

A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL OF REVOLUTIONARY THEORY, PRACTICE, AND ART

# PEACE, LAND, & BREAD

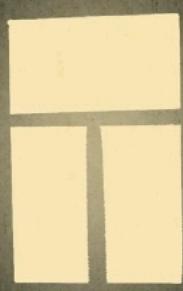
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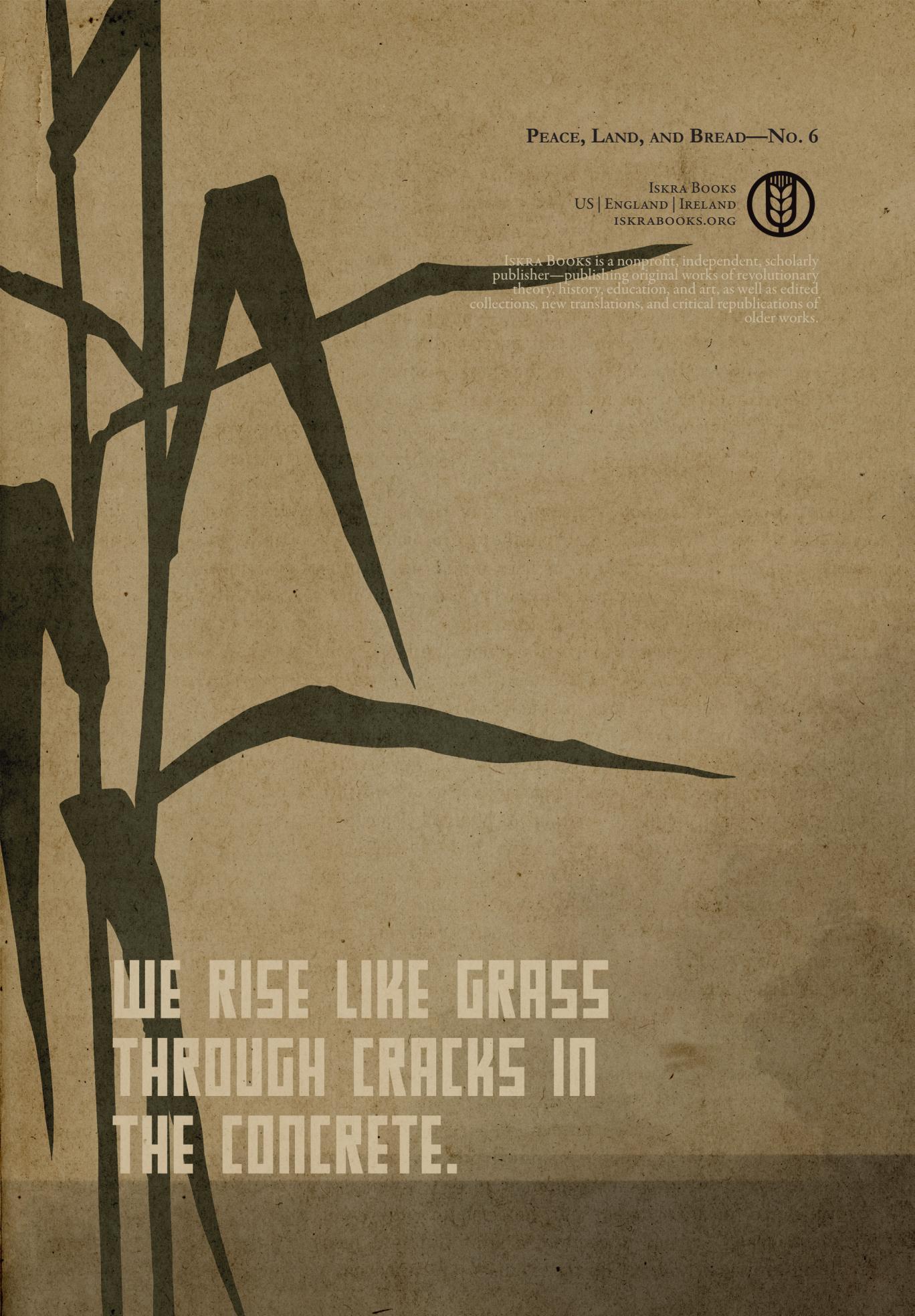




**ISSUE 6**  
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**FROM REPRESSION,  
WE BUILD NEW WORLDS.**



PEACE, LAND, AND BREAD—No. 6

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THROUGH CRACKS IN  
THE CONCRETE.

“THE ARTIST who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the castoffs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all. But the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.”

—FRANTZ FANON



WE REMAIN  
CREATIVE,  
DESPITE  
THE  
DARKNESS.

# PEACE, LAND, & BREAD

An independent, peer-reviewed, scholarly journal of revolutionary theory, practice, and art.

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**PEACE, LAND, AND BREAD** is a journal of revolutionary thought and creative practice; a space where political analysis and artistic expression converge. Founded in 2019, PLB has continually rejected the separation of art from politics, insisting instead that creation is not simple ornamentation but *resistance*—an insurgent practice that preserves memory, sustains authenticity, and opens new horizons against repression. Each issue operates as both archive and experiment, recording forward-thinking, multidisciplinary scholarships and arts while testing the possibilities of imagination as a resource for liberation.

At a time of deepening fascism, colonial control, and the commodification of knowledge, PLB affirms that art and creativity remain central to survival and to revolutionary state-building in the broadest sense: the construction of worlds *beyond* empire. We understand creativity as revolutionary hope itself, rooted in the persistence of nature and the endurance of collective human struggle. To make, to write, to create—these are not peripheral gestures but essential acts of defiance. In this way, PLB is both a mirror of our moment and a promise that even in darkness, creation persists.



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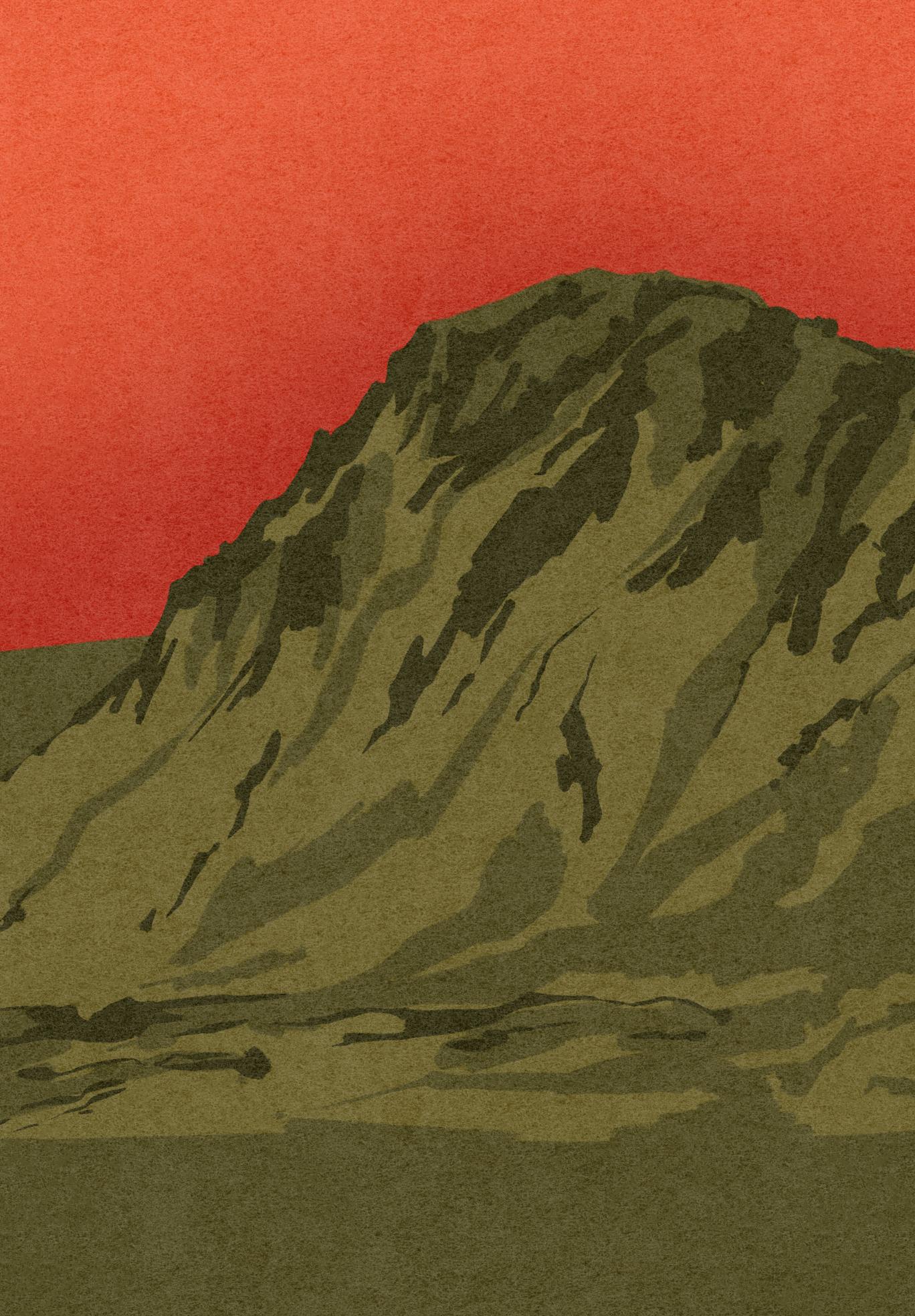
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KYLE FERRANA

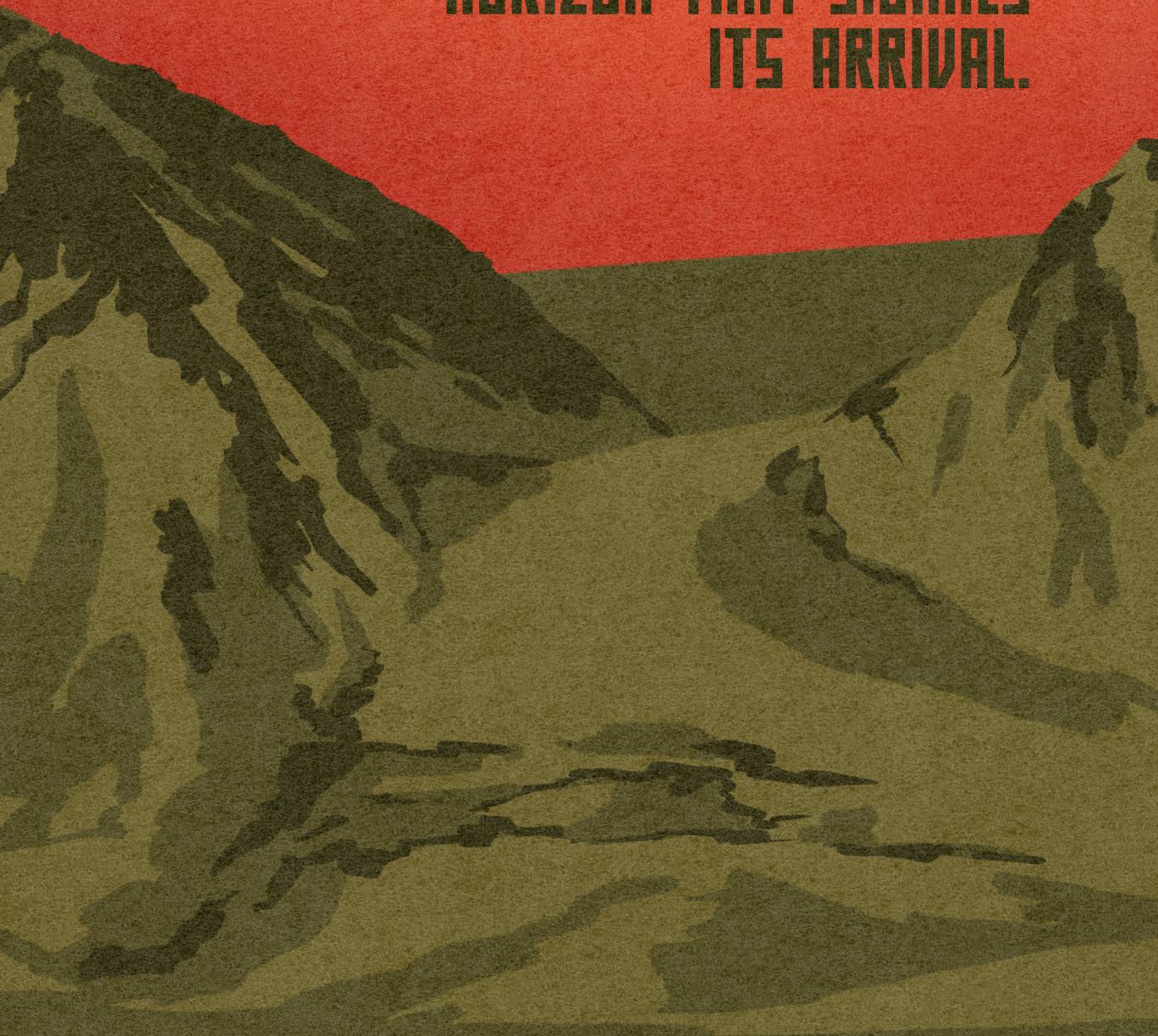
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CAPITALISM IN TERMINAL DECLINE  
AND THE ECONOMIC NECESSITY OF 'STATE  
MONOPOLY SOCIALISM'

TED REESE



WE STAND FOR A WORLD  
FREE OF EXPLOITATION,  
AND FOR THE RED  
HORIZON THAT SIGNALS  
ITS ARRIVAL.





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WE LIVE IN A WORLD where repression has begun to feel ordinary, where the creeping advance of fascism grows less subtle by the day, and where the line between imperial conquest abroad and reactionary aggression at home blurs into a single suffocating horizon. The façade has crumbled; what remains visible is the machinery that was always there: a political order sustained by war and armaments, genocide and displacement, alienation and exploitation.

In such a time, it would be easy to despair, to retreat, to bury ourselves in daily noise and to pretend that, somehow, history has stopped. But history has not stopped. It moves—whether we acknowledge it or not—and its motion is often, as much as we may resist the thought, *violent*. Ours is such a time. And in such times, artists and scholars alike must return to fundamental questions: What does it mean to create authentically in the midst of repression? What does it mean to write insurgent scholarship, to make insurgent art, when the world itself seems locked in perpetual, spiralling crises? How do we adapt to shifting conditions in a time when, as Lenin famously quipped, decades can happen within weeks?

For six years, *Peace, Land, and Bread* has been part of how I navigate these kinds of questions. Since 2019—and even earlier, in fact, in work reaching back to 2016 with the journal *Forward*—PLB has been a canvas for art, design, scholarship, and politics, a place where my creative and intellectual lives intersect with broader struggles, and a platform for others to join this conversation; a space to coalesce the most revolutionary thought worldwide made all the more palatable and attractive by keen design work. The journal is, in many regards, not separate from me; it is a mirror, reflecting both self and

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

by BEN STAHNKE

world. Today, that mirror reflects a world sliding into violence and war: the ongoing Israeli destruction of Palestine, political assassinations of both fascists and liberals alike, resurgent white nationalist movements, and the troubling complicity and silence of those who should resist.

In such an era, the task, in my view, is not only to resist but also to *create*—to carve visual authenticity, form, and beauty out of the ruins, and to insist on creativity, imagination, and truth where empire demands only silence.

In this spirit, the visual language of the issue you now hold in your hands—or read on your screens—is spare and moody, inspired by Soviet minimalism and landscapes in shadow. It follows the idea that in darkness, we may light candles—in darkness, creation continues.

The articles gathered in this excellent sixth issue (of our sixth year) capture our moment in different yet imaginative ways. Paweł Wargan shows us that the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe was not a “transition” but a neoliberal holocaust, millions of lives extinguished in the name of profit. Ted Reese demonstrates that capitalism’s trajectory today is no less cruel and no less terminal—driving toward exhaustion, leaving only the necessity of a new mode of production. Nolan Long reminds us that failed revolutions do not disappear without consequence: they reshape the terrain, harden repression, and force us to fight again from new ground. Derek R. Ford and D. Musa Springer bring us to Korea, cutting through caricature to reveal the defense of sovereignty as inseparable from the defense of truth itself.

And yet, against this backdrop, we also encounter creativity and persistence. Kyle Ferrana shows how China, by refusing historical nihilism, has transformed itself into a global center of modernity. Gerald Horne and Anthony Ballas recover Ho Chi Minh’s solidarity with Black liberation, illuminating a revolutionary vision that always crossed borders and built relations across struggles.

And we bring you art—works from some of the best and most prolific names in revolutionary art to-date, such as Color Collective Press, Earth Liberation Studio, Red Bait, and GQ of All Power Books, as well as my own humble contributions, inspired by the modern minimalism of moody Soviet book covers.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue refuse despair. They insist instead that authenticity, creation, and solidarity are not luxuries but *necessary preconditions* of possibility for liberation.

*Peace, Land, and Bread* has always been committed to a world free of imperialist exploitation, and to the red dawn that will bring it about. But more than that, it is, and has been, committed to truth, to visual authenticity, and to the sustenance of the creative act in the face of repression and coercion.

To make is to resist.

To create is to remain unbroken.

That is the lesson I carry into this issue, and it is the lesson I hope you will find in these pages.

—BEN STAHNKE, PH.D.  
Founding Editor, Artist, and Publisher  
PEACE, LAND, & BREAD  
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# HO CHI MINH AND BLACK LIBERATION

by GERALD HORNE &  
ANTHONY BALLAS

It is well known that the black race is the most oppressed and most exploited of the human family. It is well known that the spread of capitalism and the discovery of the New World had as an immediate result the rebirth of slavery which was, for centuries, a scourge for the Negroes and a bitter disgrace for mankind. What everyone does not perhaps know is that after sixty-five years of so-called emancipation, American Negroes still endure atrocious moral and material sufferings, of which the most cruel and horrible is the custom of lynching.<sup>1</sup>

—HO CHI MINH, “Lynching” (1924)

## HO CHI MINH AND THE BLACK WORLD<sup>2</sup>

ALTHOUGH OFTEN UNACKNOWLEDGED, Ho Chi Minh’s numerous written contributions on the history of global Black subjugation under the boot of European colonial and imperial expansion compose an impressive, early 20th century record of internationalism in practice. Before founding the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1930, many of these early writings, such as “The Revolt of Dahomey,”<sup>3</sup> “Uprising at Dahomey,”<sup>4</sup> “Lynching” (cited above), and “Ku Klux Klan”<sup>5</sup> were penned just prior to his arrival in Moscow where it’s widely believed he began studies at the University of

1 Ho Chi Minh (as Nguyen Ai Quoc), “The Martyrdom of the Negro: American Lynch-Justice,” *Imprecor*, Vol. 4. No. 70, 2 October 1924, p. 772. Reprinted under the title “Lynching” in Fall, Bernard B (ed.), *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-66*, New American Library, 1967, p. 51-55; and Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works, Vol. 1*, Foreign Languages Press, 2021; see also Silva, Luis (editor) and Nguyen, Dai Trang, *The Black Race by Ho Chi Minh and Selected Works on Systemic Racism*, New Vietnam Publishing, 2021.

2 **Ed. Note:** A version of this article appeared as the introduction to *Curriculum of the Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism Part 2: Historical Materialism*, tr. Luna Nguyen, Banyan House Publishing, 2025.

3 *L’Humanité*, 18 March 1923.

4 *La Vie Ouvrière*, 30 March, 1923.

5 “Le Ku-Klux-Klan,” *La Correspondance Internationale*, vol. IV, no. 74, 4 November, 1924, pp. 628-629.

the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in 1923.<sup>6</sup> Although the historical record is imperfect, Ho's attendance at KUTV would make rational sense given the school's reputation for training some of the 20th century's most celebrated internationalists as various as Harry Haywood who attended in 1925, Maude White Katz in 1927, and anti-colonial leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta in 1933, among others.<sup>7</sup> In Moscow, Ho was "considered the specialist on colonial affairs," and worked for five years as the Comintern's European representative.<sup>8</sup> As an agent of the Comintern, Ho also delivered a "Report On The National And Colonial Questions" at the Fifth World Congress in 1924, following on the heels of the Fourth World Congress, where Jamaican poet and novelist Claude McKay delivered his "Report on the Negro Question,"<sup>9</sup> and drafted "Resolutions" alongside Surinamese-born Otto Huiswoud<sup>10</sup> in 1922. Ho passionately asserted in July 1924 that it was the "task of the communist newspapers to introduce the colonial question to our militants to awaken the working masses in the colonies, [and] win

them over to the cause of Communism." Not without a bit of rhetorical flair to punctuate his trenchant remarks, Ho follows his ardent plea with a question, "but what have our newspapers done?" to which he replies, "nothing at all."<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, we might consider Ho's report as a sort of vanishing mediator, bridging McKay and Huiswoud's 1922 "Resolutions" and the Comintern's adoption of the Black Belt Thesis at the revolutionary Sixth World Congress in 1928.

While Ho's remarks not only indicate a serious blind spot in the reportage on the colonial question, they also exemplify a certain confidence and self-criticism in equal measure on his own part: "If we compare the number of columns devoted to the colonial question in the bourgeois newspapers such as *The Times*, *Figaro*, *Evre*," he explains, "or in those of different opinions such as *Le Populaire*, or *Liberty*, with those devoted to the same question in *l'Humanité*, the central organ of our Party, [then] we are bound to say that this comparison will not be favorable to us."<sup>12</sup> It is clear from these words that

6 These writings have recently been reprinted in Luis Silva's edited volume entitled *The Black Race by Ho Chi Minh and Selected Works on Systemic Racism*, New Vietnam Publishing, 2021.

7 Haywood, Harry, *Black Bolshevik*, Liberator Press, 1978, pp. 154-165; Brocheux, Pierre, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 25-26; Horne, Gerald, *Mau Mau In Harlem?: The U.S. and the Liberation of Kenya*, Palgrave, 2009, p. 98; McDuffie, Erik S., *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism*, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 54; Higashida, Cheryl, *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1995*, University of Illinois Press, 2001: "While enrolled at Moscow's Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) along with Ho Chi Minh, Deng Xiaoping, and Jomo Kenyatta, Maude White attended the 6th World Congress of the Comintern as it debated and passed the 1928 resolution on Black self-determination" (p. 36); and Lux, Talia, "The History of the Soviet Union's KUTV," *Peace, Land, & Bread*, 20 June, 2021.

8 Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 25; 47.

9 *Inprecor*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 5 January 1923, pp. 16-17.

10 *Resolutions & Theses of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, held in Moscow, Nov. 7 to Dec. 3, 1922*: <https://ia600708.us.archive.org/6/items/resolutionsthese00commiala/resolutionsthese00commiala.pdf>. As Harry Haywood recounts, Huiswoud "visited Lenin and became the first Black man to meet the great Bolshevik," and later also "became the first Black to serve as a candidate member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International." Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 147.

11 Ho Chi Minh (as Nguyen Ai Quoc), "Talk during the 22nd Session of the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, 1 July 1924," *La Correspondance Internationale*, Vol. 4, No. 53, pp. 558-559; Ho Chi Minh (as Nguyen Ai Quoc), "Report On The National And Colonial Questions At The Fifth Congress Of The Communist International," *Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh Vol. 1*, Foreign Languages Press, 2021, p. 181.

12 Ibid.

although Ho must have been aware that he was more prolific than most in his reporting on the colonial question in the pages of *L'Humanité*, for instance, he also demonstrates an acute reflexivity in his awareness that still more was to be done to encourage the proliferation of this question evermore to international audiences.

Even prior to his studies in Moscow, Ho began to develop his analysis of French colonialism. As early as 1919, Ho penned a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing appealing for support against French colonialism in Vietnam in the hope that it might grace the desk of President Woodrow Wilson.<sup>13</sup> Undaunted by the lack of reciprocation, Ho continued pressing his materialist analysis of the colonial question through such writings as "Jim Crow" and "About Siki," the latter an account of the racist double standards of the news coverage of Senegalese boxer Louis Mbarick Fall, who defeated the white boxer, George Carpentier, in a 1922 upset to become light heavyweight world champion.<sup>14</sup> In a moment which not only exemplifies Ho's rhetorical acumen, but as well sheds light on his politics in the early 1920s, Ho describes how Carpentier, "after being knocked out by a Black... calmly went to visit Russia, the land of Reds. We congratulate Siki on his victory. We also congratulate Carpentier on his open-mind-

edness."<sup>15</sup>

## Ho's HARLEM SOJOURN AND ATLANTIC TRAVELS

As one of Ho's biographers, William Duiker, puts it, although his "visit to America remains one of the most mysterious and puzzling periods in his entire life," it is through his "own account and in recollections to acquaintances" that we know with confidence that Ho "spent a period of time in New York City," particularly in the fertile political soils of Harlem. We also know, for instance, that, despite "earning... the princely salary of forty dollars a month" as a laborer "and as a domestic servant to a wealthy family, [Ho] found time to attend meetings of black activists" with the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).<sup>16</sup>

Ho lived and worked in Boston and Harlem, and may even have traveled on the same train route that would eventually shuttle Malcolm X therebetween decades later while he worked as a "sandwich man on the 'Yankee Clipper,'" a railroad connecting Boston and New York. Ho also may have worked as a baker at Parker House Hotel, where a young Malcolm was later employed as a busboy while living in

13 Letter from Nguyen Ai Quoc [Ho Chi Minh] to Secretary of State Robert Lansing (with enclosure); 6/18/1919; 851G.00; General Records, 1918—1931; Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, Record Group 256; National Archives at College Park: <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/ho-chi-minh-lansing>.

The letter, typed in French, references the Annamites, the group for which Minh would later be credited as the leader when he was arrested in Hong Kong under the alias Nguyen Ai Quoc, an accusation that he denied under questioning in 1931. See Gunn, Geoffrey C. "Media Coverage of the Arrest and Trial, in *Ho Chi Minh in Hong Kong*, 172–87. Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 181. Refer also to Robert F. Williams's Testimony where he recounts how Ho described his "illusions about the United States" and "that he really expected the United States to help them liberate the country, because he thought the United States was opposed to colonialism" (p. 95).

14 This was the era in which the hunt for the so-called "Great White Hope" was still in the background, haunting the sweet science. See also Horne, Gerald, *The Bittersweet Science: Racism, Racketeering, and the Political Economy of Boxing*, International Publishers, 2020.

15 Ho Chi Minh (as Nguyen Ai Quoc), "About Siki," *Le Paria*, No. 9, 1 December, 1922. *Le Paria* was the first newspaper founded by Minh in 1922.

16 Duiker, William J. *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*. Hyperion, 2001, p. 50

Boston.<sup>17</sup> While some parallels remain vague or coincidental, others remain, at best, superficial. For instance, we ought not let the contingent fact of history that Ho and Malcolm X (along with Yuri Kochiyama and Lorraine Hansberry) share the same birthday (March 19) cloud the fact that, although they never met in person, both Malcolm and Ho were exposed to Garveyism at a young age. Malcolm's parents, he tells us in his autobiography, were dedicated Garveyites. His mother, Louise Little, as Erik S. McDuffie explains, "insisted that her children read newspapers such as the Negro World, the official periodical of the UNIA,"<sup>18</sup> while his father, Earl Little, who Malcolm describes as "a dedicated organizer" and "disciple" of Garvey, would often bring young Malcolm with him to

UNIA gatherings.<sup>19</sup>

Robert F. Williams, who "swapped Harlem stories" with Ho in the mid-1960s, describes how a "saintly... and very jolly" Ho "recounted his visits to Harlem in the 1920s as a merchant seaman" where he "heard Marcus Garvey speak" as a young man.<sup>20</sup> Williams, who was part of a "peace delegation that visited Hanoi," later reiterated Ho's account of how he "had been strongly moved by the plight of black peoples around the world and had contributed generously to the movement." Indeed, Ho was "so inspired," as Timothy Tyson writes, "that he 'emptied his pockets' into the [UNIA] collection plate."<sup>21</sup> When Williams asked him if he had been a Communist during these early years, Ho is reported to have answered in the affirmative.<sup>22</sup>

17 Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told By Alex Haley*, Ballantine Books, 1973, pp. 69-70. See also, Vincent, Ted. "The Garveyite Parents of Malcolm X," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1989): 10-13.

18 Blain, Keisha N., "On Louise Little, the Mother of Malcolm X: An Interview with Erik S. McDuffie," *Black Perspectives*, 19 February 2017: <https://www.aihs.org/on-louise-little-the-mother-of-malcolm-x-an-interview-with-erik-s-mcduffie/>.

19 Ibid., pp. 1 & 6.

20 Tyson, Timothy B., *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power Statement Of Responsibility*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p. 295; See also United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, and Robert F. (Robert Franklin) Williams. Testimony of Robert F. Williams: Hearings, Ninety-first Congress, Second Session. Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1971, in which Williams continues his description of Ho as follows: "if a person didn't know his record he wouldn't think that he was even a revolutionary" (p. 95.); See also Dellinger, David, "Conversations with Ho," *Libération*, October 1969. pp. 2-6: "Earlier, when I had asked Ho about the time he lived in the United States shortly after World War I, he talked warmly about the people in Brooklyn for whom he had worked as a houseboy. Instead of condemning them as exploiters and class enemies, he said that they were fine people. 'I didn't have to work very hard,' he said. 'I used to have a lot of free time to study and to take trips to other sections of the city.' He spoke of taking the subway to Harlem and being shocked by the conditions of the black people. 'When you get back to the United States,' he said, 'you can say that when I worked as a domestic servant in Brooklyn I earned \$40 a month and now that I am President of Vietnam I get paid \$44 a month'" (p. 4); See also Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919-1941*, University of California Press, 2002: "A remark made to the US peace activist David Dellinger in 1969 reinforces the notion that his stay in America came after 1916. Ho Chi Minh told Dellinger that when he was in America, he heard Marcus Garvey speak in Harlem. Garvey, the leader of the 'return to Africa movement', did not arrive in the United States from his native Jamaica until 1916. In 1917 and 1918 he spoke frequently in Harlem on issues of racism, which had flared up in the US following the 1915 reappearance of the Ku Klux Klan. Ho Chi Minh published an article about the Ku Klux Klan in 1924 which described the practice of lynching in the American South—his information could have been drawn from Garvey's speeches or the US press of the time" (p. 21); See also Quinn-Judge p. 261n36.

21 Duiker, William J. *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, Hyperion, 2001, p. 50; Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 295. See also Duiker p. 588n8 where the author cites "an oral interview of Robert F. Williams by Archimedes F. Patti, contained in the Patti archives at the University of Central Florida in Orlando."

22 Robert F. Williams, Testimony, p. 95.

It is likely that “Lynching,” “Le Ku-Klux Klan,” and various of his writings on the plight of Black people in the United States during this period were inspired by Ho’s sojourn in Harlem; as active participant in an emergent and militant internationalism, and as a skilled and meticulous researcher, Ho carefully documented the brutal violence executed upon Black women and men at the hands of white supremacist terror U.S.-style.<sup>23</sup> Through historically and statistically-backed research, Ho also chronicled the tragic fates of Black soldiers who were victims of racist attacks, and even lynched after returning from the First Imperialist War—a subject taken up by James Wheldon Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois in the same era, and which Toni Morrison would dramatize in her novel *Jazz* some decades later.<sup>24</sup> It is worthy of mention that Ho offered such a pointed critique of the mysticism of the KKK, providing a well-nigh psychological analysis of how their “strange garb, bizarre rituals,” and the way “its mysteries attracted the curiosity of whites in the southern states and became very popular.”<sup>25</sup>

As a merchant sailor and ship cook on the *Amiral de Latouche-Tréville* under the alias Văn Ba, Ho traveled widely, including to former slave port cities in the Atlantic such as Rio de Janeiro and Dakar. About the latter, Ho would later recount the story of his time as a worker on the French vessel when he witnessed the cruelty of white, French sailors jeering and laughing at four Black sailors who tragically fell victim to drowning; a formative experience that made it into the pages of Ho’s early autobiography, and also would have surely influenced his early writings on the plight of colonized Africans.<sup>26</sup> Similar to the great seafarers of the 19th and 20th centuries, Ho’s travels on the high seas were formative of his political development. In this way, one may find certain parallels in Ho’s biography to that of Denmark Vesey, John S. Jacobs, or, a bit later on, Benito Sylvain, Garvey, and Ferdinand Smith, co-founder of the National Maritime Union.<sup>27</sup> Like many of the great Caribbean internationalists and revolutionaries, Ho traveled, worked, conversed, and bore witness to the mistreatment of the non-white world at the

23 There are many such parallels and intersections to be drawn between Ho Chi Minh’s early years and the long arc of Black liberation and internationalism in the 20th century that often remain unacknowledged. Ho was witness to the charnel house of French colonialism and especially to the cruelty of the latter on the coast of Dakar as a merchant sailor (see note 25 below), as well as his youthful experiences of “Harlem and the poverty of Negroes he saw there.” “Ho Dead, War Policy Unchanged,” *The Independent*, Vol. 32, No. 176, 4 September 1969, pp. A1 & A6.

24 Anticipating the global outcry garnered through Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit,” written by Jewish Communist, Abel Meeropol, Ho was not only hyper-aware of this most grotesque fixture of American life, but even ahead of the curve in terms of spreading the news and fomenting international outcry for the plight of Black Americans. It is noteworthy that Ho was covering such events for an international readership in the decade preceding the notorious persecution of the Scottsboro Boys and Angelo Herndon, both of which were to foment mass international movements in the 1930s. See Horne, Gerald, *Red Scare / Black Liberation: Ben Davis and the Communist Party*, University of Delaware Press, 1994; Horne, Gerald, *Powell V. Alabama: The Scottsboro Boys and American Justice*, Franklin Watts, 1997.

25 Silva, *The Black Race*, 2021, p. 17.

26 See Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, pp. 50 & 588n7. See also Ho Chi Minh (as Trần Dân Tiên), *Những mẩu chuyện về đời hoạt động của Hồ Chủ tịch*, Shanghai: Ba Ywe, 1949, and, abridged English translation, *Glimpses of the Life of Ho Chi Minh*, Hanoi: Foreign Languages Press, 1958: “Bọn Pháp cười sặc sụa trong khi đồng bào ta chết đuối vì chúng nó. Đối với bọn thực dân, tinh mạng của người thuộc địa, da vàng hay da đen cũng không đáng một xu” [“The French laughed heartily while our compatriots drowned because of them. To the colonialists, the lives of the colonized, whether yellow or black, were not worth a penny”]. For more on the aquatic connection to Black diasporic cultures, see also Dawson, Kevin, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. Refer also to note 22 above.

27 See Horne, Gerald, *Red Seas: Ferdinand Smith and radical black sailors in the United States and Jamaica*, New York University Press, 2005.

hands of Euroamerican supremacy while sailing in open waters and docking on ports across the globe, leaving behind a written record of the development of his political consciousness inspired by these early experiences.<sup>28</sup>

Like all great internationalists, Ho “was quite adept at foreign languages,” and even mastered several, becoming a proficient speaker and writer of “English, French, Chinese, and Russian” in addition to Vietnamese, his native tongue.<sup>29</sup> We can turn to the written record in the 1920s alone to detail the fact that, as Duiker points out, “his voluminous writings (including pamphlets, articles, reports, and letters) were written in a variety of languages.”<sup>30</sup> Even a cursory glance at some of his early writings in *La Paria*, *L'Humanité*, *Inprecor*, as well as his *La race noir*, which was also translated into Russian, attests to this fact.<sup>31</sup> It is no wonder that the great internationalist Paul Robeson, himself

a polyglot fluent in dozens of languages, extolled Ho Chi Minh, granting him the honorable title as “the Toussaint l’Ouverture of Indochina” in 1954.<sup>32</sup>

In a reciprocal display of internationalist recognition, Ho wrote eloquently in *La race noir* in 1925 on the “uprising on the Island of Saint-Domingue,” concluding that examples such as “Toussaint Louverture [leading] the black slaves to victory over armies unleashed by Napoleon and the British” as well as “the countless uprisings by slaves in the South of the United States... are enough to refute the argument put forth by our adversary that freedom is not important to Blacks, that they regard slavery as a better life for themselves.” “To the contrary,” he continues, “no one loves liberty as much as the oppressed do in the colonies.”<sup>33</sup> It should not go unmentioned that Ho’s words on the Haitian Revolution came over a decade prior to the pub-

28 As Marv Truhe writes: “During the Revolutionary War, more than five thousand free Black men fought for the colonists, despite General Washington’s initial opposition. After the war, however, virtually all Black men were excluded from the military. During the Civil War and after the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union began widespread enlistment of Black men. They proved to be excellent soldiers but were discriminated against in pay, pensions, and equipment. Of particular interest is that Black men also served honorably in the Union Navy, making up fully one-fourth of its fleet. That ratio was double the Black population of the country at the time. By the close of the Civil War, more than thirty-eight thousand Black men had given their lives fighting for the Union cause. See Truhe, Marv, *Against All Tides: The Untold Story of the USS Kitty Hawk Race Riot*, Lawrence Hill Books, 2022, p. 6. See also Jacobs, John Swanson & (ed.) Jonathan D. S. Schroeder, *The United States Governed by Six Hundred Thousand Despots: A True Story of Slavery; A Rediscovered Narrative, with a Full Biography*, Chicago University Press, 2024.

29 Duiker, pp. 34 & 4. *Nhân Dân*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam, continues to publish parallel editions in Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese, French, Spanish, and English.

30 Ibid., p. 4.

31 Ho’s polyglottal prowess was apparently a known attribute quite early on, as Geoffrey C. Gunn describes: “The first report on the arrest of Nguyen Ai Quoc entering the Hong Kong media appears to be a piece published in the *Hong Kong Telegraph* (June 22, 1931). Identified as the leader of ‘Annamite’ revolutionaries in Hong Kong, his arrest was represented as a major coup for the French authorities, who had been tracking him for many years with agents fanned out across China. However, in a passage which caught the attention of Laprade, the French consul in Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh was also depicted as, ‘A most accomplished man, speaking half a dozen European languages.’” See Gunn, Geoffrey C. “Media Coverage of the Arrest and Trial.” Chapter 7. In *Ho Chi Minh in Hong Kong*, 172–87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 174.

32 Robeson, Paul. “Ho Chi Minh is the Toussaint l’Ouverture of Indochina (March 1954),” In *Freedomways Reader: Prophets in Their Own Country*, ed. Esther Cooper Jackson and Constance Pohl, Basic Books, 2000, pp. 147–149. Horne, Gerald, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary*, Pluto Press, 2007.

33 Luis, *The Black Race*, pp. 81–82. Ho also comments on escaped slaves in Portuguese controlled Brazil, who fled from the “plantations at Pernambuco” in the 17th century, comparing their “association of free settlements” at Palmares with “the ancient Spartan Republic” (Ibid., p. 81).

lication of C.L.R. James's landmark text, *The Black Jacobins*, at a time when the import of the events of 1791-1804 remained little publicized, and even less acknowledged, in the anglophone world beyond the Black diaspora. It is no wonder as well that Ho regarded Henri Grégoire, the ardent 18th century abolitionist and leading member of the *Société des amis des Noirs*, as "the apostle of the liberty of peoples."<sup>34</sup>

## Ho's ANTI-COLONIAL THEORY

Ho's critical account of German colonialism ought to be read not only as a scathing rebuke of the German intelligentsia extant in his own time, but as well all succeeding generations who have failed and, indeed, continue to fail, with regard to acknowledging Germany's genocide of the Herero and the Nama (1901-1906)—the first genocide of the 20th century. Long neglected by Western thinkers, including by some of the most vaunted critics of German fascism

such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jurgen Habermas<sup>35</sup> among others, Ho addresses how the Herero and Nama tribes "in the former German colonies in Africa were completely exterminated," linking the latter as part of "the same system of pillage, extermination and destruction [which] prevails in the African regions under Italian, Spanish, British or Portuguese rule," as well as "in the Belgian Congo," where "the population in 1891 was 25 million, but... had fallen to eight and a half million by 1911."<sup>36</sup> It is notable that Ho writes about the genocide as early as 1925 which would subsequently take the German government over a century to acknowledge even nominally.<sup>37</sup>

To further emphasize this point, Ho's analysis was penned only a few years before Sigmund Freud would write his much celebrated *Civilization and its Discontents*, wherein he diagnoses aggressivity as a fundamental drive in human nature, exploding as the unconscious result of the repressive features of civilization. Although

34 "Ho Chi Minh to Société des Amis de l'abbé Grégoire," July 6, 1946, reprinted in Gérard Lyon-Caen, "Grégoire et les droits des peuples," *Europe 34*, nos. 128–29 (1956): 84–85. In the latter, Ho Chi Minh cites Grégoire's "Déclaration du Droit des Gens" at length. See also Goldstein-Sepinwall, Alyssa, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism*, University of California Press, 2005. Goldstein-Sepinwall describes Grégoire as "an icon of anti-racism, a hero to people from Ho Chi Minh to French Jews," recalling how "he received further attention... as movements for decolonization spread through Asia and Africa. The Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh called him 'the apostle of the liberty of peoples' in 1946; the celebrated Martiniquan poet and statesman Aimé Césaire praised him in 1950 as 'the first scientific refuter of racism' and 'the first anticolonial militant' whilst baptizing a Place de l'abbé Grégoire in Fort-de-France" (*Ibid.*, p. 224).

35 Habermas has been criticized, justifiably, as recently as 2024 for his inability or, more likely, his unwillingness to come to grips with the reality and legacy of German colonial pillage in Africa, as well as Germany's continuing colonial brokering in its obstinate allegiance with Israel and genocidal onslaught in Historic Palestine. As Hamid Dabashi writes, "Palestine is today an extension of the colonial atrocities" perpetrated by Germany and other colonial powers on the non-European world. "Habermas" he continues, "appears ignorant that his endorsement of the slaughter of Palestinians is completely consistent with what his ancestors did in Namibia during the Herero and Namaqua genocide. Like the proverbial ostrich, German philosophers have stuck their heads inside their European delusions, thinking the world does not see them for what they are." Dabashi, Hamid, "Thanks to Gaza, European philosophy has been exposed as ethically bankrupt," 18 January 2024: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/war-gaza-european-philosophy-ethically-bankrupt-exposed>.

36 Ho Chi Minh, "Report On The National And Colonial Questions At The Fifth Congress Of The Communist International," *Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh Vol. 1*, Foreign Languages Press, 2021. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/ho-chi-minh/works/1924/07/08.htm>. See also, Fall, Bernard B., *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-66*. New American Library, 1967, pp. 71-72.

37 Onishi, Norimitsu & Melissa Eddy, "A Forgotten Genocide: What Germany Did in Namibia, and What It's Saying Now," 28 May 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/world/europe/germany-namibia-genocide.html>.

Freud was living in Leipzig during the Herero and Nama genocide, it was only after the First Imperial War that he even endeavored an attempt at understanding what drove humanity to mass atrocity—a fact which reveals the blind-spot of German colonial thinking more generally, and perhaps more particularly Freud's own drive to effectively gainsay German barbarism on the African continent by providing a theoretical cover—concealing the history of European colonialism altogether behind a purported theory of universal aggression.<sup>38</sup>

While Freud was busy lambasting a straw-man version of Communism in *Civilization and its Discontents*, abstracting aggressivity while also diluting intoxication as a mere form of fantasy and escapism, Ho was applying materialist analysis to history in order to diagnose the way slavery had become sublimated through the colonial process. As Ho pithily put it in 1924, the “corvées, portage, forced labor, alcohol and syphilis complete the work of civilization.”<sup>39</sup> Or, as stated in his poignant final line of “Lynching”: “among the collection of the crimes of American ‘civilization,’ lynching has a place of honour.”<sup>40</sup> In works such as the “Monstrosity of Civilization” and “Civilization that Kills,” Ho provides razor sharp historical analyses of the colonial situation faced by the people of the darker nations on par with Du Bois’s own from the same era—an analysis which continues to evade an inordinate amount of Euroamerican intellectuals. Against the plaudits and popular sentiments of bourgeois apologists and paternalists too numerous

to mention, Ho described in 1925 how the “cruel horrors have worsened a thousand fold” in the transition to colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>41</sup>

In 1925, Ho wrote “In the Slaughterhouse,” a section of *La race noir*, in which he offers an analysis of Black soldiers fighting in colonial armies. Often recruited at the barrel of a gun, and subsequently dying on foreign battlefields and in Jim Crow hospitals, Ho argues that despite their ultimate sacrifices, these efforts “did not improve the laws of the Blacks in the United States.”<sup>42</sup> In the 1940s, Ho, then leader of the Việt Minh, confronted Black soldiers on the battlefields of the Indochina War with whom he would otherwise have been in an objective alliance with against the European powers. Though record keeping often conflated dead, missing, and deserted tirailleurs sénégalais soldiers (e.g. West and Central African soldiers conscripted into the French colonial army), of the 5,000 plus accounted for during the Indochina years, a good number were likely deserters, as Sarah Zimmerman explains: “Exploiting the French military’s inability to account for missing troops, some tirailleurs sénégalais crossed enemy lines to join up with the Vietminh.” Zimmerman recounts one “celebrated tale...of a Guinean soldier, General Zaoro, who...deserted the tirailleurs sénégalais” and was so dedicated that it “led to his rapid promotion [to]... general among the ranks of the Vietminh.” Another account even claims that “some deserters took advantage of the chaos of evacuation following

38 Had critical accounts like Ho’s or Aimé Césaire’s been available to the inordinately influential Freud, then perhaps the European intelligentsia would’ve better understood violence as mass atrocity perpetrated on Europeans by Europeans as what Césaire would later diagnose as the “imperial boomerang” coming back like whiplash against the European populous—the result of formerly exported colonial methods of torture and depravity turned inward. See Césaire, Aimé, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Monthly Review Press, 2000; Fanon, Frantz, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove, 1968, pp. 181-233; and Khanna, Ranjana, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Duke University Press, 2003.

39 Silva, *The Black Race*, p. 6.

40 Ibid., p. 15.

41 Ibid., p. 37.

42 Ibid., p. 75.

the Fall of Điện Biên Phủ.”<sup>43</sup>

Presaging events that would occur during the Vietnam War, the Việt Minh “segregated colonial soldiers from metropolitan French soldiers in POW camps,” much “like the French.” However, “instead of using this tactic to respect racial hierarchy like the French, the Việt Minh bifurcated troops to better serve the dissemination of their anti-colonial propaganda,” tailoring “their propaganda for the tirailleurs sénégalaïs by focusing on their shared colonial identity as mistreated subjects of the French” and “fan[ning] the flames of military disobedience among POWs and active tirailleurs sénégalaïs.”<sup>44</sup>

In this way, the Indochina War “was the first large-scale anticolonial war where evidence suggests that tirailleurs sénégalaïs questioned their role in French colonialism,” deserting and “abandon[ing] the French army for political reasons.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, while Ho was actively fighting

against French colonialism, a budding internationalist and anti-colonial consciousness<sup>46</sup> was brewing underfoot, cultivated and even spurred on by the Việt Minh’s deft propaganda efforts, not only calling back to Ho’s time as a journalist endeavoring to spread the colonial question to the masses, but also presaging similar phenomena during the Vietnam War when African American soldiers deserted the front, with many absconding to the famed “Soul Alley” in Saigon in order to escape the flagrant racism experienced in their own regiments. As Roger Goodwin observes, “a 1970 Army Counterintelligence investigation revealed that a large group of African Americans, most of whom had gone AWOL or deserted, were living in Saigon with Cambodians in the area surrounding Truong Minh Ky Street,” and, “allegedly,” even “had a mutual understanding of one another as ‘oppressed minorities.’”<sup>47</sup>

Reflecting in 1925, and with typically rhetorical flair, Ho asks “did we not witness Hindu

43 Zimmerman, Sarah, *Living Beyond Boundaries: West African Servicemen in French Colonial Conflicts, 1908–1962*, Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2011, p. 109: “Veterans had mixed feelings about desertion in Indochina. Some viewed desertion as an act of cowardliness and others read it as a sign of bravery. The second opinion was particularly prominent among Guinean veterans. None of this projects’ informants admitted to desertion, but the circulating rumors were fascinating. One veteran explained how tirailleurs sénégalaïs could join forces with the Vietminh. Under the cover of darkness, a soldier slipped out of a French military post and when he neared a Vietminh encampment, the absconding soldier waved a white handkerchief to indicate his peaceful intentions. He would then negotiate his integration into the Vietminh. West African veterans hypothesized that there were very few tirailleurs sénégalaïs who deserted, but those who did were aware that the Vietminh did not execute their POWs. Thus, deserting tirailleurs sénégalaïs knew that they could weather the war in Indochina with the Vietminh” (*Ibid.*).

44 *Ibid.*, p. 108. Zimmerman continues: “In one attempt to inspire soldiers to defect to the Vietminh, they sent messages to tirailleurs sénégalaïs that there were anti-colonial riots in Dakar in 1951. The Vietminh promised that if soldiers deserted, they would finance their repatriation to West Africa.”

45 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

46 It should not go unremarked that the CIA orchestrated a coup to overthrow Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 whilst he was en route to China and Hanoi on a diplomatic peace mission to meet with Ho Chi Minh and find a peaceful end to the War in Vietnam—a meeting that the United States encouraged Nkrumah to attend, and even promised to cease bombing North Vietnam to ensure his safe passage. Upon his departure, coup leaders told some 600 Ghanaian troops that Nkrumah’s intention for traveling to Hanoi was in order to make preparations to deploy troops to Vietnam, leading to the coup.

47 Goodwin, Gerald F., *Race in the Crucible of War: African American Servicemen and the War in Vietnam*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2023, p. 161. The Việt Cộng also distributed leaflets highlighting racism in Alabama as part of these efforts, which ought to be read in tandem with the events of the “Kitty Hawk incident” in 1972, which famously saw a physical fight break out between white and Black soldiers as the result of racial tensions on the aircraft carrier stationed off North Vietnam. See Truhe, Marv, *Against All Tides: The Untold Story of the USS Kitty Hawk Race Riot*, Lawrence Hill Books, 2022.

soldiers who refused to attack China?" suggesting that this ought to serve as "a grave warning for all imperialists who are thinking of sending native soldiers against the Soviet Republic, against the only loyal and resolute defender of all oppressed and exploited countries."<sup>48</sup> It is clear that the United States did not heed Ho's sage observation, given the way it would go on to, *inter alia*, stoke the flames for war between the Soviet Union and religious zealots in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the recoil of which was felt on 11 September 2001.

## BLACK AMERICA AND HO CHI MINH

When Robert F. Williams met with Ho in the mid-1960s, he is said to have participated in producing some anti-war propaganda directed at Black soldiers. "Williams's experiences in Vietnam," his meeting with Ho Chi Minh not least, "left him with a passionate new depth of commitment to stopping the Vietnam War, a political priority that he shared with the increasingly radical young insurgents of the freedom movement in the United States." This new anti-war passion culminated in Williams sending "a batch of telegrams to freedom movement leaders including James Forman of SNCC and

James Farmer of CORE" on 27 April 1965, in which he states: "Racial terrorists exterminating colored humanity of Vietnam. Decency and conscience requires all freedom fighters to join the battle for peace." On the very same day, Martin Luther King Jr. also "received another of Williams's patented political taunts," which read as follows: "As nonviolent advocate and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize," he told the minister, 'decent people of the world await your resolute condemnation of racist America's savage slaughter of the colored humanity of Vietnam."<sup>49</sup>

As President of the Monroe, North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, Williams's anti-war efforts cut against the grain in the years following the compromise of 1954 when the NAACP turned its back on internationalism, particularly under Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins. Wilkins viciously attacked Martin Luther King Jr. for his pro-peace stance on Vietnam: "When an American Negro Soldier kills a Việt Cộng, he is not killing a colored brother. Why should we consider the Việt Cộng our colored brothers," he asked querulously, since purportedly 'they don't feel the Negro is his brother."<sup>50</sup>

In 1968, the Black Panther Party sent a delegation to Montreal, including Bobby Seale and David Hilliard, to attend the Hemispheric

48 Silva, *The Black Race*, p. 79. See also Ho's obituary for V.I. Lenin: "Lenin is dead! This news struck the people like a bolt from the blue. It spread to every corner of the fertile plains of Africa and the green fields of Asia. It is true that the black or yellow people do not yet know clearly who Lenin is or where Russia is. The imperialists have deliberately kept them in ignorance. Ignorance is one of the chief mainstays of capitalism. But all of them, from the Vietnamese peasants to the hunters in the Dahomey forests, have secretly learnt that in a faraway corner of the earth there is a nation that has succeeded in overthrowing its exploiters and is managing its own country with no need for masters and Governors General. They have also heard that that country is Russia, that there are courageous people there, and that the most courageous of them all was Lenin. This alone was enough to fill them with deep admiration and warm feelings for that country and its leader...But this was not all. They also learned that that great leader, after having liberated his own people, wanted to liberate other peoples too. He called upon the white peoples to help the yellow and black peoples to free themselves from the foreign aggressors' yoke, from all foreign aggressors, Governors General Residents, etc. And to reach that goal, he mapped out a definite programme." See: Ho Chi Minh, "Lenin and the Colonized Peoples," *Pravda*, 27 January, 1924: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/ho-chi-minh/works/1924/01/27.htm>; Reprinted in Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works, Vol. 1*. Foreign Languages Press, 2021, pp. 158-159.

49 Tyson, Timothy B., *Radio Free Dixie*, p. 295.

50 Horne, Gerald, *Armed Struggle?: Panthers and Communists, Black Nationalists and Liberals in Southern California, Through the Sixties and Seventies*, International Publishers, 2024, p. 217.

Conference to End the War in Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> The BPP recognized the National Liberation Front (NLF) as the government of South Vietnam, while the NLF recognized in turn the BPP as the vanguard of liberation in the United States: “Though we have different colors of skin,” Ho writes in 1964, “the yellow Vietnamese and Black Americans are battling a common enemy—the cruelty of American imperialism.”<sup>52</sup> Likewise, “when representatives of the Black Panther Party... met<sup>53</sup> the representatives of the NLF of Vietnam in Montreal, Canada, the Vietnamese said, ‘He Black Panther, we Yellow Panther!’<sup>54</sup> and the Panthers replied, ‘Yeah, you’re Yellow Panthers, we’re Black Panthers. All power to the people!’<sup>55</sup> It would not be a stretch to suggest that Ho and the NLF were as much symbols for the BPP during the 1960s as

the BPP were symbols for Ho and the NLF in the same era.<sup>56</sup> When, for instance, Ho describes the Vietnamese as “Yellow American Slaves,” he is surely linking their common cause for liberation, which is why he also described the Vietnamese and Black Americans as fighting the first and second fronts against U.S. imperialism: “The Vietnamese People strongly support our Black brothers in America, for we believe their struggle is just and they shall overcome.”<sup>57</sup>

A year after Ho’s death in September 1969, Eldridge Cleaver penned an address in *The Black Panther* entitled “To My Black Brothers in Vietnam,” encouraging Black soldiers to either go AWOL or “sabotage supplies and equipment and turn them over to the Vietnamese,”<sup>58</sup> a call which, again, harks back to the deserting tirail-

51 See Committee on Internal Security Report, *The Black Panther Party, Its Origin and Development as Reflect- ed in Its Official Weekly Newspaper, the Black Panther: Black Community News Service; Staff Study, Ninety-first Congress, Second Session*. United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970, specifically pp. 11, 69, 102.

52 Silva, *The Black Race*, p. 92.

53 Prisoner exchanges were proposed involving Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in exchange for POWs in North Vietnam, which was unsurprisingly rejected by the Nixon administration. Although they were “confiscated by customs agents in New York,” “the North Vietnamese did send 379 letters from prisoners of war home to their families in the United States through the Black Panther Party.” See Bloom, Joshua & Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, University of California Press, p. 318 and Cleaver, Kathleen Neal, “Back to Africa: The Evolution of the International Section of the Black Panther Party (1969–1972),” in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles E. Jones, Black Classic Press, 1998, p. 234.

54 “M. Hoang Minh Giam, North Vietnamese Minister of Culture, Hemispheric Conference to End the War in Vietnam, November 19, 1968,” quoted in Lewis, Raymond, “Montreal: Bobby Seale—Panthers Take Control,” *The Black Panther*, Vol. 2, No. 18, 21 December 1968, p. 5; and Bloom & Martin, Jr., *Black against Empire*, pp. 267 & 310; and Hillard, David & Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: the Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party*, Little, Brown, 1993, p. 247; as well as Prashad, Vijay, “Bruce Lee and the Anti-imperialism of Kung Fu: A Polycultural Adventure,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2003, p. 64.

55 Prashad, Vijay, “Bruce Lee and the Anti-imperialism of Kung Fu: A Polycultural Adventure,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2003, pp. 64-65.

56 That the coinage “Viet Watts” appeared in popular parlance “and was perhaps ‘more than a slogan’ in Southern California during the Watts uprising and the Vietnam War demonstrates this throughline. See Horne, Gerald, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, University Press of Virginia, 1995, pp. 45-63; 102 & 107. Likewise, *People’s World* reported on how “the commitment to kill Vietnamese made it impossible to save lives in Watts,” linking the way the attack on Vietnam “obstructs a serious war on poverty” in Southern California (*Ibid.*, 273).

57 Silva, *The Black Race*, p. 88 & 95.

58 Cleaver, Eldridge, “To My Black Brothers in Vietnam,” *The Black Panther*, Vol. 4, No. 16, 21 March 1970, pp. 4 & 20; Also cited in Horne, *Armed Struggle?* p. 359.

leurs sénégalais during the Indochina years.<sup>59</sup> It should come as no surprise that Ho's death was also commemorated in the 13 September 1969 issue of *The Black Panther* in which his early essay "Lynching" was reprinted.<sup>60</sup> *The Black Panther* would also print Ho's New Year's Message on the cover of the 3 March 1969 issue,<sup>61</sup> while Korean leader Kim Il-Sung graced the front page alongside Ho Chi Minh in *The Black Panther* on 3 October 1970.<sup>62</sup>

## HO AND MALCOLM

In 1964, Ho commented in the pages of *Nhân Dân* how the "ink... barely had been dry" on the Civil Rights Act when racial terror by "American fascists" was unleashed from Mississippi to Harlem.<sup>63</sup> Ho then links this crusade of racial

terror to the violence that the U.S. empire was executing contemporaneously upon the "yellow American" slaves" of South Vietnam.

In his commentary, Ho also makes an allusion to "one black leader who warned, quite accurately, that this was only a deceptive swindle that was propagated by America's ruling class."<sup>64</sup> Given that Malcolm X traveled the globe railing against the Civil Rights Act in highly publicized speaking engagements in Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and England, it is possible, even probable, that Ho had Malcolm in mind when he wrote these lines<sup>65</sup> (Malcolm also referred to "three civil rights workers... murdered in cold blood" in Mississippi after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, for instance). Malcolm also would go on to give his landmark speech,

59 A year later in 1970, while in Hanoi as part of a BPP delegation, Eldridge Cleaver would broadcast similar appeals via the radio, calling for Black soldiers to either "refuse to fight, desert, or sabotage the war from within." Quoted in Cleaver, "Back to Africa," p. 234. A citation also appears on p. 254 in the latter in reference to a "Statement by Eldridge Cleaver to GIs in South Vietnam," in *The Black Panther*, 26 September, 1970, p. 14.

60 "Lynching," *The Black Panther*, Vol. 3, No. 21, 13 September 1969, p. 16: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/black-panther/03n21-sep%2013%201969.pdf>.

61 *The Black Panther*, Vol. 2, No. 24, 3 March 1969: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/black-panther/02n024-Mar%203%20201969.pdf>.

62 *The Black Panther*, Vol. 5, No. 14, 3 October 1970: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/black-panther/05%20no%2014%201-20%20oct%203%201970.pdf>; See also Ho Chi Minh, 22 May 1976, "Advice to Oneself," "On the Road," "Build the Country," and "Fine Weather," excerpted from "Ho Chi Minh's Prison Diary," reprinted in *The Black Panther* to honor Ho Chi Minh's birthday, *Freedom Archives*: <https://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC57scans/57.Vietnam.TheBlackPanther.May.22.1976.pdf>; See also Horne, *Armed Struggle?*, p. 381.

63 Silva, *The Black Race*, 91-92. See also "In Support of the Struggle of Americans," *Nhân Dân*, No. 3772, 28 July 1964.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

65 In another late writing in the pages of *Nhân Dân* in August 1966—just a year after the assassination of Malcolm—Ho quotes "a Black leader" as saying "in America, a dog has more rights than a Negro... American history is a history vault of Negroes being treated like cattle—the worst and most brutal history vault!" (*Ibid.*). It is possible that Ho may have had Malcolm in mind here as well, though there is no way to be certain. For example, from Malcolm's Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity 28 June 1964: "Convinced that, in order to translate this determination into a dynamic force in the cause of human progress conditions of peace and security must be established and maintained;" and by "conditions of peace and security," [we mean] we have to eliminate the barking of the police dogs, we have to eliminate the police clubs, we have to eliminate the water hoses, we have to eliminate all of these things that have become so characteristic of the American so-called dream. These have to be eliminated. Then we will be living in a condition of peace and security. We can never have peace and security as long as one black man in this country is being bitten by a police dog. No one in the country has peace and security." And, finally, at a Washington, D.C. rally, 10 May 1963: "If anybody sets a dog on a black man, the black man should kill that dog—whether he is a four-legged dog or a two-legged dog."

“Not Just an American Problem, But a World Problem,” in Rochester, New York on 16 February 1965, where, amid thunderous applause, he would make bold reference to “American planes, American bombs, escorted by American paratroopers, armed with machine guns” arriving in South Vietnam. Exposing certain hackneyed euphemisms often employed by agents of U.S. empire, Malcolm spoke of “Twenty thousand” soldiers, who we are made to believe were “not soldiers,” but rather “escorts” and “just advisers”—a rhetoric all too familiar to anyone with even a passing knowledge of the way the U.S. war machine operates. “They’re able to do all of this mass murder and get away with it,” he continues, “by labeling it ‘humanitarian,’ an act of humanitarianism... or ‘in the name of freedom,’ ‘in the name of liberty,’ and “all kinds of high-sounding slogans, but it’s cold-blooded murder, mass murder.”

It was likely no coincidence that FBI memos dated 18 and 21 February 1965—just days after Malcolm’s rip-roaring speech in Rochester—make reference to how he “spoke at numerous meetings and functions, appeared on various radio and television shows,” and “spoke at meetings sponsored by militant and subversive groups including the Socialist Workers Party,” as well as “participated in debates, and held press conferences,” in which “he urged Negroes to obtain guns for self protection and to register to vote; criticized the government, President Lyndon B. Johnson, and Negroes fighting in Vietnam.”<sup>66</sup>

Though they never met in person or exchanged correspondence, Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X shared more than a birthday in common. Forged in the furnaces of European colonialism and U.S. empire, from their youthful experiences as workers bouncing between Bos-

ton and Harlem, as well as the inspiration they drew from Garveyism and the UNIA, to their dedicated and principled commitments to internationalism, Ho and Malcolm were as much contemporaries to one another as they remain our contemporaries today.



Reflecting on Ho Chi Minh’s time in Harlem, his meeting with Robert F. Williams, as well as the “Maoist inflections in both the National Liberation Front (of Vietnam) and Black Panther politics,” Vijay Prashad encourages us “to appreciate the vitality of the idea of Third World solidarity,” and asserts that the “radical visions that emerged in the twentieth century enabled the sense of enchanted comradeship of the 1960s and 1970s,” and are “a legacy worth revisiting in this new century.”<sup>67</sup> With the publication of this curriculum in English, we can be assured that these radical visions of Third World solidarity remain intact and in focus in our present era. We ought to be reminded not only of this shared history in the global struggle of oppressed nations against Western imperialism, but also of the cultivation of analytical and practical forms so desperately needed to galvanize, orient, and, in some cases, reorient and retrain our theoretical and organizational sights on forms of collective action toward the continuing development of international socialism. It fills the vacuum left open by the intersection of rampant anti-intellectualism, rabid anti-Communism, and, ultimately, rapacious capital; a veritable unholy trinity which looms vulturelike over the political and social landscape of much of Anglophone world—particularly in the United States.

66 FBI File 100-399321: Section 19. June 1964—June 1980. MS Federal Surveillance of African Americans, 1920-1984: FBI File on Malcolm X. Federal Bureau of Investigation Library. Archives Unbound: [link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5100072481/GDSC?u=duke\\_perkins&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=f2b14a60&pg=100](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5100072481/GDSC?u=duke_perkins&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=f2b14a60&pg=100).

67 Prashad, Vijay, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, Beacon Press, 2001, p. 141.

As an aid in the development of materialist, global analysis trained on international solidarity, the historical confluence between Ho Chi Minh and Black liberation challenges the dominant philosophical and political modes fashionable on much of the Western left today with its monopoly on eclecticism, through which it often serves as an unwitting participant in the retreat from class analysis and thus as an unknowing handmaiden of historical amnesia. It is with hope that the recovery of this often unacknowledged confluence might aid in the development of political consciousness and, in particular, even offer insight into the much-needed analysis of ultraleftism and other infantile disorders which remain prevalent in our present era. Likewise, we remain hopeful that a thorough historical understanding of this confluence will assist in the further development of an analysis of class collaboration historically and in our own time, as well as the stubborn attachment of some of our friends on the left to virulent white supremacy, aiding and abetting the global rise of right wing extremism, which in turn, we're afraid to say, lubricates the path for the emergence of a unique form of neo-fascism.

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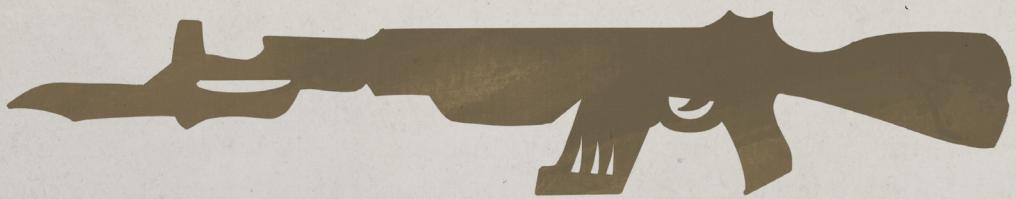
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# THE NEOLIBERAL HOLOCRAUST

by PAWEŁ WARGAN

ON 1 MAY 2009, a few dozen homeless people gathered in Katowice, Poland, to commemorate International Workers' Day. They raised the banner of the socialist Polish Peoples' Republic—a society where, they said, food was affordable and jobs were abundant. "We want to restore the First of May as a day that defends the interests of the most disadvantaged," the march's organizer said. For a few hours, the most neglected residents of Poland's eleventh-largest city lamented a time when their condition not only *did* not exist, but *could* not exist. "Your indifference is our verdict," they chanted.

Why was this march—then ignored, now forgotten—so important? What is the meaning behind its appeal to Poland's socialist past, a legacy that has been sullied and sapped in the decades since capitalist restoration? And why is it relevant in the much larger story of the mortality crisis that swept across the former socialist states of Eastern Europe beginning in the 1990s—a catastrophe, unprecedented in peace-time, that claimed nearly 17 million lives?<sup>1</sup>

In the process of excavating our history, we often ignore the social relations—specifically, the relations of production—that shape our experiences and, in turn, our perceptions and memories. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence," Karl Marx wrote, "but their social existence that determines their consciousness."<sup>2</sup> In a world dominated by capital, great pains are taken to conceal the names, the faces, and the lives of workers and the oppressed from view. Their centrality

1 Previous research put the figure at seven million, see e.g., Gábor Scheiring et al. "Deindustrialisation and the post-socialist mortality crisis," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 47, no. 3. 2023. New, unpublished research carried out by Bineh Ndefru, Jason Hickel and Dylan Sullivan indicates 16.9 million excess deaths in the former Eastern Bloc after 1990, compared with the trajectory of the 1980s.

2 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1977.

in the processes of economic production and social reproduction is hidden. The scarcity that confronts them is masked by images of abundance. When they lose their homes, become frail, or die—when they succumb to disease or hunger or desperation, or meet their end under the policeman's knee—their demise is ascribed to the natural order of things. *The weak shall perish. Crime doesn't pay. Work sets you free. Etc.* Katowice's march of the homeless mattered because, in it, the most marginalized members of Poland's society gave their verdict on a history that had banished them from its record.

Their verdict carries weight far beyond Katowice—or even Poland. It applies to the entire framework through which we reflect on the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. The fall of states built in the image of working people not only transformed the economic relations underpinning their societies—things and people that were valued for their social utility became valued for their capacity to generate profit. It also shifted the balance of narrative power within them. The state-owned factories were sold, the dialecticians were expelled from the academy, and the workers were expunged from the historical record. As a result, when we talk about the “End of History” and the victory of the liberal world order as *representative of progress*, we ignore not only the tremendous gains achieved for the working person in socialist societies but also the monumental violence that capitalist restoration inflicted on them and the world at large.<sup>3</sup>

The popular discourse about this period tends to dissolve the systemic into the particular. It treats the suffering as an inevitable by-

product of specific “economic reforms” that former socialist states implemented rather than the intended effect of the advanced socialist societies’ regression into capitalism. It treats the issues in isolation. Men died younger not because the world around them fell to pieces, but because of a rampant alcoholism often framed as innate to the Eastern European condition—an assertion that taints capitalism’s systematic erosion of lives with individualized moral judgment and an air of civilizational haughtiness. Women were sold into slavery not because imperialism commodifies the body and criminality takes root in the crevices of a crumbling society, but because the United States had not yet won its war on trafficking<sup>4</sup>—an assertion that recasts villain as saviour. These narratives then yield “policy recommendations” that demand further liberalization to undo the “inefficiencies” supposedly inherent in socialist planning. The nation, the community, and, ultimately, the individual, have to be destroyed again and again to eradicate their impulse for sovereignty. Through these processes, the threads of capitalism are woven ever more firmly into the social and economic fabric, establishing capitalist social relations as a totalizing force.

The normative discourse about the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe also ignores its impact on the structures of accumulation—and the forces of resistance—globally. It ignores the role of the Soviet Union and the socialist states of Eastern Europe in backing processes of national liberation and the construction of political sovereignty across the Third World, while holding back the worst excesses of imperial violence.<sup>5</sup> Since the collapse of the USSR, wages

3 For examples of the tendency of bourgeois economists to downplay or deny the scale of the suffering, see, e.g., Gábor Scheiring and Lawrence King, “Deindustrialization, social disintegration, and health: a neoclassical sociological approach”, *Theory and Society* 52, 2023: 148–149.

4 See, e.g., Mary Buckley, “Human Trafficking in the Twenty-First Century,” in Linda Racioppi and Katherine O’Sullivan (eds.), *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009).

5 According to data compiled by the U.S. Congressional Research Service, some 80 percent of U.S. military interventions after 1946 took place after the fall of the USSR. Barbara S. Torreon and Sofia Plagakis, “Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798–2022,” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2022).

fell globally<sup>6</sup>, access to food declined, and global labor reserves exploded.<sup>7</sup> The instruments of imperial and neo-colonial domination—from sanctions to dollarization, debt to financialization—subordinated ever-greater parts of the Third World.<sup>8</sup> The story of Eastern Europe's supposed “liberation” is a story in which the flood-gates of neo-colonial subjugation opened far and wide, unleashing a torrent of exploitation with potentially terminal consequences for the planet—the violence and destruction inherent in the process of accumulation now threaten to extinguish the majority of life on earth, whether through climate and environmental breakdown or nuclear war.

It is essential to yank the history of Eastern European socialism's collapse from the bourgeois framing in which it has been trapped. Indeed, the destruction of the socialist projects of Eastern Europe was a deliberate and long-standing goal of United States foreign policy. Its victory not only dismantled an advanced safety net that kept hundreds of millions of lives afloat. It also cut a critical lifeline for nations and peoples struggling under imperialist dependency and colonial domination. A generation that defeated German Nazism and, as Soviet poet Nikolai Mayorov wrote, “rendered the word ‘humanity’ into flesh”, saw its own humanity torn from the body of the societies that it constructed and defended. Millions died as a result, hundreds of millions more were condemned to lives of violent deprivation, and billions were denied a political horizon that had promised them liberation. Seen from outside the West, the fall was nothing short of catastrophic—a historic setback in the centuries-long struggle for liberation.

The millions of lives lost matter not only in

their own right, but also because they contradict the conventional, Western understanding of 20th century political economy. In Eastern Europe, we witnessed not a “crisis of transition”, but a terrible truncating of human life as land, labor and resources were conscripted to feed the rapacious appetites of national oligarchies and, ultimately, the imperial metropoles. Far from liberation, this period echoes the familiar dynamic of the colonial genocide, effected in Eastern Europe by contemporary technologies of accumulation. This was not the colonialism that stole land, appointed rulers, and mowed down those who resisted it—a politics that found its terminus in the concentration camp or killing field. This was an engine of neoliberal control, whose pistons included structural adjustment, privatization, financial dependency, and ideological engineering. Despite their veneer of economic rationality, the effects of these assaults were no less lethal than bombs. Between 1991 and 2019, nearly seventeen million people died as a consequence of capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe—deaths that were not accidental but structural, not incidental but necessary for the reinsertion of these territories into the global system of accumulation. In the 1990s, the former socialist states of Eastern Europe were subject to a neoliberal holocaust—and the pages of that story have been torn from our history books.

## CAPITALISM'S DOUBLE VIOLENCE

How do we make sense of the systemic violence that grips societies, violence often veiled by attributions to the metaphysical, to “human nature”? In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels studied the circum-

6 Utsa Patnaik, *The Republic of Hunger and Other Essays*, (Merlin Press, 2007).

7 Paris Yeros, “Generalized Semiproletarianization in Africa”, *The Indian Economic Journal* 71, no. 1. 2023: 162-186.

8 Paris Yeros, “A Polycentric World Will Only Be Possible by the Intervention of the ‘Sixth Great Power’”, *Agrarian South Journal of Political Economy: A triannual Journal of Agrarian South Network and CARES* 13, no. 1 ). 2024:14-40.

stances of life in the early English industrialized economy. The advent of mass manufacturing tore apart the structures of feudal society and centralized ownership in the hands of the rising bourgeoisie. The large factories established to sustain the boom in production also centralized population centers, as peasants and small manufacturers were forced into increasingly congested cities in search of work. The more workers there were, the lower the wages that the capitalists would pay. So, as they grew, English cities became sites of both obscene wealth and crippling poverty.<sup>9</sup> “The East End of London,” Engels wrote, “is an ever-spreading pool of stagnant misery and desolation, of starvation when out of work, and degradation, physical and moral, when in work.”<sup>10</sup>

The English ruling class waged “a social war” on the workers. Parents would work from before dawn until after dusk, leaving children and infants to fend for themselves. Lacking access to healthcare, they fell prey to companies peddling “miracle cures”. To calm their children, workers would give them pills laced with opium, which, unbeknownst to them, slowly extinguished their lives. Sickness was rampant. Lung disease from the poisoned air, typhus, scarlet fever, food poisoning, tuberculosis, and scores of other ailments tore through communities. The squalid, high-density homes they lived in meant that many workers burned to death in house fires. Crime rose as the wretchedness deepened. Alcoholism, suicide, and other “deaths of despair” were commonplace. In Liverpool in the mid-1800s, the death rate approached 3,344 per 100,000 people, more than ten times what it is today. For the workers of 19th century England, life was an uninterrupted tragedy that reproduced itself with each waking day.

Engels sought to make sense of the obscene mortality produced by this system—deaths caused not by the firing of a gun, the dropping

of a bomb, or the slitting of the throat, but by the creation of social conditions that cut lives short. The workers of England called it “social murder”, a concept that Engels described in this widely-cited passage:

When one individual inflicts bodily injury upon another such that death results, we call the deed manslaughter; when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call his deed murder. But when society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or bullet; when it deprives thousands of the necessities of life, places them under conditions in which they cannot live—forces them, through the strong arm of the law, to remain in such conditions until that death ensues which is the inevitable consequence—knows that these thousands of victims must perish, and yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual; disguised, malicious murder, murder against which none can defend himself, which does not seem what it is, because no man sees the murderer, because the death of the victim seems a natural one...

This passage reflects a dual charge. It condemns the state of affairs in which one of the wealthiest empires in history puts its working class in conditions so dire that they “inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death”. In question was not just the fact of the death, but its structural character—each death bookends a continuum of oppression that extends from the rural enclosure to the urban gutter; the factory floor to the booze house. It reflects conditions in which labor reserves became so large as to be expendable; workers could always be replaced by the armies of the unemployed roaming the city streets. Their maintenance threatened to eat into profits. But Engels also decries the ways in which the structural character of the violence shields it from view: “no man sees the murderer” and “the death of the victim seems a natural one”. Engels observed that Britain’s ruling class did not and could not acknowledge the violence it imposed; it simply erased the victims from the

9 Friedrich Engels, “The Industrial Proletariat”, *Condition of the Working Class in England*. 1845.

10 Ibid., “Introduction”.

historical record. The ruling class, Engels wrote, “will not confess, even to itself, that the workers are in distress, because it, the property-holding, manufacturing class, must bear the moral responsibility for this distress.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the ongoing, murderous violence of capitalism is kept from the pages of history.

When we study history, we study the history of a particular class. The prevailing historiography of feudalism traces the exchange of thrones, not the heartbeats of the people who fed and clothed the princes and landlords. The history of the early capitalist slave economies begins with the intrepid explorer traversing the Atlantic on his carrack, not the enslaved human beings dying in torment in the fetid belly of the ship. And the history of capitalism is a story of bold entrepreneurs, not those who toil to produce their wealth. Because attributions of criminality and victimhood are the prerogative of the dominating class, its history does not accommodate the stories of the oppressed and their resistance. Since the ruling class dominates in the spheres of publishing, education, journalism, and other forms of knowledge production, their material power translates into a hold over our structures of thought. Material inequality becomes an inequality of consciousness—both by limiting the education of the oppressed, and by limiting the production of knowledge about the oppressed. In a sense, then, social murder implies a double death: as life is extinguished, so is memory.

This dynamic—shaped within nations by class oppression and class struggle—also plays out across the entire social, cultural, and eco-

nomic topography of our planet. Imperialism steamrolls across the periphery—from North to South, West to East—leeching its resources and crushing its lives. In the process, the inequalities of class within the nation state translate into inequalities between nation states, producing prosperity for some and great immiseration for others. As in the streets of Engels’ Manchester, global labor reserves are growing at catastrophic rates, and workers around the planet are becoming expendable. Karl Marx predicted that capitalism would ultimately sap “the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the laborer.”<sup>12</sup> Today, the imperative to generate ever-greater profit sees capital devalue both human life and nature to the point of their systematic destruction. That process itself imparts greater returns for capitalists at every stage in the value chain; for example, the early death of a worker removes the need to pay her pension or healthcare costs and increases the surplus that can be extracted over her truncated lifetime.<sup>13</sup>

The deprivation caused by capitalism is staggering. Over two billion people live in conditions of food insecurity. Over three billion cannot afford to eat well and just as many people do not have access to a stove. Nearly four billion do not have safe sanitation facilities and as many as five billion lack access to basic health services.<sup>14</sup> If structural violence is innate in the capitalist process, then capitalism as a whole cannot be exempted from charges of genocide. Every year, five million people in underdeveloped nations die because they lack access to quality healthcare.<sup>15</sup> Every year, nine million people die from hunger and food-related diseases. Every year, one million people die from diarrhea caused by

11 Ibid.

12 Ali Kadri, *The Accumulation of Waste: A political economy of systemic destruction*, (BRILL, 2023).

13 Ibid., p. 268.

14 Jason Hickel and Dylan Sullivan, “Capitalism, Global Poverty, and the Case for Democratic Socialism,” *Monthly Review* 75, no. 3. 2023: 104.

15 Margaret Kruk *et al*, “Mortality due to low-quality health systems in the universal health coverage era: a systematic analysis of amenable deaths in 137 countries,” *The Lancet* 392, no. 10160. 2018: 2203—2212.

a lack of access to clean water and sanitation.<sup>16</sup> Every year, 100,000 people die from homelessness and inadequate housing in Europe alone. UNICEF estimates that 69 million children will die from poverty, disease, and other causes by 2030. Globally, nearly 50 million human beings are enslaved.<sup>17</sup> As Garry Leech has argued, capitalism “results in death on a genocidal scale, thereby constituting a class-based genocide that targets the poor, particularly in the global south.”<sup>18</sup>

Within the imperialist system, structural violence is not only innate—that is, it is not only the passive residue of structures of accumulation. Instead, the violence serves a purpose: to eliminate those who lack productive utility or pose a threat to accumulation.<sup>19</sup> That structural violence, in turn, is backstopped by the violence of bombs and bullets. Since World War II, imperialism has launched dozens upon dozens of such assaults, claiming well over 20 million lives in the process; the genocide in Gaza is just the latest testing ground for imperialism’s strategies of control and its toolkit of destatization, de-development, destabilization, and income deflation.<sup>20</sup> These assaults represent the North-South axis in imperialism’s unconsummated “cold” war against the revolutionary projects in the East, which emerged with the revolutions in Russia and China.<sup>21</sup> Unable to win in direct confrontation against the nuclear-armed socialist powers, imperialism struck at the foundations of sovereignty in nations across the South. The combined body count of the structural violence and its enforcement—numbering in the hundreds of millions of people—represents the sordid, unspeakable toll of the capitalist and imperialist

world system, an ongoing structural genocide that the climate crisis accelerates and nuclear warfare threatens to totalize.

Like the ruling class of Victorian Britain, the imperialist ruling class erases both the victims of its crimes and the successes of its adversaries from the historical record. Liberalism mobilizes tremendous intellectual capacity not only to ignore the death toll, but to bury its victims beneath narratives of triumph. The academy sets boundaries on the appropriate spheres of intellectual inquiry, policing the thresholds of thought on what constitutes appropriate strategies of political and economic liberation. The NGO circuit and philanthropic world repeat grotesque distortions about capitalism’s effects on poverty, women’s emancipation, literacy, and education. The contributions of socialism to these metrics is ignored, and no socialist country is given the benefit of being judged in relation to its own historical inheritance. Cuba is compared to Florida, not to Haiti, although both were birthed in the hellfire of colonial genocide and slavery and only Cuba has emerged as a sustainable state with universal healthcare. But it was precisely the socialist world that stood most powerfully against capitalism’s war on life—and on memory.

## SOCIALISM AS ANTIDOTE

Yet the slightest attention and thought will suffice to satisfy anyone that the ways of combating catastrophe and famine are available, that the measures required to combat them are quite clear, simple, perfectly feasible, and fully within reach of the people’s forces, and that these measures are not being adopted only because, exclusively because, their realisation would affect the fabulous prof-

16 World Health Organization, “Drinking-water”.

17 Walk Free, International Labor Organization, and International Organization for Migration. “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery”. 2022.

18 Garry Leech, *Capitalism: A Structural Genocide*, (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012).

19 Ali Kadri, *The Accumulation of Waste*.

20 Max Ajl, “Palestine’s Great Flood: Part I,” *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 13, no. 1. 2024: 62-88..

21 Paweł Wargan, “NATO and the Long War on the Third World.” *Monthly Review* 74, no. 8. 2023.

its of a handful of landowners and capitalists.

—VLADIMIR I. LENIN

From the Soviet Union to the People's Republic of China, processes of socialist construction largely eliminated the indignities that condemn large parts of humanity to an early grave: hunger, unemployment, sickness, homelessness, and poverty. At the national scale, this is because the socialist process involves a fundamental reorientation of the way that we relate to the economy. Capitalism is characterized by the *dominance of exchange-value over use-value*. The nature of what is produced does not matter. What matters is its capacity to generate profit for those who own the means of production. The profit motive demands not only ever-greater production, but the siphoning of ever-greater portions of public wealth to the private sector through privatization and austerity. The value generated by workers above what they are paid is extracted by the capitalists. By privileging use-value over exchange-value and removing the profit motive from the equations of economic governance, revolutionary forces are able to direct the income generated above the cost of wages toward expanding productive capacity, funding public welfare, and administering and defending the state.

The effects—despite the extreme state of exception imposed on every socialist project—were clear. In the Soviet Union, life expectancy rose from roughly 27 years in 1917, the year of the October Revolution, to over 58 years in 1955, the year after Josef Stalin's death. By 1983, the US Central Intelligence Agency noted that caloric intake in the Soviet Union caught up to

that of the United States, with the Soviet diet being more nutritious.<sup>22</sup> Across the Eastern Bloc, homelessness and unemployment were largely eradicated. The decades-long process that began with the 1949 Chinese Revolution saw China lift 850 million people out of extreme poverty, accounting for the vast majority of global poverty reduction efforts.<sup>23</sup> Despite a crippling blockade that has severely stunted its development, Cuba has some of the highest social development indicators in one of the world's most overexploited regions.<sup>24</sup> The images of stocked supermarkets so cheaply wielded by the United States and other Western countries in their anti-communist propaganda say very little about the capacity of ordinary people to buy what is on offer. Today, there is widespread hunger in the United States despite the abundance paraded before its adversaries.<sup>25</sup>

The transition to a socialized economic model where distributive concerns are not bound by the imperative of private capital accumulation enables the emergence of a much more expansive set of social claims. Even though the West has sought to center formal civil liberties in its ideological war against communism, it was the socialist bloc that most forcefully advanced the struggle for human rights, advocating for social and economic rights as *collective* human rights. From 1936, the Soviet constitution contained explicit guarantees of the right to work, leisure, social services, and education, as well as equality guarantees for women, along with political and personal freedoms. Underpinning the new legal order was the notion that emancipation was not a question of individual ad-

22 CIA Reading Room.

23 Li Xiaoyun, "Pro-Poor Development — How China Eradicated Poverty." Progressive International Blueprint (3 January 2024).

24 Jason Hickel's Sustainable Development Index, which measures human development against ecological overshoot, has found Cuba to be the most sustainably developed country in the world. See, e.g., Matt Trinder, "We would need multiple Earths to sustain that kind of consumption", *Morning Star* (24 January 2020).

25 Hunger in America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america>

vancement but of class advancement.<sup>26</sup> As the Polish-American sociologist Albert Szymanski writes in his seminal work, *Human Rights in the Soviet Union*, this is because there is a fundamental contradiction between the *right to own productive property* and the *right to employ the labor power of others in productive property*. The exercise of the latter right necessarily concentrates productive property in the hands of a minority, proletarianizing the majority of society and producing unequal distributive outcomes. In this way, the class basis of a society determines the claims that its constituents can make against the state and each other.<sup>27</sup> Capitalism, as even bourgeois intellectuals have acknowledged, is *fundamentally incompatible* with guarantees of collective rights. The rights that can be demanded of a state are necessarily constrained by the relations of production and the balance of class power within that state.

As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was being drafted, it was the USSR that pushed for greater emphasis on these collective social and economic rights. Through Soviet efforts, the UDHR came to enshrine the rights to work (Article 23), rest (Article 24), an adequate standard of living (Article 25) and education (Article 26); and the right “to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” (Article 27). The Soviet Union argued that the rights contained in the UDHR should be supported by positive guarantees from the state, ensuring, for example, that “death out of hunger is prevented”, or that the guarantee of press freedom should be

backed by the provision of necessary equipment and resourcing because material inequalities distort the exercise of rights.<sup>28</sup> The bourgeois economist Friedrich Hayek criticized such provisions as paving the road towards forms of social organization that are “totalitarian in the fullest sense of the word.”<sup>29</sup> Underlying his critique was the correct recognition that the positive guarantee of fundamental dignities by the state *requires* the socialization of production—that is, it requires mounting a fundamental and *total* challenge to the right to own productive property and exploit others for individual gain. This is a class position: “totalizing” fair distributive outcomes undoes the rule of profit. For capitalists, such measures will no doubt have a “totalitarian” flavor, because they challenge the very basis of their existence as *exploiters*.

If socialist development ensured a fairer distributive system at home, it also pursued policies to advance it globally. The principle of internationalism—the extension of class struggle to the international terrain—colored the foreign policies of the socialist world and helped counteract the logic of imperialist dependency that gripped the nations of the South. From the People’s Republic of Poland to Cuba, universities were established to help prepare the peoples of the South to address the urgent needs of development. The German Democratic Republic trained—free of charge—between 64,000 and 78,000 medical students from over 125 countries between 1951 and 1989. In doing so, it actively limited the “brain drain” caused by the poaching of medical personnel by imperialist countries.<sup>30</sup> Cuba’s Latin American School of

26 Anna Lukina. “Soviet Union and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, Max Planck Institute for European Legal History Research Paper Series No. 2017-01, p. 4.

27 Albert Szymanski, *Human Rights in the Soviet Union*, Zed Books Ltd (1984).

28 Lukina, p. 11.

29 Alice Malone. “Concessions”, *Red Sails* (1 January 2008).

30 IFDDR, “Reconstruction, sovereignty, and education: An East German medical school dedicated to internationalism.”

Medicine has taught 30,878 doctors from 122 countries<sup>31</sup> in a program that is qualitatively different from medical schools in capitalist countries, focusing on holistic, community-based, preventative healthcare rather than profiteering. Through a commitment to health internationalism, Cuba has dispatched 605,000 health professionals and technicians to 165 countries,<sup>32</sup> bringing health to as many nations as the United States has sanctioned<sup>33</sup>—and its literacy program continues to achieve world-historic gains in nations stunted by imperialism.

The socialist bloc sent builders, architects, and urban planners to nations emerging from colonial rule. They designed and built industrial plants, infrastructure, land-reclamation projects, housing, hospitals, schools, universities, and public buildings. In Ghana, the government of Kwame Nkrumah invited architects from across Eastern Europe to the country. They would study traditional Ghanaian architecture and work alongside Ghanaian architects and builders to advance the underdeveloped nation towards modernity, leaving marvels of national architecture as their legacy, alongside schools to prepare new cadres of architects. In 1973, Poland's Miastoprojekt and Budimex—public urban planning and construction firms—developed a master plan for the urban development of Baghdad, charting a path until the year 2000.<sup>34</sup> These are two examples of many. Nkrumah would be deposed by the United States and the gains made by his government were dramatically rolled back. Later, Iraq would be destroyed by the United States with Poland colluding as a junior member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. We decimated the same cities we

once helped build. And, in a tragic denouement of our internationalist legacy, in 2022 Budimex completed the construction of a border wall to stop the victims of imperial aggression from crossing into Europe.

Imperialism, Samir Amin wrote, marches on two legs: the economic leg of globalized neoliberalism and the political leg of intervention, including preemptive wars.<sup>35</sup> It has to be resisted on both fronts. That is why the most consequential contribution of the socialist bloc to the internationalist struggle was the underwriting of the armed struggles and defensive capacities of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial forces globally. It was with the help of Soviet arms—and Cuban troops—that the wars of liberation in Angola and Mozambique were won, defeating the apartheid regime in South Africa. It was the People's Republic of China that, reeling from its own protracted civil war, helped push United States' forces past the 58th parallel in Korea, preventing the fall of the entire peninsula to imperialism. The Soviet Union armed revolutionary Cuba and Vietnam, and helped build up military power in the Arab region as it confronted increasing Zionist belligerence. In this way, socialism came to undergird movements towards national liberation that swept the Third World, generating a defensive and offensive bulwark against imperialist accumulation globally. That is why the wars waged against national sovereignty in the Third World also served to chisel away at the broader project of global socialism—they curtailed the space within which sovereignty could be exercised.

The imperialist centers themselves would

31 Cuba MinRex, "The Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) and the Medical Studies program in Cuba have been internationally accredited for 6 years", 25 January 2024.

32 Cuba MinRex, "Cuba celebrates 60 years of international medical cooperation", 23 May 2023.

33 Ben Norton, "Economic world war: US has sanctions on 1/3rd of all countries, 60% of poor nations", *Geopolitical Economy Report* (28 August 2024).

34 Lukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, Princeton University Press, 2020.

35 Samir Amin, "Contemporary Imperialism", *Monthly Review* (2015).

be reshaped by these processes. The social democratic compact did not emerge in a vacuum—it was powered by rising communist movements that had the USSR as their guiding light. From the New Deal to the post-war consensus, the threat of communist revolutions in the United States and Western Europe saw the ruling classes make unprecedented concessions to the workers of their countries, adopting high taxes, curtailing the power of monopolies, and embarking on major public works projects. This social-democratic compact was combined with unprecedented levels of anti-communist action. In the United States, the McCarthyist terror, the radicalization of policing and the emergence of mass incarceration, the assassination of opposition forces, and the demobilization and marginalization of the radical working class through instruments like the AFL-CIO was the stick to the carrot of the untrammelled consumption that came to underpin the so-called “American Dream”. In Europe, socialism was contained in the East; fascism strangulated budding liberation movements in the South (primarily in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece); and US troops and nuclear weapons, deployed permanently on the continent, maintained tensions that could not allow alternative political projects to emerge and flourish. NATO not only secured the anti-communist consensus, but also helped power the West European colonial wars in Africa that fed the ruling class back home. The Marshall Plan, Truman Doctrine, and the gradual consolidation of the European capitalist class under what would become the European Union laid the ground for a fragile—and heavily policed—social-democratic consensus that persisted until its internal contradictions began to tear it apart. It is no coincidence that the gains of the post-war period began to unwind during the denouement of Soviet power.

In a stunning reversal, the lodestars of social progress, which once held promise for the workers of the imperialist heartlands, came to

be judged by the obscene standards of consumption of their adversaries. These new ideas began to wear down the social contracts established under socialism. By the 1980s, peoples across large parts of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe wanted their Levi's and McDonald's. It is perhaps Eastern European socialism's greatest failure that they were not able to see the other side of the bargain: healthcare, housing, education, and the promise of dignified employment. Or that they only saw it once it was too late to turn back the clock.

## THE CAPTURE OF EASTERN EUROPE

The collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe represented not only a transformation of domestic political economies. It represented, primarily, the cancerous extension of the mode of imperial accumulation into territories that had until then been closed to it. As socialism crumbled, its productive capacities, natural resources, labor, and markets were subordinated to Western capital. This transformation threaded through the entire social tapestry. Structural adjustment, privatization, the drain of minds and bodies into Western labor markets, and the integration of Eastern European economies into global value chains on disadvantageous terms sapped the former socialist economies of their productive capacities. Consumerist propaganda, changes to educational curricula, and the financing of media institutions helped establish the ideological scaffolding for the assault. In this way, the ideological and material wars threaded through each other, working to establish capitalism as the *only* political possibility.

We can recognize elements here in what Kwame Nkrumah described as *neocolonialism*, a form of control enforced not at the barrel of a gun—although the gun always remains as its backstop—but through a complex matrix of economic penetration, political manipulation, and cultural hegemony.<sup>36</sup> Under neocolonial-

36 Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Heinemann (1965).

ism, a state may appear nominally independent within the framework of international law, while its substantive economic sovereignty is subordinated to imperialist interests and directed by transnational frameworks established to serve imperialism. But there was something more at work in the process of transition in Eastern Europe. If neocolonialism is antecedent to revolution—arriving as a set of counterrevolutionary technologies designed to curtail the transformation of formal political liberation into economic sovereignty—the assault on the Soviet Union involved the rapid construction of new economic and political institutions on the ashes of old ones. It represented a process of imperialist capture.

The economic transformation was cooked up in institutions like the Harvard Institute for International Development, which received tens of millions of dollars from USAID—and managed hundreds of millions more in grant money—to advise Eastern Bloc countries on their “transition”. It was advanced through conditionalities imposed by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and international trade agreements. These required states to open their economies to foreign investment, reduce trade barriers, and sell state assets to private (largely foreign) investors. The productive assets built up over decades of socialist development were chopped and diced and absorbed by capital—a process representing the largest upward transfer of wealth in human history. The result was a form of dependent development remarkably similar to that experienced by Third World countries under neo-colonialism. Economies

that had been underpinned by robust supply chains and industries transformed into ones designed to siphon resources up, towards the national bourgeoisie, and out, primarily to Wall Street.

Former socialist economies were restructured to serve as sources of raw materials, cheap labor, and markets for Western goods rather than as sites of autonomous development. In Poland, for example, foreign capital came to control 70% of the banking sector, 60% of industry, and 30% of land by the early 2000s.<sup>37</sup> In Russia, some 14,000 enterprises were privatized between 1992 and 1994—roughly 70% of the country’s industry—with state assets worth billions sold for millions,<sup>38</sup> inflation in 1992 reached 2,520 percent, effectively nullifying the financial reserves of ordinary citizens;<sup>39</sup> and real government spending on healthcare declined by 57 percent between 1989 and 1996.<sup>40</sup> This pattern was repeated across the region. Public budgets were slashed, foreign capital captured the most profitable sectors of the economy, and declining industries were left in public hands to help reinforce the case for the inefficiency of public ownership. In Russia, an economy underpinned by planned industrialization transformed overnight into an economy based on rents from oil, gas and other resources—a transition that no longer accommodated an expansive workforce, producing an explosion in labor reserves.<sup>41</sup>

The political dimension of the assault on Eastern Europe was reflected in the fundamental lack of a popular mandate for the changes. No one would have voted for the reforms, knowing

37 Jane Hardy, *Poland’s New Capitalism*. Pluto Press (2009).

38 Karla Hoff and Joseph E. Stiglitz, “After the Big Bang? Obstacles to the Emergence of the Rule of Law in Post-Communist Societies,” *American Economic Review* 94, no. 3. 2004: 753–763.

39 World Bank, *Russian Economic Reform: Crossing the Threshold of Structural Change* (1994).

40 Mark G. Field, , David M. Kotz, and Gene Bukhman. “Neoliberal Economic Policy, ‘State Desertion,’ and the Russian Health Crisis.” In Kim, Jim Yong, Joyce V. Millen, Alec Irwin, and John Gershman (eds). *Dying for Growth: Global Inequality and the Health of the Poor* Common Courage Press. 2000: 155-173.

41 Ali Kadri. “Notes on the fall of fertility in Russia.” *Network Ideas*, February 7, 2012. [https://www.network-ideas.org/featart/feb2012/Ali\\_Kadri.pdf](https://www.network-ideas.org/featart/feb2012/Ali_Kadri.pdf)

the misery they would bring about, and so “shock therapy” was carried out by decree. In Poland, Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz implemented his “Balcerowicz Plan” in January 1990, nearly two years before the first full parliamentary election was held. In Russia, the economic reforms were so unpopular that former First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais—the nation’s shock therapist-in-chief—had them implemented by presidential decree rather than parliamentary mandate. These processes were driven by multiple technologies of control: regime change operations in the case of countries like Georgia and Ukraine, war in the case of Yugoslavia, and accession to transnational institutions like the European Union and NATO in the case of large parts of Eastern and Central Europe and the Baltics. These latter countries were absorbed into the imperialist bloc, stabilized through heavy subsidies, and ultimately turned against states that followed a different political and economic trajectory. In different ways, competencies that had been the prerogative of nation states—existential questions of economic governance and war and peace—were removed from the sphere of national politics across large parts of the Eastern Bloc.

This economic and political control was accompanied by an “epistemological imperialism”—the imposition of Western economic theories and models that delegitimized alternative development paths. Leading economists from Harvard, MIT, and other prestigious institutions descended on Eastern Europe as consultants, bringing with them neoclassical economic paradigms that presented market fundamentalism as scientific truth rather than ideological

preference. These “missionaries of capitalism” operated with remarkable arrogance, dismissing local knowledge and concerns while implementing policies based on abstract models with little regard for social consequences.<sup>42</sup> The ideological assault extended to education. After the German Democratic Republic was annexed by West Germany, one of the very first “transition measures” taken was the dissolution of every Marxist-Leninist institute and university department and the expulsion or reassignment of their staff. This was justified as part of a process of the “enforcement of freedom... and associated de-ideologization” in natural and technical sciences.<sup>43</sup> Across the former Eastern Bloc, university reform programs sponsored by foundations like the Soros Open Society Institute systematically reoriented humanities and social science disciplines toward Western liberalism, effectively colonizing intellectual production. US institutions like USAID and the National Endowment for democracy acquired ever-greater control of the media. In Ukraine, nine out of ten media outlets would be funded by the US—a reality revealed by Donald Trump’s withdrawal of funding in 2025.

This imperial restructuring produced a form of “uneven and combined development” where islands of Western-style prosperity (typically in capital cities) existed alongside vast zones of deindustrialization and impoverishment. The result was what sociologist Göran Therborn described as “a new European periphery”<sup>44</sup>: abandoned regions struck by economic dependency, demographic decline, and political marginalization, tinder for political reaction. The human costs of this process—measured in millions of

42 Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2001.

43 See the German “The Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship”: “Hoch- und Fachschulwesen”, Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur. Incidentally, the West German officials tasked with implementing capitalist policies in East Germany were paid what was called a *Buschzulage*, which roughly translates as “jungle bonus”. The neo-colonization of Eastern Europe carried with it the same civilizational overtones as the assault on the broader Global South.

44 Göran Therborn. “Eastern Drama: Capitals of Eastern Europe, 1830s-2006.” *International Review of Sociology* 16, no. 2. 2006: 209-242.

excess deaths—represent not collateral damage but the necessary outcome of an imperial project designed to subordinate both populations and resources to the imperatives of capital accumulation.

## THE COLLAPSE

In the early months of 2007, a dog chanced upon the remains of over 30 young women and girls—some as young as 13—systematically murdered by sexual traffickers between 2002 and 2005 and buried in a mass grave. The discovery helped solve some of the over 400 missing persons cases in the industrial city of Nizhny Tagil in Russia. It marked one of the more explicit manifestations of a new economic order in which labor—now dramatically proletarianized—became terrain for capital's most ruthless strategies of accumulation and waste. Social protections dissolved, criminality took root, and the vulnerable became objects of commodification and violence on a scale not seen since the social deprivations of empire and world war.

This gruesome story offers a particularity that concretizes what is otherwise an ocean of statistics and figures. The fall of the socialist projects in Eastern Europe produced suffering on a scale never seen in peacetime. In Russia, GDP plummeted by 40 percent. The country's industrial inputs fell by half. Real wages dropped to half of their 1987 levels. Poverty ballooned from two percent of the population to 50 percent in

just over five years.<sup>45</sup> In those same years, life expectancy in Russia declined by up to seven years for men and about three years for women.<sup>46</sup> In the Baltic states, it declined by an average of four years. In Hungary, death rates reached levels unseen since the Great Depression.<sup>47</sup> Fertility rates plummeted to levels not seen since world war.<sup>48</sup> In that time, sexual predation was rife. Countless children were forced into prostitution, and half a million Russian women were trafficked into sexual slavery.<sup>49</sup> Recent research shows that there were 16.9 million excess deaths from 1991 to 2019<sup>50</sup> as a result of the wretchedness imposed on the states of the former Eastern European socialist bloc, a period that constitutes the largest mortality crisis outside war or famine in history.<sup>51</sup>

As in Engels' time, vice crept into the social body of these states. Alcoholism became rampant, as were attempts to attribute it to something innate in the Eastern European condition—something primitive, oriental, in need of civilizing. Westerners arrived in Ukraine and Russia in search of the Slavic "soul", pursuits that often veiled more predatory motives. But, as in Victorian England, the drinking was a product of despair and alienation. "Drunkenness has here ceased to be a vice, for which the vicious can be held responsible," Engels wrote:

it becomes a phenomenon, the necessary, inevitable effect of certain conditions upon an object possessed of no volition in relation to those conditions. His enfeebled frame, weakened by bad air and bad food, violently demands some external stimulus; his social need can be

45 Branko Milanovic, *Income, Inequality, and Poverty During the Transition from Planned to Market Economy*, World Bank. 1997.

46 David Stuckler, Lawrence King, and Martin McKee. "Mass Privatisation and the Post-Communist Mortality Crisis: A Cross-National Analysis." *Lancet* 373, no. 9661. (2009. Gábor Scheiring et al. (2023).

47 Mária S. Kopp, Arpád Skrabski, András Székely, Adrienne Stauder, and Redford Williams, "Chronic stress and social changes: Socioeconomic determination of chronic stress." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1113, no. 1. 2007: 325–338, cited in Gábor Scheiring and Lawrence King. 2023: 146.

48 Ali Kadri. "Notes on the fall of fertility in Russia."

49 Mary Buckley. "Human Trafficking in the Twenty-First Century."

50 Bineh Ndefru et al (unpublished).

51 Nicholas Eberstadt. "The enigma of Russian mortality", *Current History* 109, no 729, 2010.

gratified only in the public-house, he has absolutely no other place where he can meet his friends. How can he be expected to resist the temptation?

As in Engels' time, the collapse of state healthcare saw pseudo-sciences flood markets unaccustomed to capital's capacity for deceit. Everyone who grew up in the Eastern Europe of the 1990s—from Poland's Gdańsk to Russia's Vladivostok—will remember the *wrózba* or *kolduniya*, the fortune-teller who, for a few złoty or roubles, revealed the secrets of longevity. In the streets, peddlers sold stones or crystals imbued with healing properties, or self-published guides on Radiesthesia, the power to detect radiation emanating from objects both living and inanimate. In Russia, mysticism swept through the population, with televised shows promising miracle cures for the ill and prosperity for the poor. The spread of mysticism also carried a more explicitly political dimension. In Poland, the Catholic Church won tremendous political influence and, working against popular opposition, began to lobby for the unwinding of the Polish People's Republic's laws on abortion. In 1993, Poland unrolled a socialist-era law that allowed for abortions even in case of economic hardship—until then, the most progressive abortion legislation in the world. By 2021, abortion would be outlawed in nearly all cases.

As in Engels' time, deaths were commonplace. In the 1990s, hunger in Russia reached levels unseen since the post-war famine in 1947, and the death rate far exceeded the combined rate from post-war malnutrition and that of prisoners in the Soviet labor and detention camp system in the last years of Joseph Stalin's admin-

istration<sup>52</sup>—a period whose purported excesses continue to be weaponised against the socialist system as a whole. That is, capitalist restoration killed more people than what is often elevated by imperialist ideologues as socialism's darkest hour. In 15 years after the collapse of socialism, Russia lost more lives than it did during the entirety of World War I,<sup>53</sup> and almost as many civilians as were killed in World War II. Capitalist restoration killed around twice as many people as the famine that swept Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and other parts of the Soviet Union in 1930-1933. The figure is worth repeating: The protracted crisis of mortality, lasting well into the 2000s, killed nearly seventeen million people in the former socialist states of Eastern Europe.

A comprehensive study into the causes of the deaths in the region established that the mortality rates were directly correlated with the extent of privatization. Radical privatization caused a 13-21% spike in mortality rates,<sup>54</sup> a pattern that was repeated across 22 countries in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1994.<sup>55</sup> Countries that implemented privatization more gradually, such as Belarus and Slovenia, experienced significantly lower increases in mortality. Research carried out in *The Lancet* conclusively demonstrated that “rapid mass privatization as an economic transition strategy was a crucial determinant of differences in adult mortality trends in post-communist countries.”<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting here that the very same agenda persists today, despite the collapse of socialism and the mounting evidence of the violence that capitalist restoration imposed. During the failed

52 Vladimir Popov. “Russia: austerity and deficit reduction in historical and comparative perspective”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 36, no. 1. 2012: pp. 313–34, 324.

53 Nicholas Eberstadt. 2010: 288–94.

54 David Stuckler, Lawrence King, and Martin McKee. 2009. Aytalina Azarova et al. “The effect of rapid privatisation on mortality in mono-industrial towns in post-Soviet Russia: a retrospective cohort study”, *The Lancet Public Health* 2 no. 5. May 2017. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2468266717300725>

55 Elizabeth Brainerd. “Market reform and mortality in transition economies”, *World Development* 26, no. 11. November 1998. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X98000965>

56 David Stuckler, Lawrence King, and Martin McKee. 2009.

regime change attempt in Belarus in 2021, a European Parliament resolution expressed “regret” that the Belarusian authorities failed to follow World Bank and IMF recommendations to privatize the state sector, implement austerity, and “encourage entrepreneurship”. The resolution expressed “concern” that state regulations were hostile to the private sector, “particularly the requirement to pay a minimum wage not lower than the average wage of the ten most successful state-owned enterprises.”<sup>57</sup> This is the Malthusian fine print of regime change, targeting a state that had not sufficiently been brought to its knees.

The imperative to dismantle the socialist welfare state—or its remnants—is not an unfortunate side effect but a necessary precondition for the enforcement of capitalist social relations and imperialist dependence. As Marx observed in his analysis of primitive accumulation, the creation of a proletarian class requires the forcible separation of people from their means of subsistence.<sup>58</sup> In post-socialist Eastern Europe, this process did not involve the enclosure of common lands but the dismantling of public services—enclosing the *social commons* that had sustained large industrial workforces. Housing, health care, catering, daycare, and paid holidays for the working class—once guaranteed—van-

ished overnight. The collective rights enshrined under socialist law were replaced by the rights of private accumulation. Unemployment ballooned, and with it came an avalanche of alcoholism, suicide, heart disease, and murder.<sup>59</sup> A study conducted in Hungary linked the loss of worker control in the workplace, increasing workloads on weekends, and the threat of unemployment to significant increases in cardiovascular mortality.<sup>60</sup> One study observed that the “age distribution and the upstream role of stress, inability to cope with stress, and despair are comparable to the North American deaths of despair epidemic.”<sup>61</sup> With the collapse of the socialist state system, the ailments of US capitalism—until then, largely unheard of in the advanced socialist bloc—had arrived in Eastern Europe with full force.

With the economic dislocation came the social fragmentation of the “national solidarity community”.<sup>62</sup> The integration of socialist states into the global capitalist economy widened the gap between the working person and the liberal elites that gained access to international capital. This was not just an economic gap. In Hungary, for example, there emerged a 17 percent difference in mortality rates between men without a secondary education and those with a university degree.<sup>63</sup> In Russia, the mortality rate

57 European Parliament recommendation of 21 October 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on relations with Belarus (2020/2081(INI)).

58 Karl Marx, “Chapter 26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation,” *Capital*, Volume I. 1867.

59 Gábor Scheiring et al. “Deindustrialisation and the post-socialist mortality crisis.” 2023.

60 Maria Kopp, Arpád Skrabski, Zsuzsa Szántó, and Johannes Siegrist, “Psychosocial determinants of premature cardiovascular mortality differences within Hungary,” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 60, no. 9. 2006: 782–8. Cited in Gábor Scheiring and Lawrence King, “The political economy of the postsocialist mortality crisis,” in Primrose, D., Loeppky, R.D., and Chang, R. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Political Economy of Health and Healthcare* (2024), p. 360.

61 Ibid.

62 Gábor Scheiring, “Left Behind in the Hungarian Rustbelt: The Cultural Political Economy of Working-Class Neo-Nationalism”, *Sociology* 54, no. 6. 2020: 1159–1177, 1161–1162, 1166–1168.

63 Katarzyna Doniec et al. “Education and mortality in three Eastern European populations: Findings from the PrivMort retrospective cohort study.” *Eur J Public Health* 29, no. 3. 2018: 549–554, cited in Gábor Scheiring and Lawrence King, “Deindustrialization, social disintegration, and health: a neoclassical sociological approach”.

for men with university education increased by 3-7 percent between 1980 and 2001, while for men with elementary education, it increased by 57 percent.<sup>64</sup> This disparity exposes how the violence of capitalist restoration fell most heavily on the working class and rural populations—precisely those groups that had benefited most under socialism.

The catastrophe also had a geographic dimension: the concentration of capital and investment in the urban centers saw the emergence and widening of regional disparities. Research conducted in Hungary showed how the privatizations and the resulting hardship and loss of control violated a long-standing social contract and became the tinder for the emergence of political reaction, which filled the gap left by the dismantling of socialism and provided working people with new social and economic narratives.<sup>65</sup> From the Caucasus to Ukraine, these reactionary forces became instruments of imperialist expansion, which set about engineering ethnic strife in a bid to divide the region, absorb it into transnational structures, and ultimately gain access to its mineral wealth—policies whose consequences are now claiming hundreds of thousands of lives on the battlefield

afloat. Compare the fall of the states in the socialist Eastern Bloc with the violence imposed on projects seeking to overcome capitalism and colonialism: tens of millions of lives brutally cut short, nations destroyed. Colonialism and capitalism collapse with the hellfire of the oppressor's violence and the rage of the oppressed's resistance. Socialism, it appears, simply falls.

How do we understand this dialectic of violence? Who produces the terrain of violence? Who invades and plunders and enslaves? Who imposed and imposes conditions so dire that millions die each year silently and without ceremony? Who deploys the drones and bunker busters that sustain this deathly condition? Many within the ranks of the left remain afflicted by what Domenico Losurdo described as the “self-flagellation of the vanquished”—a tendency to condemn ourselves for our past, which hinders our capacity to soberly assess the question of violence. We apologise for socialism. We apologise for struggles against colonialism. We remain on the back foot. But socialist violence is always defined by the terrains chosen for it by imperialism. Nelson Mandela once said that “[a] freedom fighter learns the hard way that it is the oppressor who defines the nature of the struggle, and the oppressed is often left no recourse but to use methods that mirror those of the oppressor.”

In fact, socialism did not simply fall—and it did not fall peacefully. The violence of capitalist restoration was systematic and total. It entailed not merely the destruction of human lives but the annihilation of the social fabric itself. The nearly seventeen million dead across Eastern Europe were not casualties of a violent overthrow but victims of a project to unseat working people from political power—a process that produced a calamitous collapse of accumulation and dragged every social support system down with it. The neoliberal architects

## POSTSCRIPT ON TWO KINDS OF VIOLENCE

Lech Wałęsa, the leader of *Solidarność* and later Polish President, once said that his movement succeeded in overthrowing socialism without throwing a single brick or breaking a single window. In response, the US historian Michael Parenti later quipped that “maybe that says more about the socialists than it does about Wałęsa.” In hindsight, given the world-historic stakes at play, it is remarkable how little violence was deployed to try to keep the socialist system

<sup>64</sup> Michael Murphy, Martin Bobak, Amanda Nicholson, Richard Rose, and Michael Marmot, “The Widening Gap in Mortality by Educational Level in the Russian Federation, 1980-2001,” *American Journal of Public Health* 96, no. 7, 2006: 1293-1299.

<sup>65</sup> Gábor Scheiring. “Left Behind in the Hungarian Rustbelt”. 1161-1162, 1166-1168

of this catastrophe understood clearly that rapid privatization would result in massive social dislocation. They proceeded regardless, viewing these deaths as the acceptable price of “market reform.” There is no single policy to which the death toll can be attributed or one moment to which it can be traced. The violence imposed on the peoples of the former Soviet Union and the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe was structural. It was normalized and then obscured by an ideological apparatus installed to discredit and erase the socialist past.

I use the term “holocaust”—provocatively, but deliberately—because we need a word stronger than “memory” to describe the violence that remains alive within our societies. I use it also because the death camps represent only the final stage in capitalism’s descent into barbarism. Auschwitz is the terminus of a continuum of oppression instantiated with each capitalist crisis as the state’s monopoly on violence is deployed to preserve the status quo. The despairing deaths of those denied their dignity come long before the killing fields. The judgement is all the more damning when we compare the counterfactual. Not every socialist country collapsed in the 1990s, and those that retained the socialist model fared significantly better than those that regressed into capitalist exploitation. While Russia saw male life expectancy plummet from 63.8 years in 1990 to 57.7 years in 1994, Cuba—despite experiencing its own severe economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union—saw male life expectancy continue to rise, from 72.2 years in 1990 to 74.2 years in 2000.<sup>66</sup> This stark divergence cannot be attributed to cultural or historical factors. It is a direct outcome of dramatically different forms of economic organization, where one channels productive forces towards the betterment of human life, and the other towards lining the pockets of a minority.

Seen from the perspective of the Wash-

ton boys and their agents across Eastern Europe, the mortality crisis represents not a failure of transition policies but their success. It saw an unprecedented siphoning of public wealth and power into the hands of transnational capital and the domestic comprador class, the beating down of forces of resistance, the truncating of lives that otherwise sapped profit, and the installation of ideological tools to secure the new consensus. Nearly seventeen million people died, and they do not have much of a footnote in the historiography of that period. Their memory must be reclaimed. The victims of Eastern Europe’s neoliberal holocaust must be situated alongside history’s many colonial exterminations. Their loss must serve as a reminder not only of the possibility, but of the necessity of organizing our societies around human need rather than profit—and of defending that new order by any means necessary. Remembering the price that has been paid is not an exercise in mourning, but an act of political consciousness. It is one step towards accepting the cost that *must* be borne in building a world free of exploitation.

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66 Richard S Cooper, Joan F Kennelly, and Pedro Orduñez-Garcia, “Health in Cuba,” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35, no. 4. 2006: 817-824.

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# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOCIAL REVOLUTION FAILS?

by NOLAN LONG

HISTORY IS RIFE with revolution; at every impasse between classes, with every instance of colonial subjugation and with every ounce of injustice, revolution rears its head. Revolution entails immense social change and a transformation of the existing order of society. This much is true in and outside of Marxist theory. Just as revolution is present throughout human history, so too is the ever-present phenomenon of failed revolutions. Those rebellions and revolts that failed to crystallize into something substantial enough to change the society they took place in are often overlooked and understudied. History is replete with anti-colonial revolutions, popular revolutions, bourgeois revolutions, and socialist proletarian revolutions, which have failed more often than succeeded. This article looks at the consequences of such failed revolutions through the thinking of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Rosa Luxemburg.

In Marxist theory, social revolution refers to a qualitative transformation of the relations of production, driving historical change on the basis of class struggle. Whereas Marxists primarily focus on the potential for a proletarian revolution (a specific type of social revolution in the capitalist epoch, whereby the working class subjugates the ruling capitalist class), social revolution is a transhistorical and general term for the action of supplanting one mode of production with another through the process of class struggle. As such, it was a series of social revolutions that replaced feudalism with capitalism in Europe, just as it was a social revolution that established a worker's state in the Soviet Union and China.

Marx and Engels, keenly interested not just in the hypothesized transition from capitalism to socialism but also in the historical emergence

of capitalism from feudalism (as well as the transitions to and from other modes of production), wrote extensively on the role of social revolutions throughout history. For Marxists, this long historical progression along modes of production begins with the move from primitive communism to “civilization.” Engels describes this transformation as follows:

Civilization is, therefore... the stage of development in society at which the division of labor, the resulting exchange between individuals, and commodity production which combines them both, come to their full growth and revolutionize the whole previous society.

At all earlier stages of society, production was essentially communal, and, likewise, consumption proceeded by direct distribution of the products within larger or smaller communistic communities...

But the division of labor slowly insinuates itself into this process of production. It undermines the communality of production and appropriation, elevates appropriation by individuals into the prevailing rule, and thus creates exchange between individuals.<sup>1</sup>

The creation of exchange, the division of labor, and the accumulation of wealth triggered this initial transition from primitive communism to ancient modes of ordering society and production. Similarly, Rosa Luxemburg offers a general schematic of the dissolution of primitive communism as follows:

In general, we can identify a trait that is constant everywhere in life of the mark community: the movement toward increasingly larger intervals of time between land reallotments, which sooner or later leads universally to a transition from allotted land to inherited land. In the same way that the transformation of communal property into private property keeps pace with the intensification of labor, one can trace the fact that forest and pasture lands remained communal the longest, while the

intensively worked farmland led first to the partitioned mark and then to hereditary property.<sup>2</sup>

From here we can trace, though with considerable variation across different societies, transitions from one mode of production to another, from medieval feudal society to modern capitalist society. But how do these transitions come about?

Engels writes, “every change in the social order, every revolution in property relations has been the necessary consequence of the creation of new productive forces which no longer fitted into the old property relations.”<sup>3</sup> Here it becomes clear that social revolutions emerge from the dialectical tensions (or contradictions) between forces and relations of production. In light of this fact, Engels also (though shortly) defines social revolution as a change in property relations. From slave societies<sup>4</sup> to feudalism, from feudalism to capitalism, and from capitalism to socialism, revolutions arise as a result of conflict between forces and relations of production. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argue that “the French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property.”<sup>5</sup> The resultant formula is that class struggle results in social revolution, which itself consists in the reconstitution of property relations such that a new society is birthed from the old. Sticking with this example of bourgeois revolutions, Marx argued in the first volume of *Capital* that “the economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of

1 Engels, Frederick. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. p. 156.

2 Luxemburg, Rosa. “The Dissolution of Primitive Communism: From the Ancient Germans and the Incas to India, Russia, and Southern Africa.” p. 103.

3 Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Community Party and Principles of Communism*. p. 86.

4 In their early work, Marx and Engels sometimes neglected pre-feudal modes of production. In their later works, and especially in Marx’s “Anthropological Notebooks” and Engels’ *Anti-Dühring*, these societies were given more weight. Part of the reason for the early neglect might be attributable to the fact that they believed history had witnessed rapid transitions between these early modes of production as subsistence agriculture decreased.

5 Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party and Principles of Communism*. p. 48.

the former.”<sup>6</sup>

For Marxists, classes arise as a result of these changes in the modes of production. It was the rise of capitalism in place of feudalism that created the proletariat, the working class. The inherently expansionist and competitive nature of the capitalist mode of production drew ever greater numbers into its scope, creating a large proletariat in contrast to the relatively small bourgeoisie. In the developing stages of capitalism, the proletariat was born from the old feudal classes of serfs and slaves; the new ruling bourgeois class usurped the old ruling class of feudal lords.<sup>7</sup> As a point of clarity, Lenin describes class as:

large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labor, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they can dispose and the mode of acquiring it.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, in every epoch, the revolutionary class (whichever it might be) undertakes a social revolution to overthrow the existing ruling class and establish its own dominance. This social revolution results in a new mode of production which then creates new contending classes for a new class struggle. The very idea of social revolution is not, then, idealistic, existing outside the domain of human activity, but is transfixated in materialist class action. Lenin writes, “the *struggle of classes* [is] the basis and the driving force of all development.”<sup>9</sup>

By way of an example, Engels writes in his preface to his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, “when Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, the rising middle class of the towns constituted its revolutionary element. It had conquered a

recognized position within medieval feudal organization, but this position, also, had become too narrow for its expansive power. The development of the middle class, the *bourgeoisie*, became incompatible with the maintenance of the feudal system; the feudal system, therefore, had to fall.”<sup>10</sup>

Our working definition of social revolution, though, is still quite short and therefore somewhat lacking. In his preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx goes some way in expanding upon what a social revolution is and how it comes about:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.<sup>11</sup>

One can see that social revolutions arise, then, as a result of contradictions between the forces of production and relations of production. Only when the forces of production are developed to such a point that they become “fetters” does social revolution then “inevitably” occur. In the context of capitalism, the development of the forces of production will unavoidably make the primary contradiction of social production and private ownership evermore acute. As a result, the proletariat will engage in a social revolution against the bourgeoisie.

Marx, however, does not engage in a mechanical or deterministic view of history or of social revolutions more specifically. One can use the word “inevitable” only so far as the

6 Marx, Karl. *Capital: Volume One*. p. 875.

7 Ibid.

8 Lenin, V. I. “A Great Beginning: Heroism of the Workers in the Rear.” p. 421.

9 Lenin, V. I. *Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*. p. 7, emphasis in original.

10 Engels, Frederick. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. pp. 21-22.

11 Marx, Karl. “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.” p. 264.

Marxist terminology will take us. Marcello Musto explains, “it would be wrong to attribute to [Marx] any idea that the advent of socialism is a historical inevitability. Indeed, for Marx the possibility of transforming society depended on the working class and its capacity, through struggle, to bring about social upheavals that led to the birth of an alternative economic and political system.”<sup>12</sup> Inevitability only exists, then, insofar as “humanity will inevitably be confronted with the question of advancing farther.”<sup>13</sup> In explaining the transition from one mode of production to the next, Marx does not engage in “a strictly chronological progression.”<sup>14</sup> In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx argues that “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under given circumstances directly encountered and inherited from the past.”<sup>15</sup> Social revolutions, then, neither arise spontaneously, without regard for material conditions, nor do they arise mechanically from undialectical material changes. Social revolutions are acutely dialectical in that they require the contradictions of the old society to birth the new society. This fact underscores the importance of class struggle in the equation of social revolution.

In analyzing the transition from feudalism to capitalism, Marx and Engels were able to uncover much of the history of social revolutions. In the *Principles of Communism*, Engels noted that “the Proletariat originated in the industrial revolution [part of the bourgeois revolution] which took place in England in the second half of the last [eighteenth] century and

which has since then been repeated in all the civilized countries [sic] of the world.”<sup>16</sup>

While Marx and Engels were able to, with the clarity of hindsight, historically study past social revolutions, their predictions of a proletarian revolution and the subsequent transition from capitalism to socialism were, while scientific, somewhat less informed. In fact, they were in the deep end of their own theoretical waters. In the context of a proletarian revolution, Engels writes that its purpose is to “[dethrone] the capitalists, who now exercise their authority over the production and circulation of wealth.”<sup>17</sup> But while the purpose of a social revolution remained the same (appropriation of class power), and while its causes were still the contradictions between the forces and relations of production, Marx and Engels struggled for some time to imagine what a proletarian revolution might look like. One can glimpse this naivety in the radical optimism of their early writings on the subject. In 1882, Marx and Engels soberly wrote that the *Manifesto* “had as its object the proclamation of the inevitably impending dissolution of modern bourgeois property.”<sup>18</sup> Returning to the theme of inevitability, one can glean from this passage not just a belief in the inevitability of the *event* of revolution, but also the inevitability of its success. The theme ran throughout the *Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx and Engels write, “in depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into the open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays

12 Musto, Marcello. *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography*. p. 4.

13 Lenin, V. I. *The State and Revolution*. p. 98.

14 White, Jonathan. *Making Our Own History: A User’s Guide to Marx’s Historical Materialism*. p. 31.

15 Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. p. 9.

16 Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party and Principles of Communism*. p. 77.

17 Engels, Frederick. “On Authority.” p. 424.

18 Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party and Principles of Communism*. p. 18.

the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.”<sup>19</sup> While the *Manifesto* was an intentionally propagandistic document (and therefore subject to exaggeration), they still claim proletarian revolution as inevitable when they say “what the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”<sup>20</sup>

In the mature works of the founders of scientific socialism, however, we find a more learned sobriety on the topic of the potential and inevitability of proletarian revolution. In these works, they contemplate the failures of various European revolutions.<sup>21</sup> Now, with the experience of the failed Paris Commune, Marx and Engels appear more apprehensive about the impending inevitability of the proletarian revolution. Adding to the load of the collapse of the Paris Commune in 1871 were the failed German Revolutions of 1848-49, the reversal of the February Revolution in France, and numerous other European rebellions that were crushed in the same period. In the wake of the failed German bourgeois revolutions, Engels wrote, quite pessimistically, “political liberalism, the rule of the bourgeoisie, be it under a monarchical or republican form of government, is forever impossible in Germany.”<sup>22</sup> In *Anti-Dübring*, Engels argued that the contradictions of capitalism would result either in a revolution or the “the whole of modern society” perishing.<sup>23</sup> In his preface to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*, Engels wrote, “History has proved us wrong and all others who thought similarly. It has made clear that the status of economic development on the Continent was then [in 1848] by no means ripe

for the abolition of capitalist production.”<sup>24</sup>

It was the failure of the February Revolution and the coup of Louis Napoleon in France that made Marx write famously, “Hegel remarks somewhere that all the events and personalities of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.”<sup>25</sup> The wave of reaction in Europe did much to make Marx and Engels more hesitant on the question of when proletarian revolution would occur. While they were always aware of the fact that a revolution was no easy or simple task, these experiences taught them that, as Mao Zedong put it, a revolution is no dinner party.<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, Mao was pointing more in the direction that revolutions require violent insurrection, but this maxim also speaks to the *difficulty* of revolution. In many instances, historical and contemporary, revolutions fail. The remaining objective of this essay is to understand what happens when social revolutions, bourgeois and proletarian, fail. In answering this question, we will look primarily at the work of Marx, Engels, and Luxemburg.

## MARX: LEARNING FROM FAILURE

In “On Contradiction,” Mao Zedong posits that certain social revolutions fail due to the existing material conditions within the movement or society:

Why is it that in Russia in 1917 the bourgeois-democratic February Revolution was directly linked with the proletarian socialist October Revolution, while in France the bourgeois revolution was not directly linked with a socialist revolution and the Paris Commune of

19 Ibid. p. 45.

20 Ibid. p. 46.

21 Lenin, V. I. *Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*. p. 38.

22 Engels, Frederick. *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Germany*. p. 137.

23 Engels, Frederick. *Anti-Dübring (Herr Eugen Dübring's Revolution in Science)*. p. 170.

24 Engels, Frederick. “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*.” p. 513.

25 Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. p. 9.

26 Mao Zedong. “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan.” p. 15.

1871 ended in failure? ... The sole reason is the concrete conditions of the time. When certain conditions are present, certain contradictions arise in the process of development of things and, moreover, the opposites contained in them are interdependent and become transformed into one another; otherwise none of this would be possible.<sup>27</sup>

While Mao summarizes a quite universal Marxist understanding of *why* social revolution might fail, he offers here no explanation of the consequences of such failed revolutions. While Marx and Engels never systematized a comprehensive theory on counter-revolution, their writings still demonstrate an understanding of counter-revolution as an inevitable outcome of revolution itself.<sup>28</sup> To answer our question of consequences, then, we will first turn to Marx and his analyses of the 1848 revolution and counter-revolution in Germany and two events in France: the coup of Louis Napoleon and the destruction of the Paris Commune.

The 1848 uprisings across Europe, including in Paris and Berlin, led Marx and Engels to consolidate their position that bourgeois democratic revolutions were necessary precursors to proletarian revolutions. “It was therefore the duty of the communists to support the radical wing of the bourgeoisie in order to achieve a liberal democratic political order that would do away with the vestiges of feudalism and prepare the ground for a proletarian revolution.”<sup>29</sup> The strategy that the Marxian socialists adopted was support for these revolutions, not necessarily because they were in the direct interests of the proletariat as much as they were in the indirect interests thereof. The relative development of the working class in England and France demonstrated that bourgeois revolutions led to the heightening of political consciousness and

capacity among the proletariat. Furthermore, the establishment of a liberal democratic order would allow for (limited) political freedoms, which would ease the work of the communist parties in Europe. For these reasons, lending critical support to bourgeois democratic revolutions was an important tactic.

However, the bourgeois uprisings across Europe in 1848 were unsuccessful and were met with harsh counter-revolution from states. The failure of the German revolution, in particular, would have been quite a blow to Marx given its proletarian character. Albert Scharenberg writes that in Germany, “the bourgeoisie had given up its historical task of democratizing society, and it was left to the fledgling workers’ movement to take it up in its stead.”<sup>30</sup> The historical conditions in Germany in this period were unique in that the bourgeoisie, “initially in alliance with the proletariat, [sold] out the latter to the forces of counterrevolution, namely the monarchy. Unlike France, where the bourgeoisie becomes the dominant class and suppresses the proletariat, in Germany the bourgeoisie loses its nerve.”<sup>31</sup>

In the wake of these “failures,” however, Marx wrote a series of articles detailing the issues that he identified in the revolutionary movements and the nature of revolution in general. It was in this period that he began to argue that revolutions would have to smash existing state machinery rather than merely take it over. He also undertook the argument that revolution in a single country could not succeed in the existing material conditions, given the large counter-revolutionary group of European states.<sup>32</sup> Marx’s insights garnered after the German counter-revolution demonstrate his commitment to rectification in the face of a failed

27 Mao Zedong. “On Contradiction.” p. 311.

28 Lewis Brownstein. “The Concept of Counterrevolution in Marxian Theory.” p. 181.

29 Eric Rahim. *A Promethean Vision: The Formation of Karl Marx’s Worldview*. p. 73.

30 Albert Scharenberg. “The Epic Failure of the German Bourgeoisie.”

31 Lewis Brownstein. “The Concept of Counterrevolution in Marxian Theory.” p. 183.

32 Eric Rahim. *A Promethean Vision: The Formation of Karl Marx’s Worldview*. pp. 76-77.

social revolution. In the face of the victory of the counter-revolution in Germany, Marx did not admit defeat. On the contrary, he wrote for *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, “the very cannibalism of the counter-revolution will convince the nations that there is only *one* means by which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be *shortened*, simplified and concentrated—and that is by *revolutionary terror*.<sup>33</sup>

The 1848 February Revolution in France saw the overthrow of King Louis-Philippe and the abolition of the French monarchy in general. Marx wrote that “the February Revolution was a surprise attack, a *taking* of the old society *unawares*, and the people proclaimed this unexpected *stroke* as a deed of world importance, ushering in a new epoch.”<sup>34</sup> The French bourgeoisie and working class were allies in this brief revolution. Soon after the abolition of the “bourgeois monarchy,” however, this class alliance was forfeited, and class struggle between the bourgeois republicans and the working class resumed. This in itself does not symbolize a failure. The February Revolution itself was not proletarian or socialist but was instead a bourgeois revolution that temporarily achieved its goal of establishing a truly bourgeois and modern capitalistic society in France. To this end, the Revolution was essentially progressive in that it contributed to the sharpening of the class struggle between the bourgeois and working classes that would eventually lead to an actual socialist revolution.

However, the failure of the February Revolution came years later in 1851, with the coup orchestrated by Louis Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte. The intervening period was rife with class struggle between innumerable political and socioeconomic factions, and Louis Napoleon stood at the head of the struggle

against the bourgeois republic. On December 2, 1851, Louis Napoleon, who was then President of the bourgeois republic of France, declared himself emperor and dissolved the National Assembly. This coup reversed the gains and successes that had been accomplished for the French working class and the bourgeoisie under the republic. While the February Revolution of 1848 achieved the abolition of the monarchy, with the coup of 1851, “society now seems to have fallen back behind its point of departure,” writes Marx.<sup>35</sup>

The suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie in the period of 1848-51 “kept France in breathless fear of the future terrors of red anarchy.” But while the bourgeoisie was preoccupied with this repression of the communist movement, “Bonaparte discounted this future for [the bourgeoisie] when, on December 4, he had the eminent bourgeois of the Boulevard Montmartre and the Boulevard des Italiens shot down.”<sup>36</sup> The ultimate crushing of the spirit of the February Revolution was not for nothing, however. From this failure, Marx learned the difficult lesson that class alliances between naturally contending factions could only go so far. This can be glimpsed in the replacement of the proletarian-bourgeois alliance with the suppression of the former by the latter after the abolition of the monarchy in France. This same lesson can also be seen in the abolition of the National Assembly by Louis Napoleon. This alliance between the bourgeois republicans and bourgeois monarchists was not such that it could last forever.

Marx also comes to the conclusion that each revolution is particular in its historical material conditions. He writes:

The social revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot

33 Marx, Karl. “The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Vienna.” pp. 506-7, emphasis in original.

34 Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. p. 11, emphasis in original.

35 Ibid. p. 12.

36 Ibid. p. 105.

begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition with regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century must let the dead bury their dead.<sup>37</sup>

The February Revolution of 1848 and its reversal with Louis Napoleon's coup, then, allowed Marx to conclude that revolutionaries must learn from their previous mistakes without being bogged down in dogmatism. Such blind commitment to the marching of history is undialectical, and can only lead to more revolutionary failure. To this point, Omar Dekhili writes:

[Q]uite often we encounter a reemergence of teleological thinking when it is proclaimed that the outcome of specific revolutions could only have been the one that actually occurred: the restoration of capitalism, the success of the counter-revolution, the defeat and murder of the revolutionaries. Here too, the class struggle is extinguished and replaced by the always already posited internal fate: defeat and capitalist restoration. The class struggle vanishes behind its fetishized objectification.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, Marx finds in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that revolution exists in the midst of class struggle, not outside of it. Any revolutionary alliances, therefore, are by necessity temporary. Additionally, past revolutions cannot serve as historical blueprints on which we attempt to transfix present struggles. Rather, this dogmatism and historical fetishism must be rejected in favor of a creative contemporaneous mode of thinking.

The Paris Commune was, for Marx, another attempt at the French Revolution. It consisted of a revolutionary government of the working class in the city of Paris, lasting for about 70 days from March to May 1871. Leading figures of the communist movement, including Marx, Engels, and Lenin, saw the Commune as the first instance of real socialist governance. This is not to say Marxists were uncritical of the Commune.

In practice, the Commune was governed by several left-wing tendencies simultaneously, which created internal conflicts that largely contributed to its conquest by the French Army under President Adolphe Thiers.

Lenin offers an analysis of why the Paris Commune failed, which works in line with the earlier quotation from Mao on prevalent material conditions. Lenin writes that the Commune at first had the support of the petty-bourgeoisie, patriots, and bourgeois republicans. However, "only the workers remained loyal to the Commune to the end. The bourgeois republicans and the petty bourgeoisie soon broke away from it: the former were frightened off by the revolutionary-socialist, proletarian character of the movement; the latter broke away when they saw that it was doomed to inevitable defeat."<sup>39</sup> In his analysis, Lenin concluded that the Paris Commune provided a loose outline for which future social revolutions could be based. He wrote, "two conditions, at least, are necessary for a victorious social revolution—highly developed productive forces and a proletariat adequately prepared for it."<sup>40</sup> As shall be seen, Marx takes a similarly productive approach to the issue of the failure of social revolution.

For Marx, the Paris Commune was a seminal moment in the history not just of the communist movement, but of human history. The impact of this social revolution reverberated throughout Europe and drew the close attention of Marx and Engels, among other revolutionaries. In an April 1871 letter to Dr. Louis Kugelmann, Marx outlined what he believed was going wrong with the Paris Commune. He wrote, "if you look at the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire you will find that I say that the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from

37 Ibid. p. 11.

38 Dekhili, Omar. "Against Dogmatism, Against Historical Fetishism." p. 26.

39 Lenin, V. I. "In Memory of the Commune." p. 140.

40 Ibid. p. 141.

one hand to another, but to *smash* it, and this is essential for every real people's revolution on the Continent.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Marx identifies two striking mistakes made in this historical experiment: first, “they should have marched at once on Versailles, after first Vinoy and then the reactionary section of the Paris National Guard had themselves retreated,” and second, “the Central Committee surrendered its power too soon, to make way for the Commune.”<sup>42</sup>

These points from Marx on the Paris Commune made it very clear that a failed social revolution, for Marx, is a learning opportunity. The failure of the Paris Commune was a moment of shocking setback and triumphant clarity. It made clear to Marx what had to be done before a revolution could establish socialism, and therefore contributed to the refining of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. To this point, Roland Boer writes:

The suggestion in... the letter to Kugelman... is that the commune should itself enact the proletarian dictatorship to the full so as to crush the forces of reaction and counter-revolution. In other words, by the early 1870s Marx was beginning to see the necessary connection between the proletarian dictatorship and the commune. We may see this relationship in terms of an effort to specify a dialectically inter-connected historical narrative, in which both must be present so as to enable the full realisation of the commune itself.<sup>43</sup>

As Boer draws out, Marx was dedicated to the criticism of the Paris Commune from a standpoint of rectification, of clarifying mistakes made in this early socialist experiment. The conclusion that Marxists ought to derive from this historical experience and from Marx's writings is that failure is not a cause for dismay or pessimism but an opportunity for enhancement of the party line, practical strategy, and ideological consistency.

For Marx, the failure of a social revolution also signifies continued progress. While such failures surely can be read as devastating blows to the movement, Marx remains optimistic. Upon the impending failure of the Paris Commune, Marx noted that “if the Commune should be destroyed, the struggle would only be postponed. The principles of the Commune are eternal and indestructible; they will present themselves again and again until the working class is liberated.”<sup>44</sup> Such failures are not the last word, then, but are a moment in the endless struggle.

## ENGELS: HISTORICAL PROGRESS IN DEFEAT

Engels shared many of the opinions held by Marx on the concepts of revolution and counter-revolution, as well as the implications of a failed social revolution. One argument that is perhaps better highlighted in the writings of Engels is the idea of a progressive quality precisely in the *failure* of these revolutions. It would no doubt strike most readers as strange that Marx and Engels might find a historically progressive feature in failed revolutions, but this argument is worked out of their non-deterministic understanding of revolution in general. For Marx and Engels, there was no uniform schematic for a social revolution in general (as we have seen, given that they studied bourgeois and proletariat revolutions alike) nor for a particular form of revolution. This is to say that no two bourgeois revolutions would be identical, either. “Marx drew a sharp distinction between the contemporary [1848] bourgeois revolution and the English and French bourgeois revolutions. The latter type of revolution took place at a time when the working people had not come to form

41 Marx, Karl. “Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann in Hanover.” p. 132, emphasis in original.

42 Ibid. p. 133.

43 Boer, Roland. *Socialism in Power: On the History and Theory of Socialist Governance*. p. 25.

44 Badiou, Alain. “The Paris Commune: Marx, Mao, Tomorrow.” (Quoted in).

an independent class.”<sup>45</sup> This uniqueness of revolutions meant that certain historical material conditions could result in even failed revolutions being progressive. In other words, even a bourgeois (or proletarian) revolution that failed to accomplish its central task could still draw the society closer to the ultimate attainment of that revolutionary ideal.

To this end, Engels argues in his preface to the 1895 edition of Marx’s *Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* that “the defeat of the proletariat in 1848 was inevitable, given their weakness, and that this defeat created the conditions for rapid industrialization which in turn produced a developed proletariat.”<sup>46</sup> So, the failure of, for example, the German Revolution still contributed to the development of the German proletariat, such that all was not lost. Even where Engels argued that “the industrial and commercial capitalist class were more severely defeated in Germany than in any other country,”<sup>47</sup> he still thought there was much to be gained from this unfinished revolution. While Marx developed profound theoretical implications in the study of revolutionary failures, Engels expounded the idea that failure was not monolithic. Every historical instance of revolutionary failure had in it a kernel of success.

Engels also writes in his preface to the 1895 edition of Marx’s *Class Struggles*, “the reversion to the empire of 1851 provided fresh proof of the immaturity of the proletarian aspirations of that time. But it was itself to create the conditions under which they were bound to grow mature. Internal tranquility ensured the unfettered advancement of the new industrial boom.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, he notes that the defeat of the Paris Commune did not bring about the burial of the

militant proletariat but “its most powerful rise.” Here is the historical epitomization of the idea that capitalism produces its own “grave-diggers” in the proletariat. Even where the bourgeoisie succeeds, history by necessity moves closer to proletarian revolution.

Engels’ assertion that failed revolutions produce progress is perhaps nowhere clearer than in his theoretical developments on the nature of socialist governance. For Marx and Engels (and later communists such as Lenin), the Paris Commune was the first historical instance of socialist governance, or what would be called the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” While the Commune failed, it was the pinnacle of progressive failure in that it determined what a socialist transitional state could look like. For Marx, the Commune provided theoretical opportunities to learn from mistakes. For Engels, the Commune was more of a beacon for future socialist projects. In the early writings of Marx and Engels, including in the *Manifesto*, the idea of socialist governance, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the socialist transitory stage were at best implicit, at worst unmentioned; it was only with the historical experience of the Paris Commune that these concepts began to come into conceptual maturity.<sup>49</sup> Boer writes, “when it came to actual revolutionary action and particularly the exercise of power and the first steps in trying to construct socialism, workers adopted the practical measures of German scientific socialism—that is, the proposals put forward by Engels and Marx. The only example available was the Paris Commune, to which Engels turns to back up his point.”<sup>50</sup>

Famously, in his introduction to Marx’s *The Civil War in France*, Engels wrote, “Do you want

45 Rahim, Eric. *A Promethean Vision: The Formation of Karl Marx’s Worldview*. p. 76.

46 Brownstein, Lewis. “The Concept of Counterrevolution in Marxian Theory.” p. 181.

47 Engels, Frederick. *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Germany*. p. 137.

48 Engels, Frederick. “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*.” p. 514.

49 Boer, Roland. *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance*. pp. 29-30.

50 Ibid. pp. 28-29.

to know what this dictatorship [of the proletariat] looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”<sup>51</sup> This understanding of the Paris Commune as the first instance of the dictatorship of the proletariat is continued in Lenin’s view. The conclusion that one must then draw from the failure of the Commune was not that socialist governance is unsustainable, but that the features of such governance are historically practicable. Boer draws out such lessons in his work on Engels, the particularities of which are not of consequence here. The point is that failure is not the be-all and end-all of unsuccessful revolutions; rather, one must look for the path forward that such failures create. This belief was verbalized in a speech delivered to the Communist League by Marx and Engels in 1850, wherein they said, “after the defeat of the revolutionary parties of Germany and France in July 1849, almost all the members of the Central Committee [of the Communist League] came together again in London, replenished their numbers with new revolutionary forces and set about reorganizing the League with renewed zeal.”<sup>52</sup>

## LUXEMBURG: BARBARISM OR RECTIFICATION?

The Communist Party of Germany leader Rosa Luxemburg is well-known for her timely offering from her work *The Crisis of German Social Democracy* (also known as the Junius Pamphlet): “capitalist society faces a dilemma, either an advance to socialism or a reversion to barbarism.”<sup>53</sup> While Luxemburg misattributes this quotation

to Engels,<sup>54</sup> she goes much further in developing its meaning:

What does a “reversion to barbarism” mean at the present stage of European civilization? We have read and repeated these words thoughtlessly without a conception of their terrible import. At this moment one glance about us will show what a reversion to barbarism in capitalist society means. *This world war* means a reversion to barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture, sporadically during a modern war, and forever, if the period of world wars that has just begun is allowed to take its damnable course to the last ultimate consequence... This dilemma of world history, its inevitable choice, whose scales are trembling in the balance awaiting the decision of the proletariat. Upon it depends the future of culture and humanity.<sup>55</sup>

For Luxemburg, then, the dichotomy of socialism or barbarism means that the consequences of a failed *proletarian* revolution are more dire than Marx and Engels, accustomed to revolutionary defeat, believed. The historical environment in which Luxemburg wrote, the First World War, no doubt developed this existentialist quality in her reading of the consequences of the potential for the failure of the socialist movement.

In order for a revolution to succeed, Marxists hold that the revolutionary class in question must be well organized and developed in the modality of the existing productive relations. Luxemburg shares this view, writing, “the seizure of political power by the proletariat, that is to say by a large popular class, is not produced artificially. It presupposes (with the exception of such cases as the Paris Commune, when the proletariat did not obtain power after a conscious struggle for its goal but fell into its hands...) a definite degree of maturity of economic and

51 Engels, Frederick. “Introduction to Karl Marx’s Civil War in France.” p. 192.

52 Engels, Frederick. *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Germany*. p. 142.

53 Luxemburg, Rosa. “The Junius Pamphlet.” p. 321.

54 In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels wrote, “The reason is that both the productive forces engendered by the modern capitalist mode of production and the system of distribution of goods established by it have come into crying contradiction with that mode of production itself, so much so that if the whole of modern society is not to perish, a revolution in the mode of production and distribution must take place,” p. 170.

55 Luxemburg, Rosa. “The Junius Pamphlet.” p. 321, emphasis in original.

political relations.”<sup>56</sup> In her view, the Paris Commune was not the outcome of a protracted class struggle by a conscious proletariat, but rather, by and large, a fluke of history. This is not a criticism so much as an observation. The conclusion is that Luxemburg, as was consistent with her leadership of the KPD, was highly committed to organizational power in the socialist movement.

Luxemburg takes something of a contrary view to that of Engels. Whereas Engels saw progress even in defeat, Luxemburg seemingly saw such defeats as resounding setbacks with real costs to the socialist movement. She writes in her classic *Reform or Revolution?*, “according to scientific socialism, the historic necessity of the socialist revolution manifests itself above all in the growing anarchy of capitalism, which drives the system into an impasse.”<sup>57</sup> For Luxemburg, the consequence of a failed proletarian revolution in her own troubled times would be a degenerate form of capitalism, unable to cope with the crises of the early twentieth century. “The last forty-five years in the development of the labor movement are at stake. The present situation is a closing of its accounts, a summing-up of the items of half a century of work.”<sup>58</sup>

Luxemburg’s moment for revolutionary change came with the November Revolution, also known as the German Revolution of 1918-19. However, as is mourned by socialists then and now, this revolution failed. Historian William A. Pelz writes that in the midst of this postwar revolutionary activity, “even Rosa Luxemburg, called the ‘best brain since Marx,’ was initially

opposed to an uprising, then unsure, decided to support a bid for power, and finally resigned to defeat.”<sup>59</sup> While caught in this whirlwind, Luxemburg was still able to provide a cogent class analysis of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary elements in the struggle; “while we may think that we have reckoned with the last reserves of the counter-revolution against us and our efforts, there remains another important reserve which has not yet been taken into account: the peasantry. Precisely because the peasants are still untouched by socialism they constitute an additional reserve for the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.”<sup>60</sup> In defeat, Luxemburg showed a similar strategy of rectification that we have seen in Marx. Her analytical insights were strengthened, rather than deterred, by this setback.

Writing the Junius Pamphlet in the middle of the First World War, Luxemburg noted that “for the class conscious proletariat to identify its cause with either military camp is an untenable position.”<sup>61</sup> This much was clear, given that WWI was an inter-imperialist conflict, the culmination of what some scholars call the European Civil War,<sup>62</sup> wherein the European states vied for imperialist ownership of the Global South. Of course, this conflict was among the bourgeoisies of the continent, as the proletariat did not stand to gain from the colonization of other peoples.<sup>63</sup> The time was then ripe for revolution, particularly in Germany. What Luxemburg also noted, however, was that the greater portion of the proletariat, which was *not* class conscious, was drawn into the nationalist fervor of the war. Seeing and fearing this development, she wrote that the war had “destroyed so many old illusions

56 Luxemburg, Rosa. *Reform or Revolution?* p. 68.

57 Ibid. p. 7.

58 Luxemburg, Rosa. “The Junius Pamphlet.” p. 314.

59 Pelz, William A. *A People’s History of the German Revolution*. p. 91.

60 Luxemburg, Rosa. “Our Program and the Political Situation.” pp. 370-71.

61 Luxemburg, Rosa. “The Junius Pamphlet.” p. 336.

62 Losurdo, Domenico. *War and Revolution: Rethinking the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. pp. 108-9.

63 Except in the sense of the creation of a labor aristocracy.

and portents, [and] created so many new forces and new problems, [such] that a return to the old Europe that existed before August 4, 1914, is as impossible as the return to prerevolutionary conditions, even after an unsuccessful revolution. The proletariat knows no going back.”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, she argued (in an unfortunate critique of Leninism) that “the working class... insists on making its own mistakes and learning the dialectic of history for itself.”<sup>65</sup> These quotations seem to turn the socialism or barbarism paradigm on its head. Here, Luxemburg seems to be saying that a revolutionary defeat is either unthinkable or *not* the precondition to “barbarism.” The conclusion is that the socialist movement will not cease even in the most decrepit and predatory form of capitalism imaginable. Perhaps this apparent contradiction is more dialectical than it seems. In a way, Luxemburg summarizes Marx’s position of rectification and Engels’ concept of undeterred progress. Even in the face of glaring defeat, the struggle continues.

## CONCLUSION

By reading the works of Marx, Engels, and Luxemburg on the topics of counter-revolution and defeat, it becomes clear that revolutionary defeat is not necessarily something to be mourned as much as it is something from which to learn. Marx teaches that these historical failures, however tragic, are lessons to be used to refine strategies and positions. Engels holds that any revolutionary activity must result in a tightening of contradictions, pushing the working class ever closer to the aspirational revolutionary moment. Luxemburg, ensconced in the historical conditions of early twentieth-century Germany, demonstrates that the communist movement can and must continue in spite of even major setbacks.

In closing, it would be worth remembering

64 Luxemburg, Rosa. “The Junius Pamphlet.” p. 337.

65 Luxemburg, Rosa. “Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy.” p. 265.

66 Lauesen, Torkil. *The Long Transition Towards Socialism and the End of Capitalism*. p. 13.

the words of Torkil Lauesen, whose recently published work, *The Long Transition Towards Socialism and the End of Capitalism* has this to say:

There have been many attempts to build socialism in the past. Their failure does not necessarily mean that their strategies were wrong, that their attempts were fruitless, or that their mission is impossible. The transformation from capitalism toward socialism is a long ongoing historical process of effort, learning, and trials as the capitalist mode of production runs out of options and declines.<sup>66</sup>

The ideas of Marx, Engels, and Luxemburg on the potential of revolutionary failure, therefore, remain relevant today. As Lauesen would argue, their strategies and ideas were not wrong just because they each failed to establish socialist in their own contexts. On the contrary, socialists today can continue to look to the lessons and experiences of the past in order to better understand the present.

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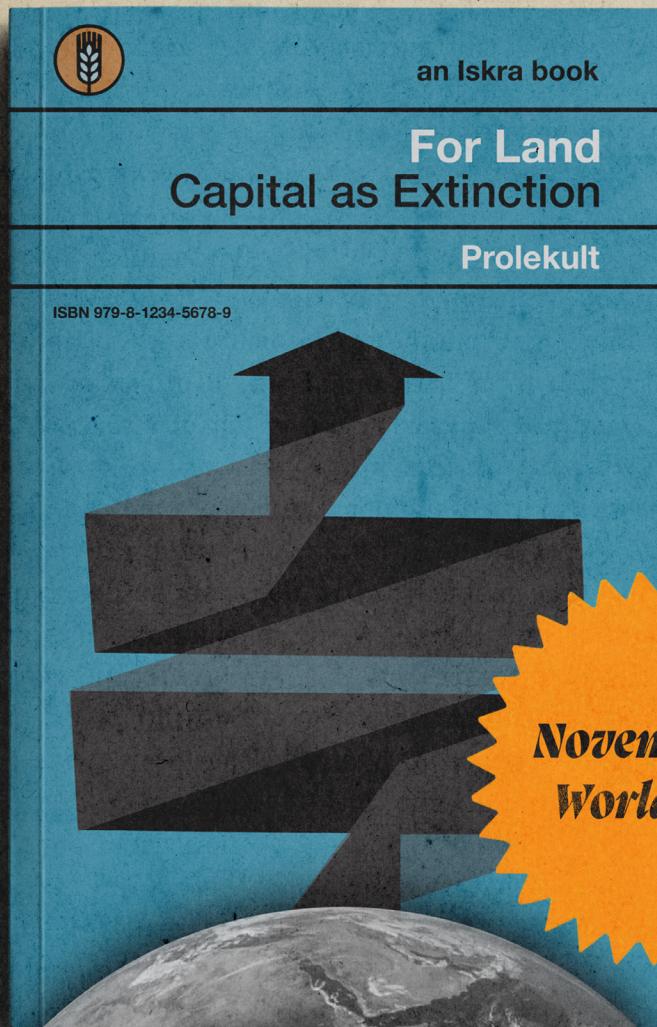
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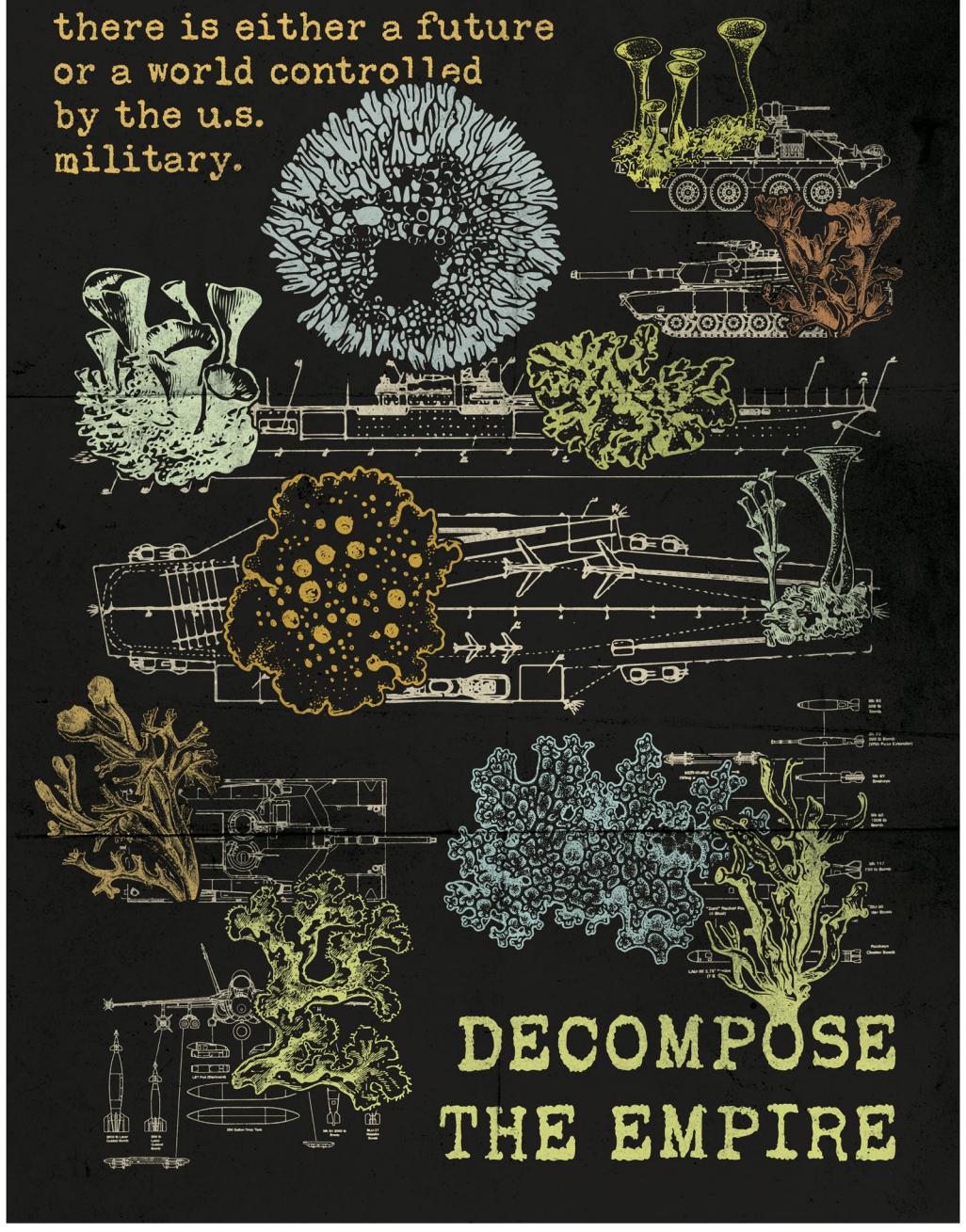
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or a world controlled  
by the u.s.  
military.



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of death

*will fall*



i promise you.

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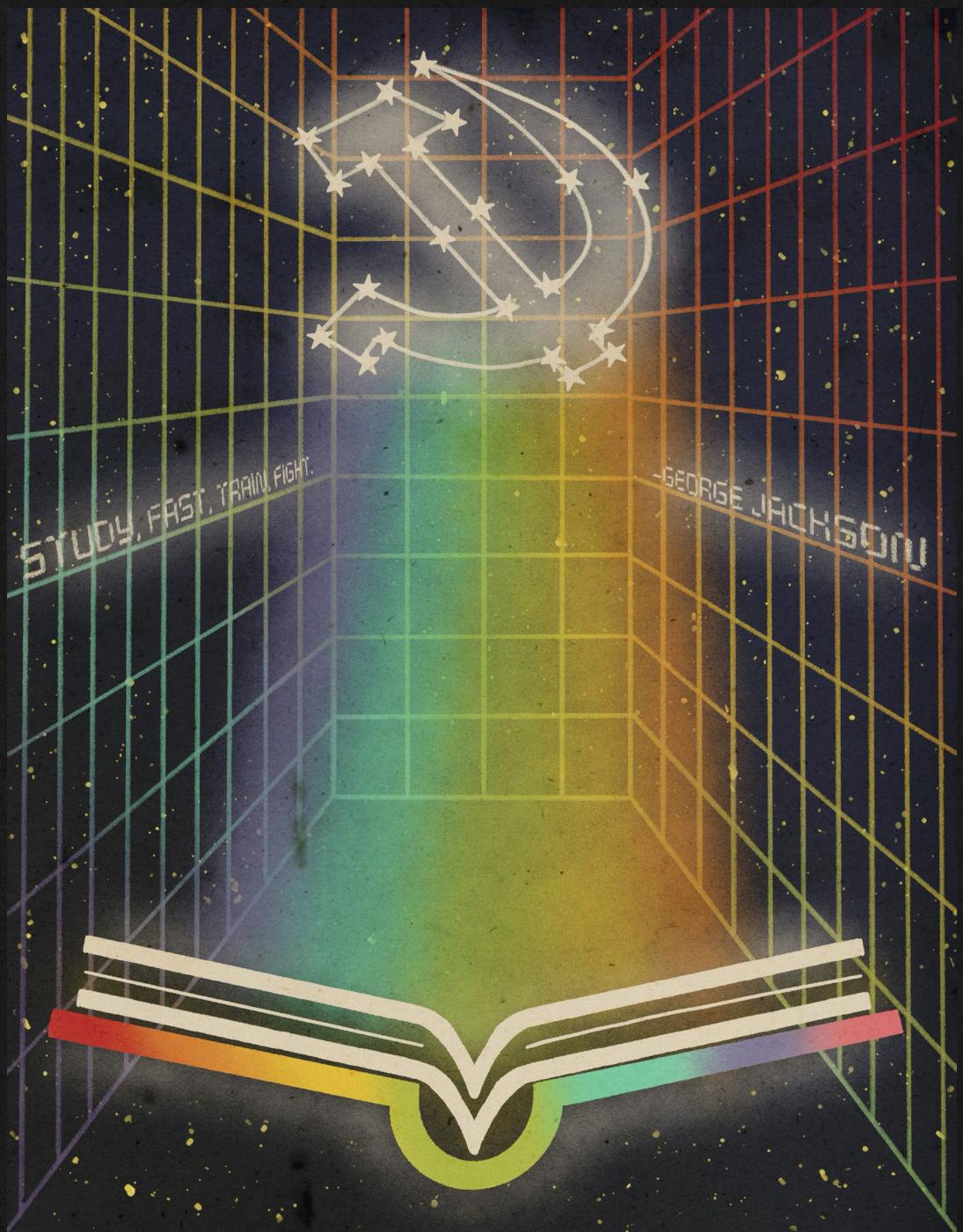
*I PROMISE YOU*



RED BAIT is an agitprop illustrator in California striving to build revolutionary working class culture to raise class consciousness within the United States through art. Her work and contact information can be found on Instagram [@theweirdingway](https://www.instagram.com/theweirdingway).

**RED BAIT**

*END THE OCCUPATION*



**RED BAIT**

*GEORGE JACKSON RAINBOW*



**RED BRIT**

*PROGRAM A NEW REALITY*

# PALESTINA VENCERA



# PALESTINE WILL WIN

فَلَسْطِينٌ سَيِّدَتْهُنَّ

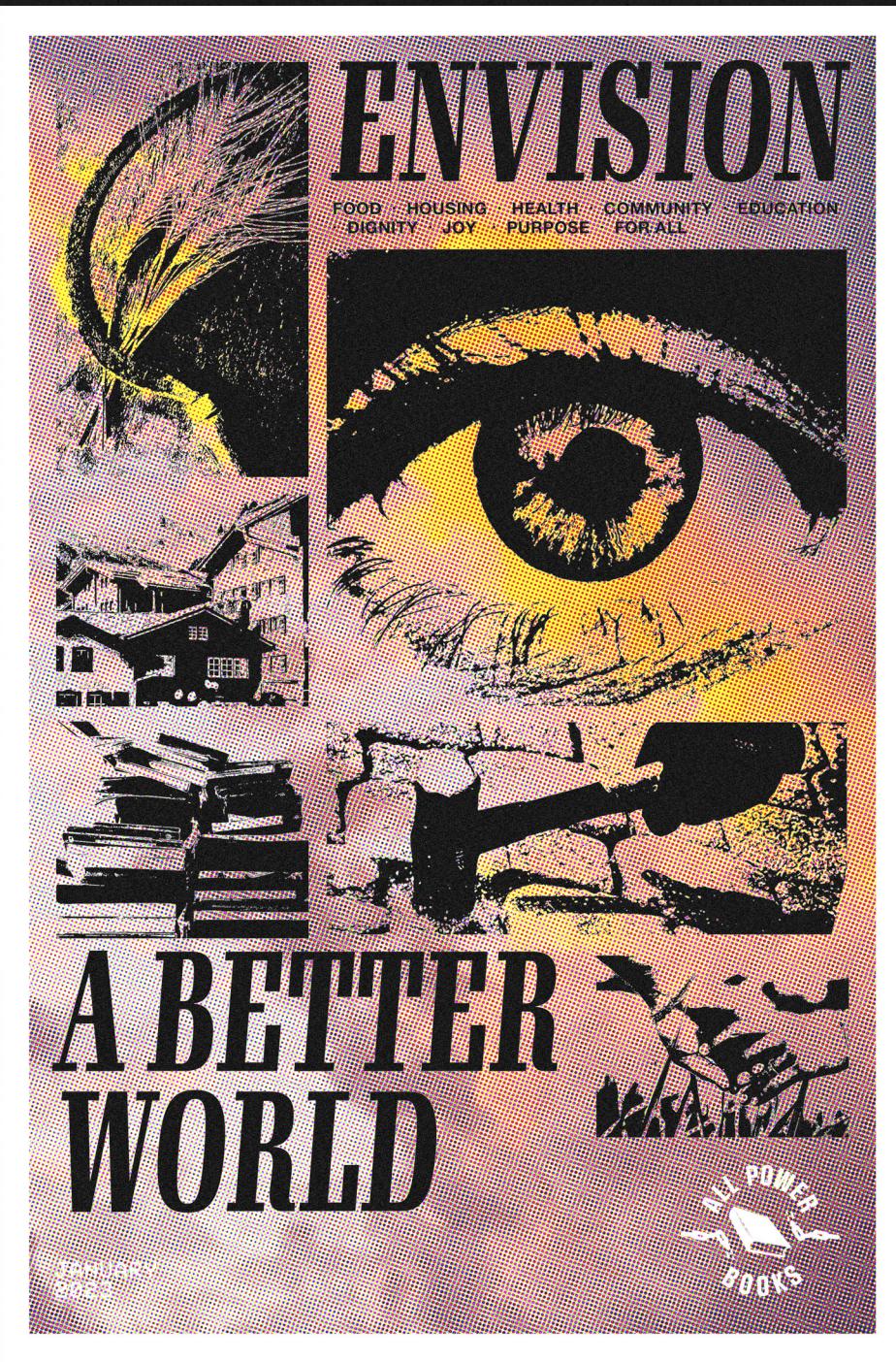
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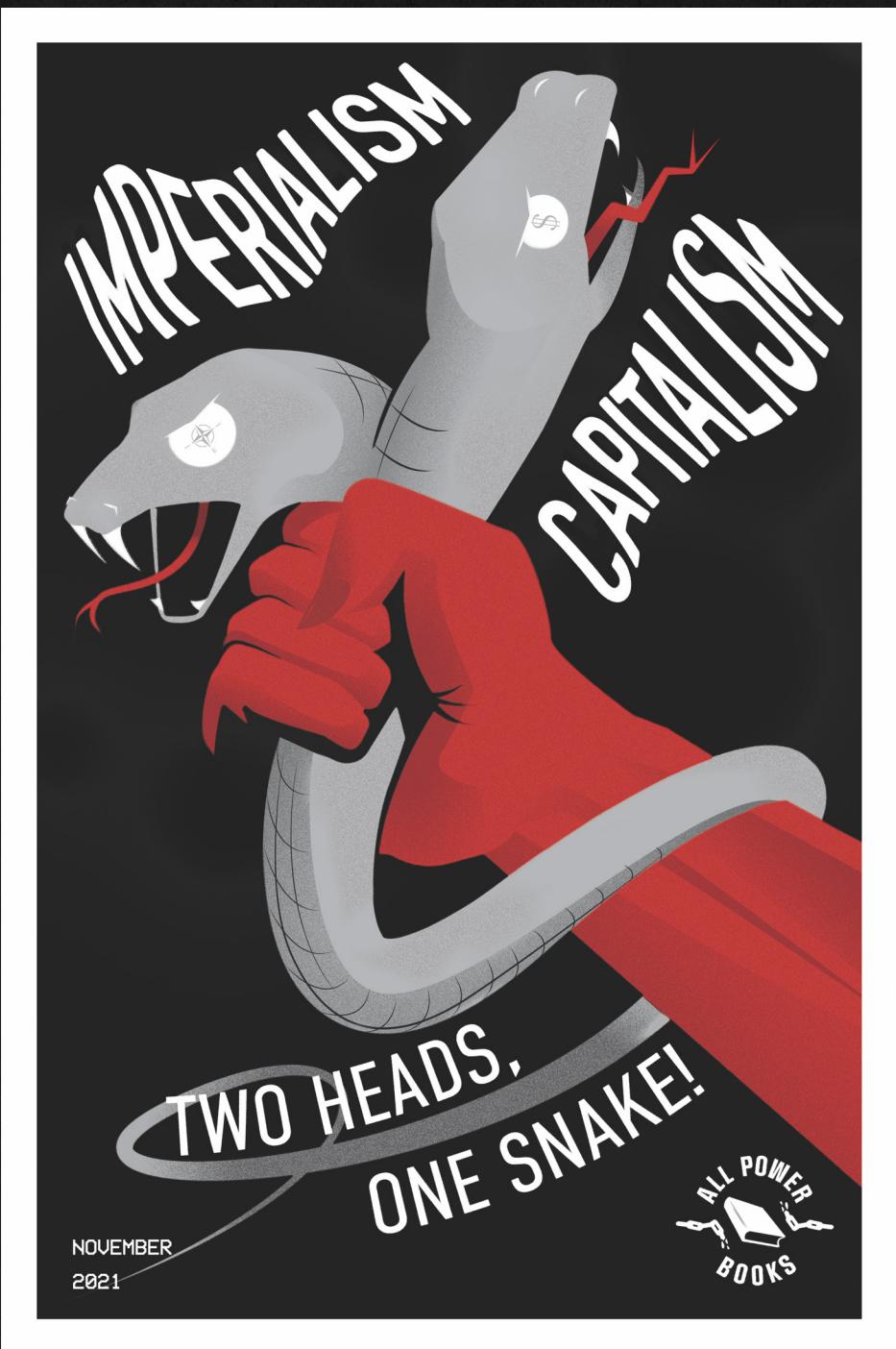
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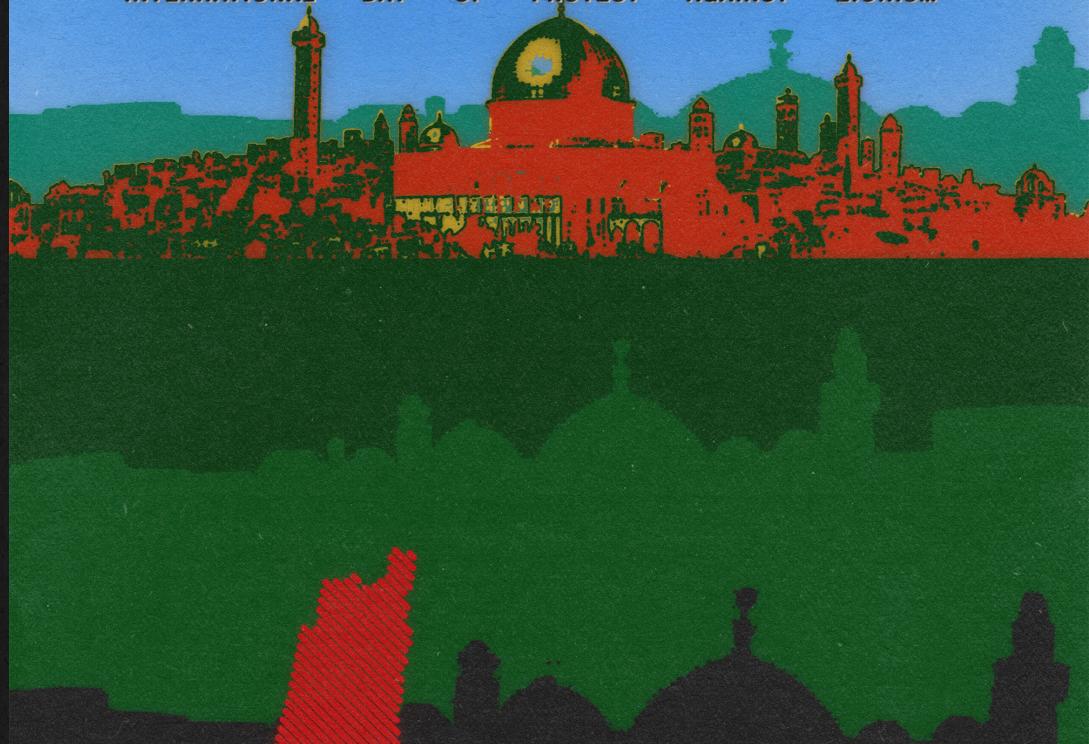
GQ's art can be purchased at [ALLPOWERBOOKS.ORG](http://ALLPOWERBOOKS.ORG), with all proceeds supporting the operation of All Power Books and its programs, which are all 100% volunteer run and not-for profit. His work can be found on Instagram at [@gqpropganda](https://www.instagram.com/gqpropganda).



NOVEMBER 2021

# AL-QUDS DAY

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PROTEST AGAINST ZIONISM



END THE OCCUPATION - END ALL AID TO ISRAEL

# PALESTINE LIVES!

THE IN THE PEOPLE OF THE STRUGGLE THE FOR A WORLD STAND LIBERATED UNITED PALESTINE

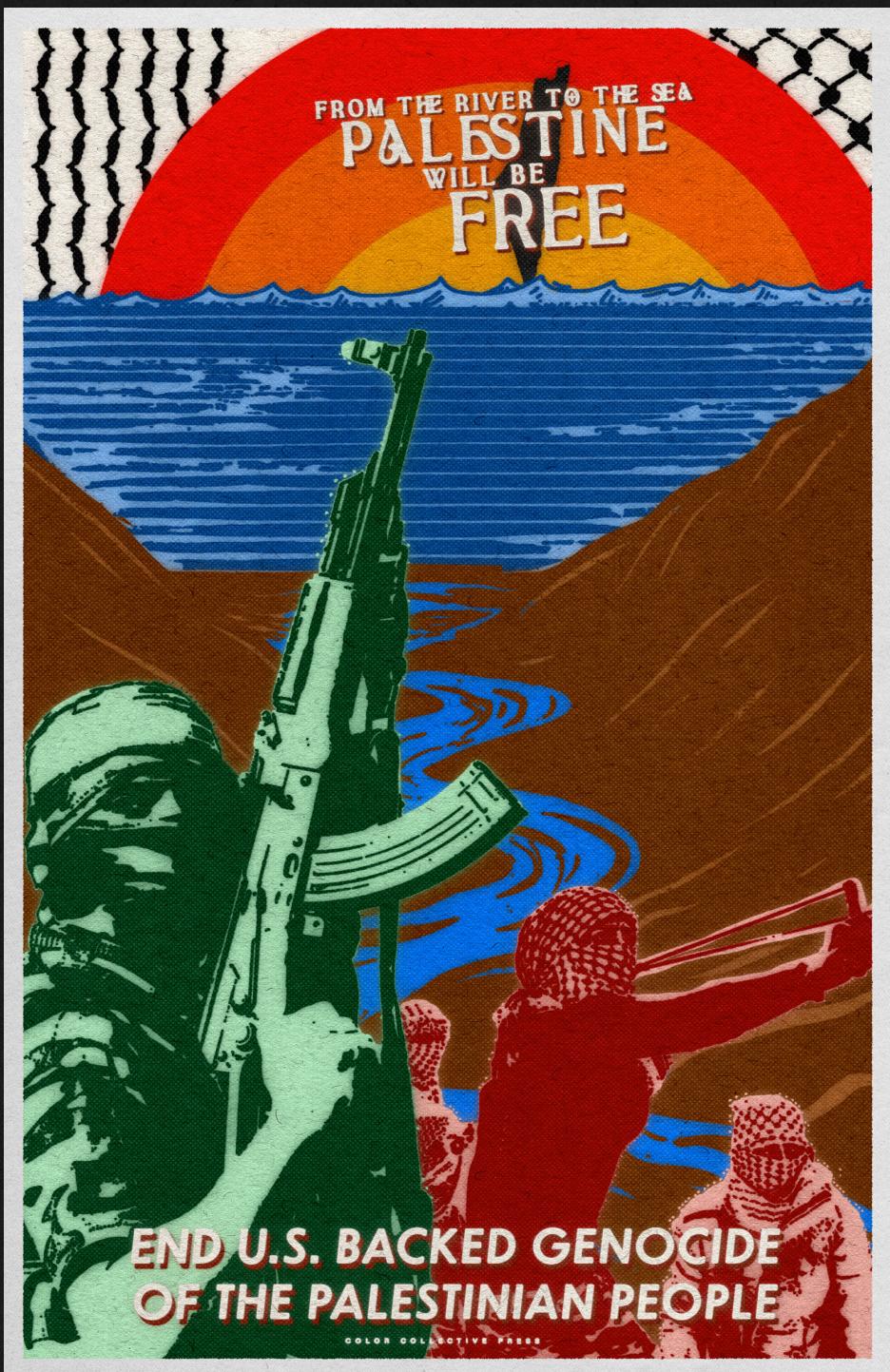
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# THE WORLD IS WATCHING



## PALESTINE WILL BE FREE

colonized peoples across the world stand in solidarity  
with the palestinian people against israel's settler colonial state-sanctioned  
apartheid program of genocide backed by u.s. imperialism  
from the river to the sea, palestine will be free  
decolonization is not a metaphor

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**COLOR COLLECTIVE PRESS**  
*THE WORLD IS WATCHING*

# CAPITAL, A FAILED PORTRAIT #7

@GLUMBIRD

A long pregnancy, longer than a long century.

Father unknown; mother disarticulated.

Every ship was a womb, every ship baring  
spices, slaves and sweet sugarcane.

Coins fed through a stretched placenta -  
Byzantine to Venice to Amsterdam to London.  
Coins dribbled, dropped, pilfered and pinched  
from all four corners, coagulation of an embryo.

The churches asked commitment—old Islamic  
merchants, conquistadors. Pilgrims found  
a new body, quietly sitting at every holy site,  
fetus stretched over the fonts and pulpits.

The water broke, we don't know when for sure,  
but the land was raised by its bloody rush,  
and as the convulsions came closer together,  
peasants fled their ramshackles and paddocks.

Coins came tumbling from every blistered  
crevice of the birth canal, and the world  
heard your scream, knew that you were breathing.

# CAPITAL, A FAILED PORTRAIT #8

@GLUMBIRD

You are the cancer cell metastasised  
inside the cancer cell, spreading in red  
fury through our flesh and your flesh.  
You are chemotherapy stock crisis  
and the factory tumours that follow,  
cutting into the land and the air  
and the people, with their empty pockets.  
You are the liquidity seizure, the flood  
of money hoards into the nervous system  
and the eyes rolling back yellow and childlike.  
You are a disease, like a phoenix.

# RIVERSIDE CEMETERY

Ty HOLTER

I'm still working on a theory  
for what happens when the names  
all become too worn to read.

For when the corresponding piece of paper  
too has, following a change in personnel  
been misplaced.

There's Archer, limping bronze.  
Shouldering disease.

And Constable Duggan shot in the day  
by whom the rumors swirl was a friend  
and whom the placard paints as doing just  
what a street gang ruffian does.

Duggan, when asked who killed him  
his last words were I'll never tell.

A trial tone from the refinery  
plays in case of a catastrophe.

The magpies, at war with the other birds  
take the side of the crows.

Two tents in the ravine  
where late last summer was a prairie fire.





# A GROUNDINGS DISCUSSION ON THE KOREAN STRUGGLE: BEHIND THE PROPAGANDA

by D. MUSA SPRINGER &  
DEREK R. FORD

## INTRODUCTION

Before a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 29, 2024, U.S. Air Force General Anthony J. Cotton emphasized that U.S. imperialism faces the biggest challenges in its history: “We are confronting not one but two nuclear peers: the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China,” he stated.<sup>1</sup> As part of his plea for more than 100 B-2 nuclear-capable bombers, he clarified that what is more dangerous than the growing military capacity of Russia and China is “the growing relationships” between the two, Iran, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea).

Perhaps without knowing it, Cotton did state a fact: the DPRK’s nuclear program is intended “to ensure regime survival and influence Republic of Korea and U.S. forces in the area.” In other words, it exists to defend the country’s independence and sovereignty against the U.S.

Cotton neglected to mention that the U.S. spends more on its military than the combined total of the next 10 countries,<sup>2</sup> although in a February 15, 2024 interview he conceded the DPRK “doesn’t have the capability or capacity of Russia or China.”<sup>3</sup> Cotton, the rest of the Pentagon, politicians, and mainstream media couple this with accusations of the DPRK’s increasingly “aggressive rhetoric” against the U.S., without mentioning the DPRK has a “no-strike first” policy, unlike the U.S.

As the possibility of war increases and as

1 Clark, Joseph, ‘Military Leaders Say Maintaining U.S. Strategic Edge Requires Continued Investment’, *DOD News*.

2 Peter G. Peterson Foundation, ‘Chart Pack: Defense Spending’.

3 Eliason, William T., ‘An Interview with Anthony J. Cotton, *National Defense University Press*.

Trump recently renewed the travel ban preventing U.S. citizens from visiting the DPRK, *Peace, Land, and Bread* is publishing the following updated and slightly modified transcript of an episode of the *Groundings* podcast series.<sup>4</sup> The episode was initially prompted after the guest, Derek R. Ford, led the last U.S. peace delegation to the DPRK in August 2017, just before the U.S. imposed a ban prohibiting its citizens from traveling to the northern part of Korea. Like all episodes, however, the host D. Musa Springer doesn't interview Ford but rather engages in a "groundings" discussion.

"Groundings" is named after the revolutionary praxis of Walter Rodney, who democratized knowledge by breaking barriers between the "academy" and the streets. As Springer writes in their description of the series, "Groundings: we sit, we listen, we talk, we share, and we learn." Springer and Ford cover a range of issues, from the modern history of Korea, Ford's trips to the north and south, the evolution of the Juche ideology and its global appeal, and other key topics that each break through the overwhelming U.S. propaganda against the DPRK.

Springer is a cultural worker, community organizer, and journalist from Atlanta. They are the International Youth Representative for Cuba's *Red Barrial Afrodescendiente*, an editor at Hood Communist, and a longtime member of the Walter Rodney Foundation.<sup>5</sup> As a journalist they have reported on the prison and other grassroots struggles, and produced several documentaries, including, *Parchman Prison: Pain & Protest* (2020). Springer is assistant editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Pamoja* and their book, *Alive & Paranoid*, is available through Iskra Books.

Springer's interlocutor, Ford, is an organizer, teacher, and educational theorist. They organize with the Indianapolis Liberation Center and the ANSWER Coalition, serve as co-coordinator

of Free Shaka Shakur, and teach at DePauw University, where they created and continue to lead the only U.S. university exchange program with Chongryon Korea University in Japan. In addition to books and other popular and academic publications, Ford has published on the Korean struggle in the *Journal of Korea University, Choson Sinbo, Uriminzokkiri* (the sister paper of the Workers' Party of Korea), *International Magazine, No Cold War*, and elsewhere, including the foreword to *Socialist Education in Korea* (Iskra Books, 2022).

## THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA BEYOND PROPAGANDA

**DEREK FORD:** Hey, thanks for having me so much, Musa.

**MUSA:** So, you first traveled to North Korea, AKA the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK, last summer. Am I correct?

**DEREK:** Yes, we went in early August 2017, just after the Trump administration announced the travel ban on U.S. citizens visiting the DPRK but just before it went into effect. We were the last group of U.S. citizens in the country. I organized a Korea Peace Tour delegation with four other people, all traveling on U.S. Passports. Although one member, my friend who has been to the DPRK hundreds of times but was born in South Korea and is the only person born there to teach at Kim Il Sung University. He's not allowed back in South Korea at this moment in time and has been exiled from South Korea because of his peace work on and off since the 1980s. Like all activists in the South, he was tortured and imprisoned by the Korean equivalent of the CIA. We were hosted by a new media organization in the country that's an independent organization, which means that it's independent of any political parties, including the Workers' Party of Korea, and the state apparatus itself. We

<sup>4</sup> This and other episodes are available at <https://groundings.simplecast.com>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.walterrodneyfoundation.org/>.

were able to travel freely and had pre-arranged talks with scholars, farmers, students, scientists, workers, and soldiers that were informal.

**MUSA:** As someone who is on the left and is a well-studied organizer, did you still have pre-conceived notions, or a thin layer of propaganda that you arrived with?

**DEREK:** Definitely. As critical as I am of the media, the only information I had of the country, people, and history was filtered through others, including many with deep roots in the Korean struggle and who were Korean. Nonetheless, I had certain gaps left unexamined.

I will note two. The first was the remarkable objectivity of the official tour guides. We went on structured tours for museums, for example. It was here that the level of objectivity displayed by the guides and escorts was truly remarkable. For example, I spoke multiple times with the soldier who escorted us to the demilitarized zone, which is where the talks between the North and South were happening at the time of our initial interview and where negotiations between the DPRK, China, the U.N. Command, and U.S. Forces occurred during the war against Korea. As we approached the border, the guide said to us, “what we’re going to show you is what happened according to our perspective. And we just want you to try to put yourself in our shoes and try to understand where we’re coming from.”

It was the same thing at the newly renovated Sinchon Museum of U.S. War Crimes commemorating the Sinchon massacre of Koreans by U.S. forces. There, the tour guide said to us, “we’re going to tell you the history of the war from our perspective, and we ask that you take this into account and make up your own mind.” Even scholars like Bruce Cummings who are critical of the U.S. and widely studied in the DPRK and at Korea University, give the impression such tours are ridiculous and over-the-top propaganda efforts where you are told: “the DPRK has never done anything wrong” and,

you know, “look at all these atrocities” with their overblown narratives. That wasn’t the case at all.

**MUSA:** I don’t mean to interrupt, but I think that propaganda narrative goes much deeper than just scholars and writers. One of the most controversial, but most popular movies a few years ago, starred James Franco and Seth Rogen and the entire premise was North Korea was showing people fake restaurants, fake religious spots, and fake towns. The whole premise of the movie was that it was a fake tour that they were taken on to make them fall in love with North Korea. I’ve even seen CNN and MSNBC commentators talking about how when Dennis Rodman went there, he was only shown “one side of the country.” This narrative is definitely very deeply ingrained.

**DEREK:** And it serves to ultimately, discount, ahead of time, anyone’s actual experiences there. If you say something positive about North Korea or defend it in any way, people say, “how would you know, you’ve never been there.” And I can say, “actually I have been there.” Yet this framing allows my experiences to be rejected outright, because “yeah, but you didn’t really see everything, just what they wanted you to see.” Not to mention, I’m pretty sure the entire state and military apparatuses had much more important matters to attend to than orchestrating millions of people for the sake of a handful of U.S. citizens—the arrogance!

We spent a lot of time in Pyongyang, which since the 5th century was the capital of Korea. During Japanese rule, Pyongyang was developed around maintaining colonialism. As Zorica Pogrmić Bojan Djerčan wrote, after 1953 it was rebuilt from scratch under socialist ideology and the Juche idea.<sup>6</sup> It is highly developed and organized along polycentric lines, where there are several centers rather than just one. There we saw the equivalent of a five-star hotel in the U.S., but we also saw people living in makeshift housing in the countryside and di-

6 Zorica, Pogrmić, and Bojan, Derčan. “Urban Development of Pyongyang under the Influence of Juche Idea.”

lapidated housing throughout the country. Yet they were very proud to show us everything, just as proud of what they continue to rebuild in the countryside and cooperative farmer housing in Migok Cooperative Farm as they were of the new science research center in Pyongyang.

This illuminates the Juche ideology or philosophy that, among other things, guides the country's foreign policies. People in the media are always saying we don't know anything about the DPRK and that it's irrational and unpredictable, but in reality, their government's behavior is incredibly consistent and measured, based on a particular kind of rationality.

**MUSA:** Well, I was just going to say, I think that along with the government's actions and rationality being extremely consistent, it's also very transparent. There are official DPRK websites that put out news briefs, daily updates and information about tourism, e-libraries for reading, and educational materials about their country. And there are pages that explain the Juche ideology, for example. So along with it being predictable, it's also fairly transparent, especially compared to other countries. We sometimes know a lot less about the U.S. Government or Western governments than places like the DPRK, which provides a good deal of information on the internet.

**DEREK:** That's true. Now, given the U.S. is still at war and can return to full-scale bombings at any moment, there is obviously certain information that we can't access, which disturbs the colonial mindset of many. Still, they are transparent in many ways and there are numerous objective scholarly sources on the country, its history, politics, and culture. The problem is even these sources are not understood outside of the dominant and *dominating* singular imperialist narrative of "the other" that is the DPRK.

**MUSA:** Would you say there's a double standard that takes place? I know that when tourists come to New York City, for example, or they come to the West Coast and go to LA and Hol-

lywood, they tend to only gravitate to the parts of the city that are attracted to tourists, that are "developed," that have five-star hotels and large theaters and arenas. I don't know any tourist who comes to the U.S. and actively seeks out impoverished areas or areas where there have been decades of structural racism that now has it looking terrible and demolished and you know, all these various things. I think there's an interesting double standard. Would you agree with that?

**DEREK:** Certainly. There are places in the U.S. you can't visit. They don't take foreign tourists to military installations or prisons. When talking about my trip there, I always emphasize that I'm from the U.S., the country that destroyed Korea between 1950 and 1953, carpet bombed it for years, and still maintains a first-strike nuclear policy against the DPRK (while the DPRK maintains a policy of defensive or retaliatory nuclear weapon use). It's understandable and logical for North Korea to determine my movements within or entry into their country; it's *their* country. The idea that any person should have unfettered access to anywhere in the world comes from a mindset framed by colonialism. Everyone should respect North Korea's sovereignty, and that includes their management of tourism, an incredibly destructive industry that has and continues to ravage oppressed nations. It's a safeguard against the chauvinistic destruction that so many, especially American, tourists engage in upon oppressed and formerly colonized nations. When you come in peace and friendship, that is not the case. If I walked into the Pink Houses in New York City, started antagonizing people, proceeded to try and steal a cherished heirloom, and got badly beaten as a result, that's my fault!

**MUSA:** Definitely, and tourism is an extremely colonial structure. I'm from the Caribbean islands. Tourism generates a lot of money, but never for the people who it's largely impacting. Another point you made was the U.S. War aggressions against Korea. Because to me it would

be justified if there wasn't objectivity and was more of a subjective appeal to emotion, given the fact that your entire country was carpet bombed by 630,000 tons of explosives. So, you mentioned the Juche ideology. Can you talk a little bit more about that and what you saw firsthand, as well as your understanding of the ideology?

**DEREK:** Juche is predominantly translated as "self-reliance" and its English transliteration is "one body." I always thought a more accurate and comprehensive translation was "subject-hood," and people and officials in the DPRK as other citizens of the North, like those in Japan, agreed. If you were to say, for example, that the proletarian—which always included colonized people—is a subject of history, that means that it's the struggle of classes—broadly construed—that makes history in a given moment. That's what Juche means. In the circumstances of Korea, it means the Korean masses, and not the Japanese or U.S. governments, make Korean history.

Just like the roots of the North are in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism, so too is the Juche idea. Korea was an independent unified nation for thousands of years, united by a common language, culture, traditions, customs, economic relations, and of course contiguous territory. Japan colonized Korea formally in 1910 after launching an offensive in 1890 and subjected the continent to the brutality of colonialism. The Japanese enslaved Koreans and brought them to Japan by force, kidnapping, and lying. They were given Japanese names and forbidden to speak Korean or practice their cultural traditions, from culinary practices to dance and musical forms of expression. It was the same for the enslaved Koreans in Japan. Many descendants of Korean slave laborers still live in Japan, fighting to live as Koreans in Japan and working for the reunification of the peninsula.<sup>7</sup> Most, around 90 percent, came from what is now

South Korea.

There's a theory that Japan even changed the English spelling of the country from "Corea" to "Korea" so it would come *after* Japan in the alphabet!

There was, as always, resistance. Kim Il Sung, who is credited as the founder of the DPRK, was a particularly important resistance fighter. His family members were resistance fighters, and after his father's death, Kim vowed to continue that legacy. In high school, he was expelled for organizing walkouts and protests. After enrolling in a nationalist resistance school and finding its ideology wanting, he founded the Down with Imperialism League (later renamed the Anti-Imperialist Youth League), and the Koreans trace the origins of Juche to a June 1930 meeting of the Anti-Imperialist Youth League and the Communist Youth League. There Kim urged the unification of the two groups and articulated the need to not only overthrow Japanese rule but build a communist Korea by uniting peasants and workers. In his introduction to *Juche! The Speeches and Writings of Kim Il Sung*, Li Yuk-sa writes—in accordance with other Korean accounts—that at that meeting Kim said, "it is absolutely impossible to achieve independence with foreign aid" and that "the only way is for us Koreans to fight and defeat the Japanese imperialists by our own strength."<sup>8</sup>

The formal argument of Juche and its adoption as state policy came in 1955, with a famous December 28 speech Kim gave to Party Propagandists and Agitators. A lot happened between 1930 and 1955. The Communist Party of Korea was formed officially in 1925 but was dissolved the next year. At the advice of the Third International, Kim and the communists formed a united front with the Chinese fighters in the area in their joint struggle based in Manchuria against the Japanese. Some estimate the majority of the Chinese Party in the area at that time

7 Ford, Derek R. "Chongryon."

8 Li, "Introduction," 9.

was primarily Korean because of their successful efforts to recruit peasants there. Yet some Chinese fighters, the nationalists, were anti-communists as were some Korean nationalists, and they betrayed the communists and murdered many of their comrades, as Kim recalls in his 1945 speech, "On the Building of New Korea and the National United Front."

There was also the tragic "Minsaengdan incident," which refers to a pro-Japanese infiltration into the Korean resistance struggle. As Kim writes about in the 4th volume of a collection of compiled speeches, *Kim Il Sung with the Century*:

The 'Minsaengdan' was the product of the intellectual development of the Japanese imperialists' colonial rule of Korea. They had set up the 'Minsaengdan' to undermine the Korean revolution through stratagem and trickery. Failing in their attempt to rule over Korea with guns and swords and in the guise of a 'civil government', fussing about 'Japan and Korea being one' and being of 'the same ancestry and the same stock', the Japanese imperialists aimed at brewing fratricide among the Koreans to destroy the revolutionary forces and to resolve their worries in the maintenance of peace.<sup>9</sup>

He writes that around 100 Minsaengdan suspects became leading fighters in the Korean struggle. The efforts to rid the struggle of such infiltrators turned into what he calls an "ultra-Leftist struggle" that killed many unjustly and "caused great damage to our revolution."<sup>10</sup> Between 1932 and 1935, at least a thousand Korean communists were killed by their Chinese comrades. The highest estimates are about 2000 to 2,500. Kim himself was almost killed, escaping partly because no one could deny his commitment to Korean independence. Throughout the Chinese Revolution and the existence of the Third International, the Koreans had to maintain independence between both entities while not alienating either.

**MUSA:** To contextualize this on a larger, more global scale, this is in the late '40s and we have decolonial movements that are pretty much

being waged all across the world, particularly across several African nations and a few Caribbean islands as well. Am I correct?

**DEREK:** Absolutely.

**MUSA:** Okay. I just want to situate that in a larger context to draw out that this is congruent with and in conversation with larger, decolonial struggles that are happening, as well as borderline socialist and socialist uprisings taking place in areas like Ghana and Cuba. So, Korea finds itself situated in what is turning into a split and deteriorating relationship between the two large socialist superpowers.

**DEREK:** Exactly. When Stalin died, there was an internal struggle in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. There was a lot of instability, and this is when some anti-Soviet revolts flared up, like in Hungary. Counterrevolutionaries were trying to seize this instability. Khrushchev emerges as a leader in 1955 and 1956. He's the first secretary of the CPSU at this point, and he begins to articulate a theory of peaceful coexistence, which is the idea that the Soviet Union and the U.S. can peacefully coexist; it's an olive branch to the U.S.

Yet the People's Republic of China had just had their revolutionary victory, while the Soviet's Bolshevik Revolution was back in 1917. A new generation was emerging in the Soviet Union that wasn't necessarily grounded in the revolutionary struggle, whereas in China there was still a very real revolutionary ethos. There were a series of debates over particular policies and criticisms of particular policies that went back and forth between China and the Soviet Union.

That is all proper and important, but this generated into a state-to-state conflict when the Chinese ended up characterizing the Soviet Union's social system as social imperialist. On the other hand, the Soviets signed the im-

9 *Kim Il Sung with the Century* (Vol. 4), 13.

10 Ibid., 9.

perialist nuclear arms deal that threatened the Chinese Revolution by restricting its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

The struggle between the two became so intense that in 1960, the Khrushchev leadership recalled all Soviet technicians from China who were playing a critical role in the economic development projects modernizing the country. In the Worker's Party of Korea, which emerged in 1948 through the coalescing of a couple of different communist groups with Kim Il Sung's leadership, there were pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese groupings. There were really important questions debated: Where would the party stand on the ideological struggle between the two forces? What country would they develop economic ties with to rebuild the country? The state was geographically and politically caught in the middle of this fight. Ultimately, the North Koreans needed assistance and cooperation from both the USSR and the People's Republic of China, but they didn't want to be dictated to by either of these socialist giants. They made a sort of quid pro quo arrangement for aid and trade. The situation came to a head in 1956 in February, when Khrushchev made his secret speech at the 20th Congress where he repudiated Stalin and his legacy, partly by chalking it up to a "cult of personality" that could be read as a critique of the DPRK.

**MUSA:** It wasn't just an intra-party struggle, right?

**DEREK:** Yes, or rather both intra- and inter-party. The struggle continued after the formation of the DPRK, as the Party included pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions. Kim noted in 1955 that still many Koreans knew more about Chinese and Soviet history than they did about Korean history, which manifested in politics and realms such as literature and the arts.<sup>11</sup> Juche was, at least initially, formulated as a clarification of Marxism-Leninism. "Marxism-Leninism is not a dogma; it is a guide to action and a creative

theory," he said, so it "can display its indestructible vitality only when it is applied creatively to suit the specific conditions of each country." Remember that this was during the emerging Sino-Soviet split, and the fact that Korea remained an independent line throughout was quite significant and no doubt played a key role in their ability to survive beyond the Soviet Union and overthrow of the Eastern Bloc socialist countries.

Kim spent a summer in the USSR during this period. During this time, the pro-Soviet faction and pro-China factions of the WPK conspired to depose Kim at an upcoming Central Committee meeting. While he was gone, the official newspaper of the party's Central Committee ran a column endorsing the errors of the Stalin era, including the cult of personality. When the plenary happened, however, both factions were shouted down by the rest of the central committee because these factions were looking to the USSR and China not just for economic support but also for things like culture. They argued that Korean culture was backwards, and they had to embrace Soviet or Chinese dressing styles. Because Korea is a nation with, thousands of years of history, the portrayal of Korean culture as backwards or somehow inadequate led even more people to gravitate towards Kim who, by this time had articulated Juche.

Importantly, however, Kim never claimed to have "invented" Juche. He was always careful to emphasize that it was born *through the decades-long anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle*.

The 1955 speech denounced formalism and dogmatism, or the idea that the tactics and policies of either the USSR or China should be copied in Korea. This is why he was so explicit in articulating Juche relative to Marxism-Leninism.

I think that these are the factors that contribute to Juche. It was born in the anti-colonial struggle and the partitioning of Korea. It's

11 Kim Il Sung, 'On eliminating dogmatism and formalism and establishing Juche in ideological work.'

sharpened in response to the attempted takeover of the WPRK, and then it's implemented to mobilize the party and the country to forge an independent path that would secure the country from intervention by larger socialist countries, who are both important allies to the DPRK. And there's another speech in 1965, which is when he explains Juche in practical terms. There are three principles, independence in politics, self-sufficiency in economic development, and self-reliance in terms of defense. He's calling it a realistic, creative, and independent interpretation of Marxism-Leninism (which should be redundant but unfortunately isn't). For Kim, it was a way of practicing Marxism-Leninism, not a "higher stage" of it. That said, it's of course evolved, and there was a notable shift after the overthrow of the Soviet Union.

**MUSA:** It's not a competing or combating ideology to Marxism-Leninism, it's more so a way to apply it. And even more specifically, one that was forged through decades of struggle, which is made to be applied to the Korean context and the Korean people's struggles. One of the things that I have heard and seen often in rooms with other communists, who are speaking about the Juche ideology, is that it's slightly too vague, meaning: it could mean anything at all. The idea of "man is the master of his destiny" is seen as too vague by a lot of people. And most of the people who I hear saying that are white Westerners. So, the concept of self-reliance is somewhat foreign to them. Having seen the Juche ideology firsthand structurally, being in the country, and watching it play out in real-time, do you have a different understanding?

**DEREK:** I do think so. I think many people across the world took inspiration from Juche and the DPRK's development, right? Che Guevara went to Pyongyang and said, "this is the model; Cuba should be looking at what they have done." Both Cuba and the DPRK placed special emphasis on education and maintaining the revolutionary spirit of the masses, arguing that it was this energy and creativity that was the

key to socialist construction.

When they built a Juche tower in DPRK around 1982, delegations from all over the world, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and even the United States sent plaques that are still on display. The reason why they're studying Juche is because they're looking for an independent path. Juche is articulated as a refusal of dogmatism, as it doesn't make sense to import it mechanically into another context. It worked. If you think about how much the DPRK has been able to withstand: they helped defeat Japanese imperialism, kicked the U.S. below the 38th parallel and in 1953, forced them to sign an armistice, survived the right-wing shift in China, survived the demise of the Soviet Union and the "Arduous March." Even today, you'll ask a question in the DPRK, and then they'll respond by just saying "Juche."

It's not a supernatural thing, but a common thread throughout history and politics, and a source of inspiration and pride. They reference it a lot, but we should refuse the colonial drive to *understand* or grasp it.

Think about it like this. When you have a unique experience with someone you can't quite articulate it 100 percent, that's what makes it unique. Later, something will remind you of it, and you look at each other and know exactly what they're thinking. Let me just end with this. On the last night, as is customary, we went out for dinner and karaoke. As the Korean comrades were getting ready to sing, they prepared us by saying: "this is our song; this is Juche." And wouldn't you know it, they start belting out—while holding back tears—Frank Sinatra's "I Did it My Way!"

**MUSA:** I think that another portion of it is that most of the criticisms on the left of the Juche ideology are extremely Western and U.S.-centric. There's a professor in Nigeria, Dr. Muhammad Abdullah, and he's actually been to the DPRK over 60 times in the last decade alone. And he's very set on keeping the Juche idea alive

and well in West Africa. And in speaking with him, I learned that all throughout the decolonial struggles that were taking place across Africa, the socialist and communist groups within West Africa, specifically, were receiving correspondence and aid from North Korea, and were very much involved with North Korean politics.

For example, in Burundi Korean engineers traveled there to help them build infrastructure. In Zimbabwe, Koreans helped train soldiers to fight off colonial leaders. All across Africa, for example, there was this connection and this reverence for the Juche idea. It resonates very deeply with other people who either were or still are trying to escape some kind of colonial stronghold exacerbated by the West. So, I certainly think that its “vagueness” is intelligible from a colonial mindset or a situation of domination that many people in the West simply don’t get because they’ve never lived under those kinds of structures or standards. In speaking with Dr. Abdullah Muhammad, one of the things that he noted is that in his travels to the DPRK, the presence of soldiers and military personnel is abundant, but the relationship with them is vastly different than in almost any other country he’s been to. In that, they’re friendly and are actually working for the people and helping the people in their daily tasks. And they’re not some separate, stratified entity that’s just a violent force within the country. Did you notice something similar? Can you speak on that a little bit?

**DEREK:** It’s true, and in fact the Korean People’s Army specialists who provided training were key to the successful overthrow of the settler-colonial regime. One thing is you don’t see any cops. I think I saw one police car the entire time I was there, except for like traffic cops. And traffic cops are like crossing guards. What they do is they blow their whistles, and they pull you over. We got pulled over once a day and it was astounding. What you do when you get pulled over is you get out of the car, and you go approach this traffic guard. One of our delegation members was a Black Cuban man from the

United States. And he was like, “whoa, I would never get out of my car” based on his experiences in the U.S.

**MUSA:** Even hearing that is just a foreign concept for me as a Black person.

**DEREK:** You see government cars get pulled over also, and they do the same thing. They aren’t held above the law. They too were going too fast, or without windshield wipers on, or something like that. You see soldiers and the only reason you can tell that they’re soldiers is because they have uniforms on. But oftentimes the uniforms are unbuttoned, because we were there in August, so it was hot. You see them engaged in construction projects and tilling the fields because an efficient way to coordinate large-scale production is to use the army. And the DPRK isn’t waging war against any countries or occupying any countries, so what else are their soldiers going to do, other than prepare to defend the country and engage in production?

That’s what’s happening and you see evidence of it as they move amongst the people. The soldiers are always unarmed, and when they’re walking around you can tell that they are no different than other people. No one cowers or moves to the other side of the street to avoid them or starts ensuring they are in proper dress or anything. Now, when you’re walking down the street in the U.S. and you pass cops, you shut up, stop talking, look straight ahead, etc. But that doesn’t happen in the DPRK with the soldiers. People joke with them. We even saw one woman slap a soldier in a playful interaction. People are very comfortable with the military because they’re from the people, right? It’s not as if there’s an intense class or racial stratification where soldiers are drawn from one particular group and sent to repress another group. The dynamic is 100 percent different from the U.S. They’re not trying to, like, intimidate people, by taking up as much space as possible or whatever, they’re just moving and doing their thing. People are respectful of that, and they’re respectful of the people; they are one body.

We were there right in August 2017, which is when Trump threatened to reign down “fire and fury” on the country. Hundreds of thousands of people went to sign up to volunteer for the army and people who had retired re-enlisted. The army is a central institution in daily life and the government. In the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union that devastated both the DPRK and Cuba, there were some large-scale natural disasters like droughts and tidal waves. The army was deployed during the “Arduous March.” The army was the sort of central institution that guided the country through that difficult period in terms of mobilizing production. The power has since shifted back away from the military towards the State and the civilian government. That was codified in the last party Congress of the WPK in a couple of important reassessments away from the military and towards civilian posts. People are proud of the military because it’s an important defense and agent in continuing to be independent and the continuing decolonial project in Korea.

**MUSA:** One of the things that is happening at the time of recording this episode is we’re seeing peace talks between the DPRK and South Korea. Now, from my understanding, based on speaking with various people who have been to the DPRK and speaking with actual North Koreans themselves, is that there isn’t animosity between the two different Koreas. It was essentially exacerbated by the U.S. And the U.S. has been the main party driving the wedge deeper and deeper at every chance it gets. I want to talk briefly about the language used inside of North Korea when discussing South Korea. Because what I’ve been told, they’re very aware that South Korea is an occupied body, occupied by the U.S. military, in an attack against the DPRK.

**DEREK:** Absolutely. In the DPRK, the South Korean government is known as a puppet government of the U.S. I would say the main thing that framed the narrative for the hundreds of North Korean people that I spoke to is that South Korea houses their brothers and sisters

who aren’t yet free. And if anything, they feel sorrow for people forced to *still* live under U.S. occupation. That’s the feeling; not animosity. Interestingly, when we went to the 38th parallel border, the U.S. troops knew we were coming, and they left so we would only see North Korean Soldiers on the Northern side of the parallel. After we left the border, one of the soldiers came back and got us. And he was like, “hey, come here,” and we followed him to see the U.S. troops coming back out as soon as we left.

And there’s always talk that Pyongyang wants to forcefully reunify the peninsula, but that’s actually not the case. What we were told is there needs to be a Federation, and before there’s complete unification, we need several decades of inter-Korean cooperation and a federalized system. I’ve been to both North and South and it breaks my heart to know that I have friends in the North and South who can’t go to the entirety of their country, even though I can. Or at least, until August 30th of September 1, 2017, I was able to go. Numerous differences developed through the division of the peninsula, but it’s still one nation, and its priority remains its peaceful reunification.

**MUSA:** I guess that’s a good segue into the last topic I want you to cover: the idea of “peaceful reunification.” I know that the DPRK does not have a first-strike policy anywhere in their constitution. Does it ever mention any kind of preemptive first-strike situation? Because you have Donald Trump in the U.S. Painting the country as this massive aggressor inches away from pressing the nuclear button. Is it just me, or is that very shallow representation false? Does it represent their military policies, whatsoever?

**DEREK:** No. The DPRK will say some bombastic things, but there’s always an “if.” *If* we are attacked, we do XYZ. It’s never that “we *will* XYZ” because they are incredibly smart. If you think about the skill that it takes to manage the historical life of that country, there’s an incredible collective intelligence there, and it’s not a collective intelligence that would think that the DPRK

could beat the United States militarily. A war is the last thing that they want. The number one thing that they want is peace, but peace to them isn't having 30,000 U.S. troops occupying half of their country. The U.S. is the sole force preventing reunification, and the presence of U.S. bases in Japan and Guam and elsewhere, having nuclear-equipped and now nuclear submarines off their coast, that's what prevents peace: the U.S.

There is no animosity toward the *people* of the U.S. As someone who is a U.S. Citizen, a white guy with blonde hair who is pretty clearly not Korean, people there treated me with the utmost kindness, generosity, and respect, including, a survivor of a war crime committed by my government. In Sinchon, the U.S. took mothers and separated them from their children, locked them both in these caverns, poured gasoline on them, and lit them on fire. I met one of three survivors. When the attack happened, he was in a corner of the building, passed out, woke up several days later, and left. He was there and wanted to build our solidarity.

It's incredible to me, but completely normal, that the Korean people, throughout so much destruction and war that's been thrust upon them, have not lost any ounce of their humanity and are always extremely welcoming.

**MUSA:** I think that's a good place to end right there. I want to thank you so much for coming on. This has been a great talk. I think it will be very educational for everybody who is listening right now. Do you want to tell people how they can find your book?

**DEREK:** Yeah, sure. I'm on Twitter @derekford, and that's probably the best way. You can find my latest book as a free high-quality PDF over at ISKRABOOKS.ORG.

**MUSA:** All right sounds good. Well, thank you, Derek. Have a good day.

**DEREK:** Thanks so much!

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# SOCIALIST CHINA: THREE EXPLANA- TIONS AND FIVE CHAR- ACTERISTICS

by KYLE FERRANA

BY NOW, the historic achievements of the People's Republic of China in the twenty-first century have transfixed the people of the world. China's dominance in manufacturing and ascent out of the periphery to become the world's second-largest economy<sup>1</sup> are undeniable, and no less riveting are its eradication of extreme poverty for hundreds of millions of rural citizens, its unparalleled construction of modern infrastructure, and its rapidly-advancing technological prowess. China now produces the vast majority of the world's renewable energy capacity, along with most of the world's new trees, and is the outspoken pioneer of cutting-edge electrical storage systems, meltdown-proof thorium reactors, and experimental nuclear fusion technology. The Chinese high-speed rail network is larger and busier than all other HSR networks in the world combined, and Chinese cities are a wonder of safe, enormous, and convenient rapid transit systems. Videos capturing flying cars, elaborate drone shows of animated pictures and messages in the sky, and the fantastic coordinated night-time illumination of skyscrapers in metropolises such as Chongqing, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou proliferate online. "The development of China is the master key," remarked English economic historian Adam Tooze in the summer of 2025, "to understanding modernity."<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, for such an unprecedented transformation to have taken place in just a few decades, China must be doing something right. Observers in the developed world, watching their own economies and infrastructure stagnate and decay, must be seeking clues to avoid

1 When GDP is adjusted for purchasing power parity, however, China overtook the U.S. to become the world's largest economy in 2014.

2 Kuo, Kaiser. *Adam Tooze Climbs the China Learning Curve*. 00:45:40.

future collapse. Those in countries that were economically on par with China in 1980, such as Mexico, Brazil, or India, must eagerly wish to replicate China's dramatic ascent. Social reformers everywhere cannot fail to notice that China's success includes not just a fantastic increase in wealth but also in general quality of life across essentially the whole population, a combination that has elsewhere become decidedly uncommon. It is therefore a great surprise that the official ideological current of this miracle, namely socialism with Chinese characteristics, is so poorly understood.

For two entire generations and more, the people of the world have been lectured to from on high that socialism "does not work." The demise of the Soviet Union is pointed to as the proof. So if there exist some characteristics that *can* make it work—and indeed work far more effectively than the anti socialist orthodoxy to which there was supposedly no alternative—someone had better tell us what they are. Yet when asked what exactly the "Chinese characteristics" of socialism with Chinese characteristics are, most cannot say.

If pressed, some people might express the vague idea that the characteristics are nothing more than the reintroduction of private enterprise in China, a process officially started by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Others may just as vaguely opine that the characteristics amount to or substantially include China's legacy of Confucianism or Neo-confucianism, or even more nebulously, "traditional Chinese culture" or "Chinese civilization." On the other hand, to ask this question of the Communist Party of China, which is after all responsible for inventing the phrase, can be quite dangerous. Not because it will censor the asker—but because in a few minutes, they may wish they'd asked what the characteristics *weren't*, instead. They include not only Deng Xiaoping Theory, but the Theory of the Three Represents, both Mao Zedong Thought and Xi Jinping Thought, and the key principles of the Scientific Outlook on Devel-

opment. Each of these components is composed of a multitude of lists, concepts, and slogans, such as the Four Cardinal Principles, the Eight Honors and Eight Disgraces, the Four Comprehensives, the Ecological Civilization, and the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation. Culture indeed plays a key role, as do the path, the system, and the theory of the characteristics. Reform and Opening Up remains an enduring component of the characteristics that must yet be comprehensively deepened and strengthened, along with the socialist market economy, Common Prosperity, and the system of the People's Congresses. It seems that every aspect and activity of the government is defined somewhere in this multitude, and if there's an aspect that isn't, that was an oversight, which will be corrected at the next National Congress of the Communist Party, if not sooner. New principles and policies are being added all the time. It means everything. There is so much specificity and substance to the official description that upon reading it, the characteristics can feel even vaguer than the uninitiated foreign impression of them.

All three of these explanations—which I'll denote respectively as the "Capitalism Explanation", the "Culture Explanation", and the "Chinese Explanation"—have distinct origins and different groups benefit from their continued existence. I hope to explore and demystify each one, and along the way, identify some key characteristics of Chinese socialism that may be useful to foreign observers. These characteristics will be considered not as concepts and slogans directly copied from official statements of the Communist Party, nor as specific policies, but as a collection of simplified and summarized observations of what about the Chinese system and Chinese success really is particular to China and what about it could become universal—that is, what can be adapted to the political economic systems of other countries.

The primary method I will use is comparison—to begin with, a comparison between the

Chinese system and some other socialisms that did *not* have Chinese characteristics.

## CHARACTERISTICS DERIVED FROM MISTAKES OF THE SOVIET UNION

In addition to everything above, the Constitution of the PRC, Chapter I, Article I, states plainly that “[l]eadership by the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>3</sup> This phrase, ratified by the 19th National Congress of the CPC, almost certainly reflects the CPC’s analysis of how the Soviet Union was destroyed. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, after all, had certainly been leading the USSR; the CPSU was not just the ruling party but the *only* political party legally permitted in the Soviet Union—until the final year of its history.

In 1988, Russian chemist and CPSU member Nina Andreyeva used the term “historical nihilism” to describe the rewriting of history to demonize Soviet national heroes and discredit historical Soviet achievements that was taking place just before the USSR’s destruction.<sup>4</sup> Her analysis heavily influenced the CPC; the constitutional amendment of the 19th Congress coincided with the release of the Chinese documentary *Historical Nihilism and the Disintegration of the USSR* (2017),<sup>5</sup> which was reportedly commissioned by Xi Jinping himself.<sup>6</sup> The documentary further developed Andreyeva’s the-

sis, arguing that this process had begun in the 1950s, when Nikita Khrushchev denounced Joseph Stalin and launched the “De-Stalinization” campaign to criticize and correct the former leader’s mistakes.<sup>7</sup>

To this day, Stalin’s legacy remains controversial throughout the world. Even his most dedicated defenders will acknowledge the grievous errors the CPSU committed during his tenure as General Secretary, instead taking note of the historical context and circumstances of these errors, and weighing them against Stalin’s considerable positive accomplishments. His legacy, in fact, is not unlike Mao Zedong’s, who is also routinely demonized in Western histories and presses. During the De Stalinization campaigns, Mao himself remarked:

In the Soviet Union, those who once extolled Stalin to the skies have now in one swoop consigned him to purgatory. Here in China some people are following their example. It is the opinion of the Central Committee that Stalin’s mistakes amounted to only 30 per cent of the whole and his achievements to 70 per cent, and that all things considered Stalin was nonetheless a great Marxist.<sup>8</sup>

Upon his death, Mao did not receive the same treatment by the CPC that Stalin did by the CPSU. Even after the Cultural Revolution, which the CPC considered a calamitous error, Deng Xiaoping said of Mao:

3 People’s Republic of China. “Constitution of the People’s Republic of China.” Chapter 1, Article 1.

4 Andreyeva, Nina. “I Cannot Waive Principles.”

5 The documentary, and its co-incidence with the 19th Congress is mentioned in the following article: 单超 (Dan Chao), “铁笔柔情 不辍不弃——记中国社会科学院离退休干部先进个人李慎明 (A pen that never gives up its tenderness: Li Shenming, an outstanding retired cadre of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences).” The documentary can be watched for free on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJCX5S9O4yg>.

6 Wei, Lingling. “Xi Has Spent Decades Preparing for a Cold War With the U.S.”

7 This was far from the first time that the CPC has judged Khrushchev negatively. In 2000, General Secretary Hu Jintao is said to have remarked that a very important factor in the Soviet Union’s disintegration was Khrushchev “throwing away Stalin’s knife.” (Chinascope. “Preparing For Danger In Times Of Safety—Historic Lessons Learned from the Demise of Soviet Communism: Introduction.”) Both Deng and Mao disparaged Khrushchev on many occasions, and Mao’s disagreements with Khrushchev were a significant factor driving the Sino-Soviet split.

8 Mao Zedong. “On the Ten Major Relationships.”

We shall certainly evaluate Chairman Mao's merits and mistakes which characterized his life. We shall certainly affirm his merits and say that they are the primary importance, acknowledge his errors and assess that they are secondary, and while making them public we will adopt a realistic attitude. But, also, we shall certainly continue to uphold Mao Tse-tung Thought, which was the correct part of his life. No, it isn't only his portrait which remains in Tienanmen Square: It is the memory of a man who guided us to victory and built a country. Which is far from being little. And for this the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people will always cherish him as a very valuable treasure. Do write this: We shall not do to Mao Tse-tung what Khrushshev did to Stalin...<sup>9</sup>

Inspired by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and urged by Western propaganda networks, the *Historical Nihilism* documentary asserts, CPSU leaders gradually allowed the accomplishments of not only Stalin but of Lenin, of the Soviet military heroes of the second world war, and finally the Party itself and the entire Soviet project to be delegitimized. Thus when the Soviet Union joined the PRC in embarking upon market reforms during the 1980s, it went further than the PRC and began *political* as well as economic reforms, ultimately "reforming" away the CPSU itself. The rest is history; upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, the subsequent deindustrialization and plunder of the public sector by the new capitalist robber barons of Eastern Europe resulted in widespread poverty throughout the 1990s and the deaths of several million people.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of historical nihilism and the need to resist it are now a part of official CPC doctrine. Thus we have determined the first salient Chinese characteristic: *socialism with Chinese characteristics upholds the Communist Party's heroes despite admitting their flaws.*<sup>11</sup> If

the CPC is correct in attributing the death of the Soviet Union to historical nihilism, then this characteristic is without a doubt a universal one, and the survival of revolutionary governments—past or future—depends on them upholding their history the way the CPC has upheld its own.

This is not the only lesson that the Soviet Union's example has to teach. While *Historical Nihilism* identifies the perpetrator and the murder weapon, it does not fully explore the motive. "In essence," it claims briefly, "historical nihilism is nothing more than a special reflection of class struggle in the ideological field."<sup>12</sup> Khrushchev, in the CPC's analysis, was not motivated solely by spite or by other personal reasons. Instead, he represented a faction within the CPSU that was ideologically opposed to Stalin not for any moral reasons, but on behalf of a privileged economic strata within the Soviet Union that invested in corrupting the CPSU leadership for the sake of its own survival and prosperity.

In 2006, the Party Development Research Association and the Chinese Academy of Social Science had co-produced another documentary series exploring this covert struggle in some detail. It claimed that although "most of the Soviet Union's cadres had integrity, courage, and dedication [and] were firmly walking on the socialist path", corruption was rife within the CPSU. Official positions were being clandestinely bought and sold for money, bribery was commonplace, and egregious incidents of corruption were swept under the rug rather than dealt with justly and publicly. In 1991, said the documentary, "most of the more than 10 thousand rich people in Moscow were former party and government

9 Fallaci, Oriana. "Deng: Cleaning Up Mao's 'Feudal Mistakes.'"

10 Scheiring et al. "Deindustrialisation and the Post-Socialist Mortality Crisis."

11 This characteristic is arguably common to every surviving socialist project. For example, the Communist Party of Vietnam still upholds the legacy of Hô Chí Minh and Võ Nguyên Giáp, and Communist Party of Cuba has never denounced Fidel Castro or Che Guevara.

12 Li Shenming. *Historical Nihilism and the Fall of the USSR*. 1:03:25.

officials.”<sup>13</sup>

During the Khrushchev era, Mao was forthright in his insistence that the Soviet Union and the CPSU itself contained a distinct bourgeois class, which he came to believe had taken control of the state. In a 1964 pamphlet, he listed as evidence the numerous instances, taken from articles in Soviet newspapers, of officials selling public property on the black market, chairmen of collective farms spending public money on illicit speculation, and managers of Soviet state-owned enterprises “abus[ing] their positions and amass[ing] large fortunes by using the equipment and materials of the factories to set up ‘underground workshops’ for private production”.<sup>14</sup> Other observers had more measured opinions; American sociologist and Marxist-Leninist Albert Szymanski, conducting careful research into the Soviet economy during the 1970s, came to the conclusion that although the Soviet intelligentsia were a “social stratum distinct from the working class” with the potential to crystallize into a bourgeoisie, Mao’s insistence that capitalism had been restored in the Soviet Union was basically incorrect, and no wealthy corporate owning and managerial class existed that was remotely comparable to that which existed in Western countries.<sup>15</sup> There is little doubt, however, that an illicit “shadow economy” did exist in both the Soviet Union and the PRC during the latter twentieth century (though in the PRC’s case only until the Reform era, when private enterprise was legalized), even if the relative extent of each is not known and difficult to estimate.<sup>16</sup>

Khrushchev’s faction eventually overreached, and in late 1964 he became the only General Secretary of the CPSU in history to be deposed. But while many of Khrushchev’s policies and theoretical contributions were later reversed, it was not until the 1980s that a comprehensive anticorruption campaign was organized within the Soviet government. Mao, on the other hand, acknowledged the existence of corruption and illicit enterprises with aplomb, remarking: “It is not strange that attacks on socialism should be made in a socialist country by old and new bourgeois elements. There is nothing terrifying about this so long as the leadership of the Party and state remains a Marxist-Leninist one.”<sup>17</sup>

It is rare to see the Communist Party of China and the Western press agree on a Chinese political issue, but on the depth of corruption in China, and the consistency of the CPC’s anti-corruption campaigns, they are aligned. A 2024 article from the BBC called the campaign “never-ending” and considered Xi Jinping’s commitment to battling corruption to be “Mao’s way of doing things”, while also quoting a prominent China Studies academic who believed that “[t]he corruption [Xi] fears is certainly real.”<sup>18</sup> If Xi’s way is Mao’s way, it is no less Deng’s way, nor Hu Jintao’s, both of whom also presided over anticorruption initiatives. For Party officials who have taken bribes and embezzled public money, to be sentenced to death is not uncommon, and coverage of their trials by the *People’s Daily* are a regular occurrence. The campaign shows no signs of slowing down, recently breaking records in the number of officials investigated and pun-

13 Chinascope. “Preparing For Danger In Times Of Safety—Historic Lessons Learned from the Demise of Soviet Communism: Episode Five.”

14 Mao Zedong. “On Khrushchev’s Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (IX).”

15 Szymanski, Albert. *Is the Red Flag Flying?: The Political Economy of the Soviet Union Today*. pp. 76–77.

16 Sampson, Steven L. “The Second Economy of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.”

17 Mao Zedong. “On Khrushchev’s Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (IX).”

18 McDonell, Stephen. “Xi Jinping’s Never-Ending Hunt for Corruption in the Communist Party.”

ished per year.<sup>19</sup>

The fight against corruption during the transition toward socialism is indeed never-ending, for as long as antagonistic classes exist, there can only be class struggle between them; and since the Chinese bourgeoisie have been forbidden to hold or independently organize for political power, that class struggle must take place in the ideological field, within the Party itself. Until socialism is in an advanced enough stage that the abolition of class society takes place, corruption will constantly seep into the crevices of the state bureaucracy. There is no government on Earth, run by communists or not, that is not corrupt to some degree, and the countries so governed have never found any solution to the problem of corruption except one: to struggle against it just as constantly.

Therefore, to name the second characteristic: *socialism with Chinese characteristics involves an unceasing struggle against corruption.*

More characteristics will be synthesized through comparisons with other systems, even those that are entirely non-socialist or bear only some similarities to socialism, given that some of these have nonetheless also enjoyed success or failure due to sharing or shunning certain aspects of the Chinese system.

## CHARACTERISTICS DERIVED FROM GLOBALIZATION

It's no accident that the Capitalism Explanation still quickly comes to mind among Westerners when considering the PRC's accomplishments. China was poor, so the narrative goes, until China tried capitalism—or at least made a substantial amount of free market reforms—and then

China became rich. Very simple! It's what Western capitalists themselves would like to believe; and naturally, they would like everyone else to believe it too. As the architect of Reform and Opening Up, Deng was the hero of the Western press, becoming *Time's* Person of the Year twice (an honor only ever shared by two others who were not U.S. presidents).<sup>20</sup> History had ended; the Communist Party was widely considered to be a moribund institution, communist in name only, and just hadn't gotten around to changing their name or disbanding yet.

The thing that first came to vex them about this story was that the PRC succeeded with its capitalism a little *too* well. China's rise became increasingly referred to as an "economic miracle"; after its third straight decade of meteoric growth, it had become the world's second-largest economy, and still hadn't shown any sign of slowing down or entering recession. (As of this writing, the PRC's last recession<sup>21</sup> was in 1976.)<sup>22</sup> That's unusual for capitalism. We've been told that a capitalist economy operates on a boom and bust cycle, with apparently random and unavoidable crashes, during which the rich mysteriously get richer and everyone else sadly just has to suffer. It's especially weird today, after the rest of the region and the world have been through serious recessions (particularly the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the Great Recession of 2008, and the COVID-19 recession) which on a year-by-year scale didn't seem to faze the Chinese economy much. Moreover, the nagging question keeps arising: if capitalism is what made China succeed, why isn't it making the rest of the world succeed, too? During China's rise, most of the periphery and semi-periphery—Latin America, Africa, South Asia, the former Soviet Union—were not getting rich nearly as fast,

19 Bloomberg News. "Xi's Corruption Crackdown Nets Record Number of Top Officials."

20 These others were Mikhail Gorbachev (for much the same reason) and—perhaps surprisingly—Joseph Stalin, who was Person of the Year in 1939 and 1942, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union were allies in the Second World War.

21 A recession here being defined as a year with a net negative GDP growth rate.

22 World Bank. *GDP Growth (Annual %)—China.*

and in fact the gap between their wealth and the wealth of the developed West had grown—and continues to grow—even greater.

The Capitalism Explainers are forced to retreat. Enter the “East Asian Development Model” (henceforth EADM), apparently an exceptionally effective *type* of capitalism, that is supposedly shared by other success stories in the region. Similar “economic miracles” are said to have occurred there during the latter twentieth century—in Japan, the “Four Asian Tigers” (Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea), and also Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The PRC, they say, is now merely using the same playbook, a few decades late to the game.

A definition of the EADM is hard to come by. It is often considered to involve significant government investment in the private sector, large foreign capital inflows, and export-driven industrialization. Economic strategist Joe Studwell also notably considered land reform toward intensive small-scale agriculture to be equally important.<sup>23</sup> However, these traits are not all universal, and there is so much variety in practice between the EADM economies that perhaps the only trait they can all definitively be said to share is their governments’ general willingness to intervene in the economy.<sup>24</sup> If indeed

the free market works so much better when it is not quite free, the Capitalism Explanation grows increasingly tenuous.<sup>25</sup>

Table 1 represents an attempt to quantify the so-called EADM and compare the economic growth of various East Asian economies with each other.<sup>26</sup> Each economy is examined from roughly between the years of 1960<sup>27</sup> and 1997, or else whichever time period it is considered to have experienced its “miraculous” growth. On this there is no real consensus. In my book *Why the World Needs China* (Ferrana, 2024), I identified 2008 as a critical year in which the PRC shifted its priorities away from quantitatively high economic growth and toward more regulations and greater investment in the public sector, as well as an inflection point in China’s trends of pollution and income inequality.<sup>28</sup> However, a calculation is also given for the PRC with 2023 as its final miraculous year (i.e., if the PRC’s miracle were considered to still be ongoing). Average growth for the world before 1997, and in China prior to 1978, are also included for reference.

It is notable that the PRC’s average growth between 1978 and 2008 outstrips that of any other country measured, while its average growth between 1978 and 2023 is exceeded only by South Korea’s between 1960 and 1997.

23 Studwell, Joe. *How Asia Works: Success and Failure in the World’s Most Dynamic Region*. p. 10.

24 Park, Jong H. “The East Asian Model of Economic Development and Developing Countries.” p. 330.

25 The history of Japanese development may also undermine its supposedly “capitalist” success story, with the early architects of the Empire of Japan’s industrial policy being heavily influenced by non Marxist “State Socialism” theories as well as the Soviet Union’s economic planning in the 1930s. (Leung, Ernest Ming-Tak. “Developmentalism: The Forgotten Ancestors of East Asian Developmentalism.”)

26 The use of gross domestic product to quantify success (economic or otherwise) is frequently and rightly criticized for its imprecision and tendency to conceal important material factors. However, since the EADM is so often quantified by GDP by those who promulgate its existence, I will analyze it here on their terms.

27 Various caveats apply due to the inconsistency and unavailability of statistical data. The World Bank’s dataset is used on account of it covering a long historical period consistently; however, this dataset does not include statistics for the decade ending in 1960, when Japan and the “Four Asian Tigers” are considered to have begun their rapid growth. GDP data for various other countries were not collected until much later in the twentieth century, and data on some economies are not tracked at all. Therefore the initial year given for each economy may vary considerably, and Taiwan and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are not included.

28 Ferrana, Kyle. *Why the World Needs China*. p. 296.

ECONOMY	INITIAL YEAR	FINAL YEAR	INITIAL GDP (THOUSAND 2015 USD)	FINAL GDP (THOUSAND 2015 USD)	AVERAGE YEARLY GROWTH
Brunei	1974	1997	9912272	12158743	0.89%
Cambodia	1975	1997	5104597	5748123	0.54%
East Timor	1990	1997	481437	832726	7.83%
Hong Kong	1961	1997	12533114	172822170	7.29%
Indonesia	1960	1997	52777607	429975440	5.67%
Japan	1960	1973	595545700	1789673700	8.46%
Macao	1982	1997	5862894	13880944	5.75%
Malaysia	1960	1997	10075054	138523310	7.08%
The Philippines	1960	1997	31344415	133055010	3.91%
Singapore	1960	1997	5946720	124643860	8.22%
South Korea	1960	1997	25704086	692726700	8.90%
Thailand	1960	1997	15908737	219495600	7.09%
Laos	1986	2023	2324692	20303702	5.86%
PRC	1978	2008	364393820	6241302000	9.47%
PRC	1978	2023	364393820	17175671000	8.56%
Vietnam	1986	2023	36666260	377364150	6.30%
PRC	1960	1978	158907450	364393820	4.61%
World	1960	1997	11070189000	43494800000	3.70%

**TABLE 1.** *Growth of East Asian economies during the postwar era.* World Bank and OECD national accounts. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) — World Bank — in Constant US\$. Average yearly growth is calculated by the formula:

$$\frac{\ln(\text{Final GDP}) - \ln(\text{Initial GDP})}{\text{Final Year} - \text{Initial Year}}$$

A greater distinction, however, will be apparent upon examining the periods *after* these times of prosperity.

Table 2 [next page] shows an equivalent comparison of each economy's growth in the period between 1997 and 2023, i.e., *post-“miracle”* until the present. The world average is again shown, and for Japan and the PRC, the figures for 1973-2023 and 2008-2023 are given alongside their rates from 1997.

Apparently, East Asia's twentieth-century capitalist miracles have never recovered from the 1997 crash. With the exception of Cambodia (which is far less commonly regarded as an EADM country, if at all), and the other

two practitioners of the socialist market economy, Laos and Vietnam, *not a single country in the region* has grown faster since 1997 than the PRC did *even in its pre-Reform infancy!* In fact, both Japan and Thailand notably grew even slower than the world average, while all three socialist market economies grew at least twice as fast. The orthodoxy of development has been turned on its head. The great success stories of capitalism are now stagnating as if run by the neoliberal caricatures of communists, while the governments run by communist parties are the ones performing miracles of capitalism.

It is therefore not enough to say that a characteristic of Chinese socialism is the socialist

ECONOMY	INITIAL YEAR	FINAL YEAR	INITIAL GDP (THOUSAND 2015 USD)	FINAL GDP (THOUSAND 2015 USD)	AVERAGE YEARLY GROWTH
Brunei	1997	2023	12158743	13183363	0.31%
Cambodia	1997	2023	5748123	36304273	7.09%
East Timor	1997	2023	832726	1769697	2.90%
Hong Kong	1997	2023	172822170	328370200	2.47%
Indonesia	1997	2023	429975440	1178924200	3.88%
Japan	1973	2023	1789673700	4605912000	1.89%
Japan	1997	2023	3942583000	4605912000	0.60%
Macao	1997	2023	13880944	40458080	4.11%
Malaysia	1997	2023	138523310	401479170	4.09%
The Philippines	1997	2023	133055010	430342470	4.51%
Singapore	1997	2023	124643860	387147100	4.36%
South Korea	1997	2023	692726700	1764487300	3.60%
Thailand	1997	2023	219495600	458457300	2.83%
Laos	1997	2023	4220558	20303702	6.04%
PRC	1997	2023	2199087500	17175671000	7.91%
PRC	2008	2023	6241302000	17175671000	6.75%
Vietnam	1997	2023	79035160	377364150	6.01%
World	1997	2023	43494800000	93346685000	2.94%

**TABLE 2.** *Growth of East Asian economies after 1997.* World Bank and OECD national accounts. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) — World Bank — in Constant US\$.

market economy. Some factor or factors must exist that distinguish Chinese capitalism from the capitalism of its neighbors, in such a way that explains why the PRC continues to succeed in the twenty-first century while they continue to struggle.

The PRC certainly exhibits all of the traits usually credited to the EADM. Virtually all the “miraculous” East Asian governments employed some form of industrial policy to promote comparative advantage in exports,<sup>29</sup> and the PRC’s has led it to become the world’s biggest exporter. During the postwar era, the Southeast Asian countries absorbed a disproportionately large amount of the foreign direct investment in the

developing world, of respective magnitudes that correlated almost exactly with their relative success according to Table 1 (from 1961 to 1990, net FDI inflows to Southeast Asia were greatest to Singapore at 42.7%, followed by Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and finally the Philippines with only 5.5%);<sup>30</sup> similarly, the PRC was (and still is) one of the top FDI destinations in the world. The commanding heights of the PRC’s economy were and remain in the hands of its state-owned enterprises. The resilience of the PRC’s development strategy, however, does not lie in any of these features, but in its ability to retain them.

The financial crash of 1997 that interrupt-

29 Park, Jong H. “The East Asian Model of Economic Development and Developing Countries.” p. 344.

30 Chia, Siow Yue. “Foreign Direct Investment in ASEAN Economies.” pp. 72–73.

ed the ascent of the Four Asian Tigers did not occur at random. After Japan had been strong-armed into signing the Plaza Accord of 1985 by the U.S.—now considered by many economists to be a major factor in Japan’s crash of the early 1990s and subsequent stagnation—it was obliged to appreciate its currency and encourage unsustainable investment in its property market.<sup>31</sup> To reduce costs as the yen appreciated against the dollar, Japanese industry began offshoring to Taiwan and South Korea, who in turn offshored to Southeast Asia. When the yen fell again in the mid-1990s, export competitiveness in the other East Asian countries dropped as well. “Pacific Asian countries have simply fell victim to globalization,” a study published in the *Journal of Developing Societies* in 2002 determined,<sup>32</sup> noting that in 1997, a total of over \$100 billion of FDI left Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea in what it termed the “greatest reversal of private capital flows ever recorded in the world economy”.<sup>33</sup> Their currencies fell sharply, stock markets in Singapore and Hong Kong crashed, and every economy in East Asia entered recession—*except* Cambodia, Taiwan, and the socialist market economies.

A common element of the crash that was *not* shared by China was the weakness of the affected countries’ banking sector. According to the 2002 study, their banks were poorly reg-

ulated and lacked “adequate capacity for project evaluation in lending practices, especially in the aftermath of increased financial liberalization in these countries.”<sup>34</sup> South Korean banks had been entirely state-owned until the decade preceding the crisis,<sup>35</sup> during which time South Korea embarked upon a campaign of privatization, surrendering much of its economy to the free market. By the mid-1990s, other than in China, cross-border capital controls had been lifted throughout the region. According to Studwell, the Southeast Asian “miracle” countries, which suffered worse than the rest, had not only failed to undergo land reform but had “accept[ed] bad advice from already rich countries to open up financial sectors at an early stage.”<sup>36</sup> Japan had also fallen victim to neoliberal orthodoxy in the 1980s, privatizing its telecommunication and railway infrastructure, and allowing the Bank of Japan greater and greater freedom from government regulators. This proved decisive in the aftermath of Japan’s asset price bubble, during which the BOJ’s managers, perfectly in line with the U.S. goals of long-term neoliberalization, prevented the bank from printing money to aid the recovery.<sup>37</sup> The BOJ was “reformed” yet again to grant it even greater “independence” from the government.<sup>38</sup> If strong government intervention in the economy had been key to the success of the EADM, the subsequent erosion of that strength correlated unmistakably

31 Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Governors of France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. “Announcement the Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Governors of France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Plaza Accord).”

32 Park, Jong H. “The East Asian Model of Economic Development and Developing Countries.” p. 347.

33 Ibid., pp. 331–32.

34 Ibid., p. 333.

35 Amsden, Alice H. “Why Isn’t the Whole World Experimenting with the East Asian Model to Develop?: Review of the East Asian Miracle.” p. 631.

36 Studwell, Joe. *How Asia Works: Success and Failure in the World’s Most Dynamic Region.* p. 12.

37 Werner, Richard. *Princes of the Yen: Japan’s Central Bankers and the Transformation of the Economy.* p. 177.

38 Dwyer, Jennifer Holt. “Explaining Central Bank Reform in Japan.”

with its demise.<sup>39</sup> “Far better,” Studwell writes of peripheral countries’ unregulated financial systems that seek high but short-term profits, “to keep the financial system on a short leash for a considerable period of time and make it serve developmental purposes.”<sup>40</sup>

The International Monetary Fund, which has, under the direction of the U.S. and Europe, has actively sabotaged the development of non-Western countries for decades, continually preaches the virtues of “central bank independence” as a matter of gospel. This “independence”, according to IMF guidelines, is measured by the involvement of “non-government officials” in appointing the bank’s governors, the lack of government oversight over the bank’s budget, and how thoroughly state auditors are prevented from examining the bank’s policy decisions.<sup>41</sup> The IMF, in other words, seeks to create within each country’s government a central bank that is unaccountable to any local authority—or, in practice and in the context of increasingly globalized capitalism, a puppet of the world’s strongest financial centers in London, Washington, D.C., and New York City. Peripheral countries are frequently compelled to re-privatize public banks and restore central bank independence in order to obtain debt relief, as in the case of Venezuela in 1996<sup>42</sup> and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2009.<sup>43</sup> The PRC’s stubborn and increasing resistance

to this agenda is precisely what saved it from Japan’s fate, and what has made its economy effectively recession-proof, whether in 1997, 2008, or the present.

The PRC’s state-owned financial system, in fact, has been drawn even further under the control of the central government and the Communist Party in recent years. In 2023, the *Financial Times* reported that the central government created a new “super-regulator” to centralize its control over the financial system.<sup>44</sup> In what the *Wall Street Journal* complained was an “unusually stern message” to the People’s Bank of China, Party discipline inspectors expressed opposition to even the mention of “central bank independence” in 2021.<sup>45</sup> International think tank OMFIF warned in 2024 that even though the PBoC’s independence was “already heavily constrained by the state in comparison with peer central banks in the West”, new legislation from the National People’s Congress would “[subject] the financial system even further to the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party”<sup>46</sup>

Due to the PBoC’s careful management, the concurrent implosion of China’s real estate market—typified by the default and collapse of private real estate giants Evergrande and Country Garden—also failed to send China’s economy into recession the way the asset price bubble

39 Studwell reckons that Taiwan, the only exception to this pattern, escaped recession due to taking the “most conservative” approach to finance of the East Asian economies, with less foreign borrowing and less domestic lending than e.g. South Korea—in other words, Taiwan avoided disaster simply by using the tool of finance itself much less, leading it to nevertheless lag behind South Korea even after the financial crisis. (Studwell, Joe. *How Asia Works: Success and Failure in the World’s Most Dynamic Region*. pp. 136–38.)

40 Ibid., p. 126.

41 Adrian et al. *A New Measure of Central Bank Independence*.

42 International Monetary Fund. *IMF Approves Stand-By Credit for Venezuela*.

43 International Monetary Fund. *IMF Executive Board Approves US\$551 Million PRGF Arrangement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and US\$73 Million in Interim HIPC Assistance*.

44 Leng, Cheng and White, Edward. “Xi Jinping Tightens Financial Sector Control as New Super Regulator Takes Shape.”

45 Wei, Lingling. “Beijing Reins In China’s Central Bank.”

46 Poenisch, Herbert. *Beware China’s Attempt to Erode Central Bank Independence*.

had done to Japan. When Western speculators attempted to profit by short-selling the Hong Kong dollar during the 1997 crisis, Premier Zhu Rongji declared that the PRC would defend the newly-returned Hong Kong “at all costs”, its support ultimately preventing the HKD or the yuan from devaluing as other EADM countries’ currencies had.<sup>47</sup> The strength of China’s banking system is also the strength of its economy; while it remains under government and Party control, neither the vicissitudes of globalization nor the machinations of the West can destroy it. Therefore *socialism with Chinese characteristics requires public control over finance*.

## CHARACTERISTICS DERIVED FROM OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

The Four Asian Tigers were not at all expected to be the biggest success stories of the postwar era, much less Japan, which had been so devastated by Allied bombing that entire cities had been reduced to ashes. It was rather the competition between China and India that the world anticipated would demonstrate the best development strategy to catch up to the modern West.

There are certain advantages China possesses that are a function of its size. The massive peasant population of China provided a functionally inexhaustible source of cheap labor during its industrialization. Now, after the peasants have been largely proletarianized and are paid increasingly higher real wages, they provide an equally massive consumer base, and allow the PRC to build economies of scale unequalled anywhere in the world. Though these conditions have unquestionably contributed to China’s rise, they cannot be universalized to any other countries as they currently exist—except one. India’s equivalent population is potentially just as powerful a resource, and as such it should

be examined closely.

At first glance, the last century of Chinese and Indian history seems like the perfect historical experiment. India’s independence from its long colonial nightmare came in 1947, just two years before the Chinese Civil War was won in favor of the communists and China’s Century of Humiliation at the hands of foreign powers was at last overcome. Until the 1980s, both countries had equivalent GDPs, were dominated by large public sectors, and relied heavily on Soviet-style economic planning. In the 1980s, both began liberalizing their economies. Should the country that has prospered the most since then not indicate which style of governance is more effective?

A multitude of observations favor the PRC, not only its significantly greater economic growth and manufacturing dominance, but its achievements in high-speed rail, public infrastructure, and its far more rapid eradication of rural poverty, illiteracy, and undernourishment. Since Reform, China’s rate of urbanization has soared to almost twice India’s, and its countryside has also enjoyed far greater access to electricity, running water, and other services. It is straightforward and not entirely incorrect to assert that a similar style of communist party rule might solve many of India’s remaining problems; in fact, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has already demonstrated an impressive capability in the Indian state of Kerala, where since the late 1950s it has spent a majority of the time in the government of Kerala’s Legislative Assembly. Under the CPI(M)’s direction, Kerala pioneered a universal healthcare system,<sup>48</sup> robust mutual aid networks, and has consistently ranked the highest or very near the highest among Indian states on most metrics regarding quality of life. Since the 1970s, Kerala’s

47 Zhou Xin. “How Beijing and Hong Kong Sent Billionaire George Soros Packing the Last Time He Attacked Asian Markets.”

48 Sen, Amartya. “Universal Healthcare: The Affordable Dream.”

literacy rate has exceeded every other state's;<sup>49</sup> during the twenty-first century, Kerala's infant and maternal mortality rates have remained among the very lowest in India,<sup>50</sup> and the average life expectancy in Kerala has been ranked the highest or second-highest.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Kerala cannot be evaluated in isolation. What is often called the "Kerala Model" is at odds with the national government's trajectory and faces serious challenges that largely prevent the CPI(M) from expanding its influence.<sup>52</sup> Despite impressive gains in quality of life, Kerala's economic situation remains modest. Industrialization is low and poverty and unemployment are still widespread. The state therefore suffers considerable "brain drain" as Keralite youth cannot put their education to good use at home and instead migrate to other states or countries for better opportunities.

Just as the Kerala Model is constrained by India's national government—which presently seeks greater capitalist development through integration with the West and with much less concern than the CPI(M) for redistribution and human health—India itself faces enormous obstacles to its development that China never did.

The comparison between China and India mentioned above is crucially incomplete because it begins too late. There were fewer similarities between the Republic of India and the PRC in 1950 than there were similarities between the Mughal and Qing Empires of the early eighteenth century. The Qing Dynasty at the time ruled over what became modern China as well as Mongolia and a small part of Russia; the Mughal Empire at its greatest extent encompassed not only modern India, but Bangladesh, Pakistan, and much of Afghanistan. Both were

vast, multicultural polities, and most of the regions that composed each had been united many times before. It is therefore curious that the PRC's borders should look so similar to the Qing Empire's while the Republic of India's look so little like those of the Mughal Empire or its antecedents.

The Mughal Empire collapsed during the eighteenth century, but its constituents would all be united again in the nineteenth, this time under British rule. When the British were finally obliged to leave, they did so with the assurance that the region would not regain for many generations the strength to seek redress for the hell of colonialism that had robbed it of trillions of dollars<sup>53</sup> and left tens of millions dead of starvation. For a century, the British colonial administration had ruled by ethnic and religious discord, setting one sect or group against another, elevating some as their pawns and inviting the rest to scapegoat the collaborators when they were through. The British Raj was far too large to be allowed independence whole; India and Pakistan were therefore partitioned in the same instant that the colonial boot was lifted. Though India is now the world's most populous country, at the time of independence, with Pakistan and Bangladesh carved away, its population was less than 350 million, or only about two-thirds of the PRC's at the time.

Thus while the PRC was born from unity, modern India was formed from division. Its borders, clumsily and hastily drawn by British aristocrats, grievously fractured the provinces of Bengal and Punjab, spurring a massive refugee crisis, riots, and organized violence that destroyed the lives of millions, for the sake of which sectarian resentment simmers to this day. Riots, pogroms, and repression against Muslims and ethnic mi-

49 Reserve Bank of India. *State-Wise Literacy Rate*.

50 Reserve Bank of India. *State-Wise Infant Mortality Rate, State-Wise Maternal Mortality Ratio*.

51 Reserve Bank of India. *State-Wise Life Expectancy*.

52 Patnaik, Prabhat. "The International Context and the 'Kerala Model'."

53 Patnaik, Utsa and Patnaik, Prabhat. "The Drain of Wealth."

norities are sadly common within India, as are clashes with Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir. Worse still, the legacy of the British Raj itself has not been fully undone. Unlike in China, comprehensive land reform has not taken place. The colonial state apparatus that was the instrument of so many iniquities was not demolished and replaced but handed over to Indian administrators, and the racialized caste hierarchy codified by British rule has lingered in the psyche of its former subjects for generations.<sup>54</sup>

The trauma of colonialism is difficult to overstate. The problems of India are not unlike the problems that still plague many former colonies in the periphery; its partition has had a similar effect to the balkanizations of West Africa and the former Ottoman Empire, rendering the resulting states weaker, riven with sectarian grievances, and easier to dominate and exploit through neocolonial mechanisms. As harsh as the Century of Humiliation was for China, the outcomes it produced did not have the same severity. Though the Qing Dynasty was forced to submit to unequal treaties, China was never directly colonized—that is, the Qing authority and the structure of the Chinese state was never entirely replaced by a foreign power.<sup>55</sup> Though the Chinese were forced to take opium, the Indians were forced to grow it, which necessitated the transformation of Indian agriculture away from food production, contributing to famine and a great immiseration of the peasantry.<sup>56</sup>

We have arrived so far at the most difficult characteristic for other countries to duplicate. It is neither instructive nor useful to insist that

success—whether in the economic or social sense—can only be achieved through the *avoidance* of direct colonialism; it is clear, however, that the legacy of colonialism is still very much present throughout the world and must be confronted in order to replicate the PRC's accomplishments. Vietnam and Laos, whose political economies most closely match the PRC's, are without a doubt further behind, having started later, having endured generations of colonization by France, and having needed to fight a long series of horrifically modern wars against the world's most powerful militaries to finally eradicate the last vestiges of colonization. Yet their rise, as shown earlier, is now proceeding apace. Suffice to say that *socialism with Chinese characteristics involves the complete removal of colonial influence*.

## CHARACTERISTICS DERIVED FROM CULTURE

The Culture Explanation for the PRC's accomplishments is now growing in popularity, and of a piece with a certain zeitgeist of anti-imperialist—or at the least anti-U.S.—sentiment felt around the world. Traditional Chinese culture, or often the “Chinese civilization”, as this school of thought would have it, is uniquely suited to a collectivist society, or a society with many aspects of socialism. To this way of thinking, the general secretary of the Communist Party is not fundamentally different from the emperor of the Qing, and the Chinese Revolution and Civil War are not fundamentally different from the historical conquests undertaken to unite China

54 Memon, Ahmed. “English in Taste, Indian in Blood’: Caste Hegemony in the Making of British International Legal Thought.”

55 Hong Kong and Macao are exceptions, as well as—arguably—the Japanese invasion and puppet state in Manchuria during the Republic of China era, although the Empire of Japan failed to conquer more than half of China's territory, and was repelled within a single generation. The Raj also did not technically administer all of the former Mughal Empire itself, having a neocolonial relationship with the fractured “princely states” on the subcontinent, yet these constituted a minority (about one quarter) of the population at the time of independence. (Matthews, Herbert L. “Princely States Post Another India Problem; End of British Rule Forces 562 Rulers To Face Question of Future Status.”).

56 Biswas, Soutik. “How Britain’s Opium Trade Impoverished Indians.”

under each new dynasty. The Marxist-Leninist orientation of the Party has therefore been preserved, though “Sinicized” with the Chinese characteristics, long after the destruction of the Soviet Union, its European satellites, and Arab Socialism, not because of the scientific basis or universalism of Marxist theory, but because Marxism simply happens to be very compatible with what China had already been doing for hundreds or thousands of years. This purports to explain not only the PRC’s socialist character but also the unusual power of the state among the purported EADM economies of the post-war era; Korea and Japan had through their proximity absorbed and exchanged enough cultural values with China that they belonged to the same “civilization”, as had other countries in region—Singapore even being populated mainly by ethnic Chinese, who had presumably brought their culture with them.

It is hardly surprising that the fall of the Soviet bloc has led to a widespread lack of confidence in Marxism as an effective alternative to Western imperialism and the hegemony of the United States. Yet before Marxism is consigned to history’s dustbin, let us make use of it one last time, not in its material application to the political economy of any revolutionary country, but as a tool of scientific analysis directed at this new theory itself. Ideas, according to Marxism’s materialist perspective, do not emerge fully formed from the aether. They do not originate from some Platonic realm of ideas nor any other metaphysical source. Instead, they are inspired by the material world around us, from objects, from other ideas, or from real phenomena that have existed already—and their popularity is a function not of their coherence or novelty, but of their *benefit* to an economic class. The Culture Explanation is no exception; just as the Capitalism Explanation is what appeals to the

Western capitalist elite, the Culture Explanation exists and is now gaining support because it appeals to another class—but a more nebulous one, consisting of those who are not the elite, but dislike Marxism just the same. This is also a class of capitalists, or those who wish to become capitalists, but altogether lack the wealth and power of the Western oligarchs and billionaires.

There is today a great frustration stirring in the stomachs of the super-rich. The Western imperialists rule the world, or most of it, and the wealthiest capitalists and financial oligarchs who are the empire’s beneficiaries possess more wealth than anyone ever has in history, and sit astride a world that is more unequal than it has ever been; yet increasingly, they are preoccupied with the supposedly discredited theory of Marxism. For all the economics and history textbooks written to disprove the conclusions of Marx, for all the horrors the historical nihilists describe, for all the Marxist-Leninist governments that have failed or been overthrown, Marxism still will not die. If it is to their annoyance that the Chinese and Vietnamese will not fully let go of it, they are driven to apoplexy by the reemergence of Marxist political parties in Africa, such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa and the Communist Parties of Kenya and Swaziland. Elon Musk, presently the richest man in the world, recently involved himself in a public feud with the leader of the EFF—not even a ruling party—calling for him to be charged as an international criminal.<sup>57</sup> In June 2025, JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon publicly accused Zohran Mamdani, the Democratic Party’s nominee for New York City mayor, of being a Marxist,<sup>58</sup> despite Mamdani’s willingness to distance himself from the label and ideology. The entire U.S. ruling class is haunted by Marxism everywhere it turns; the current arch-conservative government insists on

57 Lambley, Garrin. “Elon Musk Calls Julius Malema ‘International Criminal’ in Bombshell X Post.”

58 Mion, Landon. “Jamie Dimon Criticizes Zohran Mamdani as ‘Marxist,’ Blasts Democrats’ DEI Push: ‘Big Hearts and Little Brain.’”

applying the “Marxist” label even to opposition figures<sup>59</sup> and policies,<sup>60</sup> and the liberal opposition likewise obsessively associates President Trump with the Soviet Union or with Mao Zedong.<sup>61</sup> It is incomprehensible to the elite that Marxism, an ideology supposedly so plagued with failure, could command any popularity more than a generation after the Soviet Union was buried; thus their only answer to it is increasingly incoherent rhetoric.

The Culture Explainers have a more calculated answer. They see no particular need to attack Marxism, or at least not yet, because they may view the imperialists as a greater threat or obstacle to their interests. Instead they aim to rhetorically isolate and contain Marxism within China. Where Marxists have historically strived to universalize their theory to the fullest extent, the Culture Explainers would see Marxism particularized as much as possible, to make it more Chinese than ever—so Chinese, in fact, that it can’t be anything else. If the oppression of imperialism and the constant wrecking of the periphery by the IMF could somehow be overcome *without* Marxism, then capitalists in the formerly oppressed but *non*-Chinese civilizations could enjoy greater profit and expansion.

The Communist Party of China is more than willing to indulge the Culture Explanation, especially when it comes to the PRC’s international relations. When China is making friends and doing business with foreign capitalist governments, the less that Marxism, communism, or socialism are mentioned, the better. If foreign investment is needed to sustain China’s economic miracle, then foreign businesses must feel assured that their assets won’t be expropriated in the course of the class struggle that Marx so prominently mentioned. Hence the need for

programs such as the Global Civilization Initiative, for the frequent delegations, conferences, and cultural exchanges that the PRC has undertaken to organize or host, and for the (Chinese) Culture Explanation itself. Publishing a clear how-to guide involving the establishment of public control over institutions that capitalist governments are devoted to protecting private control over would not be particularly diplomatic. But if foreigners happen to be interested in Chinese culture, the Party is happy to oblige. China has plenty of history and plenty of culture, and needs plenty of friends.

We should therefore be skeptical of arguments centering the importance of Chinese culture in the realm of economic or social success, even if they go unchallenged by Chinese authorities. But the Culture Explanation is also frustrating when evaluated credulously. If China’s success is truly due to culture, then what lessons are other countries supposed to take from that, exactly? Will they need to somehow *become* Chinese in order to free themselves from the chains of imperialism?

If culture is really what they need, then the natural thing to do is to ask where culture comes from. In Marx’s point of view, culture emerges from class relations:

The totality of [the] relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their conscious-

59 Swenson, Ali. “Trump and Other Republicans Conjure a Familiar Enemy in Attacking Democrats as ‘Communists.’”

60 The White House. “The White House Office of Management and Budget Releases the President’s Fiscal Year 2026 Skinny Budget.”

61 Thompson, Derek. “The Disturbing Rise of MAGA Maoism.”

ness.<sup>62</sup>

In eras of social revolution, during which class relations are fundamentally changed, Marx opined that “[t]he changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.”<sup>[65]</sup> Therefore Confucianism, like other ancient traditions, had the function of keeping the economic base of feudal or dynastic China operating in the way that it should—a base which itself has recently ceased to exist. If Marx is correct, the influence of Confucianism is destined, sooner or later, to join it.

The Culture Explainers’ praise of Confucianism as the key to the PRC’s success is particularly ironic today, after the Party had spent the better part of the latter twentieth century considering Confucianism an obstacle to progress and trying unsuccessfully to get rid of it. Yet, though organized by Marxists, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’s failure to overwrite many of the traditional and religious customs of China is not necessarily a refutation of Marx on this subject. When the Cultural Revolution began, 82% of the Chinese population were still peasants in rural areas; today, less than a third of that population still lives in rural areas, and a great many of these have been proletarianized, thanks in large part to the Common Prosperity initiative and recent decades of poverty alleviation schemes.<sup>63</sup> New culture, both capitalist culture and socialist culture, is now required to maintain these new relations of production. To assume that Confucianism has already filled such a role, or to expect it to do so without significant transformation, is no more plausible than to expect the Catholic Church to launch crusades and inquisitions in modern Europe.

In fact, it is especially noteworthy that the reach into the past for ancient philosophies or schools of thought to explain modern China’s success so often returns with Confucianism,

rather than its contemporaries such as Legalism. The central doctrine of Confucian thought, that people ought to be motivated by virtue and responsibility, seems far more suited to manage the small production of the peasantry, who lived far from the emperor’s authority. For all the entrenchment in *general* Chinese society of historically-Confucian attitudes such as patriarchy or the emphasis on filial piety, it is the doctrine of Legalism, that people needed to be motivated by rewards and punishments and a system of laws, that much better resembles the operation of today’s Communist Party, which has committees in even the smallest rural villages, and disciplines itself—and others—severely for corruption. Yet it is certainly in the interests of the capitalists, or those who would become capitalists, to downplay or ignore the legacy of a philosophy that prescribed a powerful and centralized government; after all, such a government might interfere unduly in the affairs of the free market.

The influence of culture upon society cannot be disregarded, but neither can it be analyzed as belonging to this or that ancient religion or philosophy. Culture is a constantly evolving phenomenon, and even practices that date back many centuries have nonetheless taken on new and different modern forms. It would make little sense for a non-Chinese civilization to hope to borrow China’s success by studying China’s past for clues on how to become more culturally Chinese, and such an endeavor would be worse than useless if it involved imitating aspects of that culture which are dying out or which must inevitably die out in the modern era. More value lies in determining which aspects of Chinese culture that the Party has chosen to institutionalize—*materially*, not through rhetoric—including which policies that during the Cultural Revolution had been abandoned, but in the Reform era were re-adopted.

Perhaps the most obvious of these is China’s system of examinations for admission to higher

62 Marx, Karl. “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: Preface.”

63 World Bank. *Urban Population (% of Total Population)—China*.

education and civil service. For many centuries, these exams formed a barrier for entry into the imperial bureaucracy that excluded a large majority of applicants. The Party has struggled for generations to reform the notoriously difficult *Gaokao*, the modern exam taken by high school students for admission into Chinese universities, due to its regional unevenness and the extraordinary stress placed upon students from a young age, yet a powerful effect of such exams, presently and historically, has been the selection of a highly competent and meritocratic bureaucracy. A 2021 study conducted for the National Bureau of Economic Research in the U.S. found that Chinese students with higher *Gaokao* scores were less likely to become entrepreneurs and more likely to enter the public sector.<sup>64</sup> According to census data, government workers are more than twice as likely to have college degrees than the general urban population.<sup>65</sup> Those at the highest echelons of Communist Party leadership today are all graduates of Chinese—rather than foreign—universities, and nearly all with engineering degrees. Various aspects of the old imperial bureaucracy are also still in use today, such as the practice of rotating officials between different localities.<sup>66</sup>

The value of meritocracy should not be understated, given that the operations and policies of any decision-making body are necessarily a function of its competence, as are the details of those policies' implementation. The collective intelligence of its officials can make or break a government, especially if that intelligence is distributed in the most effective manner. Therefore *socialism with Chinese characteristics governs through a meritocratic bureaucracy*.

## CONCLUSIONS

While the list presented here is not comprehensive, it can provide a set of concrete objectives in the pursuit of development in the world. In all, I have argued that the PRC's political economy consists of the following five distinct characteristics:

1. upholding the Communist Party's history;
2. an unceasing struggle against corruption;
3. public control over finance;
4. the complete removal of colonial influence; and
5. governance through a meritocratic bureaucracy.

Where possible, I identified conspicuous failures of development, governance, or sovereignty in other countries, both those with proletarian and capitalist leadership, in which the absence of some of these characteristics was a factor.

I have argued repeatedly elsewhere that class power, particularly the present and historical dominance of workers and peasants within the ranks of the Communist Party of China, is the ultimate reason behind the rise and continued success of the PRC.<sup>67</sup> Here I hope to show, in more practical terms, what that class power looks like, properly wielded. The position of the Party has been severely tested in the neoliberal era, both by the class struggle within and the imperialist forces without, but it has held its own, and the PRC has thrived for it, in large part due to these strengths.

Can the characteristics above be institutionalized in countries without a ruling communist party? Some of them, perhaps. Yet the fact that so few have been, and that governments which

64 Bai et al. "Entrepreneurial Reluctance: Talent and Firm Creation in China." pp. 23–24.

65 Lun, Xiaohuan. *How China Works: An Introduction to China's State-Led Economic Development*. p. 108.

66 Ibid., p.11.

67 Ferrana, Kyle. "Ocean Elegy."

once adopted them to some degree have since “reformed” to more fully integrate into the capitalist world and with worse results, is damning. The opposites of these characteristics—historical nihilism, corruption, private finance, neo-colonialism, and plutocracy—are all tools that the U.S. and its Western allies use to maintain their empire; casting them off and building alternatives will require a powerful and organized struggle.

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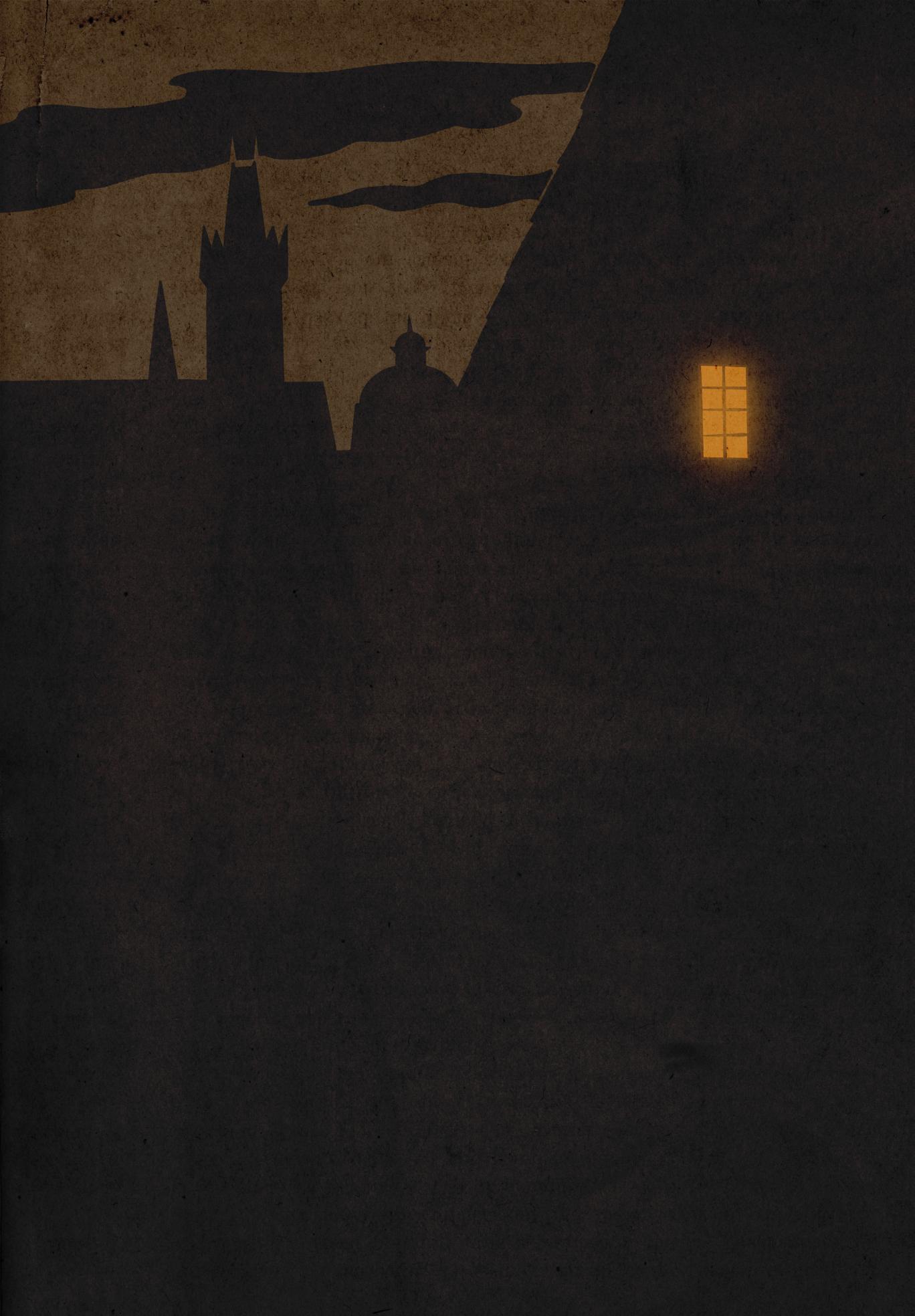
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# CAPITALISM IN TERMINAL DECLINE AND THE ECONOMIC NECESSITY OF 'STATE MONOPOLY SOCIALISM'

by TED REESE

## HEADLINE POINTS<sup>1</sup>

THE AGGREGATE 'WORLD' RATE of profit trends historically towards zero, having fallen from an estimated average of 43% in the 1870s to 11% in the 2010s.

Rates of interest (a form of profit) over the past seven centuries have also trended towards zero, where short-term central bank rates landed and remained for most of the period between 2009 and 2021—record lows in both the US and UK, the traditional capitalist superpowers—but ending recessions requires an average 6% baseline cut in order to cheapen capital and reincentivize investment.

Prices have also closed in on zero—at exponential pace as, amid accelerating innovation, productive output tends to double absolutely every 25 years.

The US dollar and UK pound sterling have lost nearly 100% of their purchasing power over the past century, mostly since 1970 when absolute productivity gains accelerated with automation and digitalisation.

The number of publicly listed US companies has more than halved since the mid-1990s and, since 1960, the average lifespan of the richest 500 has fallen from above 60 years to below 20.

Whereas the capitalist class is a relatively dwindling minority, the global working class since the 1950s has been growing exponentially, making 'bourgeois democracy' increasingly obsolete and 'proletarian democracy' increasingly necessary.

Fossil fuels are becoming too expensive to produce profitably due to dwindling ground re-

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Note: The relevant citations for these claims are provided later in the article.

serves and ever-deeper drilling.

To offset falling profitability, by economising and rationalising production, capital accumulation is increasingly dependent on central planning *within* and mergers *between* private enterprises. A 'final merger'—a necessarily public monopoly since no exchange of ownership would exist—with central planning of the economy *as a whole* and *social* accumulation is consequently becoming an economic necessity *for the first time*.



KARL MARX regarded socialism's supersession of capitalism as an inexorable natural process. Nuclear war, runaway global warming or perhaps even pollution-induced infertility could of course intervene; but the point is that capitalism tends to drive us closer and closer towards the necessity of implementing a socialist (socially/publicly owned) mode of production. That is because, in the simplest terms, expanding and speeding up the production of commodified use-values (exchangeable useful products produced for profit) inevitably results in the ever-greater withering away of the exchange value (essentially labor time realised as profit at the point of sale/exchange) that commodities contain. Eventually, therefore, the exchange of

ownership of use values and the dual character of the commodity approach obsolescence, necessitating a system of production based solely on (decommodified) use-values. As man-supervised automation tends to replace man-operated mechanisation, not only as a result of the human inclination to innovate but to meet the ever-rising demands of capital accumulation by enhancing the productivity of labor—accelerated by competition between capitalists—the labor time needed to produce a commodity is disappearing and the capitalist productive and social system is quite clearly becoming evermore unsustainable and crisis-prone.<sup>2</sup> Only purposeful human activity with an understanding of this unfolding process can ultimately bring this movement of history to fruition; but it is compelled by unavoidable economic developments. If we are conscious of this objective historical momentum, we can implement the necessary 'solution' and at least minimize the political and social conflict and turmoil that is bound up with such a transition. If we remain blinded by alternative proposals to 'reform' capitalism or attempt to skip ahead of what is practically possible—straight into a stateless form of socialism, for example—the transition to socialism will be all the more painful and the risks of the worst-case-scenarios prevailing will increase.

By analysing short- and long-term empirical economic trends, a set of compelling evi-

2 Marx found that each capitalist crisis tends to be greater than the previous one because an underproduction of total surplus value relative to the total capital value (that needs not only to be reproduced but expanded to offset the devaluation inherent to expanded and sped-up commodity production) tends to rise, resulting in a relatively ever-larger overaccumulation or surplus of capital that cannot be reinvested, a barrier to investment and productivity. Empirical data corroborates Marx's theory. The amount of money in US money market funds, for example, steepens drastically before every recession. (See <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MMMFFAQ027S>.) It then declines during and for a while after a recession—the manifesting process of devaluation that cheapens capital amid panic selling and falling borrowing rates—making investment more affordable again. This decline is only ever partial, however, and the amount of idle money capital tends to climb at a steeper rate than during the previous cycle. The figure in US money market funds rose from \$235bn in 1982; then \$555bn in 1991; 2.3 trillion in 2001; 3.8 trillion in 2009; and \$5.1 trillion in 2020. (Total US GDP contracted in each of these years.) At the end of 2024 it had risen again to \$7.2 trillion. That US debt-to-GDP rose to a record high at the end of 2021—even higher than at the end of WWII—indicates that the US's overaccumulation is relatively worse than ever, since a large part of the function of debt is to act as a substitute for the underproduction of surplus value. See Ted Resse—online video educational "The inevitability of capitalist breakdown: Overaccumulation not underconsumption or overproduction", youtube.com/@grossmanite

dence comes together to indicate that capitalist production is both approaching a *final, insurmountable breakdown*; and *evolving towards, birthing*, socialism. From this information we can attempt to plot out the most credible set of tactics and strategies for the seismic social and class struggles that lie ahead.

Capitalism, after centuries of evolution, is an increasingly *centrally planned state monopoly capitalism*, since capital accumulation is increasingly dependent on: the efficiency of central planning *within* each private enterprise (eliminated internal departmental competition; centralised real-time data; etc.); industrial monopolisation through mergers and acquisitions; and state (public) subsidies, facilities and contracts.

Capitalism's evolution is therefore culminating in laying the basis of a *centrally planned 'state monopoly socialism'*, whereby a 'final merger' of evermore concentrated private enterprise *into a public/state monopoly*—since no exchange of ownership is necessary in a total monopoly—is the next necessary shift in the evolution of the productive forces (man and technology).

## LONG-TERM INDICATORS

The 'world' rate of profit (the over and above return on investment) fell in an estimated secular trend from 43% in the 1870s to 17% in the 2000s, in one study;<sup>3</sup> and around 10-11% in the decade following the 'Great Recession' or 'Great Financial Crash' (GFC) of 2007-09, in another.<sup>4</sup> While the exact numbers differ across many

other national rate of profit studies, the consistency of the trends confirm "the law of a progressive fall in the rate of profit"<sup>5</sup> that Marx calls "in every respect the most important law of modern political economy".<sup>6</sup>

Short- and long-term rates of interest (a form of profit) have fallen in a secular/historical trend towards zero *over more than seven centuries—regardless of the forms of political and banking regimes*.<sup>7</sup>

Inversely, the trajectory of absolute 'global Gross Domestic Product' (in monetary value) veers *ever steeper, indicating an approaching peak*.<sup>8</sup> That is, as capital accumulates, rates of profit tend to fall.

The post-recession recovery from the GFC has been the weakest, relatively, since WWII. Whereas US GDP grew by 43% over the first 39 quarters of the 1991-2001 expansion, in the first 39 quarters of the expansion up to March 2019, it grew by only 22%. At that rate, the latter would have had to continue for another six years to equal the aggregate growth of 1991-2001, and nine more to match the 54% recorded in 1961-69.<sup>9</sup>

Average GDP growth rates in 'high income countries' fell from 5.59% in the 1960s; to 4.15% in the 1970s; 2.93% in the 1980s; 2.35% in the 1990s; and 1.78% in the 2000s.<sup>10</sup> A rise to 2.1% in the 2010s—based on 'austerity' (the transfer of public funds into private subsidies), a temporary boom in shale gas discoveries, and record levels of debt—gave way to a 4.5% slump

3 Maito, E., *The Historical Transience of Capital: The Downward Trend in The Rate of Profit Since XIX Century*, Universidad de Buenos Aires.

4 Basu, D. et al., "World Profit Rates, 1960-2019," *Review of Political Economy*.

5 Our emphasis. Marx, K., *Capital Vol. III*, p. 319.

6 Marx, K., *Grundrisse*, p. 748.

7 See Schmelzing, P., *Eight centuries of global real interest rates, R-G, and the 'suprasecular' decline, 1311–2018*, Bank of England, p. 40.

8 Our World In Data, 'Global GDP over the long run'.

9 Hart-Landsberg, M., "Portrait of the 2009-2019 US expansion," *Monthly Review Online*.

10 World Bank, 'GDP Growth (annual %)—High income'

in 2020, even worse than the decline of 3.2% in 2009.

The *rate* of labor productivity growth (the monetary value each employed person creates per unit of input) in advanced countries has trended downwards. Growth in output per hour slowed in the US in 2015 to 0.3%, well below the average pace of 2.4% in 1999-2006.<sup>11</sup>

Investment growth and the *rate* of innovation have also continually slowed down. Returns on US research and development (R&D) fell during 1985–2015 by 65%, despite a 250% rise in the number of scientists and engineers engaged in R&D.<sup>12</sup>

These productivity trends have ‘coincided’ with the ‘deindustrialisation’ of the global workforce, now largely based in services, as automation—which does not require breaks or expenses on wages, lighting, heating, or holiday or sickness pay—takes over manufacturing. Even sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America spent the 2010s deindustrializing.<sup>13</sup>

Through bankruptcies and mergers, *almost half*, 43%, of around 9,000 banks in the US ‘disappeared’ in 2000-17—already down from

14,000 in 1986 and 30,000 in 1921. US savings institutions are also dying out, declining from around 4,000 in 1985 to 627 in 2020.<sup>14</sup>

Despite decades of privatisation and absolute productive expansion, the number of publicly-listed US companies fell from about 8,000 in 1996 to 4,500 in 2016 and 3,700 in 2022. Some 52% of Fortune 500 companies—the richest 500 on the US stock exchange—also ‘disappeared’ during 2000-15.<sup>15</sup>

Since 2008, mergers and acquisitions in China—now challenging the US for the highest share of global GDP—have risen exponentially.<sup>16</sup>

Of seven major merger and acquisition waves in the US since the 1890s, four (60%) have taken place since 1980.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1964 and 2014, the average lifespan of companies on the S&P 500 shrank from 61 to 18 years.<sup>18</sup>

Although each ‘succeeding’ generation has tended to have a higher proportion of investors (workers supplementing wages with investment returns), UK investors in 2023 were holding onto their shares for 0.8 years on average—down

11 Fleming, S., and Giles, C., “US productivity growth slips for first time in three decades,” *Financial Times*.

12 Knott, A. M., “Is R&D getting harder, or are companies just getting worse at it?”, Harvard Business Review; Elsby, M., “The decline of US labor share,” Brookings Institution, p. 31. See also, Roberts, M., *The Next Recession, “The Productivity Crisis.”*

13 Ferry, J., and McConkey, M., “Manufacturing employment hits all-time low. Will IRA reverse the trend?,” *ProsperousAmerica.org*.

14 Fitzpatrick, D., and Hollerith, D., “Why does the US have so many banks? Thank Thomas Jefferson,” *uk.finance.yahoo.com*; Martucci, B., “Number of banks in the US—how many are there?”, *MoneyCrashers.com*.

15 Tumerkan, A., “Corporate cannibalism: How monopoly powers are widening inequality,” *SpeculatorsAnonymous.com*; K Garelli, S., “Why you will probably live longer than most big companies,” *IMD.org*. The number of companies listed on the UK stock exchange fell from 2,415 in 2008 to 1,646 in 2021. In Argentina the number fell from 321 in 1975 to 85 in 2021.

16 Xiao-Ru Wang, “A reflection on China’s merger reviews—key messages from the latest five-year report and insights from economists,” *pymnts.com*. Mergers in China rose from 16 in 2008 to 469 in 2020. See also: Huang, T., and Veron, N., “China’s share of companies in the private sector saw a small uptick in the second half of 2024 after years of decline,” *PIIE.com*. State ownership (at least 51% of shares) of the wealthiest 100 Chinese enterprises increased from 31.2% in June 2021 to 54% in June 2024; although it fell slightly to 51% in December 2024.

17 “United States—M&A Statistics”, *IMMA-Institute.org*.

18 Garelli, S., “Why you will probably live longer than most big companies,” *IMD.org*.

from 9.7 years in 1980, a decline of 91.75%. In the US the figure fell from five years in 1975 to 10 months in 2022.<sup>19</sup>

From 1977 to 2013, startups as a share of all US firms fell from 16.5% to 8%, a decline pervasive across states and sectors.<sup>20</sup>

Despite higher educational attainment, fewer than 4% of US 30-year-olds in 2013 ('millennials') were 'entrepreneurs' (business founders) compared with 5.4% of those born in 1965-80 and 6.7% in 1944-62.<sup>21</sup> The same downward trend in entrepreneurship has taken place among older citizens of prime working age.<sup>22</sup> The (small) capitalist is, evidently, a dying breed.

Of the roughly 750 currencies that have existed since 1700, less than 20% remain, all of which have been largely devalued.<sup>23</sup> British pound sterling has lost more than 99.6% of its purchasing power since 1751, around the start of the industrial revolution. The US dollar has lost 97% of its purchasing power since 1913. The vast amount of that figure, 91%, ensued after 1949, when the US supplanted Britain as the world's dominant imperialist superpower (i.e.,

the world's dominant exporter of capital/owner of overseas investments). The figure since 1970 is 85% (93.5% for Britain), around the time of the first major post-WWII recession that catalysed the digital/computing/automation revolution.<sup>24</sup>

Costs of production have secularly trended towards zero.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the fastest supercomputer in 1975 was worth \$5m (\$32m in 2013 money); an iPhone 4 released in 2010 with the equivalent performance was \$400. One gigabyte of data storage fell from \$200,000 in 1980 to \$0.03 in 2014.<sup>26</sup>

The production of 1kg of one type of protein molecule through 'precision microbial fermentation'—promising to exponentially augment the production of (chemically identical) animal and plant proteins for next to no cost, making 'conventional' intensive/industrial farming uncompetitive and obsolete (or at least unprofitable)—fell to around \$100 in 2020 from \$1 million (m) in 2000.<sup>27</sup>

The energy return on energy invested (EROI) for oil trended downwards from 100:1 in 1930 to 25:1 in 1970, 10:1 in 1990 and 3.6:1

19 Finder.com/UK, 2020 *Investing Statistics* [online PDF]; Laidler, B., "The costs of rising short-termism," etoro.com.

20 Harris, D., "America Without Entrepreneurs: The Consequences of Dwindling Startup Activity," Medium.org/Team-1776. See also, Shambaugh, J. et al., "The state of competition and dynamism: Facts about concentration, start-ups, and related policies," HamiltonProject.org.

21 Bialik, K., Fry, R., "Millennial life: How young adulthood today compares with prior generations," PewResearch.org; Leonhardt, M., "Millennials earn 20% less than baby boomers did—despite being better educated," CNBC.com.

22 Tuttle, S., "Are millennials less entrepreneurial in the United States than past generations?", Suru Institute, 13 June 2018. The number of startups led by young adults in 2014 was half of the figure in 1996.

23 Dalio, R., "Chapter 3: The Changing Value of Money," *Principled Perspectives*.

24 OfficialData.org.

25 "Long-term food commodity prices since 1850," OurWorldInData.com. Most long-term food commodity prices—barley, coffee, rye, corn, cocoa, tea, peanuts, palm oil, wheat, rice, sugar, and pork—have trended downwards since 1900. Beef and lamb started to go back up in the late 1990s, however.

26 "A history of storage cost," mkomo.com.

27 Southey, F., "Disrupting dairy with precision fermentation: 'By 2035, industrial cattle farming will be obsolete,'" FoodNavigator.com; Hinds, T., "What's new on our Periodic Table of Precision Fermentation?", rethinkx.com.

in 2019.<sup>28</sup>

With oil companies having to dig ever-deeper to extract oil and gas, the process is becoming more complex, expensive and capital- and fuel intensive. In 2019 the world burned 7.7 times more oil than was discovered. Explorers in 2015 discovered only about a tenth as much oil as they have annually on average since 1960.<sup>29</sup>

According to the International Energy Agency, oil production is declining at an average rate of 6.7% annually. Peak oil production struck in 2019, according to Shell. The shale gas/tight oil/fracking 'revolution' that (along with the debt boom) enabled (weak) US growth in the 2010s, also peaked in 2019.<sup>30</sup>

Between 2016 and 2020, the price of a barrel of crude averaged \$51, but the cost of production in Saudi Arabia averaged \$86. The value of Saudi Arabia's state assets, mainly in oil, is expected to fall from \$900bn to (minus)-\$2trn by around 2030.<sup>31</sup>

Oil producers, highly dependent on public subsidies—no bottomless reservoir—have responded to waning profitability by imposing greater levels artificial scarcity (cutting production and/or distribution) than ever before, a strategy that already lifted prices by 70-80%.<sup>32</sup>

Fossil fuels have been vital for capitalism since the intensity and non-renewability of their production—it disappears into thin air once burnt—maximises and renews the demand for labor exploitation and capital investment.

## NEAR-TERM INDICATORS

Restrictions on trade ('trade wars') have been hitting record levels since 2015 (before the election of Donald Trump or Britain's vote to leave the European Union).<sup>33</sup>

In 2023, the first major US bank failures since 2009 included the *second, third and fourth biggest bank failures in US history*.<sup>34</sup>

Whereas the number of bank failures

28 See Mearns, E., "ERoEI for beginners," [euanmearns.com](http://euanmearns.com); Wilson, A., "Energy Return on Investment," [BuildingGreen.com](http://BuildingGreen.com); Brockway, P., et al., "Estimation of global final-stage energy-return-on-investment for fossil fuels with comparison to renewable energy sources," *Nature Energy* issue 4; pp. 612–621; Dalannoy, L, et al., "Peak oil and the low-carbon energy transition: A net-energy perspective," *Applied Energy*, vol. 34, 15 December 2015. Dalannoy claimed that by 2050 half of the energy extracted from global oil reserves will need to be put back into new extraction to keep producing oil, making the whole enterprise pointless.

29 Brower, D., and McCormick, M., "What the end of the US shale revolution would mean for the world," [FT.com](http://FT.com); Berman, A., "US oil dominance is coming to an end." The average annual shale production decline rate is 27%.

30 See "Energy cliff: The coming depression that will never end," SRSrocco Report [YouTube]. See also Brower, D., and McCormick, M., "What the end of the US shale revolution would mean for the world," [FT.com](http://FT.com); and Berman, A., "US oil dominance is coming to an end", [OilPrice.com](http://OilPrice.com). US conventional oil production has been in absolute decline since the 1980s—even during the Great Depression in the 1930s it grew by 3.6%—when it started ramping up oil imports. In the 2000s the US imported around 75% of its oil, about 12-14 million barrels a day. The average annual shale production decline rate is 27%.

31 See "Saudi Arabia's oil problem", Wendover Productions [YouTube].

32 "Revealed: oil sector's 'staggering' \$3bn-a-day profits for last 50 years", [TheGuardian.com](http://TheGuardian.com). In 2009, the G20 nations, which accounted for 79% of global carbon emissions, committed to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies in the medium term, but tripled subsidies for coal-powered plants during the next decade—making up for a 75% plunge in private investment. See also "G20 nations triple coal power subsidies despite climate crisis", [TheGuardian.com](http://TheGuardian.com). Globally, fossil fuel subsidies were \$7trn or 7.1% of world GDP in 2022, according to the IMF—up by \$2 trillion from 2020.

33 "WTO warns on rise of protectionist measures by G20 economies", [FT.com](http://FT.com).

34 Bankrate, 'The 8 largest bank failures in US history'.

during the GFC peaked at 297 in 2009-10, 722 US banks reported unrealised losses exceeding 50% of their capital at the end of the third quarter of 2022 and “face significant safety and soundness risks” (Federal Reserve). Losses on the US banking industry’s investment securities totaled \$690bn in the third quarter (Q3) of 2022—around a quarter of all banking equity capital—compared to less than \$100bn in 2008, at the height of the GFC.<sup>35</sup>

Global debt—substituting for the under-production of value in commodity production—has continually hit record highs, driven by private debt, which trebled between 1950 and 2019.<sup>36</sup>

The ‘private sector’ entered 2020—before the COVID-19 lockdowns—with record debts, according to the International Monetary Fund, despite a decade of near-0% interest rates and record-high government bailouts that heaped much of its debt onto the backs of the public.

Official US national debt relative to GDP hit 126% in 2020, eclipsing the previous record of 119% *at the end of WWII*.<sup>37</sup>

Having climbed *increasingly steeply*, the US’s national debt (i.e., held by the public) exceeded \$35 trillion (trn) for the first time in the second half of 2024; up from \$23trn at the start of 2020; \$9trn at the start of 2007; \$17trn in 2013, \$9trn in 2007; and \$470bn in 1973.

In November 2022, the Bank of International Settlements (BIS, the ‘Bank of Central Banks’) warned that “mostly very short-term” geographically-hidden off-balance-sheet dollar

debt held by financial firms had passed \$80trn—exceeding the stocks of dollar Treasury bills, repurchase agreements and short-term corporate debt combined.

An unprecedented ‘everything bubble’—whereby stock market capitalisation (the total value of publicly-traded stocks) is overvalued relative to GDP—hit record highs after 2009, engulfing *every asset/debt class for the first time*, including (especially since 2020), long-term governments bonds.

It amounts to the third ‘once-in-a-century’ financial ‘bubble’ in three decades—the third to exceed the bubble that collapsed with the 1929 Wall Street Crash—following the 2000-01 ‘dot com bubble’ crash and the 2007-09 ‘housing bubble’ crash. What kind of bubble comes after an ‘everything bubble’ crash?

The value of the Wilshire 5000, the total value of all publicly-traded US stocks, stood in January 2025 at a record high of 205.7% to GDP, beating the previous high of 193.4% in November 2021; the 160% in January 2020 that preceded the two-month ‘covid/lockdown recession’; and the notorious peaks of 138.3% in March 2000 and 105% in October 2007.<sup>38</sup>

Whereas the bubble for the top 10 US technology stocks hit 30% of GDP in March 2000 before crashing to 6% by October 2002, the figure topped 56% in December 2021. In May 2023, the top seven tech stocks accounted for 86% of the S&P 500’s year-to-date returns, having trebled their share of S&P 500 valuation from 8.4% in 2013 to 29.2%.<sup>39</sup>

35 See “Why is the Federal Reserve provoking a financial crisis?”, BestEvidence [YouTube].

36 Mbaye, S., Badia, M., “New data on global debt”, IMF.org.

37 TradingEconomics.com/Office of Management and Budget, The White House. When ‘off-balance-sheet’ debt is included—such as Social Security and Medicare; respectively estimated as on course to go bankrupt in 2026 and 2034—US debt in 2019 was actually \$103 trillion, 490% of GDP. That would put global debt at 560% of GDP; \$215,000 per person (on average) instead of \$86,000. (Surz, R., “Per capita world debt has surged to over \$200,000”, Nasdaq.com.)

38 See “The Buffett Indicator: Market Cap to GDP”, LongTermTrends.net.

39 “7 or 493 stocks: What matters for the S&P 500?”, Blog.Rangvid.com; “Just 7 companies are carrying the S&P 500 in 2023”, SPGlobal.com.

The gigantic size of the bubble demonstrates that, for lack of profitable opportunities in commodity production, investment has been pouring into stock market speculation—where wealth centralises into fewer hands via glorified betting, aiding the restoration of accumulation for the winners—*on by far the largest ever scale*.

The balance sheet of the Federal Reserve (the Fed), the US central bank, rocketed from \$100bn in 2000, mainly then made up of investments in *short-term* government bonds (debt); to \$900bn in September 2008, when, by digitally spending money ‘into existence’, the Fed bailed out banks by buying government debt lent to banks (mortgage-backed securities) and (*long-term* government bonds); to \$9trn in 2020. If that pace had continued, the Fed would “own the entire Treasury [government debt] market in about 22 months”<sup>40</sup>.

The US’s M1 money supply (liquid monies such as cash) rose from \$1.6trn in May 2009, to \$4trn in February 2020, to \$16.5trn in June 2020; and \$20.7trn in March 2022.

The broader M2 supply (including deposits and money market funds) went from \$8.4trn in June 2009 to \$15.3trn in February 2020 and \$22trn in April 2022.

That meant 80.7% of all M1 ever put into circulation was ‘printed’ (electronically spent into existence) in just 23 months; or 69.5% for M2 in 26 months.

For comparison, the total the US has spent on its wars on Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Paki-

40 Martens, P., and Martens, R., “The Federal Reserve now owns 15 Percent of the US Treasury market; at its current rate, it could own the whole market in less than two years,” WallStreetOnParade.com. In April 2020, the balance sheet of the G4 central banks (the US, Britain, Japan and the EU) collectively represented 40% of their GDP, up from 18% in 2010 and 30% in 2016.

41 Crawford, N., “1 United States Budgetary Costs and Obligations of Post-9/11 Wars through FY2020: \$6.4 Trillion.”

42 The Australian, Dutch and Swiss central banks also reported large operating losses. N.B. Cancelling a government’s debt to its central bank is not much of an option. Firstly, as then BoE governor Andrew Bailey pointed out, government borrowing from the central bank cannot be cost-free, since the latter is still paying interest on reserves (“BoE is financing UK’s coronavirus measures, Bailey acknowledges”, *The Financial Times* [online].) The factoring-in of future debt repayments in spending plans, moreover, helps to hold back inflation. As of September 2023, the Federal Reserve was paying interest of 5.5% on reserves of \$3.2trn.

stan since 2001 have cost \$6.4trn.<sup>41</sup>

The Fed started to operate at a loss in October 2022—with its long-term assets fixed at lower rates but its short-term liabilities (money owed) burdened by rising interest rates (a result of falling private investment)—putting it on course to have negative tangible equity (liabilities exceeding assets) *for the first time*. That meant the Treasury stopped receiving the Fed’s surpluses, a \$100bn+ annual revenue source—four times the annual budget of NASA.<sup>42</sup>

The US government’s interest payments on borrowing rose from 8% of government spending in 2019 to 13% in 2023; making it the fastest growing component of the federal budget. As investment falls and fixed rates of interest expire, this figure will continue to rise. The tax base, which private enterprise is increasingly dependent on for subsidies, is therefore tending towards collapse. A 1% rate of interest on £30trn of national debt is \$300bn, but 10% is \$3trn—not much less than total US tax revenues of \$4.9trn in 2022, already short of the \$6.27trn in government spending.

By September 2023, the ‘gold standard’ inverted yield curve—when the interest rate on the 10-year Treasury Bill (government debt) carries lower interest rates than the usually less risky 3-month or 2-year—had been signalling a recession for a *record* 212 days straight. Historically, the longer a recession takes to start after an inversion, the more severe the recession is.

As the US yield curve started to uninvert,

it did so *in a unique way*. The yield curve has always uninverted via short-term rates falling faster than long-term rates. *For the first time*, the yield curve flattened because long-term yields climbed faster than short-term rates. This indicates that confidence in long-term investment has collapsed to an extent never before experienced.

The Fed's baseline interest rate hikes took *eight years*, peaking at 19% in 1980-81, to combat the inflation of the 1970s. Because of lower wages relative to household debt levels, interest rates of 3% in Britain in 2022 were the equivalent of 14% in 1980.<sup>43</sup>

Overall real wages (adjusted for inflation) fell globally in 2022 for the first time since comparable records began (International Labor Organization). The US in early 2022 saw the fastest ever decline in job openings (excluding the lockdown shock).

The medium real revenue growth of 'FAANG' stocks—Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, the five best-performing US tech companies of the 2010s, comprising about 20% of the value of the S&P 500—turned negative in 2022 *for the first time*.<sup>44</sup>

2022 was the worst year for stocks and bonds combined since 1871. Long-term US government bonds saw the biggest drop since 1788. The classic investor blend of bonds and equities put in the worst performance since 1932. In 2023, the Bank of America said losses on bond sales over the previous three years had been the worst over an extended period *in US history*.<sup>45</sup>

In October 2022 the US started the largest-ever emergency release of oil from the Strategic

Petroleum Reserve (SPR), which fell to a 38-year low of 21 days, then 17 a year later, down from 40 in 2020; and 350 million barrels, below half of the 2011 peak. The 283 million barrels sold took 25 years to accumulate.<sup>46</sup>

The rising costs of reproducing US military power has seen its naval and air force capacity consistently diminish. The number of its heavy bombers has fallen to 140, from 400 in 1989; and navy ships from 600 to 292; while many of those that remain are operating well past their sell-by date.<sup>47</sup>

The central bank baseline interest rate in the US and Britain hit 0% for the first time ever in the wake of the GFC as the demand for capital rose as a result of recessionary devaluations, making capital cheaper to purchase. The average Federal Reserve interest rate cut during recessions between 1958 and 2009 has been 6%. Since the 1980s, each US recession has started at a lower baseline rate—19% in 1981, 8% in 1989, 5% in 2000, 4% in 2008; 1.5% in 2020. How negative could central bank rates go before lending is disincentivised? Rates are therefore likely to trend back upwards as investment plummets, making accumulation increasingly dependent on dispossession, accelerating the centralisation of value and capital into the hands of an ever-slimmer minority.

## THE (R)EVOLUTIONARY NECESSITY OF 'STATE MONOPOLY SOCIALISM'

Empirical long-term economic data indicates that *world* socialism is becoming an absolute economic necessity *for the first time*. Socialism has grown within the womb of capitalism itself—just as capitalism emerged within feudal-

43 Conway, E., "Rising interest rates are a bigger deal than you might think," EdConway.com.

44 "A vicious stagflationary environment", Crescat.net.

45 *Financial Times*, 'A year of pain: investors struggle in a new era of higher rates'.

46 CNN, 'America's emergency oil stockpile is at a 38-year low but it's still got firepower left'.

47 *Defense News*, 'America's bomber force is too small and getting smaller'; *American Legion*, 'ALL HANDS ON DECK TO DETER CHINA'.

ism—through the evolution of material production and society's economic-technical basis. Accumulation itself—the quantitative and qualitative improvement of production—historically now demands that *social* accumulation usurp capital accumulation.

The *evolution* of society's economic-technical basis—from mechanised commodity to automated use-value—increasingly demands a *revolution* in the political-legal superstructure. Stimulated by the attacks of the capitalist class—increasingly desperate attempts to offset falling profitability—on wages, living standards and peace, the (exponentially growing) working class will be increasingly *compelled* to take up a revolutionary struggle to take over the ownership and control of production and establish a new socialist state that usurps the old capitalist state. Through ongoing struggle (including, to minimise conflict as much as possible, the expropriation of the last capitalists via compensation and long-term debt payments),<sup>48</sup> the socialist state will increasingly take production and services under public ownership until a total public monopoly of the economy is completed.

The establishment of the new *relations of production*—from private to public/social/hu-

man ownership of production—will represent a *social revolution*; and a culmination of an ultimately inseparable series of evolutionary phases and epochs not only during centuries of specifically capitalist production but thousands of years of privately-owned production comprising the various forms of slavery, feudalism and (imperialist) capitalism.

Given that evolutionary phases are regulated by productive and economic development and are therefore relatively gradual and cannot be 'leapt' over, the evolution of the productive forces (man and technology) now demands that 'state monopoly capitalism' is transcended by 'state monopoly socialism.'

Since capital accumulation is increasingly dependent on *i*) mergers/monopolisation; *ii*) central planning (eliminated internal markets, centralised data, etc.) and *iii*) state (public) subsidies, contracts and facilities;<sup>49</sup> a 'final merger'—a therefore public monopoly since no exchange of ownership is required—and central planning of the economy *as a whole*, is becoming, *for the first time*, an economic necessity.<sup>50</sup>

Since the private sector is losing its ability to employ value-creating (commodity-producing) labor—it does so only if profitable—(public)

48 Arguably this is already happening to some degree, given a significant amount of China's overseas investments are made by *state-owned* enterprises. (Whether or not China is simply a 'state capitalist' mixed economy or intentionally attempting to transition to communism is of course also open to debate.) All modes of production end partly via compensation for the 'old masters'—who, in trying to cling on to their wealth, property, power and privilege, tend to be the most rebellious and reactionary, *initiating the class struggle*—to limit social conflict as much as possible and to conquer a peace. The British capitalist state only finished paying off long-term debt to families of former slave owners in 2015. When feudal lords returned from the Crusades—wars driven by the economic need to expand land ownership—they would often be so broke that they would accept offers from peasants buying lands. With contemporary weaponry being what it is and in the context of the climate/environmental crisis, expropriation via compensation is a more important policy than ever. Given the massive productivity gains to be made, paying long-term debt should prove to be relatively easy, although 'taxes' will of course be impacted, particularly initially. It may also be prudent to offer the last capitalists prominent jobs or roles in the industries in which they hold expertise, in order to make them more receptive to defection.

49 See Mazzucato, M, *The Entrepreneurial State*, pp. 31, 193. Private spending on research and development (R&D) has consistently declined to the point that in the US private R&D labs have "mostly disappeared", making corporations dependent on state-military R&D.

50 We use the term 'necessity' not in a deterministic but *relational* way. Marx's understanding of the *immanent* (inherent) movement of matter—confirmed by contemporary quantum physics—is that it is *part random* and *part relational*. Each movement relates to the one that came before, and so although the motion of matter is *indeterminate*, it is to some extent limited by that previous movement.

society, via the state and state/social enterprise, must take over responsibility for employment, enabling actual full, formal employment (thereby revitalising earn-as-you-learn apprenticeships and retraining for workers displaced by innovation).

Since money is dying a natural death, with physical cash also becoming obsolete through digitalisation, it must be phased out and replaced by an *inherently* centralised non-transferable digital voucher credit system; with the 'currency' pegged to labor time, weighted against productivity rates and supply and demand. Work of 5.5 hours earns, on average, for example, 5.5 credits that can be used to draw down entitlements ('purchase' goods and services) that take, on average, 5.5 labor hours to produce; with prices adjusting upwards with higher demand relative to supply and vice-versa to ensure break-even production and price stability.<sup>51</sup>

Since vouchers are non-transferable, cancelled like train tickets once 'spent', the centralisation of wealth into fewer and fewer hands is impossible. The most productive workers and those whose services are in highest demand relative to supply will still receive the highest pay, but as time goes on a larger proportion of workers will join the ranks of the most productive; and falling prices and accelerating innovation and productivity will progressively lift living standards for all.

Since the workforce is now almost entirely services-based—services workers produce relatively little new value per commodity, since they tend to handle, if any, finished or near-finished commodities—stable economic growth can only be established by an applicable system, whereby 'value' (measured in labor time as an accounting measure) is created not by anarchic (recessionary, competitive), for-profit commodity-production; but by planned (joined-up, co-ordinated), break-even utility-production.

Since the process of 'globalisation', the global integration of production and distribution, is increasingly interrupted by capitalism's worsening breakdowns, its completion necessitates world socialism, making 'trade' *actually free* (again, since no exchange of ownership takes place between social enterprises)—necessitating a new Communist International, made up of socialist republics to co-ordinate global co-operation.

## **HIGHER/STATELESS COMMUNISM**

Once the transitional socialist state has taken the whole economy under public ownership, the state will have been abolished, since the state is by definition the rule of one class over another—in the case of a transitional socialist state, the rule of the working class over the remainder of the dwindling capitalist class. This process is unlikely to be a straightforward or linear one. As experienced in the past, there may be spells where isolated socialist countries or blocs need to allow partial reprivatisation in order to evade sanctions, import resources, and build up foreign reserves. Once, however, the whole economy is publicly owned (ultimately globally) class has technically been abolished. A governmental structure remains, of course, but no longer represents a state. As bourgeois worldviews and counterrevolutionaries die out, the nature of the government structure should evolve in a way that requires less and less dependence on the party and military and intelligence services.

As the productivity of social enterprise becomes increasingly prolific and prices fall back towards zero; new 'distributed' technologies promoting self-sufficiency, such as precision fermentation and 3D printing will diffuse (as has already largely happened with smartphones and laptops, for example) leading to increasingly abundant (extremely plentiful) material wealth

51 See Reese, T., "Fiat currency is dying a natural death—its logical replacement is a digital voucher system fixed to labor time", grossmanite.medium.com: <https://grossmanite.medium.com/fiat-currency-is-dying-a-natural-death-its-logical-replacement-is-a-digital-voucher-system-fixed-c0d6fc45f28e>.

for all, revitalising independent craftsmanship along with creative, aesthetic and spiritual endeavours.

The relatively centralised, hierarchical authority of the communist governing structure—although it will tend to be more heterarchical than hierarchical—will therefore tend to dissipate as mass dependence on state-owned enterprise eases and previously economically weak peripheral nations, zones and regions become increasingly prosperous. So, *whereas capitalism has a long-term tendency to centralise wealth and power, socialism has a long-term tendency to decentralise wealth and power.*

‘Lower communism’ evolves into ‘higher communism’, just as ‘lower’ ‘mercantile/free market/competitive’ capitalism evolved into a higher form, monopoly capitalism, which today has evolved into a *presocialist*, advanced state monopoly capitalism.

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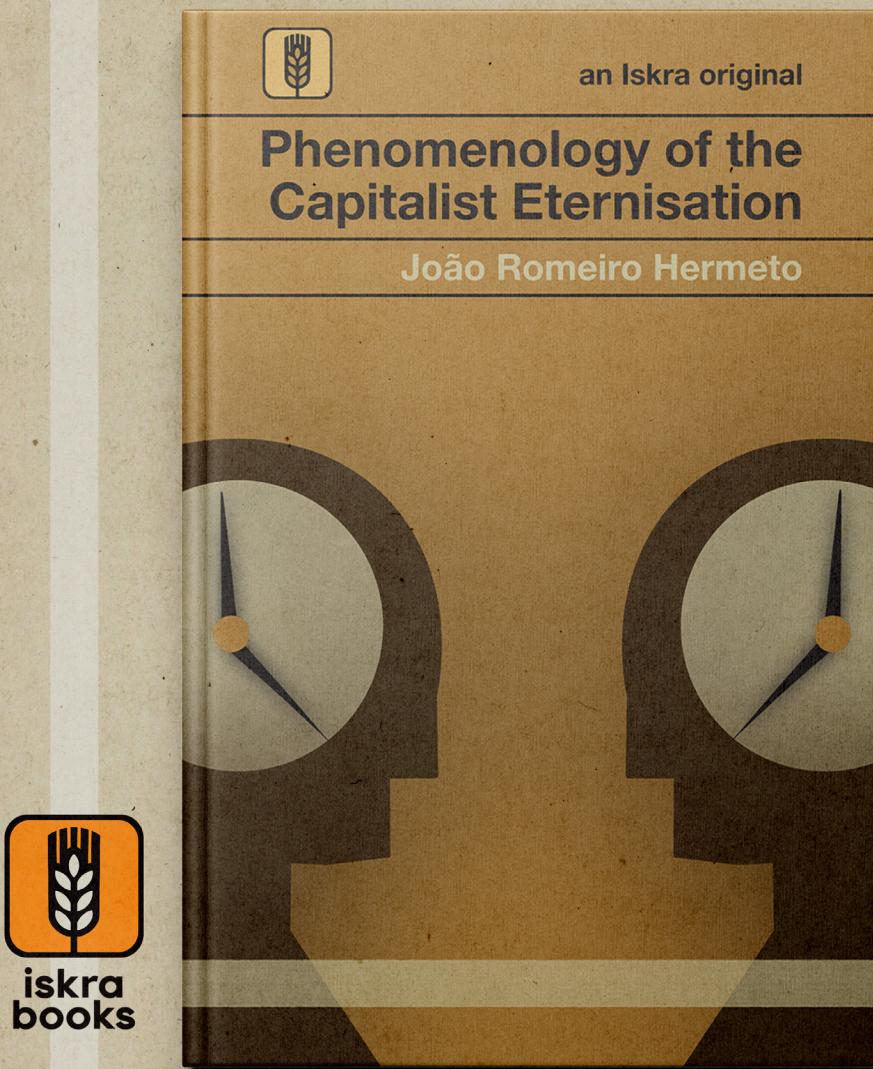
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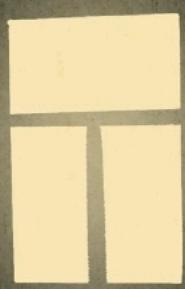
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**—KARL MARX, 1843**

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