



Pitfalls of Left-Wing Electoralism -

The Green Campaign: a Diversion from Working-Class Struggle

The Green Party made significant gains in the 2014 New York State election. Its candidates for governor and lieutenant governor – Howie Hawkins, a socialist and a perennial Green candidate, and Brian Jones, a prominent member of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) – drew 170,000 votes, just under 5 percent of the total.

Though far behind the candidates of the major capitalist parties, Hawkins/ Jones did succeed in beating the Working Families Party, a fraudulent operation that claims to be independent and pro-labor but almost always supports Democrats, right and left. This year the WFP backed the despicable incumbent governor Andrew Cuomo, despite his anti-working-class record over the past four years.

The Green Party’s success in New York follows the victory of Kshama Sawant’s socialist campaign for City Council in Seattle last year. These results have encouraged many on the left to see a growing opportunity for challenging the Democratic Party electorally from the left. Sawant and Hawkins have already pointed to the potential for an “independent left ... third-party presidential campaign beginning next year.” [1] So it is important for revolutionary socialists to assess the Green Party and its campaign.

HAWKINS/JONES – A RETREAT FROM THE SAWANT CAMPAIGN

Unfortunately, far from building on the Sawant campaign’s success in advancing a working-class challenge to the capitalist class’s two parties, the Green Party campaign was a wholesale retreat into bourgeois electoralism.

• Whereas Sawant’s campaign openly identified with the working class and its struggles, the Hawkins/Jones cam-



Green, not red. New York Green Party candidates Howie Hawkins and Brian Jones (above) are socialists, but their campaign boosted a pro-capitalist party

paigned built the Green Party, which has a non-working class outlook and composition.

- Whereas Sawant’s campaign was openly socialist (but far from revolutionary), the Green Party is openly capitalist – its program states that it stands for a “responsible stakeholder capitalism.” [2] That Hawkins and Jones chose to carry green flags instead of red symbolized their opportunistic abandonment of class politics and embrace of liberal reformism.
- Whereas Sawant emphasized using the election to provide a voice for struggles on the ground like the move-

Inside

In Defense of Hong Kong Protesters, page 7



New York, September 2014. Kshama Sawant calls on stealth Democrat Bernie Sanders to run for president.

ment demanding a \$15 minimum hourly wage, since the Green Party is purely an electoral machine with no real membership structure, the Hawkins/Jones campaign could offer only an electoralist perspective of winning progressive gains through voting.

We will elaborate these points below. But first we want to spell out our view on why it is important for socialists to engage in electoral activity.

The only hope, as we see it, for humanity to escape from capitalism's ever-worsening poverty and oppression, wars and environmental catastrophe is for the struggles of the system's victims to culminate in revolutions led by the working class – revolutions that overthrow the capitalist ruling classes and build a socialist world of freedom and abundance for all. A vanguard organization of Marxists is essential to spread awareness of the socialist vision and offer revolutionary leadership in the working class's day-to-day struggles. But the masses will only come to see the need for revolution based on their own experiences of fighting to

defend their interests and reforms through mass struggles. As Marxists, our entire approach to the struggle against the injustices of capitalism is therefore centered on advancing workers' and other poor and oppressed people's consciousness of their distinct class interests and their capacity to fight for them through building their own mass organizations. Only by such means can the principal victims of capitalism begin to take control of their destiny.

Accordingly, as revolutionaries we seek to actively participate in every possible experience of struggle, including elections. Marxists recognize that under capitalism, elections for government offices cannot bring about the vast changes that workers need – that behind the government stands the state of police and soldiers ready to defend the capitalists' grip on power. Nevertheless, running in elections and winning public offices can provide platforms to publicize, explain and advance the programs and organizations of working-class and oppressed people and test revolutionaries' warnings that the ruling class will not concede the masses' demands for reform peacefully. If a political party arose out of

working-class struggles and was seen to represent their cause, its electoral campaigns would offer a precious opportunity for workers to both assert their class interests and also test whether the leaders and perspective of that party really represent their interests and struggles.

That is why we supported Kshama Sawant's campaign in Seattle. Sawant's organization, Socialist Alternative, has a miserable record of capitulating to reformism and the trade union bureaucrats who inevitably compromise workers' interests. Along with its international tendency, the Committee for a Workers International, it also has a history of capitulating to imperialism, as in its defense of the racist colonial-settler state of Israel. But while openly explaining these criticisms, we supported voting for Sawant because her campaign was built on independent struggles and organizations of the working class that provided a basis for working-class people in Seattle to continue their struggles while testing whether Sawant and her comrades could be trusted to lead them. [3]

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LRP BULLETIN

Published by the Socialist Voice Publishing Co.
for the League for the Revolutionary Party

Editorial Board: Walter Daum (editor), Dave Franklin,
Evelyn Kaye, Matthew Richardson

Production: Jim Morgan

Additional citations and references can be found in the website versions of *Bulletin* articles or by writing to us. We welcome letters from our readers for information or for publication.

SV Publishing
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New York, NY 10156

That's also why we did not support the Hawkins/Jones campaign. The Green Party campaign did not even claim to stand for the interests of the working class against the capitalists. On the contrary, it advanced the Green Party and its vision of reconciling the interests of the working class with capitalism by means of pro-worker reforms. It thus spoke to and encouraged the illusions in liberalism held by middle-class progressives and more professional workers like teachers. It appealed to those who hope to find a new vehicle for reforms now that the Democratic Party has proved so loyal to capitalist austerity and war-mongering.

The Greens' mild reformist perspective could never connect with the rebellious desperation of the most exploited and oppressed workers and other poor people who share the bitter experience of the struggle to survive in

this unforgiving and violent capitalist society. The Green campaign was a diversion from the cause of working-class struggle. Indeed, by promoting the growth of a third capitalist party, it aided the construction of a potential new barrier to that struggle.

The Hawkins-Jones campaign was therefore a step backward from Sawant's. But even though the ISO was prominent in the former, we don't believe that there is a principled difference between Socialist Alternative and the ISO on electoral strategy. SA has backed many a Green Party candidate, including Hawkins and Jones, and now Sawant and SA are pushing for an "independent" 2016 presidential campaign by Bernie Sanders, the U.S. Senator from Vermont. [4] That proposal would mean a further step backward, since Sanders, though he is nominally independent of the two major parties

The Greens, Capitalism and Imperialism

The Green Party's dedication to capitalism is hardly hidden. It opposes "corporate capitalism," but its program favors small business and what it calls "responsible stakeholder capitalism."^[1] Over the years its best-known spokesman has been Ralph Nader, its candidate for president in 2000. Nader ran an openly pro-capitalist campaign, aiming to save "American corporate capitalism from itself."^[2] At the time Howie Hawkins laid out the Greens' class basis clearly, writing in support of Nader's candidacy:

"Nader and the Green Party are not a strictly workers' party. In outlook and composition, they are a cross-class coalition of 'the people,' the working class and the middle classes of self-employed professionals and small and medium business people, all allied against the corporate elite."^[3]

Nor are the Greens consistent opponents of the Democrats. They refused to re-endorse Nader for president in 2004, out of fear that a substantial protest vote for him could cost the Democrats the election (as his 2000 campaign was accused of doing). Instead the Greens ran a weak "safe states" candidacy and refused to campaign in states where they might take crucial votes from the Democratic candidate, John Kerry. Nader himself went further and endorsed some Democratic congressional candidates. When push came to shove, the Greens were not an alternative to the Democrats, much less a working-class alternative.

The main theme of the 2014 Green campaign was a "Green New Deal for New York." In the campaign's wording:

"We will establish as economic human rights a decent job, a living wage, quality health care, a good education, affordable housing and public transit, and sustain-

able clean energy. We will pay for it by restoring the progressive taxes and revenue sharing New York had in the 1970s, which would increase state revenues by about 20% while giving 95% of New Yorkers a tax cut."^[4]

Thus Hawkins and Jones expressed themselves in the language of Democratic Party liberalism.

Their "New Deal" explicitly harkens back to Franklin D. Roosevelt's reforms in response to the Great Depression of the 1930's, reforms that were meant to save the capitalist system in two ways: by regulating the economy to avoid economic crisis, and by derailing mass movements that could challenge capitalist state power.

Nevertheless, the basic reforms outlined above under the "Green New Deal" are desirable and indeed necessary. But the idea that these can be achieved under a rapaciously profit-driven economy (which is what any kind of capitalism is), and with a state power that defends it, is absurd. And that's what is described by a program that calls for restoring the tax program of the 1970's! It is criminal for socialists to run on a platform that maintains that such breakthrough programs could be achieved without social change far more drastic than electing Greens, namely socialist revolution. This is an example of Greens trying desperately, like Nader, to save corporate capitalism from itself.

In addition to calling for an absurdly reformed capitalism in the United States, the Green Party endorses a reformed U.S. imperialism abroad. It deplored the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq but did not call for the ouster of U.S. military forces. And its general policy is to call for the U.S. to act under the aegis of the U.N. Security Council for global "peace-keeping."^[5] The Security Council is itself an imperialist-dominated

institution under whose cover the U.S. often carries out its far-from-peaceful military interventions.

The U.S. Green Party has never held high office, but in Germany, its fraternal party, Die Grünen (The Greens), has often joined local and national governments; one leader, Joschka Fischer, was Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister from 1998 to 2005. In power the German Greens have served capitalism and imperialism loyally – enforcing austerity policies, helping to adopt the big-bank bailouts and supporting the U.S.-led wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.^[6] Many Greens objected, but a party whose reformist political outlook does not explicitly stand against the class interests of capitalism is no obstacle to carrying out what capitalism requires.

Notes

1. In the Green Party's 2012 campaign platform, at www.gp.org/green-party-platform-table-of-contents/17-platform/41-iv-economic-justice-and-sustainability
2. Statement of Ralph Nader announcing his candidacy for the Green Party's nomination for president, February 21, 2000; www.nytimes.com/books/first/n/nader-reader.html
3. Hawkins, "A Green Perspective on Ralph Nader And Independent Political Action," October 8, 2000; www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45c/069.html. Brian Jones, however, now seems to claim (without justification) that the Greens are among the "working-class parties around the world." See www.jacobinmag.com/2014/11/building-outside-the-democratic-party/
4. www.howiehawkins.org/news_conference_at_national_green_party_meeting
5. See again the Greens' 2012 platform.
6. On the German Greens' foreign policy, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joschka_Fischer

"Green New Deal" appeals to liberal illusions in capitalism and promises to provide a raft of far-reaching changes that only socialist revolution could achieve.



Hawkins for Governor

Jones for Lt. Governor • Vote Green Party

and labels himself a “democratic socialist,” is in fact a Democrat in all but name, financed by them and caucusing with them in Congress as a firm supporter of capitalism in general and U.S. imperialism in particular.

WORKING-CLASS INDEPENDENCE

Opportunities for successful left electoral campaigns have opened up because of the growing disenchantment with the Democratic Party among its traditional base of supporters. The long downturn in the capitalist economy over recent decades has driven both Republicans and Democrats to increasingly attack the working class's living standards and to roll back concessions granted in the past to Blacks, Latinos and women. The Republicans' open championing of the interests of big business wins them the support of small business people and others who still hope to find success in capitalist America. As well, their promotion of religious conservatism appeals to people fearful of deepening social crisis. And their barely concealed appeals to racism win them votes from those white workers who are not appalled by such demagoguery and are reassured by the idea that even if their living standards are falling, Blacks and Latinos will remain beneath them.

But the Democrats' are no alternative: their record of presiding over capitalist austerity has exposed their false claim to be the friends of the working class and people of color. Hopes in the Democrats were revived by Barack Obama's ascent to the White House. Millions celebrated his election with the expectation that he would address the widening gap between rich and poor and the continuing injustices of racism at home, and end the United States' war-mongering abroad. Instead, Obama bailed out the banks that triggered the financial crisis on Wall Street and abandoned the working class to drown in underemployment and debt; he has responded to America's regular racist atrocities against Black people with empty rhetoric; he has targeted immigrants for record deportations and persecution; and he has expanded Washington's murderous program of drone assassinations and bombings in the Middle East and begun to increase again the numbers of American troops in Iraq. The Democrats' smashing defeat in the 2014 Congressional elections was due in great part to its electoral base's discouragement and poor turnout at the polls.

Marxists have always recognized the terrible problem that the American working class faces at election times: that it only has a choice between the two major parties of the capitalist class. The absence of a mass party that the working class considers its own means it cannot use the electoral arena to advance its various forms of class struggle.

In the past, at times of rising class struggle, when workers' efforts to defend and improve their conditions posed the need for fighting for their interests not just locally or through trade unions but society-wide, Marxists have raised the call for the creation of a united workers' party based on the masses' organizations of struggle. In such a party, revolutionaries could seek to use the experiences of struggle and elections to prove the need for revolution.

Trotsky, for example, in the late 1930's, supported calls for the creation of a labor party in the United States, a party based on the unions which had grown tremendously through the militant strikes and workplace occupations of the Depression years. Trotsky expected that the fight for an independent working-class party under these conditions could give revolutionaries an opportunity to convince growing numbers of workers that the party would have to adopt a perspective of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. But advocating a labor or a broad workers' party, rather than an explicitly revolutionary party, is not always justified; such parties are not always a necessary stage toward raising workers' consciousness of the need for a revolutionary party. In many instances they can become just another barrier, like the British Labour Party, the Brazilian Workers Party or several European socialist parties.^[5]

In recent decades, levels of working-class struggle have dropped to their lowest point in history, thanks to a trade union bureaucracy that has strangled every effort toward working-class action. Instead it has directed all hope toward voting for and lobbying the Democrats. Some socialists and other leftists continue to call for a labor party under these conditions, despite the fact that the demobilization of the working class means that the pro-Democratic Party trade union bureaucrats' grip on power would go unchallenged. Calling for a mass workers' party at a time of rising working-class struggle could enable revolutionaries to help prove to workers that only a revolutionary workers' party can really lead the way forward. But calling for a labor party at a time of little struggle means promoting a reformist party that could only be a barrier to the progress of workers' struggles and to the building of the vanguard revolutionary party they need.

Other socialists have given up on fighting for a workers' party. Rather than dealing with present-day conditions and joining patient propaganda for a revolutionary perspective combined with practical involvement in the day-to-day struggles of the working class, they now say that any sort of breakthrough to the creation of an “independent third party” on the left will do; and that the Greens are a possible vehicle for this. But in this society there is no escaping the pressures of capitalism – either a party sets itself in opposition to the

system and bases itself on the only class with an interest in overthrowing it, or else it must succumb to the pressures of capitalist interests. This explains the record of every non-working-class “third party” created in recent years internationally, and the Greens are no exception.

FALSE APPEALS TO MARXISM

How do Hawkins and the ISO reconcile the Greens’ non-working-class character and capitalist program with their socialist views? Both have turned to the writings of Frederick Engels, Karl Marx’s closest collaborator, and his writings about the campaign for New York City mayor by Henry George in 1896 on the “United Labor Party” ticket. Hawkins quotes Engels advice to revolutionaries in New York at the time:

“The first great step of importance for every country entering into the movement is always for the organization of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers’ party. That the first program of the party is confused and highly deficient, that it has set up the banner of Henry George, these are inevitable evils but also transitory ones.”^[6]

Indeed, Engels was scathing about Henry George’s programmatic schemes. But he urged revolutionaries to support the George-led Labor Party campaign because it was an independent campaign of the working class that would allow workers to learn that George did not really stand for the interests of the class his party claimed to represent. He added that the working class has to learn through its own mistakes:

“The great thing is to get the working class to move as a class; that once obtained, they will soon find the right direction.”

Hawkins also cited the American labor and socialist leader of a century ago, Eugene V. Debs, who vowed in 1920 that he would support “a genuine labor party,” even if its platform was not everything that socialists desired. But Hawkins then ignores the fact that both Engels and Debs insisted that the party be a “distinct workers’ party” (Engels) or “a genuine labor party” (Debs) before considering supporting it. The Green Party is nothing of the sort, neither in Nader’s day nor today.

So in order to claim that voting for the Greens is the right policy for a Marxist socialist (not to speak of running as their candidate), Hawkins has to ignore the fundamental condition insisted on by the socialist leaders he enlisted in his cause, namely that the party be a distinct, genuine working-class party, independent of the capitalists – not just independent of the two main capitalist parties, the Republicans and Democrats, but of the capitalist class generally, including its minor parties. Hawkins brought up the need for working-class independence only to bury it.

Ever since it decided to hop onto the Nader bandwagon in 2000 and 2004, the ISO has also misrepresented what Engels said about Henry George. Joel Geier of the ISO claimed the same Engels statement as a precedent in 2000,

even though he admitted that “Though Nader addresses workers’ concerns, he is not building or advocating a class party, nor is his appeal to workers that they should be a self-active class.” As we noted in response, “That alone invalidates the Engels comparison” to Nader or the Greens. ^[7]

This year the ISO reclaimed Engels’ authority for the Green campaign:

“In the 1880s, Frederick Engels encouraged the small socialist groups that existed then to get involved with the campaign of the middle-class reformer Henry George, who ran an independent campaign, backed by the unions, for mayor of New York City, against the Tammany Hall Democrats and the Republicans. To Engels, who wasn’t that enamored of George himself, the campaign presented socialists with an opportunity to raise class demands within a wider political arena.”^[8]

Here, the ISO presents an utterly misleading picture of the George campaign, as if it was one of a lone bourgeois reformer backed by the unions rather than one of an independent labor party. Indeed, avoiding quoting what Engels actually wrote makes it easier for the ISO to try to present him as an opportunist in the ISO’s image.

Both Hawkins and the ISO evidently felt obliged to address the traditional Marxist position on working-class political independence, but both then put forward their opposite cross-class position without a direct argument against the Marxist one. Instead of trying to come up with an argument that the working class can advance its movement through cross-class political parties, they relied on the fear that otherwise socialists would be isolated. Hawkins said, “Socialists will be more effective arguing their perspectives from inside than preaching at it from outside”; while Geier warned against using the limitations of the Greens as an “excuse to stand aside.”

But even the ISO believes that it is important to stand aside from some struggles. Revolutionaries must indeed preach from the outside at times – for example, when workers are supporting pro-capitalist political parties or actions (as many are initially when the U.S. goes to war under a blaring trumpet of militarist propaganda). The ISO and Hawkins agree on “standing aside” when workers opt for voting for Democratic candidates, even though many on the left do choose to vote for Democrats as a supposed “lesser” evil. They just choose to oppose the Marxist tradition less consistently.

Marxists have long opposed supporting bourgeois third parties in the U.S., even if that means isolation from mistaken working-class activists. One example goes back to the dissolution of the campaign for a labor party in 1924 into the campaign of the Republican “progressive” La Follette. Although Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Communist International at the time, supported the move, Trotsky condemned it, saying that “to play the role of solicitor and gatherer of ‘progressive voters’ for the Republican Senator La Follette is to head toward the political dissolution of the party in the petty-bourgeoisie.”^[9]

In 1948, when the now-reformist Communist Party supported the presidential bid of Henry Wallace, a Democrat who had served in the Cabinet and as vice-president under Roosevelt, the Socialist Workers Party opposed that move as a class betrayal. In words that today seem directed against socialists supporting Nader or the Green Party, the SWP's James P. Cannon explained:

“It has been argued that ‘we must go through the experience with the workers.’ That is a very good formula, provided you do not make it universal. We go with the workers only through those experience which have a class nature. We go with them through the experiences of strikes, even though we may think a given strike untimely. We may even go with the workers through the experience of putting a reformist labor party in office, provided it is a real labor party and subject to certain pressures of the workers, in order that they may learn from their experience that reformism is not the correct program for the working class.

“But we do not go through the experience of class collaboration with the workers. ...The party must be educated and re-educated on the meaning of class politics, which excludes any support of any bourgeois candidate, and requires even the most critical attitude toward a labor party when we are supporting it.”^[10]

Another supporter of the Hawkins-Jones ticket, the left blogger Louis Proyect, quoted Marx and tried to enlist him in the Green cause:

“Even where there is no prospect of achieving their election the workers must put up their own candidates to preserve their independence, to gauge their own strength and to bring their revolutionary position and party standpoint to public attention. ... The progress which the proletarian party will make by operating independently in this way is infinitely more important than the disadvantages resulting from the presence of a few reactionaries in the representative body.”^[11]

Here Marx not only calls for working-class electoral independence, as does Engels; he also specifies that the workers' candidates should advance “their revolutionary position.” Obviously the non-revolutionary Green Party could not do anything of the sort. But neither did the ISO, for all its revolutionary pretensions and citations from Marx and Engels. The efforts to find revolutionary credentials for supporting the Green Party all fall flat.

SHOULD REVOLUTIONARIES RUN REFORMIST CAMPAIGNS?

Brian Jones had a great opportunity at the beginning of the campaign to put forward a different approach. Since he is a leader of the nominally revolutionary ISO, an interviewer asked him if he saw a contradiction between supporting the ISO “which seeks to abolish capitalism” and supporting the Green Party “which seeks to reform the capitalist system instead of calling for it to be ended.” His reply

was that “There’s only a contradiction if you think there’s a contradiction between reform and revolution.”^[12]

The problem with this attitude is not that there is anything wrong with fighting for reforms: revolutionaries should be engaged in the thick of such struggles. But the Green Party and its candidates work in the spirit of reformism: the idea that reforms are enough, that capitalism doesn’t need to be overcome. In contrast, revolutionaries enlist in struggles for reforms in order to show their fellow workers and other allies that capitalism, especially in times of economic hardship like the present, will not tolerate deep-going or long-lasting reforms.

Revolutionary socialists have often supported campaigns that were limited to reform programs. But in doing so they take pains to point out that reformism doesn’t work and that electoralism is no answer. For them, a reform campaign on a working-class basis may win partial or temporary gains, but above all it is a promising way to reach more eyes and ears and draw attention to the need for a revolutionary working-class party. But that is not what the Hawkins-Jones campaign did.

While the Greens at times say that movements, not just elections, are necessary, there are plenty of campaign statements, like that of Hawkins and Jones, that solely focused on the electoral arena and what the New York State government could do were they in office.^[13] They give no warning that the capitalist class realizes that a far-reaching reform program would threaten their power and their right to rule, and that they would act accordingly. Even though it could be argued that some of the Green demands have revolutionary implications, the campaign and its supporters do not even mention this, much less draw out what it means. Whatever the socialists might have in the backs of their minds, they are running a reformist and electoralist campaign.

The ISO prides itself on its emphasis on the Marxist idea that only the working class can emancipate itself, in contrast to so much of the Marxist left that capitulates to Stalinism and other forces outside the working class. But in its commentaries on governmental elections, this idea disappears. Sometimes, as in Geier’s article from 2000, the class limitations of the Greens are brought up – only to be ignored. But more typically, as in their recent writings on the Hawkins-Jones campaign, any hint that something different is needed is dropped. The ISO’s political method trains would-be revolutionaries to abandon principles in deference to popular moods, to denigrate the role of theory (e.g., by not dealing with the difference between a working-class based party and a cross-class one) and to avoid criticism of the political campaigns they support.

Those who are convinced that socialist revolution is the only solution, and that to get there the working class must build its own revolutionary party, have to seize every opportunity to make that vision clear. The many socialist individuals and organizations who enthuse over the Hawkins-Jones campaign have instead opted to build a party that is a diversion from working-class independence and class struggle. ●

Notes

1. Kshama Sawant and Howie Hawkins, "Open Letter from Kshama Sawant and Howie Hawkins to the Left and Labor Movement," www.socialistalternative.org/2014/11/03/open-letter-kshama-sawant-howie-hawkins-left-labor-movement/; and Hawkins, "America just took a wrong turn. It's time to take a hard left," *The Guardian*, November 6, 2014; www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/06/election-green-promise-2016.
2. See the box on page 3.
3. See our analysis of the Sawant campaign, "The Socialist Victory in Seattle: A Marxist View"; www.lrp-cofi.org/statements/sawant_022114.html. This article also includes a discussion of the method of critical support.
4. *Socialist Alternative*, "Bernie Sanders for President in 2016?" April 16, 2014; www.socialistalternative.org/2014/04/16/Bernie-sanders-for-president-in-2016-2/
5. See our articles "The Labor Party in the United States," www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/laborparty6.html; and "No to New Reformist Parties!," www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/reformismPR63.html
6. Quoted by Hawkins in "A Green Perspective on Ralph Nader And

- Independent Political Action," www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45c/069.html. Engels' comment is from his letter to Florence Wischnewsky of December 28, 1886, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86_12_28.htm
7. See "Nader: Saving Capitalist America from Itself," *Proletarian Revolution* No.62, 2001, www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/nader_62.html.
 8. <http://socialistworker.org/2014/05/21/independent-of-the-1-percent>
 9. Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, 1924. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1924/ffyci-1/intro.htm
 10. James P. Cannon, "Summary Speech on Election Policy," in the SWP's *Internal Bulletin*, February 1948. See also his "On the 1948 Wallace Campaign: 'A Diversion & An Obstacle'"; www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1948/02/wallace.htm.
 11. Marx, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," March 1850; cited by Project at <http://louisproject.org/2014/11/04/the-working-families-party-in-historical-context/>
 12. www.independent.org/2014/05/13/nyc-educator-runs-It-gov-interview-brian-jones
 13. Check out Hawkins' campaign platform; www.howiehawkins.org/platform

In Defense of the Hong Kong "Umbrella Movement"

For decades Hong Kong was viewed by capitalists and politicians around the world as a zone of stability, and particularly in recent years as a place where the galaxy of commercial transactions surrounding the booming manufacturing on mainland China could be carried out without state interference. A colony of the United Kingdom until 1997, it has been transformed from a privileged outpost of capital in east Asia to a privileged area within the People's Republic of China itself. As such, it has also been a showcase for the building and extension of great fortunes by pri-

vate capitalists – backed by the political authority of Stalinist rulers who understand that oligarchic and state-capitalist economic forms can co-exist. [1]

The aura of orderly and uninterrupted business was punctured a few weeks ago as tens, even hundreds, of thousands of youthful demonstrators seized control of three distinct areas of Hong Kong. Their protests are continuing, if in diminished proportions. And certainly the sources for their anger and concern are not going away.

The immediate issue is the refusal of the Chinese gov-

Hong Kong students march to protest China decision on elections, September 24.

The banner says, "Hope is in the People. Change Starts with Struggle."



ernment to agree to elections under universal suffrage when Hong Kong's chief executive is to be chosen in 2017. This was a key provision of the Basic Law, drawn up by Beijing in 1990 in preparation for Hong Kong's eventual return. Until that time, Hong Kong residents have no vote unless they happen to be on the 1200-person committee, vetted by the China government, that decides who will lead the government. The current chief executive is C.Y. Leung (Leung Chun-ying), who took office in 2012. His nicknames among the many in Hong Kong who despise him include "Wolf" and "689" – the number of votes he received from the committee that elected him.

The 2017 election and the continuation of the freedoms of speech, religion and assembly were the democratic ornaments accompanying the major pillars of agreement between China and the UK: the continued dominance of the small number of financial tycoon families and the untrammelled economic freedom of the corporations and banks that have their headquarters there. Of course, the rights of ordinary working people to a decent life, including adequate housing and food, continued to receive little attention – as is normal under capitalism. This agreement to preserve continuity in Hong Kong was summarized in the formula "One Country, Two Systems."

Given the clear trampling by Beijing and local leaders on the promised free election, the young demonstrators are rightfully worried that the heavy-handedness will not stop there. Indeed, there has been growing fear that China intends to fully integrate Hong Kong into the system of Stalinist political domination of the mainland. But there is also an underlying discontent with the growing economic disparities and other ills affecting the bulk of the population. As the tycoons further fatten themselves under China's rule, prices are high and life is harsher even for middle-class people expecting to use their education to move up the ladder.

ORIGINS OF OCCUPY HONG KONG

Even before the eruption of protests over China's insistence on complete control of the election process, there were some signs, especially among students and young adults, that popular discontent was starting to bubble into open revolt. In 2011 "Occupy Hong Kong" took over a plaza beneath the headquarters of the HSBC bank, protesting inequality in wealth and income. It survived almost a year, making it one of the longest-lasting Occupy movements. At its height it had about 100 participants, but the number had dwindled to about 10 by the time it was evicted.

At the same time, there was also a series of massive student demonstrations against the imposition of Beijing-approved courses and textbooks, pressuring the Hong Kong government to backpedal from a 2015 deadline for implementation. The idea of massive civil disobedience to pressure China to allow open elections began to circulate. A liberal activist, Bennie Tai, writing in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, worried that China would refuse to

allow candidates to run for office who had not been vetted for their political loyalty to Beijing; he proposed a campaign of civil disobedience. Shortly after, a group formed with fairly moderate political leanings calling itself "Occupy Central with Peace and Love." ("Central" is Hong Kong's financial district.)

Early last summer, Occupy Central organized an unofficial referendum on election process, hoping to get more than 100,000 supporters for allowing the public to nominate candidates for the top executive. The government responded with political, physical and digital attacks, including assaults on movement websites. Pro-government demonstrations were largely orchestrated by the regime, including one of 30,000 people with a petition labeling Occupy Central as "unruly radicals." But the regime was unable to stop the movement's unofficial referendum: nearly 800,000 turned out for it in June, overwhelmingly in support of opening the nomination process to the public.

Neither the Hong Kong government nor its masters in Beijing gave any indication that they would make any concessions. The National People's Congress, the fake parliament that rubber-stamps the will of the ruling Communist Party of China (the CCP), announced that no changes would be made in the proposed election process. No matter how nervous some in the government and among the Hong Kong moguls may feel about the intentions of Beijing, and even though many of them believe that open elections would be a better cover for their continued domination, these concerns pale in comparison to their agreement with China's rulers about the need to maintain a safe environment for raking in profits.

THE FIRST OCCUPATION

Occupy Central had been planning to engage in a brief show of civil disobedience on October 1, China's National Day, the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. But the older liberal leaders of OC were upstaged by a more vigorous movement of students and young adults. On September 26, a week-old student strike suddenly veered into an occupation of the governmental center in the Admiralty. The government reacted immediately by sending in riot police, who began to arrest demonstrators, pouring on tear gas and pepper spray. Around 80 were arrested.

The police violence on September 26-27 resulted in an even greater outpouring of protesters on September 28; estimates vary from 80,000 to 100,00. The police then launched a massive attack with tear gas and pepper spray, which was effective in driving the majority of protesters from the occupation site. What they didn't reckon with was that the movement, instead of being crushed, would spread. The riot police were withdrawn on Monday, allowing protesters to return to the Admiralty site. By that evening the protesters' numbers had swelled to an estimated 180,000 in three locations, closing many roads, causing schools to be close and more than 200 bus routes to be canceled or diverted. The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions

called for a general strike, but workers did not respond significantly to this call.

The protests came to be called the “Umbrella movement,” after the symbol seemingly meant to suggest both dignity and defiance. Fearing that continued heavy-handed police violence would only damage Hong Kong’s position economically, on September 29 the Hong Kong government, surely acting under advice from Beijing, pulled back the riot police and began a policy of less violent though still relentless containment of the occupations.

The stage was now set. Occupations were maintained with varying numbers of participants, while the police attempted at various times to diminish or shut down parts of them. But neither side was able to declare a victory. There also emerged a “civilian” force opposed to the occupations (ostensibly independent of the police), consisting of people whose businesses and livelihoods were threatened by the disruption. Prominent among this reaction were taxi and minibus drivers, and it is generally believed that elements from “triads” (criminal gangs) were also involved.

GOVERNMENT CRACKS DOWN

By October 8 the number of demonstrators had been reduced to only a few thousand, down from up to 200,000 days earlier. But many streets remained blockaded, as demonstrators constructed barricades by lashing together the waist-high grilles brought days earlier by the police as tools for crowd control. Sometimes the protesters set up barricades and then abandoned them. In other cases small groups of demonstrators attempted to guard the barricades. The *New York Times* reported on October 10:

“The blockaded territory far exceeds that taken by the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, which took over a small park in Lower Manhattan. A rough parallel would be if protesters in New York shut down Times Square and Columbus Circle in Manhattan, along with a chunk of Downtown Brooklyn across the East River, as the police stood by, too worried to clear the streets.”^[2]

In the early morning of October 13, the police took down many of the barriers to open important downtown thoroughfares and ease traffic congestion. They left untouched the protest camps themselves. Later, anti-occupation groups, some masked, dismantled many of the remaining barricades in the Admiralty. There were scuffles between occupiers and the invaders, and the police arrested two dozen people. The next day occupiers erected bamboo barricades to replace the grilles that the police had



Protesters sit down in Hong Kong street, October 20.

removed. At one roadblock well-wishers left iron chains, metal wires and bicycle locks.

While the back-and-forth continued, the government began to use other weapons to intimidate, divide and isolate the movement. With the struggle in the streets more or less static, the media grew in importance. Spying on message boards became evident when the police announced that a protester had been arrested who was accused of encouraging others online to confront police. Around the same time, Beijing began a campaign to slander the movement as a tool of foreign imperialists, claiming there was a conspiracy aimed at independence for Hong Kong that was “actively collaborating with foreign forces.”

The Umbrella movement has widened divisions on the Left within Hong Kong and internationally. Some professed Marxists parrot the CCP line that the protests are funded, organized and directed by the U.S. in an attempt to undermine China. Little evidence is given to support these conspiracy theories, which have easily been refuted.^[3]

DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS TOO DANGEROUS

On October 20 Chief Executive Leung, in an appeal to the ruling elite, told foreign journalists that containing “popular pressure” was a valid reason for opposing the demands to open up the nomination process. Speaking more frankly than capitalist politicians normally do, he asserted that there were too many poor people in the city to allow democratic elections:

“If it’s entirely a numbers game – numeric representation – then obviously you’d be talking to half the people in Hong Kong [who] earn less than US\$1,800 a month. You would end up with that kind of politics and policies.”

That is, a genuinely free election would be likely to

hand victory to candidates and parties of the working class and poor – not something that any capitalist ruling class welcomes, especially in times of economic hardship.

As the siege in the streets wore on, among the occupiers themselves differences naturally developed. Reports indicate that there has been some dissent over how to continue the demonstrations, for how long and over what strategy to pursue. Like many Occupy movements three years ago, the Umbrella movement appears to be largely unwilling to cohere a definite leadership with a unified program.

So most occupiers likely viewed with skepticism the activity of some student leaders who appeared in a televised debate with government officials. At any rate the debate consisted of polite exchanges: the student leaders inquired what steps the government was prepared to take in the direction of more democracy, while the government responded firmly that while it intends to “listen” to the students, it would not negotiate. Plans for a vote to show support for the occupation were canceled, apparently because of disagreements among occupiers over the wording of the proposals and over the value of such a vote. Some protesters argued that the vote could set the stage for compromise and retreat.

The organizational divisions reflect deeper political problems. While diverse, the protesters largely represent the outlook of middle-class or aspirant middle-class students and youth who are suffering frustrated expectations over their future under Chinese capitalism. This can be a source of radical and courageous energy, but by itself it does not present a fundamental challenge to the capitalist arrangement of their society. And even when they are angry at the system, these young people can hold elitist attitudes towards the only social force that is capable of overthrowing the capitalist system, the working class. After all, across the border lives the largest and most potentially radical working class in the world. In addition to class elitism there is a parochialism born of the relative privilege of living in the Hong Kong enclave.

Despite such limitations, the protests themselves (and even more, the issues they are protesting) have received a degree of support from workers in Hong Kong. Many sympathize with the political and economic grievances, adding to them their particular working-class interpretation. Construction workers assisted protesters with building barricades. An open letter was released, signed by “at least 1314 civil servants from 65 Departments,” declaring that they are not represented by an anti-occupation statement that had been released by the Hong Kong Civil Servants General Union & Government Employees Association.^[4] But support is hardly unanimous. As noted, some workers who have had their livelihood directly disrupted by continuing protests have opposed them. The pro-Beijing Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions called for a general strike against the protests, but workers did not respond significantly to this call.

While the issues are debated on TV and in the press and within the movement itself, divisions emerging in the

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“debate” in the streets have grown more ominous. On October 22 groups of taxi drivers attempted to forcibly remove some of the barricades, and there was an attempt to set fire to a protesters’ supply station. As we write, the protests are continuing. But unless they spread and deepen, it will be hard to maintain momentum at current levels. More workers and other citizens are apt to get annoyed at the disruptions and protesters themselves are likely to become more discouraged. But the anger is still there.

CHINESE CAPITALISM AND THE LIMITS OF DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

Reclaiming Hong Kong from British imperialism was a source of pride for China’s rulers as well as a massive economic prize. Hong Kong has continued to play its role as gatekeeper for much of the capital entering China – not only from wealthy foreign capitalists but also from Chinese investors disguised as coming from abroad to gain government breaks. Its more developed private capitalist class formed a natural ally to the Party’s increasingly market-driven policies. But putting up with the democratic expectations of Hong Kong citizens has been irritating for Beijing. So has been Hong Kong’s role as a safe haven for democratic and labor activists fleeing repression in China.

Even more dangerous for Beijing is the prospect that these struggles might inspire the mainland Chinese masses to demand similar rights and benefits. Early in this round of protests, the Beijing government began vigorously cracking down on expressions of support on the mainland. By National Day, October 1, there were reports of detentions of nearly two dozen people for “Going Bald for Hong Kong” – shaving one’s head as an expression of support. In addition to detentions, at least 60 people in China have been

called in for questioning.

For the CCP, the inability to grant or even acknowledge the demands of the Hong Kong demonstrations is tied to its survival. In the 65-year history of its rule, it has consistently had to suppress every eruption of mass participation in politics and struggle for democratic demands. At various points the Party (or a faction thereof) has tolerated or even encouraged a measure of dissent or mass initiative, in the expectation that it would be limited and serve the purposes of the elites. Each time, the relative opening set off events that became too threatening to the whole ruling class.

In 1956, Mao Zedong initiated the “Hundred Flowers Campaign,” supposedly to encourage dissent and criticism of Communist Party practice. But when the criticism became too enthusiastic and in particular gave an opening to a wave of strikes by the poorest sectors of the urban working class, Mao closed down the campaign. In a subsequent “anti-rightist” campaign, he used the brief opening to target those who dared to speak out.

The Cultural Revolution began in mid-1966 as a student movement sponsored by Mao, who thought he could use it to raise his own authority and smear rival leaders for the Party’s “mistakes.” But the political opening was again filled by the working class. By the beginning of 1967, millions of workers in China’s biggest cities and industrial centers went on strike, around demands that they had formulated on their own. Going beyond Mao’s attack on “Party bureaucracy,” the workers’ movement called for socialist reforms to institute democratic control over production, raise the masses’ living standards and eliminate the hukou (residential permit) that created two separate categories of labor and two grades of citizenship, urban and rural.

Mao, despite his radical reputation, could not allow the working class’s demands to threaten the very institutions that undergird state capitalist development. The independent workers’ organizations were suppressed, the Red Guards were outlawed, millions of politically active urban residents and especially youth were stripped of their urban hukou and sent “down to the villages,” and “revolutionary” troops were sent to occupy factories, universities and towns around the country.

ECHOES OF TIANANMEN

This year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the struggle for democratic rights and against deepening economic exploitation that was crushed when troops massacred thousands of unarmed demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in Beijing and elsewhere. The events of 1989 have shaped the thinking of every subsequent Party administration to this day, for whom the lesson of shooting down mass protests before they spread have become the most sacred of Party doctrines. But Tiananmen was less a turning point in the CCP’s relationship to the masses than a continuation of an established pattern.

To be sure, in 21st-century China there has been a loosening of daily political and cultural life from the totalitarian

bonds of earlier years. But any granting of serious democratic demands remains untenable for the Stalinist rulers. To preserve the grinding exploitation that is the basis for China’s ascent in the world capitalist system, strengthening their police state is necessary; the working masses can too easily employ democratic rights to press for far-reaching class demands.

The Communist Party today has more reason than ever to fear that any local struggle around democratic demands could mushroom into a nation-wide revolutionary movement. The main source of fear is the massive but super-exploited working class. But there is also dissatisfaction similar to that of the Hong Kong protesters throughout the country, where the “rising middle class” remains largely on paper and a generation of youth with high expectations are being shut out of the wealth increasingly visible around them. Indeed, China today is the prime example of Leon Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution – only the international working class, in the course of making socialist revolution and building a workers’ state, can fulfill the demands of the democratic revolution.

CAPITALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

The political system the CCP hopes to preserve in Hong Kong today – a “united front” with the enclave’s leading businessmen and financiers – has similarities to the policy it implemented after uniting mainland China under its rule in 1949. Characterized by Mao as “New Democracy,” it focused on the need for national unity between the “four progressive classes” – the proletariat, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the “national bourgeoisie” – under Communist Party leadership.

Above all, the working class was not to disrupt the economic activity of the national bourgeoisie, and the peasant movement was forbidden from spontaneous action which could undermine the formation of a class of capitalist farmers and grain merchants. New Party-dominated unions were established to enforce “reasonable exploitation” on the working class, and compulsory arbitration and bans on strikes remained in effect – laws that had governed labor’s relations with the state under Chiang Kaishek’s pro-imperialist regime before the revolution. Because of this enforced class peace, the private capitalist sector grew at a faster pace in the early 1950’s than at any other time in Chinese history.

But the flourishing of private capitalism was at that point a temporary state of affairs, a preliminary stage of reviving the economy and disciplining the working class that was a set-up for the wholesale nationalization of industry and collectivization of agriculture a few years later. The situation is different today. Our theory of Stalinist statified capitalism anticipated the tendency of the system’s devolution toward traditional capitalist forms, years before the downfall of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Among other things, statified capitalism limited the economic weapons like mass unemployment

that helped discipline the working class. [5] The devolution has taken place in China as well, but with “Chinese characteristics” that reflect a reaction to collapse of Stalinist rule elsewhere.

The development of open market forms and the large-scale opening to foreign capital is an essential ingredient of modern Chinese capitalism – and nowhere more than in the Hong Kong bastion of capitalist business. But what remains, and must remain, is the absolute rule of the Communist Party, and with that comes strict limitations on the rights of the masses to free expression, self-organization and general democratic and class rights.

THE WAY FORWARD

The best hope for preserving the democratic concessions in Hong Kong is to spread the movement to the billion-plus oppressed and exploited people on the mainland. This would require a direction to the struggle and a leadership that is currently lacking. Whereas the Party has not dared to introduce civil freedoms or democratic control over politics in a single village since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, one reason it has been able to tolerate them in Hong Kong is the parochial outlook of many of the region’s residents. They see their fight as a struggle to preserve the economic and political privileges enjoyed by their city. For some natives of Hong Kong, opposition to the CCP also takes on the form of reactionary prejudice against all migrants from the mainland.

The only way to defeat the Party’s ability to isolate Hong Kong is to consciously seek to spread the struggle across China. It is impossible to predict when the next great explosion of working-class struggle against the CCP will occur, though it is only a matter of time. But the movement in Hong Kong could play a giant role in hastening that day – if it raised demands beyond those concerning the specific conditions of Hong Kong and appealed to the needs of the mainland population. Freedom of speech and other basic rights would be in the interests of all, but more specific demands could strike at the heart of the regime’s vulnerable hold over the working class.

Struggles of workers and peasants in the mainland have been growing every year, but they remained isolated and disorganized because of the ban on independent organizations. By championing the call for free unions, village assemblies and political parties, the Hong Kong struggle could potentially trigger a nationwide movement linking the flares of class struggle and tensions below the surface.

The current Party administration of President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang bases its legitimacy on the promise of the “Chinese Dream.” In exchange for the continued tight grip of the Party and a radical new round of financial stimulus and the resettlement of people into the cities, Chinese workers and peasants are told they will become rich. But in reality, the migrant labor force, hundreds of millions strong and growing more quickly all the time, is relegated to second-class status and permanent pauperism. While more and more of the value they produce is

taken by the state to pay off the banks, local governments are unable to provide even basic social services to this enormous urban underclass. [6]

To break Chinese workers from the CCP, especially the relatively privileged population that holds an urban hukou, it will also be necessary to directly confront Chinese nationalism. Its attempt to portray the democratic movement as an foreign-inspired effort to wreck China’s potential to become a new “upper-income country” must be challenged by raising working-class unity and internationalism. In particular, a genuinely democratic movement would call for abolishing the hukou and would champion the rights of China’s national minorities and oppose the Party’s threats on weaker neighboring countries.

Getting the movement to raise such demands in Hong Kong will be difficult, because they are counterposed to the provincialism of the region: the end of internal migration and status restrictions would raise the prospect of millions of impoverished mainlanders moving into Hong Kong and other major cities. Therefore even the most basic demands for abolishing the hukou and establishing equal citizenship rights immediately point to the need for socialist solutions. The working class will need to take control of the economy, whether it is controlled by the Party or foreign investors, in order to use China’s industrial base to address the needs of the masses.

The struggle ahead will not be easy. In the absence of a massive working-class upsurge in China, it is unlikely that the Hong Kong protests will win their goals. But the most radical and far-seeing of the protesters can be won to a revolutionary working class perspective. Creating such a layer of revolutionary youth would be a great accomplishment of this struggle. Revolutionaries defend all openings for political activity and demands for democratic rights in Hong Kong. They also work towards the development of the needed revolutionary socialist underground in China, aiming for the construction of a revolutionary working-class party. ●

Notes

1. For our analysis of the class nature of China, see Dave Franklin, “China’s Capitalist Revolutions,” *Proletarian Revolution* No. 53 (Winter 1997), www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/ChinaPR53.html; and “Imperialism’s China Card,” *Proletarian Revolution* No. 70 (Spring 2004), www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/chinaPR70.html.
2. “Hong Kong Enters a Standoff Over Barricades as Protests Ebb,” www.nytimes.com/2014/10/09/world/asia/as-protests-ebb-hong-kong-finds-itself-in-stalemate-over-barricades.html
3. See for example the article by Au Loong-yu at www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article33439.
4. “Hong Kong: An Open Letter from over 1300 Civil Servants,” at Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières; www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article33349.
5. See the book *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, by Walter Daum; www.lrp-cofi.org/book/index.html.
6. See “Enter the Dragon: China’s New Proletariat,” *Proletarian Revolution* No.74 (Spring 2005), www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/chinaPR74.html.

Racist Cops...

continued from page 16

against the chokehold murder of Eric Garner on July 17 by a team of cops, several thousand people marched in Staten Island on August 23. They also demanded justice for Michael Brown. As in Missouri, none of the New York cops have yet been charged, even though the coroner ruled that Garner's death was a homicide. While many of the young people came to express their rage at racist cop murder, a posse of capitalist politicians and union officials restrained the march and tried to focus it on "peace" and reconciliation. Reverend Al Sharpton, a professional pacifier of anti-racist struggles, coordinated this good-will appeal to the police.

The hospital workers' union, 1199SEIU, produced placards reading "Support the NYPD. Stop Police Brutality" – a disgraceful expression of support for the cops and a plea for them to self-reform and give themselves a better image. These signs reflected the views of the bureau-

cratic union leadership, not of the mass of Black and Latino workers in the union and the city, who may still have hopes in the possibility of reform but are boiling with anger at the endless succession of police killings.

The backdrop to the justified anger is the failed promise of racial equality and the dashed hopes of "making it" in America, hopes and promises that have been used by capitalist ideologues for decades to contain Black and other struggles. It is capitalism itself that has undercut such promises – through the ruling class's long-term offensive of job cuts, wage and benefit slashes and attacks on government programs.

We expect that the most politically conscious Black and Latino youth will come to see the need to get rid of capitalism, as the only way to achieve the justice that people of color in this country have been demanding for so long. Young people of color will play a decisive role in building the vanguard revolutionary party that all workers and oppressed people need.

– November 22, 2014

A Working-Class Revolutionary View: Solidarity with the Ferguson Rebellion!

Below is a slightly edited version of the leaflet distributed at demonstrations in New York City in August against the killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown.

After police officer Darren Wilson executed 18-year old Michael Brown in cold blood on the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, the authorities mobilized a military-style force to suppress justifiably angry protests. Unarmed peaceful demonstrators chanting "No Justice, No Peace!" and "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" in tribute to Mike Brown faced cops with automatic rifles and armored vehicles, tear gas and stun-grenades – and still the protesters came out in hundreds and thousands.

The outrage in Ferguson has advanced the struggle for justice in the face of the terrorism of racist, anti-working class cops. Demonstrators bravely held their ground against the military-like attempts to suppress their rights, forced the name of the killer cop to be revealed and made sure he wouldn't get away with this murder easily. Their persistence has inspired the fight against state terror and oppression across this country and around the world. Even the Palestinian people under siege in Gaza sent messages of support.

Ferguson is obviously not an isolated case. On July 17 on Staten Island in New York City, cops murdered another unarmed Black man, Eric Garner, by applying a lethal chokehold and shoving his head against the sidewalk while he gasped, "I can't breathe." The cops then stood around his apparently lifeless body, only concerned with trying to cover up their crime.

And the carnage continues. Two days after Michael

Brown's murder, cops in Los Angeles shot to death another unarmed young Black man, 24-year-old Ezell Ford, provoking further growing protests. Then on August 20, just three miles from where Michael Brown was executed, cops shot to death another young Black man, Kajieme Powell, who apparently stole two cans of soda from a store and then stood outside waiting for the police to arrive before calling on them to shoot him. Video of the killing shows that the cops chose to kill Powell despite the fact that he was no immediate threat to anyone.

Along with murders there are constant harassments, beatings and false arrests targeting people of color. In New York, the NYPD's "Stop and Frisk" program of systematic, daily harassment of youth on the streets continues, despite the promises of Mayor de Blasio to end the policy.^[1] Nationally, immigrants face an escalated assault by the Obama administration that includes record numbers of detentions and deportations. Under Obama, the same brutal local police who kill unarmed Black and Latino men are used to enforce the oppressive Federal immigration laws. And now the government is working out how to more quickly deport Central American children fleeing violence and oppression that stem from the U.S.'s imperialist rule.

Behind this accelerating repression lie worsening economic injustice and racism. As the global capitalist economy goes from crisis to crisis and slides toward depression, it offers working-class youth a bleak future of unemployment or minimum wage labor, along with continual harassment by the police that aims to keep everyone intimidated. This oppression is visited upon Blacks, Latinos and immi-



Demonstrator waving Palestinian flag in Ferguson shows mutual solidarity with Gaza resistance.

grants first and foremost but is also used to suppress the working and living conditions of the whole working class as well as of ever-larger sections of the middle class. Racism is part of the essence of capitalist society.

It is right that protesters demand that killer cops like Darren Wilson, the murderer of Michael Brown, be jailed – their continued freedom only reinforces cops’ confidence that they can get away with murder and increases the likelihood that they will kill more. The police can be pushed back from their current wave of deadly violence if they are met with increasingly organized and massive protests, and if the cops’ ruling-class bosses fear that if they don’t rein in the police, they will face mass struggles that threaten their interests.

To build a powerful movement against police brutality, protesters will have to defy the attempts by the cops and National Guard to use repression to break the movement’s momentum. They will also have to avoid the traps set by liberal politicians of placing hopes in review boards, Federal oversight and a host of other measures. Such phony “reforms” have done nothing to curb police brutality, but they have done much to divert mass struggles away from the streets and into the death-trap of trusting politicians whose true loyalty is to the ruling class. Working-class and poor people can only trust their own power to mobilize and organize in struggle to demand justice for the victims of police terror.

However, mass struggles will also prove that the police can only be pushed back from their worst excesses temporarily. In this capitalist system, the police are armed thugs whose role is indeed to “serve and protect” – not the working-class majority but the capitalist rulers who profit from the economic exploitation of the working class. Victimizing people of color helps turn workers against each other. This weakens the working class as a whole and specifically hinders the possibility of all the exploited and oppressed uniting in mass action to demand an end to the attacks on their lives and living standards.

That’s why we say that police brutality and racism cannot be solved by reforms – only the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state and system can put an end to police terror. For this to happen, not only is mass struggle in the form of protests and strikes necessary; the most politically conscious workers and youth will have to join together to build a revolutionary political party that can lead our class to victories and to doing away with the capitalist economic system and its repressive state apparatus. In sum, we need a socialist revolution.

UNITED CLASS STRUGGLE NEEDED

A few days after August 9 the protests had spread to dozens of cities nationwide. In New York, for example, thousands shut down Times Square and hundreds more protested in Harlem, Queens and Brooklyn. There is great potential for a national movement. Fast-food workers fighting for a \$15 minimum wage and unionization have participated in the protests in Ferguson. Along with other low-wage workers, they have been at the leading edge of struggle in this country for economic justice. What’s needed is a united movement against both racist attacks like police brutality and economic attacks like the absence of good jobs at a living wage. Bringing such movements together, with young Blacks and Latinos playing a leading role, could stimulate a revived movement of the entire working class.

But there are obstacles besides the police. We have already seen in Ferguson that “community leaders” as well as officials of Black establishment organizations have a different agenda from “No Justice, No Peace.” Theirs is “Peace with Less Injustice” – but above all “Get Out the Vote,” for Democratic Party politicians who inevitably betray the justice movements that backed them. No wonder these leaders have failed to provide a decisive direction for the protests. Their acceptance of the curfew – and then their attempt to enforce a curfew even after it has been lifted – is particularly shameful.

The only real mass organizations that the working class has in this country are the trade unions, but they are almost universally led by bureaucrats who use their control of the unions to stop workers’ struggles rather than organize them. But organized workers do have a fundamental interest in seeing the strikebreaking police force pushed back, as well as in building the biggest movement possible

against economic injustice and all oppression. The unions have the potential means to mobilize tens and hundreds of thousands, if not more.

The idea of fighting for the labor movement to build these protests may seem to many people to be a sick joke given their terrible record in sabotaging the fight for their own members, much less the broader working-class and the poor – but workers face injustice at the hands of police and need to fight back, and to ignore the unions is to let their leaders off the hook and miss an opportunity to advance the cause of a stronger working-class fightback. The community and union leaders should be held accountable to their positions of responsibility – all the while we all must prepare to replace them with an alternative leadership capable of taking the class struggle forward against every form of exploitation and injustice.

THE LEADING ROLE OF BLACK AND LATINO WORKERS AND YOUTH

For years now, the whole American working class has suffered unending attacks on its jobs, living standards and social services – not to mention civil rights. While the banks that drove the economy into crisis got bailed out, the rest of the country has been left to struggle to survive amid rising unemployment and poverty. And there has been no sustained fightback by working-class and poor people.

Young Black and Latino workers and poor people suffer the worst of all capitalism's attacks. But with the rebellion in Ferguson and protests spreading around the country, they are setting an example for all working-class people, showing that it is long overdue that they stand up against the system's attacks and organize mass struggles in defense of their lives and living standards. Young people of color have played this leading role before – the ghetto rebellions of the 1960's inspired an upsurge of strikes and organization by workers of all races, along with mass protests against U.S. imperialist policies abroad.

At that time the capitalist system was still relatively prosperous and could afford to make serious concessions. But today the world economy is teetering on the edge of another Great Depression and the ruling class is on the attack. Mass struggles can push back these attacks and even win some improvements temporarily. But to put an end to the worsening misery of life under capitalism these struggles will have to culminate in working-class revolutions that overthrow the ruling class so that society's wealth can be used for the benefit of the masses of workers' and poor people.

The working class desperately needs to push aside the capitalist politicians, liberal reformers and bureaucrats who hold back their struggles and replace them with a new revolutionary working-class leadership, armed with a clear



Cops aim military-style weapons at peaceful Ferguson demonstrators.

vision of the path ahead and how to achieve it. Such a vanguard party leadership cannot be created at the last moment; it must begin to be built in the struggles of today.

We think the most politically conscious workers and youth will come to see, through the experience of struggles today as well as the study of Marxist theory and the history of past struggles, that the working class can and must overthrow capitalism and build a better, socialist world. Workers need a new political leadership – a revolutionary working-class party that fights for the best possible defense today while drawing the lessons from every struggle to convince our fellow workers, over time, of the need to overthrow the capitalists. That means replacing the capitalists' rule with a working-class state power dedicated to building a society of abundance, freedom and justice for all.

Justice for Eric Garner, Michael Brown and all Victims of Police Brutality!

Jail the Killer Cops! Drop the Charges Against All the Arrested Protesters!

No Justice, No Peace!

Mass Action Against Racist and Anti-Immigrant Attacks! Democrats and Republicans:

Two Parties of Racist "Law and Order"!

Jobs for All! Workers' Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!

Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!

Notes

1. The court decision of August 2013, in which a judge ruled that the stop and frisk program had to be modified, has been upheld. A Federal appeals court recently rejected a request from the NYPD to overturn the ruling. However, the "remedies" that the court has ordered are yet to be implemented – and would not be a significant improvement in any case. They include the establishment of an independent monitor, more police training, a pilot program for "body-worn cameras" so that cops will video their own stop and frisk incidents, and a vague call for "community input." For details see <http://failedevidence.wordpress.com/2013/08/15/nypd-stopfrisk-decision-part-ii-remedies-ordered/>.

Justice for Eric Garner and Michael Brown!

Racist Cops Must Not Get Away with Murder!

Mass protests this summer and fall were ignited by the cold-blooded police killings of two Black men, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York, demanding justice for the victims and the arrest of the police perpetrators.

Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis, erupted after the murder of 18-year-old Mike Brown on August 9, and militant demonstrations there are ongoing. As of this writing, Darren Wilson, the cop who murdered Brown, remains free, while a grand jury considers whether he should be charged with a crime. Outgoing U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has expressed irritation at foot-dragging in organizing a Federal case, but has predictably taken no perceptible steps himself toward obtaining justice for Brown.

Numerous leaks about the autopsy, officially anonymous but obviously coming from police and district attorney sources, have appeared. They claim that Michael Brown's blood was on Wilson's gun, his uniform and the patrol car interior; and that a bullet wound in Brown's hand came from a shot at a close distance while he was facing the cop. These leaks were intended to buttress the police line that Brown was wrestling for the cop's gun. None of this explains, however, how at least one bullet hit Brown in the back from a distance, as most witnesses attest and forensic evidence shows.

Other leaks aimed at encouraging sympathy for the killer cop have emerged. Among the latest is that Brown had marijuana in his system. Since marijuana has no connection to violent behavior and has been consumed at one time or another by almost half the population, this "fact" only speaks to the repressive nature of marijuana laws and their targeting of young Black and Latino men. Such leaks



Ferguson protesters with arms raised. Michael Brown was shot with his hands up.

appeal to racist sentiments and are designed to encourage the grand jury to refuse to charge Wilson. Anticipating the grand jury decision, local police are stockpiling their military-grade "riot gear" in preparation for a militant protest.

Meanwhile St. Louis area cops have continued killing young Black men. On October 8, an off-duty cop, wearing his police uniform while moonlighting as a security guard, shot 18-year-old Vonderrit Myers 17 times after chasing him down the street for "acting suspiciously." This time the cops claimed that the victim had fired a gun, and they produced a semi-automatic revolver which they attempted to tie to Myers. But video surveillance tape makes it unlikely that Myers ever had this gun – or any other.

Through all of this, the movement for justice for Michael Brown has continued, animated by a core of young Black people from Ferguson and elsewhere in the St. Louis area. Anti-racist activists, Black, Latino and white, from around the country have joined the marches. Protesters have shown bravery and tenacity in the face of repeated cop attacks, not only with tear gas and rubber bullets, but with tanks and other military weapons. There have also been blatantly illegal arrests of demonstrators and journalists – for offenses like "loitering" (staying in one place) for more than five seconds!

In New York City, in one of the biggest protests
continued on page 13

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