

What is Revolution?

What is a “revolutionary situation”?

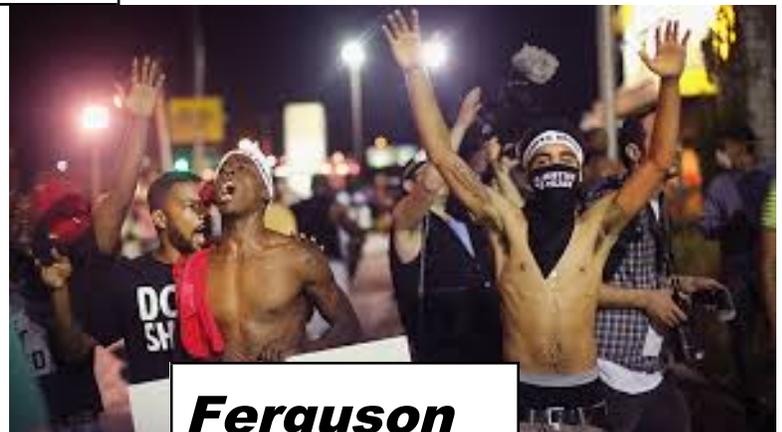
How do we prepare for it?



Egypt



Syria



Ferguson



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Introduction

In 2013, some 668 people were killed by the police in the United States.¹ Added to this are the thousands of cases of police brutality, corruption, false arrests, etc. This situation does not exist in a vacuum; it is made necessary by the economic crisis of capitalism itself which drives Corporate America to try to further repress and divide workers and youth. As self-styled “zillionaire” Nick Hanauer said: “You show me a highly unequal society and I’ll show you a police state.” But one result is that it seems to be generating a new revolutionary movement, as the growth of “Black Lives Matter” shows. This movement is not alone – from South Africa to Greece, from

Egypt to China, working class people, especially the youth, are rising up against the ravages of capitalism. Like some of their counterparts in the United States, they are dedicated to revolution.

Revolution, which is part art and part science, is a complicated process and not all movements that start down the path towards revolutionary change end up that way. And with capitalism being more of a global system than ever before, now more than ever revolutionaries have to study the process globally. We hope that this pamphlet can make a small contribution towards understanding the “science” part of revolution and that it can be part of a larger dialog on what has worked and what hasn’t.

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What Is Revolution?

The Slap Heard Round the World*

Dec. 16, 2010, Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia

Little did policewoman Faïda Hamdi know what she was setting loose when she slapped the fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi and confiscated his cart in that little town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, on that December day of 2010. First of all, she had no idea that a desperate Bouazizi, who was the sole source of support for his family, would respond by sitting down in front of the police station, pouring gasoline over himself and setting himself on fire. (He died a few weeks later.) But Hamdi also had no idea that she would be releasing the floodgates, that the anger and frustration that had been building up for years over the unemployment, the poverty, the food price inflation, and the government corruption and repression would overflow and bring down the government of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Nor did she have any idea that what would follow would be an uprising throughout the region, one that would bring down the governments in Egypt (twice), Libya and Yemen with further uprisings and major protests in eight other countries.

*Truly it was "the slap that was heard around the world."**

Shortly after Bouazizi's act, Laseen Naji, another young man, electrocuted himself out of despair of his impoverished situation, and Ramzi Al-Abboudi, a bankrupt small business owner, also killed himself. And the masses rose up. What was happening was that the regime of Ben Ali had maintained itself for years through its contract with the masses: The government would subsidize the price of bread, cooking oil, transport, and other necessities and in turn its corruption and repression would be tolerated. However, under the pressure of global capitalism, the Ben Ali regime was reversing course, cutting subsidies, privatizing and catering to huge multi-national corporations. Something had to give.

As in other countries, had it not been for Bouazizi it would have been something else that set these events in motion in Tunisia. (Just like had it not been for the assassination of Michael Brown in Ferguson, it would have been somebody else.) In Tunisia, there had been a series of strikes and protests going back as far as 2008, including in the mining regions of Gafsa. There were also tens of thousands of Tunisian youth who had graduated university only to find that the only income they could get was like the poverty wages that Mohamed Bouazizi made.

Tunisian Government Brought Down; Repression and Corruption Remain

The mass protests that followed Bouazizi's act forced Ben Ali from office. A series of maneuvers changed the faces at the top with no real change on the ground.

The repression continues with a series of political assassinations.

Also certain is that the economic issues cannot be

* In 1914, the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was shot and killed by a nationalist terrorist. This was the final impulse that led directly to WW I and became known as "the shot heard round the world."

avoided forever. The representatives of global capitalism and the main capitalist powers will be pressuring any new Tunisian regime for more "reforms." More importantly, such pressures will spring from the dynamics of the "free" market itself.

From the outside, it is impossible to get a really clear view of how the movement will develop in Tunisia. However, one thing is certain: Although it may delay a new crisis, the constitutional road and "democratic" reforms will resolve nothing. That is because the real, driving force is the economic disaster that so many in Tunisia are feeling, especially the youth. And that disaster is based on the capitalist system itself. The question that cries out for an answer, therefore, is how the budding revolutions like the one in Tunisia can move forward.

One thing the revolt in Tunisia did accomplish was to let loose a floodgate throughout the region; the "Arab Spring" was in progress.

Syria

March, 2011, Syria

In Syria, the original wave of protests in March of 2011 was put down by the military, but then rank and file soldiers started deserting. A reporter who visited Syria in the early stages of the revolt filed this report, which is worth quoting at length:

"In Taftanaz, fighters from the FSA (Free Syrian Army, made up of soldiers who had deserted Assad's army) started protecting demonstrations, quietly standing in the back and watching for mukhabarat (secret police). For the first time, the balance of power shifted in favor of the revolution, so much so that government forces could no longer operate openly. Party officials and secret agents vanished, leaving the town to govern itself.

This created new problems: courts stopped working, trash piled high on the streets, and the police stayed home. To fill the vacuum, citizens came together to elect councils—farmers formed their own, as did merchants, laborers, teachers, students, health-care workers, judges, engineers, and the



The author (right) with a Muslim fundamentalist in Tahrir Square. When it was explained that the US government had nothing in particular against Muslims, when that government's role around the world was explained, this brother responded very positively. He said he wished the author would read the Koran, to I replied "thank you and I hope you read the Communist Manifesto." This one small encounter shows the tremendous potential for open debate and discussion in that setting – a debate that was missed when it was agreed not to discuss politics in the occupation committee.

unemployed. In some cases, the councils merged with pre-existing activist networks called local coordinating committees. They in turn chose delegates to sit on a citywide council, which in Taftanaz and surrounding towns was the only form of government the citizenry recognized.

All around Taftanaz, amid the destruction, rebel councils like this were meeting—twenty-seven in all, and each of them had elected a delegate to sit on the citywide council. They were a sign of a deeper transformation that the revolution had wrought....

In the neighboring town of Binnish, I visited the farmers' council, a body of about a thousand members that set grain prices and adjudicated land disputes. Its leader, an old man I'll call Abdul Hakim, explained to me that before the revolution, farmers were forced to sell grain to the government at a price that barely covered the cost of production. Following the uprising, the farmers tried to sell directly to the town at almost double the former rates. But locals balked and complained to the citywide council, which then mandated a return to the old prices—which has the farmers disgruntled, but Hakim acknowledged that in this revolution, "we have to give to each as he needs."....

From "A Revolution of the Poor" to counter revolution

(In) the public-affairs committee, (of) one of the village's revolutionary councils (meets). The mustached man slammed his hands on the floor and shouted, "This is a revolution of the poor! The rich will have to accept that." He turned to me and explained, "We've gone to every house in town and determined what they need"—he pointed at the ledger—"and compared it with what donations come in. Everything gets recorded and can be seen by the public."²

Note that these revolutionary councils in and around Taftanaz, Syria, were starting to take on the tasks, not only those of self-defense, but of running society as a whole, including the economy. In doing so, they intuitively rejected the "free market" propaganda; they intuitively started to move toward some sort of economic plan.

However, Assad managed to keep a base within the Shiite community. As a result, his regime was able to launch an all-out military assault on the revolutionaries, and this then led the revolution down the road to a military battle. Through this, various forces came to the fore. One was former commanders of the Assad regime. Another was Sunni fundamentalists. The latter's entry strengthened Assad's grip on his supporters and also drove the Syrian Christians and Shites into Assad's camp, as they understandably feared attack from the Sunni fundamentalists.

The potential was there to appeal to the still-loyal rank and file soldiers. This would have meant clearly explaining to

them what these new workers' councils meant, how they could transform the lives of the families of the soldiers – peasants, workers, small shop keepers, etc. Had that been done, then the revolution could have advanced as a revolution.

Instead, within months, a layer of former Assad loyalist military officers jumped ship, probably with prior contact with the West. Also, the reactionary, pro-capitalist Sunni Islamic fundamentalist groups got involved, some supported by the degenerate and reactionary Saudi regime. Other reactionary regimes like that of President Erdogan in Turkey got involved. *The political uprising from below became dominated by reactionary military forces from above. This combined with the massive military intervention by the reactionary Russian and Iranian regimes. The counter revolution also struck in the form of the Islamic State, which was actually encouraged by Assad.*



Daily "Freedom rally" in Taftanaz. During the revolt from below, these rallies drew thousands.

Egypt

The Egyptian revolution actually started several years before the overthrow of Mubarak with a series of militant strikes. Then there was the mass occupation in Cairo's Tahrir Square and other cities starting in January of 2011, but the event that sealed Mubarak's fate was a general strike in and around Cairo on Feb. 1. During the occupation, itself, the occupiers realized that it was necessary to organize their occupations, if for no other reason than to remove garbage, direct traffic, etc. They set up occupation committees for this purpose. The occupations were made up of many different groups with many different points of view. In Cairo's Tahrir Square, for instance, there were groups of strongly religious Muslims, Christian groups, socialists and many others. The occupation committee decided that since the political views were so varied, that the committee would be "non political", that it wouldn't take up political issues. This was to avoid internal conflict. Unfortunately, the socialists on the committee went along with this decision.

This was a serious mistake; internal conflict and debate are inherent and necessary for any revolution-in-the-making.

Consider what could have happened: At the same time as the occupation, a group of workers who had had their company privatized were filing a court case. The socialists on the occupation committee should have pushed for that committee to hear the workers' case also – as well as the cases of any other workers who had a grievance against their employer. If the committee ruled in favor of the workers, it could have sanctioned an occupation of that work place. If the official committee refused to take up such cases, then those in favor of it in the occupation could have organized it themselves, and made that a center of action and discussion within the occupation. In that way, the clear class issues could have started to arise in the occupation. Also, in that way, a body would have started to develop that would have started to play a role in society as a whole – an alternative to the capitalist state apparatus.

In just two years, the Egyptian revolution has undergone many twists and turns. From the occupation, the

²<http://harpers.org/archive/2012/08/welcome-to-free-syria/>

movement was led to focus on the elections. The socialists who went along with keeping political debate out of the occupation committees supported Morsi in the elections.

Mass Sexual Assaults in Egypt

Then, following that, a new counter-revolutionary development arose: the mass sexual assaults on women. This was a constant threat under Mubarak, and during the movement that removed him, his forces stepped up those attacks. They stripped searched women, and in one well-publicized case they dragged a nearly naked woman through the streets. Under Morsi, these assaults increased. In dozens of cases, scores of men would surround a woman, strip her naked, insert their fingers and objects into every orifice in her body, etc.

As one Egyptian activist, Magda Adly, put it *"Under Mubarak, the government paid thugs to beat male protestors and sexually assault women... this is still happening now.... I believe thugs are being paid money to do this.... The Muslim Brotherhood have the same political approaches as Mubarak."*³

These women, especially the working class and poor women, are not going away. As one web site reported, many women in Mo'assasset el Zakat, *"an impoverished shanty town in close proximity to El Marg, north of Cairo.... argue that this is a ploy to terrorise and intimidate women so that they do not go out to the streets, and the only thing to do is push back and not be deterred."*⁴

In response, the women have started organizing armed marches as well as self defense groups. In some cases, they were joined by some men.

It is impossible to tell from here how these could have developed. However, maybe they could have also been filled out to not only defend women (a task of fundamental importance), but also defend the movement as a whole.

After the new government was in power less than a month, workers' protests were already on the rise. This is the result of the continuation of the same anti-worker policies which pushed Egyptians into organizing the largest number of protests anywhere in the world last year and was the main factor behind the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood regime.⁵

Maybe the self defense committees could have approached the striking workers, first of all for support in their task of defending women and defending the revolution. This would have included defense committees in the work places and on the strike lines. It would also have included defending other threatened groups, such as the Egyptian Christians, who have been threatened and attacked.

These committees could also have approached the rank and file of the military, who can be a powerful ally. This author, for instance, personally met participants in the occupation of Tahrir Square who were soldiers on leave. In this way, the revolution could start to make inroads into the central power base of Egyptian capitalism's regime – the military.

This is, of course, partly speculation since it is written from afar, but it shows how these self defense committees could

possibly have developed into a source of power that rivals that of the capitalist state.

State Apparatus and Relations of Production

One thing is clear, though: Changing the people at the top will not bring about fundamental change. That is because power does not rest in the hands of one individual head of state alone. He or she must rest on a government bureaucracy which includes the police, the judicial system, the military, etc. In addition to this apparatus of direct repression, there are all sorts of other indispensable wings of any regime, such as a wing to collect taxes, for which all sorts of record keeping is also necessary. In the capitalist world, these bureaucracies do not exist in isolation from the capitalist class. The leading military tops are directly tied in with them by a thousand threads, including social ties, positions that will be open to them after retirement from the military, etc. The same is true for the judges, and heads of the different bureaucracies. This influence then filters down through every department through opportunities for promotion – or disciplining or firing in the case of rebellious members of the bureaucracy.

JP Morgan & New York Police Department

A clear example of this connection occurred in New York City in 2011. There, right during the height of the Occupy Wall St. movement, JP Morgan bank made a \$4.6 million donation to the New York City Police Department. Within days the NYPD were attacking the protesters, and the "white shirts" - the upper echelon officers - were the most brutal.

So as long as these government bureaucracies remain in place, the revolution is incomplete.



NYPD "white shirts" attacking Occupy protesters. They were paid by JP Morgan.

That is why it is not just a matter of changing the individuals. They are just the cogs in the wheel; their mode of function is based on how the bureaucracy is set up in the first place. As anybody with any experience with any government agency can tell, these agencies are set up to create a barrier between themselves and the working class. They are set up to be out of control of the working class.

U.S. Government

The writing of the Constitution of the United States is a perfect example.

The framers of the Constitution – bankers, capitalists and slave owners to the last man – had a difficult task. They needed to establish a stronger central government that would remain under their control, but in such a way as to get approval from the voting majority (white males, mostly property owners including small farmers). One of the tricks they carried out was the famous "separation of powers" of the three different branches of government – the executive, the legislative and the

³<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3503/egypt-islamists-sexual-assault>

⁴<http://theislamawareness.blogspot.com/2013/03/politically-motivated-sexual-assault.html>

⁵<http://menasolidaritynetwork.com/2013/08/01/egypt-textile-strikes-put-pressure-on-new-government/>

judicial. Any one branch could put the other two in check. Not only that, but if there were a mass movement, it would be nearly impossible for that movement to seize control over all three branches at once. Congress members were elected every two years; Senators every six and neither the Senators nor the Congress members were all elected at the same time. This meant that a mass movement, at best, could only gain one third of the senate in any election. As for the president, he or she is elected indirectly. And sitting over all of this is the judicial system – with court justices appointed for life and who can throw out any action of the legislature and the president together.

A review of the writings of some of the leaders of the Constitutional convention reveals that they were very conscious of what they were doing.

But it is more than that. Sitting behind these branches of government are the various bureaucracies. They assign and collect taxes, grant (or deny) licenses and permits, meaning permission to do everything from pollute the water and air to build a building. All of these bureaucracies are insulated from the direct control of the working class.

Then on top of that sits the military, whose officers are tied by a thousand different threads to the capitalist class. Many of them come from that class. They socialize with them. They participate in think tanks and conferences organized by them. And when they retire, they often are given lucrative consultant positions for various corporations, or are called upon by the corporate press as “experts”.

In short, the capitalist class (or in the case of the United States, in collaboration with the slave owning class) sets up a government that they can control; the working class will never be able to assert its will through this government.*

Examples from today

Just a brief search of today's government shows how it works. Take the CIA, for instance. Originally set up by Allen Dulles under President Eisenhower, it has the closest of links with Wall Street. Dulles, himself, was a lawyer with the Wall St. attorney firm Sullivan and Cromwell. “According to Peter Dale Scott, over the next twenty years, all seven deputy directors of the agency were drawn from the Wall Street financial aristocracy; and six were listed in the New York social register.”⁶

Or consider the tops of the US criminal (in)justice system. US Attorney General. US Attorney General (as of this writing) Eric Holder and his head of the criminal “justice” division “were partners for years at a Washington law firm that represented a Who's Who of big banks and other companies at the center of alleged foreclosure fraud, a Reuters inquiry shows. The firm, Covington & Burling, is one of Washington's biggest

* Some make the mistake of concluding from this that we should therefore never participate in capitalist elections, never try to get socialists and workers' representatives elected to office in a capitalist state. This is a mistake of formal logic which doesn't take into account how workers actually view matters and how the movement will develop. This issue can't be fully dealt with here, but we can say this: Socialists elected to office can use their position as a powerful platform to campaign against capitalism and to help workers organize to fight for themselves.

6 <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article30605.htm>

white shoe law firms.” This firm included as its clients Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase, etc.⁷

At the local level, one of the more prominent police chiefs is New York City's police commissioner, William Bratton. A search on the valuable web site Muckety.com reveals his links with corporations such as Motorola, for a start. He is also a member of the Homeland Security Advisory Council, and through this he is linked with major corporate executives, including those from Booz, Allen, Hamilton; Southwest Airlines; and Lockheed Corporation and also top strategists for Corporate America like William Webster, Mitt Romney and James Schlesinger. Another member of the Security Advisory Council is Kenneth “Chuck” Canterbury, national president of the Fraternal Order of Police. Through him, Corporate America makes direct links with the rank and file of the police nationwide.

So we can see that from the very top, from the heads of the top law enforcement agency in the nation (the Department of “Justice”) on down to local law enforcement – both its chiefs as well as the rank-and-file – this branch of government is completely integrated into Corporate America, that is, the US capitalist class. If you look at the major donors to almost all sitting politicians, if you look at the links with the judges, you will find the same thing.

The main point is this: At the top of every government agency sits appointees who have direct links with the capitalist class. They set the culture, the method of operating, for the entire bureaucracy. Since there is no way for the workers to directly intervene on a daily basis, it's impossible to for the working class to take these bureaucracies over and run them in their interest. The very best they could possibly do would be to review decisions and actions after the fact. That is simply fighting a losing battle.

For workers to control a government, the entire apparatus has to be swept clean. History shows how this can be done.

Workers' Government

As we saw in the case of Taftanaz, Syria, and from what could have been possible in Egypt, whenever there is a mass workers' uprising, that movement always tends to throw up some sort of committee to coordinate the struggle.

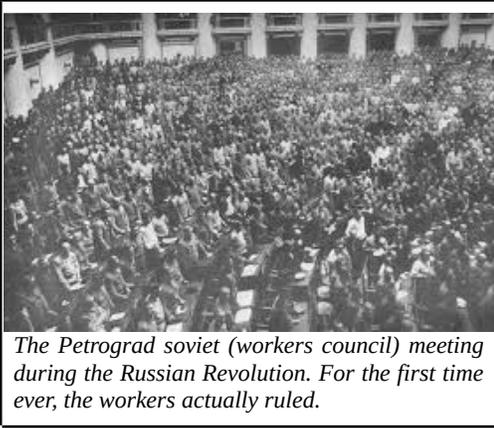
The idea that the women's self defense committees could start to play a wider role, or the idea that the committees that organized the occupation in Tahrir Square could have done so, does not come from nowhere. It comes from the entire history of the workers' movement over the decades and centuries, including under totally different circumstances.

During the Seattle general strike of 1919, for instance, the strikers set up a general strike committee. Realizing, however, that Seattle residents would need certain basic goods, the general strike committee set about determining which businesses could operate and which couldn't. Milk suppliers, for instance, appeared before the general strike committee, received permission to deliver their milk, and their trucks operated with a sign showing that they had permission from the general strike committee. In other words, this committee started to take on the

⁷http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/20/eric-holder-banks-lanny-breuer_n_1218452.html

broader tasks of running society as a whole.

A more “complete” form of this process was the Russian Revolution.** There, the revolution developed in two great waves – those of 1905 and 1917. In both of those revolutionary waves, the workers threw up workers' councils, what they called “soviets”, to consolidate the movement and carry it forward. These soviets tended to take on all sorts of different issues, such as dealing with supplies and prices in stores in the workers' neighborhoods. The rank and file soldiers also elected representatives to these councils, and at a key point in the 1917 revolution, the soldiers placed themselves under the command of the soviets, rather than of their official commanders.



The Petrograd soviet (workers council) meeting during the Russian Revolution. For the first time ever, the workers actually ruled.

The situation became one of “dual power”, where power lay in the competing hands of the soviets and the provisional government. It was the turning point in the revolution; it meant the downfall of the

previous provisional government, the government that had replaced the Tsar.

From the Russian Revolution to the mass movement in Chile in early 1970s and in Iran later in that same decade, from political uprisings to general strikes – time and again whenever workers have gone onto a widespread offensive they have tended to build their own committees first and foremost to coordinate their movement and help it advance. But in the process, these committees of struggle have always tended to broaden out and take on wider tasks. This was the case in Taftanaz (and almost certainly elsewhere, too) in the earlier stages of the Syrian revolution. Every struggle is different in some ways, and exactly how such committees form will vary also. *One key task of revolutionaries is to identify the specific way such committees are forming and be able to see what is the next logical step in advancing them.*

“Dual Power”

Some will ask, “How can a revolution possibly stand up to the military?” After all, no matter how many guns workers might have, they are like the Native Americans' bows and arrows vs. the Gatling guns of the early US Cavalry. A few rifles and hand guns can't begin to compare with the fighter jets, tanks, and similar weaponry.

But all the weapons in the world need rank and file soldiers to control and use them, and that's where the capitalists have their weak spot. Corporate America had to withdraw from

** *That this revolution later degenerated and was then reversed is a different matter that is well worth studying also. The main point though, is that the revolution was isolated to one country and a backwards, impoverished one at that.*

Vietnam largely because they had lost control over their own troops, thousands of whom were refusing to fight and many of whom were attacking their own officers.

Domestically, the National Guard is the last bastion of law enforcement, and who are the National Guardsmen but, literally, workers in uniform? In normal conditions, they will feel forced to obey their officers, but we're talking about *abnormal* conditions here. In the Russian Revolution, the rank and file of the military had their own representatives in the workers' councils. And more recently, during the uprising in Egypt, there were rank and file soldiers in the occupation of Tahrir Square. When a revolution is in full swing, the soldiers will be open to only obeying the directives of the workers' committees, rather than their own officers. This was what happened in the course of the Russian Revolution, for instance.

How this can develop is different in every situation. In Egypt, for instance, maybe it would have been possible at one point for such councils and for dual power to have developed initially through the women's self-defense committees. In other cases, through a general strike committee. Part of the *art* of revolution is understanding those developments, those openings, in every mass movement and figuring out how they can be carried forward, how their potential power can be fleshed out. *The key, though, is to always be looking for the organizations of the working class to resolve the issue – no matter if it's the question of police brutality and murder or environmental destruction or anything else – instead of looking towards governmental bodies.*

Economy

In all societies, the class that owns the “means of production” controls the state apparatus. That was true in ancient slave societies like Greece, Rome, Egypt, the Aztecs, etc. It was true for the US slave society. And it's equally true today for two reasons:

First of all, as we've shown, they directly control the entire government (“state”) apparatus.

Second, under capitalism, almost all economic decisions are made based on maximizing profits. Will we eat healthy food, or will a few corporations like Monsanto genetically manipulate the crops so that they can tolerate ever-increasing amounts of pesticides and with unknown ultimate consequences for the environment and our health? Will we have inexpensive or outright free, clean mass transit, where people ride together collectively, or will every individual be forced to move around in their own, inside a hermetically-sealed piece of steel-on-wheels, while they enrich the auto insurance companies and add to global warming? Will we have decent housing for all, or will thousands of homes sit vacant while luxury housing is built for the few and tens of thousands of others live in tents under freeways?

All these investment decisions must be made by the capitalists themselves, with one thought in mind: maximizing profits and power. No amount of government regulation can stop them from basing those decisions on private profits, and private profits alone. And if any serious attempt is made to interfere, they are always free to simply move their capital to China or Vietnam or Guatemala or anywhere else where regulations are non-existent and labor is dirt cheap. That is the

essence of capitalism.

Some years ago (2000), we found that according to the Statistical Abstract of the United States (published by the US department of Commerce), there were 19,622 corporations with assets of \$50 million or more. In the health care industry (and the fact that it's an industry not a public service says a lot), the companies of this size were a mere .02% of all companies but they did 14% of all business in that sector. In finance they were 20% of the industry but did 31% of all business, and in manufacturing they were .5% of the companies but did 40% of the business. And bear in mind, this is only the percentage of the business they did directly; they controlled many thousands of other, smaller companies in one way or another.

As we pointed out then, *“these giant corporations, and the ones just below them, the ones with \$10 million to \$50 million in assets, constitute a dictatorship over society.”*

So the other aspect of what is necessary in a revolution is to take the “commanding heights” of the economy out of private hands and place them under public ownership. This doesn't mean every little mom-and-pop grocery store or family farm. (They are rapidly being swallowed up by the factory farms and the Walmarts, anyway.)

What is a Revolutionary Situation?

These are not easy steps to take – bringing down an entire government and its entire apparatus, lock, stock and barrel, getting soldiers to refuse their officers' orders, building a workers' alternative to this government, and at the same time taking the major private corporations out of private hands. They can only be done in the very rarest of situations – what Lenin called a “revolutionary situation.”

There are three “objective” factors that are ingredients to such a situation. By “objective” we mean that the forces of history will, in rare instances, bring them about no matter what anybody does, just like objective forces force the earth's crust to shift and create earthquakes.

Mainly because of the power of US capitalism, the United States is nowhere near a revolutionary situation at this point, but a bare outline of it can be seen despite that:

- **The first condition is that the capitalist class must be divided and can't find a way forward.** In the US right now, there is a lot of talk about the conflict between the two main big business parties – the Democrats and the Republicans. While a lot of that conflict is simply due to a rivalry over who will get their snout into the public trough, the main reason for it is that the different wings of the US capitalist class can't figure out how to advance their interests. Do we get even more aggressive with China or with Iran or Russia, or do we back off? Do we at least pretend to do something about global warming, or do we continue to deny it is a problem? Do we make at least verbal concessions to black protesters against police brutality, or do we crack down even harder? One side says that any concessions to these problems will only whet the opponents' appetite for more. The other side points out that we simply can't keep going like we have. Back and forth they argue, and they are both right and both

Greece

Another country which, as of this writing, seems to be on the brink is Greece. As of this writing, the radical socialist party “Syriza” seems on the brink of winning an election there. Below, Roger Silverman explains the historic background:

Reformism never acquired the stable mass base in Greece that it had achieved historically in the rest of Europe. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Greece was subjected to a succession of wars, mass migrations, coups and military dictatorships; and its wartime and postwar history is closer to those of the Philippines and other South-East Asian countries than to Western Europe. Having first driven out the army of Italian fascism and then waged an indescribably heroic guerrilla struggle and popular resistance which single-handedly overthrew the Nazi occupation regime, the Greek population then suffered years of civil war against first the British and then the US army, followed by a period of repressive rule under a pro-American quisling regime. Then – with a renewed revolutionary upsurge once again gathering pace – came the brutal dictatorship of the colonels, which was itself eventually overthrown by a mass youth uprising. It was not until the election of the first PASOK government in 1981 and accession to the EU that an era of liberal reforms, bribes and handouts came, a pale imitation of the substantial welfare gains won over generations of struggle by workers in Western Europe. That explains why, when PASOK was founded after the collapse of the dictatorship, by a member of the longstanding liberal Papandreou political dynasty seizing the chance to fill the gap between Stalinism and conservative authoritarian, he had to proclaim the new party as “a socialist party, not a social-democratic party” and present a radical face. Forty years later, the party is already in shreds, its collapse as spectacular as its earlier brief rise.

Now, George Papandreou has walked out of the party his father had created with such bombast, and – in an apparent ruse to siphon off enough votes from SYRIZA to deprive it of a crucial margin – declared yet another new party. It is hard to imagine this universally despised figure regaining enough credibility to succeed. The fate of PASOK was doomed once it had departed from initial radical slogans and tried to achieve the stability of a Western reformist party without enjoying the material economic base to sustain it. There is a lesson there too for SYRIZA.

Like PASOK between 1974 and 1981, SYRIZA too has materialized with lightning speed from obscurity to become the most popular party in Greece. Like PASOK did originally (although with a less compromised origin), it has inspired a new generation with radical slogans. To a far greater degree, SYRIZA is a classic centrist party, comparable to parties like the ILP and POUM in the 1930s. Such parties are like fireworks or radioactive elements: volatile, subject to explosive contradictions, destined either to transform themselves into revolutionary parties or to fizzle out. We have to be clear: the election of a SYRIZA government will be nothing like the election of an Hollande in France or a Miliband in Britain. If SYRIZA comes to power – and if it wins a plurality of votes, then surely it would be senselessly, unthinkably provocative for the other parties to block its path to office – then it will have a very brief chance to seize the opportunity. (see update at end)

wrong.

- **The next condition is that the middle classes must be in ferment.** That is exactly what is starting to happen with, for example, their turn to right wing populists like the Tea Party. The fact that more of them aren't turning to the left is because the third factor is lagging behind still.
- **That factor, the third factor, is that the working class – the majority in society – be united, determined and willing to make the greatest sacrifices.** The barest outline of that can be seen in the beginnings of the movement against police brutality and police murders. We have to admit that we still have a long, long way to go, but especially in the US, once things really get started the movement can cover enormous ground in just a very short time.

To sum it up, it must be a situation where the ruling class cannot rule in the old way anymore and the working class is unwilling to be ruled in the same way. While we haven't seen that situation (yet) in the US, we do see it in other parts of the world.

However, not every such situation leads to a revolution where the old ruling class is overthrown by a united and conscious working class; on the contrary, just the opposite often happens. Consider two examples:

Chile

The 1970s was a difficult decade for US and world capitalism. On the one hand, the economic policy of “Keynesianism” was in crisis as Bretton-Woods Accord (which stabilized the world currency market after WW II) collapsed, and inflation threatened to rocket out of control in the US. On the other hand, the most powerful military in world history – the US military – was defeated by a rag-tag group of peasants in the tiny country of Vietnam. Then there was the rising global revolution.

The decade was ushered in by the election of Socialist Salvador Allende as president of Chile. Allende was the head of a “Popular Unity” regime, made up mainly of the Socialist and Communist Parties, and workers elected him into office in order to carry out the socialist transformation of society, and Allende started down that road. Among other things, he nationalized major industry, including Kennecott Copper.

The Chilean capitalist class and their international allies – especially in the US – fought back, as was to be expected. They hoarded goods and otherwise destabilized the economy, causing an inflation rate of near 100%. Following elections a year later that even further consolidated the Popular Unity government, the capitalists launched a strike. This started with a strike of the truckers – mainly small business owners – on which the economy was dependent. Other sectors, including owners in heavy industry followed suit.

The regime was committed to “legality”, but the workers themselves had no such illusions. In one case after another, they simply seized their plants and kept production up under workers' control. Here is how one historian describes the workers' response: “*Within a few days, most of the country's industries were in the hands of their workers: faced with the*

*employer lockout, they showed in practice that the production process did not need the bosses.... The workers' actions against the employer stoppage overran all self-imposed limitations... In October (1972), then, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie faced each other without intermediaries, as open class enemies, with respect to the concrete problem of production and distribution...”*⁸

The leadership of the Communist and Socialist Parties were committed to trying to transform society through the Chilean constitution, but faced with the reality in the streets and work places, the workers were forced down a different road. “*In the October days, worker-created structures arose which were not envisaged in the Constitution nor in the Popular Unity's plans and program.*”⁹

Faced with economic sabotage as well as with the threat of attack from counter-revolutionary forces, the workers set up “cordones industriales” - industrial coordinating committees – to organize and coordinate production. In the working class communities, Supply and Price Committees (JAPS) were set up (mainly by women) to prevent hoarding and price fixing. Along side of all this, workers set up *comandos comunales* – neighborhood committees – to coordinate the joint efforts of the cordones, JAPS, etc.

But the workers did not stop there. “*All of these got together to name a leadership committee that grappled with the most immediate problems: defense and security against sabotage, maintenance of production levels, methods of community mobilization, public order in the poblaciones...*”¹⁰ etc.

The capitalists tried to reestablish their control through “normal”, constitutional means, but their problem was that their own soldiers were threatening to revolt.

The *cordones* and *comandos* were faced with only two options: Either advance, challenge the official capitalist state for power, or decline. In a signal to what was to come, in November the Popular Unity government reshuffled its cabinet, appointing military generals to three ministries. This was a sign that the central forces – the leadership of the Communist and Socialist Parties – were going to do everything to remain within “bourgeois” (capitalist) democracy and the Chilean constitution. But it was exactly this capitalist democracy, which rests on a degree of compromise between the capitalist and working classes, that was impossible. The capitalist class had gotten a tremendous fright from the October days and was determined to reassert itself through any means necessary. Lacking a clear, centralizing force, the working class was gradually worn down and on Sept. 11 (!), 1973, General Augusto Pinochet instituted a military coup and crushed the Chilean working class, killing tens of thousands in the process.

This was a historic defeat from which the Chilean and the Latin American working class is still recovering.

Iran

Closing out the same decade, and half a world away, similar events happened in Iran. There, the Shah had been installed into power. Corruption was rampant in his regime,

⁸Gabriel Smirnow, “*The Revolution Disarmed: Chile 1970-73*

⁹ Smirnow

¹⁰ Smirnow

which also conflicted with the more reactionary Muslim clerics, who had a base mainly in the countryside and among the small shop keepers and artisans of the bazaars (market places).

By 1977, there was a rising tide of worker protest against the Shah, especially among the powerful oil workers. A series of strikes – both economic and political (against martial law) – spread rapidly. *“By early October 50 major plants were closed. These included factories in all the main industrial areas and even remote workplaces such as the copper mines near the southern city of Kerman. Service industries and office workers joined in, with bus drivers, postal workers, hospital staff, teachers, bank employees and hotel workers participated.”*¹¹ The demands ranged from calling for a 100% wage increase to the firing of management and to the ending of martial law. The Shah's position rapidly deteriorated and on Dec. 11 some two million protesters marched in Tehran with slogans like “Hang the American puppet” and “Arms for the people.” Soldiers were starting to desert.

Preferring to avoid dancing at the end of a rope, the Shah appointed a replacement and fled to Egypt in January of 1979. There followed a period of turmoil and struggle.

Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from France, where he had been in exile (after living in Iraq for a period). His strong opposition to the Shah, coupled with the Islamic hierarchy's base in the bazaar and some rural areas, gave him credibility. On the other side was the workers' movement and the traditional workers' party, the Tudeh, which was linked with the Soviet bureaucracy. During this period, it was the workers' movement that dominated, and Khomeini cleverly made verbal concessions to that movement. He refused to clarify his program. He said that the clerics should not run the government. He made radical pronouncements about workers' interests.

Although he and the religious hierarchy – the mullahs – were unable to dominate the workers' movement during this period, they did have a key advantage: They had a national network which was clear on its goals (although millions of Iranians might not have been at that point). The only equivalent the working class had to the clerical network was the Tudeh Party. This party insisted on the unity of interests between the Iranian working class and the “small” “national” capitalists.

In February of 1978 the Shah-appointed caretaker government had collapsed and Khomeini had come to power. He declared that the revolutionary process had come to an end. Workers didn't quite think so, however:

*“Security had collapsed. The officers and the rank and file in the army, national police and gendarmerie... had abandoned their... posts. The citizenry was in control of barracks, and police stations, palaces and ministries. In government offices, private companies, factories and universities, employees, in a riot of participatory democracy, were demanding to be consulted on policies and appointments. Army units refused to accept commanders appointed by the provisional government; newly-appointed police chiefs were arrested by citizens' committees; governors found the way to their offices barred by revolutionary youths.”*¹²

The strike movement spread, resulting in the average

“Get in the Car”: A Lifelong Lesson

In 1973, this writer was involved in an unofficial “wildcat” strike of carpenters in the San Francisco Bay area. The strike was over a 75 cent raise that we were due according to the contract but weren't getting. We went from job to job, urging carpenters to walk off. On one job, I went up to a carpenter who was in his car, getting ready to drive to another part of the job. I tried to convince him to walk off, but he was very aggressive, telling me to “*get the f___ away from my car.*” I wasn't blocking his car, but I also didn't back off, and finally he jumped out of the car preparing to hit me.

“Hold on a second, brother,” I said. *“Are you getting the 75 cents you're supposed to be getting.”*

He stopped dead in his tracks.

“No,” he said.

“So in other words, every hour you're working, you're getting screwed out of 75 cents,” I said.

Pause....

“You know something – you're right,” he said. *“Get in the car.”*

I got in the car with him and he drove to the other part of the job and he got the other carpenters to walk off.!

I learned a lifelong lesson from that: If you talk to workers – even those who are hostile at first - in terms of their own self-interest, it will take you a long ways.

wage rising by 53% in 1979 and a doubling of the minimum wage. But there were also political strikes as well as work place take-overs similar to what workers had done in Chile. Also similar to Chile, workers established workers' production committees called *shoras* as well as neighborhood *shoras*. These spread to some schools as well as to the rank and file of the military. The work-place *shoras* also started linking up across industry.

On March 1, 1979, the founding conference of the All-Iran Workers' Union asserted:

*“We the workers of Iran, through our strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations overthrew the Sha's regime.... We made the revolution in order to end unemployment and homeless(ness), to replace the Savak (secret police)-oriented syndicates (unions) with independent workers' shoras – shoras formed by the workers of each factory for their own economic and political needs.”*¹³

The Khomeini regime responded with a two-prong approach: On the one hand, in an effort to rescue Iranian capitalism they nationalized a whole series of businesses. On the other, they tried to repress and/or undermine the shoras, outlawing them for instance from interfering in the affairs of management.

In addition to the Khomeini regime's pressure from the outside, many shoras faced confusion from within. In some

¹¹Phil Marshall, “Revolution and Counter Revolution in Iran”

¹²Shaul Bakhash, “The Reign of the Ayatollahs” as quoted by Marshall

¹³Marshall, p. 75

cases, lower, middle and even upper level management participated. Connected with this, while the most militant shoras were led by secular, worker militants, in some cases religious fundamentalists – supporters of the mullahs – were able to gain control.

In general, then, the pro-capitalist Khomeini regime was clear on its goals and strategy – pressure the workers' organs (the shoras) from outside while seeking to confuse and divert them from within. On the side of the workers, the most militant clearly wanted to press forward, but the road was not clear to them. What was required, as in Chile in 1973, was for a layer of the most militant workers and their allies, those who had learned the lessons from similar struggles of the past, to press forward with the shoras, to consciously and systematically work to develop them and bring ever increasing power in society into their (the shoras') orbit.

There was a revolutionary (or would-be revolutionary) left in Iran, in the form of the Fedayeen as well as the Mojahadeen. Both of these forces opposed the position of the Tudeh to support Khomeini, but instead they turned to guerrilla tactics. In other words, they cut themselves off from the working class. In the case of the Fedayeen, although they didn't support Khomeini, they did take the view of the Tudeh that the revolution was not anti-capitalist.¹⁴

The Fourth “Subjective,” Factor

In both Chile and Iran, the most conscious and aggressive sections of the working class were drawing their conclusions, and had they been given indefinite time and barring interference from outside the working class, they would have seen where the road to power lay. But that's exactly the point: Revolutionary situations are inherently unstable; they have a very limited “shelf life”, and must be resolved one way or another fairly quickly, either through revolution or counter revolution. “Outside forces” will always “interfere” with the development of the working class - the influence of small business people, slightly more privileged layers like technicians and engineers, the religious hierarchy, etc. On top of that there are always the steps the capitalists take to destabilize society, including destabilizing the economy (by hoarding, sending capital abroad, stopping production, etc.)

So for a revolution to succeed, the fourth necessary factor is for that layer of the working class that is most militant and most conscious to be organized, able to draw conclusions as quickly as possible, and able to assert its influence on the rest of the working class and others (peasants, youth, etc.) It needs to be organized in a revolutionary party of its own, one which has learned from its own immediate experiences as well as of the experiences of other workers' struggles elsewhere in time.

Revolutionaries and the wider workers' movement

How can the most determined and far-seeing section of the working class organize in order to influence the rest of the class?

That can only happen in the course of the

development of the class struggle itself. Inevitably, any struggle goes through its ups and downs, its victories and defeats. At every turn of events, different layers of workers draw conclusions – sometimes together and sometimes sharply different ones. In every set-back, for instance, some workers can become partially demoralized and conclude that there is no point in fighting big business. Others – the more far-sighted and more determined - will look at what happened to figure out what went wrong and what has to be done better. They will tend to try to influence the rest of the working class based on their conclusions. Into this volatile mix is thrown the influences from outside the working class – the capitalist propaganda, the influence of all sorts of self-appointed saviors and geniuses, the role of those who are simply trying to take advantage of the movement to further their own careers.

If given indefinite time, the more far-sighted and determined sector of the working class would ultimately be able to exert full influence, and the vast majority of workers would adopt its point of view. But that's exactly the point; revolutionary situations, by their very nature, have a relatively short “shelf life”. As history shows, they must be resolved fairly

Revolution and the Non-profits

On January 16, the London Daily Mail reported that billionaire George Soros was donating \$33 million to “social justice” organizations involved in the struggle in Ferguson. The non-profits he donates to as well as others are effectively controlled by these rich liberals. It's not that the non-profits are directly told what to do and what not to do; simply that they know their limitations. Ferguson activist Bgyrl4life, comments: *“Ferguson Inc. People have been compromised... co-opted, bought and sold. Everything changed the minute money started filtering in. The focus went from justice, Mike Brown and changing the region to grant money, gofundme accounts and soliciting funds...”* She writes further: *“This article is about the environmental movement, but the parallels to what's been happening in #Ferguson are striking... Here's one '.organizing has shifted to career-based models, anti-oppression work has become fashionable, and even worse, fundable. Through trainings, some may have learned the politically correct language to use, but much of the “anti-oppression” process has remained superficial, void of a real consideration for intersections of race, class and gender.”*

Revolution and the Union Leadership

So far, the union leadership has held their unions out of the movement against police killings and brutality and racism. As a UAW member that this author met in Ferguson reported, his leaders told him “this isn't our battle.” What a disgraceful position.

When they do get involved, it will be to ensure that their membership is not infected with the radicalism of the youth in this movement. That's because on the one hand they are always looking to make a deal with “their” employers, and any radicalism among their members would break up these deals. On the other hand, they are also tied in hand and glove with the Democrats, who are just as much part of the problem as are the Republicans. And on the job, the union leadership advocates what's called the “team concept” - that the union and the boss are on the same team.

For more on how the union leadership functions and their alliance with the employers, see:

<https://oaklandsocialist.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/what-happened-to-our-unions1.pdf>

¹⁴Marshall, p. 87

quickly, either by revolution or counter revolution. So the most combative and far-sighted of the working class, together with their supporters among the youth and elsewhere, have to prepare in advance; they have to organize in advance.

This doesn't mean organizing outside the movement; on the contrary, it means organizing within and as part of the movement, but it does mean starting to draw the conclusions in an organized way, nevertheless. It means participating in the struggles and also in the debates and discussions that always accompany any struggle. It means, most important of all, in every situation to be able to point to the concrete necessary steps forward and how to achieve them. It means, in every situation, to find where are the forces of the working class and their organizations (even if only in embryo) that can potentially lead to the next step.

This also means organizing, with its own means of communication, its own structures, etc. Not that these can be built outside of the workers' movement and any organizations that the movement throws up, but built they must be.

As we hope the examples of Egypt and Syria have shown, there is no set formula for that. It requires listening and learning and thinking. It means seeing how workers and young people are using their already-existing organizations or building new ones in order to drive the movement forward. That is where the "art" of revolution comes in.

Revolution in the United States?

From Greece to South Africa, from Mexico to China, workers and young people are rising up against the ravages of capitalism. Truly, it is a global movement, and inevitably the United States will get caught up in this process. In fact, it seems that that is starting to happen, with the movement against police-involved murders and police brutality, a movement led mainly by black youth, who have historically tended to lead the youth in general in the United States.

This movement started out bursting the bounds of

The revolutionary party today

Today, there are hundreds of small groups that claim to be the revolutionary party-in-the-making. But the idea that they, and they alone, have the exclusive title is absurd on the face of it:

- In the first place, such a revolutionary party has never and can never develop outside of the rise of a general, mass international workers' movement. And while we are seeing the embryo of such a movement (as partly described in the opening of this pamphlet), we are very far from its really taking form.
- Secondly, as it does take form, it will combine all sorts of different views, just as did the First International in the days of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.
- *The different would-be revolutionary groups in general don't understand this process; they think the situation is like it was in the days after the Russian Revolution, when there were already the mass workers' parties in existence, at least in Western Europe.*

"acceptable" protests, with its occupying of bridges and freeways all over the country. That is "bad enough", but it would be even more terrifying if that tended to spread to wider layers of workers and young people. Suppose it spread to workers defying their bosses and the law by occupying their work places and shutting them down. Suppose the communities occupied city council meetings to prevent them from carrying out business as usual. Suppose students and education workers occupied schools to prevent cuts and privatization. Suppose whole communities rose up to physically prevent the poisoning of their earth, air and water by practices like "fracking."

It is through such revolutionary-type action that Corporate America (the capitalists) is forced to grant reforms.

Revolutionary Program in Today's Movement

It seems that this movement-in-the-making may be the next step after the Occupy movement of 2011. That movement was a first small step towards US society joining the world movement. It was positive and important, but it also had some problems. One of the biggest problems was that it did not develop clear goals – what it was fighting *for*. Among other things, this made it harder to win over a wider layer of workers. It seems that already, this movement-in-the-making is starting to go beyond the Occupy movement by starting to take on other related issues, including low wages and gentrification. At least that seems to be happening in Oakland. But as this happens, we should not wait for the liberals and other forces linked to the establishment to define that program.

Below are some ideas for this movement-in-the-making. We know that others will have different and additional ideas; we would like to add these to the mix:

- ***Build the movement in the streets and freeways, in the communities and work places. Demand the convictions of the cops who killed Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, John Crawford, etc.***
- ***For elected community committees of public safety in every working class and poor community to keep watch on the police and keep the community safe from all violence and crime – both police crime and otherwise.***
- ***For both local and an international people's investigation into US human rights abuses.***
- ***For an end to solitary confinement and other forms of torture in US prisons and for union rights for prisoners and for the minimum wage to apply to prisoners. End mass incarceration; end the "war on drugs" and "stop and frisk". End denial of social services for previously convicted.***
- ***For a \$20 per hour minimum wage, a guaranteed job with union rights, socialized medical care and free higher education for all. Adequate funding for all needed social services!***
- ***For an end to privatization; restore all cuts to public services.***
- ***Save the environment; ban fracking.***
- ***For the movement to put up its own political candidates, completely outside of and in opposition to the "Republicrat" politicians and paid the same as the workers they represent.***

Police Civilian Review Boards/“Community Control of Police”?

As this pamphlet tries to show, what every real radical workers' movement tends to do is to build its own organs that tend to compete with, to “crowd out”, the capitalist state. How can that happen regarding the police?

Already, at this very early stage, we are seeing a return to something the Black Panther Party developed: Community patrols where the people, themselves, patrol the police. Maybe we should think about how this tendency can be strengthened as the movement spreads and deepens. One possibility, as this happens, is for the development of elected community committees of public safety. These would be responsible for keeping all aspects of public safety – safety from the crimes of the police and of other criminals, from the

bosses to landlords to just plain ordinary street crime. In a truly revolutionary (or even a “pre-revolutionary”) situation, these committees would compete with the police and, where they were strong enough the police could not enter.

This contrasts with the call for police civilian review boards. These exist throughout the country and have not stopped police murders and brutality. They amount to an attempt to regulate the police, and, like attempts to regulate private industry, these review boards are really controlled by those

they are supposed to regulate – in this case, the police themselves.

Not only that, but all such a board can do is consider cases after the fact. Just like every other aspect of the corporate-controlled government, “the people” - working class people – will never be able to control the police and the criminal (in)justice system.

- ***For socialism! Take under public ownership the commanding heights of the economy (the banks, major corporations, etc.) and democratically plan production under the direct control and management of the workers themselves.***

Concrete Steps

How can a program like this be used?

Take the issue of prisoner rights: Millions of families are consumed by the fact that a loved one is locked away. As for the prisoners themselves, many of them have started to organize, including going on hunger strikes against solitary confinement, which is a form of psychological torture. The present movement



Police murder of Eric Garner: A civilian review board won't stop police murders or brutality.

against police murder could draw in those families and also make links inside the prisons with some of these demands. (And remember: In the past, the prisons were universities for revolution.)

Another example: Inside the unions there is massive frustration and anger at the union leadership because of their collaboration with the bosses. Also, many union members and their families suffer from the same police oppression. Yet the union leadership remains silent. The movement-in-the-making could go directly to union members, for instance by campaigning inside the major grocery chains, most of whose workers are union members. We should also be aware that many grocery workers (the “courtesy clerks”, for example) make under \$10 per hour. A special effort could be made to draw them into the movement, especially since it's so easy to get in and talk with them. The radical movement that confronts the police and disrupts the system can set an example for union members; it can help the members organize to change their own unions.

Up until now, the main activity of the most militant wing of the movement has been the street confrontations, blocking freeways, etc. We should think about how this could be combined with going directly into the working class and poorest communities to help them organize around the issues they feel most directly.

We also shouldn't forget the issue of the environment and global climate disruption. In the end, this is one of the greatest threats of all, one caused by the drive for profit and the anarchic “free” market – in other words, by capitalism. One of the greatest issues is “fracking”.¹⁵ Those of us who live in major cities don't hear much about this, but it will affect us all. It's the process of pumping poisonous chemical deep under the ground to fracture oil bearing shale rock. Both the chemicals and the oil and gas ultimately leak out into the environment – the air we breathe and water we drink. By adding to the stock of oil and gas to be burned, it adds to global climate disruption/global warming. The movement against fracking is one of the main environmental movements that involves ordinary, working class people, and in some areas it's actually starting to link up with the movement against police murders and brutality.

Conclusion

From the developing turmoil in the world monetary system to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the old ways aren't holding anymore. Add to the political turmoil the effects of global climate disruption and environmental pollution, which are only just starting to be felt. As that process bites more deeply, we will see even greater turmoil. This turmoil will be taken as a sign that control over society by the capitalists has weakened; it will be a sign to revolt in even greater numbers. Even the spread of reaction, from Islamic fundamentalism to racism in Europe and the US, will drive some to the opposite extreme – socialist revolution.

Almost 100 years ago, Leon Trotsky wrote: “*History says to the working class, ‘You must know that unless you cast down the bourgeoisie [the capitalists], you will perish beneath the ruins of civilization. Try, solve this task!’*”

¹⁵ For more information on fracking, see: <http://oaklandsocialist.com/2013/05/20/us-energy-independence-and-hydraulic-fracturing/>

Update: Greece

(Note: This article was written on Feb. 4. Events in Greece are moving extremely quickly and this article could be out of date any time. But the point made – the necessity of international solidarity in action not just words – will remain valid.)

It has been a scarce two weeks since the Greek working class put the radical Syriza party into power in Greece. They did that to put an end to the starvation there - to 65% youth unemployment, to thousands having to pick through garbage cans for food, to living without electricity. In doing that, the Greek working class took front and center in the global struggle against capitalism's attacks. That's why all workers, and all those involved in the struggle against capitalism, should take an interest in what is happening there, and learn the lessons.

Similar to the debt crisis of Latin America decades ago, the Greek government will run out of money by the end of February. So far, they have been bailed out mainly by the European Union bankers, at the cost of being forced to cut and cut and cut some more. Syriza and its central leader, Alexis Tsipras, came to power on the promise of reversing that. But what are his plans? He and his government cannot rehire laid-off government workers if the government has no - literally *no* - money. Nor can the reinstitute government services.

So the solution of Tsipras has been to travel around Europe, meeting with and negotiating with various leaders of European capital. Yesterday (2/3/15), he was in Brussels, meeting with Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission. On Tuesday, Greece's finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis was in Italy to meet with his Italian and British counterparts. He will also be meeting with the head of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble.

All around Europe these two are traveling, trying to convince European capital that Greece cannot and will not continue down the same road. The hope, presumably, is that they could divide the enemy, getting some of the European capitalist governments to agree to granting Greece additional time and money. So far, the governments of Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Spain, Finland and even tiny Estonia have rejected Syriza's appeals.

But a key player has been left standing on the sidelines: The working class of the rest of Europe. While Tsipras and Varoufakis are traveling their rounds, negotiating with the enemy, they seem to be ignoring their most important ally in those countries - the workers.

The central fact is this: So far, European capital has made some headway in cutting the living standards of European workers, but nowhere near enough by their standards. While austerity in Greece has not resorted the Greek economy, that was never its main purpose. Its main purpose was to use newly introduced Third World living standards in Greece to batter the living standards of German, French, Belgian, etc. workers. In other words, the old race to the bottom.

There is nothing wrong with the Syriza government negotiating with European capital. Even enemy generals negotiate with each other. But to do so without mobilizing the potential troops is a serious mistake at the least. Everywhere Tsipras and Varoufakis go, Syriza should also be sending representatives to help rally the workers of those countries to explain what is at stake, to explain that it is not "Greece" against "Germany" or any other country; instead it is the race to the bottom, a race in which all workers lose.

The fact remains: The Greek working class cannot stand up to the united European capital no more than could the Greek army stand up to the armies of the rest of Europe. The stakes are high: If Tsipras backs down, this will hugely demoralize the Greek workers. And if he doesn't, then by early next month if European capital isn't forced to make concessions, then the Greek government will be out of cash, causing a really huge crisis for Greek workers. Nor is Greece leaving the EU a solution, as that would provoke a similar crisis, plus mass inflation to boot.

The global struggle against racism is also involved. Greece is a central entry point for refugees into Western Europe from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. Every hot spot - Afghanistan, Syria, Nigeria, Congo - sees thousands of people fleeing, many of whom pass through - or settle in - Greece. Syriza has taken a positive stance on immigration, but their support could collapse overnight if they are unable to show a way forward. Waiting in the wings is the fascist (literally), and racist Golden Dawn party. In the past, they carried out physical assaults against immigrants in Greece. They and their allies would make a come-back if Syriza fails. If that happens, it will give an impetus to racist forces throughout Europe and, in fact, globally.

So there's a lot at stake in Greece for all of us.



Alexis Tsipras (l.) and Jean-Claude Juncker (R.) holding hands.

It is up to us, those who are looking now for a road to revolution, to learn the lessons of the past and to prepare for the crises and turmoil, counter-revolutionary movements and revolutionary movements, for the moments of sudden clarity amidst the confusion and chaos, and to try to see how the road to socialist revolution can unfold and to press ahead down that road.

“Rely only on your own strength.”

Leon Trotsky to the Russian working class, 1917

It was good advice then; it's good advice now



The Oakland/East Bay socialist Group maintains the web site www.oaklandsocialist.com. We are a small group of people who work with the Workers' International Network – a network of workers and socialists around the world, including in North America, Europe, South Africa and Asia. We believe that the workers movement is starting to rebuild itself after many years and the most important task of socialists is to help in and learn from this process. This includes the process of organizing to fight the attacks of capitalism as well as discussing the lessons from these struggles as well as the struggles of the past.

Check out our web site for commentaries and Marxist analysis of current events.

Also by the author:

What Happened to Our Unions? Focused on the Carpenters Union, where this author was a member for over 30 years, this pamphlet explains the issue of the “team concept” to the union leadership follows. It is based on events, quotes from the leadership itself, statistics, etc. - in other words, it's not just abstraction. Written about ten years ago, it's still relevant.

The New Apartheid: The Rise of Zionism and the State of Israel - Zionism was always a tiny fringe movement until the 1930s. From its outset it was racist, based on different imperialist powers, and anti-socialist. This pamphlet explains how it got a mass base and the role it played both in Europe and in Palestine.

The Environmentalist Manifesto – Capitalism is destroying the planet, yet the major environmental non-profits - “Big Green” are locked into the system. This pamphlet explains how they function, their relationship with the Democratic Party, and the alternatives. It focuses on the issue of fracking.

What is Socialism? - Today, more young adults see socialism as a positive than they do capitalism. But what socialism is is widely misunderstood. In answering this question, this pamphlet also answers some of the main arguments against socialism by the capitalists.

How Did We Become Humans? - Written for this author's grandchildren, this is the first in a planned series of pamphlets for young people (around 8-10 years old) on the development of human society. It explains how, as Engels put it, “tools made people.”

All Available and downloadable at:

www.oaklandsocialist.com



About the Author: John Reimann (holding sign in photo) is a retired carpenter and the former recording secretary of Carpenters Local 713. He was expelled from the union for life for his role in helping organize the Bay Area carpenters wildcat strike of 1999. John has done political travel in Egypt, Pakistan, Mexico and elsewhere. He remains active in the movement against capitalism, from the struggle in Ferguson to environmental issues to union struggles. He can be contacted at: 1999wildcat@gmail.com