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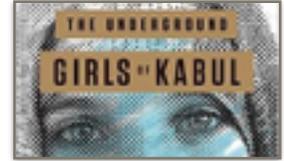
**LIBERTY.
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**U.S. WORKERS
MOVEMENT
PART IV**



**#BLACKLIVESMATTER
& THE FIGHT AGAINST
POVERTY WAGES**



**BOOK REVIEW
AFGHAN GIRLS &
GENDER FLUIDITY**

THE RED VINE



Journal of the Red Party

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The Workers Movement in the United States: From Populism to Socialism

by Peter Moody

As mentioned in last month's article, the Socialist Labor Party did important work in adapting the radical-democratic core of Marxist politics to the American political landscape, despite the compromises and limitations put upon said program by the way the SLP was formed. Nevertheless, the Socialist Labor Party ultimately did not grow. While it was able to win some local elections in smaller industrial cities and had periodic influence in the developing trade union movement, the SLP did not take off in the way that its contemporaries in Europe did, and quickly developed a reputation as a non-influential sect. It would be a quarter of a century after the foundation of the SLP before a party started to approach relevance. This party was, of course, the Socialist Party of America, and while the SLP did play a role in its creation, the Socialist Party was a product of social upheavals of the 1890s in a way that the SLP wasn't, which gave it deeper roots in the American working class from the start.

The first of these upheavals - the Pullman strike of

1894 - is perhaps better known for its connection to the rise of the Socialist Party, because it helped spur the radicalization of Eugene Debs, who went on to become one of the Socialist Party's most well-known members as well as its presidential standard bearer for nearly two decades. It was also important because it managed to show both the strengths and weaknesses of trade union action on its own. On the one hand, the American Railroad Union - an early industrial union which by and large spearheaded the Pullman strike - was able to shut down passenger and freight traffic across wide sections of the US rail network. According to one account of the strike written a few years after the fact, by the end of the second day the strike had spread from its origins in Illinois to Minnesota, Colorado, Arizona, and other states in the Midwest and West. On the other hand, the strike did not gain mass support outside of some localities, and without much of an organized presence engaged in supporting the strike aside from the ARU, the railroad workers weren't able to link up with other movements in a systematic way. Ultimately, the strike was put down through

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Submissions and Contact:
party@red-party.com



federal intervention, and many of its leaders were imprisoned or blacklisted, including Eugene Debs. It was during this stint in prison, however, that Debs started to read socialist literature in a more in-depth way, and through prison visits came in contact with some of the socialist activists who would later become founders of the Socialist Party.

Many of these activists were involved with party politics around the same period, though again, the SLP was not their political home. Rather, they participated as a semi-organized tendency within a group called the People's Party, a party which drew its primary base of support from small farmers in the Midwest and South, and the second movement which helped form the Socialist Party. The People's Party, or Populists, carried out strong agitation against banks, railroad conglomerates, and what it saw as corrupt, plutocratic governments supporting them. While this aspect of their

program was considered at least "semi-socialistic" by the socialists working within the People's Party, this was tempered by a strong faction which saw monetary reform as the party's primary or sole focus, as well as a tendency towards coalitionism on a local level, where Populists would forge electoral alliances with one of the two major parties against the other - generally, this played out with Populists forming alliances with the Democratic Party against the Republicans in the Midwest, and allying with the Republican Party against the Democrats in the South. While this allowed the People's Party to win a fairly large degree of representation on both the federal and local levels, it also meant that the political independence of the Populists was tenuous at best in many instances.

These contradictions within the People's Party came to a head in 1896, when the Democratic Party nominated William Jennings Bryan as its

presidential candidate. Bryan, who was a strong supporter of changing the US currency to be backed by silver as well as gold, gave both the monetary reform wing and coalitionist wing of the People's Party a perceived route to greater power and influence through supporting his candidacy. This move was opposed by other Populists, as well as the socialists who organized within the People's Party. Led by Victor Berger, who had helped bring Debs towards socialism while he was in prison and would later become a Socialist Party member of Congress, socialists in the People's Party spearheaded an effort for the People's Party to nominate Debs for president. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful, partially because Debs insisted he did not want to be nominated for president, though partially through the political subterfuge of pro-Bryan Populists. Nevertheless, this effort helped win some segments of the People's Party to more explicitly socialist politics, which, combined with the association of labor radicalism through the person of Eugene Debs, gave socialist forces in the United States a much firmer ground to merge a socialist program with with the American workers movement than earlier efforts were able to. While it would still be a few years before these forces coalesced into the Socialist Party of America, it was during this time that the foundation was laid.

Revolution and “Schools of Solidarity”

Editorial by the Red Party Central Committee

For a long time, the very idea of mass-struggle politics was almost invariably considered anathema in this country. The United States is just too conservative, we were (and still are) told both by the active defenders of the status quo and those who passively accept it out of resignation. “American exceptionalism” - the concept that the U.S. is magically different, exempt from the laws of historical and social change (if those laws are admitted to exist at all) - was the flame retardant poured on even the flicker of rebellion in the mind. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the corpse of Stalinism was dragged out by representatives and ideologues of Capital everywhere to “prove” that there is no alternative to the present order, that the best we can do is a little tinkering here and there - if that. Mainstream political discourse narrowed to choices between the Ronald Reagans and Bill Clintons of the world.

What a difference twenty years can make! In the wake of the 2008 world recession, public confidence in the system was shaken on a mass scale. Discussions began about ‘capitalism’, itself a recognition that the present order is but one economic system among many possible permutations. Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, despite their limitations and contradictions, put the concept of far-reaching economic and political change back on the agenda; the era we live in is one in which millions of people are groping for answers to problems they’re increasingly recognizing as deep-rooted and systemic. If the answer to these problems is “revolution”, we have to consider what that means and whether it can be done.

The word itself suffers a lot of abuse, where in the hands of pundits and advertising executives it’s used to mean anything from “like, freeing your mind, man” to a slightly slimmer smartphone. For



Marxists though, we use ‘revolution’ in a very specific way. A social revolution occurs when one ruling class is deposed and replaced with another, bringing with it a different form of government and - crucially - a different economic system. Capitalism itself was born on the crest of a revolutionary tide, with the Americans in 1776 and the French in 1789 overthrowing the feudal aristocracy to lay the foundations for the rule of the modern capitalist class. In both cases, old property forms had to be done away with. Serfdom and the lords’ landed estates gave way to wage labor and private ownership of the means of production. The new economic conditions under the revolutionary bourgeoisie lead to tremendous development of the productive forces - alongside the slave trade, colonial conquest and naked exploitation of the laboring masses. The new political forms - namely, democracy - developed with the capitalist economy were a genuine advance over feudal absolutism but, since the capitalist class is a small minority of the population, it was still a case of ‘democracy for the few, dictatorship for the many.’

Today, the positive aspects of capitalist development - namely, getting the world’s productive forces up to a level inconceivable in earlier societies - has reached its limits. The forces

of production are actually *hindered* now by the *relations* of production, ie; private ownership producing for private profit. Now a decaying system, capitalism bears the rotten fruits of war, privation and oppression. But it also creates its own gravediggers: the proletariat, the modern working class.

Divide et impera

Probably the most common objection to the idea of revolution in the United States, tied up with myths of exceptionalism, is that Americans are fundamentally unfit to make it. This comes in many forms: American workers are said to be either too backward, too apathetic or too caught up in “false consciousness” to recognize and fight for their own interests. Xbox and Netflix are said to rule our lives, not visions of social change. Futile dreams of ‘making it big’ and *becoming* rich preclude any chance of getting organized to *fight* the rich.

There is a hint of truth in this, if we look only at surface appearances and take them for the whole picture. Suffering people who don’t see a way out of their present situation may seek the shelter of fundamentalist religion or aspirations toward becoming “middle class” as a way out. Since the ruling class is a small minority of the population, it’s also necessary to use the time-honored tactics of “divide et impera” (divide and rule) favored by tyrants throughout the ages. In our society, this is done by pitting workers of different races, national origins, ages and genders against each other. You’re less likely to unionize your workplace or demand a public jobs program if you see Hispanic immigrants, rather than the billionaires, as the cause of your economic woes. All forms of oppression play a similar role in perpetuating the current order.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Every uptick in the class struggle exposes the idea that ordinary people are too lazy or bigoted to resist for the lie that it is. We see this now with the rebellions against police violence and the steadily-growing movement of poverty-wage workers in retail and fast food, just to name a few examples. We’ve also seen it, to an even greater extent, in the not-too-distant past with

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the mass movements for civil rights, the labor revolt of the 1930s, and the powerful socialist and communist parties of the 20th century. We concede that the numbers of people, both in the U.S. and globally, who are actively resisting exploitation and oppression (in one form or another), don’t constitute the majority, and that there is still a tremendous amount of reactionary sentiment within the working class itself. But how could it be otherwise? The ruling ideas of every society are the ideas of the ruling class, the class which controls the major media and the official politics. But every mass movement in history, whether culminating in reform or revolution, began as a besieged minority amidst a hostile sea.

“We Are Many, They Are Few”

What we’re seeing right now, as with Occupy and the 2011 labor struggle in Wisconsin, is

mostly *spontaneous* outbursts against this or that aspect of the capitalist system. Notwithstanding the links that are beginning to forge between different movements, they're still largely sectional and without long-term strategy, radical or otherwise. But the capitalists and their state are highly organized and above all very much *conscious* of their own role and what they need to do to defend it.

In the long run, what makes a successful revolution possible is the prior existence of a mass revolutionary party-movement. The Red Party argues that now is the time to lay the groundwork for this. Forging a revolutionary socialist party out of the existing patchwork of far-left organizations won't immediately result in a mass force that will overthrow capitalism next Tuesday, but it's the only thing that can break the current cycle of explosion, then repression / co-optation and demoralization we find ourselves stuck in.

This idea isn't a recent invention on our part. As we've explained in the pages of *The Red Vine*, communists (or socialists or Social-Democrats, depending on the time) have historically made themselves into mass forces by organizing in a myriad of ways all tied to the core project of working class self-liberation. Trade unions, cooperatives, mutual aid societies, *et cetera* were built not just for their own sake but as schools of solidarity where ordinary people got a sense of their strength *as a class* rather than as atomized individuals or passive subjects of whatever top-down populism happened to be the flavor of the month.

Take, for example, the Unemployed Councils set up by the Communist Party USA in the 1930s. Formed as a response to mass unemployment, which neither the private sector nor the government would address (sound familiar?), the Councils organized sizable (and often successful) demonstrations calling for public jobs programs or unemployment relief. But they also engaged in direct action to block evictions and raised money and supplies for each other to help the worst-off

among them make it through lean times. In the Bronx, communists founded "The Coops", a cooperative housing project where tenants democratically controlled their own living conditions. The Coops were the site of fierce political debate and were a center of solidarity. On one occasion, co-op members physically blocked the eviction of tenants in the building next door. Amid racist hysteria, The Coops gave its support to black struggles and became the first integrated housing in the area.

Another illustration of this approach was known as the Red Falcons, sponsored by the Socialist Party alongside its sister organizations, the Socialist Sunday Schools. Participatory education and values of cooperation appealed to many parents who otherwise would have sent their children to the Boy / Girl Scouts or to church Sunday schools. These examples can be repeated at length, particularly in Europe where the workers' movement was better established than in America. Anything from economic and farmer coops to mass sports.

You didn't have to be a committed communist to be a part of any of these movement organizations. But just by existing, they were spaces in which immediate, day-to-day struggles coexisted alongside a strategic conception of fighting for a freer, more democratic society - socialism. Like any labor union worth its salt, they taught workers the basic truth that "we are many, they are few." Even some of the more backward layers were drawn in. These organizations were organically tied to parties that, whatever their faults, were programmatically committed to socialism and could function as a vehicle through which the most far-seeing and dedicated members of the working class could come together and generalize their experiences. Whether a given struggle ended in victory or defeat, its lessons could be absorbed for next time.

When we build such a party-movement again, the question of revolution won't seem so impossible anymore.

#BlackLivesMatter Meets Fight for Fifteen

by Gabriel Pierre and
Mari Pierre-Antoine

Around the United States in towns small and large workers are organizing to gain a living wage. To achieve their goal for a fifteen dollar an hour minimum wage workers are organizing protests and strikes, shutting the businesses down and raising public awareness of the poverty in which workers live. The federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25 (\$2.13 for workers who rely on tips); hardly what you could call a living wage. Getting your head above the federal poverty line can be an impossible task even while juggling multiple jobs. 26% of workers make less than \$10.55/hour and 3.8 million workers make \$7.25 or less an hour.¹ Two weeks ago in around 180 cities thousands of fast food workers went on strike for \$15 and a union. On Black Friday, workers and their allies affiliated with OUR Walmart turned out for the biggest strike at the company yet. The “virus” is even spreading to gas stations and convenience stores. Flying pickets and even the first sit-down² strike in Walmart’s history: definitely not something we would have expected to see just a few years ago.

It would be a mistake to downplay the impact these actions have had so far. Already,

the low-wage workers have made headway in raising consciousness about poverty wages and the people who work for them. There’s a growing awareness that the minimum wage (or close to it) simply isn’t enough to live on, especially with the jobs’ haphazard scheduling and precarious nature. The pitiful social safety net provided by the government isn’t enough to bridge the gap, full-time work is practically a pipe dream, and “at-will” employment combined with aggressive management tactics mean that workers are afforded very little input or even basic respect on the shop floor. While the corporate media and “middle class” sentiment scoff at the idea of paying a living wage - don’t you know these people *deserve* to be poor, because they have shitty jobs? - they’ve already had some success in making \$15 sound less unrealistic than it once did.

Poverty wage workers are disproportionately people of color, and consciousness of that fact has meant enthusiastic participation from groups like Show Me \$15 (Missouri’s Fight for \$15 affiliate) around



#BlackLivesMatter. They understand that police violence is tied not just to race but also to class, with the odds of police killings going up the more economically distressed a given area is. Working people from geographically disparate areas are demonstrating that the battle against poverty and the battle against our tragically misnamed criminal justice system aren’t just two worthy causes - they’re the *same* cause, with the same common enemy.

Unfortunately, the labor movement’s leadership in general has yet to take the same principled position. Yes, many individual trade unionists and some locals, including from Fight for \$15’s sponsor (the Service Employees International Union) have come on to the streets. Any trade unionist or union local acting in solidarity with the movement against police violence should be applauded. But the labor *leadership* - who, like the word implies, are supposed to lead -

have lagged behind the more proactive elements of the rank-and-file. SEIU President Mary Kay Henry released a half-hearted statement³ that was apparently written specifically to avoid offending anyone; as a consequence it says basically nothing of substance. Ditto AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka's hollow reaction to the Ferguson verdict⁴ - "a lot of people believe that the criminal justice system is still biased against people of color" isn't exactly a revelation, brother. The initial response⁵ to Mike Brown's death from the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) leadership, which is the main backer of OUR Walmart and of which Mike Brown's mother is a member, was even worse.

Truth be told, the labor bureaucracy isn't any more interested in mobilizing its millions-strong membership around a program to end police violence than it is in going all-out to organize the low wage workforce. It's not so much that the top labor leadership is made of bad or dishonest people (although there are some!), it's the bureaucracy's role in capitalist society that causes them to hem and haw like this. They don't go "all-out" in fighting racism or organizing retail / fast food workers for the same reason they don't end labor's subordination to the Democratic Party: they don't acknowledge the class struggle, the plain truth that our interests

(the majority) and the capitalists' interests (the "1%") are diametrically opposed. The labor tops' lifestyles are closer to the bosses than to the workers they represent, and their actions reflect this.

But if we want to successfully push back state-sponsored racism, labor support is crucial. Since we don't have a workers party in this country (yet), the trade unions are the only mass expression of the organized working class - warts and all. Labor-black connections at the grassroots level are the first step toward turning the emerging unity into something lasting, organic and generalized.

Workers will also need to organize independently of the bureaucracy in the low-wage industries. The UFCW's current strategy in Walmart is based on generating bad publicity for the company in order to extract concessions. But, on the official OUR Walmart site, they meekly claim that they don't even have unionization as the end goal! Whatever gains might be won by embarrassing the Walton family (and there is a low ceiling to this tactic already), how are they supposed to defend those gains without a bona fide union? The UFCW leadership has already shown, through its conduct in the 2004 California supermarket strikes⁶, that it's unwilling to rock the boat, even though mass struggle is what built the labor movement in the first place (and

in conditions even more repressive than what we have today.) Timidity is waging a half-hearted fight for \$15 rather than a living wage *and* a mass public works program to end unemployment and underemployment; timidity is writing petitions to the Department of Justice instead of addressing the role played by the police *as an institution of state (and therefore corporate) power.*

The same goes for Mary Kay Henry and the rest of the SEIU tops - and, for that matter, the "official" civil rights leadership, up to and including that serial opportunist and traitor Al Sharpton⁷. What we desperately need now is for the emerging rank-and-file militancy to solidify and show the labor bureaucrats and civil rights shysters how it's done.

Notes:

1. <http://raisetheminimumwage.org/pages/demographics>
2. Twenty-eight workers took part in the sit-down in Los Angeles, protesting employer retaliation against a fellow worker and OUR Walmart organizer. Though they didn't shut down the store, the fact that it happened at all is a sign of things to come.
3. <http://www.seiu.org/2014/12/seiu-president-mary-kay-henry-statement-on-non-ind.php>
4. <http://www.aflcio.org/Blog/Other-News/Trumka-on-Ferguson-We-Cannot-Deny-the-Perception-That-the-System-Is-Not-Yet-Color-Blind>
5. <http://www.ufcw.org/2014/08/22/ufcw-president-hansen-statement-on-mother-of-michael-brown/>
6. <http://libcom.org/history/2003-2004-los-angeles-supermarket-strike>
7. The Reverend has a long, sorry history of sidelining the very people he claims to represent: <http://theantimedia.org/an-open-letter-to-al-sharpton/>

The Fluidity of Gender & Resistance in Afghanistan: A Book Review

by David Smithers

The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan
Jenny Nordberg, Crown Publishers, New York 2014.

The class war is older than capitalism. It began with the agricultural revolution and the rise of patriarchy, when women became slaves to procreation and men - especially ruling class men, but even the poor - assumed comparative economic advantage. That advantage, according to the *bocha posh* (literally “dressed up as a boy” in the Dari language) women of Afghanistan that Swedish journalist, Jenny Nordberg, followed between 2009 and 2014, is freedom.

“Regardless of who they are, whether they are rich or poor, educated or illiterate, Afghan women often describe the difference between men and women in just one word: freedom.” (p.211)

The history of women is unwritten, like a lot of oppressed peoples’ resistance is. The resistance that *bocha posh* girls and women present is even more hidden, but in plain sight of many Afghans who are fully aware of its existence.

The immediate backdrop is the present war and foreign influence, first from the Soviets and now the American-led war. The root of the practice of presenting a girl as a boy probably goes back many centuries to the wider region’s pre-Muslim magical belief system growing out of Zoroastrianism. That belief is that a *bacha posh* will actually spur the birth of sons.

Beyond that, a *bacha posh* often serves to protect and preserve a more valued object: a younger brother. She may protect him and often do the work a boy would do.

Gender is an idea and a choice. Nurture becomes nature. *Bacha posh* are living testimony of gender fluidity, beyond male and female; this fluidity finds expression in almost every society. Generally a girl assumes a male identity in childhood and converts back to a woman by puberty. But not always. And even then, the experience makes that woman a much different and fuller person than she otherwise would have been.

Homosexuality does not necessarily enter into this practice, nor in much of what is open, in Afghan society. The practice of male dominance over other males, in powerful men raping boys, mostly demonstrates the open sexuality of men versus the repressed sexuality of women, rather than a true division between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Lesbian homosexuality does exist, but it is far more hidden. Women are, for the most part in this highly patriarchal culture, asexual.

The author does a good job of examining and describing the life courses of her subjects life challenges, including that of a composite subject. One is a female parliamentarian who turns her fourth daughter into a boy; a tomboy teenager who refuses to turn back into a girl; a mother who lived twenty years as a man; and two who remain in male form as adults.

The center of control for this opening up of gender possibilities are fathers. “Men are the key to infiltrating and subverting patriarchy... I believe most Afghan men, on an individual level, are far from extremist or fundamentalist... Hope rests with those men who control what happens to their daughters.” (p.303)

Nordberg advises that many Western-funded gender projects “might have been more effective if

they had also included men.” (p.304)

The author first broke this story in the *New York Times* in 2010 and was awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Award for Excellence in Journalism for a television documentary on Afghan women. In the article¹, Nordberg writes: “The practice may stretch back centuries. Nancy Dupree, an 83-year-old American who has spent most of her life as a historian working in Afghanistan, said she had not heard of the phenomenon, but recalled a photograph from the early 1900s belonging to the private collection of a member of the Afghan royal family.”

This longstanding division between women and men does not really serve the humanity of either or the civilization they construct. As long as this division exists, with all people mechanically shoehorned into one category or the other, the human race will never evolve into its full potential.

Party Update

by Mari Pierre-Antoine

December is here. We’re seeing a resurgence of activism, especially around #BlackLivesMatter and low-wage workers. Between that, the CIA scandal and the response to Obama’s immigration order, more people are asking questions that challenge the political and economic system itself.

That brings us to the *Red Vine*. Readership held steady last month at 302. Supporters can now print a leaflet highlighting each issue’s contents. You can still order print copies, but this way we have a more flexible distribution model that will help us get the paper into more hands. We’re still open for 2015 perspectives contributions, which we encourage especially on the most contentious issues of the day.

By the way: is “principled unity in a revolutionary party” on your Christmas list? Santa may be a little slow in getting around to it, but you can send us your donations to help push it along.

That evolution is suffering as Western presence (which itself reinforced the oppression) in Afghanistan fades and the Taliban stricture returns. But it is a resistance that will continue, as it begins and ends with patriarchy. That has been and is a longer struggle for humanity that is not contained by borders or regimes.

Before “workers of the world unite”, there is, perhaps, “genders of the world unite.” There are and always have been more than two genders. Most certainly, a continuum of gender and sexuality, between and among individuals and never really constant throughout any person’s life. That is why the Red Party supports gender and sexual liberation. The class struggle exists not just in the workplace or on the streets, but at home and within the family.

Notes:

1. <http://tinyurl.com/kzop97v>

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SACP Splits Unions Down the Middle

by Peter Manson

This article was originally printed by the Weekly Worker on November 12th, 2014

Cape Town has just played host to the “largest global gathering of trade unions ever to take place in Africa”, in the shape of the December 7-10 world congress of the Swiss-based UNI Global Union. Originally called Union Network International, UNI groups together 900 service-sector unions worldwide - including the Communication Workers Union and Connect in Britain - with a total membership of 20 million.

Hosting this gathering of 2,000 delegates was seen as a bit of a coup for both the African National Congress government and the main trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions. However, two embarrassing factors have removed a good deal of the gloss. The first is the rolling power cuts - “load shedding”, as they are called - whereby every day the state-owned electricity supplier, Eskom, desperately tries to get round its disastrous lack of capacity and failure to maintain the grid by pulling out the plugs for a couple of hours. These rotating cuts, currently taking place at the height of the South African summer, are due to go on until 2016 at the very earliest. Inevitably, it will be the working class and poor, with no access to private generators, who will be worse affected.

The second embarrassment takes the form of the split in Cosatu driven by the South African Communist Party. In the early hours of November 8, a special meeting of Cosatu’s central executive committee (CEC) voted by 33 votes to 24 to expel its largest affiliate, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa). Led by

Cosatu president Sidumo Dlamini and National Union of Mineworkers general secretary Frans Baleni, the SACP loyalists insisted that the 350,000-strong Numsa must be booted out because of its desertion of the ANC and rejection of the ANC-SACP-Cosatu triple alliance.

The leaders of every Cosatu union are (or were) SACP members - and that applies to Numsa and its general secretary, Irvin Jim. But, after two decades of cuts, privatisation and attacks on the working class, a good number of them, with the Numsa leadership in the fore, have finally realised that the SACP narrative - of an ANC-led “national democratic revolution” (NDR) that is the “most direct route to socialism” in South Africa - is nothing but a pathetic sham.

A year ago, Numsa voted unanimously to withdraw all support from the ANC and, in a direct challenge to SACP policy, sponsor a specifically working class “United Front” and a “Movement for Socialism”, with the aim of establishing a workers’ party in opposition to the ANC. For the SACP leadership, this was a combination of sacrilege and treason. In the words of Numsa spokesperson Castro Ngobese, for the Communist Party

“The way forward is only through the ANC. It does not matter whether the movement is limping or it implements neoliberal policies that hurt workers and the poor. Everything must be through the ANC. It is the ANC and nothing else. By endorsing the expulsion of Numsa from Cosatu, the SACP confirms what many of us have painfully learnt: that if you do not agree with the strategic approach of the Communist Party you are an enemy that must be dealt with and defeated.¹

To read the rest of this article go to:

<http://tinyurl.com/mvs7pxl>

Community Control Over the Police: Reformist Trap or Transitional Demand?

by Levi Rafael

Comrade David May [*of the Workers International League - Ed.*], in his recent article *The Struggle in Ferguson Continues*¹ makes a big mistake in dismissing the demand for community control over the police. The comrade argues that “(d)emands like ‘community control of the police’ may therefore be well intentioned, but in practice can only serve to disorient and mislead those who are trying to find an alternative.” As an alternative solution, he argues that what revolutionary Marxists must do is to explain to people that what we need instead is a worker’s state, with democratic control over the economy and government, including the police. He argues that, under a capitalist state, the police will always remain functionaries of the capitalist system and that any effort to exert democratic control over them will lead to support for the capitalist state, and therefore of the same system which perpetuates the racism and violence that led to the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. Comrade May is incorrect to dismiss “community control over the police,” and to not recognizing it as a transitional demand and slogan that could serve the move the working class and oppressed masses to the

establishment of an actual worker’s state.

May’s error is in misunderstanding the value and role that transitional demands play in the struggle for the establishment of a worker’s state, and the transition to socialism. Of course, it is true that revolutionary Marxists understand that no lasting solution to the fundamental social problems of our day, including racism and police brutality, can be solved within the framework of a capitalist state that is based on private property in the means of production. To overcome this, we must organize the working class to overthrow the capitalist state, nationalize the means of production, reorganize the economy on a democratic socialist basis, and institute governmental forms based on the democratic rule of the working class in alliance with all other oppressed and working groups in society.

Unfortunately, there is a gap in consciousness and practical action between the establishment of a socialist worker’s state and the situation that the working class and oppressed finds itself in today. For one thing, many workers and ordinary people are apprehensive

and even sometimes hostile to the idea of a worker’s state because of Cold War, anticommunist propaganda, as well as the reactionary experiences of Stalinism. On top of that, working people are told that there is “no alternative” to the capitalist state that we live in; that we have reached the “end of history” and that the only way that people can have any control over their own lives is to work within the system as it is. They are told by the capitalist media and education system that capitalism is the most efficient way of organizing the economy, and that in the end workers must be willing to sacrifice to it to keep it functioning because, after all, “there is no alternative” except Stalinist oppression.

It is our task as Marxists and revolutionary communists to challenge this reactionary anticommunism. We must explain, using Marxist analysis, the real causes of Stalinism and how it could be prevented in a future worker’s state. We must explain how capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class, and that it’s continued existence hampers the development of the human species and perpetuates our existing social problems. But as Marx said, it is not enough to interpret the world: we must also

seek to change it. We have to be able to show the working class and oppressed masses, through practical demands and action, just how a worker's state can be built, and why it is necessary for humanity. This is where the necessity of including a system of transitional demands is important for a revolutionary party's program for action.

The communist method of advancing transitional demands came out of the experience of the 1917 Russian Revolution, and was codified in the third and fourth congresses of the Communist International (Comintern). Previously, socialist programs had been divided into a minimum and a maximum program. The minimum program advanced basic demands for reforms that could be accomplished, through struggle, within the framework of the capitalist system to increase the standard of living, economic power and political freedom of the working class and the oppressed. The maximum program demanded the expropriation of the capitalist class and the advancement to a socialist society, in effect the forming of a worker's state and the transition to socialist and then communist society.

But, as Trotsky argued in his 1938 Transitional Program, between these two programs "no bridge existed," and there was no way for the masses to understand how their struggles for day to

day needs could lead to the overthrow of the capitalist system. The system of transitional demands was meant to serve as this bridge, by raising demands that, by their definition, facilitated the practical transition from a non-revolutionary situation (where the working class and its allies struggle only for day to day, reformist issues, if at all) to a revolutionary situation (where the working class and its allies are organized and actively mobilize to overthrow the capitalist system and state and establish their own).

The most important goals of these demands have an economic and political content to them. In the economic context, transitional demands lead to worker's control of the capitalist economy. In the political context, it means the establishment of a worker's government to take over the capitalist state apparatus and to direct its resources to arm the working class, and to take the necessary political measures to clear the way for a full scale worker's revolution. These transitional demands, however, take place within the framework of the capitalist economy and state. It is not yet the establishment of a worker's state based on the expropriation of the ruling class. The means of production still remain the private property of the capitalist class, and so long as this system exists the state has a capitalist character in preserving capitalist

property. However, with the leadership of a revolutionary communist party, based on a program for revolutionary socialism, the working class can use these demands to go beyond the limits of the capitalist system entirely when they realize that, if the working class wants to keep its economic and political power gained through the struggle for transitional demands, it will have to get rid of the capitalist system and state entirely.

This is where comrade May makes the fundamental error of rejecting the call for community control of the capitalist police. As a transitional demand, it could be quite effective in raising both the consciousness and the organizational forms of the Ferguson demonstrators to a revolutionary level. Comrade May is right to argue that, no matter how democratic, the capitalist state, and therefore its police, will always serve the capitalist system and its needs, and will crush the working class and oppressed to do this. But if the masses in Ferguson today raise this slogan, community control over the police could lead to new forms of community power that could serve as the basis of a new, democratic security system run directly by the communities themselves. This is because, objectively, the experience of community control over the police will present the masses with two solutions in the long run: either allow the

capitalist state and its economic foundations to remain intact, and therefore end up losing all real community control, or fight to preserve this control by overthrowing the capitalist police system entirely and establishing new forms of enforcing public safety based on democratic community control. Via the transitional demand of “community control over the police,” the Ferguson movement could become convinced, through practical action, of the need for a worker’s state.

May makes the case that practical experiences with community control over the police have resulted in failure. He argues how “(c)oncretely, in those cities where something like what some have called ‘community control’ has been won, these have mostly been ‘civilian review boards.’ However, there is not much genuine “control” with these boards because they only are able to ‘review’ cases after the fact.” While this is certainly true, comrade May fails to see in this a political opportunity to move the struggle forward, or at least educate people on what forms “community control” can take, and ultimately what their logical conclusion must be. For example, a revolutionary party could serve its purpose well by campaigning for:

- the complete independence of these civilian review boards from the apparatus of the police and government

- for transparency in all police activities
- for absolute control over all activities and arrests made by the police,
- for the civilians of this board and the community to be armed, and the right to use physical force for public safety, including against the police
- for community control over the police budget, and what weapons they’re allowed to have
- the boards to be able to make dismissals and arrests of officers, and to have the power to take over law enforcement duties when possible and necessary

In The Transitional Program, Trotsky argued how worker’s control over capitalist industry would serve as a “school for planned economy” by giving the workers practical experience in the democratic managing of an economy, and preparing them organizationally and consciously to administer a nationalized economy after the revolution. The same analogy could be drawn with community control over the police: not only will it provide a channel for the community of Ferguson and others to address the pressing issues of racism and police brutality today, but also to give the community practical experience in the democratic administration of law enforcement, preparing them for how they will run their state and police force in a worker’s state. For this reason, it is important

that Marxists support the call for community control over the police as a transitional step towards actual control over politics and law enforcement, which can only be accomplished in the framework of a worker’s state in the process of building socialism.

Notes:

1. <http://www.marxist.com/usa-the-struggle-in-ferguson-continues.htm>

WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Red Party is a U.S. political organization that fights for working class unity in a single socialist party-movement. A united organization, based on a Marxist program, would turn politics as we know it upside down, injecting the labor and social movements with a renewed sense of confidence and strength.

- * A united workers' party-movement would combine political action with economic and social action, including running socialist candidates for office, protests, strikes, co-operatives and mutual aid societies.
- * Our organization has the word party in its name, but we recognize that in the world-historic sense there is no revolutionary party in the U.S. today. Instead we have a fractured array of competing sects organized on a bureaucratic basis. Their work is hampered by hyper-activism with little to no long-term strategy, lack of internal democracy and lack of deep roots in the working class. The Red Party organizes day-to-day resistance against injustices spawned by capitalism within the context of strengthening working class organization and building support for socialism.
- * Marxists operate through democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we

seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form factions to advance their views.

- * Marxists oppose all imperialist wars and interventions, from Iraq to Syria, but recognize that ending war permanently means ending capitalism.
- * Marxists are internationalists. We strive for the closest unity of the working class and oppressed peoples everywhere. We oppose nationalism in all its forms. We advocate a new revolutionary workers' International. Without an International (a world party), the struggle against Capital is weakened. Capital organizes across borders; so too must we.
- * Marxists support industrial unions (organizing workers by industry) rather than the more narrow trade union structure. We support the highest possible level of pan-American union coordination for workers' rights. Bureaucratic leadership and class collaboration, particularly support for the Democratic Party, in the unions must be replaced with democratic revitalization and class independence.
- * Marxists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, racism, national oppression and LGBT/QI

oppression are just as much working class questions as are higher pay, union rights and struggles for quality health, housing and education. Marxists demand self-determination for American Indian nations, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and all other territories.

- * World capitalism, based on exploitation and a reckless quest for profit, is increasingly putting the future of humanity at risk through war and climate change. World capitalism must give way to world socialism - a society based on freedom, solidarity and a radical extension of democracy.
- * Marxists oppose Stalinism, a system of bureaucratic dictatorship that rules in the name of socialism the same way the capitalist class claims to rule in the name of liberty.
- * Socialism itself is the first stage of the global transition to communism - a society where war, exploitation, money, classes and states exist only as museum pieces. Communism is the negation of class society and provides the maximum individual and collective freedom.

If you agree with these principles, join the Red Party!

red-party.com | (319) 775 - 0697
party@red-party.com
facebook.com/redpartyusa