

Issue No. 010

**LIBERTY.
EQUALITY.
SOLIDARITY.**



HAITI
LEGACY OF
REVOLUTION



SOCIALIST UNITY
AT THE POLLS



TRANS LIBERATION
LEFT BEHIND BY
MAINSTREAM

THE RED VINE



Journal of the Red Party

**Suggested
Donation:
\$2.00 - \$3.00**

Haiti: Reaching for Emancipation

by **Gabriel Pierre**

Protesters have returned to the streets of Haiti as the Caribbean island's suffering people once again act to take their destinies into their own hands. The protests have been going on for months, with thousands - sometimes tens of thousands - in Port-au-Prince and other important cities demanding the resignation of U.S.-backed President Michel Martelly's authoritarian regime, which has now lost all semblance of legitimacy.

Martelly has ruled the country since 2011 in the result of a fraudulent election where the left-populist Fanmi Lavalas (Waterfall Family) was excluded. 71.5% of eligible voters didn't bother to turn out at all. Martelly's administration has governed in harmony with the United Nations military occupation (MINUSTAH) and with U.S. imperialism's profitability in mind.

When it's not ignored altogether, Haiti is usually portrayed by the major media as a perpetual basket-case, a sea of grinding poverty useful mainly for its ability to earn well-to-do Westerners brownie points through their benevolent sponsorship (think Bono, Save

the Children and church food drives.) But Haiti's woes are not some eternal truth with an unknowable cause. That depiction, thoroughly soaked with chauvinism against the Third World, ignores the heroic role played by the Haitian masses and their supporters abroad in the cause of liberation.

Haiti's fighting spirit goes all the way back to 1791 when the slave colony launched a war of liberation against its French masters, becoming both the second independent state in the New World (after the United States) and the first successful slave revolt in history. While the Black Republic was initially among the region's richest, French gunboats arrived not long after to demand massive payments for the defeated masters' expropriated property - the slaves' own bodies! Thus began the long relationship of neocolonial subjugation that continues to the present day.

Eventually, the United States replaced France as Haiti's main exploiter. The U.S. occupied Haiti in 1915, creating a centralized state apparatus out of the local bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie. Coffee and mineral resources were extracted on terms highly favorable to

Table of Contents:

General Content

- ▶ **Haiti: Reaching for Emancipation**
Pg. 2
- ▶ **Leelah Alcorn and the "T" in LGBT**
Pg. 8
- ▶ **In Brief: Reclaiming Dr. King**
Pg. 10
- ▶ **Book Review: Mean Lives, Mean Laws**
Pg. 11
- ▶ **Party Update**
Pg. 13

Editorial

- ▶ **For a Socialist Alliance in 2016**
Pg. 4

The Red Vine is the official organ of the RP. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the RP; editorials reflect the views of the RP Central Committee. We encourage readers to contribute letters and articles to the paper.

Submissions and Contact:
party@red-party.com

American corporate interests. Eventually, a mass revolt in 1934 that included a general strike wave spelled the occupation's end. The Haitian Communist Party was instrumental here, organizing much of the resistance itself and making common cause with American Blacks and anti-imperialists.

In the late 1950s Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier came to power, presiding over one of the most brutal regimes ever known to Latin America. Duvalier smashed the trade unions and physically liquidated the Communist Party and the left in general, purged the Catholic Church and his own state apparatus, and sponsored paramilitary death squads known as the "Tonton Macoutes" who killed not only suspected opponents of the government but their families as well. He deified himself like an ancient Pharaoh (going so far as to release an updated version of the Lord's Prayer with his name in it front-and-center) and lived in opulence in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Yet in all this, the Duvaliers were firmly supported by the United States government as a bulwark against "communism" / national liberation movements and a source of ultra-cheap resource extraction and manufacturing. Their relationship certainly had its ups and downs - chilling under John F. Kennedy's administration, for example - but at the end of the day he wasn't

Fidel Castro, and that was good enough.

By 1986, an elemental movement developed that was strong enough to overthrow Baby Doc Duvalier, who had taken the reins after his father's death. His final insult was to flee to Paris with U.S. assistance, carrying millions of embezzled dollars with him. The Haitian masses showed tremendous popular revolutionary enthusiasm, striking and protesting to remove key Duvalierist officials. Known members of the hated Tonton Macoutes were lynched, press freedoms were expanded and political life reawakened. The interim government that soon formed, however, used millions in generously given U.S. aid money to kill more Haitians than Baby Doc had during his entire time in power. The government, on advice from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, slashed its import duties from 50 percent to 3 percent - the consequent flood of U.S.-subsidized rice destroyed Haitian agriculture, plunging hundreds of thousands into poverty. Haitian farmers, who were now prohibited by law from receiving their own state financing, couldn't compete with imported rice made cheaper by American subsidies and high labor productivity.

As poverty rose, Haitian workers and peasants sought not just political freedom but

economic justice. By 1990 the popular movement had coalesced into Fanmi Lavalas, whose candidate, the populist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, won Haiti's first free elections with an overwhelming majority - despite intense CIA support for his main opponent. But Aristide and his left-populist party were not prepared for the inevitable whip of counterrevolution that soon followed. Domestic capitalists worked with elements of the old regime to stage a *coup d'etat* against the president just nine months into his term, returning the country to Duvalierist repression. The U.S. condemned it in words, but its actions didn't match up - for example, an embargo that left Haitian elites virtually untouched but heaped yet more misery on the masses.

Still, the Haitian government was far from ideal for Democratic President Bill Clinton - not because its policies were unfavorable to capital but because its chronic instability meant that a renewal of popular democratic revolt remained. The masses had to be contained, so the coup regime was itself overthrown three years later by U.S. military intervention - officially titled "Operation Uphold Democracy." Anyone familiar with what many socialists, this writer included, refer to as the "myth of humanitarian imperialism" can guess how closely the operation matched up with its name.



Exiled President Aristide was returned to the country to complete his term, but the Faustian pact came, as all deals with the Devil do, with a price. Aristide accepted an IMF austerity program, aligning his strategy with international capital rather than looking toward the international working class as Haiti's road to justice. To manage social discontent, both from the poor and from the elites who were still not satisfied by his policy shift, Aristide turned to Bonapartist methods.

Bonapartist leaders try to maintain power by balancing between classes. Aristide accepted neoliberalism, but stopped short of fully privatizing

the nationalized industries. He dropped many of his anti-poverty policies — super-exploited labor was (and remains) the capitalists' key demand in Haiti - but he acceded to the popular demand of disbanding the military. He turned to strong-man methods and state corruption while at the same time espousing pro-poor rhetoric. But you can't serve two masters. Aristide betrayed the masses' aspirations too often to prevent discontent from brewing, but bucked Washington's diktats too frequently to have its backing. In 2004, a political crisis was seized by the United States and Canada as an excuse to back yet another coup. Aristide was effectively exiled, a new government installed and a

U.N. occupation of Haiti began that is still ongoing.

Haitian capitalism's long-standing underdevelopment, the legacy of the Duvalierist state (which was never really smashed), and Fanmi Lavalas's failure as an instrument of revolutionary change have all lead to the current state of chronic misery. The protesters in the streets of Haiti are attempting to break out of that impasse. In my next article, I will discuss how the aftermath of 2010's devastating earthquake is triggering a new wave of resistance in Haiti that has the potential to reclaim the country's best revolutionary traditions.

For a Socialist Alliance in 2016

Editorial by the Red Party Central Committee

It's only January, but it already feels as though 2016 is here. The highest expression of American democracy - let that sink in for a moment - is swinging into gear, with Hillary Clinton's candidacy all but confirmed and Republican hopefuls lining up, from the expected (Jeb Bush) to the downright bizarre (Ted Cruz; Mitt Romney... again.) Since hardened conservatives are not exactly this paper's core demographic, let's move away from the GOP and consider how socialists can use the upcoming elections to extend working-class consciousness and organization.

Revolutionary socialists see elections for governmental office under capitalism as an arena of class struggle. The present state is a capitalist state, with the ruling class having a controlling interest via its money, its commanding role in the economy and its parties. Democracy is stunted and hobbled with a variety of means: large corporate donations, the revolving door between government and big business, the unrepresentative "winner-takes-all" system and fundamentally unrepresentative bodies like the Senate, just to name a few. Still, even under these conditions running for office is worthwhile insofar as it allows communists to expose the fetters on majority rule, spread socialist ideas to a wider audience than is normally possible and cohere the most advanced layers of the working class around a clear program. An additional fringe benefit - which admittedly doesn't happen often owing to the above-mentioned winner-takes-all system and the current political climate in general - occurs when revolutionaries actually *win* the office in question. When this happens, socialists can act as a revolutionary opposition to the state and a legislative arm of the workers' and oppressed peoples' movement.

Next year's general election offer socialists two choices: either continue falling into the various

pitfalls we have set up for ourselves, or to go beyond them and take the steps that will lead to socialism being put "back on the map" in the way that socialist and communist parties were once a big factor in the country's political life.

Populist Trap

Every election cycle, the Democratic Party apparatus mobilizes a massive scare campaign to push all forces to its left back into its orbit, lest the "greater evil" - the Republicans - gain power. The problem is that the Democrats' policies are every bit as regressive and anti-worker as their counterparts, and possibly more effective as well (from capital's point of view) since the Democrats are able to defang potential opposition to their policies in a way the Republicans can only envy. We have written extensively¹ about the Democrats' record in power, but what about the likes of Elizabeth Warren, who many are hoping will mount a primary challenge to the neoliberal Hillary Clinton?

Warren, a former consumer advocate before joining the U.S. Senate in 2012, does talk tough about Wall Street, raising the minimum wage and equal pay for women. But what she actually proposes is only toothless regulation and continued poverty wages. She does not support public, democratic control over the financial system, scrapping student debt or a mass public jobs program to address the climate crisis and end unemployment. The fast food and retail workers on the ground fighting for \$15 and a union have already done much more to advance the goal of a living wage than she ever will, and as far as taking on the super-rich goes, she actually voted *for* the repeal or reducing of the millionaires' estate tax.² On foreign policy, Warren lines up in lock-step for imperialism with the rest of her party, seen most clearly with the unconditional support for Israel.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is much the same; the fact that he self-identifies as a “socialist” changes little. Sanders is formally Independent, but it’s basically certain that if he runs for president he will do so as a Democrat. Both, like Dennis Kucinich or Jesse Jackson before them, are a way to corral progressive malcontents back into the Democratic fold, regardless of their subjective intentions. Even if we assume that Bernie Sanders is a socialist class warrior - Karl Marx born again - he would be crushed if he actually took on the Party establishment. The Democratic National Convention, like its GOP counterpart, has a system in place where “super-delegates” - unelected party officials, Congresspeople, Governors and former Presidents - can vote for whatever nominee they choose, with each super-delegate’s vote equal to around 10,000 individual primary / caucus voters.

3



those like the “official” Communist Party and the Democratic Socialists of America who, to their shame, shilled for Barack Obama in '08/12 and will likely do the same for Clinton next year. Like in all other areas of work, the anti-capitalist left is hampered by its disunity during election cycles.

Several Trotskyist organizations - the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative, Solidarity and the Workers International League - routinely support Green Party candidates, the Greens being the main beneficiary of left-wing protest votes in a country without a mass workers’ party. They usually qualify this support by saying that there is no worthy left party, and that we need a Labor Party to really turn things around. (Although the ISO and more recently Socialist Alternative favor the creation of a broad left party rather than an explicitly trade-union based one.) The Marcyite⁴ Workers World Party nominally supports left-populist candidates, but in practice mostly bowed to “Obamania.”

It could be argued that the Sanders and Warrens of the world (or even Clintons) are the best we can hope for, with political consciousness being so backward. But social change doesn’t happen by running to the center. Working people’s consciousness and attitudes are conditioned and set within the limits established by “official politics”, and those limits are set by the ruling class through its major media and its two reliable parties. Class-conscious workers can (and have) smashed through all kinds of seemingly intractable barriers by forging serious political challengers armed with a bold vision of the future and a strategy to get there.

Sects and Sensibility

The main working-class political forces operating outside of the Democratic Party are the numerous small socialist organizations, excluding

Some organizations, to their credit, do try to fill the political vacuum that exists by either running or supporting explicitly socialist candidates. In 2012 the Socialist Party, Party for Socialism and Liberation, Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Equality Party and Freedom Socialist Party all ran

presidential candidates - with a little over 20,000 votes total between them⁵. The irony of standing five separate, *competing* campaigns in the name of working class *unity* was apparently lost on them.

We don't need to repeat these mistakes again. As time goes on, pressure will mount inside the trade unions and social movement organizations - fully backed by their pro-capitalist leaderships - to persuade fighting workers and youth to set aside their criticisms, their disappointments, their sense of betrayal, and vote for the Democrats in 2016. Any demands that might embarrass Democratic politicians; demands and methods of struggle that are insufficiently "respectable", that don't conform to the logic of capital, will have to be put aside. The socialist argument for class political independence is muted by our sect form of organization. Why should any fast food striker support or join the socialists when we cannot even consistently cooperate on issues of common agreement, and when we metastasize into new sects at the slightest whiff of political difference within our ranks?

Unity is strength, but unity and democracy aren't mutually exclusive. To that end, the Red Party calls for a united socialist alliance to contest elections for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2016. A convention should be held, including all interested individuals and organizations, to democratically decide on a common platform. Debating platform and selecting individual candidates will be a fierce and possibly even painful process, but we will emerge stronger for it. Hopefully, a socialist alliance would come to see itself not as a purely electoral vehicle but a permanent campaign in its own right - a step toward a genuine revolutionary party.

The emphasis on the legislative, rather than executive, side of the election is deliberate. Practically speaking, launching campaigns for some of the 435 Congressional seats contested in November 2016 provides more opportunities for socialist organizations to use and deepen their local roots. It lessens the chance of sects pulling out of the

project because their own nominee wasn't selected, as would be the case for a joint presidential ticket. And in principle, communists are opposed to the presidency's sweeping executive power. A united Congressional slate puts us in a better position to advance a radical democratic-republican platform in addition to our economic demands, one that includes proportional representation, abolition of the Senate and the presidency, the right to recall elected officials, *et cetera*.

There are many obstacles to forming this kind of socialist alliance, but we believe that contentious questions can and should be subject to debate and the test of practice. With just a few minimum principles - the centrality of the working class, proletarian internationalism and independence from the capitalist parties - we can create the framework for a basic electoral unity with the potential for something higher. For us, we fight for a communist party worthy of the name.

Notes

1. <http://red-party.com/tag/democratic-party/>
2. <http://onpolitics.usatoday.com/2014/02/06/elizabeth-warren-liberal-senate-national-journal/>
3. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-abrams/voters-not-superdelegates_b_85791.html
4. "Marxism" refers to Sam Marcy, Workers World founder. It's a peculiar form of official communism, emphasizing support for any bourgeois nationalist regime (like al-Assad's Syria) on "anti-imperialist" grounds.
5. By comparison, candidates who self-identify as socialists received 800,000 votes in the 2014 midterm elections. 2012 results at <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/> (chart does not include Freedom Socialist Party's write-in campaign.)

Leelah Alcorn: Putting the “T” Back in LGBT

by Mari Pierre-Antoine

Leelah Alcorn’s tragic suicide has brought national attention to the oppression faced by transgender people. A seventeen year old trans female from Ohio, the highly public nature of her death - with her heavily shared suicide note and her Tumblr and Reddit activities laying bare her struggles - meant that her story has been seen much more widely than the 41% of transgender and gender non-conforming people who attempt or commit suicide at some point in their lives.¹ Many LGBT activists and their allies have cast a light on the state of transgender people by looking at them through the lens of Leelah Alcorn.

“To put it simply, I feel like a girl trapped in a boy’s body, and I’ve felt that way ever since I was 4. I never knew there was a word for that feeling, nor was it possible for a boy to become a girl, so I never told anyone and I just continued to do traditionally “boyish” things to try to fit in.”

It would be a mistake to put all responsibility for transgender oppression on

parenting. It’s true that Alcorn’s parents were abusive, denying Leelah social interaction with her friends and therapeutic intervention in favor of sending her to a bogus Christian “counseling” service that’s been rejected by the American Medical Association as



medically unsound. No doubt Leelah would be alive today were it not for her parents’ negative and unsupportive attitude. But calls to imprison them, besides bowing to the logic of our country’s diseased prison-industrial complex (which no left-leaning individual, let alone a revolutionary, has any business supporting) narrowly focus on punishing one horrific act instead of addressing the

circumstances in society that lead to transphobia and hate. Instead, things like the petition² on WhiteHouse.gov to ban so-called “conversion therapy” are much better starting points.

But what’s really needed is to integrate LGBT/QI struggle into the working-class movement, realizing the workers’ movement’s historic mission to be the champion of all exploited and oppressed people regardless of race, nationality, gender and gender identity. Bourgeois gay and lesbian organizations don’t offer a path to liberation for the majority of LGBT people. Take for example the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest American gay rights organization and the “official” face of the movement. HRC is thoroughly middle-class, financed by well-to-do lesbian and gay donors and enamored with praising allegedly ‘progressive’ corporations... including the multinational banking giant Goldman Sachs, that great champion of equality!

The Human Rights Campaign was formed as a Political Action Committee to

elect Democrats, not as a democratically-controlled mass organization.³ It narrowly concentrates on a legalistic strategy of supporting sympathetic capitalists (and capitalist politicians) to win same-sex marriage. Yes, marriage equality is a necessary democratic right, but HRC promotes it *at the expense* of the community's vital economic needs like disproportionate homelessness (especially youth homelessness) and poverty.

The transgender community gets the worst end of the deal from HRC and other organizations committed to respectability politics. In 2007 they dropped the "T" from LGBT in trying to pass the Employee Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) through Congress, fearing that transgender people didn't have enough mainstream acceptance to garner support. Despite the unprincipled compromise and the Democrats' total control in Washington between 2008 and 2010, the ENDA still hasn't passed to this day. More radical currents among queer activists recognize that, instead of bowing to current prejudices and bowing to respectability politics, the path to victory is changing minds and changing the balance of forces through struggle.

Contrast the HRC to Pride at Work, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO (the main union

federation.) Pride at Work builds up LGBT participation and inclusion in the trade union movement, works toward sexual orientation and gender identity-inclusive contracts and pushes for strong protections against hiring discrimination.⁴ Notably, they support transition health care coverage for those who choose it. Private insurers frequently deny transgender customers coverage *altogether* just for their gender identity, and for those seeking transition the costs⁵ range from about \$10,000 to \$100,000. This includes regular therapy visits, hormone replacement therapy, top surgery, bottom surgery and much more. The cost is highly dependent on what an individual chooses to change physically. Not all trans people elect to undergo every procedure. For some a mastectomy is enough. The transition process is highly important and no one should be denied the ability to be the person they really are.

Pride at Work just a small glimpse of what's needed to fight for genuine LGBT/QI liberation. All forms of oppression are working-class questions; all manifestations of divide-and-rule hurt the cause of general human freedom. The workers' movement needs to champion the LGBT struggle, fighting for (among other things) transition therapy included in a socialized health care system and gender identity education in

schools. Leelah Alcorn didn't even realize that the way she felt was called "transgender" until she was fourteen.

Don't let Leelah's death be in vain. Let's answer her call to action:

"The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated the way I was, they're treated like humans, with valid feelings and human rights. Gender needs to be taught about in schools, the earlier the better. My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. I want someone to look at that number and say "that's fucked up" and fix it. Fix society. Please."

Notes

1. williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf
2. Conversion therapy band
3. A member of the radical queer group Occupy the Castro details HRC's phony equality and its unaccountability to the people it claims to represent here: http://open.salon.com/blog/avimecca/2012/02/07/dont_support_human_rights_campaign
4. In 32 states, gender identity isn't covered by workplace discrimination law.
5. <http://www.tgender.net/taw/tsins.html>

In Brief: Reclaiming Dr. King

by Gabriel Pierre

Although it's no longer at the top of corporate media headlines, Black Lives Matter is by no means finished. The movement seems to have more staying power than the protests that erupted in the wake of Trayvon Martin's murder in 2012 and the resulting acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman. This year, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on January 19th looks to be an interesting one, with actions planned around the country that will stand in sharp contrast to the official (and thoroughly empty, hypocritical) praise heaped on the late Reverend by the political establishment. Ferguson Action sums up their participation in #ReclaimMLK as follows:

"Dr. King's legacy has been clouded by efforts to soften, sanitize, and commercialize it. Impulses to remove Dr. King from the movement that elevated him must end. We resist efforts to reduce a long history marred with the blood of countless women and men into iconic images of men in suits behind pulpits."

Lenin once remarked that, while partisans of the oppressed are condemned and demonized in their own lives, they become sanctified - and sanitized - icons in death. This way the ruling class can flash some progressive credentials while at the same time emptying the new icon's ideas of all their radical content. Nowhere is this more clear in the United States than with Martin Luther King, Jr. His opposition to Southern segregation earned him the total hatred of the Dixieland elite. Throughout his political life he evolved into stances that challenged structural racism built into our political system, not just *de jure* racism in the South.

While socialists, communists and civil rights organizers to his left (including the Black Nationalists) rightly criticized him for his conciliatory attitude, to his credit the final years of



his life saw him condemn the imperialist war in Vietnam and the economic exploitation that serves Black oppression. King even noted the need for a "radical redistribution of wealth and power" in our society, and, when asked about acts of looting and violence during Civil Rights protests, retorted that the "greatest purveyor of violence on Earth" was the United States government.

It's that side of Doctor King that sections of #BlackLivesMatter are coming into alignment with, rather than establishment Civil Rights gurus like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton. Anti-racist organizers have a chance now to confront and replace formations like Sharpton's National Action Network, which has consistently minimized the plain reality of institutional police violence in favor of the "just a few bad apples" approach and in general acts as a brake, not a driver, on consciousness and organization. There are already flash points of tension, such as the national march in Washington on December 13th where Sharpton clamped down on a group of protesters who came from Ferguson. For the awful crime of attempting to get up on the podium to speak, to address their own movement, Sharpton had them expelled.

The break between middle-class official liberalism and new black freedom organizations will be a long process, with fits and starts and some steps backward. But it's a necessary one.

Book Review: Mean Women or Mean State?

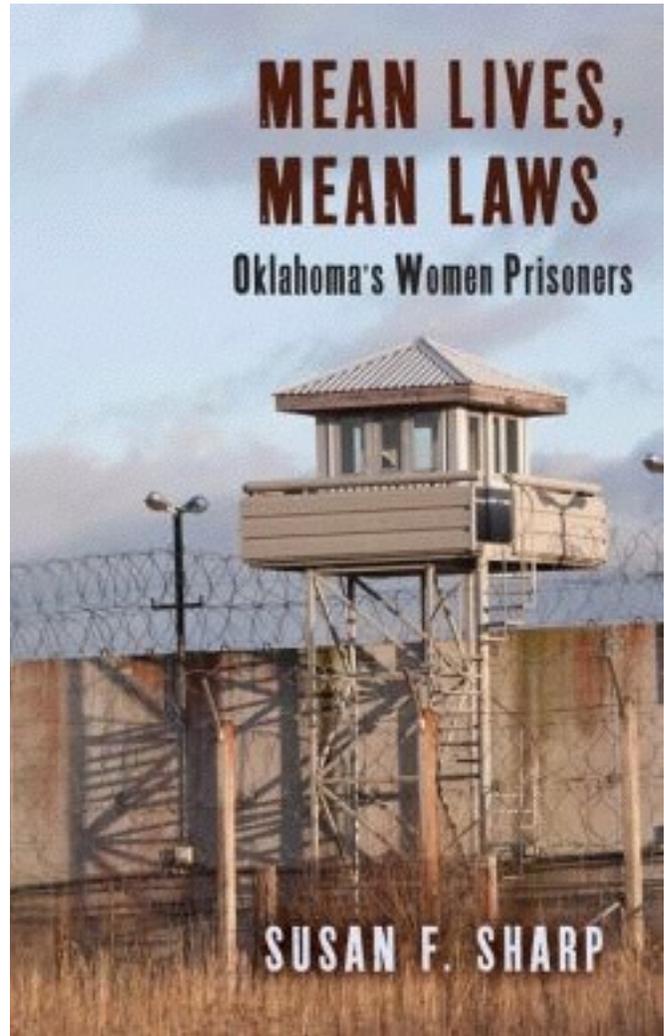
by David Smithers

Oklahoma is the 20th most extensive and 28th most populous state of the 50 United States, and also, according to Wikipedia, derives its name from the Choctaw words “okla” and “humma”, meaning “red people”. 25 indigenous languages are spoken there, second only to California. It was a place where various indigenous peoples of North America were forced to go, part of the Indian Territory. Oklahoma is also known as the Sooner State, after the white settlers who were able to claim the choicest lands prior to statehood and the Indian Appropriations Act of 1889.

I was thinking, when I saw the new book on the shelf at the University of Iowa library, about what anti-Native American racism might be a part of prison life for females in Oklahoma. The stats go like this. The female prison population went from 5.8% of the prison population and reached 10% by 1995 and 10.6% by 2010. And this occurred during a period of general rise in prison population in Oklahoma and nationwide. American Indians make up 12.3% of the women prisoners (add another 10% for mixed race white/American Indian, by 2009) The rest in 2009: Hispanic 3.3%, Black 19.6%, White 49.5%. Oklahoma is 72.2% white; 8.6% native, 7.4% black, 1.7% Asian, 4.2% other, and 5.9% multi-race.

This book is about female incarceration in Oklahoma. It is nearly twice the national rate for women prisoners. But the subject matter and discussion reflects national and international conditions of women both in prison or not. It is simply a particularly harsh corner of the world of capitalism and patriarchy.

A timeless viewpoint is of deviant women not



only as criminals, but also in violation of the code of womanhood. Sexually deviant, acting like men, they are doubly deviant. That supposedly discredited viewpoint is underneath much of the blame the victim mentality and the threat to females from a significant sector of the public who would hold women totally responsible for their fetuses, even to the point of being murders, in case of miscarriage, by drug usage or other behavior.

The strain theory and more particularly feminist

strain theory posits that societal structure traps women before they are even criminalized. Life pathways analysis and adverse childhood exposures already trap individuals who need help and treatment. The criminal justice system, tuned by harsh laws, particularly for drug usage, stiff sentences, frequent legal and / or practical parental separation from children, and paltry care in prison for these these life tattered women, sucks up all the money and energy of society to make mean lives even meaner.

The so-called winds of change are reformist milquetoast. Religious missions of volunteer agencies color what help women do get, as the state refuses to provide enough funding to ameliorate the conditions, much less to repair the lives the women have already led between the dangerous shoals of their varied, yet strikingly common pathways to deviance or simply being snared by the justice system.

Susan F. Sharp is the David Ross Boyd professor of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma. She is co-chair of the Oklahoma Task Force on Children of Incarcerated Parents, and author, also, of *Hidden Victims: Effects of the Death Penalty on Families of the Accused*.

Mean Lives, Mean Laws: Oklahoma's Women Prisoners is a volume in the Critical Issues in Crime and Society series. Her other work, mentioned above, and other interesting titles by other authors are in this series, edited by Raymond J. Michalowski. Of few authors that I have read on this topic, Angela Davis with her calls to abolish prisons, particularly for the connection of labor, race, and gender to the prison-industrial complex, are a gold standard. Susan Sharp is critical but merely reformist, at least for this book, tied as it is to state and foundation-funded research and politics. But the details of her studies and teachings are important nonetheless.

A student of Sharp's *Women, Girls and Crime* course made a video for her senior project.

"WOMEN BEHIND BARS was directed, produced, shot and edited by Amina Benalioulhaj, a Women's and Gender Studies graduate of the University of Oklahoma. Using the research of Presidential Professor of Sociology, Dr. Susan Sharp, Amina sought to make a documentary film the would expose Oklahoma's #1 rate for female incarceration in the world."¹

What are the pathways to prison? Aside from the Kafkaesque system and the War on Drugs, the women in and headed to prison frequently had physical and sexual abuse growing up and often continuing in adulthood, including intimate partner abuse and rape. The women were often in families where crime existed and previous generations had been in prison. Some have a mother or even grandmother in prison. And their children are at risk of a mean life path to prison, poverty and mortality. As children, they experienced more and more multiples of adverse childhood experiences than the normal population. Women are likely to spend multiple prison terms.

Most important, they lacked support outside of prison. Success depends on uncritical and enlightened support. Society and prison gives little to none of that. Out of prisons the job market is reduced, and hiring for even approved jobs is marred by prejudice and fear from employers. Housing and reuniting with family is hindered by restrictions from publicly funded housing. If the woman is lucky she has access to good halfway housing.

It is a mean world even without a criminal record for many women. Much more so with one. Women are caught by drug laws, including drug traffic laws which penalize certain levels of possession as trafficking. Women are low-hanging fruit ensnared, instead of the real pushers, and by their often very collateral or innocent association with criminal husbands or boyfriends.

A woman leaves harsh prison with fifty dollars, original and probably ill-fitting and inadequate clothing, hefty state-imposed debt, and virtually no

plan or hope or assistance. Prison did nothing but rob her of her life years and probably her children and family. Often her only option is to return to her former life and associations that got her in trouble in the first place.

Caregivers of children, often a grandparent, get paltry monthly assistance, foster parents better. The risk of sibling separation is grave. Abuse and placement trouble exist. Parental rights are at great risk and the practical separation all but dooms mother-child bonds.

Sharp's student, Amina Benaliohaj, the one who made the film said it best: "I've studied domestic violence, the gender wage gap, the feminization of poverty, divorce, single motherhood, abortion, reproductive rights, and sexual health education. All these issues that touch women in particular touch incarcerated women disproportionately.... The most important thing that I've learned interacting with these women and children is that they're human."²

One especially noteworthy chapter in the book is "Going Back Again" by one of Sharp's students, Dr. Juana Ortiz. Her chapter is based on interviews of women incarcerated for a second or subsequent time. Life in prison is often kinder than the horror outside. Lack of public transportation, inadequate

welfare support, low wages, lack of housing, and lack of support for those who are abused, mentally ill, or in debt to the state, are problems for workers and ex-prisoners. For many of the same reasons that life is harsh for workers who are not ex-convicts, life is next to impossible for ex-convicts to make a go of it.

Amazingly, Sharp relates in *Women Behind Bars* that the sociologist who hired her at Oklahoma State, having proudly stated that the female incarceration rate was twice the national average, explained why that was the case - Oklahoma just had mean women! The video gives good aural perspective to the readings available in Sharp's work and I recommend watching it as a companion to the book.

There are no good reasons for so many people to be in prison, especially for nonviolent offenses. Prison, as we know it, must be abolished so that resources can be redirected to treatment, education and support for working people. Prisoners need to be able to form labor unions and to vote - basically, to organize for their interests.

Notes:

1. <http://youtu.be/1nweHlzVass>
2. Larson, Annika 2010, *Oklahoma Daily* October 26, 2010

Party Update

by Mari Pierre-Antoine

310 people read *The Red Vine* last month, although that number doesn't include those who read individual articles online but don't download the digital edition or buy a paper copy. That will change in the future as we use some of the money saved from our digital switch (see December's update) to redesign the Red Party website, making it more user-

friendly, improving the mobile display and publishing more articles throughout the month. On that note, remember we encourage readers to send in letters and articles - we make it our business to facilitate a frank and open exchange of ideas on the left, so let's get to it!

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