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Z MAGAZINE *April 2019*

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Z MAGAZINE is an independent magazine of critical thinking on political, cultural, social, and economic life in the U.S. Z Magazine (ISSN: 1056-5507) is currently published bi-monthly Copyright 2018 by The Institute for Social and Cultural Communications; Periodical postage paid at Hull, MA and additional mail offices.

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We welcome unsolicited submissions. Due dates are the 25th of each month. We also welcome zap listings of events, listings, news releases, etc. Ads are free at our discretion.

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One Year \$36

Two Years \$65

Three Years \$85

One Year Low Income \$28

Back issues/Replacement issues \$7 each

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International One Year U.S. \$57

Libraries and Institutions: sub \$50 (\$7 each replacement, U.S. only).

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Tosepan: Resistance and Renewal in Mexico

By Alex Jensen

Since the mid-1980s, Mexico has been a poster child for globalization. Through free trade treaties and structural adjustment policies imposed by international financial institutions, the country has been “liberalized”—opened up to unfettered corporate investment and imports—to an extent matched by few other countries. Though the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is the most well-known trade treaty to affect Mexico, it is but the first and largest of numerous multilateral and bilateral agreements that make Mexico the world’s free trade agreement (FTA) leader. All told, Mexico has signed 12 free trade agreements with 44 nations, 28 bilateral investment treaties, and 9 agreements of economic cooperation. (“Free Trade and Mexico’s Junk Food Epidemic,” *GRAIN*, March 2, 2015)

The grim consequences of globalization in Mexico are by now familiar. NAFTA threw the doors open to heavily subsidized U.S. agribusiness products—especially corn—which subsequently flooded into the country. Imports increased

three-fold, and the price of corn dropped 50 percent, devastating the rural economy and forcing some 4.9 million campesinos (peasants) out of farming altogether, precipitating their mass migration from the countryside to cities (and to the U.S.) in order to survive. (Wise, Timothy A., “Policy Space for Mexican Maize: Protecting Agro-biodiversity by Promoting Rural Livelihoods,” *Global Development and Environment Institute*, Tufts University, February 2007; Weisbrot, Mark, et al, “Did NAFTA Help Mexico? An Update After 23 Years,” *Center for Economic and Policy Research*, March 2017)

NAFTA also exposed the Mexican economy to retail and fast-food multinationals based in the U.S., besieging the country with an avalanche of junk

hypertension, diabetes, and obesity (these would be more accurately termed “corporate globalization-related diseases”). (*GRAIN*, op. cit.; Clark, Sarah E., et al., “Exporting obesity: US farm and trade policy and the transformation of the Mexican consumer food environment,” *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 2012, 18:1, 53–64)

The liberalization regime has also fueled a veritable bonanza for extractive industries—from mining and fossil fuels to big dams and mega-infrastructure developments. Transnational companies—with the blessing of state and national governments—have been scouring the country, extracting its natural wealth and concentrating the benefits in fewer and fewer corporate hands (the richest 1



Protesting president Donald Trump’s decision to end DACA, photo by Diego G Diaz/Shutterstock.com

foods and soft drinks high in fat, salt, and sugar, and an attendant epidemic of deadly “diet-related diseases”—e.g.

percent in Mexico owns over half of the country’s wealth). (“Mexico’s Extreme Inequality: 1% Owns Half of Coun-



Demonstrators participate in a Families Belong Together rally, one of several held nationwide to protest separating immigrant children and their parents, photo by Jana Shea/Shutterstock.com

try's Wealth," teleSUR, June 25, 2015) Consequently, Mexico hosts over 500 ongoing environmental conflicts—one of the highest counts in the world today. ("Investigadores de la UNAM, revelan más de 500 conflictos ambientales en México y construye mapa que los georeferencia y categoriza," México Ambiental, March 16, 2018) Defenders of the environment are targeted with violent reprisals by those pushing destructive development. Global Witness reports that 15 environmental defenders were killed in Mexico in 2017, up from 3 in 2016. ("At What Cost? Irresponsible business and the murder of land

and environmental defenders," Global Witness, 2018)

Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan

It is hard to find much hope amidst this desperate situation, and yet, throughout Mexico, there is a florescence of inspiring resistance and alternatives, some long-established, some only now springing up. In the southern state of Puebla, the lush, cloud-forested Sierra Norte mountains bordering Veracruz are home to one of the oldest and most inspiring of these movements of "the other Mexico" or México profundo (Bonfil Batalla, Guill-

ermo, México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization [Austin: University of Texas], January 1996: the Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan (Also known as Tosepan Titataniske, meaning "United We Will Overcome," in Náhuatl).

In Puebla, local communities defending their territories and lifeways are confronting corporate-state development projects, including mining, gas fracking, centralized electrical grid infrastructure, big dams, and big box stores. According to the *EJ Atlas*, concessions have been granted in Puebla for 11 mines and 14 hydroelectric projects, along with petroleum development (including



Protesting Trump's decision to end DACA, Diego G. Diaz/Shutterstock.com

fracking). (“Hidroeléctrica Puebla 1, Puebla, Mexico,” *Environmental Justice Atlas*, February 1, 2017)

But there has been a fierce backlash across the state, successfully blocking many of these projects. In the Sierra Norte, the resistance has been particularly spirited and effective, causing a number of hydropower projects to be suspended, and a planned Walmart (under its Mexican subsidiary name, Bodega Aurrerá) to be scuppered.

Some of the most effective resistance has emanated from a network of cooperatives called Tosepan that has been working in the region for 40 years, building up a parallel solidarity economy among largely Nahuatl and Tutunaku indigenous communities, encompassing some 35,000 members across 430 villages in 29 municipali-

ties. Tosepan was instrumental in encouraging a citizen's plebiscite to reject the incursion of a Walmart/Bodega Aurrerá store in the town of Cuetzalan in 2010, by using arguments about the economic, cultural and environmental harms it would cause. (“Walmart Store in Cuetzalan, Puebla, Mexico,” *Environmental Justice Atlas*, March 3, 2017) An analysis was done showing that Walmart's promised 60 low-quality jobs would come at the cost of 500 local businesses, and put at risk the entire solidarity economy built up by Tosepan and others, based on ancestral indigenous practices. (Gonzalez Amador, Roberto, “Cuetzalan frenó a Wal-Mart; se impuso la economía real,” *La Jornada*, April 25, 2012) The significance of this victory cannot be overstated in a country where Walmart has steadily been

taking over and dominating the economy (1 in 5 Walmart stores worldwide are in Mexico, destroying local livelihoods and spreading a culture of consumption, disposability, and waste). (Barstow, David, “Walmart Hushed Up a Vast Mexican Bribery Case,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2012)

All of these struggles of resistance help to uphold the main work of Tosepan: constructing a holistic, sustainable, locally and democratically controlled economy rooted in the indigenous culture and knowledge of the Sierra Norte—a source of dignified livelihoods and ecological security, and a viable alternative to the distress-migration suffered by so many other communities.

As one of Tosepan's members, María Luisa Albores, explained in a 2016 article in *La Jornada del Campo*: “The history of Tosepan is completely tied to its mission and reason for being, adhered to up until today: ‘Improve the quality of life of the families of the members (of the cooperative), through work organized to advance towards the construction of a project of ‘vida buena.’” (Albores, María Luisa, “Experiencia de Agroecología en la Tosepan...,” *La Jornada del Campo*, December 17, 2016)

Tosepan is comprised of three civil associations and eight cooperatives, which together cover basic needs. These include: organic agroecological

farming of staples like corn, beans and vegetables, as well as crops like coffee, pepper, and sugarcane, both for sale (primarily to local markets) and for the community's subsistence; small-scale, community-based eco-tourism; natural building using local resources like bamboo and adobe, incorporating features like water harvesting, solar dehydrators, ecological cookstoves, and renewable energy; local health-care, focusing on prevention and traditional herbal remedies; decentralized renewable energy with a goal of total energy sovereignty; and local finance to support the functioning of the entire ecosystem of cooperatives (Tosepan has its own cooperative bank, called "Tosepantomín," meaning "money of all"/"everyone's money," in Nahuatl). (See "Tosepantomín," Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan, 2016; Bien, Ethan, "Light for everyone: Indigenous youth mount a solar-powered resistance," Mongabay, December 10, 2018; "Comunidad indígena recurre a energía alternativa, rechazan a CFE," Slow Food, January 20, 2017; "Yolseuiloyan: Donde el Corazón descansa y se fortalece," Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan, 2018)

Since 2001, Tosepan's members have been involved in organic coffee production based on highly diversified, biologically rich agroecological "gardens of coffee" that are possi-



Mexican Americans march in support of equal rights for immigrants during a rally in San Jose, California, photo by Krista Kennell/Shutterstock.com

bly the most diversified coffee farms in Mexico. A single hectare may contain over 200 species of plants, with multiple ecological and social functions and values (ritual, medicinal, fuel, food for family consumption, non-timber forest products for trade, etc.).

Since 2014 there has been a special emphasis on food sovereignty in Tosepan, with the

goal of meeting local needs first. Some of the activities towards this end have included:

- increasing production of organic corn
- establishing vegetable gardens and chicken coops in the majority of member homes
- designing a local credit scheme called "Backyard Garden Credit"

- producing a documentary film, *Corazones de Maíz* (*Hearts of Corn*)
- writing a recipe book for wild greens/amaranth greens
- holding tastings to rescue and share traditional foods
- organizing events to barter backyard garden produce as well as seeds of corn, beans, amaranth, chilis and squashes
- maintaining a nursery with approximately 1 million plants—valuable forest species like coffee, macadamia, red cedar, cinnamon and many others—distributed each year to members for reforestation and agroforestry
- growing edible mushrooms on coffee pulp

Beginning in 2003, one of Tosepan's signature efforts has been to bring back the native bee *Scaptotrigona Mexicana*, known in the region as *pisil-nekmej*. This bee was domesticated in pre-colonial times, and the unique system of two-tiered clay pot hives has been maintained since then. The bees' honey, propolis, and wax have many medicinal properties, while the pollen is rich in proteins. The cooperative also makes products like shampoos, soaps and creams from the honey and wax.

Albres explains the ethos guiding Tosepan's work: "Our

cooperative model is based in values of a cosmovision or form of life that closely coincides with the social and solidarity economy which values life, people, the land, plants, and animals. From this vision we have constructed the mode of life of Tosepan.... The sense of belonging and permanence in our territory gives us identity...in the face of the onslaught and displacements of the capitalist system. Here we are and will continue with dignity, on foot walking in our land, which is sacred."

The capitalist system's relentless need to expand and grow continues to pose a threat, and Tosepan has not been spared the violence that the global economy inflicts on local people standing in its way. Some of its leaders have been murdered and others have narrowly escaped attempts on their lives by mercenaries in the pay of industry. (Bien, Ethan, "An Indigenous Cooperative is Dodging Bullets to Defend Their Land," *In These Times*, June 21, 2018) Violence and physical intimidation, it seems, continue to be favored tools of plunderers who have otherwise been blocked by well-organized communities deeply committed to defense of their homes.

This is one of the signal lessons of the inspiring work of Tosepan: that a culture of solidarity—fortified by cooperative(s) providing for material and cultural needs—deepens

democracy, and that this in turn makes it very hard for predatory capital to enter. However inspiring and admirable, though, the corporate free-trade regime bearing down on Mexico continues to hover menacingly in the background, posing a constant threat to any initiatives in local self-reliance, ecological security, dignity, and renewal. Thus the need to confront and dismantle this regime is still paramount, to enable many more Tosepans to emerge and succeed.

For additional information about Tosepan, see the following Spanish-language videos: Tosepan Titataniske and Video Institucional de la Cooperativa Tosepan Titataniske. Explore more grassroots initiatives for localization and community resilience in the Planet Local library on Local Futures' website, www.localfutures.org.

ICE Announces "New Normal"

By Danica Jorden

At a press conference in Charlotte, North Carolina on February 8, 2019, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) regional director Sean Gallagher announced a "new normal" for his agency in terms of

how, where and why they will be arresting people they deem to be immigration violators. The conference was called because of the sudden and drastic uptick in immigrant arrests in Central North Carolina over the last three days, which ICE confirms have reached 230.

The recent wave began on Wednesday with the 8:00 AM raid of a gun manufacturing factory in Sanford, resulting in 30 arrests. Soon increasing reports of other arrests in nearby towns began to be relayed by phone, text and social media, between friends, lawyers and charitable organizations. Charlotte's Centro Hispano heard

about an arrest at an apartment complex, a gas station, and in front of a child being dropped off at school. Speaking in Spanish, one woman told Channel 11 news, "They came with five cars and then five more came to take him away."

Gallagher blamed area sheriffs who refuse to participate in 287(g), a policy enacting cooperation between law enforcement and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS, which oversees ICE) wherein local jails respect ICE requests, whenever they suspect someone arrested for a crime may also be undocumented, to hold such persons until ICE arrives.

The regional director claimed that because local sheriffs and police are not turning offenders over to ICE, ICE is being forced to go into the community to seek them out. And when they do so, ICE agents may also make "collateral arrests," detaining anyone in the area who is not capable of providing official documentation to prove their citizenship or legal status at their discretion.

When a reporter asked Gallagher, "How many of these people are actually a threat to homeland security?," Gallagher replied that if local police and sheriffs do not comply with 287(g), "I wouldn't have to put



A demonstrator protests the US Government policy of separating immigrant children and their parents, photo by Jana Shea/Shutterstock.com



Demonstrators participate in a Families Belong Together rally, photo by Jana Shea/Shutterstock.com

so many officers in the street and you wouldn't have so many of these people going to work being arrested."

It's a move reflective of the hostage-taking negotiating style of the Trump Administration, like shutting down the government and starving low-wage federal workers and SNAP recipients, or separating small children from their parents at the border. If you don't want working people, immigrants and refugees used as pawns, fund the wall and hand over enough immigrants to satisfy the current appetite for scapegoats and fulfill the president's nativist campaign promises. Give us the "bad hombres" and the "good immigrants" can go free.

Ironically most of the people arrested at Bear Creek Arsenal, the gun manufacturer in Sanford, weren't even men. Christian Canales, who live streamed

meeting ICE officers at the factory and was later arrested and released for "communication threats," noted that most of the employees detained were women, and the majority of them from El Salvador. One of them was held for nine hours before being released to take care of her handicapped child. Bear Creek's main product is the AR-15, the automatic rifle notoriously employed in recent U.S. mass shootings.

Sanford is in Lee County, whose sheriff supports and cooperates with ICE activity. But the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Police Department printed a statement on Friday February 8 unequivocally reiterating their position against 287(g): "The CMPD has not and will not participate in ICE immigration enforcement operations.... CMPD policy mandates that officers are required to treat everyone whom they have con-

tact with equally and without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, citizenship, sexual orientation or any other arbitrary stereotype."

Recently elected Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden ended 287(g) on his first day in office in December 2018, as did Sheriff Gerald Baker, his counterpart in Wake County, location of the state's capital, Raleigh, who released 18 persons on immigration hold from the county jail on December 18. Durham County Sheriff Clarence Birkhead reaffirmed Durham policy not to honor ICE detainers as soon as he came into office as well. Sheriff Charles Blackwood of Orange County, where Chapel Hill is located, declared that Orange County has not collaborated with ICE since 2014.

Trump Moves the World Closer to "Doomsday"

By Marjorie Cohn

In 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union adopted the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in an effort to eliminate missiles on hair-trigger alert for nuclear war due to their short flight times. It was the first time the

two countries agreed to destroy nuclear weapons. That treaty outlawed nearly 2,700 ballistic or land-based cruise missiles with a range of roughly 300 to 3,000 miles.

The Trump administration thought nothing of pulling out of the INF. On February 2, the United States suspended its obligations under the treaty, starting a dangerous chain reaction that brings us closer to nuclear war. Russia followed suit and pulled out of the treaty the next day.

Then the three countries with the largest nuclear arsenals quickly test-launched nuclear-capable missiles. France conducted a test of its medium-range air-to-surface missile on February 4. The next day, the United States fired a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). And an hour and a half later, Russia launched an RS-24 Yars ICBM.

Richard Burt participated in the negotiations of the INF during the Reagan administration. Last fall, he predicted that U.S. withdrawal would lead to Russia's deployment of intermediate-range missiles and the United States' development of new sea- and air-based weapons systems. Sure enough, on February 4, Russia's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, announced his country plans to build mid-range, nuclear-capable missiles within two years.

"New intermediate-range cruise and ballistic missiles

and low-yield warheads now being planned both in Russia and United States are nothing other than filed-down triggers to all-out thermonuclear war," Daniel Ellsberg, author of *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, told Truthout. He warns of "nuclear winter," which is the end of civilization as we know it. A consultant to the Defense Department and the White House in 1961, Ellsberg drafted Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's plans for nuclear war.

Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, concurs. "Trump has fired the starting pistol on Cold War II. Only this one could be bigger, more dangerous, and the world may not be so lucky this time around."

Trump's Actions Undermine Nuclear Disarmament

The adoption of the INF led to the 1991 signing of

the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which considerably reduced the number of long-range strategic nuclear weapons. The New START, signed in 2010, requires the U.S. and Russia to reduce the number of deployed nuclear warheads from a maximum of 2,200 in 2010 to 1,550 in 2018. Trump's cavalier withdrawal from INF does not portend well for the renewal of New START in 2021.

Moreover, Trump's Nuclear Posture Review of 2018 would allow the United States to use nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear attacks. This new U.S. policy opens the door to first-use of nuclear weapons, which is prohibited by international law.

The Nuclear Posture Review also violates the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which the United States is a party. This treaty requires parties "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective mea-



By Tschub/Shutterstock.com

asures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.”

The Doomsday Clock Says “Two Minutes to Midnight”

In order to convey the urgency of the threat to humanity and the planet, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists created the Doomsday Clock. It uses imagery of the apocalypse (midnight) and a nuclear explosion (countdown to zero). The decision to either move or leave in place the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock is made each year. The Clock is a universally recognized measure of vulnerability to catastrophe caused by nuclear weapons, climate change or other emerging technologies that could pose a threat. On January 24, the Bulletin once again kept the Doomsday Clock at two minutes to midnight. And that was before the U.S. and Russia pulled out of the INF.

“Trump and Putin are both posturing as gunslingers in a Western movie,” Ellsberg warned. “But the weapons in their quick-draw holsters are not pistols; they are doomsday machines. And this is not high noon; it is two minutes to midnight.”

Toward Denuclearization

In his book, Ellsberg proposes the U.S. government undertake the following measures toward the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons:

- A U.S. no-first-use poli-

cy;

- Probing investigative hearings on war plans to avoid nuclear winter;
- Eliminating ICBMs;
- Ending the pretense of preemptive damage-limiting by first-strike forces;
- Foregoing profits, jobs and alliance hegemony based on maintaining that pretense; and
- Otherwise dismantling the U.S. nuclear arsenal, which Ellsberg calls the American Doomsday Machine.

On January 30, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Representative Adam Smith (D-WA), chair of the House Armed Services Committee, took a good first step. They introduced the No First Use Act, to establish in law that it is the policy of the United States not to fire nuclear weapons first so “that the United States should never initiate a nuclear war.”

The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) forbids ratifying countries “never under any circumstances to develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.” It also prohibits the transfer of, use of, or threat to use nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices. The treaty, adopted in

2017, will enter into force after 50 nations have ratified it. Thus far, it has 21 ratifications. But the five original nuclear-armed countries, which also happen to be the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—the U.S., Russia, France, China and the U.K.—did not participate in the treaty negotiations and have not agreed to it.

Resistance against nuclear weapons also takes the form of civil disobedience, such as the recent action by the Kings Bay Plowshares 7.

The Kings Bay Plowshares 7

When I was growing up in the early days of the Cold War, the fear of nuclear annihilation was pervasive. Although U.S. nuclear weapons have been on hair trigger alert for 73 years, “nuclear weapons have become normal,” Patrick O’Neill told Truthout. He and 6 other Catholic activists are facing up to 25 years in prison for their symbolic action to disarm the nuclear weapons on Kings Bay Naval Base in Georgia. They chose April 4, 2018, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to mount their protest.

In May 2018, the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 were charged with conspiracy, destruction of property on a naval station, depredation of government property, and trespass, stemming from their action at the Kings Bay Naval Base. The base is homeport to six nuclear bal-

listic missile submarines each armed with 16 Trident II missiles. They carried with them a copy of Ellsberg's book and left it on the base.

The defendants, who will likely go to trial this spring, maintain that any use or threat to use nuclear weapons of mass destruction is illegal, Kings Bay Plowshares 7 spokesperson Bill Ofenloch told Truthout. They are also arguing that their prosecution violates the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, because their actions were motivated by their Catholic belief that nuclear weapons are immoral and illegal. The Act was passed in 1993 to strengthen protection of free exercise of religion. Finally, the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 are claiming that Trump's repeated threats to use nuclear weapons and his illegal conduct have not been prosecuted, so the government's decision to prosecute only those who protest against nuclear weapons constitutes unlawful selective prosecution.

Co-defendant Martha Hennessy is the granddaughter of Catholic Worker Movement co-founder Dorothy Day. The movement, founded in 1933, comprises 203 Catholic Worker communities committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, prayer, and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry and forsaken. Catholic Workers protest war, racism, violence and injustice. (The Catholic Worker newspaper is still published and sells for a penny

a copy.)

Hennessy told Truthout, "The U.S. withdrawal from the INF treaty is designed to ensnare Russia and the world in a new nuclear arms race." She warns, "This is empire run

**It is incumbent
upon all of us
to resist the inexorable march
toward nuclear
winter**

amok, we have lost our democracy, let us pray we don't lose our world and each other."

It is incumbent upon all of us to resist the inexorable march toward nuclear winter. We must join together in coalitions and protest to Congress, the White House, in writing and in the streets. There is no time to lose. It is two minutes to midnight on the Doomsday Clock.

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and a member of the advisory board of Veterans for Peace. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*. The Publication of Origin for this article is Truthout.

African Diaspora Rising: The Year of the Door of Return to Africa

By Ron Daniels

This year, 2019, marks the 400th year since the Dutch ship White Lion arrived in Jamestown in the British Colony that was to become the Commonwealth of Virginia with "20 and odd Negroes" from Africa. The arrival of these indentured enslaved Africans was the opening chapter in one of the most horrific events in human history, the holocaust of African enslavement, the MAAFA via the European slave trade. Proud African men and women from highly civilized and accomplished kingdoms and nations were savagely assaulted by European invaders bearing terrifying weapons of war previously unknown to the continent—canons and guns ignited by the Chinese invention of gunpowder. Despite fierce resistance, millions of Africans would eventually be captured and taken to ports on the west coast to face the horrifying experience of being dragged through "Doors Of No Return" at Elimina Castle on the "Gold Coast"/Ghana and

Goree Island in Senegal. Thus, began the creation of the Diaspora as the sons and daughters of Africa were forcibly scattered throughout the western hemisphere on board the ships of profit-seeking, profit-driven conquering European colonizers, hell bent on making fortunes in the “new world.”

But, this tragic conquest and “underdevelopment” of the people and nations of Africa and the genocidal dispossession of the indigenous people of the western hemisphere and ruthless imposition of a plantation system supported by enslaved labor, this nadir also witnessed the continuation of the heroic resistance and historic struggle/quest for the reformation, restoration/rebuilding of African communities and nations in strange/foreign regions and lands. The “African/Black Freedom Struggle” that began with resistance to the European invaders on the continent continued under the unspeakably harsh conditions of enslavement in the form of sabotage, relentless revolts, victorious escape and formation of maroon communities throughout the Caribbean, Central and South America and North America.

From the motherland to the western hemisphere the Honor Roll of the Black Freedom Struggle is replete with the names of courageous freedom fighters, institutions and nation-builders:

- Queen Nzingha
- Yaa Asantewaa
- Queen Nanny
- Boukman
- Toussaint
- Dessalines
- Marie-Jean Lamartiniere
- Mambo Iwa Marinet bwa-Cheche
- Cinque
- Harriet Tubman
- Nat Turner
- Gabriel Prosser
- Denmark Vesey
- Sojourner Truth
- Richard Allen
- Frederick Douglass
- Callie House...

Unquestionably the Haitian Revolution was the highwater mark of the widespread resistance, rebellion and quest for self-determination and nationhood. The Haitian revolutionaries shattered the myth of white supremacy by defeating the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte at the height of the European slave trade. January 1, 1804 in the City of Gonaives, Jean Jacques Dessalines declared Haiti an independent nation. He further proclaimed that enslaved Africans from anywhere who set foot on Haitian soil would be granted citizenship in the first Black Republic in the world. The African drumbeat and grapevine spread the word of this magnificent feat like wildfire, sparking inspiration and hope for enslaved and oppressed Africans everywhere.

January 1 was also an important date in the United States in

North America. Faced with the economic and military reality of the multifaceted insurrection and escape of enslaved Africans from plantations in the South and the militant campaign of quasi-free Blacks, President Abraham Lincoln made a calculated decision to sign an Emancipation Proclamation. This widely hailed document only “freed” enslaved Africans in those states that were actively engaged in “belligerency” against the Union. Enslaved Africans in other states remained in servitude until the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. African freedom fighters in virtually every territory colonized by the imperialist nations of Europe waged struggles to achieve “emancipation” as a basis for independence. And these days are celebrated/commemorated accordingly.

However, declarations of emancipation or independence did not heal and repair the wounds and damages of enslavement or colonialism. In the U.S. the promise of 40 acres and a mule, reparations to begin the process of repair, went unfulfilled, setting the stage for a protracted struggle against de jure and de facto segregation and various forms of oppression and control of people of African descent. In the Caribbean, in many instances European colonizers actually compensated/paid reparations to the plantation owners for the loss of their property, while

leaving behind the “mess” created by centuries of enslavement and domination. On the African continent, the ravishes and “underdevelopment” of enslavement, colonialism and neo-colonialism wreaked immeasurable havoc and harm on the birth place of humankind and civilization.

But, “truth crushed to earth will rise again”—“We have come over a way that with tears has been watered... We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered...” In the face of the unrelenting machinations of the exploitative and oppressive forces of white supremacy, the resiliency gene in the DNA of Africans has enabled an uprooted, scattered, battered, abused and battle-scarred people to keep rising, to “keep on pushing” toward the restoration of the race.

Despite the massive political and economic disruption, cultural aggression and loss of untold millions of lives during the holocaust of enslavement, the MAAFA, 400 years after the arrival of enslaved Africans in Jamestown, there are now more than a billion Africans on the continent and some 213 million in the western hemisphere. As DuBois prophesized, the “color line” remains the principal barrier to full freedom and self-determination for African people. But, Dr. Martin Luther King declared that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but



Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), by Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

it bends towards justice.” On the continent of Africa and in every corner of the globe, conscious Africans are proclaiming that “Black Lives Matter,” mounting resistance to oppressive systems, storming the barrier, demanding reparations, building institutions, communities and nations and bending the arc toward the restoration and revitalization of the race.

Africans in America have yet to achieve full freedom, but, as the old folks in our community

used to say, “We sure ain’t what we want to be, sure ain’t what we’re going to be, but we sure ain’t what we were.” Milestone victories in Montgomery, Birmingham, Little Rock, Selma and beyond shattered the legal barrier of segregation. Today there are thousands of Black elected officials across the country—sheriffs, city council persons, mayors, state legislators, Congresspersons, Senators. And, the “hands that once picked cotton, elected the first



Toussaint Louverture on 1 Gourde 1989 Banknote from Haiti, Georgios Kollidas/Shutterstock.com

African America President of the United States. Blacks preside over multi-billion-dollar, multi-national corporations in Capitalist America, and Black artists, athletes and entertainers have claimed to heights that were impossible... "in the days when hope unborn had died." Africans in America have more than \$2 trillion of economic power in our Black hands; a sum that would make Black America the eighth richest nation in the world. It's time for Africans in America and the totality of the Diaspora to rise up to help lead an African Renaissance.

2019 will be a galvanizing moment, the historical, spiritual, cultural backdrop for a powerful surge of energy propelling people of African descent to reclaim our rightful place at the forefront of human development with mother Africa, the richest continent on the face of the earth, at the center. The daughters and sons of Africa in the Diaspora, including

the descendants of those who were forced through Doors of No Return, must seize this occasion as a Door Of Return To Africa moment; a time for a spiritual, cultural, social and economic connection with our sisters and brothers in the motherland.

In that spirit, Reverend Dennis Dillon, Senior Pastor of the Rise Center in Brooklyn, New York and visionary proponent of Black economic development for global Black empowerment envisions a massive initiative in this historic year. In his words, "2019 must be the year when thousands of people of African descent from the Caribbean, Central and South America, the United States and Canada make their journey back to the motherland and the year that the motherland lays out the welcome mat and rolls out the red carpet to welcome her children back home. The Door of No Return must be replaced by The Door Of Our Return, and a decade of return

must begin. A bridge must be built, the estrangement broken, and a new era embraced that endears Africans in the Americas to work in collaboration with Africans on the continent for a new and empowered Africa." Awesome.

With the blessing of H.E. Arikana Chihombori-Quao, the dynamic and visionary African Union Ambassador to the U.S., the endorsement of the World Conference of Mayors under the leadership of Johnny Ford former Mayor of Tuskegee, Alabama and the support of the New York-based Pan African Unity Dialogue and the Institute of the Black World 21st Century, the Door Of Our Return 2019 Initiative has the potential to be a momentous undertaking. Reverend Dillon envisions a contingent of hundreds of conscious and dedicated Sojourners, business and professional leaders, entrepreneurs, elected officials, youth, faith, civil rights and human rights leaders, embarking on a spiritual, cultural and economic Pilgrimage to Ghana, Senegal, Ethiopia, Benin and Nigeria culminating with a climatic gathering in South Africa.

Up from the trials and tribulations of enslavement, colonialism, segregation, neo-colonialism, ongoing racial oppression and economic exploitation, the triumphant sons and daughters of Africa in the Diaspora must continue to rise up to finish the unfinished struggle for genuine

“emancipation” and self-determination; emancipation that none but ourselves can realize; self-determination with a firm African based economic foundation that will make the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey smile from on high. 2019 will be a milestone moment in the victorious history of Africans in human history. “Up you mighty race, accomplish what you will.”

Dr. Ron Daniels is President of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and Distinguished Lecturer Emeritus, York College City University of New York. His articles and essays appear on the IBW website www.ibw21.org and www.northstarnews.com. His weekly radio show, Vantage Point can be heard Mondays 4:00–5:00 PM on WBAI, 99.5 FM, Pacifica in New York,

streaming live via WBAI.org. To send a message, arrange media interviews or speaking engagements, Dr. Daniels can be reached via email at info@ibw21.org.

Securing Peace

By Kathy Kelly

Constant military surveillance of Afghans yields almost no real intelligence about the problems they face each day. An unusual group of volunteers uses a far different approach.

Hossein, a member of the Afghan Peace Volunteers, (APV), which hosted my recent visit to Afghanistan, rolled up his

sleeve to show me a still-healing three-inch wound. Thieves had broken into his family home in Kabul. When they were discovered, one of the robbers stabbed Hossein.

An APV coordinator, Zekerullah, was robbed and beaten by assailants in broad daylight. Ata Khan lost his camera and mobile phone to a gang of young thieves who accosted him and eight other people in a public park during the daytime. Habib, a recent young graduate of the APV Street Kids School program, suffered blows from several attackers a month ago.

“I didn’t have anything they wanted to take,” he said, assuring me he is okay, even though his lower back, where they beat him, is still sore.

Attacks like these—which all happened within the last six



Four young school friends sit on top of a wall having finished their first day at a newly built school in Baharak, Afghanistan, Maximum Exposure PR/Shutterstock



Afghanistan, Kabul, photo by Lebedev/Shutterstock.com

months—are predictable in a chaotic war-torn city that absorbs new refugees every day. Some have been forced off their land by drought and food scarcity, while others flee the terror of violence carried out by various warring parties, including the United States. In 2018, the United States dropped 7,632 bombs on Afghanistan, more than any other full calendar year since the U.S. Air Force began documenting its attacks in 2006.

According to the United Nations, in the first 9 months of 2018, there was a 39 percent rise in the number of casualties from airstrikes, compared to the same period of the previous year. Within Kabul, violent bomb attacks by the Taliban and other groups have become horribly normal. Rising unemployment rates, now at 25 to 30 percent, also afflict people. The

International Labor Organization, reporting two months ago, said Afghanistan has the highest unemployment rate of any country in the world. My four young friends are very lucky, on many counts, that they are still alive.

And they're trying to make things better. Thirty-five young people recently gathered for the seventh of twelve weekly orientation classes. Topics covered include ecological sanity, combating inequality, confronting world hunger and abolishing war. Muhammad Ali, age 20, teaches the course. The APV maintain a waiting list of young people wanting to join the next cycle of classes.

"The people coming to the class learn information they've never heard about before," Muhammad Ali says. "We think about ways to make peace and to live with respect for nature."

U.S. efforts to improve Afghanistan's decaying education institutions have been woefully inadequate. Reconstruction projects have been riddled with corruption. Millions of dollars have been poured into various militias, while seemingly endless shipments of weapons arrive in the country. Drones and military blimps prowl the skies, supposedly in search of "bad guys."

But the militarization of the society and the constant surveillance from remote cameras yield almost no real intelligence concerning the problems ordinary Afghans face each day, as they try to survive.

Negotiations over Afghanistan's future are being guided by people in charge of huge arsenals and sophisticated intelligence networks. The outcome would be better if U.S. leadership would take an interest in the APV's approach to "surveillance."

In stark contrast to "intelligence" operations carried out by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan, the APV continue building their database, recording details about destitute and impoverished families whom they invite into projects aiming to help needy families subsist.

Traveling on foot, the Afghan Peace Volunteers gather their "intelligence" by sitting on the floor with families in precarious homes, respectfully collecting information in spiral notebooks. They ask about rent

expenses, access to clean water, and whether the family can afford beans over the course of a week. Families who have little-to-no income and who must depend on a child's earnings for food and rent are especially welcome to join the APV Street Kids School.

This year, more than 100 children have gathered every Friday to study reading, writing, and math. Equally important to the APV are the weekly nonviolence classes organized around themes mirroring the course taught by Muhammad Ali.

The children apply what they learn by participating in APV projects. They help plant trees, tend gardens, and serve meals to day laborers. They join in clean-up projects along the city's riverfront. Every year, they climb a high hill, carrying kites, as part of their "Fly Kites, Not Drones" campaign.

Families whose children participate in the Street Kids School receive a vital monthly contribution of rice, cooking oil, and beans. The children know they are helping their families as well as themselves. When I ask what fuels her energy to coordinate classes and activities at the Street Kids School, Masoma, who has been with the school since its inception, responds immediately: "It's my passion." Concerned for the future of the 100 children who finished their 3-year program last year, APV mem-



By Optimarc/Shutterstock.com

bers have begun working on ways to help them gain skills in various trades. They're also forming cooperatives to enable future employment.

Where you stand determines what you see. I admire the APV blend of idealism and practicality, doing "the things that make for peace," even as they face daily anxieties in the chaos and upheaval that mark life in a war zone. They take time, day in, day out, to notice and care about people in need. They aren't afraid to share resources. Facing violence, they control the urge to retaliate. And they clearly see the futility of entrusting their futures and those of the neediest people they know to predatory power brokers who have already plundered and killed people in murderous wars.

A version of this article first appeared on the website of the Progressive magazine.

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Drug Company Executives Defend Their Prices on the Hill

By Martha Rosenberg

Why have you raised the price of an insulin vial from \$200 to \$1,500? Why does Actimmune, for malignant osteopetrosis, sell for \$350 in Britain and \$26,000 in the U.S.? Why does Novartis charge \$475,000 for its new cancer drug? Why does the

gallstone drug Chenodal cost \$42,570 a month?

If members of the Senate Finance Committee ask these questions of the seven pharmaceutical executives testifying on the Hill, they will probably hear, “because we can.”

Pharma’s shameless profit party is hard to miss. It began with TV ads for its most expensive drugs, segued into aggressive marketing of 5-digit injectable biologic drugs, and even had a stopover overseas where it tries to incorporate to duck U.S. taxes. Yes, the U.S. taxes it lives on.

Now, even Congress is crying uncle.

Pharma has two lobbyists for every member of Congress. It spends more on lobbying than tobacco, oil and defense contractors combined. The U.S. government is captured.

Want a chilling example? The CDC Foundation which receives millions from corporations (not that it affects policies or anything) lists as donors Abbott, AbbVie, Bayer, AstraZeneca, Merck, Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals, Eli Lilly, Amgen, Genentech, Gilead and many more. (Many speculate that is why the CDC allows its name to be used in Gilead ads for its megapriced Hep C drug.)

Until 2010, PhRMA, Pharma’s top lobbying group, was headed by former Louisiana Representative Billy Tauzin who resigned from Congress where he chaired the commit-

tee which oversees the drug industry only to immediately reappear as the leader of PhRMA where he drew a \$2 million salary. No conflict of interest there.

Tauzin had played a key role in shepherding the Medicare Prescription Drug Bill through Congress which prohibited government negotiation of lower drug prices and Canadian imports. “It’s a sad commentary on politics in Washington that a member of Congress who pushed through a major piece of legislation benefiting the drug industry, gets the job leading that industry,” Public Citizen’s President Joan Claybrook said.

Two-thirds of Pharma lobbyists previously worked for Congress or federal agencies reports the *New York Times*. An aide to the late former Michigan Representative John D. Dingell now works for PhRMA, and an aide to former Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, who was the chair of the Senate health committee “is now a top lobbyist for Merck.” Gary Andres, former staff director of the House Energy and Commerce Committee now lobbies for biotech companies. And the list goes on.

Having captured Congress, you wouldn’t think Pharma needs a charm offensive. Yet it spends millions trying to convince the public it has our interests at heart as it raises our taxes and health care costs. Recently, “America’s Biopharma-

ceutical companies” are running a “Go Boldly” campaign, ennobling their work with the pay-off line “here’s to permission to fail.”

Yes, Pharma knows a lot about “permission to fail.” Over 20 of its drugs have been withdrawn from the market in recent years because they were so dangerous—after maximum money was made, of course. They include Vioxx, Bextra, Baycol, Trovan, Meridia, Seldane, Hismanal, Darvon, Raxar, Redux Mylotarg, Lotronex, Propulsid, phenylpropanolamine (PPA), Prexige, phenacetin, Oraflex, Omnicor, Posicor, Serzone and Duract. Meanwhile Humira is the best-selling prescription drug in the world though its immune system suppression invites tuberculosis, lethal infections, melanoma, lymphoma, “unusual cancers in children and teenagers” and, in a recent report, leprosy. Will senators grill Richard Gonzalez, the CEO of AbbVie, who makes Humira?

Pharma has gotten most of its extreme-priced drugs approved by parading “patients” in front of the FDA and insurance panels. What will happen when Pharma captains themselves are paraded in front of the Senate Finance Committee? Can this shameless industry be tamed?



Iran Sanctions

By Medea Benjamin
& Nicolas JS Davies

When the Trump administration unilaterally pulled out of the Iran nuclear agreement in May 2018 and announced it would reimpose sanctions against Iran, the European Union (EU) declared its commitment to preserving the agreement and finding ways for its companies to circumvent U.S. sanctions. Now, eight months later, the Europeans finally announced the creation of INSTEX (Instrument In Support Of Trade Exchanges) as an alternative payment system so that European firms can do business with Iran. This mechanism might be too little and too late

to salvage the Iran nuclear deal but it marks a milestone in an inevitable transition of epic proportions: the end of the global hegemony of the dollar.

INSTEX is a complicated mechanism registered in France and headed by a German banker, with shareholders from the three European countries that were signatories to the Iran nuclear deal: France, Germany and the UK. It will initially be used for non-sanctionable trade, such as medicine, food and medical devices, and is also likely to only attract smaller businesses, not large companies with significant exposure to U.S. markets.

It has had an 8-month difficult birth because no one country wanted to claim maternity rights for fear of a U.S. backlash. Indeed, the U.S. threatened to devour it before it was born.

While other countries use economic sanctions as weapons in international disputes, the U.S. is the only country that imposes secondary sanctions on third country citizens and

institutions. The U.S. government uses the role of the dollar as an international reserve currency and the central role of U.S. banks and institutions in the international financial system to present third country firms with an insidious either/or choice: cut off business ties with Iran (or Russia, North Korea, Turkey, etc.), or lose far more lucrative business with the U.S. and risk financial penalties in U.S. courts. For most companies, the choice is clear.

The Iranian economy has been devastated as dozens of European companies have abandoned trade deals and investments that had resumed following the signing of the nuclear accord.

It's not just European companies that have jumped ship. Iran has had bad news from China, too. On December 20, China's Bank of Kunlun, which until now has processed most Chinese payments for Iranian oil, announced that it would fully comply with U.S. sanctions and stop processing payments when its current sanctions waiver runs out at the end of April. The bank, which is majority-owned by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), seems to be prioritizing its business dealings with the U.S. over its relations with Iran.

On the other hand, the CNPC has shelled out a billion dollars to take over Total's share of a contract to develop Iran's South Pars natural gas



By AlexLMX/Shutterstock.com

field, the largest in the world, after the French firm caved to U.S. sanctions. As in other areas of U.S.-China relations, China is clearly making calculated and nuanced decisions about how to respond to the U.S. sanctions regime and its consequences.

For the people of Iran, the recent inclusion of Parsian Bank among a list of 50 Iranian banks subjected to U.S. sanctions has been particularly devastating. Parsian Bank, the largest private sector bank in Iran, had been processing payments for most imports of food, medicines and other humanitarian supplies to Iran. These items are officially exempt from U.S. sanctions, but the *Washington Post* reported on November 17 that the U.S. action against Parsian Bank was already “choking off medicine imports.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif posted on Twitter four letters from European pharmaceutical companies announcing that they were ending operations in Iran. Iran has a large domestic pharmaceutical industry, but many of the raw materials are imported. A woman in Tehran told the *Washington Post* that her father’s medicine for macular degeneration—from Bausch & Lomb in Canada—had already become hard to find, and the price had spiked from \$7 to \$70.

The U.S. pretext for sanctions against the Parsian Bank is a convoluted chain of relation-

ships that allegedly connect Parsian to the Basij, a paramilitary organization that serves as a reserve corps and police force under the command of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Basij polices demonstrations in Iran, and some Basij members have been fighting with the IRGC’s elite Quds Force in Syria. The Basij is best known outside Iran for recruiting boys as young as 12 during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s to launch “human wave” attacks on Iraqi forces. Today, groups such as Human Rights Watch allege that it recruits Hazara (Shiite) Afghan refugees as young as 14 to fight in Syria.

In a press release entitled “Treasury Sanctions Vast Financial Network Supporting Iranian Paramilitary Force That Recruits and Trains Child Soldiers,” the U.S. Treasury laid out its case for sanctioning Parsian Bank as “part of the Basij’s economic conglomerate.” But the Parsian Bank is only tenuously connected to the Basij via one of its shareholders, the Andisheh Mehvaran Investment Company, which the Treasury alleges is indirectly owned by the Basij. This is akin to alleging that a U.S. corporation is guilty whenever one of its shareholders is accused of a crime.

While sanctions hurt ordinary Iranians, U.S. leaders claim they are intended to force the Iranian government back to the table to negotiate

a deal that would ban nuclear weapons forever, end its ballistic missile program, and stop its support for armed groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. Inside and outside Iran, however, U.S. sanctions are seen as part of a larger strategy for regime change, something key members of the Trump administration, including National Security Advisor John Bolton, talk openly about.

This short-term victory of creating economic chaos, however, is not setting the scene for new negotiations or causing the government to collapse. It is, however, contributing to a growing international frustration that the U.S. can use the power of the U.S. dollar and its financial and judicial systems to tell firms in other countries who they can and can’t do business with. This imposition of U.S. sovereignty and control over people and firms in third countries is deeply resented overseas.

As economist Jeffrey Sachs told *Business Week*, “Europe and China have banks. One of these days, the U.S. is going to talk the dollar right out of its international role.” Already, 87 countries, including many traditional U.S. allies, have joined the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which operates independently of the dollar-based financial system.

Europe’s new mechanism for circumventing U.S. sanctions

may or may not work, but the extraterritorial reach of U.S. sanctions on Iran and other nations is certainly hastening the day when the rest of the world will develop a multipolar financial system that no one country can use as an illegitimate tool of imperial power. This will gradually force the U.S. to find a new place in a post-imperial, multipolar world that it cannot dominate by military force or economic warfare.

As our deluded leaders escalate their economic warfare against other countries, not least Cuba and Venezuela, it's a good time for Americans to start thinking about how we can instead cooperate with all our neighbors in a smooth, peaceful transition to a sustainable, multipolar world.

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The Big Obstacle for Bernie Sanders is

Media Trash-ing

By Norman Solomon

Some people are attached to the idea that the Democratic National Committee will “rig” the presidential nomination against Bernie Sanders. The meme encourages the belief that the Bernie 2020 campaign is futile because of powerful corporate Democrats. But such fatalism should be discarded.

As Frederick Douglass said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” Of course top Democratic Party officials don't intend to give up control. It has to be taken from them. And the conditions for doing that are now more favorable than ever.

The effects of mobilized demands for change in the Democratic presidential nominating process have been major—not out of the goodness of any power broker's heart, but because progressives have organized effectively during the last two years.

“I think I will not shock anybody to suggest that the DNC was not quite evenhanded” during the 2016 race, Bernie said recently on CNN. “I think we have come a long way since then, and I fully expect to be treated quite as well as anybody else.”

One big factor: this time, no candidate can gain frontrunner leverage with superdelegates the way Hillary Clinton did early in the race. Last August, under grassroots pressure, the DNC voted to abolish superdelegates' votes at the Democratic National Convention for the first ballot of the nominating process. There hasn't been a second ballot since 1952.

When timeworn polemics insist that what's now underway can't really happen, it is time to revise the polemics. For many years, we heard that genuinely progressive Democrats couldn't make meaningful inroads in Congress. Now, with impacts that far exceed their growing numbers, recently arrived House members are doing a lot to help reshape the political discourse—notably Pramila Jayapal, Ro Khanna, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib.

While ill-founded, the line that “the DNC will rig 2020” is apt to have perverse impacts. No doubt sincerely believed by some, the outdated notion serves to demoralize and de-energize.

Is the Bernie 2020 campaign facing a steep uphill climb? Of course it is. Are powerful forces arrayed to crush it? Absolutely.

But let's be clear. The huge obstacle ahead is not the DNC—it's the mass media. The corporate-owned and corporate-advertiser-funded media of this country are the biggest



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barriers between Bernie Sanders and the Oval Office.

Often functioning as propaganda outlets, the major news media serve as an amplification system for corporate power that has long shielded the Democratic Party from the combined “threats” of social movements and progressive populist candidates. The synergies of momentum from the left—outside and inside of electoral arenas—are continuing to accelerate.

It’s crucial that progressives develop more effective challenges to the media serving the predatory big-money system. More than any other force, reflexive spin from corporate media stands between us and a Bernie Sanders presidency.

In sharp contrast to campaigns with enormous budgets for Astroturf, the first Sanders presidential campaign was able to effectively defy the conventional wisdom and overall power structure by inspiring

and mobilizing at the grassroots. His campaign was—and is—antithetical to the politics of corporate media.

Two examples of news coverage, exactly three years apart, indicate what the Bernie 2020 campaign will be up against. In early March 2016, at a pivotal moment during the primary campaign, FAIR analyst Adam Johnson documented that the *Washington Post* “ran 16 negative stories on Bernie Sanders in 16 hours...a window that includes the crucial Democratic debate in Flint, Michigan, and the next morning’s spin.”

When Bernie Sanders launched his 2020 campaign with a big rally in Brooklyn, the MSNBC coverage was so slanted that an assessment from Glenn Greenwald appeared under the headline “MSNBC Yet Again Broadcasts Blatant Lies, This Time About Bernie Sanders’ Opening Speech, and Refuses to Correct Them.”

Greenwald’s critique of MSNBC focused on flagrantly inaccurate anti-Sanders commentary from a former Hillary Clinton aide that immediately followed the senator’s Brooklyn speech. No Sanders supporter was included in the discussion. The coverage prompted an email from FAIR founder (and my colleague) Jeff Cohen to an MSNBC vice president: “You have no trouble finding hardcore Clintonite Bernie-bashers; please offer some balance in your analysts. In today’s Democratic Party, there’s clearly more sympathy for Bernie than the Clintons—but not on MSNBC.”

It’s worth noting that the *Post* is owned by the world’s richest person, Jeff Bezos, while MSNBC is owned by Comcast, “the world’s largest entertainment company.”

To counteract the media propaganda arsenal now in place, we should fully recognize that arsenal as the main weaponry

that corporate power will deploy against the Bernie 2020 campaign. We must confront those corporate media forces while vastly strengthening independent progressive media work of all kinds.

Norman Solomon is cofounder and national coordinator of RootsAction.org. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from California to the 2016 Democratic National Convention and is currently a coordinator of the relaunched Bernie Delegates Network. Solomon is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.

Labor's Spectacular Revolt

By Cal Winslow

On February 6, 1919, Seattle's workers struck—all of them. In doing so they took control of the city.

The strike was in support of 35,000 shipyard workers, then in conflict with the city's shipyard owners and the federal government's U.S. Shipping Board, which was still enforcing wartime wage agreements.

The strike rendered the authorities virtually powerless. There was indeed no power that could challenge the workers. There were soldiers in the

city, and many more at nearby Camp Lewis, not to mention thousands of newly enlisted, armed deputies—but to unleash these on a peaceful city? The regular police were reduced to onlookers; the generals hesitated.

Seattle's Central Labor Council, representing 110 unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), called the strike. The CLC's Union Record reported 65,000 union members on strike—a general strike, the first and only of its kind in the U.S. Perhaps as many as 100,000 people participated.

Working-Class Destination

Seattle in 1919 was a city of 300,000. A prosperous and progressive city, it had women's suffrage, prohibition, and planning. Its prosperity was built largely on its port and its state-of-the-art municipal piers. Seattle was terminus of the northern railroads, gateway to Alaska, and two days closer to China than its rival, San Francisco.

Seattle from the start was a working-class destination. Free-thinkers and utopians

had encamped nearby in the 1890s, intent on founding an industrial democracy. Socialists, including Eugene Debs, had encouraged settling in Washington, then in his opinion “the most advanced” U.S. state.

Seattle's unions were allies of reform. They supported women's suffrage, were divided on prohibition, and endorsed public ownership of markets and laundries. Many demanded workers' control of the shipyards. In the 1910s, they shifted to the left, driven by conflict with employers and in keeping with the new syndicalism, a radical trade unionism based on workers' power on the job, and the national strike wave that began and intensified during the war.

Socialists led the city's unions, including the CLC and the powerful Metal Trades Council, but most other unions as well. They were advocates of industrial unionism. Seattle was also home to the Industrial Worker, the western paper of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). It became the basecamp for radical workers throughout Washington and



Sandra Matic/Shutterstock.com

Alaska, as well as Oregon and the mining towns of Montana.

When the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations met in the city in 1914 for five days of hearings, Wisconsin labor specialist John R. Commons attended, observing that in Seattle he “found more bitter feeling between employers and employees than in any other US city.”

An Explosive Mix

Western Washington’s timber industry dominated the regional economy, and in few industries was conflict more intense. IWW organizer James Thompson testified before the Industrial Relations Commission that the loggers “breathe bad air in the camps. That ruins their lungs. They eat bad food. That ruins their stomachs. The foul conditions shorten their lives and make their short lives miserable.”

When winter rains made work in the woods impossible, loggers settled in Seattle, sleeping in Skid Road’s flop-houses, seeking relief in its brothels and cheap saloons. There they were joined by migrant agricultural workers, redundant railroad workers, and blacklisted miners. They also mingled

with Seattle’s radicals, including the rapidly increasing ranks of shipyard workers—it was an explosive mix.

The organized labor movement grew in these years, though not evenly. The bitter 1916 waterfront strike was lost. Just north in Everett, the shingle weavers strike ended in catastrophe, with six Wobblies murdered in the Everett Massacre. Still, the IWW fought on. In June 1917, 50,000 loggers and mill workers struck, ultimately winning the 8-hour day.

In the city, CLC secretary James Duncan called 1917 “a red-letter year in the history of organized labor. A dozen new unions have been organized and all of Seattle’s unions are flourishing.” These included large numbers of women workers—telephone “girls,” laundresses, and hotel maids. Organized labor grew by 300 percent in that year alone.

No One Went Hungry



Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

In 1919, the war behind them, Seattle’s workers were well organized and itching for a fight. It was a city, wrote Anna Louise Strong, who became a mainstay at the Union Record during the time of the strike, “divided into two hostile camps.” Class lines had hardened.

The general strike as a tactic was widely identified with the IWW. Yet the CLC had used the threat of a general strike half a dozen times, as a bargaining chip in fights for wages and benefits, as well as in its insistence that the closed shop prevail. But for Kate Sadler, Seattle’s best-known socialist, the workers’ “Joan of Arc,” the general strike was about far more—the power of workers to transform society: “we will progress to the full knowledge that no man is good enough to be another man’s master. That the private ownership of things used in common must go, and social ownership take its place.”

When shipyard workers, on strike since January 21, appealed to the CLC for support, there was no opposition to speak of. Union members elected the strike’s leadership, a committee, 300 strong, comprised largely of rank-and-file

workers. They in turn elected an executive committee. These bodies ensured the health, the welfare, and the safety of the city.

Garbage was collected, the hospitals were supplied, babies got milk, and people were fed, including some 30,000 a day at the strikers' kitchens. There may have been no other time, before or since, when no one went hungry in the city.

The streets were safe, rarely safer—patrolled by an unarmed labor guard. Off the streets, Seattle was a festival—in union halls, co-op markets, “feeding stations,” and neighborhood centers where workers and their families gathered.

On Saturday there was a dance. And a massive rally in Georgetown—the crowd was so large that the building, “settling,” had to be evacuated. And in all these places the strike was the topic. It was analyzed, criticized, extolled, and debated. Thus, when these worker-representatives packed the rowdy, emotion-filled Strike Committee meetings they came prepared—they were making history and they knew it.

Made Their Point

The Seattle Star asked, “Under which flag—the red, white, and blue or the red?” The Times, hysterical, appealed for federal soldiers. The Mayor, Ole Hanson, well knowing this was not the case, proclaimed a revolution underway. The conservative AFL joined in,



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denouncing the strikers and sending out staff from the East and Midwest in the hundreds.

The strike lasted through the weekend, five working days. Then singly, then in small batches, unions began returning. On Tuesday, the strike was pronounced off. Still, solidarity ruled, an accomplishment of great pride. Seattle's unions remained “strike prone,” co-ops flourished, and the Union Record's circulation surpassed 100,000. The shipyard strike, however, lasted into the spring, eventually dissipating as the authorities held fast.

Much is made of this, the splintering of the strikers. Duncan would have preferred all to go back together, but the truth was that there were many who favored staying out. Still, the rank and file, the majority, felt they had made their point. “We did something in this strike which has never been done before,” explained Ben Neuman of the Hoisting Engineers, a leader of the strike committee.

How to assess this? The Times pronounced, “The Revolution

Is Over.” Samuel Gompers at the AFL joined in extolling the “revolution” defeated; he praised his emissaries and pledged to rid the unions of the radicals. But it had not been a revolution nor was it intended to be one. It was a strike to support the shipyard workers, though a very radical strike.

Seattle's workers, their unions intact, would live to fight another day. And Max Eastman, the Greenwich Village intellectual, spoke for many when he judged that the strike had “filled with hope and happiness the hearts of millions of people in all places of the earth...you demonstrated the possibility of that loyal solidarity of the working class which is the sole remaining hope of liberty for mankind.”

Cal Winslow is the author of *Seattle General Strike: The Forgotten History of Labor's Most Spectacular Revolt*, forthcoming from Verso in May, as well as *Labor's Civil War in California: The NUHW Rebellion*.

The Publication of Origin for this article is Labor Notes.

Feature



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Rousing the Multitudes

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

CJ. Polychroniou: After 35 days of a partial government shutdown, Trump signed a three-week funding bill but without securing money for the border wall. Leaving aside for the moment the surrealist nature of contemporary U.S. political life, do you detect some hidden political strategy behind Trump's funding conflict over the border wall with the Democrats?

Noam Chomsky: There's a political strategy,

but I'm not convinced that it's hidden. With Trump, everything is pretty much on the surface. There have been constant efforts by political analysts to discern some deep geostrategic or sociopolitical thinking behind his performances, but they seem to me unconvincing. What he does seems readily explained simply on the well-grounded assumption that his doctrine is simple: Me.

Trump understands that he has a primary

constituency—extreme wealth and corporate power—and that he has to serve its interests or he's finished. That task has largely been assigned to the Ryans and McConnells, who have performed it admirably. Profits are skyrocketing, real wages are barely increasing despite low unemployment, regulations that might limit greed (and help mere people) are being dismantled, and the one legislative achievement—the tax scam—put lots of dollars in the right pockets and created a deficit that can be used as a pretext to undermine benefits. All is working smoothly—with analogues worldwide.

But Trump must maintain enough of a voting base to stay in power. That requires posturing as the defender of the ordinary guy against hated “elites” (always suppressing the true “masters of mankind,” to borrow Adam Smith’s phrase for the merchants and manufacturers who were “the principal architects” of policy). This act is helped along by such figures as Rush Limbaugh, who instructs his tens of millions of followers that they should beware of “the four corners of deceit: government, academia, science and media,” institutions that “are now corrupt and exist by virtue of deceit.” So, he argues, just listen to Me.

Meanwhile Trump must rise to the defense of the masses from awesome threats, chief among them now the hordes of “rapists,” “murderers” and “Islamic terrorists” he says are being mobilized down south to storm across the border and slaughter decent law-abiding white Christian Americans. We must therefore have a “beautiful wall”—which they will pay for. Trump promised that, and to back down would not only betray the trembling masses but also be a defeat, which his ego cannot tolerate.

The game is not really new. After all, the revered Ronald Reagan bravely donned his cowboy uniform and declared a National Emergency to protect the country from the Nicaraguan army, supposedly poised to destroy us all only two days’ drive from Harlingen, Texas. Trump is only carrying it further, helped by the fading of such infantile notions as “truth”—or “false

realities,” to borrow Jared Kushner’s innovation. Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s admonition that policymakers must be “clearer than truth” has long passed into obsolescence. They can do far better in the atmosphere of “alternative facts” for those liberated from the four pillars of deceit.

I doubt that there is any deeper political strategy.

Furthermore, such performances are rather natural, perhaps even necessary. As both parties have drifted to the right during the neoliberal assault on the population, the Democrats abandoned the working class and became pretty much what used to be called “moderate Republicans” (something that is beginning to change now in promising ways), while Republicans climbed so deeply into the pockets of the super-rich and corporate power that it became impossible for them to gain anywhere near enough votes on their actual policies. Antics of the Trump style fit the requirements, along with a variety of measures to suppress voting and increased reliance on the many regressive aspects of the constitutional system, which by now make it possible for a small minority of white Christian traditional rural older citizens to have effective control of the government. The tendency is increasing and may soon lead to a major political crisis since it is virtually ineradicable given the structure of the Senate, designed by the Framers so that the small states would ratify the mostly unpopular Federal Constitution. A topic for another day.

Responding to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s call for measures to tackle climate change, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders made the incredible statement that climate change should be left to God. Don’t you find it utterly mysterious and indeed dangerous that such thinking still prevails among U.S. public officials in the 21st century? And, really, how well do you think that such messages resonate with the American public today?

Sanders’s insight is not new. She is in good



International youth climate justice activists at the COP22 UN climate conference, Ryan Rodrick Beiler/Shutterstock.com

company. After all, the former chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, James Inhofe, condemned efforts to address global warming as sacrilege: “God’s still up there,” he proclaimed, and “the arrogance of people to think that we, human beings, would be able to change what He is doing in the climate is to me outrageous.” It seems to work, at least in Oklahoma, where the senior senator has been in office since 1994. Doubtless well beyond Oklahoma, in a society with fundamentalist religious commitments that are far beyond the norm.

Yes, mysterious and dangerous—as is the fact that half of Republicans deny that global warming is even taking place, and of the rest, barely more than half think that humans have some responsibility for it. But there’s good news, too. Trump’s new acting administrator of the EPA, former coal industry lobbyist Andrew Wheeler, agrees that global warming is probably happening—a problem he considers to be an “eight or

nine” on a one-to-ten scale of concern, he informed Congress at his confirmation hearings.

Venezuela seems to be in the throes of a civil war. The U.S. backs Juan Guaidó as interim president, in turn forcing Nicolás Maduro to consider expelling U.S. diplomats, a decision he eventually backed away from, all while the leaders of China, Russia and Turkey slam Trump’s stance in Venezuela. First, what’s your assessment of what’s happening in Venezuela, and, second, why is it that much of the left worldwide continues to support Maduro when it is obvious that he has been a complete disaster?

Maduro has been a disaster, and the best the opposition has to offer is the self-declared President Juan Guaidó. About him little is known, apart from his great admiration for the neo-fascist Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, whom Guaidó praised for his commitment to “democ-

racy [and] human rights,” as illustrated, for example, by his criticism of Brazil’s military dictatorship—because it ... didn’t murder 30,000 people as in neighboring Argentina, the worst of the vicious military dictatorships that swept across South America from the 1960s.

The roots of the Venezuelan disaster go back to failures of the Chavez administration, including its failure to diversify the economy, which is still almost entirely reliant on oil export. Venezuelan opposition economist Francisco Rodríguez, former chief Andean economist for the Bank of America, notes the failure of the government to set aside reserves during the period of high oil prices so it was at the mercy of international financial markets when prices dropped sharply in 2014—and has been blocked from access to credit by harsh U.S. sanctions, which have exacerbated the effects of what Rodríguez describes as the “atrocious” mismanagement of the economy under Maduro. Writing in *Foreign Policy*, Rodríguez observes that the policy of “Starving the Venezuelan economy of its foreign currency earnings risks turning the country’s current humanitarian crisis into a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe.” Arguably that is the purpose, following the Nixon-Kissinger script of “making the economy scream” to undermine the Allende regime. (That was the soft track; the hard track, soon implemented, was brutal military dictatorship.)

The drift toward civil war, with outside interference, is all too apparent. There is still room for negotiations among the contending parties, but it diminishes daily as the crisis deepens. Maduro is digging and Washington is intensifying its intervention, imposing new sanctions and selecting the egregious Elliott Abrams to join Bolton and Pompeo in what has been called “Trump’s axis of evil.” If skeletons can shudder, many must be doing so in the Central American countries that Abrams helped to ravage during Reagan’s terrorist wars.

Israel and Iran seem to be moving ever further closer toward a full-blown war. Why are they

clashing in Syria?

Iran joined Russia in ensuring Assad’s victory in Syria, along with Iran’s Lebanese ally Hezbollah. Israel has been bombing Syria regularly. Four months ago the IDF reported over 200 strikes against Iranian targets since 2017, and they have been increasing since.

Israel, of course, has overwhelming military dominance in the Middle East, even apart from its close alliance with the U.S., which lavishly funds its military with the most advanced weapons in the U.S. arsenal and even uses Israel to pre-position U.S. weapons. And, of course, Israel is the region’s sole nuclear power, the reason why Washington has regularly blocked international efforts, led by the Arab states and Iran, to establish a nuclear weapons-free zone (furthermore, WMD-free) in the Middle East. That would end any imagined Iran nuclear threat, but it is unacceptable because the primary U.S. client state in the region would have to open its nuclear arsenal to inspection, and those who regard U.S. law as having some force would have to stanch the flood of military support for Israel.

Iran is not under U.S. control and is therefore an enemy. Furthermore, the U.S. and Israel recognize that Iran is a deterrent to their free resort to force in the region. The same is true of Hezbollah, whose Iranian-supplied missiles target large parts of Israel. The U.S. and Israel have been threatening to attack Iran for years (“all options are open”) in radical violation of the UN Charter (hence the U.S. Constitution), but that is a matter of no concern for lawless states with overwhelming power. And Trump has, of course, escalated the confrontation by withdrawing from the Iran nuclear agreement. An actual invasion of Iran would be too costly and dangerous, but the U.S.-Israel might consider attacking from a distance after somehow neutralizing Hezbollah (which would mean destroying much of Lebanon). The consequences could be devastating.

In Davos, the multibillionaires expressed an-

noyance at and even fear of the presence of radical Democrats in the U.S. Congress and their talk of “soaking the rich” on taxes. Has a global financial oligarchy replaced democracy in today’s advanced capitalist world?



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It's impossible to replace something that has never really existed, but it's true that the partial democracies of the West have been undermined further by the financialization of the international economy during the neoliberal years. That's a large part of the reason for the bitterness, anger and resentment, mislabeled “populism,” that is shaking the foundations of the western democracies, where the centrist political parties that have run the political system are crumbling in election after election. Many analysts have to account for the rise of such “populism” throughout the neoliberal capitalist world on the basis of psychic disorders—in one respected version, impulses “deep in our psyches and bodies beyond matters of fact: physical pain, fear of the future, a sense of our own mortality.” It is, however, not really necessary to appeal to an epidemic of irrationality and “emotional appeals” somehow spreading over the domains subjected to the neoliberal assault of the past generation, including the enormous growth of largely predatory financial institutions with its deleterious impact on democratic systems of governance.

Fear that the “rascal multitude” will threaten the property of the self-designated “men of best quality” traces back to the first modern democratic revolution in 17th century England, and was a major concern of the framers of the U.S. Constitution in its successor a century later. It reappears constantly when there is even a minor threat to overwhelming power, as in the famous Powell memorandum of 1971, which

warned that the world is practically coming to an end because of the slight infringement on overwhelming business domination of the society. The influential manifesto, sent to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, helped set off the

harsh counterattack in the years since.

It's not surprising that these fears are surfacing in Davos as a few young Democratic representatives are arousing the rascal multitude again.

For many years, a considerable majority of the U.S. population has favored higher taxes on the rich, while they regularly decline. And now, a few recently elected members of Congress are advocating what the public wants, most vocally Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who even went so far as to suggest tax rates at a level regarded as optimal for the economy by the most prominent specialists (Nobel laureate Peter Diamond, Emmanuel Saez, among others). Scandalous indeed. What else can one expect when 26 people now have as much wealth as half the world's population, according to the latest of the regular Oxfam reports on inequality? No wonder the “masters of mankind” are trembling.

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. He is the author of *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at Truthout and collected by Haymarket Books.

The Publication of Origin for this article is Truthout.

Feature



Last campaign for President Hugo Chavez, photo by Luis Arismendi/Shutterstock.com

The War on Venezuela is Built on Lies

By John Pilger

Traveling with Hugo Chavez, I soon understood the threat of Venezuela. At a farming co-operative in Lara state, people waited patiently and with good humor in the heat. Jugs of water and melon juice were passed around. A guitar was played; a woman, Katarina, stood and sang with a husky contralto.

"What did her words say?," I asked.

"That we are proud," was the reply.

The applause for her merged with the arrival of Chavez. Under one arm he carried a satchel bursting with books. He wore his big red shirt

and greeted people by name, stopping to listen. What struck me was his capacity to listen.

But now he read. For almost two hours he read into the microphone from the stack of books beside him: Orwell, Dickens, Tolstoy, Zola, Hemingway, Chomsky, Neruda; a page here, a line or two there. People clapped and whistled as he moved from author to author.

Then farmers took the microphone and told him what they knew, and what they needed; one ancient face, carved it seemed from a nearby banyan, made a long, critical speech on the sub-

ject of irrigation; Chavez took notes.

Wine is grown here, a dark Syrah-type grape. “John, John, come up here,” said El Presidente, having watched me fall asleep in the heat and the depths of *Oliver Twist*.

“He likes red wine,” Chavez told the cheering, whistling audience, and presented me with a bottle of “vino de la gente.” My few words in bad Spanish brought whistles and laughter.

Watching Chavez with *la gente* made sense of a man who promised, on coming to power, that his every move would be subject to the will of the people. In eight years, Chavez won eight elections and referendums: a world record. He was electorally the most popular head of state in the Western Hemisphere, probably in the world.

Every major chavista reform was voted on, notably a new constitution of which 71 percent of the people approved each of the 396 articles that enshrined unheard of freedoms, such as Article 123, which for the first time recognized the human rights of mixed-race and black people, of whom Chavez was one.

One of his tutorials on the road quoted a feminist writer: “Love and solidarity are the same.” His audiences understood this well and expressed themselves with dignity, seldom with deference. Ordinary people regarded Chavez and his government as their first champions: as theirs.

This was especially true of the indigenous, mestizos and Afro-Venezuelans, who had been held in historic contempt by Chavez’s immediate predecessors and by those who today live far from the barrios, in the mansions and penthouses of East Caracas, who commute to Miami where their banks are and who regard themselves as “white.” They are the powerful core of what the media calls “the opposition.”

When I met this class, in suburbs called Country Club, in homes appointed with low chandeliers and bad portraits, I recognized them. They could be white South Africans, the petite bourgeoisie of Constantia and Sandton, pillars of the cruelties of apartheid.

Cartoonists in the Venezuelan press, most of

which are owned by an oligarchy and oppose the government, portrayed Chavez as an ape. A radio host referred to “the monkey.” In the private universities, the verbal currency of the children of the well-off is often racist abuse of those whose shacks are just visible through the pollution.

Although identity politics are all the rage in the pages of liberal newspapers in the West, race and class are two words almost never uttered in the mendacious “coverage” of Washington’s latest, most naked attempt to grab the world’s greatest source of oil and reclaim its “backyard.”

For all the chavistas’ faults—such as allowing the Venezuelan economy to become hostage to the fortunes of oil and never seriously challenging big capital and corruption—they brought social justice and pride to millions of people and they did it with unprecedented democracy.

“Of the 92 elections that we’ve monitored,” said former President Jimmy Carter, whose Carter Center is a respected monitor of elections around the world, “I would say the election process in Venezuela is the best in the world.” By way of contrast, said Carter, the U.S. election system, with its emphasis on campaign money, “is one of the worst.”

In extending the franchise to a parallel people’s state of communal authority, based in the poorest barrios, Chavez described Venezuelan democracy as “our version of Rousseau’s idea of popular sovereignty.”

In Barrio La Linea, seated in her tiny kitchen, Beatrice Balazo told me her children were the first generation of the poor to attend a full day’s school and be given a hot meal and to learn music, art and dance. “I have seen their confidence blossom like flowers,” she said.

In Barrio La Vega, I listened to a nurse, Mariella Machado, a black woman of 45 with a wicked laugh, address an urban land council on subjects ranging from homelessness to illegal war. That day, they were launching Mision Madres de Barrio, a program aimed at poverty among single mothers. Under the constitution, women have the right to be paid as carers, and can borrow

from a special women's bank. Now the poorest housewives get the equivalent of \$200 a month.

In a room lit by a single fluorescent tube, I met Ana Lucia Fernandez, aged 86, and Mavis Mendez, aged 95. A mere 33-years-old, Sonia Alvarez had come with her 2 children. Once, none of them could read and write; now they were studying mathematics. For the first time in its history, Venezuela has almost 100 percent literacy.

This is the work of Mision Robinson, which was designed for adults and teenagers previously denied an education because of poverty. Mision Ribas gives everyone the opportunity of a secondary education, called a bachillerato. (The names Robinson and Ribas refer to Venezuelan independence leaders from the 19th century.)

In her 95 years, Mavis Mendez had seen a parade of governments, mostly vassals of Washington, preside over the theft of billions of dollars in oil spoils, much of it flown to Miami. "We didn't matter in a human sense," she told me.

"We lived and died without real education and running water, and food we couldn't afford. When we fell ill, the weakest died. Now I can read and write my name and so much more; and whatever the rich and the media say, we have planted the seeds of true democracy and I have the joy of seeing it happen."

In 2002, during a Washington-backed coup, Mavis's sons and daughters and grandchildren and great-grandchildren joined hundreds of thousands who swept down from the barrios on the hillsides and demanded the army remained loyal to Chavez.

"The people rescued me," Chavez told me. "They did it with the media against me, preventing even the basic facts of what happened. For popular democracy in heroic action, I suggest you look no further."

Since Chavez's death in 2013, his successor Nicolas Maduro has shed his derisory label in the Western press as a "former bus driver" and become Saddam Hussein incarnate. His media abuse is ridiculous. On his watch, the slide in the price of oil has caused hyper inflation and

played havoc with prices in a society that imports almost all its food; yet, as the journalist and film-maker Pablo Navarrete reported, Venezuela is not the catastrophe it has been painted. "There is food everywhere," he wrote. "I have filmed lots of videos of food in markets [all over Caracas] ... it's Friday night and the restaurants are full."

In 2018, Maduro was re-elected President. A section of the opposition boycotted the election, a tactic tried against Chavez. The boycott failed: 9,389,056 people voted; 16 parties participated and 6 candidates stood for the presidency. Maduro won 6,248,864 votes, or 67.84 percent.

On election day, I spoke to one of the 150 foreign election observers. "It was entirely fair," he said. "There was no fraud; none of the lurid media claims stood up. Zero. Amazing really."

Like a page from Alice's tea party, the Trump administration has presented Juan Guaido, a pop-up creation of the CIA-front National Endowment for Democracy, as the "legitimate President of Venezuela." Unheard of by 81 percent of the Venezuelan people, according to the *Nation*, Guaido has been elected by no one.

Maduro is "illegitimate," says Trump (who won the U.S. presidency with three million fewer votes than his opponent), a "dictator," says demonstrably unhinged vice president Mike Pence and an oil trophy-in-waiting, says "national security" adviser John Bolton (who when I interviewed him in 2003 said, "Hey, are you a communist, maybe even Labour?").

As his "special envoy to Venezuela" (coup master), Trump has appointed a convicted felon, Elliot Abrams, whose intrigues in the service of Presidents Reagan and George W. Bush helped produce the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s and plunge Central America into years of blood-soaked misery.

Putting Lewis Carroll aside, these "crazies" belong in newsreels from the 1930s. And yet their lies about Venezuela have been taken up with enthusiasm by those paid to keep the record straight.

On Channel 4 News, Jon Snow bellowed at

the Labour MP Chris Williamson, “Look, you and Mr. Corbyn are in a very nasty corner [on Venezuela]!” When Williamson tried to explain why threatening a sovereign country was wrong, Snow cut him off. “You’ve had a good go!”

In 2006, Channel 4 News effectively accused Chavez of plotting to make nuclear weapons with Iran: a fantasy. The then Washington correspondent, Jonathan Rugman, allowed a war criminal, Donald Rumsfeld, to liken Chavez to Hitler, unchallenged.

Researchers at the University of the West of England studied the BBC’s reporting of Venezuela over a ten-year period. They looked at 304 reports and found that only 3 of

these referred to any of the positive policies of the government. For the BBC, Venezuela’s democratic record, human rights legislation, food programs, healthcare initiatives and poverty reduction did not happen. The greatest literacy program in human history did not happen, just as the millions who march in support of Maduro and in memory of Chavez, do not exist.

When asked why she filmed only an opposition march, the BBC reporter Orla Guerin tweeted that it was “too difficult” to be on two marches in one day.

A war has been declared on Venezuela, of which the truth is “too difficult” to report.

It is too difficult to report the collapse of oil prices since 2014 as largely the result of criminal machinations by Wall Street. It is too difficult to report the blocking of Venezuela’s access to the U.S.-dominated international financial system as sabotage. It is too difficult to report Washington’s “sanctions” against Venezuela, which have caused the loss of at least \$6 billion in Venezu-

ela’s revenue since 2017, including \$2 billion worth of imported medicines, as illegal, or the Bank of England’s refusal to return Venezuela’s gold reserves as an act of piracy.

The former United Nations Rapporteur, Alfred de Zayas, has likened this to a “medieval siege” designed “to bring countries to their knees.” It is a criminal assault, he says. It is similar to that faced by Salvador Allende in 1970 when President Richard Nixon and his equivalent of John Bolton, Henry Kissinger, set out to “make

the economy [of Chile] scream.” The long dark night of Pinochet followed.

The Guardian correspondent, Tom Phillips, has tweeted a picture of himself in a cap on which the words in Spanish mean

in local slang: “Make Venezuela fucking cool again.” The reporter as clown may be the final stage of much of mainstream journalism’s degeneration.

Should the CIA stooge Guaido and his white supremacists grab power, it will be the 68th overthrow of a sovereign government by the United States, most of them democracies. A fire sale of Venezuela’s utilities and mineral wealth will surely follow, along with the theft of the country’s oil, as outlined by John Bolton.

Under the last Washington-controlled government in Caracas, poverty reached historic proportions. There was no healthcare for those could not pay. There was no universal education; Mavis Mendez, and millions like her, could not read or write. How cool is that, Tom?

The Publication of Origin for this article is johpilger.com.



People crowd the Diego Ibarra Square during an event for Maduro registering as Candidate for Presidential Election, Testing/Shutterstock.com

Feature



Rawf8/Shutterstock.com

Financial Imperialism

By Jack Rasmus

The invasion of Venezuela by the U.S. and its proxies is just around the corner. Recently Vice-President Pence flew to Colombia once again—for the fifth time in recent weeks—to provide final instructions to U.S. local forces and proxy allies there for the next step in the U.S. regime change plan.

Evidence that the “green light” for regime change and invasion is now flashing are supportive public statements by former president Barack Obama, and several high-level U.S. Democratic party politicians and candidates, directly attacking the Maduro regime. They are signaling Democrat Party support for invasion and regime change. Events will now accelerate—just in time, perhaps, to coincide with the release of Mueller Report on Trump.

Behind the scenes it is clear, as it has been for months, that U.S. neocons are once again back in charge of U.S. foreign policy, driving the U.S. toward yet another war and attempt at regime change of a foreign government.

U.S. Strategy in Brief

The U.S. Neocon-led strategy is increasingly clear: establish a “beach-head” on the Colombian-Venezuelan (and Venezuelan-Brazilian) border under the guise of providing humanitarian aid. Use the aid to get Venezuelans on the border to welcome the U.S. proxy forces set to cross over. Set up political and military structures thereafter just inside the Venezuelan borders with Colombia and Brazil, from which to launch further similar efforts deeper into Ven-

ezuela. Repeat this province by province, step by step, penetrating Venezuelan space until enough local units of the Venezuelan military change sides and convince one or more of the Venezuelan military hierarchy to join them, thus establishing a dual state and government within and along the border of Venezuela. Make it appear, by manipulating the media, that the Venezuelan people are rising up against the Maduro government, when in fact it is U.S. proxy forces invading and using opportunist local politicians, military, and others in the “conquered” zones, as the media covers for their invasion.

The main ideological justification being used for the invasion and regime change is that the Maduro government has grossly mismanaged the Venezuelan economy and driven its people into poverty. With Democrats now joining Trump and Republicans in support of invasion, the liberal mainstream U.S. media, as well as the right-wing alternative media, are both pushing the same line, to blunt U.S. opposition to invasion and yet another war before the final military assault is launched. Somehow the democratic elections less than a year ago, which returned the Maduro government to power, did not represent the “will of the people.” Explanations of how they did not are thin and unconvincing. Nor is any explanation given how U.S. policies and actions have played the central role in destroying Venezuela’s currency and economy. And the financial measures used to destabilize the economy are especially opaque.

The Case of Venezuela

Venezuela today is a classic case of how U.S. imperialism in the 21st century employs financial measures to crush any state and country that dares to break away from the U.S. global economic empire and pursue an independent course outside the U.S. empire’s web of entangling economic and financial relations.

Here’s how U.S. “financial imperialism” has worked, and continues to work, with the intent of assisting regime change in the case of Venezuela.

In a world where U.S. capitalism is the dominant hegemon, the U.S. currency—the dollar—is the centerpiece of the U.S. global economic empire. The dollar serves as the global trading currency as well as the global banking reserves currency. More than 85 percent of all global trade (export and import) is done in dollars. Certain commodities, like global oil and oil futures contracts, are traded virtually only in dollars. Recently more countries have begun to peg their own currency to the dollar, allowing it to move in tandem with the dollar. Some have even eliminated their currency altogether and now use only the U.S. dollar as their domestic currency. Increasingly as well, more countries are issuing their domestic bonds in dollars (i.e. dollar-denominated bonds). And their central banks follow the U.S. central bank, the Federal Reserve, policy as it raises or lowers U.S. interest rates that in turn cause the U.S. dollar to rise and fall. They do so even if rising U.S. interest rates mean rising rates in their own economies that precipitate recessions and mass unemployment. These are all examples of the growing financial integration with the U.S. Imperial State and economy.

But even those economies that maintain their own currency are at the mercy of the U.S. dollar. Since the dollar is the global trading and reserves currency, whenever the dollar rises in value due to U.S. monetary policy changes, or U.S. inflationary pressures, or just changes in supply or demand for the dollar, the currencies of other countries fall in value. As the dollar rises in value, other currencies fall. That’s how global exchange rates work in the 21st century global U.S. empire where the dollar is the trading-reserves currency. Other currencies—the British pound, Euro, and even less so the Japanese Yen or China Yuan—are still largely insignificant as reserves or trading currencies. And it appears very unlikely they will soon replace the dollar—one of the key pillars of the U.S. empire.

The U.S. has the power to engineer a collapse in a country’s currency. A collapse in its currency means the price of imported goods rises

rapidly, especially those goods that can only be obtained by imports—i.e. medicines, critical food commodities, intermediate business goods necessary for domestic manufacturing, etc. Accelerating import inflation, in turn, leads to domestic businesses cutting back production due to lack of affordable resources, commodities, or parts. Mass layoffs follow production cutbacks. Rising inflation brought on by currency collapse is thus accompanied by rising unemployment. Wage income and consumption in turn collapse and thereafter the economy in general.

Widespread shortages of key imports, inflation, and domestic production decline and unemployment brought on by the shortages and inflation simultaneously lead to social discontent and loss of support for the government. Opposition groups and parties proclaim these problems are due to the mismanagement of the economy by the government, or corruption by its leaders, or just socialist policies in general. But in fact the economic crisis—i.e. shortages, inflation, production, unemployment—is traceable directly to the root cause of the collapse of the currency engineered by U.S. imperialist policies intent on crashing the economy as a prelude to regime change and economic reintegration to the U.S. global economic empire.

There are many ways the U.S. can, and does, cause a collapse of a country's currency. One set of measures are designed to cause a severe shortage of dollars in the target country's economy. A shortage of dollars drives up the value of the U.S. dollar in the target economy which, in turn, drives down the value of the country's own currency. The U.S. has been engineering a collapse of Venezuela's currency, the Bolivar, for years—first by causing dollars in Venezuela to flow out of the country and, secondly, by measures preventing Venezuela from obtaining dollars from abroad.

U.S. policy over the last several years has been to force U.S. companies doing business in Venezuela to repatriate their dollars back to the U.S. or else divert them elsewhere globally among subsidiaries. Or just to leave Venezuela and take

their dollars with them. U.S. policy has also been to publicize and promote wealthier Venezuelans with dollars to take them out of the country and invest them in Colombia, where the U.S. has arranged an online investment firm with the assistance of its Colombian government ally. Rich Venezuelans have also been encouraged to send their money to Miami banks, and to move there in large numbers, which they have, taking their dollars with them or dumping their Bolivars in exchange for dollars. The outflow of dollars from Venezuela has raised the value of dollars that remain in Venezuela on the black market there, thereby helping to depress the value of the Bolivar in Venezuela even further.

These measures pale, however, to U.S. imperial efforts to prevent Venezuela from obtaining dollars in global markets in an effort to try to offset the outflow of dollars from the economy.

For example, the U.S. has taken action to prevent U.S. and global banks from lending dollars to Venezuela, or from participating in underwriting and insuring Venezuelan bond issues which would also raise dollars for Venezuela if allowed. Bank loans and bond funding thus dry up, depriving the government of alternative sources of dollars. More dollar shortage; more Bolivar domestic currency collapse—i.e. more expensive imports, more inflation, more shortages, declining production, rising unemployment....more discontent.

The main effort by which the U.S. is attempting to deprive Venezuela of dollars is to impose sanctions on other countries that try to buy Venezuelan oil. Oil sales are the number one source of the country's dollar acquisitions, since all oil trade is done in dollars and Venezuela depends on 95 percent of all its government revenues from selling its oil. The U.S. imposes sanctions on would be buyers and thus cuts off access to dollars, as it simultaneously through other policies works to encourage dollar flight out of Venezuela and cut off bank loans and bond issuance by the country. And if the prior bonds and loans were "dollar denominated," then the lack of dollars to pay the interest and principal coming due

leads directly to defaults and in turn to business collapse and even more unemployment.

Venezuela has turned to selling its oil to China and Russia and a few other countries. It has been forced to resort to paying its interest and principal on past loans from these governments with shipments of oil instead of payments in dollars. As the U.S. turns to sanctions as an economic “weapon” to enforce its will on other countries, more countries are becoming aware of the tactic and are taking countermeasures, such as dumping dollars (or reducing their purchases of dollars in world markets) and buying gold. China and Russia are leading this way, while experimenting with non-currency dependent trade.

Another recent move by the U.S. to deny Venezuela dollars and collapse its currency has been to seize the Venezuelan oil distribution company, CITGO in the U.S. Its remittances back to Venezuela have been in dollars. By seizing CITGO, the U.S. deprives the country of yet another source of dollars, with which Venezuela might otherwise have been able to purchase imports of food, medicines, and other economically critical goods. So Venezuelans in this case are clearly forced to forego these critical imports due to U.S. policy—not due to economic mismanagement by its government. Moreover, adding insult to injury, the dollar funds from CITGO seized by the U.S. are being delivered to the Venezuelan government’s opponents and its hand-picked ally of the U.S., Guido. The opposition now gets to finance its counter-revolution with the money formerly remitted to Venezuela. The counter-revolution is financed at the expense of critical goods and services that otherwise might have been made available to the Venezuelan people.

Seizure of the CITGO asset is not the only such example of dollar deprivation. Other assets in the form of inventories, investments, cash in U.S. banks, etc. are also being impounded. And not just from the Venezuelan government. Individual Venezuelan companies and individual citizens have been having their assets in the U.S.

impounded as well. And the U.S. is increasing its pressure on foreign governments to impound and seize assets as well—of the government, businesses, and citizens.

The impoundment and seizure has recently been extended to Venezuelan gold stocks held offshore in other countries, in direct violation of international law. Recently the U.S. company and mega bank, Citigroup, has been forced to withhold Venezuelan gold in violation of its contracts with the country. The Bank of England has also been asked, and is complying, with the U.S. demand to freeze Venezuelan gold deposited in the UK. And countries like Abu Dhabi, where gold is traded globally, have been asked to stop trading in Venezuelan gold. Gold is a substitute money for the U.S. dollar, so preventing gold access to Venezuela is like preventing dollar access as well. With its gold, Venezuela could more easily buy dollars, or trade for goods directly, than with using Bolivars that are falling in value and sellers are less likely to take as payment.

Countries with economies whose currency is seriously declining in value are able to get a loan to stabilize its currency from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Recent examples are Argentina, Turkey, South Africa, and even Pakistan. But the IMF is an institution set up by the U.S. in 1944. The U.S. maintains with its close European allies a majority vote on IMF decisions. The IMF does nothing the U.S. does not approve. Its mission is to lend to countries in need of stabilizing their currencies. The IMF, however, as an appendage of the U.S. global empire, has refused to lend Venezuela anything to help stabilize its currency.

This is in contrast, for example, to the record loan of more than \$50 billion recently provided to Argentina once that country put in its current business and U.S.-friendly Macri government. The record IMF loan, by the way, was so that Argentina could pay off debts owed to U.S. and other speculators in the early 2000s. So Argentina saw little of that \$50 billion. What the payoff did enable, however, was for Macri and

other Argentinian bankers to go to New York to get new loans from U.S. banks once it repaid the speculators, from which Macri and friends no doubt personally benefitted immensely.

As the Venezuelan currency collapses due to U.S.-arranged dollar shortages, Venezuela must print even more Bolivars to enable it to purchase what goods from abroad it might still be able to buy. A collapsed currency means the price of imported goods rises proportionately. So more Bolivars are needed to buy the goods that are continually rising in price. Printing more Bolivars adds to the supply of Bolivars in the economy which raises domestic price inflation even further. But the excess printing is in response to the currency collapse which is engineered by the dollar shortage and the falling exchange rate in the first place. The over-supply of Bolivars is not due to mismanagement; it is due to the shortage of dollars and the desperate effort by the Venezuelan government to somehow pay for inflating import goods.

The falling price of crude oil in 2017-18 added further pressure on the Bolivar. The collapse of oil prices globally appears unrelated to U.S. policy. But it wasn't. The oil Venezuela has been able to continue to sell, mostly to China or Russia, declined by 40 percent in price in 2018. The global oil deflation of 2018 thus generated less oil revenue for the country and thus fewer dollars.

But that too was due, indirectly, to U.S. policy and economic conditions. The collapsing price of oil in 2018 is directly attributed to U.S. shale oil producers raising their output by more than a million barrels a day, which increased the world oil supply and depressed world oil prices. The U.S. then attempted to manipulate world oil output with Saudi Arabia but that exacerbated the over-production and deflation problem still further. Here's how: the U.S. attempted to impose sanctions on Iranian oil in 2018. Saudi Arabia believed it would capture the customers that Iran would lose, and therefore it, Saudi Arabia, also raised its output of crude as U.S. shale producers raised theirs. But Iran was able to contin-

ue to sell its oil, as U.S. sanctions broke down. The result of the U.S. shale overproduction plus Saudi overproduction was a 40 percent collapse in world oil prices in 2018 that further deprived Venezuela of much needed government revenue—apart from U.S. sanctions on Venezuela oil sales.

U.S. monetary policy in 2018 further exacerbated the currency crisis in Venezuela—as it did elsewhere in Latin America and emerging markets in general. In 2017-18 the U.S. central bank launched a policy of raising interest rates. Since other world central banks respond to the U.S. central bank, world rates began to rise as well. Rising U.S. interest rates caused a rise in the U.S. dollar, and as the dollar rose in 2017-18 emerging market currencies fell. They fell for Venezuela in part due to this effect, as well as due to other causes mentioned.

Falling currencies precipitate what is called “capital flight” out of the country. Less money capital means less available for investment and thus lower production output and more unemployment. So currency collapse precipitates not only inflation but recession as well. To prevent the capital flight, emerging market economies raise their own domestic interest rates. This led to recession, for example, throughout Latin America in 2017-18. Capital flight out of Venezuela has been significant since 2016, as wealthy Venezuelans sent more of their dollars out of the country to Miami, thus exacerbating dollar shortages in Venezuela and further driving down the value of the Bolivar left behind.

U.S. sanctions on other countries, banks, and companies offshore are designed not only to prevent Venezuela access to dollars and money capital offshore. Sanctions also target real goods trade, like oil and other key commodities. But there's another means by which the U.S. shuts down the flow of real goods into and from a country, causing shortages of critical goods. It's the U.S.-controlled international payments exchange system, called SWIFT. This is where U.S. banks arrange the exchange and transfer of payments for goods and services by converting



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from one currency to the other and transferring the funds from one bank to another across countries. The U.S. has been preventing Venezuela from normally using the SWIFT system. So even if another country is willing to buy Venezuela goods, including oil, and exchange Bolivars for its own currency, it is prevented from doing so by the U.S. bank-controlled SWIFT system.

Summing Up

Financial imperialism has been waged against Venezuela for decades, but the attack on Venezuela employing financial measures has recently intensified as U.S. neocons and imperialists have accelerated their plans to launch a more direct attack by political means, including military, to force regime change in Venezuela. At the center of the on-going, and now intensifying, financial warfare against the country by the U.S. are measures designed to destroy Venezuela's currency. Imperialism is often thought of as military conquest and colonialism. That's 19th century British and European imperialism. But the American Empire in the 21st century does not need colonialism. It has a more efficient system for forcing the integration of other economies and for extracting value and wealth

from the rest of the world.

The U.S. empire is increasingly knitted together in the 21st century by a deep web of financial relationships that afford it multiple levers of economic power it can pull if and when it desires. And when those economic and financial levers prove insufficient to overthrow domestic forces and governments that remain intent on pursuing a more independent path outside the Empire's economic and political relations, then the breakaway State is attacked more directly once the economy is sufficiently wrecked. Such is the case of Venezuela today. Financial imperialism has paved the way for more direct political and military action.

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Feature



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Education, Jobs, and Capitalism

By Gerald Coles

American capitalism has a hate-love relationship with the nation's schools. On the "hate" side is a stream of complaints from business leaders and organizations about the many students, particularly in city schools, who fail achievement tests, are high school dropouts or, if they complete high school, do not have the academic qualifications for college and advanced-skills education. Given these educational failings, they ask, how will the nation's economic system obtain the workforce needed for the 21st century economy?

On the surface, this corporate complaining seems to have merit. However, if we pose the question "how well are the nation's schools serving U.S. capitalism?" there is every reason

to conclude that business leaders and organizations, despite their complaints, actually very much love the schools. That's because, overall, the nation's schools do a first-rate job educating and providing the array of workers capitalism needs. As importantly, the varied academic achievement outcomes provide capitalism's leaders a major explanation for why vast numbers of Americans either work for wages insufficient to meet individual and family basic needs, have job insecurity, cannot obtain secure work, can only patch together several part-time jobs, have jobs for which they are educationally overqualified, and why so many workers lead financially precarious lives. Who's to blame? Why, the schools, of course.

Fundamental to the corporate criticism of the schools for failing both businesses and vast numbers of Americans is the view that in the 21st century global economy, the nature of work is dramatically changing. That is, an increasing number of high-skilled jobs now demand more education, which schools have the task of providing. An example of corporate blame-casting is a report, sponsored by the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Defense Industry Association, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, expressing worry that the U.S. would not “sustain [its] economic leadership of the world because the nation’s schools were not providing the highly skilled workers” businesses need to win in the global economic combat.

For businesses’ political surrogates, this perspective has been bipartisan. President Barack Obama maintained: “The source of America’s prosperity has never been merely how ably we accumulate wealth, but how well we educate our people. This has never been more true than it is today . . . education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success, it’s a prerequisite for success.” This prerequisite was the aim of his Common Core State Standards, legislation devised “to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive.”

Despite Donald Trump’s antipathy for all-things-Obama, he echoed his predecessor by expressing support for an educational “agenda . . . that better prepares students to compete in a global economy.” Equipping “America’s young people with the relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them . . . to compete and excel in lucrative and important [high tech] fields.” Echoing her father’s vision, Ivanka Trump, “senior advisor” to the President, proposed closing the “growing gap between workforce and business needs and workers’ skills” by beginning to teach tech in Kindergarten, thereby putting “our citizens on a pathway to a job.”

Strong support for this vision of “education for the 21st century economy” has come from national teacher organizations. For example,

arguing that new business imperatives underscore the need to fully fund schools, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, asserted that “today’s public school teachers are on the front lines of our collective efforts to compete in the global economy.” Providing scholarly evidence for this view has been the work of many leading educational scholars, such as Linda Darling-Hammond, who advocated for schools in which all students, especially those living in poverty, have “access to an equitable, empowering education” that will enable them to “thrive in a technological, knowledge-based economy.”

High-Tech Jobs and U.S. Economy

To appraise these purported business and employment imperatives, let’s look first at the U.S. economy’s current proportion of high-tech jobs (commonly called STEM—science, technology, engineering, mathematics—jobs). The Bureau of Labor Statistics determined that “depending on the definition, the size of the STEM workforce can range from 5 percent to 20 percent of all US workers.” Looking at the issue historically, we find that in 1850, around the start of the Industrial Revolution, top-skilled jobs made up about 10 percent of all work. Consequently, using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ generous calculation, we can conclude that the proportion of STEM jobs has doubled, but it has taken over 160 years to do so, and that these jobs still represent only a significant minority of overall jobs—particularly if the 20 percent estimate is high.

With respect to the workforce the schools educate for these high-level jobs, a study by the Economic Policy Institute concluded that the “United States has more than a sufficient supply of workers available to work in STEM occupations,” thanks to increased student enrollment following forecasts of employment opportunities in these jobs: “For every two students that US colleges graduate with STEM degrees, only one is hired into a STEM job.” In computer and information science and in engineering, “US

colleges graduate 50 percent more students than are hired into those fields each year.” The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), a “global management consulting firm and the world’s leading advisor on business strategy,” concluded that the “skill gap crisis” was “overblown.” Putting the “crisis” in broad employment terms, BCG added, “Trying to hire high-skilled workers at rock-bottom rates is not a skills gap.”

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately two-thirds of today’s occupations do not require post-secondary education; although those jobs will decline in the years ahead, by 2022 they will still comprise more than half of all new jobs that are expected to be created. Furthermore, of the 30 occupations with the largest projected employment increase by 2022, two-thirds will typically not require post-secondary education. These include such jobs as personal health care aides, home health care aides, retail salespersons, food preparation and service workers (including fast-food workers), janitors and cleaners, medical secretaries, insulation workers, and construction assistants.

Another illuminating perspective is to compare STEM jobs in the 1950s with the present. In the 1950s, STEM jobs were about 15 percent of the total, a proportion that continued into the 1960s. Yet despite this relatively modest percentage, those years were a time when good-paying jobs expanded across the economy, and when the long-haired U.S. “middle class”—defined as those having a good wage, a house, vacation time, some savings, a retirement pension—was built. It was also a period when profits accumulated as well. When Trump demands we “make America great again,” that is the time to which he looks back.

However, given the relatively modest percentages of STEM jobs that persisted over decades and up to the present, why is it that now there is the corporate insistence that if American workers are to survive in the new economy, they must acquire advanced skills (STEM) education? In other words, between the height of the Amer-

ican Dream years—the 1950s and 1960s—and today, the percentage difference in STEM jobs has been about 5 percent, and perhaps less. Is it really possible that with 5 percent fewer STEM jobs, the age of the American Dream was built? Or, looking at the other side of the equation, how can we explain that the middle class was built with 85 percent non-STEM jobs, yet presently the middle-class is collapsing with about 80 percent non-STEM jobs?

One major answer lies in the difference in organized labor then and now, and in the forbidden phrase: labor’s “class struggle.” Consider manufacturing jobs. Although there are not as many manufacturing jobs now as then—currently, there are slightly more than 12 million such jobs in the United States, compared with about 15-16 million in the 1950s—manufacturing today should demonstrate an area of employment through which, as before, the American Dream could be reached. In other words, shouldn’t the mantra be, “If you get a STEM education or a manufacturing job, life can be good (or, at least somewhat economically secure)?” The answer, unfortunately, is no, because, as a study by the National Employment Law Project illustrates, today’s manufacturers can pay workers deficient wages, so why should they pay them more?

In the 1950s, economist Robert Reich calculates, manufacturing job wages were significantly higher than the average wage: “Fifty years ago, when General Motors was the largest employer in America, the typical GM worker got paid \$35 an hour in today’s dollars.” Wages for manufacturing jobs have continued to drop over the decades, however, with many manufacturing jobs now paying less than a living wage. Currently, the median wage in manufacturing is \$15.66 an hour, with approximately one-quarter of manufacturing workers earning less than \$12/hour, and many earning just \$10–\$11/hour. For example, General Electric workers in Louisville, Kentucky, earn \$13/hour making electric water heaters. Remington, the gun company, pays workers \$11/hour in its Alabama manufactur-

ing facilities.

dren's lives.

Serving Capitalism Well

Why does corporate America actually love the nation's schools? Given U.S. capitalism's control of the American economy, the economic system's educational needs are best served by ensuring that the nation's school achievement does not get out of hand; that is, schools cannot become too successful in producing well-educated graduates for the purportedly vast (but actually small) number of STEM jobs. The corporate strategy in this regard is simple:

- provide just enough funds to maintain the educational system that, overall, currently serves the economy well;
- ensure that taxpayers fund most of the schooling serving businesses;
- do not fully fund schooling for those poor or marginally poor American youth whose futures will fit well with the present and future jobs that will be predominant in the economy—fast food, simple service, basic health care, low-skilled factory work;
- maximize profit by not contributing more to the public good than is absolutely necessary for business needs;
- pay workers as little as possible, maintaining that the work and wages are commensurate with their educational levels and skills.

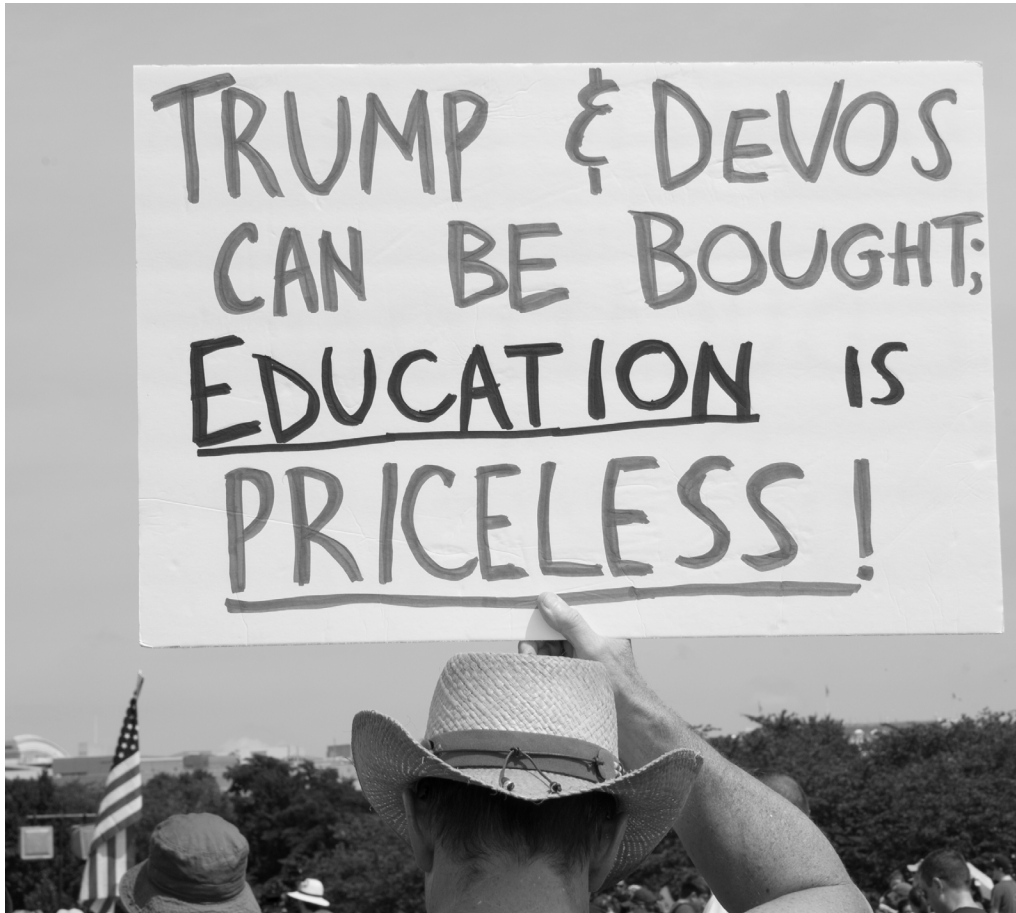
Were the schools as a whole not serving the economy well, we can be certain that the nation's major corporations—Walmart, Dow Chemical, Goldman Sachs, Chevron, Microsoft, IBM, Apple and others—would be focused on achieving the best educational outcomes in STEM education by providing schools with additional tax funds from the more than \$1 trillion these corporations have stashed in offshore tax havens. Similarly, were these corporations concerned that not enough poor children were being properly educated to meet employment needs, we should not doubt that some of these unpaid taxes would have made their way into these chil-

Blaming the victim

Blaming schooling, teachers and students turns the nation's focus away from the reality of the array of jobs actually available, and away from U.S. capitalism's numerous ways for extracting ever-greater profits—such as paying the lowest wages here and abroad, reducing or eliminating job benefits, outsourcing work, and creating an ever-growing temporary workforce. While all the blame is foisted on teachers, students, and Americans generally, the “failure of education” ideology is meant to keep the eyes of Americans on one message: YOU are responsible for yourself; getting a decent job and having a decent income depends solely on YOU; and if YOU don't have a good job and income it's because YOU haven't had the right kind of education (for which educators are to blame). Your problem is not a consequence of corporate policy, corporate greed, and corporate attacks on the public good, not a problem of how wealth is acquired and used. YOU and your teachers are the problem, and most of all, YOU are a problem for American business and America because YOU have failed to become part of the skilled workforce these businesses and the nation need.

Teacher organizations, parents and older students must face the fact that they will never obtain the reforms they demand because the schools are actually serving capitalism well. Consequently, it is imperative for teacher organizations and other social justice groups concerned with education to begin creating an opposition that explains how educational achievement is primarily contingent on what the economic system needs, which is far different from what American workers and families need. That is, schools serving capitalism well is not the same as serving all children and young people well.

With respect to the curriculum, these organizations need to take up the very difficult but necessary task—surely a task that will meet strong corporate resistance—of insisting that



A demonstrator holds a sign at the March for Education, Rena Schild/Shutterstock.com

“education for the 21st century economy” is a legitimate goal, but that “education” must include comprehensive study of the actual working of that economy. In recent years there has been an increased, critical spotlight on capitalism. “Capitalism” is no longer the word that cannot be uttered. For example, inquiring about American views on capitalism and socialism, Gallup Poll found that a substantial percentage of Democrats/Leaners (57 percent) had a more positive view of socialism than of capitalism, with the most positive view of socialism expressed by Americans 18 to 29. While Americans overall have a positive view of capitalism, the positive rating has declined over the last eight years, and is now at its lowest level since 2010. Again, most significantly, public conversations about capitalism’s benefits and harms are increasingly in pub-

lic and political discourse. In August 2018, for example, Senator Elizabeth Warren introduced the “Accountable Capitalism Act,” which raises questions about the interests corporations serve. Education activist organizations might do well to push for similar legislation.

The time is overripe for teacher organizations to frame schooling and school reforms within the context of that-which-must-be-named. Only by explaining how schools as a whole serve capitalism will teachers’ organizations begin to acquire a more successful leadership role in improving young people’s education, lives and futures.

This article is drawn from Gerald Coles’ new book *Miseducating for the Global Economy: How Corporate Power Damages Education and Subverts Students’ Futures* (Monthly Review Press, 2018). References for this article can be found in the book.

