an endless supply!

Obama conducted seven wars in his time, bragging that he was at war virtually every day of his presidency. During his reign the U.S. sent 100,000 soldiers to Afghanistan, fully half in the form of secret private contract armies under the direction of Erik Prince and his associates operating out of his then private Blackwater military base in Qatar. Not to be outdone Trump, overtly and not covertly as with Obama, today discusses more “private contractor wars” with Prince. He suggests that perhaps the whole army might be efficiently privatized—that is, run for even greater profits than at present. Trump is currently backing Prince for a Senate seat in Wyoming.

#### Gifts to the corporate elite

Trump’s explanation for his much touted tax cut for the rich—wherein he claims the government’s multi-billion-dollar corporate largess will trickle down to the general economy in the form of new jobs, economic growth, and budget deficit reductions—is believed by virtually no serious economist, likely including his Goldman Sachs Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin.

Trump, true to form, bragged about the wonders of his tax proposal, which he delivered to Congress

# Is Trump a ‘Moron?’



(Above) Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (rt.) said at a meeting that Trump is a “fucking moron.”

## Donald Trump’s economic and military priorities align well with a desperate capitalism’s need to squeeze every dollar from working people.

in the form of a three-page memo. The details, as always, will be worked out as the real representatives of the ruling class scour the thousands of pages of tax-code gifts to the rich, to insert a few lines here and there in order to add a few more billions to their balance sheets.

The rich are in need of additional such “breaks” these days. Just five men, according to Credit Suisse’s 2016 Global Wealth Report, own almost half the wealth of the entire world. The previous figure was six men. Before that it was eight! No mind, Trump will guarantee them another bump if his proposal to eliminate the estate tax is approved. The latter would affect only some 400 of the nation’s most wealthy.

But President Obama’s gifts to the superrich put Trump to shame. His 2008-2016 bailouts saved the capitalist elite some \$32 trillion!

#### Obama vs. Trump on the environment

President Trump, excoriated by the Democrats as the engineer of environmental catastrophe, just announced the voiding of some 50 Obama-era environmental regulations, topped by his pledge to “end the war on coal.” In contrast, Obama constructed a pro-environment facade with his restrictions on coal-powered energy. He also burnished his climate crisis credibility by championing the toothless Paris COP22 climate accords, which Trump shunned.

But the climate-posturing Obama neglected to mention that the slumping coal-industry barons had already retreated from coal production to pursue, on an unprecedented scale, the more profitable hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. The latter’s deadly release of poisonous chemicals into the air and water supplies is rarely mentioned by Obama’s legacy-enhancing Democratic Party friends. Neither is the fact that fracking releases incredible amounts of methane gas (and other chemical byproducts) that are 84 times more toxic as greenhouse gases than CO2.

Add to this Obama’s authorization to drill the Arctic icecap and his granting multiple offshore drilling permits to the oil barons, and poor Donald comes off, by comparison, almost as a “moderate.”

#### Women’s and trade union rights

Today, the “moron” Trump, seeking adulation from religious bigots, argues that “religious” employers have a constitutional right to deny abortion coverage to women. He will leave it to the Supreme Court to

decide the matter, as he will the latest versions of the infamous *Friedrichs* case. The latter is aimed at eliminating the right of unions to collect agency fees from workers they represent in collective bargaining—some five million people. In both cases, the smiling Democrats have repeatedly demonstrated, pretense aside, that their policies are little different. Access to abortion facilities today is absent in 87 percent of the nation’s counties.

Yes, the “moron” Trump is a crude character indeed, ever surrounding himself with new layers of ruling-class sycophants, or firing and replacing them with “morons” of the same ilk, not to mention reactionary ideologues like former White House Chief Strategist, Steven Bannon, who advised the more than willing Trump to place an equals sign between the neo-Nazis in Charlottesville and those who mobilized to oppose them.

Trump’s “moronic” rhetoric—his ceaseless tweets and campaign rallies, attacks on Dreamers and other immigrants, insistence on building the Wall, embrace of “some very fine people” among the fascists, and nasty barbs against the media—are aimed in part at whipping up support from disaffected and racist white workers and middle-class people (whom he and Steve Bannon have referred to as their “base”).

Tillerson is right that President Trump is a “fucking moron.” And Corker, mindful of Trump’s threat to unleash nuclear “fire and fury” on North Korea, is right that Trump is dangerous. But he is tolerated by a nervous ruling elite, who at least at this moment has no practical alternative other than to manage his mania and press him to at least *sound and appear* less threatening. Constructing a more palatable presidential facade is all that a crisis-ridden capitalism can expect in these troubled times.

But make no mistake: Trump’s economic and military priorities align well with a desperate capitalism’s need to squeeze every dollar possible from working people in order to remain competitive on the world’s ever-declining markets. Capitalist necessity trumps everything human.

Trump’s approval rating has declined to a low of 32 percent, an indication that an increasing majority has no truck with his racist, anti-immigrant, sexist, and homophobic scapegoating. Neither do they believe that he, his party, or the Democratic Party will be, down the line, their economic savior.

The gap is closing between the build-up of deep anger and resentment on the part of the vast majority and their taking the field of action to defend their interests, rights, and dignity. Their fightback will include new forms of struggle to advance their economic and social interests, including class struggle, democratic and inclusive trade unions, and a working-class party in the political arena to champion the interests of the oppressed and exploited. ■



## Stop the ethnic cleansing of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims!

By MARTY GOODMAN

Capitalism has reached a new level of barbarism in Myanmar. So far, over 500,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees have been driven out of their homes in the Northern Rakhine State and into unsanitary, crowded camps in Bangladesh, without adequate food and water. Soldiers and Buddhist fascist-like gangs have torched thousands of Rohingya homes; they have beaten, stabbed, gang raped and killed hundreds of defenseless Rohingya.

Those fleeing violence, mostly women and children, face land mines planted on the Bangladesh border, resulting in horrific injuries and death. Refugees tell of Rohingya being shot and thrown out of army helicopters. Helicopter guns mow them down in their own fields.

In an Oct. 4 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, Rohingya refugees described seeing children executed. Khotiaz, 28, recounted the savage execution of her

nephew by a local army officer named Baju: "When Baju entered the room, there was my nephew, Mohammed Tofail. He was 10 years old. He was a student of class two. First Baju shot him in the head, his skull shattered into four pieces. Then he fell down. I saw there were brain and blood on the floor."

In the report, Mustafa, 22, said: "There was a pit with [the bodies of] 10 to 15 children, all under 12 years old. They were all young children hacked to death. I recognized four of the bodies: Hakim Ali, 9; Naim, 8; one child from Pongu Para, who was about 10; and Chau Mong, who was 7."

The HRW reported from Rakhine state that "in Maung Nu, several Burmese soldiers entered the compound while others surrounded it. They took several dozen Rohingya men and boys into the courtyard and then shot or stabbed them to death. Others were killed as they tried to flee. The soldiers then loaded the bodies—some witnesses said a hundred or more—into military trucks and took them away."

The war crime of "collective punishment," as during the Vietnam War or in Israel today, is being waged on civilians because some Rohingya exercised their right to resist. On Aug. 25, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a Rohingya insurgent group, attacked police and army posts in Rakhine state, killing 12 officers, according to the government. The poorly armed rebels attacked with mostly sticks and machetes. The attack resulted in savage retribution against Rohingya civilians.

The UN has called Myanmar, also known as Burma, a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing." Satellite photos show 214 villages destroyed by fire. Incredibly, the regime says Rohingya burn their own homes to gain sympathy, despite media reports of military responsibility.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto Myanmar leader, is known to millions as a Nobel Prize winner, an iconic "human rights" activist, and longtime prisoner of house arrest. But Suu Kyi the capitalist politician has shamelessly refused to criticize the military's attacks on the Rohingya. After avoiding a scheduled address to the UN Assembly in September, Suu Kyi told a Myanmar press conference, her first since the recent wave of atrocities, that international reports of genocide were "fake news" and the "tip of a huge iceberg of misinformation."

All the while, Suu Kyi has refused to even use the word "Rohingya," repeating the military's blatant lie that "terrorism" is responsible for the calamity. Amnesty International has called her response "unconscionable." In disgust, several Nobel winners challenged Suu Kyi to support human rights, including anti-apartheid leader Desmond Tutu.

### Capitalist "human rights" & Rohingya oppression

Before the most recent exodus, many Rohingya were herded into what is often described as "concentration camps." Deprived of voting rights, they couldn't vote in the sham 2015 election, which elevated "democrat" Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party to power. The NLD did not run any Muslim candidates.

The oppression of the one million Rohingya, who practice their own brand of Sunni Islam, is not new in this country of 53 million, which is 90% Buddhist and only 5% Muslim. Rohingya have lived in Burma for centuries, but are stateless like Palestinians.

Rakhine has a poverty rate of nearly 80%, double the national average. They are usually of darker complexion than most Burmese and subject to the lingering

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## Myanmar: A revolution betrayed

MARTY GOODMAN

Myanmar (Burma) was a colony of Britain from 1824 to 1948. Despite super-exploitation and trigger-happy British troops, Myanmar was known for its ethnic diversity, rich cultural life, and intellectual influences, including Marxism. Burmese Muslims participated in the fight against British and Japanese imperialism and were officials in the first post-colonial governments.

In February 1939, a well-known anti-colonial student protester, Aung Gyaw, was arrested in Rangoon and died later from a head wound. In response, a huge demonstration was organized in Mandalay on Feb. 10, 1939, during which forces of British imperialism opened fire and killed 17.

In August 1939, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was founded, destined to be the largest Stalinist party in Southeast Asia. Its first secretary was Aung San, father of today's de facto Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Aung San distanced himself from the CPB by 1947. In July 1947, Aung San was assassinated with six others, possibly with help from a British agent—six months before the country achieved independence.

In the 1930s, Aung San began a trip to China to get aid from the Chinese Communist Party but by an incredible blunder landed in territory controlled by imperial Japan. Nevertheless, Aung San and later other CPB leaders sought Japanese military training to oust British imperialism. Others trained in China.

In 1943, after Britain had been ousted from Rangoon, Aung San took a top post



(Above) Aung San, early Communist leader and Burmese colonial premier.

in the Japanese occupation government. Other CPB members joined Aung San in Japanese-occupied Burma, including the then "left" Bo Ne Win, a future general and vicious leader of the 1962 military coup. Aung San broke with Japan in 1945 to work with British forces.

Over time the CPB revealed its long-term unprincipled blocks with non-working-class forces. The CPB itself was an unstable mixture of "nationalists," like Ne Win, and Marxists.

The CPB created the multi-class Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League. CPB leaders took high posts (Aung San) in the AFPFL colonial government. Later Aung San broke with the CPB and co-founded a pro-AFPFL party, the Burma Socialist Party, in 1945. The CPB itself was expelled in 1946 from the AFPFL pre-independence, post-war government. Nevertheless, within a few years, the CPB had organized the entire union movement and nearly 1 million peasants.

From April 1948 to 1955 was a period

of intense armed struggle. The CPB adopted the Maoist-Stalinist strategy of encircling the cities with a peasant army. Some 15,000 CPB troops fought into the 1970s.

In the meantime, some 13,000 Muslims who had fled during the war were living in refugee camps in India and East Pakistan and were not permitted to return; those who did were considered illegal immigrants. Muslim rebels quickly seized control of large parts of the north and expelled many Buddhist villagers. Law and order almost completely broke down, with two communist insurgencies, Red Flag and White Flag, in addition to the Mujahidin, Rakhine nationalist groups, and the (Marxist) Arakan People's Liberation Party in the south of the state.

In the chaos, relations between Buddhists and Muslims communities deteriorated further. Many moderate Muslim leaders rejected the mujahidin insurgency. In 1954, the army launched a massive offensive, Operation Monsoon, which captured most of the mujahidin mountain strongholds on the East Pakistan border.

The rebellion was ended by ceasefire in 1961 and the defeat of the remaining groups. The 1962 military coup led to a more hardline stance toward minorities. Today, many small armies exist, founded on dozens of ethnicities—among them, at least two armed Rohingya groups.

The March 1962 coup was led by "war hero" General Ne Win and his Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), which ruled with an iron fist but with socialist camouflage. All banks and corporations were "nationalized," but under military,

not workers', control. The BSPP published the pseudo-socialist *Working People's Daily*, with no real opposition.

From August 1988 until the end of the year, tens of thousands demonstrated and conducted general strikes across the country. Hundreds, maybe thousands, were slaughtered during protests. Police, army, and military death squads hunted down student leaders and other human rights advocates.

On Sept. 18, 1988, General Saw Mung oversaw another coup, killing protesters and banning demonstrations of more than four. The State and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), was created, which ruled Myanmar from 1988-97. In a few years the military regime would drop all socialist pretensions.

In 1990, "democracy" leader Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest after decisively winning the May 27 presidential election. She was released in 2010. Her National League for Democracy (NLD) won the 2015 election and she became Myanmar's de facto leader. She could not run for president because her former husband was British.

The CPB, for its part, largely abstained during the big student-led protests in the late 1980s, because students were "not working class" and in any case, not the peasant vanguard, according to Maoist "theory." The ossified Stalinist CPB finally imploded in 1989, 41 years after its armed struggle began, with most leaders fleeing to China to retire from politics. CPB cadre splintered into at least five parties, some engaging in smuggling.

Tragically, as yet, no authentic revolutionary force has emerged in Myanmar, a sad tribute to the bankrupt, unprincipled nature of Stalinist politics and Suu Kyi's pro-capitalist NLD. ■

# Trump: 'We will totally destroy North Korea!'

By BARRY SHEPPARD

Trump made this unprecedented threat not in a tweet or off the cuff remark but in a written speech before the United Nations General Assembly. No other country in the UN has ever openly stated its intention to destroy another country. Coupled with his earlier threat to rain down "fire and fury" on North Korea, this threat must be seen as one that at least includes the possibility of a nuclear attack.

It is true Trump set conditions for this to be carried out, specifically that North Korea would threaten the U.S. or its allies. But he left vague what this means. He has repeatedly said that the U.S. would not tolerate a nuclear-armed North Korea with the ability to deliver a weapon to the United States.

North Korea is already a nuclear-armed state. Its recent missile tests demonstrate that it is well on its way to be able to hit the U.S., and it already has the capacity to hit Guam. North Korea has repeatedly said it will continue its nuclear and missile program unless the United States finally puts an end to the Korean War by signing a peace treaty with the North.

No U.S. politician, from Bernie Sanders on the left to the most extreme rightist Republican (take your pick), is ready to do anything that even moves in that direction. On the contrary, with bipartisan support the U.S. just completed its annual belligerent "war games" in South Korea, whose aim is to threaten the North. These "games" include the South's army, but that army is under the command of the U.S. occupying force.

South Korea's new president, Moon Jae-in, was elected on the promise of seeking dialog with the North, and restricting the deployment of the U.S. Thaad anti-missile system. But Trump bullied Moon into reversing himself on both. Now the South is deploying a special commando with the avowed public goal of assassinating the North's leadership.

One purpose of Trump's threat to destroy North Korea is to force China to stop supplying oil to the North, which would devastate its economy, in the hopes that this would force the latter to abandon its nuclear program. In all likelihood, this will not come to pass.

China does not want the North to collapse, which would be the case with an oil embargo for any length of time. That would lead to a U.S. invasion, resulting in a united Korea as a militarized client state of the U.S. on its borders. Even if Xi groveled before Trump and cut off the oil, a desperate North, facing collapse, is likely to strike back.

It should be recalled that when President Roosevelt imposed an oil embargo on Japan as part of the intensifying rivalry between the two powers at the time, Japan replied by striking at the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, triggering World War II in the Pacific.

It is obvious that the increasing tensions between North Korea and the U.S. pose a very serious dan-



(Left) North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

decided against using them, which would have meant a major war with China and the Soviet Union.

The war continued until 1953, when a cease-fire recognized that it had become a stalemate. The North and South were again divided along basically the same lines as before the U.S. invaded. An armistice was signed, but not a peace treaty. The U.S. and its puppet regime in the South remain in a state of war with the North.

China withdrew its troops from the North, but the U.S. has maintained its occupation force in the South up to the present. Washington continued its hostile stance toward the North since, including its "war games" practices for invasion of the North.

ger, and Trump has just upped the ante with his UN speech.

North Korea has solid reasons for fearing a U.S. attack, given Washington's hostility going back to the end of WWII. After the defeat of Japan, which had been the colonial power in Korea, the U.S. tried to occupy the peninsula as the spoils of war. However, it was only able to occupy the southern part of Korea, since the USSR occupied the northern. This stalemate explains why there are two Koreas.

What became South Korea was ruled by the U.S. military directly from 1945 to 1948. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union withdrew its armed forces from the North. In 1948 Washington's military staged phony elections in the South, installing the first in a long line of dictators up until 1987.

At the end of the war, the U.S. also tried to occupy parts of China, much of which had been occupied by Japan. China was the big prize the U.S. coveted. However, this plan had to be scrapped because of a mass uprising in the U.S. armed forces called the "bring us home" movement, which balked at invading what was viewed as a U.S. ally. The U.S. had influence with the government run by the Nationalists.

Then in 1949 the Chinese Revolution completely tore the country out of the U.S. imperialist's hands. China now became Washington's enemy. The U.S., using hostilities between North and South Korea as the pretext, invaded Korea in 1950 and quickly moved deep into the North and threatened to continue into China. China countered by sending its army into Korea, blocking the U.S. advance.

At that point U.S. President Truman considered using atomic weapons against the Chinese and North Koreans. Nine nuclear bombs were transferred to the U.S.-occupied Japanese island of Okinawa, along with bombers to deliver them. Fortunately, Washington

In 1958, the U.S. stationed tactical and strategic nuclear weapons in the South, aimed at the North, which would also be used against China and the Soviet Union in case of a general nuclear war. At its height, there were 950 U.S. nuclear warheads in South Korea. The U.S. weapons were removed in 1991 as part of the Strategic Arms Reduction treaty. The U.S. threat against the North then resided in the atomic weapons in the U.S. Naval fleet in the western Pacific, as well as other parts of Washington's nuclear arsenal.

Beside the enormous inequality between small North Korea and the heavily armed U.S., there is the gross hypocrisy of Washington. The U.S. was the first country to develop atomic weapons and tried at first to keep a monopoly on them. That began the nuclear arms race.

The U.S. is the only country to unleash atomic weapons against civilians, in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The purpose of those bombings had nothing to do with Japan, which had already been defeated, but to demonstrate that the U.S. had the inhumanity and will to repeat such bombings of cities, first as a threat against the Soviet Union before the latter developed its own nuclear weapons, then also against China, which did likewise, but also against any potential enemy of the U.S.

The U.S. has never renounced the first use of nuclear weapons, and is opposed to any possible treaty to abolish such weapons.

Trump's belligerent "America First" speech at the UN aimed at the rest of the world and included much more than the threat to destroy North Korea. He made stepped-up threats against Iran, Cuba, Syria, and Venezuela among others, but that is beyond the scope of this article. ■

## ... Rohingya

(continued from page 4)

racism of the British colonial mindset, which has not disappeared. Myanmar has the lowest life expectancy and the second-highest rate of infant and child mortality in Southeast Asia. It is estimated that an average worker earns about \$1.76 a day. Poverty and exploitation creates excellent spawning grounds for racist hate under capitalism.

Although attacks on Rohingya voting rights and citizenship began earlier, the right to vote as a citizen was formally removed in 1982 with the Citizenship Law, with absurd exceptions like voting only for military candidates. The Rohingya are widely called Bengalis by chauvinist Buddhists and other bigots.

After the junta was "dissolved" in 2011, the country has seen a rise in fascist Buddhist extremism. During WWII, reactionary Buddhist forces sided with Buddhist Japan during the Japanese occupation.

The military refuses to use the term "Rohingya," preferring to portray them as job-stealing migrants from Bangladesh, thus dividing workers with racism. Rohingya describe round-ups of Muslim youth to perform forced labor for the Army.

Although some monks have spoken out against racism, reactionary monks spew filth. Racist leader Ashin Wirathu, a Buddhist monk, said, "Muslims are like African carp. They breed quickly and they are very violent and they eat their own kind ... the national religion needs to be protected." Wirathu likened Muslims to "mad dogs" and "cannibals."

Wirathu and others have spurred a movement known as "969," which calls for Buddhists to band together to

defend their faith and to do business only with other Buddhists. The numerology of the "969" movement refers to the virtues of the Buddha, the practices of the faith and the community.

Military crackdowns on Rohingya in 1978 and 1991-2, prompted hundreds of thousands to flee to Bangladesh. Violence erupted in 2012, leaving villages torched, up to 300 dead, and 140,000 fleeing their homes in terror. It was the worst example of ethnic cleansing in the region in decades. Cops merely watched the spiraling violence. Thousands died at sea trying to escape.

An example of Rohingya displacement for profit is the destruction of the settlement in Kyaukphyu, off the coast of Rakhine state. It will be part of a multi-billion-dollar Special Economic Zone (SEZ), built with the involvement of CITIC Group from China and Japanese engineering company Nippon Koei. During the 2012 riots, more than 14 hectares of the Rohingya settlement were burnt to the ground and cleared for private development. The SEZ, a five-year tax-free zone, is based around the Chinese-funded \$2.5 billion energy pipelines that will transport oil and natural gas to Yunnan province, exploiting newly found gas deposits.

### Change for the worse

The Rohingya enjoyed many democratic rights from 1948 to 1962 and played a role in post-colonial governments. Myanmar, also known as Burma, has endured decades of brutal military rule, especially after a 1962 military coup.

U.S. sanctions over "human rights violations" have been used cynically - as in Haiti - to impose neo-liberal austerity and to politically direct the human rights struggle into safe, i.e. pro-imperialist, channels. With the easing of sanctions in 2011-12, Myanmar passed a foreign investment law in 2012 designed to facilitate U.S. and Western economic penetration with big tax write-offs.

Myanmar's rich assets include jade, rubies, teak wood and a major oil pipeline to China still under construction in the North—all made possible with cheap Burmese labor. Reports include youths forced into labor by the corrupt military.

To outflank China, Myanmar's biggest investor and regional powerhouse, Obama's imperialist "pivot to Asia" restarted U.S. "non-military" aid in Myanmar, which saves the regime money on civilian projects, eases political pressure on the military, and frees up funds for repression. Since Obama's and Clinton's photo-ops in Myanmar, the dictatorship received about \$375 million in (supposedly) non-military U.S. aid through fiscal 2014.

The U.S. dominated World Bank has issued hundreds of millions in new loans on condition of maintaining a so-called "business friendly" (pro-U.S.) economy. Moreover, the U.S. has re-established the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in the country, a giant funding agency and notorious CIA conduit. All that sent the regime a green light that it had Western backing, even after the 2012 massacre of hundreds of Rohingya (see July 2015 *Socialist Action*).

So far, despite regime propaganda, the Rohingya armed groups are not Islamic jihadists or anti-Buddhist. Resistance forces, encompassing the Rohingya and other ethnics, should unite on a working class platform to fight for self-determination. New U.S./UN sanctions or even U.S./UN so-called "humanitarian aid," a la post-earthquake Haiti, will only tighten imperialism's grip. A socialist strategy capable of smashing racism and imperialism is urgently needed.

In the U.S., antiwar, antiracist, and labor forces must step up to defend the Rohingya. Gaining support in the Muslim community is key. The Islamophobic Donald Trump and the bigots in Myanmar can only be defeated by mass action! ■

# Relevance of the Russian Revolution today



By **JEFF MACKLER**

Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Vladimir Lenin of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, famously argued that the “Russian Question” was key to the standing of every party on earth that claimed allegiance to the heritage of revolutionary socialist politics.

To this day, 100 years after Lenin’s Bolshevik Party led the world’s first socialist revolution, no party has matched its record of social, political, theoretical, organizational, military, cultural, and moral contributions to the advancement of the interests of the working-class masses.

The official name of the Bolshevik Party was the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, Majority, with the latter word, “majority”—a translation of the Russian word *bolshevik*—added to the RSDLP’s name following a critical early split in 1903. The minority faction, (the “Mensheviks” in Russian) have their modern-day offspring well-represented in the ranks of “socialist” parties that seek to reform capitalism as opposed to fighting for its abolition.

The Russia of pre-February 1917 was headed by a dullard-type, Tsar Nicolas II, whose self-infatuation and delusions of grandeur included his belief that he was practically descended from God and endowed with a blue-blood purity derived from the ever-interbreeding European monarchy. Like the modern-day chauvinist bigot Donald Trump, Nicolas was no man of culture. He ruled virtually unaware of the vast social forces swirling around him, believing to the end that his incessant decrees would be implemented by the force of his will alone.

Nicolas presided over a partly feudal but capitalist Russian Empire. He never tired of giving orders to his generals to advance Russia’s nearly enslaved largely peasant armies to their doom in the course of World War I—an imperialist conflagration to divide and re-divide the world. Among Russia’s prizes was to be the Ottoman Empire’s strategically located and richest city, Constantinople, later re-named Istanbul. By prior agreement, his allies, especially France and Great Britain, were to divide up the Middle East and other continents at a time when a maturing world imperialism required free colonized labor and bountiful natural resources.

Tsarist Russia was also allied with the Japanese Empire and the United States. Both had designs on China as well as islands in the Pacific and other places where Germany had established colonial outposts.

Russia itself was often referred to as the “prison house of nationalities” after more than a century of conquering and colonizing its neighbors. Its imperial domain encompassed one-sixth of the earth’s land

surface. Its conquered peoples included oppressed nations speaking some 50 national languages, all of which were officially banned in public institutions by the Tsarist autocracy.

## Two revolutions in 1917

There were two revolutions in Russia in 1917. The first ended Tsarist rule and established a Provisional Government of capitalist ministers who largely abandoned the Tsar, preferring its own “democratic rule”—that is, the rule of the one percent of capitalist property owners as opposed to the rule of one. The first revolution was brought on by the terrible deprivation imposed on the masses as the Tsar pursued his war effort, using Russia’s peasants and workers as cannon fodder. While his royal court—dukes, grand dukes, princes and associated court bootlickers—reveled in luxury and engaged in all too conspicuous gala extravaganzas, starving workers and shell shocked and/or wounded workers and peasant soldiers returning or deserting the front lines roamed the streets in growing anger.

Triggered by a mass strike and the mobilization of Petrograd (St. Petersburg) women garment workers on International Women’s Day, many hundreds of thousands took to the streets to march on Tsarist institutions. This time however, armed Tsarist soldiers on horseback in the capital city refused to fire on unarmed workers and let them pass. The ensuing unprecedented nationwide cross fertilization of workers, including those employed in some of the largest factories in the world, combined with landless or near-serf peasants and disillusioned soldiers to isolate the Tsar and drive him and his family to his summer palace at Tsarskoe Selo, outside Petrograd— isolated, with no support from any quarter. Centuries of autocratic rule and tradition evaporated overnight.

But the massive mobilizations of Russia’s workers and peasants gave birth to another quasi-governing institution, the soviets, an interlocking system of workers councils that emerged throughout Russia and that were governed by workers, directly elected from their workplaces and subject to immediate recall. Peasant and soldier soviets were also spontaneously established in a context where the historic and hated repressive state apparatus of the Tsarist Empire had disintegrated.

The soviets and the Provisional Government existed in a state of dual power, with the major working-class parties, the “moderate” Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), using their mass influence to subordinate the soviets, where they were usually the large majority, to the capitalist-led Provisional Government. This was done in the belief that the latter,

given Russia’s still extreme backwardness in development and its small working class (only 10 percent of the population), was the only form of state authority possible at that moment in history. Limiting the revolutionary process to an interim “capitalist stage,” according to the theory and practice of these “moderate” socialists, was a historic necessity.

## Trotsky: Permanent revolution

In sharp contrast, Trotsky, as early as 1905, when he led the short-lived Petrograd Soviet, formed after the defeat of Tsarist Russia in the 1903 Russo-Japanese War, rejected a “two-stage”—capitalist and then, in an unstated future, socialist—scenario for Russia’s development. Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution held that the national democratic tasks of previous bourgeois revolutions—land reform and democratic rights and institutions as opposed to autocratic/monarchical institutions—could only be accomplished in the framework of a socialist revolution, which would abolish capitalist property relations and establish workers’ democratic rule through the agency of nationally and locally organized soviets.

The critical political convergence on this crucial question of Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 was expressed in their demand, “All Power to the Soviets,” as opposed to the insistence by “moderate socialists” (Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries) on a capitalist Provisional Government to which the nationally-organized Soviets—now representing the vast numbers of Russia’s workers, peasants, and soldiers—had to be subordinate.

Lenin and Trotsky were far from blind to the Mensheviks’ “Marxist” argument that a workers’ state would most likely emerge first in the most advanced capitalist nations—perhaps Germany, France, or the U.S.—where the level of industrial and technological development could immediately provide the material bases for a qualitatively better life for the vast majority. Indeed, the fundamental arguments of Marxists had always been that a socialist society, emerging on the economic foundations of the most advanced capitalist states would guarantee a better life. Backward Russia was perhaps the last candidate for socialist revolution, they reasoned. The “first stage” of the revolution in Russia, they concluded, must be aimed at developing the capitalist state and economy itself. For this an empowered and “progressive” capitalist class was required.

Lenin and Trotsky replied in a myriad of real-life debates inside the Bolshevik Party, and especially with the “moderate socialists” outside who constituted the large majority of the soviets, that Russia’s capitalist class was incapable of democratic reform and land distribution, that it viewed any governing role for the soviets as inimical to their capitalist interests, that they would resort to force and violence to advance their interests. They pointed out that the capitalist class would seek the support of the old guard Tsarist military officers to enforce order and that they would look to their “allies” in the imperialist World War to crush the soviets.

In the nine-month interim between the February and October Revolutions the Bolsheviks proved right on all these questions. This was far from an abstract debate over Marxist theory. Further, in response to the argument that Russian backwardness ill-prepared it for socialism, they looked to the white hot radicalization among soldiers and the working class that was sweeping Europe at that time, as mass sentiment began to crystalize against workers being used as cannon fodder to advance the imperialist interests of the world’s predatory elite.

Thus permanent revolution, i.e., the abolition of capitalist rule in backward Russia and the establishment of a socialist order, was rooted in the immediate needs of the Russian masses and in the Bolshevik perspective that Russia’s isolation would soon be mitigated by the spread of socialist revolution in Europe.

For the Bolsheviks, Marxist theory had to coincide

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with reality; the highly unstable dual power that they faced, soviets versus a capitalist government, had but one resolution: "All Power to the Soviets!" On Oct. 25, 1917, when the Bolsheviks had won a significant majority in all the soviets throughout the country, they moved to establish the world's first workers' state, headed by a government of the working class and its allies among the vast poor peasantry and soldiery.

#### Which class shall rule society?

This critical issue, "Which class shall rule society—the workers and their allies among the oppressed or the capitalists—remains the central issue in world politics today. Indeed, many socialist groups today support, in one form or another, openly capitalist politicians and politics. Some are quite open in this support—including the Democratic Socialists of America and the Communist Party, which called for a vote for Democrat Hillary Clinton. Similarly, in the Democratic primaries, Socialist Alternative gave support to Bernie Sanders. The Party of Socialism and Liberation and Workers World called for a Sanders primary vote in New York and California. The latter two parties have a longstanding record of supporting "progressive Democrats" who are Black or Latino, as with their support to Jesse Jackson and others from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

The Green Party, a party of middle-class liberals and radicals, sometimes runs its own candidates in "safe states" while calling for a vote for the Democrats in contested races.

In all of the above instances, the Bolshevik credo of working-class independence, or the fight for a government of the working class, is subordinated to various "lesser evil" or related electoral schemes, usually taking the form of arguments that the Republicans are more reactionary than the Democrats or that a vote for Democrats is a requirement to stop the "fascist" Barry Goldwater, or Richard Nixon, or George Bush, or Donald Trump

Or, as with the Mensheviks of yesteryear, they seek to form multi-class "peoples' parties" that include "progressive" or "left-wing" Democrats" who, they insist, are more attuned to the needs of the working masses than their capitalist colleagues. Bernie Sanders is a prime example; Jesse Jackson and his Rainbow Coalition served the same purpose in decades past.

In point of fact, all political parties are formed to represent the interests of one or another competing class in society—either the vast working-class majority or the capitalist-class one percent or less minority. The latter rule not only through the so-called democratic trappings of parliamentary government but also, when necessary, through the force and violence imbedded in the very fabric of all capitalist states, including the police and army as well as the courts, the prison-industrial complex, the FBI, CIA and the myriad secretive and/or repressive organizations, from the Department of Homeland Security to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Just as in the time of the Tsarist autocracy, when challenged by any significant or potential mass movement, these institutions of the capitalist state all justify the use of force in the name of "national security," the term repeatedly adopted, employed and codified in capitalist law to maintain the minority rule of the elite few who make the real decisions in every capitalist state.

#### Relevance of the Bolshevik program today

The Bolshevik-program not only focused on the issue of working class political independence from capitalist politics and from the capitalist state power but also on a number of related issues that were critical to winning the massive and majority support required to establish and maintain the world's first experiment in majority rule.

On Day One of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, the All Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers, Peasant and Soldiers Deputies approved a decree that nationalized all capitalist land in the largest nation on earth. This land was immediately granted to the peasant soviets to distribute in accord with the historic aspirations of Russia's vast poor peasantry. This single measure cemented Russia's massively oppressed majority to the revolution.

Aside from revolutionary Cuba, no nation since then has implemented a land reform-distribution of that scope. Indeed, today in Latin America every so-called revolutionary or "popular" regime, from Venezuela to Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay to Nicaragua and Argentina, has failed to accomplish even a modest land reform. To do so would entail a break with the capitalist system of private property that none of the above dared to contemplate.

This fundamental failure to meet the needs of the historically oppressed poor peasants and farmers inevitably cuts deep into the support required to un-



### On Day One of the Revolution, the Soviets decreed the right of Russia's conquered peoples to self-determination.

derline the inevitable imperialist efforts to destabilize and overthrow these "popular" governments, all of which are or have recently been dominated by a combination of left-sounding reformers allied with the nation's bankers and ruling capitalists.

#### Self-determination of oppressed nations

On the same Day One, the Soviets decreed the right of Russia's conquered peoples, its oppressed nationalities, to self-determination—that is, the right to decide to leave the USSR and organize their own separate state or to remain. Those who chose to remain were guaranteed their historic rights to language and culture, as opposed to the domination of the previous colonialist Russian conquerors. The oppressed nations were granted an autonomy that guaranteed their political, economic, and cultural rights as well as their right to change their minds in the future and secede.

With few exceptions the oppressed and now liberated peoples decided to remain, if for no other reason that the revolution had granted them the land as against their landlords and a political and social freedom that exceeded any other on earth.

The Russian Revolution's stance on the national question—that is, the nationalism of the oppressed, not the nationalism of the oppressor—cut deep into the consciousness of revolutionaries everywhere. In discussions with the then revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1939, Trotsky observed, "Ninety-nine per cent of the American workers are chauvinists; in relation to the Negroes they are hangmen and they are so also toward the Chinese. It is necessary to teach the white American beasts. It is necessary to make them understand that the American state is not their state and that they do not have to be the guardians of this state. Those American workers who say: 'The Negroes should separate when they so desire and we will defend them against our American police'—those are revolutionaries, I have confidence in them."

Paraphrasing Trotsky elsewhere: "Until the great white racist beast of the American working class realizes that he cannot advance his cause on the backs of his Black brothers and sisters, there will be no revolution in the United States."

With this in mind, the SWP early on championed Malcolm X, who was pilloried by most socialists and "progressives" at that time as a "racist in reverse," separatist, and hater. It was no coincidence that the ever-evolving Malcolm X established the closest of relations with the SWP, who published his speeches and organized mass forums to make his revolutionary Black nationalist views known far and wide.

Today's National Football League players and athletes from an ever-expanding number of sports who have "taken the knee" in solidarity with the example of Collin Kaepernick know full well the pain and suf-

fering inflicted on oppressed people by racist America's institutional police state of hate, violence and mass incarceration. The vast numbers of today's Black NFL players, some eighty percent of the sport's modern day gladiators at the service of white billionaire bosses, hail from poor working-class families, daily deprived of fundamental rights. The great majority, their six-figure salaries notwithstanding, never become vested in NFL pensions, their often broken and crippled bodies and CTE brains used as justification to cast them off before they have met the required five years of combat to qualify for a pension.

The Bolsheviks taught these lessons on the right of oppressed people and nations to self-determination to working class fighters around the world. No nation today has exceeded their achievements.

#### The world invades the nascent USSR

When some 17 nations invaded the nascent USSR with the single objective of restoring the despised capitalist-imperialist-chauvinist ruling-class minority, they were defeated by the very forces that were central to the 1917 October Revolution—that is, the massive majority who directly benefited from its achievements. From a disintegrating Tsarist and then capitalist-led army of conscripted and abused workers and peasants who had no interest in defending the imperial aims of its oppressors, the 1917 Revolution produced an armed force unequalled in the entire world—an army of 10 million free people who rose to unprecedented heights to defeat the invasion of the combined forces of both sides of the imperialist war.

Just what were the strategies and tactics of this revolutionary army? Did they reside in military prowess or advanced military technologies? To the contrary. The victory of the Red Army, led by a person with virtually no prior military experience, Leon Trotsky, resided in the political consciousness imbued in the Russian masses that they were fighting to preserve the momentous conquests of the October 1917 Revolution. The Russian masses fought with political weapons above all.

Russian soldiers with Bolshevik commissars (political leaders drawn from the ranks of the revolution's finest young soviet leaders) sought to convince their German and all foreign soldier adversaries that their fight was against their own capitalist classes and not against the Russian workers and peasants who had shown the world that a new world free from capitalist oppression and war was possible.

Massive propaganda campaigns and widespread troop-declared truces aimed at fraternization with opposing front-line troops helped to win soldier workers to understand their own class interests as opposed to their imperialist bosses. This was coupled with Bolshevik leaders' visits to workers and socialist organizations everywhere to convince them to fight the class war at home and not the imperialist wars of their oppressors.

Nothing outraged the imperialist diplomats stationed in Russia more than to read Soviet government flyers that were dropped in the millions on the battlefields proclaiming that thousands of their soldiers had deserted the battlefields to return home to fight for their own interests. This was a form of revolution-

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(Above) Storm-surge damage after Hurricane Maria hit the island of Dominica.

## ... World burns

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has lengthened by two and a half months since 1970 due to global warming, with twice the number of acres burned per year as would be expected without it.

Over 10 million acres—an area almost three times the size of Connecticut—burned across the U.S. Northwest and British Columbia this summer. Portland, Ore., residents were shrouded in asthma-inducing smoke from the fires for weeks on end. Health officials told people to stay indoors whenever possible. At one point, satellite photos showed fire smoke wreathing the northern U.S. all the way to Niagara Falls.

If the fires out West are the drought side, the Gulf Coast provides the counterpoint. Hurricane Harvey was the third “500-year flood” event that Houston saw in three years (i.e., the statistical probability of even one of these floods occurring any given year is about 1 in 500). After 40+ inches of rain, places well outside of floodplains shown on federal flood insurance maps were inundated.

But global warming was not the only environmental culprit of Houston’s flooding. The city is built on bottomland with a 2000-mile network of natural bayous. Native prairie grasses with roots that burrow a dozen feet into the sod can soak up tremendous quantities of rainwater. But the city’s explosive growth has paved over much of the prairie land with impervious buildings and concrete, while local officials have simply refused to limit the profits of developers with zoning regulations.

Instead, driven by the irrational logic of capitalist development, the city’s engineers have buried their heads in the sand. A recent piece by *The Texas Tribune* and ProPublica quotes flood-control officials as calling the conservation-oriented conclusions of their agency’s own flood-management research “absurd” and dismissing climate science.

Then there was the response to the hurricane—or lack thereof. Harvey made landfall as a Category 4 storm, the same intensity as Hurricane Katrina when it devastated New Orleans in 2005. But preparations were haphazard at best. While the state issued mandatory evacuations for several coastal counties, Houston city officials explicitly told residents to stay in the city—largely because they feared huge traffic jams

with cars trapped and inundated as waters rose. Requisitioning buses and trains to speed evacuations and include those without private vehicles was simply not considered as an option.

Residents who have returned to the highly industrialized Texas Gulf Coast face cleaning up a toxic mess from flooded oil refineries. In Port Arthur, many of the town’s 15 toxic waste Superfund sites flooded, spreading carcinogenic chemicals around. A fuel storage tank in a Black neighborhood exploded, releasing a million pounds of toxic emissions into the air. Environmental justice activist Hilton Kelley told “Democracy Now!” that neither the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) nor the Red Cross were responding to residents’ pleas for help, and many renters who evacuated were evicted by their landlords.

### Puerto Rico: Imperialism worsens storm damage

But the damage and displacement in Texas pales in comparison to Puerto Rico. Hurricane Maria knocked out electricity and water treatment across the entire island. These services are unlikely to be restored for months—not just due to the storm, but also to the cataclysm of financialization and neoliberalism that have destroyed the island’s infrastructure over the past three decades.

Financialization—described thoroughly by Lenin in “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism”—is a result of the monopoly-building of corporate capital. Capitalists must increasingly invest in financial capital, i.e., interest-bearing bank assets, instead of real infrastructure to see a return on their investments. Writes Lenin: “Finance capital, concentrated in a few hands and exercising a virtual monopoly, exacts enormous and ever-increasing profits from the floating of companies, issue of stock, state loans, etc., strengthens the domination of the financial oligarchy and levies tribute upon the whole of society for the benefit of monopolists.”

This tribute is exactly what has been extracted from Puerto Rico before and during its ongoing debt crisis. The June 2016 Act of Congress relegating the U.S. island territory back to pure colonial status was named PROMESA, Spanish for “promise.” The promise was to reorient the territory’s budget toward paying the investors who own its massive debt.

Signed into law by Obama, the act created an unelected seven-member “fiscal control board” (non-ironically nicknamed *the junta*) to seize the island’s finances, effectively voiding the territory’s constitution. Draconian cuts to health care, pensions, and education followed. Even before the latest round of austerity, the territorial government was spending more on debt service than any of these human services.

The failed PR spectacle of U.S. President Donald Trump throwing paper towels to onlookers in one of the least-damaged parts of the island made a mockery of the real human needs of residents, most of whom still lack food, fuel, or clean drinking water weeks after the hurricane. Meanwhile, more than 10,000 shipping containers filled with food and supplies sat untouched in the Port of San Juan for over a week, the victim of a disorganized and underfunded disaster response effort.

The island’s electrical infrastructure is in shambles. The electrical utility, PREPA, was chronically underfunded before the hurricane and racked up billions of dollars’ worth of deferred maintenance. Even Trump admitted that rebuilding the island’s infrastructure to meet human needs will require forgiving the debt—comments which other Trump administration officials have already backpedaled on.

While the U.S. preparation and response to this season’s hurricanes has been dismal, Hurricane Irma’s impact on Cuba provides a major contrast. That storm hit Cuba as a Category 5 hurricane and did extreme damage to the island’s central and western provinces, causing major flooding in Havana. It garnered the highest death toll of any storm since 2005: 10. The low number is a testament to Cuba’s comprehensive disaster preparation and response system, one that’s admired as the best in the world.

Cuba has a state-of-the-art storm tracking system that allows the country to issue weather alerts 72 hours before landfall. The National Civil Defense agency inspects and stocks shelters and coordinates evacuations. TV and radio broadcast instructions. Neighborhood-level Committees for the Defense of the Revolution go door-to-door checking on or evacuating pregnant women, the elderly, and the infirm.

If beleaguered Cuba can take care of everyone’s needs during disaster, the wealthiest nation on Earth also should be able to. Working people in the United States must demand more from the government, starting with a nationwide organized effort to anticipate and plan for more frequent future storms and fires. FEMA should be reorganized and given a huge boost in funding along with new protocols along the lines of the Cuban model.

Puerto Rico’s debt must be forgiven now! Infrastructure in Puerto Rico must be rebuilt by the government under democratic control, funded by the federal government through higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy. At the same time, Puerto Rico must be granted self-determination to forge its own economic and political future.

The U.S. government and all states must mobilize a Marshall Plan-like just transition to renewable energy—particularly wind and solar—hiring displaced workers at union wages. Ultimately, the way to address growing climate catastrophe is by replacing the system that created the crisis with a socialist system that puts people and the planet first. ■

## ... Russia

(continued from page 7)

ary political warfare that made the Soviet armies and the Soviet Union an example for the world’s workers. While the Red Army’s combat losses were in truth massive, as in any world military conflagration, the strength in their fighting machine was the just and revolutionary cause that they exemplified.

For the Bolsheviks, a mass working-class party that grew from several thousand to hundreds of thousands and won the allegiance of Russia’s poor and oppressed from every quarter of society, permanent revolution was not only the political and theoretical expression of the impossibility of capitalist reform but also a rejection of the notion that socialism could be built in a single country, isolated from the working classes of the world.

### Bolsheviks implement revolutionary program

The Bolsheviks seized on that special moment in history—a generalized crisis of capitalist credibility, an immediate revolutionary crisis wherein their program was in perfect harmony with the immediate aspirations and mobilizations of tens of millions of Russia’s working masses.

In this context, the actual seizure of power in Petrograd on Oct. 25, 1917 was achieved with an estimated loss of some dozen lives. The same scenario was more

or less repeated in the following days across Russia.

The decrees that shortly followed the Bolshevik-led seizure of power astonished the world. They published and repudiated all the secret treaties that Tsarism had imposed on conquered nations. They renounced Russian territorial acquisitions and financial concessions forced on conquered peoples.

They opened the borders of revolutionary Russia to revolutionary fighters from around the world and led in establishing the Third or Communist International, based on a repudiation of imperialist war, on solidarity with the oppressed people and nations, and on the premise of constructing disciplined, democratic revolutionary parties on the Bolshevik model everywhere with the objective of organizing for social revolution.

The Soviet government abolished all discriminatory laws against women, against gender discrimination, and against racism in all its manifestations. These were not just empty decrees but were implemented in practice via newly established Soviet organs led by the best fighters in all these critical fields of human endeavor.

The Soviet government established a system of free education and health care. It opened its doors to artists, writers, musicians, and scientists to share every form of social, cultural and scientific expression of humanity’s future. It encouraged the formation of Communist Parties dedicated to humanity’s future everywhere on earth.

All this was accomplished in the context of the concerted efforts of world imperialism to shut down and cut off the wonders achieved by the free people of the

Soviet Union.

In the U.S. the 1919 Palmer Raids, led by U.S. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer, rounded up and arrested thousands of communists in the notorious “Red Scare,” wherein the government feared the spread of the ideals of the Russian Revolution. Similar mass arrests and persecution of communists were implemented by almost all capitalist European governments.

These were combined with ferocious invasions of the Russian workers’ state by countries on both sides of the imperialist war aimed at stamping out the physical existence of the vibrant revolutionary state headed by the Bolshevik-led multi-party soviets (which included representatives of the Left Menshevik Internationalists and Left Socialist Revolutionaries). The U.S. itself sent in troops to Siberia in this imperialist effort.

Still, all these efforts failed to reverse or defeat the historic achievements of the Soviet masses. But the brutal invasions and accompanying devastation took a great toll. Indeed, they laid the material basis for the future rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Contrary to bourgeois historians and to many among today’s “moderate socialists,” however, counter-revolutionary Stalinism had no “roots” in the program or practice of the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky. To the contrary, the rise of Stalin can only be attributed to the terrible conditions of deprivation and devastation imposed by the world imperialist invasion and subsequent embargo aimed at wiping out all vestiges of the Great Russian Revolution. But this is the subject of Part Two of this article. ■



# Fascism: What it is and how to fight it

By MARTY GOODMAN

Following is a presentation that the author gave on Sept. 13 to an anti-fascist forum sponsored by Socialist Action in New York City. Other speakers included Black Agenda Report Co-editor Glen Ford, Manhattan Green Party chair Daniel Vila, and Suzanne Ross of the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

What is fascism? Let's consult an expert, Adolf Hitler. Hitler cut to the chase at a 1933 meeting of German industrialists when he told them: "Private enterprise cannot be maintained in a democracy."

Actually, Adolf, capitalism is a dictatorship by definition, whether fascist or a so-called "democracy." Under capitalism a grotesquely tiny minority runs society. Moreover, every capitalist, big or small, is a dictator. Disguising or obscuring these essential facts about capitalism is what passes for political discussion in the United States.

But capitalism *does* take on different political forms. Is fascism with us today? Let's look at what's happening. Since the beginning of the year 27 people have been killed in racist, Islamophobic, and transphobic attacks according to information compiled by Antifa International. In January alone, over 40 Jewish centers in the U.S. received bomb threats.

On Aug. 12, we saw on TV protesters confront the racist beast head-on in Charlottesville. The right was having a unity rally and riding a wave of racism, anti-immigrant hate, Islamophobia, and transphobia stoked by Mr. Trump and the alt-right. The KKK and Nazis murdered Heather Heyer and injured another 19, as cops looked on. Several of the victims identified themselves as socialists.

The reaction by the organized left and outraged individuals has been encouraging. On Aug. 16, some 3000 marched in Philadelphia; a coalition of 70 organizations led an Aug. 27 march of up to 7000 in Berkeley, Calif., against a "No to Marxism in America" rally, and the massive Aug. 19 march of 40,000 took place in Boston.

In New York City, hundreds, maybe thousands, marched on Trump Tower. Unfortunately, these rallies were less organized than others, perhaps deliberately so by Democratic Party forces. Except for the nurses, union contingents were not present. We must do better.

Besides Trump's ravings, anger over the fact that whites will eventually be a "minority" in the U.S. has added fuel to the growth of fascist forces. In addition, international capitalist competition tightens, stoking the racism and xenophobia that we've seen. Contributing factors include a refugee crisis from wars and climate change—outgrowths of imperialism.

The struggle against fascism is just beginning. As capitalism in crisis spawns the fascist beast, it also presents opportunities for a new generation of socialists to step and lead the struggle.

Is fascism here? Is Trump a fascist? I remember in 1968 telling my dad that President Lyndon B. Johnson was a fascist. B-52s were dropping massive ordinance and napalm on the non-white people of Vietnam, and by war's end, more than all bombs dropped in World War II. Back home, Panthers were getting offed by pigs (didn't use that word with dad!). Antiwar activists were getting their skulls bashed in.

Was I right? No. As bad as it's gotten with war, segregation, McCarthyism, FBI Cointelpro spying, Watergate, the frame-up of Mumia, we can still vote, have unions, and have meetings like this. These are democratic rights, won through struggle—rights we must defend. Bottom line, this is a bourgeois democracy and a dictatorship of capital simultaneously.

Do capitalists prefer fascism to "democracy?" Not really. As Trotsky observed in the 1930s, "The big bourgeoisie likes fascism as little as a man with aching molars likes to have his teeth pulled." Only in extreme crisis, like depression and threats of revolution, will most capitalists opt for fascism.

Those who, with good intentions, constantly shout "fascism!" should learn that the biggest profit maker of all time is, in fact, a stable capitalist bourgeois democracy—where everyone "accepts" oppression, goes to work every day, and signs up for war. Essential to this stability are unions, today's junior partners in the Democratic Party, which are now down to



## As capitalism in crisis spawns the growth of fascism, it also presents opportunities for a new generation of socialist revolutionaries.

6% of the working class. Their wretched leadership poses no threat whatsoever to capitalist profits.

Given these conditions, the ruling class tells itself, "Why overthrow democracy, have a bloodbath, and risk rebellion when we're doing so great?" If working people get mad we can always throw them the bone of the Democratic Party—Hillary, Bernie, or whoever. As the saying goes: "The Democratic Party is the graveyard of social movements."

Is Trump a fascist? I don't think so. We need to understand capitalism's inherent capacity for brutality and depravity. Trump may be a demagogue, but plutocracy, war, and racism are capitalism's bloodthirsty history—without fascism.

Democrats like to pose as avenging angels. The Democratic Party saw to it that lynch-mob rule in the South lasted 100 years. Who are they to scream racism at Trump when Obama's immigration policies resulted in more deportations than any other president? And, let's not forget Obama's wars, handed down from Bush, including the war on Palestinians. The Democrats want to divert the disgust at Trump's racism, misogyny, etc. in order to stampede voters back into the voting booth and out of the streets.

I just read a very good book titled "The Korean War." Not only did the Democratic President Harry Truman stoke the fires of McCarthyism and drop the first A bomb but he pursued a brutal racist war that set the stage ideologically and psychologically for Vietnam and Iraq. As a result, millions died.

Was Truman an imperialist? Yes. Racist? Yes. Fascist? No. He was a capitalist politician.

Socialists say we need to break completely with the Democratic Party and stay in the streets! We need a fighting labor party that will lead working people, especially the doubly oppressed, into a genuine struggle against fascism and injustice.

### A "battering ram" against the workers

What exactly is fascism? How is it different from other forms of reaction? As Malik Miah put it in the *International Socialist Review* in 1975, "Fascists try to turn the anger of all those threatened with ruin by the capitalist crisis against the oppressed racial minorities and organized labor. [They] claim to be the representatives of the 'little man' against both the big capitalists and the communists, directing their fire at Blacks, Jews and 'big labor.'"

Historically, fascism was a mass movement that used the ruined middle-class or petty bourgeois as a "battering ram," as Trotsky put it, against the worker's movement. It also attracted violent down and out types, those whom Marxists call the "lumpen proletariat." The capitalists could not count on their military to attack workers, since most of the soldiers were working class. For that reason, a special army of goons was created, financed by capital, to violently smash the workers' movement.

Thankfully, the fascist movement has not yet be-

(Above) Sir Oswald Mosley, fascist leader in Britain in the 1930s, receives salutes.

come a mass movement and is confined to marginal elements and psychopaths.

Nevertheless, the internet is crawling with fascist websites like the *The Daily Stormer*, *The Daily Shoah* (Shoah is Yiddish for Holocaust) and *The Right Stuff*, which openly call for genocide against Blacks and Jews. One article in "The Right Stuff" was called "Genocide: The Inescapable Conclusion."

John Spencer, a pseudo-intellectual leader who coined the term "alt-right" in 2010, established *AlternativeRight.com*. While Spencer was editor, he published an article called, "Is Black Genocide Right?" Spencer, who was present at the Charlottesville fascist rally, calls John Bannon, "alt-right lite."

### How should we counter the fascists?

Examples from history teach us how *not* to defeat fascism.

In Germany, the powerful Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party, during Stalin's "Third Period," refused to unite to fight Hitler. Reformism and sectarianism allowed Hitler to assume power without a shot being fired. Some 40 million died.

Also in the 1930s, the major parties of Spain's working people, the Socialists and the smaller Communist Party, put their hopes in an alliance with so-called "democratic" capitalists in the fight against fascism, rather than pursuing a working-class fight against fascism and for socialism. Their liberal "democratic friends" turned tail to fascism. As brutal as the Nazis, the fascist "Falange" took over.

The first fascists took governmental power in 1922 in Italy. Led by Mussolini, roving fascist bands crushed strikes and beat and killed workers, especially Socialists and Communists. Workers' headquarters were smashed. The socialists and Communists did not organize a mass armed defense, a deadly mistake.

Socialist Action advocates building mass united fronts against fascism. Small groups, however sincere, cannot overcome the fascist threat, and they become easy targets of police repression.

Mass organizations, especially trade unions, which include oppressed groups directly threatened by fascists, are key. Mass organizations can adequately take up the task of defending the workers' movement by using, as Malcolm said, any means necessary. I can imagine my 35,000 fellow transit workers dealing with the KKK!

Socialist Action does not call on the state to ban fascist demonstrations, knowing all too well from history that the real target of the capitalist state is to destroy the anti-capitalist left and ban its demonstrations.

We look forward to working with all working-class and anti-fascist organizations to build a united anti-fascist, anti-racist movement right here in New York City as conditions permit. Working with forces fighting police brutality would be a perfect fit.

But face the facts: Until the day that capitalism is overthrown by revolution, the threat of fascism will always be with us. That's why being part of a revolutionary organization with decades of experience will help lead the struggle to victory. Please join us. ■

# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

## A big opportunity for the Socialist Left

Jagmeet Singh's election as federal party leader is, at least in part, the revenge of the NDP top brass and the liberal media establishment. They never forgave the party and labour union ranks for forcing the leadership review that ultimately deposed Tom Mulcair following his disastrous 2015 election campaign. Enormous resources were marshaled to portray Brampton, Ontario, MPP Singh as "an outsider" and a "fresh face" with a cool, hipster image who can challenge Justin Trudeau for

"middle-class" allegiances.

But what's in it, concretely, for the working class? What does it mean for the vast majority of Canadians who are the victims of capitalist austerity, growing inequality, and environmental chaos?

While barely over half of the eligible party members voted, Singh's first ballot victory inclines many to think that he embodies meaningful racial and generational change. So, it will be crucial to hold him accountable, to insist that he

not retreat even from his sparse "progressive" policies, and furthermore, to demand a bold socialist alternative to Trudeau's Harper-lite regimen. This should include public ownership of the energy sector, and attention to the much-ignored issues of foreign policy: BDS and justice for Palestine, getting Canada out of NATO, and reducing the military budget, which Trudeau just increased by a whopping 70 per cent.

Illusions in Singh may soon be dashed. This is a time of social upheaval, from indigenous Caledonia, to Catalonia in the Spanish state. Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie

Sanders showed that the open road is to the left, not the centre. Thus, now is the time to fight for a Workers' Agenda, for socialism, inside the only mass, labour-based political party in North America.

The NDP Socialist Caucus recognizes the huge opportunity and the heavy responsibility to unite all anti-capitalists and social justice fighters inside and outside the NDP. We invite Niki Ashton MP, her supporters, and all leftist backers of the other candidates, to come

together now. With conservative forces dominating at the summit of the NDP and labour unions, the space is open for an insurgent, militant left wing in the major working-class institutions, organizing from the bottom-up.

**The Socialist Caucus national conference—to be held Saturday, Dec. 2 at the University of Toronto's Woodsworth College Residence—may be a turning point.**

Together, we can unite the left and build on the momentum that caused the NDP leadership candidates to tack to the left. The working class needs socialist solutions to the crisis of capitalism and to counteract the rise of the alt-right.

We can, and we will, advance socialist policies. More democratic debate. Socialist candidates for federal NDP executive. Direct action against capitalist austerity.

Get ready for the NDP Federal Convention, Feb. 16-18, 2018, in Ottawa. Stoke your ideas and your energy. Register now for the NDP Socialist Caucus conference in Toronto on Saturday, Dec. 2. Please visit: [www.ndpsocialists.ca](http://www.ndpsocialists.ca). E-mail: [info@ndpsocialists.ca](mailto:info@ndpsocialists.ca). Phone: 647-986-1917. ■

## Who is Jagmeet Singh?

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The 38-year-old turbaned Sikh lawyer from Brampton is the first person of colour to head a major Canadian political party—in itself a significant development. As the target of racist attacks, he must be defended, although not in the way he did when confronted by a racist woman in Peel who absurdly berated him for being a Muslim. Singh simply repeated the words, "We love you. We support you." Racism and incipient fascism must be countered by stressing the need for working-class unity against the system that breeds racism, and by initiating mass actions to crush the racists.

Singh handily defeated his opponents for the NDP leadership by skillfully recruiting from his social network. His election represents a doubling down on the shift to the centre, to glamour politics, to trying to beat the Liberals at their game. All this occurs at a time when the right wing, including the Liberal government, are moving ever more stridently against democratic rights, to shore up and extend the grip of imperialism on the world, to put profit before the environment.

Sadly, the most left-wing candidate for leader, Niki Ashton MP, squandered the opportunity to present a bold socialist policy platform, to integrate grassroots socialist activists into her campaign, and to turn it into a vehicle for mass action against capitalist austerity, environmental plunder and war. She steered away



from the path of Jeremy Corbyn.

Jagmeet Singh, an Ontario MPP who lacks a seat in the federal Parliament, appointed leadership opponent and Quebec MP Guy Caron to be NDP House Leader until the 2019 election. Charlie Angus, who has what the *Toronto Star* calls "the most nuanced position on pipelines and energy projects," is left out in the cold. Does this mean Singh will oppose pipelines, and fight for public ownership and a rapid Green energy transition away from carbon dependency?

Given his overall record, it would take enormous pressure from below to move him in that direction. Recall that Singh initially opposed LGBTQI-positive sex education in Brampton schools. As Deputy Leader of the Ontario NDP he fully backed Leader Andrea

Horwath's failed 2014 Ontario election campaign opposing tax increases on corporations and the rich (a policy not unlike Tom Mulcair's "Balanced budget, No matter what" stance). As her Consumer Affairs Critics, Singh did nothing to advocate public auto insurance, a longstanding ONDP policy championed by beloved, deceased MPPs Mel Swart and Peter Kormos.

During the 2017 federal leadership race Singh stunned members when he came out against universality in seniors' benefits. He infamously toured Israel hosted by Zionist organizations, and he was backed by the openly pro-imperialist NDP Foreign Affairs Critic Helene Laverdiere. Singh initially favoured the Energy East pipeline, then backed down under pressure from Niki Ashton and others. On post-secondary school fees and student debt he has been vague.

On the positive side, Singh wants to de-criminalize all drugs and invest in the treatment of substance abuse as a health issue. At the same time, he never uses the word "socialist" to describe himself; he proposes only minimal changes to tax law; and offers not a word about striving for democratic control of the economy.

That means party and labour leftists should press Singh sharply on pharma-care, dental care, free post-secondary education, steep taxation of corporations and the super-rich, for BDS and Canada Out of NATO, and for public ownership, particularly in the areas of energy, banking, telecommunications and transportation. Instead of offering a care-free honeymoon to the new leader, working-class militants need to set the tone at the 2018 NDP federal convention. This should be done by advancing socialist policies and demanding that Singh lead the fight for a Workers' Agenda. ■

By BOB LYONS  
ILD Coordinator

**PepsiCo Argentina**—PepsiCo, one of the world's largest producers of snack food, including Lays potato chips as well as the iconic drink, has faced fierce opposition from the 691 workers it has tried to lay off at its north Buenos Aires facility. Arriving to work in June, the workers were met with a locked gate and a notice that read that the plant was being closed.

The workers responded on 20 June with a plant occupation. Led by the factory stewards' committee, shop-floor reps elected directly by the workers began to popularize their struggle across the country and internationally.

On July 27, the day after the workers were violently evicted from the plant by police, the Argentina labour tribunal ruled that the layoffs were illegal, and that PepsiCo Argentina had to immediately reopen the plant as there was no economic reason for its closure. PepsiCo has refused to abide by the court ruling, and the workers continue their

mobilization, despite repeated roadblocks put in their way by the Macri government.

**Nadia Shoufani**—After a year-long battle against the attacks of right-wing Zionist organizations like B'nai Brith Canada, the Center for Israel and Jewish Affairs, and the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center Canada, Nadia Shoufani—the Peel-Dufferin (just west of Toronto, Canada) Catholic School teacher accused of promoting violence and terrorism, and suspended for a month with pay by her employer—has been cleared of the charges leveled against her.

Posting on Sept. 8 on Facebook, Shoufani said: "A victory for myself, for the Palestinian solidarity movement, for the freedom of expression!" The Zionist organizations have lost another battle to silence those who criticize the Israeli apartheid state and its genocidal poli-

cies towards the Palestinian people.

Shoufani not only kept her job and defeated the attempts to silence her open support for the Palestinian liberation struggle and its political prisoners held by the Israeli state, she and her supporters—which included her union, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association—have scored an important victory against the Zionist lobby and its attempt to chill speech against criticism of the apartheid policies of the Israeli and international Zionist political movements.

**Santiago Maldonado**—The international campaign for the disclosure of the whereabouts of Mapuche indigenous rights activist Santiago Maldonado, kidnapped by the national police near Chubut in Patagonia, southern Argentina, has spread to Europe and the Middle East. Palestinian activists staged a group demo demanding to know his

whereabouts. In Madrid, Spain, hundreds of activists marched through the downtown in a militant display of international solidarity demanding to know: Where is Santiago Maldonado?

Maldonado is one of hundreds of Mapuche people organizing to defend their territory against imperialist encroachment on their traditional land. The Mapuche people of Patagonia have a traditional territorial connection that encompasses both Argentina and Chile. They have a history of unremitting resistance to colonialism and imperialism, and have suffered great repression for it.

The international dimension of the campaign around the kidnapping of Maldonado has created a political crisis for the Argentinian government, who first tried to dismiss the claims of kidnapping. Now, in its latest maneuver, the government is trying to lay the blame for the disappearance of Santiago at the foot of five policemen. The policemen in their turn have said they

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By BILL ONASCH

## Labor Briefing

**Trying to Stop Runaway Train**—As recently as a few years ago, the biggest local in the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers had nearly 6000 members at General Electric's locomotive works in Erie, Pa. There is strong demand for locomotives and GE's are most favored. But instead of rewarding their workforce with a sense of security, GE has chosen to relentlessly transfer work to other, non-union locations.

Just last year, GE destroyed 1400 UE 506 jobs in Erie. Even though these were skilled workers, most haven't found work in the small Erie area. This is already having a big impact on the local economy. But in July, GE served notice that they would be eliminating 572 more jobs in Local 506 and 80 percent of sister Local 618, representing quality assurance workers.

While GE and UE had some "off the record" exchanges about the new runaway ploy, the union did not insist on formal negotiations. Instead they invoked the grievance procedure and announced their intention to strike in November. Stay tuned.

**Will He Also Get His Name on an Airport?**—There was still grumbling about adding Ronald Reagan—who

fired striking air traffic controllers and destroyed their PATCO union—to a Labor Department Honor Roll when Trump announced the appointment of Peter Robb as general counsel for the National Labor Relations Board. Currently an anti-labor lawyer with Downs Rachlin Martin, Robb was Reagan's lead attorney in the PATCO atrocity.

**Iron Clad Agreement**—According to Maine Public Radio, a strike was averted at the General Dynamics-owned Bath Iron Works shipyard when 700 members of the Bath Marine Draftsmen's Association, affiliated with the UAW, ratified a new 4½-year agreement. It came after some compromise on a contentious change of flexible work schedules. The new deal provides two hourly raises totaling 5.8 percent and lump sum payments of \$6000 dollars.

**Carpenters Become a Pain**—Tucson.com reports that 160 union carpenters dressed in neon safety green recently confronted a meeting of Arizona's Industrial Commission, a body that oversees a wide range of labor is-

ssues, including the Arizona Division of Occupational Safety and Health. The unionists were protesting sweetheart deals ADOSH has been making that are reducing penalties for OSHA violators. They also blasted the commission for not responding to complaints about the widespread practice in the construction industry in which workers are paid in cash off the books—resulting in wage theft, tax fraud, and dodging scrutiny of their hiring and safety practices.

**Electric Resistance at Fremont**—The once unionized auto plant in Fremont, Calif., abandoned by General Motors and Toyota during the GM bankruptcy, today is cranking out the all-electric Tesla as fast as they can get batteries. The pace has resulted in a considerably higher accident rate than the industry average. The UAW is conducting an organizing drive there but the management team hired by owner Elon Musk—seen by many as a less greedy 21<sup>st</sup>-century Thomas Edison—is playing hard ball. Based on numerous complaints of workers being intimidated

by security guards while attempting to distribute union leaflets on non-work time in non-work areas, the NLRB has issued complaints against the company and has scheduled a hearing in Oakland on Nov. 14.

**Traversing RtW**—A *Labor Notes* article begins: "Nurses in rural northern Michigan made history August 9-10 when we won labor's biggest organizing victory since 'right to work' took effect in the state in 2013. By a vote of 489-439, more than 1,000 RNs at Traverse City's Munson Medical Center, the area's largest employer, will be represented by the Michigan Nurses Association."

**Efficiency Experts**—While the Nurses can be proud of their achievement, 35,000 Michigan public-sector workers got slapped down by the governor-appointed Civil Service Commission. Oblivious to hundreds of protesting workers, the panel voted 3-1 to deny the unions the right to bargain over seniority relating to layoffs, job transfers, and overtime. The not very civil commissioners said such measures impede efficiency. ■

*If you have a story suitable for Labor Briefing please contact billonasch@kclabor.org*

## ... International Labour Defense

(continued from page 10)

were just following orders from their political bosses.

The immediate cause of the action, a blockade of the roadway leading to their lands, which precipitated the kidnapping, was an attempt by international clothing corporation Benneton to seize the Mapuche land with the connivance of the Argentine government. The colours of Benneton run red with the blood of Santiago Maldonado.

International Labour Defense believes that the campaign for the disclosure of Santiago Maldonado's whereabouts represents a start to the building of international united-front campaigns in defending the prisoners and victims of the class war. Like its namesake, ILD believes that the motto, "An Injury to One is an Injury to All," can serve as the basis of agreement for all of the non-sectarian left and progressive forces globally to act in a coordinated way. The lives we save may be our own. ■

## Socialist Educational Conferences

### Minneapolis

Friday, Nov. 3, 7 p.m.

Jeff Mackler, Socialist Action National Secretary, speaks on the Relevance of the Russian Revolution Today.

Saturday, Nov. 4,

9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Talks and discussions on Marxist economics, women's oppression, and "How Capitalist Agriculture Misuses Science"

Location: Minneapolis Community & Technical College.

Info: TCSocialistAction@gmail.com

### Connecticut

Saturday, Nov. 4,  
10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

*'The Solution is Socialism'*

Panels with a large spectrum of movement activists

Location: CCSU Semesters Hall, Student Ctr., New Britain, Conn. Hosted by CCSU Youth for Socialist Action. See Facebook page for info, (google Solution is Socialism).

## ... Puerto Rico

(continued from page 12)

icy towards climate change. The bill was never passed. It was defeated in part thanks to the politicians' lack of recognition of climate change.

Most of Puerto Rico's infrastructure is along the coast, which makes the topic of climate change very relevant. This infrastructure includes airports, hospitals, universities, water treatment plants, and power plants. It is a scientific concern that from the list previously mentioned only a few government entities have plans to address climate change impacts (the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority and the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico).

**SA:** Over a million Puerto Ricans (70% of the population) were left without power by hurricane Irma, and over 150,000 lacked potable water. Maria knocked out the power grid completely. Can you discuss how the exploitation of Puerto Rico by U.S. capital has made the island more vulnerable to natural disasters?

**OP:** The perfect example for this is the cabotage law. Under the Jones Act of 1920, the U.S. government determined that the only merchant marine that Puerto Rico could use to receive or send merchandise abroad was that of the United States. This has a direct impact in our economy, because the U.S merchant marine is one of the most expensive in the world.

This is also an issue of concern, because if for any reason the port of Jacksonville, Fla.—which is the port we receive our merchandise from—were to close, the island would be at a standstill. Puerto Rico imports 90% of its products (food, clothing, cars, among others) from there. In early Spetember, the Jacksonville port was closed because of Hurricane Irma. And so, Puerto Ricans were freaking out.

Finally, the U.S. Congress had to issue a standstill on the cabotage law, so Puerto Rico could function. In the

final analysis, however, we are at the mercy of the U.S. government when it comes to the cabotage law. They will enforce it when they deem it more convenient [on Oct. 9, the Trump administration reinstated the Jones Act].

**SA:** Cuba faced a direct hit by Hurricane Irma. Yet Cuba is largely seen as being able to bounce back quickly from such disasters compared to its neighbors in the Caribbean and in the U.S. What can we learn from the way Cuba deals with hurricanes?

**OP:** I think a very distinctive trait of the Cubans is their solidarity. Their education system is built so kids at an early age start thinking as collective. This is very different from the U.S education model, which focuses on the individual. If we extrapolate the previous argument, in the occurring of a hurricane we have the Cuban society working together towards the same goal, the country's recovery. But on the contrary, in other regions where solidarity is not a stronghold, you have speculators trying to get richer at the expense of others' suffering.

Another aspect we can learn from the Cubans is their recognition of their geographical location. They are very aware that because of their location they are very likely to get hurricanes and they are prepared for them, they have plans of mitigation, climate change impact, etc. We do not have to reinvent the wheel, we must be prepared and implement the plans that we have. Moreover, we have to take up the challenge to convince politicians and society that we are not currently prepared, and we need to be, because hurricanes will keep occurring.

**SA:** What role do you see the people of Puerto Rico playing in the struggle for a sustainable earth?

**OP:** We need to be like the salmon, we need to keep on pushing, push the climate change agenda, because climate change and its consequences are real. As a friend of mine in the U.S. said once, "The sea level rise does not care if you are a Republican or Democrat." There is strong wisdom in his words; you can argue all you want whether climate change is real or not, but you cannot dispute the catastrophic consequences.

No change is a small change; we all have an impact. Because Puerto Rico is an island, we are feeling the climate change impacts more quickly. This is already triggering communities to be prepared, because they know the government will do little to help them. Without knowing it, these communities are developing management plans and driving climate change acknowledgement, which I know we all can learn from.

**SA:** How would a Puerto Rico independent of U.S. rule organize to withstand natural disasters? Does the current situation point out the necessity of independence?

**OP:** Let's start by saying that the term "natural disaster" has been misused for decades. Yes, there are disasters, but that does not make them natural. The magnitude of a disaster depends greatly on people's capacity to respond. If a country does not have the institutions or the sovereignty to respond quickly or according to what is needed, it means it is not resilient.

Hurricane Maria's consequences in the island are not natural; on the contrary, they are the result of decades of an imposed political regime. This regime has hindered our resilience and our economic growth. One example is the Jones Act, which prohibits Puerto Rico to import or export any product that is not on a U.S. ship.

Today, more than ever, we need our independence; we need to have the power to decide our future. We cannot have thousands of pounds of so many needed supplies, waiting for the U.S government to decide when it is time to enter Puerto Rico.

Also, we need to foster our own economy. This political system has us subjugated; we import up to 90% of our products. We have big seed companies like Monsanto and Pioneer using our most fertile lands to plant their products and export their revenue. We need our independence to stop it, to have control over our soil.

Finally, we need the power to compete in the global markets as equals. Currently, we cannot protect our products to be sold at better prices and in better conditions. More than ever we need our independence. Viva Puerto Rico libre! ■

## ***Maria wrecks Puerto Rico U.S. slack in delivering aid***

Hector Retamal / Agence France-Presse / Getty Images



Soon after hurricane Irma devastated islands in the Caribbean and parts of Florida, Socialist Action reporter Ernie Gotta interviewed Omar Pérez Figueroa about the effects of the storm on Puerto Rico. Gotta followed up with Perez after hurricane Maria decimated the island.

Pérez, a native of Puerto Rico, is a member of the Juventud Hostosiana, the youth group of the Hostosian National Independence Movement. He is an investigative analyst on climate and water quality and a doctoral student at the University of California Irvine School of Social Ecology.

**Socialist Action:** Can you discuss the situation in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria?

**Oliver Pérez:** The situation is chaotic right now, there is no electricity, only 25% of people have water, and approximately 88% of the cellular towers are out of power. People are dying in the hospitals, treatment such as dialysis and oxygen therapy need electricity to be provided, and the gas that is used to run the power generator is scarce. The government is saying that they have supplies, but somehow people are not receiving them. As a result, people are camping, making long lines just to get some gas.

Another issue that has gone unnoticed is the mixture between stagnant water from the floods and sewage water. In a normal rain event, manhole lids burst because of the water pressure. Now imagine how many manholes blew with the hurricane! This water mix poses a health risk to everyone that comes in contact with it; sewage water contains high levels of pathogens. Because roads are either blocked or flooded, people do not have another option than to get in contact with this polluted water.

Also, there are areas in the interior of the island where aid has not arrived. We have people writing "S.O.S." on their roofs, hoping that someone will send

aid. There are people who lost everything, unlike high-income people from Guaynabo, where President Trump visited during his trip to the Island. This media circus portrayed Puerto Ricans as if they are doing just fine, rather than showing a humanitarian crisis.

**SA:** Can you talk about the U.S. relief response?

**OP:** FEMA is responding at snail's pace. My sister told me yesterday that on the way to visit my grandmother's house she saw houses without roofs and people sleeping out in the open. The process to obtain aid from FEMA has been exhausting. It is very complicated; you need the internet to complete the formularies. The people that I know that have been able to fill the application had done it through the phone.

How come the fastest way to apply for aid is via internet and phone, when most of the island is without power and cell phone signal? Supposedly, FEMA sent people on foot to complete these forms, but they are nowhere to be found.

The U.S government has had an Army colonel named Jeffrey Hughes to oversee the aid operations in the island. This has been seen by many people as a new military occupation of the island. Yes, we need aid, we need tools and structures that can allow us to bounce back from this crisis, but we don't need to keep perpetuating the same political system that has made us dependent on U.S. aid.

Furthermore, last week (Oct. 3) President Trump visited Puerto Rico to see first hand the consequences of Hurricane Maria. Rather than being supportive or expressing his concern for Puerto Ricans' wellbeing, he stated that Puerto Ricans have thrown the U.S. budget "out of whack." He went on to say that Puerto Ricans and Governor Ricardo Rosselló should be proud because only 17 people have perished in this event, which compared to Hurricane Katrina, in which the dead count went into the thousands, was "good."

He mentioned how they have finally arrived to help

us, as if Puerto Ricans have not done anything to pull themselves out of this crisis. That visit showed a lack of respect and understanding of the Puerto Rico situation. Losing 17 lives is more than enough.

**SA:** There was fear on Sunday (Oct. 1) that the Guajataca Dam could burst open. What's the dam's status now, and how would that impact those living nearby? How has U.S. economic extraction of wealth from the island affected infrastructure in Puerto Rico and the ability to rebound from natural disasters?

**OP:** We are facing a major issue with the Guajataca Dam. It broke on one side, and it seems it can flood the area if completely broken. This dam provides water to many towns in the western part of the island. If it breaks, this would mean that 11 billion gallons of water would be unleashed onto the communities nearby.

Puerto Rico has a serious problem with its water infrastructure, which is very old, and in some areas, it should have been repaired long time ago. Most of this infrastructure could have been repaired or even rebuilt, but the PROMESA law has limited the funds that can be invested in these efforts. As a result, most of Puerto Rico's budget has been allocated to pay its debt, leaving essential services such as education, health and infrastructure adrift.

**SA:** What role does climate change have on the powerful storms generated in the Atlantic?

**OP:** Scientific data from the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) suggests that climate change is increasing ocean temperatures. This change in temperature increases hurricane strength.

Nevertheless, the Puerto Rican government and society have yet to recognize this relationship. It was not until 2016, and with the help of the Puerto Rico Climate Change Council (PRCCC), that the Puerto Rico Senate tried to pass a bill to establish Puerto Rico's public pol-

*(continued on page 11)*

