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Humanity's choice: Freedom and revolution or fascism, war and genocide

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I. Two opposite directions: Climate strike and genocide

Two events that happened almost simultaneously on March 15 dramatically reveal the tectonic forces ripping at this disintegrating capitalist society: the international climate strike carried out by youth and the racist massacre at New Zealand mosques.

The first reveals a profound reach for a new human future. The second a reach in the opposite direction for a mythic past—one rooted in the actual past of slavery and oppression, but purged of the freedom struggles.

A. The global youth climate strike

Greta Thunberg and seven other teenage women leaders of the climate strike released a **brief manifesto** explaining the strike actions that took place in over 120 countries and involved as many as 1.5 million pre-teen and teenage students, as well as older supporters. This is not only a new level of mass activity around climate. It is a new point reached in the thought of the movement.

“The system we have right now is failing us,” they wrote. “We have watched as politicians fumble, playing a political game rather than facing the facts that the solutions we need cannot be found within the current system. They don’t want to face the facts—we need to change the system if we are to try to act on the climate crisis. This movement had to happen, we didn’t have a choice. The vast majority of climate strikers taking action today aren’t allowed to vote....Despite watching the climate crisis unfold, despite knowing the facts, we aren’t allowed to have a say in who makes the decisions about climate change....The kind of changes that need to happen mean everyone recognizing that this is a crisis and committing to radical transformations. We strongly believe that we can fight off the most damaging effects of climate change—but we have to act now.”

Sophie Sleeman, 17, of the UK, counterposed the Youth Strikes, as a “movement unrestricted by walls,” to the far right’s growth. “Going across borders,” she wrote, “young

people from around the world are weaving a new social fabric in which climate justice is our connecting force—a sledgehammer to the walls around us.”

The clarity of the climate actions cuts through politicians’ and corporations’ show of pretending to do something, as the youth have their eyes focused on the already unfolding disasters. As opposed to outright denial of the science and the shell game of fretting over costs to “the economy” to put off real action to protect human beings, the youth are grounded in solid knowledge that puts to shame most politicians. On April 12, **several leading climate scientists released a letter of support** declaring that the youth’s “concerns are justified and supported by the best available science. The current measures for protecting the climate and biosphere are deeply inadequate.”

The reality pierces the show. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, with only a slight pause after the 2008 crash. Emissions of both carbon dioxide and methane have actually accelerated, despite the pitiful measures under the Kyoto Accord, the Paris Agreement, and individual governments. Some 40% of the increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has occurred since the 1992 Earth Summit, out of which came the first world treaty promising to limit global warming.

Half of emissions are due to resource extraction like mining, oil drilling and deforestation. Resource extraction and energy production keep rising faster than population. Plastic production has increased twenty-fold in the past 50 years and is set to rise 40% more in the next decade as petrochemical companies vastly increase plastic manufacture based on cheap fracked oil and gas.

At the behest of oil companies, the Trump administration sabotaged UN negotiations on reducing plastic use and production in March. New chemicals keep being brought to market despite lack of knowledge of their effects. U.S. recycling systems are collapsing. The capitalist economy keeps moving in the direction opposite to what is needed, despite empty assurances by government and industry. It keeps moving toward more and more production because its inherent spirit and motive force is, as Karl Marx pointed out, “production for production’s sake.”

B. The deadly escalation of white supremacist counter-revolution

If the youth in the climate strikes are reaching for a totally transformed future, the massacre of 50 people in two New Zealand mosques reveals a pull in the exact opposite direction. That shooter's manifesto makes clear that the logic of that direction is genocide. It is the logic of how the system hits back at forces reaching for the future and tries to chain the present to the past of slavery, conquest, exploitation and domination. This was part of an alarming wave of successful, attempted, or planned mass killings by white supremacists.

Trump tried to hide this genocidal logic, which is inherent in his obsession with white nationalism—about which he desperately lied, “I think it’s a small group of people that have very, very serious problems.” No one could escape remembering his discovery of “very fine people on both sides” at the far right’s deadly 2017 rally in Charlottesville, Va.

Fact-checkers got busy reminding Trump of the **2018 Pittsburgh synagogue massacre**, the anti-Muslim killings in Quebec City and London in 2017, the **2011 slaughter of 77 people by a far-right terrorist in Norway** as well as the U.S. Coast Guard lieutenant arrested in February for plotting to copy the Norway attack. They could have added the huge spike in hate crimes that individually fall short of mass killings, ever since Trump started campaigning against Mexicans, Muslims and women, which spiked again after he “won” election. Trump-fueled hate crimes have targeted immigrants, Jews, Muslims, African-Americans, Latinx people, women, Gays, Transgender people, people with disabilities, homeless people, anyone viewed as outside the “right” people. The long history of anti-abortion terrorism continues, and is tacitly supported by Trumpism.

To Trump, the true emergency, other than the threats to his personal fortune and prestige, is not the stream of disasters fueled by climate change. Nor is it the war clouds over Iran or building conflict with China, and even North Korea. It is certainly not the never-ending police execution of Black Americans like Willie McCoy in Vallejo, Calif., Stephon Clark in Sacramento, Daniel Hambrick in Nashville, Antwon Rose II in East Pittsburgh and **Laquan McDonald in Chicago**. Nor is it the precarious wage situation of millions counted as employed under the rosy official statistics. It is not the brutal human rights abuses at the border such as separation of families, nor the presidential power grab to build a wall wanted only by a delusional mob.

What counts as an emergency is asylum-seekers, mostly women and children, who are not white. Using the same language as the terrorist attackers of the New Zealand

mosques and the Pittsburgh synagogue, Trump called the caravan “an invasion of our Country.” Trump’s wall-building is a militarization of the mind, aimed more at keeping the U.S. population in line than at keeping others out. That effort involves demonization of people of Latin American descent as the Other.

One measure of the depth of today’s crisis is the fact that, unlike the fabricated emergency, the rekindling of the nuclear arms race does not seem to merit front-page news. It is not only the fact that the new deputy national security adviser, Charles Kupperman, has stated that the U.S. could win a nuclear war. The U.S., soon followed by Russia, withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, one of the last remaining arms control instruments, and both are ramping up the nuclear arms race while talking ominously about “useable” nukes.

Foremost in the Trump administration’s arms race calculations is the rising power of China. Its conflict with China ranges from rolling out new weapons to waging a trade war, from confronting the Chinese Navy in the South China Sea to deploying troops across Africa, which it sees as a commercial and geopolitical battleground.¹ The nuclear arms race extends to India and Pakistan, which conducted air strikes on each other this year.

If the Trump administration has its way, Saudi Arabia will have a chance to build nuclear weapons, confronting both regional rival Iran and nuclear-armed Israel. Outright war against Iran is still on the table: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu let the cat out of the bag with a tweet, swiftly deleted, announcing a meeting with Arab countries including Saudi Arabia “to advance the common interest of war with Iran.” The meeting he referred to was Trump’s February anti-Iran summit in Warsaw.

If nuclear war does not put an end to civilization, the rulers are pursuing another such path through climate catastrophe. Those who spearhead the turn to fascism can’t abide even the mild restrictions placed on oil, coal and deforestation. From Trump to Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, they are opening the floodgates while attacking climate science.

¹ See our editorial on “**Is nuclear war on the horizon?**” (March-April *N&L*), which analyzes how the global economic crisis is forcing a unity of economic and war policy, as well as the reach for something new in opposition.

Whether in power like Trump or gunning for it like the Alternative for Germany party, these far-right wreckers pretend to oppose “elites,” but in reality they are doubling down on capitalism and its attacks against working people as well as against women and all kinds of minorities and scapegoats.

II. Remaking the world order in the image of the far right

Fascism never disappeared after the Nazis’ defeat in World War II because capitalism could not solve any of society’s fundamental problems. It was somewhat marginalized, though at times unleashed to stave off revolution, as in the bloody Brazilian military dictatorship that Bolsonaro praises and has ordered the military to celebrate. But so crisis-ridden is the post-2008 world that fascism, in new costumes, is rushing to power across the world, with little resistance from top capitalists, and often with their complicity. They feel the underlying instability well enough to take some comfort in less democracy, more authoritarianism; more freedom of speech for noxious counter-revolutionary voices instigating violence, less free speech for workers organizing as workers, for water protectors and other environmental defenders, for those speaking the scientific truths about climate as well as medical truths about abortion and birth control, and for women and minorities targeted for harassment by mobs.

In Europe, the far right has made strides in country after country, in some cases becoming part of the government, and in others pulling governing parties into immigrant-bashing. The UK’s endless descent into crisis and disintegration over Brexit, set in motion by the Right’s victory in the 2016 referendum, is a harbinger for Europe and the world. The May 23-26 European Parliament elections are likely to see a big enough far-right surge to transform the dynamic of the European Union, with or without the UK.²

The European Union is one of the prime targets of Trump’s campaign to dismantle multilateral international institutions. Trumpism’s “America First” strategy is rooted in the economic stagnation and simmering discontent in the U.S., and consequently the desire to

² See “European Union elections: mixed signals,” p. 12, and “**Rise of Far Right threatens ‘Europe,’**” March-April *N&L*.

weaken competitors, especially China and Europe, and to throw around the weight of the waning but reigning superpower.

Trump is suspicious even of such U.S.-dominated international institutions as NATO, let alone the EU and the UN. He even objected to the phrase “rules-based international order” in the June 2018 G7 communiqué. His administration has leveled numerous attacks at Europe, including support of anti-immigrant fascists. He is joined in this by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has his own reasons for trying to divide Europe. Trump-Putin are also very pleased with Brexit, which has already strengthened the Right internationally and weakened both Britain and the EU.

The liberal/conservative establishment laments Trump’s attacks on the old alliances and the old liberal order since, in their time, they benefited capitalism and kept the U.S. on top. They fail to understand that the new moves, even if poorly thought out, are aimed at benefiting capitalism and keeping the U.S. on top in a changed economic-political environment.

In place of rules-based trade, which was always geared toward U.S. supremacy, Trump prefers bullying each country “bilaterally” with a more open brandishing of U.S. military and economic power. His project is to stabilize world capitalism on the basis of entrenched U.S. power in league with a network of authoritarian strongmen. The pitfalls of this approach, which cannot neutralize the objective forces pushing nationalisms into conflict with each other, is seen in Trump’s on-again off-again love affair with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un and in the growing tensions between the U.S. and Turkey.

There is a split in the ruling class between those moving toward fascism and those preferring a greener, gentler capitalism, whose neo-Keynesianism is trending toward some variant of a “green new deal,” and who want to rescue the 2015 Paris climate agreement along with the decrepit suite of international institutions from which it issued. Both sides aim to shore up failing capitalism, instead of abolishing it, the only way to save humanity.

Trump’s actions did not create the old international order’s decay. He contributed to, but did not create by himself, the record levels of global debt, the ongoing stagnation, the record trade deficit, the weakening of international institutions and their growing replacement by a proliferation of authoritarian strongmen, whose

cooperation in global reaction is a prelude to competition and conflict that could end in world war. In short, Trump is a personification of the crumbling of the system.

Because of that, what appears as a pre-election gift to his partner in racist-nationalist reaction, Netanyahu, is a grave new move in the dismantling of post-World War II norms, and a step toward war.

That gift is the U.S. recognition of Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights from Syria, which flies in the face of international law, both in the general prohibition of grabbing territory by military conquest and in the particular unanimously adopted UN Security Council resolutions. Of course, the U.S. has long acquiesced in Israel's rule over the occupied territories.³

The open repudiation of such a central principle of international law has real consequences, as Netanyahu showed when he cited it as "proof" his state can "hold" occupied territory. Annexing parts of the West Bank was long in the air in Israeli politics, and Netanyahu made it a plank in his election campaign, alongside the racist "Nation-State" law.⁴ His re-election on this platform with Trump's blessing pounded the final nail into the coffin of the two-state solution. Trump's move also strengthens Russia's annexation of Crimea—which he has been supporting for two years by demanding an end to sanctions on Russia, and China's claims in the South China Sea.

China's assertiveness on the world stage is turning 30 years of primitive accumulation of capital into political capital for Xi Jinping. The hothouse development of capitalism, courtesy of the blood and sweat of workers under state and Party repression, propelled China to second in gross domestic product (GDP) worldwide and propped up global capitalism in crisis. On this basis, China presents its single-party, police-surveillance-state-capitalist society as the destined leader and model for the next world order.

³ Going further, David Friedman, Trump's ambassador to Israel, proclaimed on March 26 "the need for Israel to maintain overriding security control of Judea and Samaria and a permanent defense position in the Jordan Valley"—that is to say, permanent military control of the West Bank, regardless of any "peace" deal to be offered. That is the position of Netanyahu, but also most of the other parties in Israel's Knesset. See Maayan Lubell, "[U.S. envoy hints at peace deal with Israeli security control in West Bank](#)," *Reuters*, March 26, 2019.

⁴ See "[Israel's reactionary nation-state law](#)," Sept.-Oct 2018 *N&L*.

The particular umbrella covering China's outreach is the Belt and Road Initiative. Xi resurrects the mythology of previous dynasties' furthest historical expansion to mount a 21st-Century challenge for control beyond its borders. The 15th-Century expeditions of Admiral Zheng He to East Africa provided the pretext for proposing massive infrastructure projects there, but it is the lure of loans overflowing from China while capital is otherwise unavailable that accounts for Ethiopia and the rest of East Africa agreeing to China's ambitious plans, even with the examples of China claiming title to ports and assets in foreclosure in Sri Lanka and Greece. The right-wing government of Italy is the first in Western Europe to accept Chinese loans, for redevelopment of the Adriatic port of Trieste.

China's economy is slowing. Its GDP growth last year, under 6.5%, is the lowest since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. Because banning unions led to rank-and-file organizing in foreign-owned factories, a decade or so ago the official national union claimed to represent them to impede workers' revolt. Escalating resistance, especially against factory closings and theft of benefits, has been accompanied by police intervention and incarcerating workers, especially activists, as in the Pearl River Valley. Through labor's efforts, the low wages have risen tenfold.

China's rulers are fearful that the high economic growth rate that the regime banks on for legitimacy will drop again this year, maybe even leading to recession. Along with controlling workers at every factory and every uprising, China harshly represses people at the margins in Tibet and Xinjiang with internment camps that the world is ignoring in order to reap the benefits of Chinese trade.

A "social credit" system is being imposed across China now, employing computerized records as the modern form of party hacks in every village gauging how loyal one is to the Party. If not loyal, people can be excluded from apartments, jobs, transportation, etc. Xi Jinping fits well into the mold of today's authoritarians. Solidarity is needed with Chinese workers. China can show us our own future, and Chinese workers will help reshape that future.

Neither false alternative—China's regime or Trumpism—can rescue humanity from social and environmental collapse. Both are forms of rule trying to remold the world order but only within the narrow bounds of imperialist state-capitalism.

III. World crises in economy, politics, ideology—and the missing link of philosophy

Sectors of the capitalist class long chafed to throw off the restraints imposed by the New Deal in the U.S. and social democracy in Europe, but were held in check during the three decades of the post-World War II boom. That changed in 1974-75 when capitalism's endemic tendency for the rate of profit to fall led to the deepest world economic crisis since the Great Depression, which was not matched until the even deeper 2008 crash. The resulting structural change meant that capitalism could not go on as before. Led by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, capitalists tried to shore up profits through an assault on the wages, working conditions, and organizing ability of workers and on poor countries. That was never separate from an assault on our minds.

Reactionary ideology—pushing racism, sexism, heterosexism, militarism, climate change denial, rejection of any environmental or workplace safeguards, the constant drumbeat that there is no alternative to capitalism—had its counterpart in the ideological pollution of the Left. That was borne out by the incompleteness of the revolts that brought down Communism in Eastern Europe and Russia and by Left apologias for the genocide in Bosnia. A new study found that today's wave of “autocratization” and assault on democracy actually began in 1994,⁵ at the height of the genocide—and just as importantly, the feeble international response to it. It is no accident that the New Zealand killer's livestream included a song devoted to Radovan Karadzic, a leader of that genocide campaign.

In the wake of the 1995 Dayton Accords imposed by the U.S., which legitimized the country's ethnic partition, global politics of the rulers made a palpable turn toward nationalism and ethnocentrism.⁶ This turn of global politics was facilitated by the failure of the world Left to make a category of the opposite tendency coming from the Bosnian masses defending multicultural existence.⁷ While genocide in Bosnia was going on, the Rwandan genocide ignited, with little response from the U.S. and European powers except likely

⁵ Anna Lührmann & Staffan I. Lindberg, “[A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New About It?](#)” *Democratization*, March 1, 2019.

⁶ This may well have been a factor in Netanyahu's first rise to Prime Minister of Israel in 1996.

⁷ We did not shy away from making such a philosophical category of the new kind of national liberation struggle in Bosnia that opposed ethnic divisions—which we posed as the test of world politics—and from linking it with the search Marxist-Humanism found in Marx's late writings for multilinear pathways to a new society. See *Bosnia-Herzegovina: Achilles Heel of Western 'Civilization'* (News & Letters, 1996).

complicity by France. Rwanda's holocaust in turn set the stage for the genocidal "African world war," with fighting, atrocities and oppression continuing in Congo to this day.

As much of the Left twists and turns to avoid looking in the historic mirror and glimpsing their own share of responsibility for the counter-revolutionary descent since the Bosnian genocide, will they remember how they accepted, even celebrated, deniers of the genocide as legitimate allies; or how the paucity of Left solidarity left the field open for the U.S. to set the terms of peace? Will they recognize the repetition of that failure of solidarity again and again, from apologies for Iraq's Saddam Hussein to defense of Syria's Bashar al-Assad, which brought them into alliances, sometimes open, with elements of the far right because of their agreement that Assad was a victim of "globalists"?

In the absence of any such epiphany, can our projection of Marxist-Humanist philosophy as an element of the struggle help establish a sorely needed dividing line within the Left to fight against the rampant ideological pollution?

The dividing line in life is between revolution and counter-revolution. Because the century since the Russian Revolution has proved that counter-revolution dialectically emerges not only from outside the revolution but from within it, *and* since *thought* is integral to life, the line between a philosophy of revolution and ideological pollution is not only a frontier but a line of battle. And that is a life and death battle.

Revolutionaries faced a life and death battle in 1914 when World War I broke out and the Marxist Second International collapsed, with many socialist parties and leaders supporting their rulers in the imperialist war.

While many revolutionaries broke with the pro-war socialists, only Lenin made a philosophical break, shocked to find that those he had seen as leaders had misled the movement. He felt compelled to rethink the philosophical roots of Marxism by diving into Hegel's dialectic. It led to a break in his conception of the relationship between materialism and idealism. In Hegel's concept of world-transforming subjectivity whose self-movement is objective, Lenin saw a deeper basis for his own concept of masses as reason. As Raya

Dunayevskaya added, “It wasn’t only self-movement that Lenin discovered in Hegel’s philosophy, *it was also the plunge into freedom that a generalization gives you.*”⁸

We return to this 1914 break in thought to shed light on what is needed *both* to separate the revolutionary movement from the trends within it that are aiding counter-revolution, *and* to make new revolutionary beginnings.

Lenin’s break was followed by his analysis of the subjectivity of new forces of revolution in struggles for national self-determination against imperialism, and led to his concept of the toiling masses “to a man, woman and child” taking charge of production and the state if revolution was to mean liberation.

Thereby Lenin provided ground not only for total opposition to the betrayers and opportunists, but for the revolution to come. The break with his own philosophical past enabled him to intervene in the 1917 Russian Revolution so that the second, October Revolution came to be. That point is central to the recent Marxist-Humanist book of selected writings by Raya Dunayevskaya, *Russia: From Proletarian Revolution to State-Capitalist Counter-Revolution*.

The present split within the Left calls for realizing philosophy as a polarizing force that gives action its direction. That direction would begin, but not end, with fighting for solidarity with real revolution and breaking with those who support counter-revolution. That is only the first step toward second negation and a direction driven by the concept of revolution in permanence.

The Great Divide in Marxism that Lenin established does not answer today’s problems, but skipping over it is a way of evading the indispensability of philosophy for revolution, since the success of the October Revolution gets attributed to the leadership of a vanguard party, or simply denied and viewed as the advent of tyranny, throwing out any idea of transformation into opposite, of counter-revolution emerging from within the revolution—even though that contradiction has beset not only the Russian Revolution but every other one since—and thus throwing out the indispensable weapon, the dialectic.

⁸ Raya Dunayevskaya, “On Working Out Our Perspectives: Practicing Dialectics” (May 24, 1968, letter found in Vol. VI of the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/4092.pdf>, #4093-4096).

That ground was not followed up on—in part due to Lenin’s own philosophic ambivalence and his failure to make his Hegel notebooks the public basis for the revolution’s further development.⁹ In the absence of that philosophical ground, the 1930s depression led to fascism and world war, the same threats we face today, only with even more apocalyptic potential consequences.

This is not just about 1914-1917. The point is to make a new philosophical beginning to set the ground for a new beginning in reality, in revolution, in the achievement of a new human society. The absence of that kind of ground sapped the Left’s power to project a pole of attraction for the discontent that is so widespread, and therefore its power to resist the rise of the Right. As we have seen, much of the Left’s thinking got warped by the ideological pollution from the Right.

IV. Humanity’s never-ending quest for liberation

The past four and a half decades have been shaped not only by the capitalist onslaught but by a series of struggles, of revolt, revolution, and counter-revolution. Since the 2008 crash, a new revolutionary wave arose with the Arab Spring at its center. Counter-revolution’s victory, above all the Syrian genocide with support from wide swaths of the Left as well as the Right, threw the doors wide open for the current march of fascism.

Yet revolt keeps springing up across the world, most dramatically in Sudan and Algeria, continuing even after they toppled those countries’ long-time rulers. (See “**Algerian women at forefront**,” p. 2, and “**The genius of the Sudanese revolution**,” p. 12.) It shows that the human quest for liberation cannot be killed, and it shows why ruling classes are willing to tolerate economic disruption caused by the counter-revolutionary mob as long as it attacks the revolt. This year has seen new uprisings as well in Serbia, Montenegro and Haiti. Labor strikes keep erupting from Iran to Bangladesh, from China to Zimbabwe.

A. Youth revolt vs. climate chaos

The global climate strikes of March 15 must be seen in this context of a period of revolt, revolution and counter-revolution. Those strikes were the most massive and challenging

⁹ See chapters 1-3 of *Russia: From Proletarian Revolution to State-Capitalist Counter-Revolution: Selected Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya* (Haymarket, 2018).

event of something that has been building for years: a many-faceted surge of opposition to climate inaction and continuing intensification of fossil fuel extraction and use.

A host of local, national and international organizations have formed to take up this battle, with youth key to their founding and leadership. The **movement at Standing Rock** against the Dakota Access Pipeline, led by Native Americans, energized Indigenous opposition to colonialism worldwide and opposition to pipelines in the U.S. and Canada, and inspired many of the youth now expressing the urgency of fighting looming climate chaos.

Standing Rock also sparked a clampdown by the state and corporate security, including surveillance, infiltration and a wave of draconian state and federal bills to make even indirect involvement with pipeline and other climate justice protests into felonies. These bills are being pushed by oil companies with the aid of the reactionary corporate lobbying group American Legislative Exchange Council. Another side of this repression is a wave of laws and regulations to muzzle government employees, including scientists, and public school teachers who would dare to speak the truth about climate change.

The rulers recognize that the movement is about minimizing climate change *and* about how society will adapt to already built-in warming. Mitigating and adapting to climate change entails massive disruptions to the existing economy. That is why the movement calls for a “just transition”—one of the green new deal’s main goals. Despite the limitations of the latter,¹⁰ this concern sends the movement toward “system change not climate change.”

Inaction on climate change is already causing massive disruption, which promises to mushroom. Every year brings new disasters. Striking five African countries, Cyclone Idai—like Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Hurricane Florence in the Carolinas—slowed down over land and caused massive flooding. The city of Beira, Mozambique, was 90% destroyed, over 1,000 people were killed, thousands more were missing, and three million were affected. The devastation in Africa together with massive flooding in Iran and the Midwestern U.S. show that, while the poor and oppressed of the world will suffer most and earliest from climate chaos, it is a delusion for anyone to believe they are beyond its reach.

The world will adapt to global warming one way or another, either in a militaristic, police-state, authoritarian, gated-community, wall-building way under the control of a small

¹⁰ See “**The Green Not-so-great New Deal**,” Jan.-Feb. 2019 *N&L*.

elite, or in a human way under the control of the masses. That spells revolution in permanence, although the word “revolution” is only rhetorical in most corners of the movement and theoretical debates. It is incumbent on us to project from within the movement that this is what the movement is reaching for and to battle ideas that would divert it in another direction. And therefore a philosophy of revolution is crucial to avert the diversions and advance toward the goal.

B. Labor confronting capitalism’s destructiveness

The capitalist economy is always engaging in what economist Joseph Schumpeter called “creative destruction” and today’s tech moguls boastfully call “disruption.” Jobs, towns, industries, regions, countries are decimated in the name of progress in the normal workings of capitalism. This has been happening for decades with coal mining, for example. The number of U.S. coal miners fell from almost 900,000 in 1923 to just over 500,000 on the eve of automation in the mines to under 150,000 by 1969.

The founders of Uber raked in their fabulous wealth through just such disruption, decimating the livelihoods of taxi drivers, undermining public mass transit systems in city after city, and shamelessly exploiting the drivers they employ. (See “[Uber and Lyft drivers strike against pay cuts](#),” p. 3.)

A vast transformation has been hollowing out the rural U.S. since the 1980s farm crisis. Agribusiness corporate monopolies aided by state-capitalist intervention in the agricultural economy have driven thousands of small to mid-sized farmers out of business, a process greatly accelerated by climate change. Small farmers are more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of weather, aiding the consolidation of agribusiness.¹¹

The centralization of agriculture has contributed to environmental destruction, which in turn contributes to climate change. For example, huge factory farms of chickens and hogs yield massive amounts of waste contaminated by drugs and heavy metals. Instead of uncontaminated waste being applied to the soil in reasonable amounts to rejuvenate fertility,

¹¹ See Emily Atkin, “[Climate Change and the Death of the Small Farm](#),” *The New Republic*, March 27, 2019, and Chris McGreal, “[How America’s Food Giants Swallowed the Family Farms](#),” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2019.

it becomes concentrated in waste lagoons that end up polluting rivers and lakes and breeding antibiotic-resistant disease-causing organisms.¹²

While productivity growth has stalled, a new wave of destruction is building under the impact of technologies like Artificial Intelligence. When implemented, jobs from retail stores and warehouses to truck driving could be decimated. Capitalist ideologues foresee this coming as if it is an unstoppable force of nature, and argue only about whether we should worry or not, whether a code of ethics should be suggested to soulless corporations, and whether to adopt some welfare measures.

Previously, the loss of 800,000 coal mining jobs merely represented progress to the ideologues. But when the last 50,000 jobs are threatened mainly by the cheapening of fracked natural gas, technological change, and the switch to mountaintop removal mining, the ideologues raise the alarm as long as they can blame it on environmental regulation. They are silent about the gutting of benefits for retired and disabled miners, who outnumber working miners. They are silent about the gutting of health and safety protections, and the boom of black lung cases. This reveals that the destruction's roots lie in the capitalist system itself, and hence the need for revolution in permanence.

It also points to the importance of labor's revolt. A period of militancy has been signaled by the massive, well-supported teachers' strikes all over the country, most recently in Denver, [Oakland](#), [Los Angeles](#), West Virginia (the [second year in a row](#)) and [another set of Chicago charter schools](#), and on March 19 graduate workers at the University of Illinois at Chicago went on strike.

Striking teachers give the lie to claims that the working class put Trump in power. Instead, they are clear that Trump, like Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, is on the side of the wealthy who are pushing a racist, class-divided educational system and starving out education for the masses. The teachers, school staff, parents and students pushed back hard.

Teachers have articulated a vision of themselves as workers in a different relationship to their work than workers in commodity production, while making sure to build class solidarity. For years sectors of service workers have been expressing this, like the California

¹² See Carrie Hribar, "[Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities](#)," National Association of Local Boards of Health, 2010.

nurses who insisted that their speedup and bad working conditions negatively affected the quality of patient care. They resist capitalism's alienation of their labor by affirming that their patients are human beings and must be treated as such. *N&L* "Workshop Talks" columnist Htun Lin has consistently contrasted this humanistic vision of direct healthcare workers with the healthcare corporations' relentless march to quantify and commodify patients as objects of the services they provide.

Parents understand that teachers are fighting for the quality of their children's education. In contrast, a "Today Show" host recently interviewing striking teachers suddenly looked puzzled and asked, "So...your strike is not just about pay?"

Prior to the historic 2012 Chicago teachers' strike, the radical new Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) leadership spent two years to revitalize and organize the entire staff at every school. It also formed genuine alliances with the school community, to win most of their demands and work together towards "the schools our students deserve." We see this vision now in the statewide strikes.

The 2012 Chicago strike represented a mass assertion by unionized teachers that *they* can create "The Schools Our Children Deserve," the title of a document that called the present Chicago system "educational apartheid." In contrast, the so-called "reform agenda" led by Education Secretary DeVos is the agenda of 21st-century capitalism, in which students, schools and teachers are all commodities in an ever more alienated system.

Yet we cannot forget that in 2013, Chicago's mayor-appointed school board closed 49 schools despite thousands of teachers, parents and students in the streets. New "per-pupil" funding led to massive budget cuts and class size exceeding contractual limits. Budget constraints forced principals to lay off veteran teachers to hire cheaper inexperienced teachers. And custodians' jobs represented by SEIU (which did not support the CTU strike) are now outsourced to mega-corporation Aramark.

Striking teachers and their communities will need to realize the ramifications of their own narrative as a radical philosophical articulation essential for grounding effective strategies to combat the nationwide push toward private, commodified, class-biased education.

Strikes have broken out in other sectors as well, such as the strikes that hit 240 Stop & Shop stores in New England, Uber and Lyft in Los Angeles, the Chicago Symphony

Orchestra, GE Transportation in Erie, Pa., and Marriott hotels in several cities. Not only nurses but lower-paid healthcare workers, including those who provide home care, are organizing, and so are domestic workers, who have traditionally been left out of minimum wages and everything else. They come from all over the world and speak all different languages.

C. Women's liberation, the Black dimension, and prisoners

In teachers' strikes, healthcare and domestic worker organizing, climate movements, struggles for a living wage, the fight against toxic water in Flint, Mich., and beyond, women are active and in many cases women of color are leaders.

Women are one of the prime targets of the reactionary movements. That is seen in the vicious worldwide attack on women's reproductive rights, although Ireland's legalization of abortion via a landslide referendum shows how movements for women's liberation can make stunning progress. Still, anti-feminism is one of the primary means of recruiting men to fascist groups. International Women's Day (IWD) 2019 reveals that the world is becoming more dangerous for women.

Women demonstrated for an end to violence on every continent and every nation—from Nairobi, Kenya, where women protested femicide; to Rome, Italy, where women from the feminist movement “Non Una Meno” (Not One Less) staged a gathering in front of the Labor Ministry protesting violence, gender discrimination, and harassment in the workplace; to a massive demonstration in San Salvador, El Salvador, where women demanded decriminalization of abortion, an end to violence and respect for women's rights. Women in Sudan made themselves part of the revolt against Omar al-Bashir and went on a hunger strike. They were teargassed, arrested, beaten and denied healthcare. In defiance of Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, over 4,000 marched in Manila shouting slogans against him.

Taking a closer look at three countries shows the world is becoming more dangerous for women.

In Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has tried to sabotage IWD, but this year the stench of the police state Turkey has become permeated the air. The demonstrations were banned *on the day of the March*, and police in riot gear jammed the site. Thousands were

funneled into a small side street with buildings on both sides.¹³ Then the police attacked with “tear gas, plastic bullets, batons and police dogs.” So thick was the tear gas that a demonstrator said, “The police tried to beat us after the gas attack. They were directing the dogs to attack us as well, but the dogs had a hard time breathing and seeing.”

Vilification was clearly planned ahead of time. A Muslim call to prayer—called “*azan*”—was broadcast at the same time as the march and not heard by the demonstrators who were blowing whistles, banging drums, chanting and singing.

Erdoğan and his minions spread the lie that the demonstrators, “under the guise of women’s day...whistled at our *azan*....They chanted slogans.” Erdoğan continued, “Their only alliance is the enmity towards *azan* and the flag.” This ignores the hundreds of scarfed Muslim women at the demonstration who were gassed by the cops. The *Diyanet-Sen* (the syndicate for employees of the Religious Affairs Directorate) demanded that the government investigate and that the marchers apologize to the Turkish population, even though the marchers represent the Turkish people—especially Turkish women.¹⁴

Turkish women were not alone in facing orchestrated attacks using fundamentalist religion and “our culture” to demonize them.

In Spain, tens of thousands marched. Feminism is so popular in Spain that the Right is determined to co-opt it in order to destroy it. The far-Right party Vox claims that proposed legislation to fight violence against women, for equality, and for LGBTQ rights discriminates against men. A Catholic organization, *HazteOir* (Make yourself heard) drove a bus around the country painted with the slogan #StopFeminazis and a picture of Hitler with pink lipstick.

A group started by Spanish right-wingers, “Women of the World Global Platform,” aims to bring conservative groups from around the world together. They called for a counterdemonstration in Madrid on March 10. They claim that IWD is “a day for those who reject femininity as well as masculinity, complementarity, maternity and dedication to the family,” while they embrace it.¹⁵

¹³ “Istanbul police fire tear gas at banned women’s day rally,” by AFP, March 8, 2019.

¹⁴ “Has misogyny become the official state policy in Turkey?” by Pinar Tremblay, al-monitor.com, March 20, 2019.

¹⁵ “Feminism is the word in Spain’s electoral campaign,” by AFT, *Arab News*, March 6, 2019.

They pulled off a demonstration of about 200 where every sign was preprinted with slogans like, “I am a woman and men are our allies” and, “I don’t want a confrontational feminism.”

The Right is attempting to create a “good feminism” that wants to embed the status quo and a bad feminism that wants women’s liberation. It is an attempt to destroy a freedom movement while pretending to support it.

In **Pakistan** the demonstrations in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad were described by a participant as “groundbreaking celebration[s] of women in a massive march comprised of women from all backgrounds, ages and ethnicity, coming together to raise the banner of women empowerment and making the world feel their presence on a colossal level.” The range of issues was evidenced by the signs: “My Mind, My Body, My Power,” “Women have heads too!,” “#IPledgeToStopAcidAttacks,” “#IPledgeToStopHonorKillings,” “Arrange marches, *not* marriages,” “A Woman’s Place Is in the ~~Kitchen~~ Resistance,” “Towards Social Services for Women,” “It’s Time to Organize,” “A Free Media is a Feminist Media,”¹⁶ “Keep your dick to yourself,” “We are not punching bags.”

In a country where honor killings are rife, the Aurat (Woman) March issued a manifesto that “demand[ed] the right to autonomy and decision-making over our bodies; ...equal access to quality reproductive and sexual health services for women, all genders and sexual minorities.” Women want “economic justice, implementation of labor rights,” an end to sexual harassment in the workplace, “recognition of women’s unpaid labor, and the provision of maternity leave and day-care centers....[It] also focused on climate change...clean drinking water and air, protection of animals and wildlife...Other demands covered nearly every aspect of social justice.”¹⁷

The backlash was brutal. A well-known Islamic cleric’s video said that if women claim the right to their bodies, men can also claim the right to rape them. Planners received rape and death threats and there were calls to the government to investigate them; pictures on social media were altered to make marchers look bad; complaints were made to police.

¹⁶ “**In Pakistan: Breaking the shackles of patriarchy at Aurat March 2019: In pictures,**” by Bismah Mughal, *The News*.

¹⁷ “**Pakistan’s Women Marched for Their Rights. Then the Backlash Came,**” by Tehreem Azeem, *The Diplomat*, March 20, 2019.

None of this has stopped the forward move of Pakistani women for a different, freer reality. One of the Aurat March planners, Shumaila Hussain Shahani, said, “I do not think such petty right-wing tactics will deter the marchers. Marches will continue, our struggle for a gender-just world will continue.”¹⁸

These attacks against IWD are new in intensity and size. They signal a recognition by the Right of the power of women’s thought, actions and determination to crush women’s drive for liberation. But the objective truth is that women’s struggle for freedom continues to grow globally both in size, in militancy, and in ideas.

Black women have been in the forefront of much Black Lives Matter organizing, and striving to make police violence against Black women and children visible as well as that against Black men, which itself in the age of Trump gets less media attention than his mindless tweets. Some of the latest protests have brought out the impunity of killer cops:

- In Sacramento, Stephon Clark’s shooters were given a paid vacation and not charged.
- In East Pittsburgh, 17-year-old Antwon Rose’s killer was acquitted despite the cop’s inconsistent statements (his lies had cost him a previous police job) claiming that the unarmed teenager was a threat, and the mountain of evidence that included three bullet holes in Rose’s back and a video showing him being shot as he ran away.
- Six cops in Vallejo, Calif., got a paid vacation and are back on duty after executing 21-year-old Willie McCoy as he slept in his car—including the cop who had previously shot and killed another Black man from behind.
- Protests met the light sentence a judge gave the cop who **murdered Laquan McDonald** in Chicago and the total impunity of his cover-up co-conspirators.

It is not only white but also many Black cops who have absorbed the racist system’s dehumanized attitude toward Black youth, as seen by the brutal beating and tasing of 16-year-old student Dnigma Howard at Chicago’s Marshall High School, which was caught on video, beginning with an unprovoked attack by two cops as Howard started walking away from them after hugging a friend.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

During this period, news came out revealing ties to white supremacist organizations by police in Virginia; Portland, Ore.; Sacramento; Oakland; and the FBI.

What the best of the growing number of prisoner strikes and actions have shown is a deep consciousness of how the prison industrial system uses racism to divide and oppress them. In response, they have most often crossed ethnic lines. That was in one prisoner's words a leap in consciousness to acting consciously as a class—thus showing how the slave's consciousness can become truer and deeper than that of the master. Where the system “validated” the prisoners as gang members, they demanded explicitly to be validated as human.¹⁹

V. What to do in a world in upheaval

All this revolt is a beginning that has prevented Trump's retrogression from becoming the new normal—but the resistance is not the absolute opposite of capitalism in its degeneracy.

The situation cries out for a banner of total human liberation to be unfurled as the absolute opposite of degenerate capitalism rushing humanity to destruction, and to act as a pole of attraction and organization for today's revolts and social movements.

The concrete is no mere point of departure for restating Marx's vision of liberation. It calls for us to work out the current changed world of capitalism so concretely that the opposite shines forth from within it; that the movement from practice that is itself a form of theory shines forth from within it. We need to help release the reach for a new relationship between theory and practice and the urge for theory to root itself in the movement from practice to develop, and to develop to philosophy. Such a release will make the degeneration of thought so clear that the rulers' turn to fascism cannot be held apart from the ideological pollution of the Left and therefore we cannot ignore the crying need for Marxist-Humanist organization, which does not separate organization of people from organization of thought.

A new generation's hunger for revolutionary thought is reflected in the surging popularity of socialism and of openly naming capitalism as the enemy. This began before the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign made the media take notice. It is the masses of youth reaching for socialism that made possible the popularity of that campaign as well as of the handful of

¹⁹ *Pelican Bay Hunger Strikers: 'We want to be validated as human'* (News and Letters, 2013).

self-declared socialists elected to Congress last year, and of the call for a green new deal. It is powered by the disillusionment of a generation that sees its future being sacrificed on the altar of profits and political expediency by the same system that shows no great concern for their present either.

This makes it all the more important to deepen the discussion of what capitalism and socialism are. The transformation into opposite of the socialist movement at the time of World War I and the counter-revolution that emerged from within the socialist Russian Revolution show the need to be rooted in objective history and in a dialectical philosophy of revolution that can anticipate and comprehend such transformations.

It shows the need for a philosophical-political as well as economic understanding of what happens after the revolution, the question at the heart of Marxist-Humanist philosophy and theory. Old mistakes are resurfacing and lessons of history are missed even by those who think that adding the words “democratic,” “ecological” and “feminist” to socialism is enough to avoid repeating the Russian Revolution’s transformation into opposite—or that the abandonment of revolution can somehow allow socialism to win. This is why we will be issuing a pamphlet this year on *What Is Socialism?*

It is why that pamphlet is being shaped in the context of our new book, *Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution in Permanence for Our Day: Selected Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya*, as well as the Marxist-Humanist trilogy of revolution (*Marxism and Freedom; Philosophy and Revolution*; and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*) and the whole body of ideas. This new book takes the standpoint that what Marx and Dunayevskaya were about was *revolution* and it is that which compelled them to immerse themselves in dialectical philosophy. The absolute negativity of the Hegelian dialectic became translated into the crucial revolution in permanence. The failure of post-Marx Marxism to root itself in the totality of Marx’s body of ideas uniting philosophy and revolution made post-Marx Marxism into a pejorative category, which is one of the crucial ideas explored in the new book.

Development of revolutionary philosophy and theory depends on the work of comprehending the current stage of world politics. Every issue of *News & Letters* addresses that question in articles and Readers’ Views. Now more than ever, we

need to work on our projection so that these Marxist-Humanist analyses become widely recognized as a challenge to all other tendencies, whether post-Marx Marxist, anarchist, social-democratic, or other.

We have much to build on, beginning with Dunayevskaya's trilogy of revolution, [her Archives](#), and our other publications. Our new books and the new pamphlets we will be publishing are interventions on their topics of focus and on what characterizes this degenerate stage of capitalism, why it arose, what is the opposite seething within it, and what to do about it. That is true of the publication on Syria, the country whose revolution and counter-revolution we identified as early as 2012 as the test of world politics. It is true of the publication on women's liberation, the Subject that broke out into the first mass opposition to Trump and now faces new contradictions. It is true of the pamphlet to challenge dominant conceptions of what socialism means.

In the coming year, we will deepen our comprehension and projections of the new publications through a series of classes with the two new books as focus. The classes will bring together the books with the projected pamphlets and the Archives, and each class will be conceived as an intervention into the objective-subjective situation, in a particular movement going on today.

We do not discuss movements as detached observers, but with the aim of projecting Marxist-Humanist ideas as an intervention within the movements. At the same time, our work will be a way to stimulate theoretical development. *News & Letters* is both a newspaper for all the forces of revolution and a theoretical journal; in addition to being printed, it is online on both our website and social media.

Organizational growth remains an urgent need, as our [2018-19 Perspectives Thesis](#) stressed: "Its objectivity is shown in the rise of a new generation of potential revolutionaries. In order to avoid leaving philosophy as well as organization as abstractions, our local and national discussions need to take up the need for such growth, and concretely address what we are going to do about it. All our locals need growth, and for the functioning of the center and the organization as a whole, growth in the Chicago Local is a key perspective."

So let us, as we have stressed before, "prepare ourselves, theoretically as well as in daily activities in mass struggles, to influence events in a most decisive way through

concretization of our Marxist-Humanist philosophy politically....Towards that end, this year's plenum becomes a way to collectively work out our Perspectives in a way that analysis of an event and activity in mass movements lead to organizational growth as well as the self-development of masses as Reason as well as Force."²⁰

—**The Resident Editorial Board of News and Letters Committees, April 15, 2019**

²⁰ From the 1977 Call for Plenum, quoted in [this year's Call for Plenum](#).