

# NEWS & LETTERS

THEORY / PRACTICE

“Human power is its own end”—Karl Marx

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## Trump after impeachment

After the House of Representatives impeached Donald Trump and he easily beat the rap as the Senate failed to convict, he crowed that he is unrestrained. House Democrats, knowing he would not be convicted, still did not add articles of impeachment for the deaths of children in inhuman refugee camps and other human rights violations. Senators voted along party lines except for Mitt Romney adding one vote to convict.

### EDITORIAL

#### A SPLIT IN THE RULING CLASS

Beyond the political split is a split within the ruling class over whether current capitalist crises can be handled with capitalist business as usual or require ceding power to a strong man (however personally weak). Trump has tried to paper over that split, courting the ruling class by lowering taxes and gutting labor and environmental protections.

Even before impeachment Trump had stated that “Article II allows me to do whatever I want.” He taunted: “If you go after the king, you have to kill the king.” He quickly enacted payback. On Feb. 7 he fired Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman (and, to make it personal, his twin!) and called for the army to punish him for testifying against Trump. Even Gordon Sondland, such a Trump loyalist that Sondland bought his ambassadorship for a million dollars, got fired for committing perjury for Trump’s benefit only the first two out of the three times he testified.

Trump rewarded his friends with pardons and commutations of convicts who committed white-collar crimes like Trump. Michael Milken got rich (and has stayed rich) peddling worthless junk bonds.

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## VOICES FROM THE INSIDE OUT

### On becoming human

by Faruq

To successfully negotiate the transition from prison to society, there are social norms we former prisoners have to adapt to. Now every morning I board the bus to go to work. A variety of people get on the bus and immediately pull out their phones, burying themselves in whatever has their interest.

That prevents social interaction with the people around them. In general people move about as if nothing around them matters. For a former prisoner being held so many years in solitary confinement, an opportunity to talk to others, to try to find a new way out of our reality, is all important.

Many of these people are holding down multiple jobs to make ends meet. It is evident because they fall asleep on the bus. I think: How does one begin a conversation that could lead to envisioning a different reality? It is a dilemma that has to be faced, if we are to survive as a human species.

#### PRISONERS HAVE TRANSFORMED REALITY

All people become human through their participation in society according to given social norms. Yet a tendency to entrench those norms can lock the mind, hinder thinking and produce subservient people. Many of us prisoners and former prisoners have an irrepressible desire to exercise our human capacities.

We changed our reality through participation in the California hunger strikes of 2011-13 against indeterminate solitary confinement. We experienced

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## Women’s movements reach for new global stage

by Terry Moon

What has become clear in 2020 is the global nature of the women’s movements. It is a new stage which has announced itself by the international fight against femicide (see “Anti-femicide goes global,” Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*); the Women’s Marches in the U.S. and worldwide that continue to draw in new women three years after they began, despite the contradictions evident in its leadership; and by the National Women’s Meetings in Latin America, also called Encuentros, which have been gathering yearly since 1985 and now draw up to 90,000 participants.

What else announces the new moment the women’s liberation movement has reached is women’s participation in revolutions and in work to save the planet; their leadership in actions to drive neo-fascists out of power from India’s Narendra Modi to Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil and to Donald Trump of the U.S.; and the now-too-numerous-to-count demonstrations that burst forth over issues as diverse as the right of women to enter Hindu temples in India to the demand for legal abortion in Poland and Argentina.

#### IRAQI WOMEN DEMAND FREEDOM

Women’s demand to be recognized as full human beings is, as we go to press, being worked out by women in Iraq as hundreds filled the streets on Feb. 14 in Tahrir Square in Baghdad demanding freedom and declaring their right to participate in protests against their government’s corruption, widespread unemployment, and the gunning down of fellow activists.

Since October, women have been active in the protests—preparing and delivering food and caring for the wounded. Now they have taken to the streets, deepening the movement to include their liberation.

The Iraqi women and their male comrades have taken on big-shot pro-Iran Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr who in a 19-point decree tried to shame the demonstrators, pontificating about “nudity, mixing the sexes, drunkenness and debauchery.” Surprisingly, according to al-Sadr, what the demonstrators want

is Chicago! “We cannot allow Iraq to become a place like Chicago, where immorality, sexual perversion, homosexuality and debauchery are pervasive.”<sup>1</sup> Al-Sadr was not bothered by his own immorality when in January he sent his Blue Hats—read thugs—to attack protesters and gun down over ten unarmed young demonstrators.

What Iraqi women are doing is reminiscent of an uprising in another Tahrir Square, the one in Cairo, Egypt, in 2011.

In Egypt the occupation of the Square transformed human relationships between men and women—at least

for a short time.

“Society inside the square has changed,” said one of the Iraqi women’s march organizers, Fatama Ramadan, who was 23. She continued, “You can see there’s a difference (in how women are perceived) between inside and outside (of the Square).”

In response to al-Sadr’s sexist rant, the women chanted: “Our voice is not shameful, it’s the key of the revolution!” and “Stop discrimination against women! Stop gender segregation!”<sup>2</sup> The men who came to support and protect them from the threats of al-Sadr’s henchmen shouted, “I am your brother, and you are my sister!” “Revolution is my name, male silence is the real shame!” and “Freedom, revolution, feminism!”

That this historic march is not a one-time event is shown in how the women’s protests have spread to more religiously fundamentalist cities such as Najaf and Karbala. Furthermore, it is a rebellion against being dehumanized. As 30-year-old Ban Layla told Egyptian Streets, “We are here to mark our role and challenge the misogynistic culture that looks at us as though we are from a lower degree.”<sup>3</sup>

Globally, women have much in common. Issues

1. “Iraqi protests blush pink as feminists flood streets,” by Lujain Elbaldawi, *al-Monitor.com*, Feb. 14, 2020.
2. “Hundreds of Iraqi women challenge al-Sadr’s call for segregation,” by Sofia Barbarani, *AlJazeera.com*, Feb. 14, 2020.
3. “#DaughtersOfTheNation: Voices From the First Ever Women’s March in Iraq,” by Mirna Abdulaal, *Egyptianstreets.com*, Feb. 15, 2020.

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## COVID-19: A world-historic threat

by Gerry Emmett

As this is written, the COVID-19 coronavirus has continued to spread across Eurasia from its origin in China’s tormented province of Hubei. Cases have also appeared in North Africa, Brazil, the U.S. and Australia.

This pandemic is a crisis of world-historic proportions. A significant portion of those who become infected will develop serious symptoms—one study of 72,000 reported cases indicates a death rate of 2.3%, as opposed to the common flu’s rate of 0.1%. As of Feb. 27, 2,808 deaths have been reported worldwide.

One of the keys to COVID-19’s quick spread was the lack of transparency of China’s surveillance state. As the epidemic began in the city of Wuhan, officials played down its seriousness, refused to cancel public events, and persecuted health workers and citizen journalists who told the truth. Dr. Li Wenliang, who was threatened by police after issuing warnings, and later died of the disease, became a martyr in the eyes of many Chinese people.

Iran’s genocidal regime also became an instru-

ment of COVID-19’s spread throughout the Middle East and beyond. Iran has now reported the most deaths outside of China. Worldwide, the disease threatens those made most vulnerable by this current stage of capitalist reaction—the homeless, the refugees, prisoners, and all who have seen cuts in public health budgets.

Other governments, including the U.S., played along with the compromised World Health Organization in downplaying the seriousness of this crisis. They kept stock markets artificially inflated, for example, until the sight of machine guns on the highways of Italy enforcing quarantine made propagating illusions impossible. The Trump administration is still pushing the illusion that the U.S. might escape a virus that is already here.

#### HUMANITY’S METABOLISM WITH NATURE

COVID-19 has arisen a century after the last great pandemic, the Spanish flu of 1918, which killed as many as 100 million around the world. That disease spread among the military camps and ruins of World War I, and it can be argued that it was as much a class aspect of that war as was the Russian

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# WOMEN WORLDWIDE

by Artemis

*Editor's note: In celebration of International Women's Day and Women's History Month we are publishing an expanded "Women WorldWide" to show a small part of the diverse and militant global women's movement. As we go to press at the end of February, we will cover International Women's Day events in the March-April issue.*

♀



Red dresses hanging on trees, wires, fences and shrubs represent missing and murdered Wet'suwet'en women.

In February, in British Columbia, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrested several hereditary chief matriarchs of the Unist'ot'en house, a subgroup of the Wet'suwet'en people. Coastal Gas-Link Pipeline Ltd. had obtained a B.C. Supreme Court injunction to build a pipeline across unceded lands belonging to the Indigenous people. In January, the chiefs had delivered an eviction notice to the corporation, stating it was the one violating Wet'suwet'en law and that the land was necessary to their survival. Wet'suwet'en women blocked the path of the pipeline, holding a ceremony to honor the Indigenous women and girls missing and murdered in epidemic levels in the area. **The RCMP removed numerous red dresses hanging on wires as memorials.** The chiefs had filed a request for a judicial review of B.C.'s Environmental Assessment Office's decision to extend the corporation's environmental certificate, partly because it did not consider the findings of Canada's National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women that work camps—also called "man camps"—are associated with greatly increased murder and sexual violence against women.

\* \* \*

In Kenya, women's savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) normally pool their members' money so they can take turns funding their own farms and small businesses. The 25,000 members of Murang'a County Women SACCO (MCWS) instead used their communal savings to build a 102-room apartment building to be rented to university students. Some of the women did construction work to help raise funds, then built the apartment building themselves. Proceeds from the rent will be used to buy 2,000 acres of land which the women will divide among themselves to start farms and other businesses. In a country where only about 6% of women own land, they can also use their status as landowners to get bigger loans from banks. MCWS has accepted invitations from women in seven other countries to teach them how to create similar SACCOs.

\* \* \*

"Nr. 1 Tourist Attraction" is a current exhibition by artist Jimini Hignett at the Amsterdam Museum. "The Prostitution Monologues" are a series of videos of actors reading interviews Hignett had done with survivors of prostitution and photos of them wearing masks they had painted. "A Small Collection of Innocuous Objects" displays Red Light District souvenirs that "instill the idea that paid sex is as innocuous as a kitchen sink." Accompanying text links these to facts and statistics. Hignett had intended to include an emotional video of a previous exhibit in which people were invited to carve their initials into a wooden copy of "Belle," a famous sex-worker statue in Amsterdam, to represent complicity of citizens ignoring the harm of prostitution. She removed this due to pressure from the Prostitution Information Center and other pro-sex-work lobbyists who claimed it would incite violence. She said she "had not anticipated the ferocity and abusiveness" of their continued online protests of the exhibit and herself but that comments in the visitors' book are overwhelmingly positive.

\* \* \*

In 2019, Yumi Ishikawa complained on Twitter that her job, like most in Japan, had a dress code requiring women to wear high-heeled shoes, which she found painful. Her comment received over 30,000 retweets and 60,000 likes, and women shared pho-

tos of their own foot injuries from the shoes. She started a movement called #Kutoo, a play on the Japanese words for "pain" and "shoes," with a nod to the #MeToo movement. Ishikawa collected over 150,000 signatures on a petition to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to declare this dress code requirement a form of harassment. She stated, "the root cause of the problem is that (there are companies) that have rules for women only—such as a ban on wearing glasses or a requirement to wear make-up."

\* \* \*

In India, for the past two months, millions of people, especially women, have been demonstrating against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new racist citizenship law undermining India's secular constitution by attempting to redefine India as a purely Hindu country. A nationwide citizenship test, the NRC, could cause millions of legal Muslim citizens to be declared illegal aliens. Women would be most affected because they are poorer and less likely to have legal documentation or property ownership. Activist Karuna Nundy stated, "Being a woman feeds into the experience of and resistance to oppression. We know oppression and we know it viscerally. But, it's important to see how the rise of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) has been powered in part by a toxic masculinity...violent, explicitly supremacist, and hostile to women." Previously apolitical elderly housewives from conservative families have joined long-term, road-blocking sit-ins where Muslim and Hindu women of all ages stand together, even when assaulted by police.

## Zapatistas host 'Women Who Fight'

by Ángeles

In Altamirano, Chiapas, the Second International Meeting of Women who Fight was held from Dec. 27-29, 2019. Thousands of women from 49 countries were received by the Zapatistas. "They keep killing us, they demand, they order us to be well behaved," said Commander Amada of the Zapatistas during the commencement of the meeting.

**The Zapatistas stressed that "for the right to live, it is not enough to fight against machismo, we have to fight against the capitalist system, they go hand in hand."**

The main theme of the meeting was gender violence, and at the end of the convocation hundreds of women, who had been waiting to be heard, spoke out. The agenda dedicated the first day to making a single roundtable of grievances; the second to sharing ideas and experiences, and the third for culture and art. But there was not enough time to hear all the women who wanted to take the microphone.

**Roundtables, workshops, conversations and presentations of projects came together spontaneously, where women were the voice of the diverse struggles and proposals.**

The themes were: the struggle for land; against the government's genocidal megaprojects; against violence, selective killings, massacres, hegemonic medicine, economic and labor violence, prostitution; the defense of student and migrant rights, among others. The different struggles must be recognized, as they are all the fight against oppression in Mexico, Latin America and the world.

♀

by Haranda Zurco

Hands took the microphone and women began to tell one story after another: "You are not alone!" "We are all Diana!" "We are all Norma!" Facts that are not spoken because there are no words to tell them, neither for violence against land defenders like **Lilia Vázquez**, a Chilean woman killed in the fight against a Canadian mining company; nor the 13 stabs to another defender for acting against a hydroelectric dam, nor women slaughtered for building peace; **Berta Cáceres**, murdered in 2016 for loving and defending the river from death; **Guadalupe Campanur**, for preventing her land from being devastated and violated; **Eli Juárez**, Bolivian, and **Juana Guisper**, for fighting for the same reason. **Cynthia Orozco** of the Movement for Socialism (Bolivia) reads a letter calling on the diversity of struggles to unite against violence: **"IF WOMEN STRIKE, THE WORLD STOPS."**

The final agreements: 1) All make and know proposals on how to stop violence against women; 2) respond to the call of every woman from every place, race or age asking for help; 3) all the groups of women who fight and want to coordinate collectively for joint actions, exchange communications; and 4) that in the joint actions of women fighting around the world, wear a black bow in mourning for all murdered and disappeared women from all over the world.

*Translated from Praxis en América Latina, February-March 2020*

## 'Leftover Women'

by Adele

Leta Hong Fincher wrote *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (Zed Books, 2016) to debunk the Chinese government's propaganda that the status of women has been soaring since the introduction of corporate capitalism. She focused her research on the fact that women have mostly been left out of the wealth created by the real estate boom.

In the 1990s, China went from a "welfare-based housing allocation" to a "market-based system of home ownership." For most, a home is the only way to invest money. It is also a source of stability during retirement and emergencies such as job loss. Chinese society views home ownership as necessary to enter the middle class.

### Patriarchy wrecks havoc on lives

Interviewing many young, urban, professional women, Fincher found patriarchal attitudes often influence the thinking of all family members. Parents buy homes for sons or nephews, not daughters; and wives put their savings into homes owned legally by their husbands.



Letta Hong Fincher

**Women often lose**

**jobs upon marriage or childbirth and find themselves in an increasingly unequal relationship. This has been a factor in the increase in domestic violence, but it is difficult for women to escape with no job, no home and little support from the police or justice systems.**

The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) was created by the Communist Party in 1949 to uphold the revolutionary goal of the emancipation of women. But this same government agency promoted forced abortions with its "one child" policy in the 1980s and 1990s and now struggles to clean up the social damage this caused. Patriarchal social pressure for that one child to be a boy influenced sex-selective abortions, which led to China having tens of millions more men than women. Many unmarried men are forming gangs and turning to substance abuse and crime.

### Revolution turned into its opposite

The ACWF's response is not to solve the problem but to force social stability. A media propaganda campaign of articles, cartoons, and self-help industries promotes the notion that "leftover," i.e., unmarried women in their late twenties, are miserable because their education, income, and professional positions are supposedly intimidating to men. There is no attempt to make men more attractive to upwardly mobile women. The government hopes this control of women by family and state will keep them from fomenting dissent. The ACWF also attempts to blame women for the increase in birth defects, claiming the cause is delayed childbearing. In reality it is mostly caused by industrial pollution.

**Fincher explains that the status of women throughout the history of China has risen and fallen as if part of a cycle. She explores previous eras in which Chinese women achieved some degree of liberation and how this freed them to fight for philosophical, social and governmental change. Each time, patriarchal attitudes were never fully uprooted, leading to a withdrawal of their freedoms in a counter-revolution.**

For example, in 1907, feminist writer He-Yin Zhen introduced Marxism to China and criticized Confucianism, stating, "The husband becomes identified with yang and the wife yin. The relationship between men and women thus became one of absolute inequality through cosmic abstraction." Fincher links this struggle for greater freedom for both women and men to the overthrow of the Qing Empire. However, Chinese women continue to be haunted by the Confucian doctrine that women have a "yin" nature, suiting them to serve men, who belong in the "yang" public sphere.

Fincher describes extreme state repression of feminist activists but finds more women becoming aware of and reacting against increasing patriarchal oppression. Activists find creative ways to organize and demonstrate. More Chinese women reject marriage, which social analysts say could foretell some sort of long-term change. This book is valuable for depicting the destructiveness of patriarchy and counter-revolution and the importance of the struggle for personal freedom in the struggle for revolution.

# Indigenous create tools of resistance

by J.G.F. Héctor

On Feb. 22, the Assembly from Oaxaca in Defense of the Land and Territory met with more than 15 Native peoples attending from all over this southwestern state. It was part of the nationwide three Days of Action

## LETTER FROM MEXICO

(Feb. 20-22) called by the Zapatista Army for National Liberation and the National Indigenous Congress to commemorate one year since the murder of Indigenous activist Samir Flores.

After an opening statement, representatives from three different communities spoke briefly about their struggle. One of them was the community of Capulálpam de Méndez, which just a few days before had obtained a legal ruling declaring mining forbidden on its territory.

**In Oaxaca, several communities rule themselves by the customs and traditional system, which allows them to make local decisions autonomously. Capulálpam has turned this legal recognition into a tool for resistance.**

What has to be pointed out is that, among the spokespersons for the Assembly and the representatives from the communities, there were almost no women. This speaks to the profound changes and social uprooting that still have to be worked out within the movements themselves. A second concern is the lack of reflection about the limits of the customs and traditional system, which does allow communities to manage their land and to decide how to distribute their share of federal funds, but which still works within the frame of the national state and the capitalist system.

### ACTIONS OF RESISTANCE

After listening to the experiences of these three communities, the assembly divided itself into four groups, each of which would discuss proposals about what to do next, and then present them to the rest of the attendees. Then the assembly just went south, since most of the proposals were merely denunciations of how companies and government are trying to despoil peoples from their land. In the “best” case, proposals were reduced to specific actions such as demonstrations, dates for a second meeting of the assembly, etc.

Clearly, the movements present in the gathering have no illusions about capitalist “progress.” As they declared in their closing statement, “...the view of ‘development’ of neoliberal capitalism and the current administrations is in total opposition to our way of life.” However, without working out philosophically and practically how to overcome such contradiction, as well as what it means to actually give birth to a new society, the rejection of capitalism dissolves into mere actions of resistance.

**These philosophical/methodological issues should be, in our view, an integral part of the assemblies from below—not as collateral “study circles,” but as serious collective reflections which would determine the activity and the organizational life of the struggles themselves.**

This is precisely what it would mean to recreate Marx’s concept of revolution in permanence for our day. Can we recognize the importance of it in order

## Prison slave labor

**Petersburg, Va.**—I reported several months back that federal prisoner slave labor was producing comic books for the U.S. market. It now appears that prison slave labor has penetrated further into the mainstream.

To recap, the UNICOR corporation pays federal prisoners from 23¢ to \$1.15 per hour, often working 15½-hour shifts, with unpaid lunch and dinner times, but no other breaks. UNICOR is not supposed to compete with U.S. companies or give them the benefits of slave labor. Nevertheless, UNICOR prints comic books and graphic novels clearly intended for the U.S. market, under the ostensible justification that they do it for Japanese companies.

Now, UNICOR has moved beyond the limited market of “independent” comics. UNICOR at Petersburg Low is cutting advertisements that state Estée Lauder makes the “#1 Foundation in the U.S.”

**The front of the advertising card shows three models, all in black turtlenecks. It reads, “Free 10-day sample. See details.” The back lists three products: “Stay-in-Place Makeup,” “Radiant Concealer,” and “Matte Powder Foundation.”**

It is unclear whether the cards are intended for mailings or magazines or trays in shops. They have no instructions on how to obtain the sample.

What is clear is that these cards are processed by prisoners at the Petersburg Low UNICOR. There is no indication on the cards of prison slave labor. Their origins are concealed. —Eric Pepke

to move forward in our battle against capitalism? Can we look collectively into this philosophy?

### NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

The Assembly from Oaxaca in Defense of the Land and Territory decided to constitute itself as a statewide organization in Oaxaca, and agreed on a date for a second gathering and for a national demonstration. Surely the emergence of any new organization from below should be welcomed and supported, for it means a new front in the fight against capitalism. However, once again, an organization without a philosophy of revolution in permanence as its inner source of self-movement is at risk of stopping short in its effort to overcome the system. Can we make this philosophy an integral part of this newly formed organization?

## Copper miners strike



Workers walk the picket line against Asarco/Grupo Mexico.

The strike of more than 1,500 copper miners and smelters in Arizona and Texas against Asarco/Grupo Mexico has entered its fifth month, as workers face off against their intransigent boss. Union membership is fractured between Steelworkers, Electrical Workers, Teamsters, Machinists, Operating Engineers, Boilermakers and Pipefitters, but that has not interfered with unity on the picket lines.

Miners, who had worked without a contract for more than a year, walked out in October after Asarco presented what it called its “last, best and final offer” as prelude to unilaterally imposing its settlement on union workers. They had not gotten a raise in the more than a decade that Grupo Mexico controlled the mines, and Asarco was demanding a pension freeze and greater healthcare contributions; but current violations of labor laws make the walk-out a strike over unfair labor practices.

**In the past the company has paid out close to \$2 million in fines—just the cost of doing business—for environmental, health and safety violations. In December Asarco formally imposed their last, best and final offer and counted on replacing strikers.**

Support from other union members and communities around Asarco sites has been strong. Many strikers who have found other work, temporary or steady, still come back to help maintain picket lines against scabs. But opposing the power of an international conglomerate like Grupo Mexico that can call on the government for support will test even this solidarity. Union officials have put their hopes in documenting the extensive outlaw record of Asarco before the National Labor Relations Board even though Trump’s lackeys control it.

**In the Reagan era in 1984 News & Letters’ Labor Editor Felix Martin spent time with copper miners in Arizona on strike against Phelps Dodge since the year before. He delivered messages of solidarity from UAW workers in his California GM plant and from News and Letters Committees. The miners returned that solidarity. He was able to report that attacks by the company and police hadn’t broken the spirit of miners, women and children.**

One 10-year-old miner’s daughter had refused to say the pledge of allegiance in school, because she saw the words were a lie. The whole town was involved in the strike. Felix Martin called the People’s Clinic serving strikers a real unity of mental and manual labor, and he and his wife only got to stay in the motel because they were strike supporters.

Phelps Dodge eventually broke the union, but the legacy of copper miners (and air traffic controllers and meat packers at Hormel) challenging bosses during Reagan retrogression in the 1980s helped inspire teachers, GM workers and now copper miners to confront their bosses and command support from their communities.

—Bob McGuire

Do you have something to say about labor? In *News & Letters* people in struggle speak for themselves. We want to hear from you. Contact info on page 9.

## Workers strike Aptiv!

In Zacatecas, Durango and Chihuahua, more than 18,000 workers at the U.S. company Aptiv’s *maquiladora* plants walked out on Jan. 30 and 31 because, after a 120-peso wage increase, Aptiv withheld much more than that for taxes. Workers said: “We thought that the labor reform was to improve the conditions of workers.”

**In Zacatecas, on Jan. 31, thousands of workers found that 687 pesos of their 1,100 pesos weekly wages had been withheld for taxes. They decided to march to the Tax Administration Service (SAT) rather than start work.**

Petra García, representative of the workers, said: “We made an appointment with the Treasury for Feb. 4 to see why this time the year’s tax was deducted in one month. People are going without food.”

Workers at four plants went back to work after getting an agreement that SAT would suspend collection of income tax, and that same day the money it had deducted was refunded via electronic banking.

### WORKERS FORCED ACTION

In Chihuahua, workers at Aptiv plants in Ciudad Juárez and Parral also stopped work. One worker said that Aptiv executives “promised to return the money that afternoon, but as loans and not wages, which we refused.” A group of young women from the *maquiladora* said: “We are asking for what belongs to us, for what is right. The bosses are hiding. The wage increase was 120 pesos and they took a lot more. So why are we working?”

**In Parral city, security guards stopped all but 50 workers from getting out to demonstrate. More than half a million workers in the state of Chihuahua will see their weekly salary reduced under new fiscal regulations.**

In Durango, 8,000 striking workers in two plants rejected the company’s proposals: (1) to return money withheld to the workers and instead withhold it in installments; and (2) to absorb the tax deductions, because this would only work for one occasion, while the problem would continue for the following months.

Thanks to the strike, the workers managed to reduce the income tax by the company compensating the Treasury. For its part, the Conciliation and Arbitration Board indicated that the income tax reduction should be applied as of April, by law.

### TAKING FROM POOR TO PROP UP RICH

The current regime in Mexico supports the extractivist neoliberal system. It not only offers big capital the optimal conditions for super-exploitation and global accumulation, but now snatches more from workers’ income in order to finance the social programs with which it hopes to deceive the 30 million voters who are beginning to challenge the “change” of the current regime.

—Translated from Praxis en América Latina, Feb.-March 2020, which cites articles in La Jornada, El Sol de Parral and El Heraldito de Chihuahua on Feb. 1, 2020.

## Mental health strike

**Oakland, Calif.**—On Dec. 16, 2019, 4,000 mental health workers at Kaiser Permanente HMO here began a five-day strike, once again calling attention to a serious lack of resources to provide timely care. Therapists have staged, over several years, work actions against participating in this system of what they termed “unethical delays” in providing care.

Htun Lin reported in *N&L* that Kaiser had been forced to pay a \$4,000,000 fine in 2013 “for systematically understaffing its psychiatry department, falsifying patients’ appointment records to conceal long wait times, and providing patients with misleading information regarding the care available to them.”

### AFTER SO MUCH ADO, NOTHING CHANGES

After so much ado, everything is the same. Kaiser fulfilled its legal obligations through clever record-keeping. Patients trying to access care for depression or other mental health issues continue to face an obstacle course. Kaiser meets the standards for “timely access” through call-center intake assessment interviews which, in effect, ration care.

**Patients relay their problems in a phone interview to a healthcare professional, but actual treatment doesn’t start. Treatment is put off, sometimes with dire consequences, until a follow-up appointment scheduled weeks or sometimes months later.**

Healthcare workers try to unite science with the well-being of the human. For over two decades Htun Lin chronicled how healthcare restructuring, organized by bean counters, has divided them. Healthcare workers, especially nurses, have carried on a protracted struggle against HMO policies that have undermined their efforts to provide care. The barrier they—and we all—face is how capitalism presents itself as “objective” and “scientific.” In contrast to the lie of this reality outside of the material well-being of the human, or the planet, stands Marx’s unity of science and life, beginning from human essence, humans freely determining their own life activity.

—Ron Kelch

## FROM THE WRITINGS OF RAYADUNAYEVSKAYA

*Editor's note: This 60th anniversary of the "Year of Africa," the turning point of the African revolutions, sheds light on today's dilemmas. The new passions and new forces manifested in the African revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s "opened a new page in the dialectic of thought as well as in world history....Africa was charged with a dynamism of ideas that opened new paths to revolution and looked for new roads to development," as Raya Dunayevskaya put it in Philosophy and Revolution, from Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao. And yet, with political independence came the separation between leaders and masses, neocolonialism and counter-revolution. We reprint for the first time Dunayevskaya's May 28, 1962, Weekly Political Letter, written immediately after her trip to West Africa and originally titled, "The African Revolutions at the Crossroads: Role of Labor, the Single Party, Neo-Colonialism, State-Capitalism, and Africa, Africa, Africa." The original can be found in #3038-3041 in the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, within a series of letters on many topics, including several others on Africa, #2906-3152.*

May 28, 1962

**THERE IS HARDLY A DAY** one spends in Africa, especially West Africa, when one isn't torn by such conflicting emotions that he is both at a loss for words and so full of them that every word, literally, has a double meaning. You come to Nigeria and see that there really has been no revolution, just a change in administrations.

You therefore listen, inspired, to the opposition: the Nigerian Youth Congress, the "left" of the Trade Unions that talk of "foreign gold" and wish to break with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the young Hausa rebels that talk of how the emirs still rule the North, with "Zik's help," the same Zik [Nnamdi Azikiwe, first president of Nigeria] who had been in the forefront of the continental revolution long before all other "lefts"—Kwame Nkrumah [first president of Ghana], Sékou Touré [first president of Guinea], Modibo Keita [first president of Mali]—even dreamed of nationalism.

Then, suddenly, you hear the "solution": follow the example of Ghana, the single-party state, *Osagyefo*<sup>1</sup> will lead; never mind Europe, what is [the 1956 Hungarian Revolution] to us here where Britain holds on, America horns in, and even the Negro American does not see to return to his "homeland"—and your heart sickens.

You come to Ghana, and, at first, you are elated, for—compared to Lagos, Nigeria—Accra, Ghana, is clean, with wide boulevards where but yesterday there was bush, and the general public does feel it has had more than a change of administration; there has been a genuine political revolution.

**Then you pick up the press—and the adulation of Osagyefo, "the Leader," "our Light," "the all-knowing," "the father of not only our country but all of Africa," "Nkrumahism, our philosophy, our politics, our life, and our song" sickens you all over again, as if you were watching the Kremlin in the heyday of Stalin, "the sun of the Himalayas."**

You begin to go deeper into the workers' ranks—those that struck and had to retreat, work overtime without pay "to make up for loss of time during non-patriotic strike" and now must also, out of their small wage, put 5% to 10% away in forced savings—and then you meet some in education who refused to have classes in "Nkrumahism" unless at least a pamphlet was produced that told them *what* it is in black and white, not just in empty oratory; finally you hear it whispered, "Of course, you can't tell *Osagyefo*, but Russia is awful as a country to live in, their technicians are too expensive to keep and not half as efficient as they would like you to believe; as for the love the Russians are supposed to have for the Africans, forget it, it isn't there."

By the time you hear that Nkrumah is also calling back the head of the United Africa Company<sup>2</sup>—the very one against whom, back in the 1940s, the strikes were held and the revolution unfolded—to bring about "higher labor productivity and efficiency," you are ready to write Ghana off, too. Then you meet a South African who has come for aid and gotten it, or a Gambian<sup>3</sup> who has not a single library or bookstore in town, not just reading, but literally "eating up" all books on Karl Marx, easily available here, and once again you are torn apart.

**YOU TRY ESPECIALLY HARD** to see the positive aspects of Pan-Africanism in the best example of it—Sékou Touré's Guinea. Here the press is not so full of the "cult of personality." Rather, the numerous quotations from Touré are on a theoretical

1. "Osagyefo," meaning "redeemer" in Akan, was an honorific that Nkrumah claimed.

2. United Africa Company was an imperialist British trading company active in West Africa.

3. The Gambia was still a British colony in 1962.

# African revolutions at the crossroads

plane—and he has, not just an ego like Nkrumah's, but a theory of "full Re-Africanization" so that the single party aspect is palatable, even "democratic," for it reaches into the smallest village level.

But in the airport, or at the Ministry of Information, there is the white French CPer [Communist Party member] who sums you up in a moment, refuses a visa or follows your every move with such suspicion that even if you had your African-speaking friends who helped you to get down to the people, you really couldn't find out much.

And the brush with the Russians and demand that the Russian ambassador be recalled as responsible for stirring up the non-patriotic strikes?<sup>4</sup> Well, if the Russians are in disfavor today, the Chinese are the favorite ones—obviously Touré thinks that no one can use *him*—but that he can use all for he knows where he is going and no one is fooling *him*—neither the French Communist Party nor the American capitalists who are also being invited in; neither the Russian sputniks nor the Chinese communes hold out any fear for him who is full of Africa, Africa, Africa. All he needs is labor, labor, labor.

**AND THOUGH THAT PAN-AFRICANISM** is the umbrella that hides not only the unbridgeable gulf between the kingdom of Ethiopia and the Afro-communalistic state of Guinea, but also all three varieties of Pan-Africanism—Nkrumahist, Zikist, and the Negritude of Touré—you meet still another—Léopold Sédar Senghor [first president of Senegal], the poet who writes so movingly of humanism, the most learned who quotes with equal ease Marx and Father [Pierre Teilhard de] Chardin, the one who prefers art to "science" but is the most efficient in the administrative angle of the plan, the man of Paris that can live in Dakar, Senegal, because that too is Paris, with the wide boulevards and more majestic Atlantic to substitute for the quiet Seine, but both having the mass of books and endless variety of bookshops, goods, and culture, when just below begin the slums that rival Ibadan's [in Nigeria].

You walk with a Wolof friend who says suddenly, as he looks at the white settlers and coiffure shops, and more shops and more shops, all French-owned and De Gaullist, "When the second revolution will come to Senegal, we will have another Algeria!"

**YOU TRY TO GET AWAY**, go into the bush where not just neocolonialism but full colonialism—wave Britannia—rules: the colony and protectorate of the Gambia. There you will meet up with the coming revolution, with the first stages of independence, where the nation is one in wanting out, where this oppression and yet the humor is there—that you even see the *international* aspect of tribalism.

For it is a fact that, whether English or French speaking, each African country speaks that official language only in the cities and only for the whites. Among themselves, not only in the hinterland but among the sophisticated in the cities, it is the tribal

4. In November 1961 Touré's government expelled the Russian ambassador from Guinea, providing an opening for both China and the U.S.

Read "The African Revolutions and the World Economy," chapter 7 in *Philosophy and Revolution*, by Raya Dunayevskaya

"Where de Gaulle deprived Guinea of even its telephones, the daring of the Guineans inspired the French Left to go to Guinea to help them. The crucial element, then, was the masses' confidence that they, and not dead things, whether machines or lack of machines, shape the course of history."

"Just as the vision of undiminished freedom achieved decolonization, so the leaders' isolation from the very people who made the revolution led to the dependence upon existing world state powers and the emergence of neocolonialism."

To order, see page 7



Part of the protest near army headquarters in Khartoum, Sudan, April 7, 2019.

language that conveys the small talk and the big ideas of freedom, freedom, freedom. And you soon find out that it is not only the language of that tribe in that country, but the tribe that was also in the other country and the one further away yet when they had their own wonderful cultures and empires.

And so to this day, Wolof will take you a long way not only in the Gambia but in Senegal, much better than French, in fact, even as Hausa will be better for you not only in the north of Nigeria but in Dahomey [today called Benin], and Mandingo, and Fulah, and Ibo and Yoruba, and Ewe. Whoever told you the Jews were "the rootless cosmopolitans," the "wandering world figure without a country"—wait till you meet the African; yes, he knows someone in every part of that continent, East, West, North, South, and *has a means of communication with him*.

Africa, my Africa, how the imperialists have divided you up, massacred and enslaved, robbed you of men and soil, left you with neither roads nor clothes, and illiterate, ah, illiterate. What of the thousands of years of history you can recount if you cannot today read the latest law of the land that tells you you cannot read "foreign" (foreign? And who are these Britishers if not foreign?) literature—"subversive," "propaganda-bred hatred," "Russian," "Communist," "Marxist."

Well, you are back in stride with your African friends and can say with that wonderful Mandingo who sticks close to his "leader," "Capitalism, imperialism, colonialism—I don't like it. out, out, out. I want my freedom, my land, and I'll work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for nothing to restore its richness."

**Then comes the rude awakening: yes, what of the role of labor? Of course, you hear, we**

**are for labor: we have no other class, but if the unions dare to mix in politics, we ask our members to withdraw their membership. And the unions say, sure, we aren't given credit for it, but it was our strikes that compelled con-**

**stitutional reform, but now that we're facing self-government, the workers have no right to always want to strike!**

You return to reason with the intellectual but you get no different answers from those out of power than those in it: first let's get the imperialist out, then we'll talk of which road of the Pan-African roads; you cannot speak of "what after," when we haven't even got independence; oh, yes, I read about Hungary, and even the East German wall, but Russia is not our enemy; Trotskyism? Well, they can betray "again" (!); the world? My world is Africa, and for that we need unity, which means single party; we need to industrialize, which means using both sides—no, I'm not asking the price; that too can be talked about later, later, later.

Suddenly you feel you have no common language after all. You thought it was the philosophy—Marxism? But who wants to begin seeing differences between Marxism and Communism? Ah, the youth—yes, the wonderful, high school youth who, God knows where or how—maybe it was through Ghana or Guinea, God preserve them after all!—they got hold of Marx, even asked you to speak about your version, talked most knowingly of everything from "surplus value" (I swear it) to Abolitionism, African socialism, humanism—the future, the really true, new human world. Yes, the youth and the strikers—another revolution is on its way.

—Raya

P.S. The pull of the two nuclear powers is not only over the domination over Africa—and neocolonialism is a fact, not just a dead horse the African leaders keep beating for propaganda purposes at UN sessions—above all, it is a suction process for the world market, world stage of production: stified production in its full or "free enterprise" sense. This suction process is the tragedy of the African Revolutions whose leadership is so weighted down with the consciousness of underdevelopment that they cannot see that forced labor is evil even if it is "for the country, your own country, the one that finally belongs to its people, Africa for the Africans."

But I preferred in this letter not to talk in the cold language of economic laws even though production relations are as alive and decisive as any talk of Negritude. For it is first of all necessary for the white to get the feel of Black Africa, to take it to its bosom as is, in order, together with it, to work out a common solution of worldwide and historic import that will not separate technologically advanced from technologically underdeveloped. So let's leave statistics for another time.

—R.

## ESSAY

## Ecosocialism and post-Marx Marxism

by Franklin Dmitryev

Capitalism is robbing young people of their future and is threatening the world with climate catastrophe. That view has become much more common, both in the climate justice movement and among young people generally.

Where to turn, then? Socialism is growing in popularity, especially among people under 30, although its meaning is contested. Crucially, it carries the baggage of the destructive history of state-capitalist countries that called themselves Communist. The “socialist” welfare states present no real alternative, having accepted capitalism and not coincidentally being major emitters of greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Since the late 1980s and especially in the last two decades, some activists and theoreticians promoted “ecosocialism” as the way forward. Besides having various meanings, it raises the question of how adding “eco” sets it apart. How can there be a nonecological socialism—especially one that has so turned into opposite that it wrecks massive ecological destruction?

**One thing they all lack is the concept of post-Marx Marxism as pejorative, beginning with Frederick Engels. Many want to revise Marx in light of the failures of state-capitalist regimes that called themselves “Marxist.”**

Even anti-Stalinist post-Marx Marxists muddied the path to true liberation by evading the question of our age, what happens after revolution, and thus failing to give the movement ground with which to oppose counter-revolution coming from within revolution. Much of it even fell into the defense of supposed anti-imperialists such as Syria’s genocidal Bashar al-Assad.

If we are to re-create socialism for our day, a fundamental criticism of post-Marx Marxism is necessary—including its narrowing of Marx’s revolutionary humanism, his all-sided concept of human development as liberation, which encompassed the human relationship to nature, the relations between the sexes, and the abolition of the division between mental and manual labor.

#### STATE-CAPITALISM IS THE OPPOSITE OF SOCIALISM

Consider two of the most prominent ecosocialists, Joel Kovel and Michael Lowy, who co-wrote the 2001 International Ecosocialist Manifesto and were among founders of the International Ecosocialist Network in 2007. Their manifesto announced:

“We see ecosocialism not as the denial but as the realization of the ‘first-epoch’ socialisms of the twentieth century, in the context of the ecological crisis. Like them, it builds on the insight that capital is objectified past labor, and grounds itself in the free development of all producers, or to use another way of saying this, an undoing of the separation of the producers from the means of production.

“We understand that this goal was not able to be implemented by first-epoch socialism, for reasons too complex to take up here, except to summarize as various effects of underdevelopment in the context of hostility by existing capitalist powers. This conjuncture had numerous deleterious effects on existing socialisms, chiefly, the denial of internal democracy along with an emulation of capitalist productivism....

“Ecosocialism retains the emancipatory goals of first-epoch socialism, and rejects both the attenuated, reformist aims of social democracy and the productivist structures of the bureaucratic variations of socialism. It insists, rather, upon redefining both the path and the goal of socialist production in an ecological framework.”<sup>1</sup>

**What is totally written out of this historical summation is the counter-revolution that came from within the Russian Revolution. The fact that revolutions as great as that ended up being transformed into opposite, into state-capitalism, and that these totalitarian regimes called themselves Marxist, only served to disorient genuine revolutionaries.**

The “productivism” of these societies, their drive to industrialize no matter the cost to environment or to workers, did not stem from some alleged roots in Marx’s theory but from the law of motion of capitalism, which these states had no choice but to follow because the production relations were capitalistic.

Our ecosocialists draw the wrong lesson from history: lumping Marx in with Stalinist “productivism,” yet failing to grapple with how to prevent an ecosocialist revolution from turning into opposite.

#### LOWY: SEEING ‘PRODUCTIVISM’ IN MARX

Lowy makes clear his ambivalence toward Marx. On the one hand, “For Marx, the supreme goal of technical progress is not the infinite accu-

mulation of goods (‘having’) but the reduction of the working day and the accumulation of free time (‘being’).” But right after this he lumps Marx together with Engels, charging them with productivism “to the extent that one often sees in Marx and Engels... a tendency to make the ‘development of the productive forces’ the principal vector of progress, along with an insufficiently critical attitude toward industrial civilization, notably in its destructive relationship to the environment....It requires that Marxists undertake a deep critical revision of their traditional conception of ‘productive forces’ and that they break radically with the ideology of linear progress and with the technological and economic paradigm of modern industrial civilization....

“Socialism would mean above all the social appropriation of these productive capacities, putting them at the service of the workers....

“The experience of the Soviet Union illustrates the problems that result from such a collectivist appropriation of the capitalist productive apparatus....

“What, then, is ecosocialism? It is a current of ecological thought and action that appropriates the fundamental gains of Marxism while shaking off its productivist dross” (*Ecosocialism*, pp. 2-3, 21, 6).

It turns out that what makes a socialist “eco” is criticizing Marx for “productivism.” It’s not post-Marx Marxism but Marx himself that is to be blamed and revised.

Trotskyist ecosocialists like Lowy are quick to criticize Marx but never rethink the fetish of the Plan that pervades Trotskyism. Planning, planning, planning is the overwhelming sense one gets from Lowy’s *Ecosocialism*, and not only in the chapter on “Democratic Planning.” It is the real answer, as long as this time ecosocialists make it democratic and stipulate that it take ecology into account.

#### KOVEL: ‘INTRINSIC VALUE,’ OR NATURE AS SUBJECT

Where Lowy hails from Trotskyism, Kovel came out of the Greens. His big criticism of Marx is for “foreshortening of the intrinsic value of nature.”<sup>2</sup>

**The deep ecology concept of “intrinsic value” is a subjective attribute of human morality and psychology, passed off as an objective, transhistorical attribute of nature—in other words, a kind of fetishism:**

“This original, *intrinsic* value, may be thought of as the primary appropriation of the world for each person....intrinsic value is a kind of ablation of our productive power; that is, we intrinsically value the nature that we have done nothing to, that will always stand and beckon, that is our primordium and cosmos...both sensuously immediate and eternally beyond our ken and grasp.” (*Enemy of Nature*, p. 212)

Trying to correct Marx’s concept of value by introducing “intrinsic value” as a spiritual essence, outside humanity and beyond history, culminates in the mystification of Nature as Subject. It goes back to an old idea that environmental destructiveness is due to an “anthropocentric” attitude, so we must put nature at the center. That leads to displacing subjects of revolution, who can only be humans. This is no way to help spontaneous revolts of workers and other groups of people develop into the self-organization of a new society.

**One result is that the abolition of the division between mental and manual labor is missing from sketches of the new ecosocialist society, whether that be in Kovel’s *The Enemy of Nature* or in the ecosocialist manifestos. Yet the need to begin breaking down that division even before the revolution, and certainly during and after it, is one of the foremost lessons of 20th Century revolutions.**

In contrast to the formula that “ecosocialism [is] a struggle for use-value,”<sup>3</sup> Marx’s socialism was never about use-value over exchange-value. He dove deeper to the forms of labor that produce use-value and value: concrete labor and abstract labor. This two-fold nature of labor in capitalist society is “cruc-

cial to an understanding of political economy,”<sup>4</sup> yet it plays no part in ecosocialist theory. Without it, a theory cannot center on human activity, as alienated labor, as struggle against alienation, as the goal of a new society based on free self-activity.

#### DUNAYEVSKAYA: RECOVERING THE TOTALITY OF MARX’S PHILOSOPHY

The impulse to rethink what socialism and Marxism mean is surely correct. The best ecosocialists, like Kovel, are reaching for a philosophical basis for such rethinking, but get in their own way when they assume that productivism is part of Marx’s theory.

That Stalin’s USSR could not be considered a workers’ state, let alone any kind of socialism, should already have been clear by the time he signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler’s Germany in 1939. It was this shock that forced Raya Dunayevskaya to begin rethinking the predominant assumptions about Marxism.

Working out the theory that Russia had become state-capitalist, she highlighted the lack of “political and social rule” by the working class, as against the common Marxist fetish of nationalized property and state plan supposedly making it non-capitalist. This quickly led her to Marx’s 1844 philosophic moment, his concept of alienated labor and the

self-activity of the worker as key, and his opposition to “vulgar communism.”<sup>5</sup>

**The total contradiction of counter-revolution coming from within the revolution spurred her to question what had become of Marxist thought. This led to recognizing Marx’s work as a philosophy of revolution in permanence and disentangling it from what post-Marx Marxism has made of it.**

Where ecosocialists always single out capitalism’s “need for growth” (*Ecosocialism*, p. 84; *Enemy of Nature*, pp. 38-47), Dunayevskaya renewed Marx’s absolute general law of capitalist accumulation, reflecting the domination of dead labor (capital) over living labor.<sup>6</sup> She showed this happening in Stalin’s Russia, with production of capital goods outdistancing consumer goods—the trend ecosocialists see as “productivism”—as a sign of the counter-revolution.

Marx, she saw, split the question of the plan into two, theorizing the duality of “the despotic plan of capital against the cooperative plan of freely associated labor.”<sup>7</sup> Lowy cites Trotskyist theoretician Ernest Mandel as an authority on “democratic planning,” with only the mild criticism that “until the late 1980s he did not include the ecological issue as a central aspect of his economic arguments” (*Ecosocialism*, p. 106 n. 9). Dunayevskaya, however, exposes “Mandel’s utter perversion” of Marx’s *Capital*, which Mandel linked to Russian state-capitalism and separated from workers as subjects and the goal of *freely associated labor*.<sup>8</sup>

Today’s climate struggles contain an implicit rejection of the notion of development corresponding to capitalism’s law of motion. The answer given by most post-Marx Marxists, planning and nationalization, hardly rises to this challenge, even if a promise to be democratic and ecological is added. Nor does substituting Nature as subject solve anything. What is needed is the kind of totally new human relations that could provide a basis for a rational, unalienated, freely self-determined human relationship with nature.

To achieve the new vision and new direction needed to sustain and advance ecosocialism, its challenge to the capitalist concept of development has to directly oppose the dialectical inversion of subject and object, and root itself in the potential of the self-developing human being. Marx’s dialectical approach, as a total philosophy, as reinterpreted for our day by Marxist-Humanism, is indispensable for arriving at that goal.

4. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (Penguin Books, 1990), p. 132.  
5. See chapter 9 of *Russia: From Proletarian Revolution to State-Capitalist Counter-Revolution: Selected Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya* (Haymarket Books, 2018).

6. See Franklin Dmitryev, “Ecosocialism and Marx’s Humanism,” Aug.-Sept. 2009 *N&L*.

7. See Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 until Today*, chapter 6.

8. See chapter 6 of *Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution in Permanence for Our Day: Selected Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya* (Haymarket Books, 2019).



Chicago Climate Strike, Dec. 6, 2019

1. The manifesto and some other important collective ecosocialist declarations are reproduced in Michael Lowy, *Ecosocialism: A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe* (Haymarket Books, 2015). The quoted passage appears on pp. 80-81.

2. Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* (Zed Books, 2007), p. 232.

3. *The Enemy of Nature*, p. 215. Similarly, Lowy declares: “The very idea of socialism—contrary to its miserable bureaucratic deformations—is that of production of use values” (*Ecosocialism*, p. 2).

## CLIMATE STRUGGLES

How important Indigenous struggles are to the current moment of unrest (see “Australia’s Megafires Lay Bare Capitalism’s Climate Death March,” Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*) is starkly shown by the Canadian nationwide revolt in support of the Wet’suwet’en. When heavily armed Royal Canadian Mounted Police attacked the Unist’ot’en resistance camp, blockades and protests spread from Victoria to Halifax, shutting down train traffic. The camp is blocking construction of pipelines that would



carry tar sands oil and fracked gas, adding to Canada’s contribution to the climate emergency. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau claims the cops are “upholding the rule of law,” but ignores the massive violations of First Nations laws that are supposedly part of the law of the land.

**Supporter of Indigenous struggles**  
**Chicago**

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The raging fires and now floods in Australia and the new coronavirus are examples of the many problems facing the entire human race with such danger that our only hope of survival is to end the many warlike rivalries between nations. These conflicts—like the U.S. trade war with China and our resumption of the nuclear arms race with Russia—are simply a waste of our collective energies and are making it impossible to act decisively to solve the growing world crises like climate change, water shortages, overpopulation and the outbreaks of deadly diseases like Ebola, AIDS and the coronavirus that threaten us all. It is so important that all people see that only by acting in unity and cooperation with each other is there any hope of saving our threatened planet from becoming a death trap for the entire human race. There has never been a time in the past when love and respect for each other was so important as it is right now! I am sending \$10 to renew my subscription for two more years. I’m including \$5 more to support your compassionate and deeply needed prisoner support program.

**Rama Kumar**  
**Fairfax, Calif.**

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I absolutely love *N&L*! It is awesome how there is more revealing news in such a small publication than you find in status quo newspapers, national news, or even on TV. My daughter currently lives in Australia. I never hear squat on regular news and did not know that 250,000-plus people were evacuated over there and other nightmare disasters. Thank you!

**Prisoner**  
**Twin Falls, Idaho**

## LABOR STRUGGLES

Jeff Bezos, the billionaire head of amazon.com, pledged to give away \$10 billion

(without which he would still be the richest person in the world by far) to fund “ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change.” One of the main reasons he made that pledge is surely the pressure he is getting from amazon.com employees, who point out the company’s role in the march toward total destruction (“Google and Amazon Workers Rebel,” Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*). They have already pointed out the hypocrisy



# READERS' VIEWS

of pledging this fantastic sum while refusing to take their advice to stop helping fossil fuel companies extract every last drop of oil. One of the signs Bezos must see as most dangerous is the growing cooperation between white-collar workers in Amazon Employees for Climate Justice and warehouse workers trying to organize. The warehouse workers are asking why Bezos can drop \$10 billion and not find enough money to lift their wages out of poverty, reduce their deadly and crippling speedup, and implement health and safety measures in warehouses. When workers organize, the bosses try to take over their issues—exactly the way the Saudi ruler eases restrictions on women and simultaneously imposes harsh prison terms on the women who rebelled by driving.

**Environmental justice activist**  
**Southern California**

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The Warren Tech Center of General Motors used to employ 16,500; now it is down to 3,300. (See “GM Strikers Fight Capital’s Drive to Impoverish Workers,” Nov.-Dec. 2019 *N&L*.) General Motors announced it was paying smaller bonuses to temporary workers, who already are paid only half of what “permanent” workers earn. Every large enterprise divides workers.

**Reader**  
**Michigan**

## RACIST POLITICS

The presidential state of the union address was the most unbelievable display of the patronization of Black people that I have seen in a long while. Trump will talk about how well it was received and that it was the best state of the union address ever, since he is a legend in his own mind. What was disturbing is how clueless the dude really is, promoting a 100-year-old icon of Black success with the promotion to a Brigadier General of a Tuskegee airman who was also recognized at the Super Bowl on Sunday, and then recognizing one of the most xenophobic, misogynistic representatives of racist rhetoric in the country, Rush Limbaugh, and giving one of the most divisive entities in this country the Presidential Medal of Freedom. One of the ironies is that he even has disdain for that award. Until today, only the president has hung that award around a recipient’s neck; never a first lady and never in such a forum. The most interesting response was Nancy Pelosi ripping up her copy of his speech. The best part of the evening in my mind was the thoughtful Democratic response by Michigan’s Governor.

**Robert Taliaferro**  
**Black River Falls, Wisc.**

## ELECTION CONTRADICTIONS

Important points, but by no means limited to Republican policies, are that the contradictions in electoral politics USA have seriously sharpened in the past decade, with increased cyber vulnerability and at the same time increased cyber accessibility. Voter suppression is also partly indirect, by flawed technology and subpar procedures as in Detroit (run by Black Democrats) in 2016. Then a recount was stopped by party leaders after only two days. Nevertheless, 60% of the ballots were “uncountable.” The very real foreign attacks by Russia take the spotlight off the equal ability of the U.S. to mess up our own elections, deliberately or by uncaring and incompetence. Though there is youth cynicism, “all politicians are bad,” there is also youth activity against gun violence and climate change.

There are many fighting for women’s freedoms and expressing enthusiasm for Bernie Sanders. So youth are also seeking far-reaching change. Electoral democracy will not alone make a revolution, but what can the desire for it mean in the struggle for REAL human freedom?

**Susan Van Gelder**  
**Detroit, Mich.**

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In his presidential bid Bernie Sanders is proposing the decommodification of an entire industry, the bloodsucking health insurance industry. Many in my generation are drawn to his campaign because they’ve given up on the idea that capitalism can be trusted to serve human needs. The Bernie coalition is multiracial, largely young, and often speaks in terms of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, synthesis of racial justice combined with the anti-capitalism he was developing especially later in his life. It’s easy to see the limitations of movements when they’re related to electoral politics but I prefer to get excited about the radical tendencies emerging.

**Millennial**  
**Laramie, Wyo.**

## MODI’S KRISTALLNACHT?

It was exhilarating to read about the demonstrations across India against the apartheid-like anti-Muslim CAA law that Gerry Emmett enumerated in “Mass Protest Challenges India’s Modi” (Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*). They forced Modi to pay attention, but he has responded by doubling down. He used Trump’s visit to India, and Trump’s approval and praise, to instigate Hindu riots targeting mosques and Muslims and their homes and businesses. By the end of February, reports of police shooting at crowds of Muslims while protecting Hindu rioters, and even standing down while they burn down mosques and Muslim-owned shops, not just in rural areas but even in Delhi, have become too common. When the Nazis killed Jews and pillaged their businesses in Germany in November 1938, they called it Kristallnacht to mark the broken plate glass of Jewish shop windows. This just adds to the urgency that the fervor of mass protest against Modi’s designs for a Hindu-only nationalist autocracy actually help spur his overthrow.

**Revolutionary**  
**Nova Scotia**

## ANTI-ABORTION TERROR

For decades the U.S. government refused to recognize those who burn and bomb abortion clinics, or murder doctors and healthcare workers who work in those clinics, as domestic ter-



rorists—although they fit the definition perfectly. Now, since the fanatics have invaded the White House, FBI Director Christopher Wray wants to create a category, “abortion violent terrorism,” but it will include “people on either side of that issue who commit violence...” But there is no terrorism from those who support abortion rights. This is an attempt to criminalize clinic escorts, the people who try to protect women walking into clinics from the fanatics who scream, block and throw things at women walking

into healthcare clinics. Anti-abortion Trump et al have already tried to paint doctors as murderers who rip babies ready to be born from the womb and kill them. The lie within this new “terminology,” is a boon to anti-abortion terrorists.

**Abortion rights activist**  
**Chicago**

## REWRITING HISTORY

So historic was the first Women’s March in 2017 that even the National Archives and the Library of Congress felt the need to rewrite history to mollify Donald Trump. The National Archives gave an incredibly stupid reason for rubbing out the signs women held that criticized Trump, in its exhibit on the history of women’s suffrage in the U.S. They claimed that because they are “a nonpartisan, nonpolitical federal agency,” they scrubbed the photo of the historic D.C. Women’s March “so as not to engage in current political controversy.” But the March was exactly a statement on current political controversy. It was, at its core, a massive demonstration to protest Trump’s racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ agenda. The Library of Congress was just as bad, refusing to exhibit a mural-size photo of the 2017 March precisely because it was critical of Trump in its commemoration of U.S. women’s decades-long struggle for the vote. Did they think that in that long fight women weren’t critical of the presidents of their day? Give me a break.

**Women’s liberationist**  
**Chicago**

## WOMEN AND CULTURE

Regarding “Anti-Femicide Goes Global” (Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*), I work in the field of violence against women. Sometimes I am told that women from other cultures accept it, but I have only once heard that from a woman from another culture. I have worked with women from all over the world, from many cultures, who all want to be respected—both at home and outside the home. Men who have gotten in trouble with the law have said, “You do not understand our culture, and you are trying to impose a Western culture.” However, when I tell them I have worked with women from their culture, they usually go silent. One of the big reasons women in India are marching is that the police do nothing about violence toward women. Women all over the world are marching. Women are tired of hearing from men that we protest because we are not getting attention, or are ugly. Women are chanting “The Rapist in Your Path” worldwide. It is a very exciting article.

**Social worker**  
**Los Angeles**

### To our incarcerated readers

Prisonrats sometimes choose to return an issue to us undelivered, but if you have been moved—to another prison, or within the same prison—the USPS will *not* forward newspapers. Help us keep *N&L* in your hands by letting us know your change of address, including when you are released. When you leave prison your donor subscription can continue to your new address for one additional year.

We welcome your contributions to *N&L* and for our website. There are some things we cannot provide. We do not match up pen pals. *N&L* cannot help prisoners with individual legal cases, and we cannot offer legal advice or access to attorneys. This paper is a place where the voices of people engaged in struggles inside and outside prison walls can be heard speaking for themselves.

**PHILOSOPHY AND THE RETROGRESSIVE CHANGED WORLD**

Viewing “Crises of the Retrogressive Changed World” by Raya Dunayevskaya (Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*) from today, despite the decline in union membership, teachers’ strikes have won fair demands and workers’ struggles have won minimum wage increases in many places. These are only temporary solutions. Ideas of freedom cannot coexist with actual exploitation, racism, and sexism. It is a matter of life-and-death struggle to release totally new dimensions such as the climate movement of the youth, Black Lives Matter and women’s uprisings against sexism and inequality. As Dunayevskaya pointed out, separation between “immediate” and “ultimate,” put off for the “day after,” dooms the revolutions the day before. Despite setbacks, the potentiality of the working man, woman and child for a freer world has to be in the forefront of our consciousness.

**Iranian exile  
Los Angeles**

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Dunayevskaya was really on point when she called Reagan “King” because he was putting troops all over the world for regime change. (See “Crises of Retrogressive Changed World,” Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*.) Trump is the same; he is pushing the limits of presidential powers. How can a president ignore subpoenas? The beat goes on. Trump is getting away to the point that he out-Reagans Reagan. I am reminded of a quote: “The United States is a republic—as long as you can hang on to it.” The House of Representatives is smoldering—I don’t know why it doesn’t burst into flames.

**Observer  
Detroit**

**PANDEMICS AND SOCIAL CONTROL**

The coronavirus pandemic is an example of why the U.S. needs universal healthcare and decent sick time for U.S. workers. Without paid sick time, millions of workers are too poor to take off work when they are ill. Instead, they will come to work and, if they have the virus, will spread it. Universal healthcare would mean that

sick people could be taken care of in a timely fashion instead of putting off going to the doctor and, again, spreading the virus. Treating workers poorly and having health care as a luxury, not a right, is a great way to spread more illness.



**Maggie Soleil  
Hawaii**

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We have seen only the tip of

the iceberg of Chinese government massive repression of human rights (affecting 60 million) in the name of quarantine. The disastrous economic and social consequences have only begun. We can certainly expect a faster spread and more deaths in the world’s population of homeless, refugees, and impoverished peoples in general. Even if cures and vaccines are developed, these people are the least likely to benefit, as with the continued spread of AIDS in Africa. There are no simple fixes: there are always enough people who defy authoritarian conditions to prevent total control of a disease, even when those measures are known to prevent suffering and death. Besides, do we really want such measures to become the new normal means of controlling all social problems, especially aimed at revolutionary movements against capitalism and for a more human society?

**Environmentalist  
Michigan**

**MENTAL ILLNESS AND CRIMINAL ‘JUSTICE’**

My son Charles, who was a senior at University of Illinois-Chicago, had a meltdown due to his bipolar disorder, and approached a campus cop with a metal tent pole. Instead of using his taser, the cop shot him without Charles actually attacking him. This officer was trained to deal with people with mental illness and ignored his training. Charles survived with a collapsed lung and other injuries. He disappeared right after getting out of

the hospital and was found in a field alive two weeks ago. Even though he did not attack the officer, Charles was arrested and charged with attempted murder and other offenses. The campus cop that shot him got off. Charles has been unable to get adequate help for his mental illness in jail and more meltdowns are likely. I fear for his life.

**Father in fear  
Chicago**

**CULTURE’S BIZARRE NORMAL**

Faruq made some acute observations after spending 40 years in California’s gulag, including 20 in its infamous torture of perpetual solitary confinement. (See “A ‘Free World’ View,” Jan.-Feb. 2020 *N&L*.) When he described how he had to mediate between those on the street suffering severe deprivation and those in the “hip” counterculture, I was incredulous. All I could think of was Hegel’s description of self-alienating “pure culture” as the “absolute and universal inversion and alienation of the actual world and of thought,” calling it appropriately a “nihilistic game which it plays with itself.” Faruq, who has experienced the power of thought over the actual world in the prison movement that ended perpetual solitary confinement, has a fresh view of the bizarre “normal” in the commodity culture and work world on the streets of San Francisco.

**R.K.  
Oakland, Calif.**

**VOICES FROM BEHIND BARS**

There are a lot of Native Americans in South Dakota, but nobody reports on the injustices here. Jeff Davis was the presiding judge in the 7th circuit court. It was found out that he was giving Native Americans, Blacks, and other minorities harsher sentences than white people. He has been doing that for years, and when he was caught, he wasn’t fired or punished. They just demoted him to a regular judge instead of presiding. Nobody cares about South Dakota, so there’s no coverage.

**Prisoner  
Springfield, S.D.**

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I was convicted of “destruction of an energy facility” or destroying a coal-fired power plant. Capitalism will literally burn through all the natural communities on earth within a few generations. Capitalism: turning living communities into dead communities. The Dept. of Justice tried to place a “terrorism enhancement” on me at sentencing. They failed! And yet, the Bureau of Prisons placed a terrorist management variable on me in order to place me in a medium/high security violent prison run by racially motivated gangs fueled by rampant drug addiction and readily available drugs in a prison the guards control.

**Prisoner  
Florence, Colo.**



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Revolutionary greetings! I did not receive the Nov.-Dec. *N&L*, which means the fascist system here at CCI Portage, Wisc., confiscated and destroyed it. *N&L* shines the light on issues and conditions that the mainstream media ignores. It puts a human face on the Queer struggle, it’s the voice of the voiceless. Though I am Muslim, I recognize the humanity in all oppressed nationals both in the U.S. and abroad. And as a true revolutionary it’s incumbent upon me to lock arms with anyone who despises fascism, imperialism, racism and capitalism and at the same time longs for true justice and liberation. If they come for you tonight, they will come for me in the morning. May the people’s revolution be with you.

**Prisoner  
Portage, Wisc.**

*TO OUR READERS: Can you donate \$5 for a prisoner who cannot pay for a subscription to N&L? It will be shared with many others. Prisoners are eligible to continue their free subscriptions when they first get released, a time when the system tries to make them forget the struggle.*

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## VOICES FROM THE INSIDE OUT

# Impeachment and injustice

by Robert Taliaferro

Regardless of how democratic a form of government might seem, more often than not those entrusted with its administration tend to do injustice to many that the administrators of government are sworn to protect. This lack of justice extends beyond the boundaries of race, color, culture, gender, economics or political idealism.

**In the last several months we have seen how abusively the concept of justice can be applied, not in some inner city or back country courtroom, but on national TV in the hallowed halls of Congress where the very possession of power excites a desire to use it, often poorly, regardless of what party one aligns themselves with.**

We have watched one of the most abhorrent characteristics of human nature that allows those vested with power to exercise it in a manner that transcends any number of oaths that a person might take, allowing the offending parties an unconscionable authority to abuse that power as they see fit.

### NOT SO BLIND JUSTICE

Because of the practice of mass incarceration in this country, we are all too familiar with the infinite

## On becoming human

continued from p. 1

the power of changing our social norms. Long before the hunger strikes, we challenged the prison-established norm of dealing with us as gang members intent on killing each other. We established cross-race solidarity as our new norm.

**The condition for changing our social norms was talking to each other. As I pointed out previously (“What is freedom?” *N&L*, July-Aug. 2019), the moment I experienced the euphoria of freedom was not walking out of prison, but being released from solitary where I thought I would die. The dramatic change happened through our re-creation of ourselves through new relations with other prisoners.**

Now I see different social strata living in separate worlds. I am mediating those. Out here I see the self-separation as a barrier to experiencing freedom. I see dual qualities of humanity, which come out of the complicated nature of capitalist social relations.

Recently my job took me closer to the financial area. We are there to keep street people away from those standing outside “Supreme” stores, waiting for a chance to buy a \$40 T-shirt or other limited-edition exclusive merchandise, which can be re-sold, sometimes for ten times more. Every Thursday those special items go on sale. Huge crowds show up.

### CAPITALISM’S OBSESSION WITH THINGS

A Latin American immigrant screamed, “Supreme’ is a killer. Don’t buy from them. These people killed my family.” Most of my colleagues dismissed this man as crazy. Yet what he said may have been true, given the way U.S. industry treats workers in Third World countries. I wondered who is crazy? The mentally ill who call out “What’s going on here?” or the 300 or so people waiting for the 15-minute opportunity to buy the latest fad?

**This obsession with things as objects of speculation is writ large when it comes to real estate. Money has come in from all over the world to make San Francisco housing prices outrageous. San Francisco’s housing is out of reach for the great mass of people. Astronomical housing prices have emptied the previously substantial New Afrikan population.**

San Francisco has a homeless population of over 8,000. We don’t need another study of the city’s homeless or abstract rhetoric about affordable housing, which means a few houses made available to a small group of people out of the hood. We are glad for their good fortune, knowing they deserve better.

This system is not working for human beings. The struggle is to figure out what it means to become a human being in this new situation, outside of prison, to challenge social norms when they are not quite as obviously imposed on us by an outside force, but are accepted as “normal.”

permutations that any form of justice might take. We should not be surprised that Lady Justice, despite her mandate for blind faithfulness to the concepts of fairness and equality, often tends to take a peek from beneath her vaunted blindfold to see what color, creed, race, gender identity or socioeconomic status that a defendant might have, thus balancing her scales accordingly.

Yet even with the commonplace knowledge in how the justice system of the U.S. is often meted out unjustly, it is still surprising that this country—and the world—was introduced to one of the most blatant spectacles of social and cultural elitism in its history during the Senate’s impeachment trial of Donald J. Trump.

### BULLIES AND CHILDREN RUN THE U.S.

We got to see both houses of Congress, in their official mandates and legislative functions, square off into their respective corners as they embarked on tirades of name-calling, truths, half-truths and blatant lies with the intent—and juvenile intensity—of spoiled children and bullies on a grade school playground.

**We got to see grown men and women, alleged representatives of multicultural constituents, engage in vehemently brutal verbal tribal warfare that represents how dysfunctionally polarized this nation has become.**

We have borne witness to blatant political coercion and acts of cowardice on the part of U.S. legislators of both parties, along with too few acts of courage and perhaps political suicide.

Rousseau, in his treatise *The Social Contract*, posited that the will of a group of individuals no longer exists when one person’s opinion prevails over the rest. “It is therefore essential,” Rousseau wrote, “that each citizen should express only his own opinion,” not mimic the opinions of others.

Failure to do so negates the contract that a representative made with his or her constituency, as they were elected not to represent just their respective party, but the diverse elements and opinions of the individuals within that party, regardless of the party’s name.

That is what democracy and freedom is all about.

## Free Lyris Wolfe!

**San Francisco**—Lyris Wolfe was arrested on May 29, 2017, and has been languishing in a San Francisco jail ever since. She was trying to get medical help for her abusive boyfriend, who was stabbed during a scuffle, but no help arrived in time. Even though there is video evidence that the offense was an accident, an involuntary manslaughter at worst, the DA office at the time wanted to charge her with first degree murder and two instances of assault with a deadly weapon—the last based on completely bogus information.

On Feb. 7 many of Lyris’ neighbors, friends and supporters came to San Francisco court to urge her release on her own recognizance. She is loved in her Bay View community. Despite the evidence, the DA still insisted that she plead to the bogus assault charges. She refused.

Finally, after almost three years in jail, she was released on Feb. 18 following a plea agreement with the D.A.’s office. The agreement will be finalized at a hearing on March 17, 9:00 AM, at 850 Bryant, Department 22. If you are in the area, please come to show support for this survivor of both domestic and criminal “justice” abuse.

—Urszula Wislanka

## Baridi speaks to Free the Caged Voices

*Editor’s note: A renamed Free the Caged Voices coalition (formerly “Free Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa,” see Jan.-Feb. *N&L*), was called to promulgate the new “Solidarity Message from The Four Prisoner Reps and California Prison Update” (for the full text see [prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com](http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com)). We were able to hear directly from Baridi, one of the signers of the 2012 “Agreement to End Hostilities.” We reproduce excerpts of his talk below.*



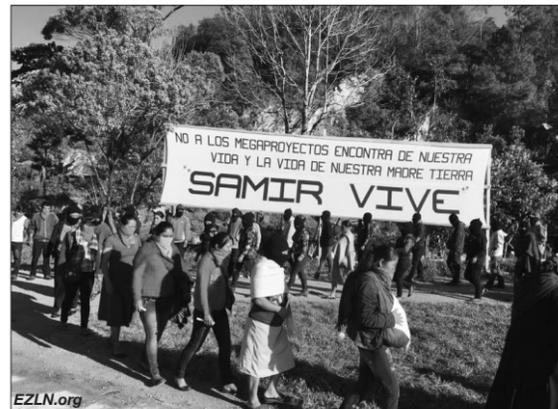
The inhumanity of the torture behind the redwood trees was aimed to cause us death—intellectual, emotional, as well as physical. The hunger strike was for all those enslaved, whether on slave ships or subjected to any other forms of unfreedom. The hunger strike connects to all world struggles for freedom.

**We contributed the “Agreement to End Hostilities” to humanity. As we can come together, many others can come together, too.**

The programs we created show we are the best of the best, not the worst of the worst. Our programs for the youth aim to break the cycle of violence.

**We need to flood the Board with letters of support for those going to the Board, showing how, concretely, we have resources for them to continue this important work on the outside.**

## Indigenous protest megaprojects



One of the many demonstrations on the anniversary of Samir Flores’ murder. The sign reads: “No to the megaprojects against our lives and the life of our Mother Earth. Samir Lives.”

**Amilcingo, Morales, and Mexico City, Mexico**—Samir Flores was an Indigenous activist, community member of the Congreso Nacional Indígena, and a leader of the protests against the Morales Thermoelectric Project. On the one-year anniversary of his murder, there were three days of commemoration of his life held in dozens of cities throughout Mexico called “Days in Defense of Territory and Mother Earth.”

**From the ten Zapatista caracoles (regional organizations of autonomous communities) in Chiapas, to the streets of Mexico City, to the autonomous pueblo and home of Samir Flores, Amilcingo (where special masses and an all-day meeting of the National Indigenous Congress and their supporters were held)—thousands of original peoples of Mexico and supporting social activists celebrated his life. They demanded an end to the many megaprojects threatening the dozens of Indigenous communities and despoiling much of Mexico’s land, water and air. In Chiapas, the Zapatistas held commemorations in each of their government centers.**

I participated in protests in Mexico City. (For a short very good video on the main Mexico City march, see: <https://desinformemonos.org/marchan-indigenas-contra-megaproyectos-y-colocan-un-busto-de-samir-flores-en-el-zocalo-capitalino/>). There were also a number of protests the day before that blocked main streets in various parts of the city.

### NEEDED DISCUSSION OF IDEAS

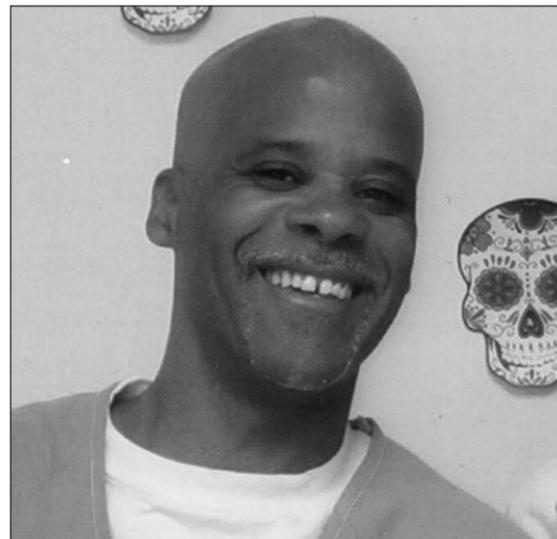
The next day I traveled with hundreds of others to Amilcingo where we joined the National Indigenous Congress in having a discussion of the three days of activities and proposing possible resistance actions to come. It was important to hear about the protests that various communities, groups and collectives organized, and a few possible future activities—against the Mayan train, the transoceanic corridor and a number of mining projects.

**But what was missing in assessing the three days of “Defense of Territories and Mother Earth” was a discussion of the need to develop emancipatory ideas—theory, a freedom vision—to go along with the needed actions.**

It seemed that only action, action, action (practice) was all that was on the agenda. But practice without theory as well as theory without practice is a recipe for incomplete and even failed change. We in Praxis en América Latina raised the question of dialectics, particularly Marx’s dialectics, and his concept of the need for revolution in permanence.

—Eugene Walker

The system is designed to strip you of your humanity. California Department of Corrections built



a \$10 billion system that does not serve society. We are the ones who can speak to that.

The hunger strike was organized to stop the torture. Now we want to keep improving conditions for all those oppressed.

—Baridi

## NEWS & LETTERS

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# Torture of immigrants in the U.S.

As millions of young women, men, and students, immigrants, people of color, and workers invest heavily with their time and energy to improve the U.S. in various ways, Donald Trump continues on a vaunted crusade to keep his most vile campaign promises.

Among the foremost of these is stopping all immigration: bogging down migrants in rigged and stalled asylum hearings, and putting even the most vulnerable populations in jail cells instead of simply setting a court appearance bond. A key feature of “aggressive deterrence” started by Barack Obama and worsened under Trump is boastful mistreatment of pregnant women, teens, and other adults in those cells.

## PREGNANT WOMEN MISCARRY, KIDS DIE

Asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border are essentially being told: “Take a number.” KPBS interviewed pregnant asylum seeker Karina, who arrived in August and waited until Jan. 24. Meanwhile, she was mugged twice. When that day finally arrived, “the official said I couldn’t board the bus because I was pregnant and already eight months along.” She had to come back the following day for a new date.

Under previous administrations, pregnant women facing a U.S. immigration proceeding were rarely detained, but in December 2017, Rubia Morales was among the first women jailed under a new policy. In 2020 she sued ICE over her miscarriage suffered in a CoreCivic private jail in San Diego. After seeing a nurse on Jan. 4, 2018, she complained of progressive bleeding, but wasn’t seen again until she collapsed on Jan. 15. Documents given to the *Arizona Republic* show there were 28 women who miscarried in immigration custody in 2018.

ICE has not released data from 2019, and on Feb. 4 *The New York Times* ran an op-ed announcing the agency intended to destroy internal documents, a claim the National Archives disputed. Nevertheless, watchdog groups quickly filed Freedom Of Information Act requests to safeguard records.

A sharp contrast is ICE’s treatment of therapy notes from mandatory sessions with unaccompanied minors. The *Washington Post* revealed on Feb. 15 how each note is meticulously pored over and twisted against the child’s interest. “In Virginia, a 16-year-old told a shelter therapist his brother was wanted for murder. The therapist reported that the 16-year-old himself was involved in a murder, and he was transferred that same day to secure detention.” Another teen “detained for 11 months...confided to shelter staff that he wanted to die...the confession was [later] read aloud as evidence he was a danger

to himself and should be deported.” After months and years of isolation, some asy-



Children who were held in immigrant detention spoke of their experiences to Every. Last. One, which was then made into art by Marc Nelson.

lum seekers and other immigrants have maintained hunger strikes, demanding improved conditions and release. In Louisiana in 2016, three out of every four asylum seekers were released on bond. By 2018, that number was only 1 or 2 out of every 100! In March 2019, at least 25 men in Ferriday, La., went on hunger strike. One hundred more struck in August at Pine Prairie, La., in the outdoor recreation area. Guards shot at them with rubber bullets.

## FIGHTING BACK WITH HUNGER STRIKES

In November, Mahad, who ran from religious persecution in India, went on a 90-day hunger strike in Jena, La., until being deported in January. Three more men in Port Isabel, Texas, continue a hunger strike they began in December.

Eight men from Central America who went on hunger strike in Adelanto, Calif. in 2017 have concluded a civil suit against private prison company GEO Group. As *News & Letters* reported at the time, they were attacked with pepper spray. (See “The struggle for immigrants’ rights challenges humanity, July-Aug. 2017 *N&L*”) A video of the assault obtained through discovery is now online.

Last year, California passed a law prohibiting any new ICE contracts with state or private prisons, but the Adelanto jail reached an atypical 15-year contract with ICE just before the law took effect. Residents of Adelanto and the Los Angeles area packed the next three hearings of the city planning commission. “Quality of life doesn’t go up where there are prisons,” said local activist Jose Servin. “Quality of life goes up where there are hospitals, where there are parks, where there are better schools. That’s not going to happen with GEO.” —Buddy Bell

# AMLO and Trump join forces to oppress

Despite Mexican President López Obrador’s sweet words about humanitarian treatment of Central American immigrants entering Mexico, the truth is horribly different.

On Mexico’s southern border: By the hundreds National Guard troops—supposedly organized to fight narco-traffickers and extreme violence—have instead been mobilized to prevent immigrants from crossing into Mexico. Tear gas and batons, mass arrests and immediate deportations, family separations, are all being used.

On our northern border: AMLO, as López Obrador is known, has accepted Trump’s draconian “Stay in Mexico” requirement for those seeking asylum in the U.S. Only a tiny handful of asylum requests have been granted, with close to 60,000 immigrants crammed at the border still awaiting this so-called justice.

Meanwhile, Doctors Without Borders reports that 80% of those awaiting decisions on the border have been subjected to violence.

The vast majority of migrants are fleeing from gangs, poverty and violence in their places of origin. Why are so many being treated in an inhuman way in Mexico and in the United States? —E.W.

# QUEERNOTES

by Elise

Human Rights Watch says that Queer youth in Vietnam continue to be bullied, harassed, assaulted and threatened with medical treatment. Vietnamese advocacy rights group ICS Centre calls for its government to fight discrimination and to “create a safe and inclusive educational environment.” A bill that would allow Transgender people who have undergone gender-affirming surgery to register under their new gender has been introduced but not enacted, and Vietnam’s Education Minister has proposed guidelines for an LGBTQ-inclusive sex education curriculum which have not been implemented.

\* \* \*

The University of Louisville has reversed itself, now banning a homophobic student from any contact with the students and professor of the Introduction to LGBTQ Studies course. Students had been encouraged by the seeming receptiveness of University President Neeli Bendapudi to their ideas for an introductory course on the LGBTQ community for incoming freshmen, and that times and locations of LGBTQ studies classes not be made public. But when a student distributed an anti-LGBTQ pamphlet, *God & Sexuality*, published by evangelical Christian group Living Waters, the university initially had determined that the pamphlet did not constitute hate speech and that the student did not pose a threat to the students.

\* \* \*

Many colorfully clad students at John F. Kennedy High School, a Catholic school in Burien, Wash., left their classes to participate in a sit-in protest, honoring teachers Michelle Beattie and Paul Danforth, who were forced to resign. After announcing to school officials their engagements to their same-sex partners, Beattie and Danforth either had to keep their engagements private or leave the school, per the morality clauses they signed. As a condition for employment, employees of many religious schools must sign morality clauses that say they will adhere to church teachings. Students, alumni and parents also protested in front of the Archdiocese of Seattle. “Reinstate, not hate,” and “Separate, church and hate” were among the protest signs. A GoFundMe account has been set up to help the teachers cover expenses until they find new jobs.

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# COVID-19: A world-historic threat

continued from p. 1  
 Revolution.

Since then science has learned much more about viruses, and humanity has had the invaluable experience of struggles waged against AIDS, for example, by ACT UP, or sickle cell disease by the Black Panther Party. As Zeynep Tufekci writes for *Scientific American* (Feb. 27), “We should prepare not because we are facing a doomsday scenario out of our control, but because we can alter every aspect of this risk we face as a society.”

**It is impossible to separate these health issues from what Karl Marx called humanity’s metabolism with nature, which formed the basis of his critique of capitalism. The antagonistic relationship between public health and state-capitalist bureaucratic interests is one aspect of this; the absolute opposition between human life and the inhuman logic of capitalist accumulation is another.**

Just as happened at the moment of imperialist world war a century ago, the supposedly abstract categories of *Capital* take on life and voice. The formation of the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance in Hong Kong followed a strike of healthcare workers last month, which *China Labour Bulletin* (Feb. 18) said “marked the beginning of a new era of worker activism” there. Much more such activity is

likely as people across the world defend their lives.

## CONTEXT OF ‘PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION’

The U.S. and China are, respectively, the first and second largest economies in the world. Bourgeois scholars and ideologues have made arguments for and against the possibility of a U.S.-China condominium (joint dominion over the planet), or G-2. What they failed to see was that relationship already existing within the context of what Marx termed the primitive accumulation of capital.

In fact, the exploitation of China’s dispossessed working class, coupled with the growth of the U.S. national debt—mechanisms identified by Marx as central to this category—in recent decades have come together to create one of the most intensive periods of primitive accumulation in history. Imperialist tensions could continue to exist within this reality, as much as North-South tensions continued to exist during the era of U.S. slavery.

**Nevertheless, for world capitalism this combination is the definition of “too big to fail.” Chinese factories account for about 20% of world manufacturing output. Already many industries—from automakers to food and pharmaceuticals—are beginning to feel the effect of disrupted supply chains. The inhumanity of capitalism’s logic is obvious in the demand today that Chinese workers should return to the factory floors despite the great danger of contracting COVID-19.**

In writing of the lack of proper ventilation in 19th-century English factories, Marx made a point relevant to today’s crisis. Provision of proper ventilation wasn’t cost effective for employers then, and so “The health officers, the industrial inquiry commissioners, the factory inspectors, all repeat, over and over again, that it is both necessary for the workers to have these 500 cubic feet [of breathing space], and impossible to impose this rule on capital. They are, in reality, declaring that consumption and the other pulmonary diseases of the workers are conditions necessary to the existence of capital.”

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# Women's movements reach for new global stage

continued from p. 1

that unite us are the seemingly never-ending and escalating brutality and violence against women; the demand for reproductive justice which includes safe, accessible abortion along with the ability to have and raise children in peace and economic security, and to have healthcare as a human right; the struggle to end racism and discrimination against the poor that often makes living a dehumanizing drudgery that shortens lives, hopes and dreams.

## UNITED BY INTRACTABLE FEMICIDES

Women in Mexico, those who invented the word “femicide” to describe the murder of women because they are women, have now been fighting this reality since it first came out in the open in 1993 in the maquiladoras on the border between the U.S. and Mexico. From 2008 to 2011 over 7,600 people died in Ciudad Juárez, with 3,112 murdered in 2011 alone. Over 400 women have been murdered between 2001 and 2011, with another 400 disappeared. Hundreds more have been murdered and disappeared since.

Now 10 women are murdered every day in Mexico, up from seven per day in 2017. Authorities have done nothing but blame the victim, saying that she was drunk, ran with bad company, or just left on her own. Any work being done is done by women themselves—the mothers, aunts and sisters of those murdered and missing.<sup>4</sup>

Just since the beginning of this year, the deaths of three women have shaken the country, brought forth countless protests, and showed the pathetic do-nothingness of Mexico's leaders—from the local police who not only do not protect women but are sometimes their attackers, to Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

## SAY THEIR NAMES

On Jan. 18, 25-year-old feminist artist and activist Isabel Cabanillas de la Torre was murdered, shot in the head and chest with a high-caliber revolver as she rode her bike home in the evening in Ciudad Juárez. Cabanillas de la Torre was a member of Puro Borde (Pure Border), an art collective whose purpose, said founder Arón Venegas, is “to take back the streets with art, colors and visual ideas.” Cabanillas de la Torre's comrades “are in no doubt that Isabel's death was a political, misogynist execution.”

When asked if she will get justice, they replied: “Not a chance,” “Unthinkable in this city,” and “Impunity has been the rule.” These women are the daughters of the women who first moved to Ciudad Juárez to work in the maquiladoras in the early 1990s. As her friend Arena said, “What Isabel was doing was rebellious in Juárez. In a machista city, she was occupying the streets with art, she was riding her bicycle home alone at night, she was subversive of patriarchal culture.”<sup>5</sup>

The murders in February of Ingrid Escamilla, who was 25 years old, and seven-year-old Fátima Cecilia Aldrighett were political in that they were killed because they were female. Their deaths shocked the country; Aldrighett's because she was so young and had been tortured before her murder and Escamilla's because she was stabbed to death by her boyfriend, skinned and disemboweled. Then the picture of Escamilla's body was leaked to the tabloids, one of which used it for their entire cover with the headline: “It was Cupid's fault.”

Mexican women have, again and again, taken to the streets. In August 2019, over 2,000 demonstrated in Mexico City, chanting “Attack One of Us and You Attack All of Us!” and “Rapist Pigs!” referring to two cops who had raped teenage girls.<sup>6</sup> In November over 1,000 filled Mexico's huge central square and sang the song made popular by the Chilean feminist group Las Tesis, “The Rapist in Your Path.”

## LÓPEZ OBRADOR PART OF THE PROBLEM

After these most recent killings, dozens of women demonstrated at Mexico's presidential palace where López Obrador was holding a meeting. They chanted “Not one murder more!” as they threw blood-red paint on the massive palace doors. More marches are planned.

4. “World in View: Murder in Juárez,” by Gerry Emmett, *News & Letters*, April 18, 2011.

5. “Why did she have to die? Mexico's war on women claims young artist,” by Ed Vulliamy, *theguardian.com*, Feb. 11, 2020.

6. “Women WorldWide,” by Artemis, *News & Letters*, Sept.-Oct. 2019.

López Obrador's response was irritation at the protesters and the issue of femicides. He complained that, “This issue has been manipulated a lot in the media. I don't want the issue just to be women's killings.”<sup>7</sup> He oozed disdain for the growing number of deaths of women in Mexico, saying “I don't want femicides to overshadow the lottery.” With leaders like these, it is no wonder that women's struggle against femicide has become worldwide.

It is not alone young Mexican women and working-class women, but also women Zapatistas and academic women—all have been fighting to end violence against them. Women from the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) have been on strike since Nov. 5, 2019. They are demanding concrete responses from UNAM administrators about gender violence and sexual harassment, including by faculty. Refusing to settle for general statements against sexism, they are demanding tribunals and specific procedures for dealing with sexism.

Their strike has wide support at the University with actions at 23 faculties, schools and campuses. In re-

sponse to a Feb. 5 call for a general strike, UNAM faculty was joined by high school students who broke windows, painted buildings and chanted against the violence. Again, López Obrador's response was pathetic, claiming that “dark interests” were responsible for the demonstrations.<sup>8</sup>

Zapatista women had a meeting of several thousand at the end of December in Zapatista territory titled Meeting of Women who Fight (see p. 2). There they called for huge demonstrations for March 8—International Women's Day. Women in Mexico in the recent past have created massive demonstrations on March 8. This year, in addition, there is a call for a general strike the next day, March 9, titled #UNDÍASINNOTRAS (A Day Without Us). (We go to press at the end of February and will cover March 8 and 9 in the next issue.)

## THE U.S.'S OWN 'RAPIST IN YOUR PATH'

Women in the U.S. have their own “Rapist in Your Path” who adds to the violence against women—Donald Trump. There is widespread disgust at him and his racist and sexist policies: against immigrants; opening the White House to, and channeling

7. “It fills us with rage: Mexican activists protest femicide at presidential palace,” by Staff, *theguardian.com*, Feb. 14, 2020.

8. “Mexico City: Resistance to Sexual Violence at UNAM Explodes During Campus General Strike,” *It's Going Down*, Feb. 6, 2020.



Some of the thousands of Chicagoans who demonstrated on Jan. 18, 2020, at the fourth Women's March.

federal funding for, anti-abortion, anti-birth-control fanatics; promoting abstinence-only sex education; gutting Title IX and the very concept of equal rights; expanding the global and local abortion gag rule that has decimated women's reproductive health abroad as well as in the U.S. All this and more has compelled women to take to the streets four years in a row.

In the U.S., massive Women's Marches have taken place every year since 2017, when women worldwide created the largest mass marches in history, gathering by the tens of thousands in every major city in the world where people could freely demonstrate and thousands of smaller cities as well. This year, the mainline press seemed determined to play down or ignore the marches with headline after headline emphasizing that the marches this year were smaller without telling their readers how large, creative, and militant they actually were.

Thousands marched in Washington, D.C. In California alone, tens of thousands more—30,000 in San Francisco, 7,500 in San Jose, 200,000 in Los Angeles, 5,000 in Oakland—and those were just the large ones. New York and Chicago also hosted marches in the thousands. In the U.S. there were over 250 events and marches were held as well in Britain, New Zealand, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, France, and numerous other countries.

## INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS ABOUND

Marchers have to contend with a March leadership that is seriously flawed. While three anti-Semitic leaders of the original Women's March have been replaced, this year the Women's March Foundation turned down speakers from Los Angeles Black Lives Matter with the ridiculous excuse that because “this is an important election year,” their speakers were “focused on highlighting organizations and individuals who have a mission to register and encourage people to vote.”<sup>9</sup> It is not only that no Democrat can be elected without winning the Black vote, but in this time of Republicans' attacks on Black and other minority voters via voter suppression, gerrymandering and outright intimidation, to use the excuse that this is an election year to ban Black Lives Matter speakers is racist stupidity.

Fortunately, most women don't come to the Marches because of the March leadership, they come because they want to change this world to one where ending violence against women is a priority and immigrants are welcome, where climate change is understood as urgent and women have reproductive justice. In short, they come because they want a new, more human world. As one 18-year-old marcher in Washington, D.C., put it: “I'm Black, I'm proud. This is my march as much as it is any other person's march.”<sup>10</sup>

## THE MOVEMENT FROM PRACTICE NEEDS THE MOVEMENT FROM THEORY

There is no question that the movements of women are militant and that participants think through why they take part in actions, what they oppose, and, within that, what they would like to see happen in the future. There is also no question that contradictions and traps are everywhere. In the U.S., many self-appointed leaders cannot see further than Democratic Party politics. Certainly, getting Trump out of office is a necessity if our world is to survive and stop the U.S. from turning into a powerful fascist state.

But what has made it possible for women to have any reproductive justice or to stop widespread rape and abuse, to fight emerging fascisms, racism, homophobia, and class oppression has always and only been strong, passionate, and militant movements for freedom. It is only the movement that keeps politicians somewhat in check.

A philosophy of freedom is also a necessity because it makes it possible to comprehend the meaning of these movements from practice and at the same time to keep as the goal, not a reformed capitalism, but a different kind of society than we have now—one based on new, actually human relationships.

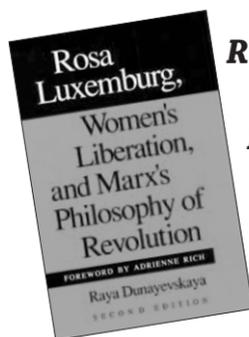
Karl Marx called for revolution to be permanent because he recognized that overthrowing a tyrant is but the first step, and it would take many negotiations to get to that new society.

What is implicit in all these struggles women and others are waging against violence, for control of our own bodies, against racism and class oppression, homophobia and discrimination against the disabled is the yearning for a world where everyone can develop all their potential and live free. It is no abstraction to say that women are fighting for that kind of world. It needs to become our explicit goal.

9. “Women's March draws thousands to rallies across the country,” by Associated Press, *nbcnews.com*, Jan. 18, 2020.

10. “Women's March Draws a Smaller, but Passionate Crowd,” by Isabella Gomez Sarmiento, *npr.org*, Jan. 18, 2020.

**For Women's History Month and International Women's Day... Two books by Raya Dunayevskaya**



**Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution**

**Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution**



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# Review of Joseph Daher's *Syria After the Uprising*

Joseph Daher's study, *Syria After the Uprisings: The Political Economy of State Resilience* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), investigates the resilience of Bashar al-Assad's regime in the face of a popular revolution that began nine years ago, in March 2011, as part of the broader Arab Spring. Despite his rejection by the vast majority of the Syrian people, and their inspiring models of self-organization in this struggle, Assad has managed to survive and even prevail in reconquering most of the country.

**Refuting those self-styled leftists who malign the Syrian Revolution in the name of geopolitical considerations, Daher situates the Assad regime and Syria's three counter-revolutions into a broader trend of global neo-liberalism.**

Following his 2000 ascent to power, Assad over-

saw a situation where a third of the population lived below the official poverty line and another 30% lived just above it. As in many other neoliberal settings, economic liberalization relied on well-known patterns of brutal state violence and a glaring "absence of democracy."

This situation helped spark widespread revolt in March 2011. In the first counter-revolution, the most well-known, about 90% of the civilian deaths were caused by Assad's regime in a conflict that has left more than 500,000 dead and 12 million homeless.

## COUNTER-REVOLUTION AGAIN AND AGAIN

The second counter-revolution involved jihadi forces that came to dominate the military struggle against Assad. Whereas democratic revolutionaries initially espoused non-sectarian and egalitarian

messages, their voices have since been eclipsed.

Assad's regime systematically avoided targeting Islamic State, preferring to target democratic opponents. The founding of the reactionary rebel group Jaysh al-Islam was "engineered" by Saudi intelligence, while its ally, Ahrar al-Sham, was supported by Turkey and Qatar.

**Syria's third counter-revolution, led by regional and global imperialists, enabled Assad to hold onto power in order to buttress the functioning of capital. Illustrating the fundamental inhumanity of the inter-state system, Russia and China, as**

**permanent UN Security Council members, have vetoed all resolutions aimed at accountability for Assad and Vladimir Putin's crimes in Syria. The U.S. has conditioned aid to rebels on their focusing on Islamic State rather than the Assad regime, has committed alleged war crimes in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, and has avoided taking the basic humanitarian step of airlifting food to communities under siege.**

The Revolution's persistence, with the Idlib region's ongoing protests and a likely shift to underground revolt, corroborates Marx and Raya Dunayevskaya's theory of a "revolution in permanence."

While the state has been resilient, so has the opposition. Were the uprisings' two "halves"—Arab and Kurdish—to somehow unite, overcoming the traumatic gaps between them, they could possibly realize the revolutionaries' original goals.

As precedents, we can point to the initial enthusiasm with which Kurdish youth met the Revolution, the non-sectarian and pluralistic message of the Revolution's early phases, the affirming cooperation between Free Syrian Army and (Kurdish) People's Protection Units in defending Kobani, parallels between the local councils proposed by Omar Aziz and Abdullah Öcalan, and the Syrian Democratic Force's denunciation of Assad's "holocaust" in Idlib.

**Currently resurgent uprisings throughout the region and the world, by recognizing their links to the destinies of Syrians and Kurds, could help overcome sectarian and campist analyses and coordinate global organization against Syria's three counter-revolutions and the neo-liberalism that animates them.**

Daher's study, instructive with its combination of ruthless criticism and consistent solidarity, deserves wide study and discussion.

—Dan Fischer and Javier Sethness



Joseph Daher

## YOUTH IN ACTION

by Buddy Bell



Nepalese Youth for Climate Action demonstrate on Feb. 21, 2020—week 17 of Climate Awareness—at the Square in Bhaktapur, Nepal.

In a Valentine's Day protest surge, Greta Thunberg and the Fridays 4 Future and Climate Strike campaigns counted over 2,000 actions in 150 countries.

- In Delhi, India, police intended to break up a local strike but eventually left them alone, but not before an officer scolded and waved his finger in the face of eight-year-old Licypriya Kangujam, who was holding a sign calling on Narendra Modi to sign the Climate Change Law.

- In Krasnoyarsk, Russia, 16-year-old Rita Naumenko defied a ban on protests by minors in order to call attention to her city's severe air pollution.

- In Lamu, Kenya, activists organized in the campaign DeCOALonize Kenya protested a proposed coal plant while circulating a petition to the Chinese ambassador requesting that he pull funding and invest in alternative energies.

- Siyadinoh Fazulini, a 25-year-old demonstrator in Kenya, tweeted: "The air pollution crisis is dragging us to our deathbed very fast. We must break away from fossil fuels, especially coal which is seriously harming our hearts and lungs."

\* \* \*

Last winter, the New York student group Teens Take Charge held a virtual press conference on Facebook to say that the city was not moving fast enough to integrate a school system that a 2014 UCLA study called the "most segregated in the nation." Quoted in the online newspaper *Chalkbeat*, junior Sokhnadiarra Ndiaye said that students expect "a comprehensive plan to racially, socioeconomically, and academically integrate high schools before the end of the school year."

**As spring and summer slid by, the mayor's office offered talk and no action. In the fall, students organized a series of Monday walk-outs that began on Nov. 18 and are pledged to continue each week until the city does away with selective admissions tests.**

Among those who walked out was senior Carla Gaveglia, who attends a selective high school with a 41% Black and Latinx student body. It shares the same building as a conventional public high school where 81% of students are Black and Latinx. "It is clear to see the inequities between our schools that are separated by a staircase," she told the *Daily News*.

On Jan. 30, several hundred students attended a forum organized by Teens Take Charge, where education officials were summoned to answer questions about student proposals, which included equalizing school resources by combining sports programs among selective and conventional schools and changing the way PTAs can raise money. Students also took aim at metal detectors and selective enforcement of school policy against students of color.

Three of New York City's most selective high schools have an admissions test regulated by the state, and students were in Albany on Feb. 15 to support a bill to eliminate it. Looking ahead, the student groups Teens Take Charge and Integrate NYC are calling for a day-long school boycott on May 18.

## EDITORIAL

continued from p. 1

Rod Blagojevich, as Illinois Governor, was caught offering Barack Obama's vacant Senate seat to the highest bidder. Bernard Kerik was a Rudy Giuliani bodyguard, police commissioner and public grifter.

But Trump knows how to hide one scandal with another, dumping Robert Maguire as Acting Director of National Intelligence for allowing the House Intelligence Committee to hear about Russian election interference and replacing him with loyalist Rick Grenell.

## TRUMP: PRESIDENT OF PURGES

Trump has given the green light for deeper purges in the State and Defense Departments, demanding lists of anyone suspected of being disloyal, or insufficiently loyal, to him.

**As revolutionaries we have condemned past administrations marshaling those agencies to carry out counter-revolution and regime change in one country after another—from Iran and Guatemala under Eisenhower to Bush's invasion of Iraq. Before our eyes Trump is using those government departments to carry out regime change at home: making the (un) popularly elected President (by a minority of voters) unchallenged.**

*News & Letters* in 1974 called Nixon's ambitions in his second term a "criminal campaign to set up a one-party state within the two-party system." He was thwarted by Congress and the Supreme Court. Trump seems determined to be stopped by nobody in government, and to make elections irrelevant even as Democratic politicians insist that the only weapon left against Trump is the vote.

He made Ginny Thomas the chief compiler of enemies' lists at the above agencies and at the Justice Department. Her husband happens to be Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Trump already has the Senate in his pocket, William Barr as his enforcer at Justice and the Supreme Court majority supporting administration policy regardless of the law or of justice.

## REVOLUTION DEFENDS THE DEFENSELESS

When the political system is defenseless against autocracy, people in other countries have taken to the streets. Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Syria from the end of 2010 on, not only spread across the Middle East and Spain, in the U.S. they inspired Occupy Wall Street and labor activists in Wisconsin singing "Walk Like an Egyptian"—and, in turn, the banner of workers across the U.S. was "We Are All Wisconsin."

**The Syrian Revolution that has persisted for nine years—despite a hellish rain of bombs, shells, bullets and poison, suffering war crimes perpetrated by Bashar al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian protectors—has been invisible to many anti-Trump activists. It would be revolutionary malpractice to ignore the philosophy of freedom that Syrian revolutionaries have developed and expressed in banners and videos and, in every brief cessation of fighting, their massive demonstrations.**

We have seen the limits of political maneuvering in Congress, and the threat that even using the vote as a defensive weapon is in jeopardy. Americans have been expressing their opposition, from Women's Marches and teachers' strikes to pipeline occupations.

If armed with the philosophy of freedom that has challenged regimes from Sudan to Iran, the opposition to Trump and to the capitalist system that spawned him and is using him would give Trump the challenge that fellow politicians could not.

## #FixTheElevators

**Detroit**—A coalition of students and workers at Wayne State University (WSU) here have been conducting a campaign since November 2019 for the elevators on campus to be repaired.

There are 170 elevators in 130 campus buildings; some are over 50 years old. Police were called 150 times last year to rescue people trapped in elevators. Additionally, the coalition has received 675 reports about elevators negatively impacting the lives, work, and education of those at WSU.

**Classes have been moved from buildings with non-functioning elevators to those with working ones due to complaints that holding classes in buildings with broken elevators is a violation of the Americans With Disabilities Act.**

AFT-AAUP local 6075, the faculty union, initially filed a grievance over working conditions with regards to elevators for obvious reasons. They later set up a coalition involving members of the IBEW, UNITE HERE, the Operating Engineers, the Teamsters and the UAW. The Wayne State Student Senate and the WSU Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) have also joined the coalition.

The YDSA, of which I am a member, have been flyering and handing out buttons as part of our regular tabling at the Student Center to raise awareness of the poor conditions of the elevators. We also appeared with flyers and buttons to support Professor Hayg Oshagan at the January Board of Governors' meeting, who told them we want the elevators repaired as soon as possible.

**The Board responded with excuses that they are studying the problem, and that there is a shortage of parts and labor to make the repairs.**

We are watching carefully what the Board of Governors will do. If the university can find the money to increase administrative costs by \$16 million in the last four years, it seems logical that they can find money for elevator repairs. Until then we call on all Wayne State students and workers to join our campaign to #fixtheelevators!

—Hank, WSU Student

# WORLD VIEW

## France, Ireland, & ‘the idea of Europe’

by Gerry Emmett

With the exit of Britain from the European Union, there has been much discussion about the “idea of Europe.” It is a significant discussion. Far Right parties, basing themselves on anti-immigrant and narrow nationalist ideas, have at the same time identified themselves with an imagined history of crusaders and colonialists.

**The Far Right has continued to make incremental gains in elections in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Scandinavia. Most recently Rightist Janez Jansa has been nominated as**

**Prime Minister of Slovenia by the new ruling coalition there. His party looks forward to a European Union controlled by the Far Right.**

For many, this is like watching their more liberal idea of Europe die by a thousand cuts.

The author George Steiner, who died Feb. 3, wrote recently: “It may be that the future of the ‘idea of Europe,’ if it has one, depends less on banking and



In Reims, France, on Feb. 6, workers protest Macron's plan to raise retirement age.

agricultural subsidies, on investment in technology or common tariffs, than we are instructed to believe.”

### MACRON'S INGLORIOUS DAY

One political figure that presents his own “Europe” is French President Emmanuel Macron, who was elected in 2017 mostly because he wasn’t neofascist Marine Le Pen. Since then Macron has not scrupled to use brutal violence against his fellow citizens, whether the populist Yellow Vests—dozens of them have lost hands and eyes to police attacks—or in current protests by unions against Macron’s plan to raise the age of retirement.

**Macron has also begun to fantasize himself as Europe’s military leader, since France is the EU’s only remaining nuclear power (300 warheads). He is calling for a major increase in military spending. Like Charles de Gaulle, he envisions being able to deal with the U.S. and Russia on equal military terms. In fact, much of the French military is currently deployed against the French citizenry.**

Macron isn’t de Gaulle—more like a schoolboy who’s read about de Gaulle—but he is close to the thought of the 19th-century con man and dictator Louis Napoleon when Macron says, “I’ve seen from inside the emptiness of our system.” It is an emptiness, a “Europe,” he would fill with his own emptiness.

The Feb. 8 elections in Ireland expressed a very

## In Syria, righteous hours expose evil years

Free Syria, the revolutionary idea that can’t be killed, claimed its ground in Idlib. There it has been subjected to continuing, genocidal assault by the Bashar al-Assad regime and its fascist allies, imperialist Russia and Iran.

In the last few weeks of February we have seen the provision of MANPADS allow Free Syrians to shoot down a number of regime helicopters as they arrived with their cargoes of barrel bombs. Putin’s air force is much less effective when it has to remain out of range of these missiles.

In revenge, the regime made the foolish mistake of attacking a Turkish observation post and killing dozens of Turkish personnel. It opened a rift between Vladimir Putin and Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that allowed some truth to show through.

### ‘THE PEOPLE WANT A NO-FLY ZONE!’

Contrary to the myth of “Syrian air defense,” we have seen how easily Turkish planes and drones can devastate Assad’s forces. (In the south of Syria, Israeli helicopters have also had no problem entering Assad’s airspace at will.)

There was never any doubt about this. This writer was at a public meeting some years ago, during the previous U.S. administration, where an official spoke of cell phones being provided to the Syrian people to record the regime’s atrocities.

One of the audience members spoke up: “To hell with cell phones! Send us some Stinger missiles!” This was said to great applause, but it never happened then. Years of hypocrisy followed.

### SAVE IDLIB, SAVE HUMANITY

The most intense reaction to these events seems to concern Turkish President Erdogan’s “threat” to allow Syrian refugees to enter Europe. The usual torrents of racism were unleashed. The dispossession of Syrians has been the wind in the sails of the racist Far Right.

different idea of Europe. For the first time, Sinn Fein led with 25% of the vote.

This is worthy of note. At the moment of European debate over the meaning of nationalism and internationalism, an unprecedented vote was given to the explicit party of revolutionary Irish nationalism. Further, this party is critical of the EU’s current politics, from the Left, but supports Ireland’s membership.

### JAMES CONNOLLY WAS THERE

Sinn Fein is an explicitly Leftist party. It campaigned on rights to housing and healthcare, marriage equality, and women’s right to choose. It has explicitly opposed racism and anti-immigrant rhetoric—making it hated by the parties of the Far Right. At the same time, it has given up using the word “socialism” as an explicit goal.

A century ago, during the brutal imperialist world war, Irish revolutionary James Connolly took part in the 1916 Easter Rebellion with a vision of national liberation that was inseparable from internationalism. It is remarkable that so many Irish voters endorsed this historic legacy. It is a very different vision of Europe, and the world.

The transformation of the world, as Connolly knew, won’t be accomplished through the ballot box, including by Sinn Fein. But the battle of ideas joined by the Irish voters should be seen as the life and death struggle that it is.

## Notes on a pandemic

The COVID-19 coronavirus is present, as of this writing, in over 50 countries.

**The massive drop in the stock market indicates that capitalists expect serious economic problems, including supply chain disruptions; cutbacks in consumers’ discretionary spending; and probable layoffs. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that employees be able to work at home. Good luck with that. Every aspect of this pandemic can be expected to highlight the class nature of society.**

In Japan, schools have been ordered closed for months ahead. In northern Italy, mass gatherings have been stopped.

### SOLIDARITY IS MOST IMPORTANT

In recognition of the limited capacity of hospitals, self-isolation and home treatment is being recommended for patients with milder cases—which include most.

**The more important thing to remember is human solidarity. Those most at risk are older people and people with compromised immune systems. When you take precautions for yourself, you do them a great service.**

Special care should be demanded for prisoners, the homeless, and those with disabilities. In China where COVID-19 originated, prisons became centers of transmission. Human Rights Watch spokesman Yaqiu Wang said of Chinese prisons: “Prisoners are routinely denied adequate medical care even during normal times. With medical resources stretched to the limit, it is hard to imagine prisoners’ needs would be a priority of the government.”

## NEWS AND LETTERS COMMITTEES

# Who We Are And What We Stand For

News and Letters Committees is an organization of Marxist-Humanists. It has always stood for the abolition of capitalism, both in its private property form as in the U.S., and in its state property form calling itself Communist, which appeared as the Russian Revolution was transformed into its opposite. That retrogression anticipated the next stage of development—the age of state-capitalism. We stand for a society of new human relations, what Marx called a new Humanism.

News & Letters was founded in 1955, the year of the Detroit wildcat strikes against automation and the Montgomery Bus Boycott against segregation—activities which signaled a new movement from practice that was itself a form of theory. News & Letters was created so that the voices of revolt could be heard unseparated from the articulation of a philosophy of liberation.

Raya Dunayevskaya (1910–1987), founder of the body of ideas of Marxist-Humanism, was Chairwoman of News and Letters Committees from its founding to 1987. Charles Denby (1907–1983), a Black rank-and-file autoworker, author of *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker’s Journal*, was editor of the paper from 1955 to 1983.

The articulation of the relationship between the movement from practice which is itself a form of theory and the movement from theory to philosophy is reflected in Dunayevskaya’s three major works.

*Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 until Today* (1958), established the American roots of Marxism while presenting a comprehensive attack on present-day Communism, which is a form of state-capitalism. It re-established Marxism in its original form as “a thorough-going Naturalism or Humanism,” while pointing to the new Humanist philosophy expressed by the working class. It presented history and theory as emanating from the movement from practice.

*Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao* (1973), written after the failed revolts of the 1960s, articulated the integrality of philosophy and revolution as the characteristic of the age and, tracing it historically, caught the link of continuity with the Humanism of Marx. As against the vanguard party, the integration of dialectics and organization reflects the revolutionary maturity of the age and the passion for a philosophy of liberation.

*Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (1982) ex-

plores Marx’s body of ideas from his discovery of a continent of thought and of revolution in his youth to the “new moments” of his last decade. Written for our time of revolutions in developing countries, the rise of the international women’s liberation movement, and global economic crisis, it reveals the absolute challenge to make real Marx’s “revolution in permanence” as the determinant for the relationship of theory and practice and as ground for organization.

These works spell out the philosophic ground of Marx’s Humanism. *American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard* (1963, 1983) concretizes it on the American scene and shows the two-way freedom road between the U.S. and Africa.

In 1989 News and Letters Committees published Dunayevskaya’s original 1953 philosophic breakthrough—her two letters on Hegel’s Absolutes—and her 1987 Presentation on the Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy in *The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism*.

This body of ideas challenges all those desiring freedom to transcend the limitations of post-Marx Marxism. In light of the crises of our nuclear-armed world, climate change, and failed revolutions, it becomes

imperative not only to reject what is, but to further work out the revolutionary Humanist future inherent in the present. The recreation of Marx’s philosophy as Marxist-Humanism is recorded in Dunayevskaya’s archives, *The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection—Marxist-Humanism: A Half-Century of Its World Development*, deposited at Wayne State University in Detroit and available to all.

We aim to continue to develop Marxist-Humanism and make it available to all who struggle for freedom. In opposing this capitalist, racist, sexist, heterosexist, class-ridden society, we have adopted a committee form of organization rather than any elitist party “to lead.”

We participate in all class and freedom struggles, nationally and internationally. As our Constitution states:

“It is our aim...to promote the firmest unity among workers, Blacks and other minorities, women, youth and those intellectuals who have broken with the ruling bureaucracy of both capital and labor.” We do not separate mass activities from the activity of thinking.

Send for a free copy of the *Constitution* of News and Letters Committees or see it on our website: [www.newsandletters.org](http://www.newsandletters.org).