

RED HORIZON



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A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAPITALIST RESTORATION IN CHINA: PART I

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A Chinese poster from 1976 which reads, "the capitalist roaders are active again, we must struggle resolutely!" A crucial lesson from the experience of the Chinese revolution is that the struggle against capitalism continues into socialism.

Today there are no socialist countries in the world. This is a painful fact to accept, and in the United States where we are inculcated with the ideology of lesser-evilism, some have been taken in by the idea that perhaps China is still socialist. After all the Chinese government claims it is socialist, and the country is still ruled by a Party that, in name, professes allegiance to Communist ideology. Or so the confused logic goes. However, a willingness to look sharply and critically at China today dashes the fantasies of such wishful thinking. Today, China has hundreds of billionaires who run massive private companies and in the country, there are hun-

dreds of millions of migrant laborers who are forced to travel around looking for work. This alone should make it clear that China is not socialist, especially since in 1976 (before Mao's death) there was no unemployment and no migrant laborers, no private businesses, or industries, and only a small gap in income between the highest and lowest wage levels. In short, the ballooning of wealth and social inequalities over the last 50+ years stand in sharp contrast to the earlier period (from the victory of the revolution in 1949 until 1976) where inequalities were drastically reduced and capitalists were suppressed, not allowed to start massive bil-

lion-dollar companies and exploit the working class as they do today in China.¹ In order to understand how this situation arose, it is necessary to understand how capitalism was restored in China.

Continuing the Revolution After Overthrowing the Ruling Classes

The great revolutions of the 20th Century, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, made huge advances beyond those of the 19th Century. The Paris Commune of 1871 and the European revolutions of 1848 were defeated before the revolutionaries fully succeeded in overthrowing their respective ruling class. These revolutions were snuffed out, in part, with the aid of foreign military aggression (e.g Prussia helping France crush the Paris Commune, Tsarist Russia mobilizing forces to crush the 1848 Hungarian Revolution, etc.). Both the October and Chinese Revolution not only overthrew the ruling classes in their respective countries but also overcame various forms of imperialist intervention and predation. Successfully defeating these foreign interventions allowed the people, under the leadership of their respective Communist Parties, to go forward with continuing the revolution after the overthrow of the ruling classes. That is, with building socialism, overcoming various inequalities, and taking the next steps down the road to communist society, which is a

classless and stateless society. This is no easy task.

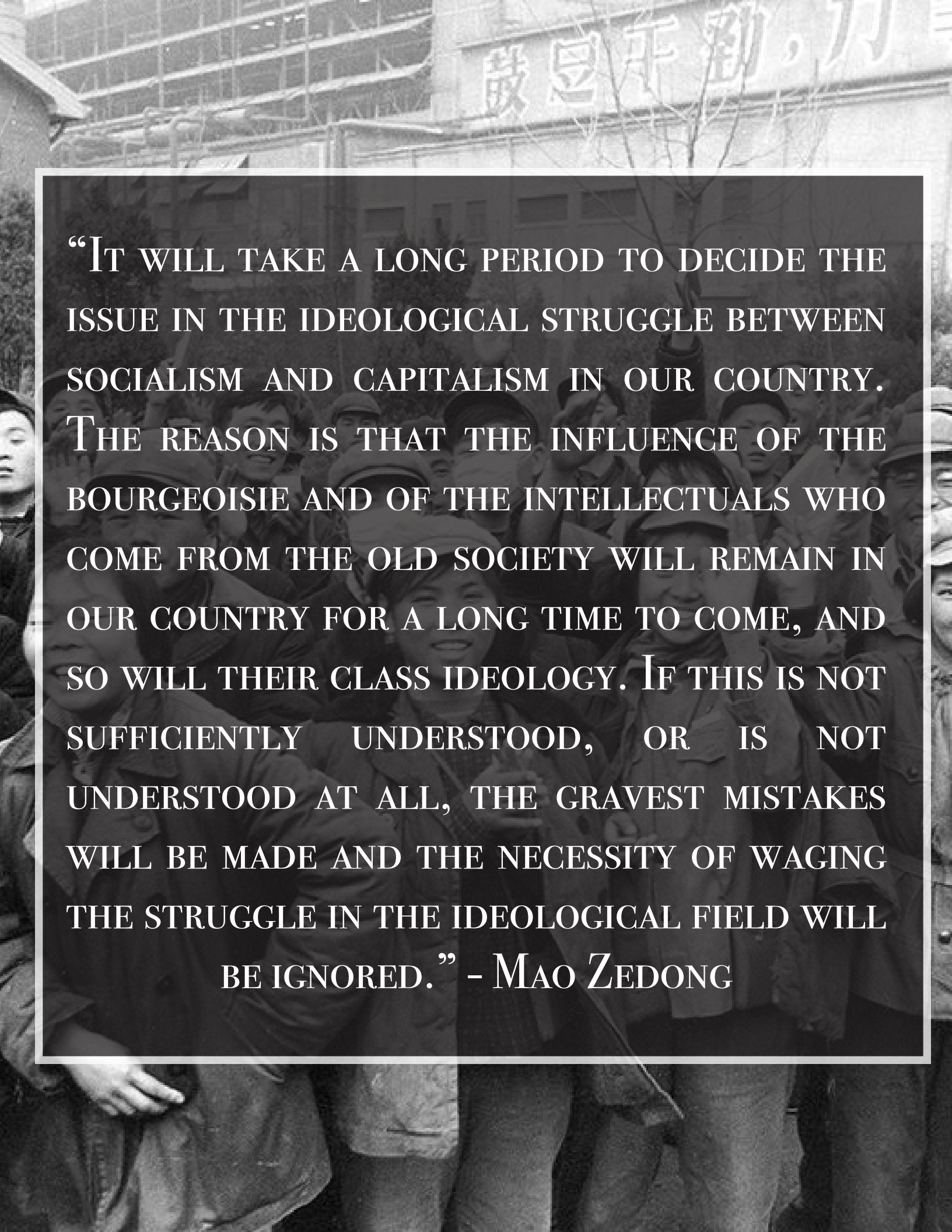
Given the difficulty in having a successful revolution, many people often incorrectly assume that once the old oppressors are overthrown, socialist transformation of society follows automatically. While overthrowing the ruling class opens things up for massive social transformation in a million different ways, there are still numerous obstacles to continue revolutionization of the society and overcoming of inequality. In fact, in a certain sense the transformations and struggles that come after the revolution are even more challenging than overthrowing the ruling class. That is why Mao emphasized in 1949, on the eve of the victory of the Chinese Revolution, that:

“To win countrywide victory is only the first step in a long march of ten thousand li.² Even if this step is worthy of pride, it is comparatively tiny; what will be more worthy of pride is yet to come. After several decades, the victory of the Chinese people’s democratic revolution, viewed in retrospect, will seem like only a brief prologue to a long drama. A drama begins with a prologue, but the prologue is not the climax. The Chinese revolution is great, but the road after the revolution will be longer, the work greater and more arduous. This must be made clear now in the Party. The comrades must be taught to remain modest, prudent and free from arrogance and rashness in their style of work. The comrades must be taught to preserve the style of plain living and hard struggle. We have the Marxist-Leninist weapon of criticism and self-criticism. We can get rid of a bad style and keep the good. We can learn what we did not know. We are not only good at destroying the old world, we are also good at building the new.”³

1 Some apologist groups of contemporary Chinese imperialism—who call themselves socialist—argue that billionaires, massive youth unemployment, a huge domestic AI surveillance network, hundreds of millions of migrant laborers, and more is all necessary “to develop socialism.” They claim this is a transitional period of capitalist development that will lay the groundwork for socialism. Their pro-capitalist views contradict the basic lessons of history and the writing of Marx, Lenin, and Mao. Such sycophantic support for the Chinese bourgeoisie serves to justify all sorts of oppression, often in the name that it is a lesser-evil to U.S. imperialism. This is the twisted same logic Democratic Party enthusiasts use to brow-beat people into getting out to vote every four years.

2 *Li* is a Chinese unit of measurement, which has varied slightly historically, but has generally been equal to about 1/3 of a mile.

3 *Report to the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* (March 5, 1949), Selected Works, Vol. IV, p. 374



“IT WILL TAKE A LONG PERIOD TO DECIDE THE ISSUE IN THE IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE BETWEEN SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM IN OUR COUNTRY. THE REASON IS THAT THE INFLUENCE OF THE BOURGEOISIE AND OF THE INTELLECTUALS WHO COME FROM THE OLD SOCIETY WILL REMAIN IN OUR COUNTRY FOR A LONG TIME TO COME, AND SO WILL THEIR CLASS IDEOLOGY. IF THIS IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY UNDERSTOOD, OR IS NOT UNDERSTOOD AT ALL, THE GRAVEST MISTAKES WILL BE MADE AND THE NECESSITY OF WAGING THE STRUGGLE IN THE IDEOLOGICAL FIELD WILL BE IGNORED.” - MAO ZEDONG

Mao knew that after the revolution, the tasks at hand would be immense, not just in terms of constructing a new society from the ashes of the old, but also to prevent the rise of new bourgeois and oppressive tendencies. This is because class struggle does not end under socialism but continues in new and more intensified forms. Mao was drawing on Marx's insight that socialism is "in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges."⁴ And so classes and inequalities still exist. The division of mental and manual labor, patriarchy, the contradictions between rural and urban areas, various prejudices, and many other social ills are still present. That being said, with the overthrow of the ruling class and the establishment of socialism, the road is cleared to overcoming these inequalities and class contradictions in new and amazing ways.

However, the road to doing this is not easy or straightforward. It involves an intense class struggle, as even after they are overthrown, the bourgeoisie and their agents violently resist efforts to transform society at every turn. What's more, the existing inequalities in socialist society provide fertile ground for the growth of various new reactionary tendencies, including the rise of a new bourgeoisie within the Party itself.⁵ These inequalities are called bourgeois right, and refer to differences of all sorts. Even some as seemingly small as two workers receiving equal pay may be unequal in various respects.

For example, one may have a big family and one a small. In this sense, equal pay to people in different circumstances is actually a form of *inequality*. Likewise, various differences and inequalities in terms of decision-making power, access to education, and more still persist under socialism. These too are forms of bourgeois right. To understand classes and class struggle under socialism, an understanding of bourgeois right is of key importance.

And yet, the existence of these inequalities should not distract from the fact that socialism is a tremendous step forward from capitalism. For example, working class control of the means of production and workers being paid for their work—instead of receiving the bare minimum compensation needed to survive and reproduce the next generation of workers—are both important developments that place the working class in control of society overall.⁶ However, various imperfections in socialism and the continued existence of bourgeois right means that sections of the population do have a class interest in opposing the continued revolutionary transformation of society (as it will reduce their relative privilege in one way or another), even if they also hold a contradictory class interest in continuing the revolution. This reflects the divided and contradictory nature of various class forces under socialism, including for example, leading Party members, various intellectuals, and even the better-off sections of the working-class. The point is not that these forces are

4 *Critique of the Gotha Program*

5 This does not mean that the whole Party is capitalist, but rather that, insofar as they exist in a class society, communist parties are themselves divided by class contradictions, and that under socialism, this even gives rise to new bourgeois forces.

6 In capitalism, the wage-form disguises the exploitation of the working-class. It appears that the workers are being paid for their work, insofar as they receive an hourly wage. But in reality, they are, on average, paid just enough to reproduce their ability to work. All the social-surplus (everything produced above and beyond that which is needed to reproduce society as it is) is appropriated by the capitalist to do with as they please. In contrast, under socialism, workers receive compensation well above the bare minimum to reproduce their existence day-to-day. However, a portion of the social surplus does not go directly to the workers, but is invested to expand production, narrow inequalities, support revolutionary movements abroad, etc. Given that, under socialism, the workers are the masters of society and the related existence of the socialist system of ownership by the whole laboring people, the workers also control this portion of the social surplus that they produce, they just don't directly appropriate it. Instead, it is invested in improving the society overall and advancing towards communism.

necessarily going to support oppression and the restoration of capitalism, but that they are pulled in different and contradictory directions by having conflicting class interests.

The Chinese Revolution, Capitalist Roaders, and the Rise of a New Bourgeoisie

While Mao and others in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were acutely aware that the class struggle continued under socialism, they were not clear about some key elements of how this would play out. In particular, they knew of the dangers posed by the old ruling classes, by small commodity production which plants the seeds of capitalism, and by various oppressive tendencies among the people. However, they did not initially grasp the dangers of the rise of a new bourgeoisie *within the Communist Party itself*. These members of the Party became known as the capitalist roaders, meaning those who wanted society to develop along the capitalist road instead of the socialist one. It was only through the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union in 1956 and a related series of sharp struggles in the CCP that the real nature of this threat came into focus.

Some background on the history of the Chinese Revolution can help to clarify these points. Pre-revolutionary China was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Although not under the exclusive control of any single imperialist power, various colonial powers (old and new) fought with each other to carve up China. They did this, in part, through cultivating a loyal and pli-

ant class of lackeys, known as the comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie. These were Chinese capitalists who were totally subservient to and dependent on foreign capital. While they ran domestic industries in China, these were controlled (via loans, supply chains, force, etc.) by foreign banks and capitalists from the imperialist countries. These compradors could not exist independently from foreign imperialist powers, and they developed China according to the needs of these powers, instead of as an independent capitalist power.

After the failure of the 1927 Revolution, this class was largely represented by the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Guomindang, led by Chiang Kai-shek, who were largely controlled by American and British capital interests. There were also a series of Chinese comprador capitalists who were puppets for Imperial Japan (which was occupying Northeast China and began to conquer larger swaths of the country in the lead up to WWII). This class was also aligned with the big feudal landlords in China, who brutally oppressed the peasantry and bled them dry, leading to large-scale famines on numerous occasions. These reactionary forces, in alliance with foreign imperialism, were the main enemies of the Chinese people, and the main targets of the revolution.

On the side of the people were the peasants, the working class, the petty-bourgeoisie (intellectuals,⁷ artisans and small producers, clerks and various office workers, etc.), and the national bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie were smaller capitalists in China who were much more independent from foreign imperialism. They sought to develop China independently from foreign capitalist control and were heavily oppressed by the foreign imperialists as well as

⁷ While intellectuals in general are often part of the petty-bourgeois, a section is often more closely attached to the bourgeoisie. In China the right-wing and reactionary intellectuals were understood to be aligned with the oppressors against the people.

the Chinese comprador capitalists. The national bourgeoisie was a vacillating ally of the Chinese Revolution, despite their objective class interests in overthrowing the imperialist domination of China and sweeping away feudalism.

Given this analysis of classes in Chinese society, Mao and the CCP argued that the proletariat should be the leading force in the Chinese revolution, with the peasantry (especially the poor and lower-middle peasants) as their chief and most reliable ally. However, the CCP also understood that a successful revolution was only possible by uniting all who could be united in the struggle. This meant winning over the petty-bourgeoisie and a section of the national bourgeoisie to support the revolution as well.

This strategy was successful, and China achieved national liberation in 1949. The imperialists were kicked out, the comprador capitalists were overthrown, and the power of the feudal landlords was broken. Industry was nationalized, land was distributed to the peasants, and the process of socialist construction was begun. This entailed sustainable industrial development, overcoming backwards relations of production (e.g. capitalist managerial practices, division of mental and manual labor, etc.), laying the foundations for collective landownership and cooperative agriculture, and more. However, real difficulties arose at this point, reflecting deep divisions in the Party and the society over how to go forward after overthrowing the old oppressors. The basic question was if kicking out the imperialists, as well as overthrowing the landlords and comprador capitalists, was “enough” or if China should continue on the road to socialism and communism.

Fred Engst explains the situation well:

“It comes down to: do you justify the oppression or do you try to overcome the oppression? In other words, the problem is: do you want to overthrow the old oppressors to become a new oppressor or completely eliminate the system of oppression? There were those people in the revolutionary ranks who opposed to feudalism, comprador capitalism and imperialism; but they did not really oppose the system of oppression per se. So, once the revolutionaries became the rulers, a new problem emerged: Would they rule in the name of the people together with the people or would they simply become new oppressors? How to prevent revolutionaries [from becoming] new oppressors was the real issue.

In its first seven years from 1949 to 1956, Mao’s China underwent a very successful transformation of the agriculture into collectives; per capita income of the farmers steadily rose. And also they successfully transformed entrepreneur industries into state-owned or joint venture enterprises.⁸ So basically, they were able to complete the transformation from a capitalist, semi-feudal society to a socialist one. But then, immediately, some other questions arose when the people in factories, cities, and provinces started to face some issues. Workers and students were going on strike over some bureaucratic handling of contradictions. There is a famous example: Army wanted to build an airport in Henan province without taking care of the livelihood of the peasants in the village. They just tried to bulldoze over everything to build the airport, and peasants had no way but to resist and blockade the way.

[...]

So the question here is: how do you overcome day-to-day, inevitable contradictions between the managers and the managed in the factory? How do you organize production? There are many different opinions, different ideas about what to do. So, what are the people in leadership to do? Do they apply the mass line, listen to people, find a solution, get into consensus or just ride roughshod over the people? These questions are mainly about how to democratize the production process.

By 1956 it became very apparent that in socialist period there were two very distinct type of contradictions: On the one hand, old landlords and capitalists were not happy with losing their

8 These were small and medium enterprises in which the state was, for a time, a joint-partner with the capitalists and the capitalists would receive some share of the profits produced. The state ensured that the capitalists would not oppress their workers, and this was an important transitional step to full state-ownership which allowed them to maintain the support of significant sections of the national bourgeoisie for the revolution during this transition. Such support would have been lost if they had immediately nationalized small and medium enterprises. Instead, the CCP was able to use this transition period to train the masses on how to run these factories, learning from the various experts and engineers employed there.

control over the land and enterprises, and they wanted to overthrow socialism. On the other hand, there was another set of contradictions regarding the nitty-gritty of how to run day-to-day production process. How do you manage a school or a farm? How do you handle the conflict between the managed and the managers? What is the limit of the authority of the managers? These were what was then called “contradictions among the people.” Because sides of these contradictions did not have the opposite goals; they had the same goal but they just differed in terms of how to approach it. How to run a factory better and more efficiently? How to make China overcome its poverty and its backwardness? How to turn it into an industrialized nation? These were contradictions among the people. How would you handle them?

It had become apparent by 1956 that new bureaucrats, people in the leadership were trying to ride roughshod over the people. So Mao started the Hundred Flowers Campaign to criticize the people in the leadership and to rectify the Party. And that’s how, to borrow an English phrase, “the shit hit the fan.” The people who opposed the old oppressors rather than the system of oppression itself during the Revolution, the people who wanted to become new rulers felt very threatened by this rectification campaign. What they wanted was instead to redirect the attack at anybody criticizing them.”⁹

While these bureaucratic tendencies and opposition to listening to the masses at first appeared to be shades of differences of opinion in the Party, by 1956-1958, it became clear that these were actually deep political disagreements. As Engst notes, these questions were fundamentally about if the revolutionary transformation of society should be continued all the way to communism, or if capitalist development was the order of the day. Another way to say this is that a section of the Party felt that, having overthrown the old oppressors, it was now their turn to become the oppressors, to discard communist politics and turn China into a capitalist country, but keep the name “Chinese Communist Party” given the prestige it had among the people. This struggle between two lines and two roads (the socialist and capitalist ones) was not just an internal division within the Party but a

reflection of the larger class relations and contradictions in the society.

These struggle first really came to a head around the question of collectivization of agriculture. Various members of the CCP, led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, argued against the development of socialist agriculture, agricultural cooperatives, and collective ownership of land on the grounds that it was impossible to do this until mechanized agriculture could be developed. In practice this meant allowing capitalist agriculture to run wild in the countryside, for many poor peasants to lose their land and become disposed, and for some rich peasants to develop into larger capitalist farmers. This was a very dangerous line as it would have led to the rise of a series of rural capitalists and upset the poor peasants who would have been correctly outraged by the Party pursuing a policy that turned them into migrant laborers. What’s more, it would have consolidated the relative power and privilege of those in the Party taking the capitalist road and intensified the contradictions between the urban and rural areas. In effect, the capitalist roaders’ opposition to the development of socialist agriculture was based on their support for capitalist development in China, for expanding bourgeois right and inequality. This was tied to their class basis among various sections of the national bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, the better off peasants, and various officials within the Party who had forms of power and authority.

Mao and the left in the CCP defeated this capitalist line and went forward with the collectivization of agriculture. There was great mass enthusiasm among the peasants for this, as they had seen through their own experience that cooperating led to better harvests and provided the basis to jointly carry out large scale improve-

9 “The Struggle for Actually Building Socialist Society: An Interview with Fred Engst”, Research Unit for Political Economy, <https://rupeindia.wordpress.com/2018/01/19/the-struggle-of-actually-building-socialism-an-interview-with-fred-engst/>

ments like irrigation and land reclamation. However, after the defeat of the capitalist roaders' line, they did not just give up on their hopes of restoring capitalism in China. Instead, they did all they could to sabotage collectivization through appearing to support it.

This was during a very difficult period in China where the USSR—following capitalist restoration there in 1956—pulled all support from China and the country was hit by a series of natural disasters. In this situation, the capitalist roaders, no longer able to openly oppose collectivization without facing mass outrage, sought to destroy efforts to develop socialist agriculture through promoting what was known as a “communist wind”¹⁰ or “exaggeration wind.” Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping had control of a lot of the administrative machinery of the Party and used this to demand that local cadres produce bigger and bigger yields. They promoted extreme competition between different villages and communes, threatening people if they didn't produce big enough yields, harassing the peasants saying that they were “holding back grain” after natural disasters hurt the harvests, and demoting cadre who refused to play ball. To simplify mass collection of as much grain as possible, they promoted the idea that bigger units of accounting were always better, that collectivization should not start smaller scale and lay the basis for larger developments over time, but the rural communes should rapidly leap to large-scale collective ownership. This led to a real crisis and shortage of grain and even famine in some locations.¹¹ However, it was Mao and his allies in the CCP who struggled against and eventually overcame these policies which led to the crisis.

Fred Engst provides some insight into this topic as well:

“For example, people in Henan and Anhui boosted how much grain they could get. In 1958, everybody really got a lot of grain. It was a bumper harvest. But in 1959, natural disasters happened in Henan and Anhui. So grain production actually went down. Yet the local leaders did not want to admit any shortage; rather, they wanted to cover it up. They insisted that peasants refused to give half of the grain they had. Guess who wrote that notorious letter to the Central Committee about peasants hiding grain in 1959? Zhao Ziyang [a close ally of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping who would later play a large role in capitalist restoration post 1976]! If a peasant hides the grain, what do you do? There are two approaches: The capitalist roaders' approach says: 'No matter what happens, we should just go and get it!' Mao's approach says: 'Wow, why are these peasants hiding their grain? That means we have antagonized them. We cannot have this big commune as level of accounting' That's why Mao said, 'wait, we have to lower accounting units.' That's why he pushed for a three-level ownership system. The basic unit was the production team. Then we had brigade level, and then commune level. The grain that farmers produce was divided by the production team. There was a dozen or a few dozen families in each production team. When you work hard, you could get more grain from your immediate neighbors' collective work. It was more direct. Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang, etc., all these people rather liked the commune level. They preferred a simpler, larger scale option, which was to go to the commune and grab all the grain that was produced. Mao, actually, warned them. He said, 'If you do this, you'll starve people!' We have memos to prove that.

After Zhao Ziyang's report many officials went to the countryside to try to figure out where peasants were hiding their grain: they shouted at the peasants, bullied and threatened them, and beat them. They took the feed grain, seeds and everything from the peasants by force. That's what caused the 'famine.' As the famine spread people started to flee away from the affected area. Malicious local officials chased these people back to their villages to cover up what was going on. And if anybody wrote a letter to the Central Committee, they just held onto it. In a village, for example, there were only four Party members left. They wrote a letter with their blood. They just wanted to send

10 Based on the incorrect belief that it was possible to “leap” all the way to communism in a few years.

11 While there was some famine during the Great Leap Forward, recent efforts to discredit communism in general and Mao in particular have inflated the death tolls from this period to absurd levels and sought to heap the blame of all of this on Mao, despite the fact that he was the leading voice in the CCP opposing the policies of Deng, Liu, and others, which led to the famine. For more this see <https://mronline.org/2011/06/26/revisiting-alleged-30-million-famine-deaths-during-chinas-great-leap/>

it outside the Henan province. When the centre came down trying to find out what happened, they saw that the situation was terrible, even worse than what they thought. They tried to ship the grain right away to solve the problem. And the leader in Henan province, for example, rounded up all brigade leaders, tens of thousands people, and accused them of being ‘criminals.’ He laid the blame on the local people... This is fascism. These people were calling themselves ‘communist,’ but they were fascists, pure and simple, wearing the coat of ‘communist.’ What they wanted was just to save their rank, their position in the Party. They didn’t care how many people died. That’s what imperialism does all the time. For their profit, they would fight to the end.

After this, Mao realized how deep-rooted these people were in the Party. After the “three difficult years,” guess what they proposed as a solution to overcome the difficulties? Decollectivization! In early 1950s, they had fought against collectivization. Then, they developed the ‘communist wind’ policy. After the disaster of famine, they were proposing privatization, decollectivization once again! That is what ‘capitalist roader’ is! This made Mao understand that the capitalists were in the Party. They blamed Mao for the deaths, especially for those in Sichuan. But the Sichuan famine had not been caused by lack of grain. Rather, Sichuan had had a bumper harvest. Deng Xiaoping is from Sichuan. Some people in China say that it was he who had ordered Li Jingquan, then the head of the Sichuan Party Committee, to ship the grain out. Li Jingquan had warned him: ‘If you get more than much grain out of Sichuan, the peasants will starve.’ They say that Deng Xiaoping had pretty much said, ‘I rather prefer people in Sichuan die rather than in Beijing!’ The policies that these people made caused tremendous hardships in 1960–61. To cover their asses, they let the people in Sichuan starve! After seeing what Deng was capable of 1989, I can believe this. This is the truth about the famine. The places where people died most were the places where, in 1958, production had been boosted most. They were not the places hardest hit by natural disasters. Actually, natural disasters affected some other provinces, some other places worse. But people did not starve there.”¹²

Fred’s remarks provide a vivid and striking picture of the sharp class struggles playing out in this period in China. They show how a section of the Party, which had previously supported the revolution, had transformed in this period into a right-wing force of capitalist restoration. It is no coincidence that this key struggle came

to a head precisely at the point of socialist transformation of agriculture. These Party members were in support of overthrowing imperialist domination of China and domestic feudalism. But they did not support the socialist transformation of the country; they were not opposed to all forms of oppression and exploitation.

In the wake of these issues in the Great Leap Forward, the capitalist roaders actually gained power in the Party. They were able to pin blame for these three difficult years (1958-1961) on Mao, even though it was largely their sabotage which created the famine and other problems. Despite this setback, Mao and the left in the CCP emerged from this struggle with much greater clarity on the problems at hand. They knew that a new bourgeoisie had arisen within the Party itself, and that the struggle for China’s future would be a struggle between two lines, and two roads. All of this laid the groundwork for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, in which the masses of Chinese people would rise up against the capitalist roaders and fight a decade-long struggle to stay on the revolutionary road to communism. This period will be discussed in the next issue of *Red Horizon*.



Socialist society requires increased production to meet the needs of the people. This requires a fierce struggle against capitalist political lines that would hinder both production and the overall goal of abolishing class and inequality. The poster reads: “Grasp revolution, promote production! Thoroughly crush the new counterattack by the capitalist line!”

¹² See footnote 9.

GUNS FOR THE COPS, CRUMBS FOR THE PEOPLE

RUTH DAVIS



The capitalist class has definite interests and definite needs. Paramount among them is maintaining the capitalist system and preserving their position as the dominant class, which requires state oppression of the lower classes in society. The state uses both overt and veiled measures of repression as various crises develop around the world and within America's borders. Decades of austerity and the offshoring of millions of manufacturing jobs have devastated America's working class. The conditions of the masses worsen as the economy tanks, and the already unstable capitalist system becomes even more precarious. The masses face rising costs of living, low wages, and ever-increasing inflation,

and the likelihood that their conditions will sink to even greater depths in the months and years to come is a major concern for the capitalists; insofar as the ruling class is concerned about growing social unrest in America. They know that the social conditions are ripe for another large-scale protest movement (like the one following George Floyd's death) and they want to preserve the state's monopoly on violence, i.e., the state's ability to decisively enforce the ruling class' will by armed force when necessary.

Given the capitalists' need to consolidate and maintain power over society, they must strengthen their grip on it by weakening the masses'

ability to defend and liberate themselves. One method of doing so is by enacting strict gun control policies. There have been several united pushes by the ruling class at different points in U.S. history to disarm the masses, particularly when the storm clouds of rebellion start to gather. Currently, the ruling class' national messaging to drive this agenda doesn't primarily rely on racist articulations—the way it did when they worked to disarm the Black Panther Party—though it is important to note that racist messaging could be used again in the future. Instead, a section of the ruling class currently uses “woke” ideology and identity politics to justify its push for disarmament. The state has declared another “war on terror,” but this time it's a war on “domestic terror.” But much like the original war on terror (which was explicitly against Islamic fundamentalists), this domestic war on terror will cast ripples throughout American society and affect all sections of the population, despite it being framed as being aimed solely at “white gun nuts.” In the wake of mass shootings, politicians exploit public emotion and employ the influence of identity politics among the masses to posit gun control as a solution to indiscriminate or white supremacist violence. However, gun control is a consolidation of ruling class power, a component of a larger push for increased repression and limits on democratic freedoms, and a continuation of the ruling class' history of disarming rebellious populations.

Bipartisan Support For Gun Control

Many believe gun control's supporters are on the left and its opponents are on the right. This misconception reflects the facade of the U.S. state and media, and their push to convince us that contradictions among the people can be

reduced to divisions between Democrat and Republican voters. Although capitalism has indeed created and fueled many backward divisions among us, as people with an ultimate shared interest in overthrowing capitalism there is a need to largely overcome these divisions and work toward resolving internal contradictions aimed at racial, national, gender, and other oppressed groups. Once we are able to see past these divisions, the most consistent, violent, and adaptable oppressive force, the ruling class, will come into focus. The main enemy of the people are not one section or another of the popular masses, but the ruling class and the state power that serves and protects its own interests. A people with greater freedom, unity, and consciousness threatens the current ruling class' position of power, so when people's struggles begin to develop the ruling class uses the state to infiltrate, subvert, and co-opt them. Unfortunately, contemporary mainstream struggles against reactionary tendencies like racism and patriarchy are reduced to a stale-mate conflict between “woke” identity politics and “common sense” conservatism—all while the capitalist system of exploitation, which thrives off of these divisions among the people, is left untouched.

Gun control is dramatized as being a significant division between Republican and Democratic politicians. However, the general consensus among the ruling class is that the masses should be disarmed to maintain the oppressive status quo. There are some sharp contradictions within the ruling class—for example, a significant section of the ruling class opposes Trump, as shown by the recent Department of Justice raids on his estate, but he also has many adamant supporters in the ruling class—however it is united in promoting a large-scale “culture war” as part of its divide-and-rule strategy to maintain domination over the working class and petty-bourgeoisie. Ultimately, gun control serves the ruling class' united and essential interest in

social control. And the Democrat vs. Republican disagreement around it can generally be seen as a question of the form this social control takes. Relatedly, pro-gun politicians do not hold principled convictions about gun rights; they support gun rights to win elections in regions where the overwhelming majority of people believe in the right to be armed.

Given the spread of woke ideology, and considering that a huge number of existing and better-paying white, middle class jobs are disappearing, the ruling class has deemed it advantageous to use the discontent expressed by various people in groups like QAnon or the Jan. 6 incident to dupe the masses into believing that these various right-wing groups are the primary source of violence in society. The ruling class uses identity politics to demonize white gun-owners, rally liberals behind the state, and frame gun control as a “fight against white supremacy.” Liberals are encouraged to view the white working class, as antagonistic to “progressive” policy change, including gun control. The capitalist state, the “champion of progress and justice,” comes forward bearing rainbow flags and holding anti-racism workshops. These maneuvers are analogous to politicians garnering support for the War on Drugs and ensuing mass incarceration by promoting racist narratives about Black and Hispanic people in poor urban areas. Whether under the guise of controlling crime, preventing mass shootings, or “fighting racism,” the ruling class adapts its continuous push to disarm the population.

Michael Bloomberg is a longtime proponent of gun control, and a closer look at his political scheming gives away the agenda behind this policy. The former Republican mayor of New York City, Democratic presidential nominee, and billionaire businessman has transcended party lines in his quest to consolidate ruling class power. As mayor of New York City, Bloomberg

founded Mayors Against Illegal Guns, a political coalition of city mayors that confiscated illegal guns through Bloomberg’s brutal, racist stop-and-frisk policy. After a few years, the racist and abusive nature of stop-and-frisk caused significant outrage among large sections of the masses. Bloomberg was forced to put an end to this policy, and Mayors Against Illegal Guns metamorphosed into Everytown for Gun Safety, a political organization that exploits public outrage over mass shootings to garner support for restricting the masses’ access to arms.

With the aid of the sensationalist and alarmist corporate media, the ruling class has largely determined how a significant section of the masses perceives mass shootings. Each mass shooting sees coverage for days, weeks, and months on end; turning the heinous shooting into a glorified “15 minutes of fame” for the shooter. This coverage, perhaps more accurately called “outrage porn,” exploits the fear and anxiety of the masses caused by living in a society which breeds dangerous social conditions. As coverage increases in frequency and intensity, many people see gun crime as a central and growing threat and gun control as a vital measure to take against it.

It’s plain to see that violence between people in our country is rampant, and the public is justified in their concern about gun violence—mass shootings and gang violence are trending upward. Opportunist politicians have been largely successful in funneling mass outrage into support for increasing police budgets and gun control. However, the increase in coverage of these things far exceeds the relatively modest increases in these forms of violence. The media makes it seem like these issues are far more widespread than they are in reality. Among Democratic Party aligned media sources, the focus is generally on fear mongering about mass shootings. And for Republican outlets there tends to be a

fixation on the supposed “Crime Wave” sweeping the cities.

The truth is that just like more policing doesn’t reduce crime, gun control won’t stop unstable or historically violent people from getting their hands on guns. Gang members often get their guns through illegal avenues and mass shooters could easily get guns through illegal means in the future if guns were to be banned. In countries with similar social issues as the U.S., but where gun access is severely limited, mass stabbings are frequent occurrences. Violence among different sections of the masses does not exist because we have an innate inclination to hurt each other. It has roots in a deeply violent system that breeds this type of behavior. Access to weapons is not strongly correlated with mass shootings around the world; these outbursts of violence are a consequence of the growing rot in our society—typical of an empire in an acute state of decline. In order to eliminate the social conditions which give rise to these disturbing phenomenon, it is necessary to overthrow the ruling class and establish a socialist society.

The real source of mass shootings is this rotten system in which we live, with its imperialist culture which venerates violence, individualism, patriarchal values, and “going out in a blaze of glory.” Only through changing these basic and fundamental social conditions and cultural values will we be able to stop mass shootings and gang violence. We must treat the root cause of the disease in order to cure it. And we should be clear, if the capitalist state is the only one armed, the masses will be left with a more weakened ability than ever to defend themselves. Therefore, we should see gun control as what it is, an effort to limit the masses access to one of the key tools needed to defend themselves and ultimately overthrow the system.

Some Background on Gun Control in the U.S.

A person’s right to gun ownership in America has always depended on one’s standing within society. The right to bear arms means something different for the ruling class and the people: arms for the masses provide an increased ability to defend themselves (and ultimately is one of many essential tools for overthrowing the ruling class), while arms for the ruling class (and their agents and lackeys) are used to oppress and coerce the masses.

The right to bear arms was not protected in the original Constitution by the Founding Fathers. In fact, the 2nd Amendment was won through rebellion and struggle as there was increasing concern among the population that the relationship between common people and the fledgling U.S. government was essentially identical to how the people had been oppressed by the British government.

Throughout American history, different restrictions have been placed on gun ownership when the ruling class deemed it necessary to do so. Today, gun control is generally seen as a largely Democratic Party issue (and they are certainly the face of it right now), but Republicans have come forward at different points in history as the staunchest supporters of gun restrictions. Gun control is always a push by the ruling class of capitalists, but its representative party depends on the political situation of the time. Gun control may appear to be a protective measure for ordinary people—merely the state’s response to “spontaneous” violence in society—but it has in fact always been a means of disarming rebellious populations, especially black populations.

In the early 1960s, there was major social upheaval, particularly in urban ghettos, and it

reached a fever pitch in August 1965. Two brothers were pulled over and accused of drunk driving in Watts, a black ghetto in Los Angeles, and a violent altercation began. One of the cops pulled a gun and a crowd started to gather; after both brothers and their mother were beaten to the ground and arrested, more cops showed up wielding batons and shotguns, and the crowd's size and anger continued to grow. Thus the Watts Rebellion of 1965 began. The rebellion was major in its own right—it lasted five days and saw the participation of 30,000 people—but more importantly it was a part of a movement that couldn't be defeated in one fell swoop, even when the National Guard was sent in and forcibly put down the rebellion. In the years following, there were rebellions in ghettos across the country; Cleveland, Omaha, Chicago, Newark, Plainfield, Detroit, and Minneapolis

all saw major rebellions against conditions of poverty, police brutality, racism, high unemployment rates, poor schools, and inadequate housing.

Each rebellion was met with increased state repression, but that wasn't enough—the ruling class wanted black working people disarmed. The Black Panther Party (BPP) was one of the country's most important advocates for gun rights, and they argued that armed black self-defense groups were an important defense against police brutality. The Panthers were inspired by the philosophy of Malcolm X (assassinated by the government a year and a half before their founding) and their program took it up to a large extent. In particular, the BPP's stance on armed self-defense drew inspiration from Malcolm who said, "I don't even call it violence

when it's in self defense; I call it intelligence." The Panthers carried guns and encouraged black people to arm themselves. This was made evident in Point 7 of the Panthers' Ten-Point Program which states, "We believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality." They did this not with the intention of shooting it out with the cops—though they understood that there was an ultimate need to overthrow the capitalists—but because they saw the need to actively intervene and organize the masses when black people were constantly being harassed by po-



Members of the Black Panther Party protesting at the California statehouse in 1967.

lice and white supremacists. The Panthers began a campaign of police patrols, following police cars and stopping to observe, and stand by a member of the masses when the cops pulled them over or harassed them. The Panthers would recite the relevant legal code to the person being stopped by the cops, and warn the police not to brutalize anyone. The Panthers used guns to enforce the rights of oppressed people—not because the state merely failed to do so, but because *the capitalist state is an overt force of violent oppression*.

The Panthers posed a grave threat to the capitalists, and it was only a matter of time before the state cracked down in a major way on the BPP's growing influence and militancy. In 1967, Republican Don Mulford brought a bill to the California State Senate which would prohibit unpermitted public carry of loaded firearms, which was written in direct reaction to the Panthers' use of guns. In protest of the bill, 30 armed Panthers gathered on the steps of California's statehouse and declared, "the time has come for black people to arm themselves." Politicians, including the Republican Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, were terrified and the Mulford Act was swiftly passed. The bill set California on a path towards having some of the strictest gun laws in the U.S. and was followed by a surge in gun restrictions across the country. *This was the first time in history that the NRA supported gun control legislation.*

A major federal law on firearms was passed just one year after the Mulford Act. The Gun Control Act of 1968 severely restricted gun access for black working people, classified "certain groups" as being "irresponsible or potentially dangerous," and prohibited gun sales to these groups while heavily restricting the importation of inexpensive firearms. An important lesson should be learned from this: at a time when poor and working black people faced horrible

living conditions and constant harassment by police—and when they were rebelling in large and sustained numbers—the ruling class used gun control to disarm the masses and while brandishing the police and military to snuff out their struggles.

Conclusion

The issue of gun control should not be seen in isolation. It is part of a larger ruling class scheme to bolster the state's ability to censor and direct discourse, to surveil every citizen as though they are an imminent threat to the public, and to direct enormous firepower against a disarmed population. The language of gun laws has evolved to fit the times all while serving the same fundamental purpose of preventing oppressed sections of the population from bearing arms. As people earnestly struggling for the liberation of the masses in the U.S. and around the world, we must understand the capitalists' tools for ensuring their ability to oppress, coerce, and exploit (despite their claims that those tools are for our own good). We must also understand our tools for revolution. It is ultimately political clarity that must direct the revolution for socialism and communism (i.e. politics must command the gun and not the other way around), but no successful revolution in history has occurred peacefully. The BPP understood the gun's importance to their ultimate struggle of ending all forms of oppression and exploitation. In a 1967 essay titled *In Defense of Self Defense*, Huey Newton wrote:

"When a mechanic wants to fix a broken down car engine he must have the necessary tools to do the job. When the people move for liberation, they must have the basic tool of liberation: the gun. Only with the power of the gun can the black masses halt the terror and brutality perpetuated against them by the armed racist power structure; and in one sense only by the power of the gun can the whole world be transformed into the earthly paradise dreamed of by the people from time immemorial."

THE TRUE PRISON

G.N. SAIBABA

It's not the high walls
nor the solitary cell.

It's not the clanks of keys
nor the sounds of surveillance.

It's not the monotonous food
nor the cruel hours of lock-up.

It's not the pain suffering in isolation
nor the fear of death.

Neither the emptiness of days
nor the blankness of nights.

My friend, it's the lies that spread
on the high tables of justice.

It's not the canards thrown at me
by the enemy of the people,
nor the intrigues of criminal jurisprudence,
nor the demagoguery
of the political establishment.

My friend, it's the silence of voices
against injustice done to the vast multitudes.

Some silence is imposed,
the rest is self-imposed.
Some censorship is ordered,
the rest is self-practised.

It's not the fear for the powers-that-be,
but it's the fear in the voices
to give voice to the voiceless.

It's the moral decrepitude.
It's the hubris of a civilization.
It's the amnesia of our combined histories in struggles for a free society.

Dear friend, it's this
that turns our world
into a true, dreary prison.

About G.N. Saibaba

G.N. Saibaba is one among thousands of political prisoners targeted by the fascist Indian state for taking a dissenting stand against social and economic oppression of the people. In an effort to quell popular resistance to exploitation by imperialist multinational corporations and their lackeys in the Indian ruling classes, the government and police forces routinely arrest and torture not only prominent intellectuals, but common people involved in mass organizations—usually relying on draconian legal statutes. Although these arrests constitute real losses to the struggle and cannot be taken lightly, they will never eliminate the basis for people to rise up against their oppressors.

In March 2017, a court in the western state of Maharashtra convicted Professor G.N. Saibaba and five other activists under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, a repressive law that originated under British colonial rule. They were convicted with being members of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist), with opposing industrial development in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra and with “waging war against the state.” The only evidence for these charges came from 22 coached police officers.

The Committee for the Defence and Release of Dr. G.N. Saibaba in Delhi pointed out that the 827 page judgment failed to point out a single instance in which Saibaba and the other five conspired to commit violence or provide logistical support to violent acts. The charge of “waging war against the state” which the Indian state has levied against Saibaba is particularly ridiculous since he has had polio since the age of five and is 90% disabled from the waist down.

Saibaba and four other activists received life-sentences; one received a 10-year sentence. Since Saibaba was arrested in 2014, he has been denied adequate medical care for gall bladder stones, acute gastric condition, high blood pressure, and COVID-19. The judge who handed down the sentence pointedly refused to order Saibaba’s jailers to provide him with adequate medical care in the future.

We are including Dr. G.N. Saibaba’s poem “The True Prison” from his larger collection of poems *Why Do You Fear My Way So Much?: Poems and Letters From Prison* in an effort to spread awareness of his struggle against Indian state oppression. As Marxist students, one of our duties is to support the struggles of the people across the world against their oppressors by any means possible—including the overthrow of our own ruling class in the U.S. which oppresses the masses at home and abroad.

RESISTING U.S. IMPERIALISM ON CAMPUS

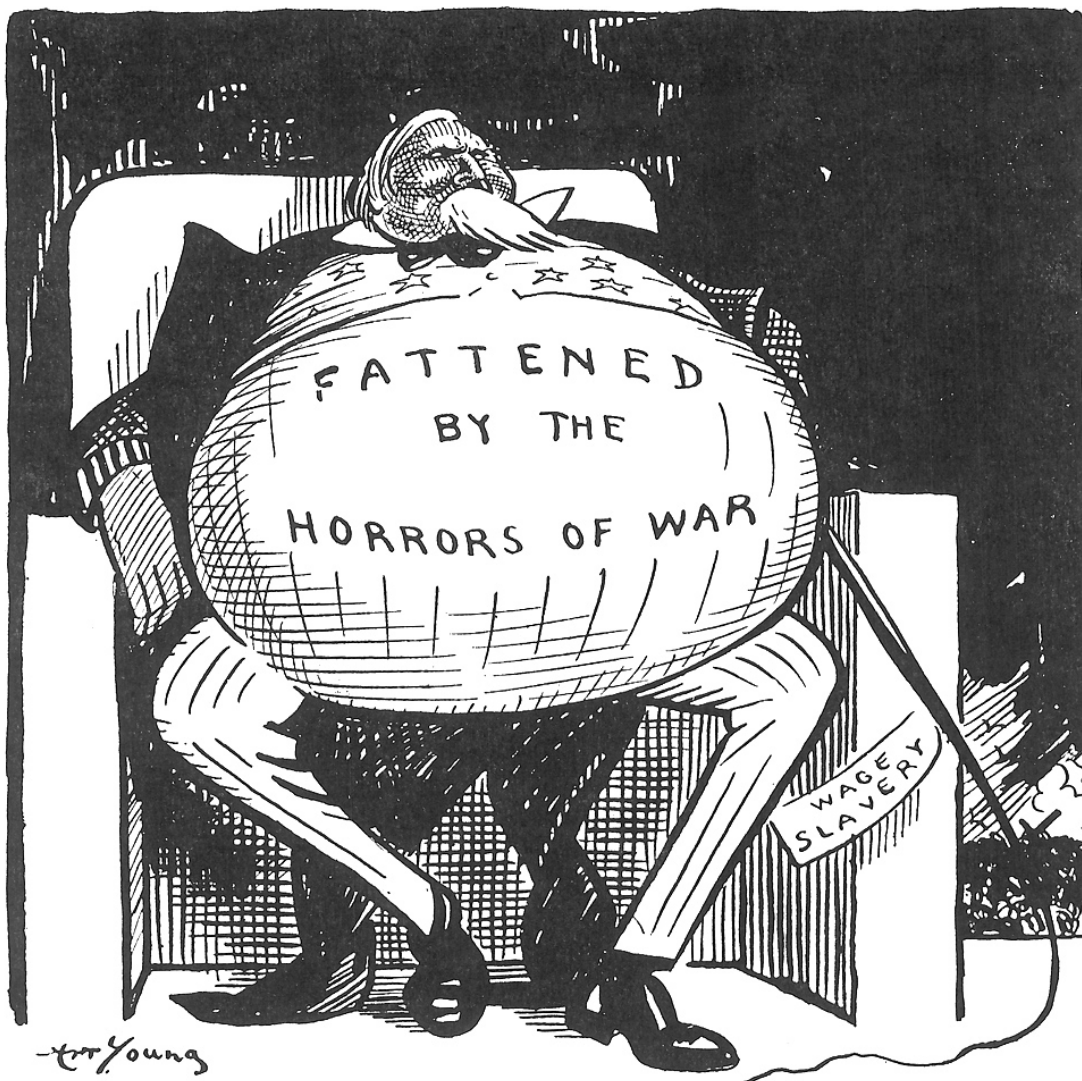
REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST STUDENTS

In the spring and fall of 2022, Revolutionary Marxist Students held protests against student recruitment events by the U.S. military, FBI, CIA, and various war profiteers like Raytheon at UC Berkeley, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Boston University, Tufts University, and Columbia University.

These protests are part of our efforts to put Marxist theory into practice. Why do we study

revolutionary theory and history? We are not studying Marxism to engage in some abstract intellectual exercise. To understand the objective reality we live in, how capitalist society functions, and how we can organize for revolution, we must study the lessons of previous revolutionary struggles. As Lenin said in *What is to Be Done?*, “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” And as Mao noted in *On Practice*, “Marxist philosophy

holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world.” We are studying revolutionary theory as part of our efforts to rebuild a revolutionary movement in the U.S. to overthrow the rotten capitalist system we live under.



Universities are one of the key institutions and tools of the capitalist class in this society. These institutions promote various forms of bourgeois ideology (from post-modernism to neoliberalism, “common sense” conservatism, and everything in between), and serve as key recruitment grounds for the state and corporate America.

Students have to open their eyes to what the universities are really about, instead of blindly being funneled into one form of corporate careerism or another. Being clear about these matters is the first step towards joining the people in the fight for the overthrow of the oppressive capitalist system we live under, because that is the only real way forward to deal with all the pressing social issues that we face today.

In addition to joining in struggles off campus, it is also important for students to lead struggles on campus. There are many outrages that we should organize against in order to build revolutionary consciousness among our fellow students and also among the people more broadly who learn about these struggles. We decided that in addition to supporting various existing struggles on campus, we also wanted to build up a student movement against recruitment to the military industrial complex and various spy agencies like the FBI and CIA. This is an important part of standing against U.S. imperialism, which keeps so many people around the world in chains. Those of us living in imperialist countries like the U.S. have a duty to struggle against U.S. chauvinism in all its forms. This means opposing not just flag-waving jingoism, but also those who become cogs in the machine of companies like Raytheon by designing new missile systems, “smart bombs,” and dystopian surveillance technology.

In the 1960s and 70s, inspired by the revolutionary struggles across the world including the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Chi-

na, students at universities across the U.S. rose up to oppose the U.S. war in Vietnam. They organized militantly against military and CIA recruitment on campuses and exposed the role of universities in U.S. imperialism. For example, a number of elite universities made up the board of the Institute for Defense Analyses, a non-profit corporation founded in the 1950s to do military research. Because students on numerous campuses organized huge protests, occupied campus buildings, and went on strike, they successfully brought an end to the oversight of the IDA by the university consortium. We should learn from these powerful movements.

Today, the importance of these struggles has unfortunately been largely forgotten. We can see this across the society, including on campuses, where there are regular events and recruitment fairs with the U.S. military that generally go unopposed. We students need to take up the mantle of past struggles and organize against military recruitment and blatant celebrations of U.S. imperialism on campus. Our protests at career fairs are part of this larger effort. U.S. imperialism is not a force for global good. The U.S. state is not fighting wars, maintaining bases, and carrying out military actions around the world in order to protect “democracy.” Whether led by Bush, Obama, Trump, or Biden the U.S. state is a rapacious force of loot and plunder, of oppression and genocide. Its purpose is to protect the interests of the U.S. capitalist class by economic, political, cultural, and military means.

Our hope is that by organizing protests against military recruitment, we can spark debate and discussion on campus and raise political consciousness about the nature of U.S. imperialism and the key role played by universities in imperialism, and put forward revolutionary politics to present an alternative to the dominant bourgeois ideas common on campus.

UC Berkeley

On Wednesday September 14th, a group of around 10 students protested outside UC Berkeley's STEM Career Fair. Of the 70+ companies present, the companies we focused on exposing were Chevron, Boeing, Aerojet Rocketdyne, Tesla, the U.S. Bank, Sandia National Laboratories, and the NSA (National Security Agency). We wanted to make sharp exposures about the role these companies play in capitalist-imperialist plunder of countries abroad, as well as their exploitation of workers in the U.S. Boeing is the second largest weapons manufacturer in the world yet deludes the people and prospective hires by portraying themselves as only commercial plane manufacturers. Sandia National Laboratories, which was owned by the University of California until 1949, designs the "non-nuclear elements of nuclear bombs" and creates things like the first "self-guided" bullet. The NSA surveils nearly every single person on the entire planet in its twisted efforts to strengthen the U.S. ruling class's domination and suppression of the people.

These were just some of the exposures we made to students to get at how these companies further the U.S. government's slaughter of the masses abroad, and the surveillance state that represses the masses at home and abroad. We also wanted to expose to other students the role the university plays in teaching students to "shut up and calculate" and not think about what the research or work they are doing is contributing to. The university plays a key role in developing students to be eager worker bees for these companies, and often works directly with companies to research and develop new weapons and other military and surveillance technologies. For the four hours we protested, there was a consistent stream of students who were eager to talk to us after leaving the career fair. There were students

open to talking because we emphasized in our speeches and conversations that we were not trying to shame students for trying to find work, but that we wanted to expose how the university serves the ruling class by working with these companies.

The most common response students had to the protest was some basic agreement that these companies play a negative role in society, but they were not sure what their role in opposing this should be as individuals. We made it clear that students cannot end oppression or imperialism by individually getting more ethical jobs, though we do think that students should refuse to work for weapons companies. We also noted that an important part of changing the larger society is us students joining in collective struggle to overthrow the capitalist system built on exploitation and oppression. In some conversations people raised the idea that even if they worked for a weapons company, but had one of the "good jobs" within it (Human Resources instead of weapons development), then it would be okay. But these jobs are necessary for these companies to carry out their basic operations—each cog has a part to play in maintaining imperialism.

UC Berkeley desperately tries to hide the basic reality of its role in U.S. imperialism from students, papering over this with "progressive" slogans about "diversity in the workforce," and "opportunities" for "historically marginalized" students. All this amounts to is really just them saying: "join up with the ruling class, and fight for your slice of the plunder!" The university co-opts the radicalism of past movements on campus, using pictures from protests against the Vietnam War in its marketing campaigns, even though UC led the charge in attacking these movements at the time. They revise the basic history that the student movement really erupted in response to the UC's brutal crackdown of

student resistance to the Vietnam War—a war that the UC developed weapons for! Career fairs funneling students into the weapons industry and big tech are just one aspect of UC’s role in maintaining U.S. imperialism.

University of Massachusetts Amherst

On September 2, members of the Revolutionary Marxist Students (RMS) branch in Amherst, MA protested the defense industry career fair on campus. Among the companies present that day to recruit students were some of the most notorious gangsters of U.S. imperialism, including the likes of Raytheon, General Dynamics, the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, Infineon, Sensata, and so on. Comrades were posted on the steps of Marcus Hall on the UMass Amherst campus where those at the bustling career fair could see and hear the protest. In people’s speeches the role that the different corporations have in plundering and oppressing the masses domestically and abroad was laid bare. From Raytheon and General Dynamics making the weapons that are directly responsible for the death and misery of the toiling masses across the world off of our tax money (and inflationary spending), all the way to the technology companies who were manufacturing the integrated circuits and chips that served as the brains of the weaponry—none of the companies in attendance were free from ties to U.S. imperialism.

Many students passed by on their rush to get to class, quickly taking a pamphlet exposing the nature of these companies and the university’s ties to the immiseration of the masses, but quite a few also stuck around or joined the protest. Comrades leading chants and giving speeches brought up important questions about the uni-

versity’s role in inviting out these recruiters and its connection to the capitalist system. If our professors or advisors aren’t completely cynical, we’re often told as students that what we learn in the classroom is ultimately for making a better world. But this is simply a lie to cover up the true nature of universities in a capitalist society. Students go through four years of schooling to be shaped up and join the ruling class’ army of intellectuals, bureaucrats, and office workers. A nice career path is carved out through the different career resource centers, classes, fairs, clubs, etc. so that students are pacified to join or assist the U.S. ruling class in its drive to maintain power over the people. It’s really no surprise then to see that universities are inviting out these more openly heinous companies, that are actively engaged in committing war crimes, to recruit students. The university institution is a crucial part of the capitalist system.

Students who work for these corporations won’t be designing advanced new technology to make a safer, efficient, and green future as many corporations euphemistically advertise. Instead, they will be making the latest surveillance technology to spy on people, improve addictive social media algorithms, and design “green cities” that displace working people to make investors rich and keep politicians powerful. This is the path being carved out for many students, but we don’t have to take this route. We can choose to join the ranks of the people and fight against the profiteers and warmongers. We can expose the nature of the universities to our fellow students and raise awareness among society overall about the workings of the system. Our unique position as students gives us the time to study, and to struggle for revolution and a new society.

UMass Amherst, along with many other schools across the country, has a rich history of anti-imperialist organizing and agitation; we hope our efforts on campus serve as a modest step to reig-

nite this flame and bring others into struggle to overthrow the capitalist class.

Tufts University

Over the last several months, RMS at Tufts has protested Tufts sponsored recruitment events that have hosted entities such as the CIA, Raytheon, and General Dynamics. These protests were carried out in conjunction with activists from various leftist circles on campus and with representatives of the anti-war movement across Boston. Many of these groups that joined our protest were not necessarily revolutionary, but we found political unity in the need to oppose these arms of the U.S. war apparatus as well as the need to expose the key role universities play in imperialism.

Our efforts have had varying levels of success. Last spring semester, General Dynamics came to campus to give a presentation and recruit students. We took advantage of the fact that this was happening in a public location and flooded the area with protesters, chants, and megaphones. Through these tactics, we were able to disrupt the presentation and forced the General Dynamics representatives out of the room.

Two weeks later on May 2nd, Raytheon came to campus for a similar recruitment presentation. Our protest started with a public facing demonstration outside and nearer to public view, while several protesters went inside to disrupt the meeting with pointed questions. The group protesting outside soon moved closer to the building and forced the presentation to end early.

At the start of this fall semester, the CIA held a recruitment event on campus. Given our prior protests, the university had extra security in place for the event. Attendees were required to

sign up for seats ahead of time, and a Tufts email was required in order to register. As a result, we contacted a wide range of supporters to register for the available slots and then not attend, in effect ensuring that there would be a small crowd in attendance. On the day of the event, a select number of students went in again to make exposures of the recruiters while the student facing protest outside the event attracted significant numbers. While the event wasn't halted because of our protest, the protest overall was a strong representation of our continued resistance to agents of U.S. imperialism recruiting on campus.

Yet, this resistance has been met with a significantly divided response amongst the student population. The online slander from some students was best exemplified by some of the anonymous internet comments about the protests:

“These 5 white kids protesting Raytheon will never understand what it's like to be a black or brown engineer who need to get a job to do good by their families.”

“Defense contractors are some of the best employers for EEs [Electrical Engineers]. I'm not spoiled rich like you, so I'm not angry when a company is coming to hire and pay me well. Stop protesting my future, not everything is about you.”

“I know damn well none of the kids [who are protesting] are going to pay their own tuition. Being able to choose an ethical job is a privilege many cannot afford because they have loans.”

In the eyes of these objectors it could only be white, rich, and privileged students who would speak out against the role of these companies and Tufts in U.S. imperialism (never mind that there were more than five students protesting, and that many of them were not white or rich).

NO RIGHT TO
RECRUITING OFF
CAMPUS



And—perhaps most surreal—students who care about such issues like stopping U.S. wars abroad, are just selfish! By their twisted logic, it is “oppressive” to protest students’ “opportunity” to make a living off of blood money. This shows the ways in which various forms of post-modern identity politics serves the interests of U.S. imperialism.

Despite these objections from those who wish to justify their plans to become cogs in the imperialist system, these protests have proven to be quite a success. They have shown something of an alternative to the typically casual, passive, and liberal student activism on campus. Protesting these recruitment events has been both a testament to our ability to seize on opportunities as they arise and work with others in a principled way. Given the very low level of political activity on campus and in society as a whole, the success of these efforts have been quite substantial.

Boston University

The members of BU Revolutionary Marxist Students organized a few protests this past semester: a protest against an army recruitment center that opened relatively recently in Cambridge, MA; two protests of career fairs at BU (the first of which we’ll describe more); and a protest at the Harvard Kennedy School against a class teaching its students how to use the military to suppress mass outrage and social upheaval caused by climate change. In doing these protests, we’ve found that it is important to unite with local anti-war groups even if we have a good amount of political disagreements. This unity helps in spreading the word and getting more attention, having more numbers at the protest, and making links with people through these groups. We have also found that people from these anti-war groups tend to be more se-

rious about organizing than the leftist groups on BU’s campus.

The first protest at BU was Oct. 6th against the engineering career fair. Companies in attendance included General Dynamics, General Electric, and MIT Lincoln Labs (plus the U.S. Army). General Dynamics quietly pulled out last minute because of the flyers we spread all around campus criticizing them for making weapons used in to destroy Yemen and Iraq. This shows that these companies and government institutions are afraid of any negative PR and exposures. They do not want prospective employees to be thinking about the role their employers are playing in the world; so our modest efforts in protesting the career fair do have some impact.

At the start, our numbers at the protest were fairly small. Due to this we decided to go inside the building and give speeches outside the hall where the career fair was happening. We soon realized this did not make sense since the hall was too large for us to disrupt given our numbers, and the engineering students we hoped to engage were clearly disinterested. Our mistake points to the fact that the main priority for these protests, especially when we have small numbers, should be to do public facing agitation amongst a broader range of people. In this way we can meet those who are more interested in potentially working together and joining future protests.

Towards the end of the protest we had more people from local anti-war circles (Massachusetts Peace Action, Vets for Peace, Code Pink) attend, and a few from BU’s student activist groups. We were pleasantly surprised to see a few non-activist students stick around and listen to the speeches. This was in part because our protest coincided with a class rush, but also because we moved ourselves to be closer to the sidewalk where students were passing by. It was

a relatively small amount of people given the number of students at the school, but still a success in particular because the speeches were able to engage their interest. These students who listened to various speeches, and left their contact information with us, unfortunately did not attend the following studies. But it still shows that there is a basis to continue these protests in future semesters. By building up a contact list of people who are interested, we can help to develop something of a mass base for opposing things like military recruitment on campus.

When talking with students who attended the protest and listened to speeches, many asked what alternative there is to a career path. We discussed that there is a need for students to leave their career aspirations behind, learn what is going on in society and the different ways people are kept down by the capitalist system, and see the need to join in people's struggles. We brought up the history of students in the U.S. dedicating themselves to people's struggles, such as with the Revolutionary Union (RU).

The RU was a communist organization formed by students who came from the radical movements on campuses in the 60s. Critical of the trend of students activists who only stayed on campus and within leftist circles, the RU made an active effort to organize amongst the working class. Students are still doing this around the world, such as in the revolutionary movements in India and the Philippines. Learning about these examples of students taking up revolutionary struggle inspired some of the students we spoke with.

Columbia University

On October 8th, Revolutionary Marxist Students at Columbia held a protest outside Columbia Lerner Hall, where the Engineering and

Tech Career Fair was happening inside, to oppose the presence of the FBI, U.S. Navy, Naval Information Warfare Center, Naval Undersea Warfare Center, and the Institute for Defense Analysis corporation which works for the U.S. military and government agencies like the NSA and DHS. We chanted "when missiles fly, people die, and Columbia's profits multiply," gave speeches, and handed out pamphlets as students were walking by; and many students stopped to listen. Most students didn't even know there was military and FBI recruitment happening on campus, which is indicative of how much struggles against U.S. imperialism have died down on U.S. college campuses since the 1960s and 70s.

During the protest, we spoke about how in the 1960s, students at Columbia rose up, inspired by people's struggles and revolutionary movements around the world. In 1968, students fought against Columbia's classified military research for the Vietnam war and the Columbia president sitting on the Executive Board of the Institute for Defense Analysis; against military and CIA recruiting on campus; against Columbia's construction of its racist "Gym Crow" in Morningside Park with a separate entrance for Black residents of Harlem. At the time, many students didn't ask the university nicely to "please stop being a little less oppressive." They saw the true nature of the university as protecting the capitalist class's interests, and they got organized, militantly occupying campus buildings and going on strike for weeks. This was a powerful struggle, and Columbia responded with wide-spread repression: Over 700 students were arrested and many were beaten by the police.

Columbia eventually cancelled its construction of the gym, and severed the institutional ties with the Institute for Defense Analyses. The university only did this because students forced



From our protest against FBI, military, and weapons manufacturers recruiting students at Columbia University's engineering and tech undergrad career fair on October 7th. We protested not just the fact that these warmongers and oppressors of the people in the U.S. and abroad were recruiting, but the key role that Columbia plays in U.S. imperialism as an institution that is run by and serves the interests of the ruling capitalist class.

it to. We also highlighted how, at elite universities like Columbia, there is a revolving door with the U.S. state. For example, after Dwight Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force during WWII, he was president of Columbia from 1948 until 1953, when he became president of the United States. Columbia is a bastion of U.S. bourgeois ideology and power.

One of our members noted “the level of hypocrisy that Columbia needs to function as an educational institute, that pays lip service to the idea of critical thoughts, compassionate learning, making students into people who care about the world around them.” We read Marx in class and we learn about colonization and imperialism in the abstract but we still manage to maintain this massive cognitive disconnect between the things we learned—we say “maybe Columbus was a bad guy” or “the Vietnam war was a mistake”—but the ongoing present wars that

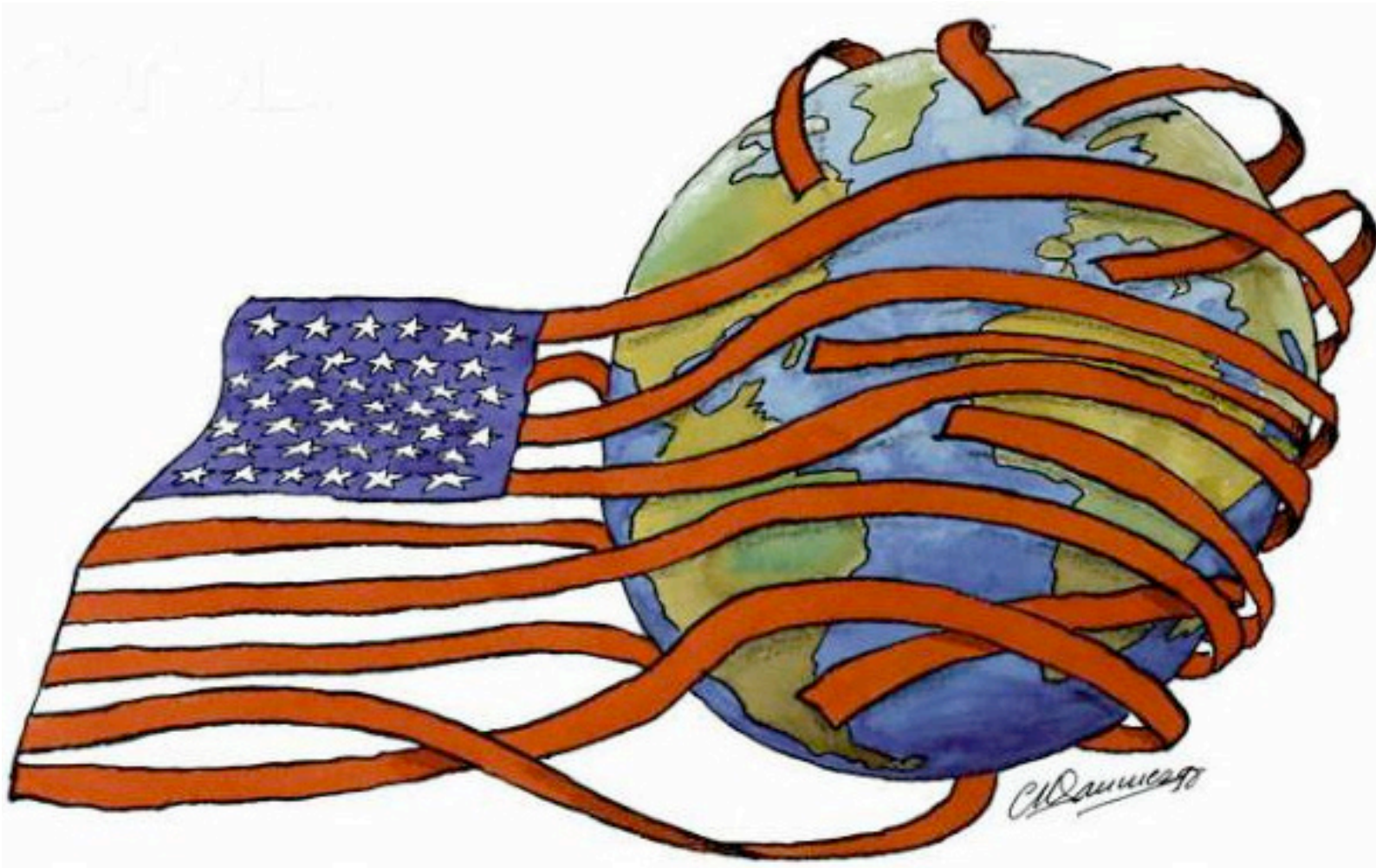
the U.S. continues to perpetuate don't get paid any attention to, and if they do, then we can kind of dismiss it as something that's not our problem.

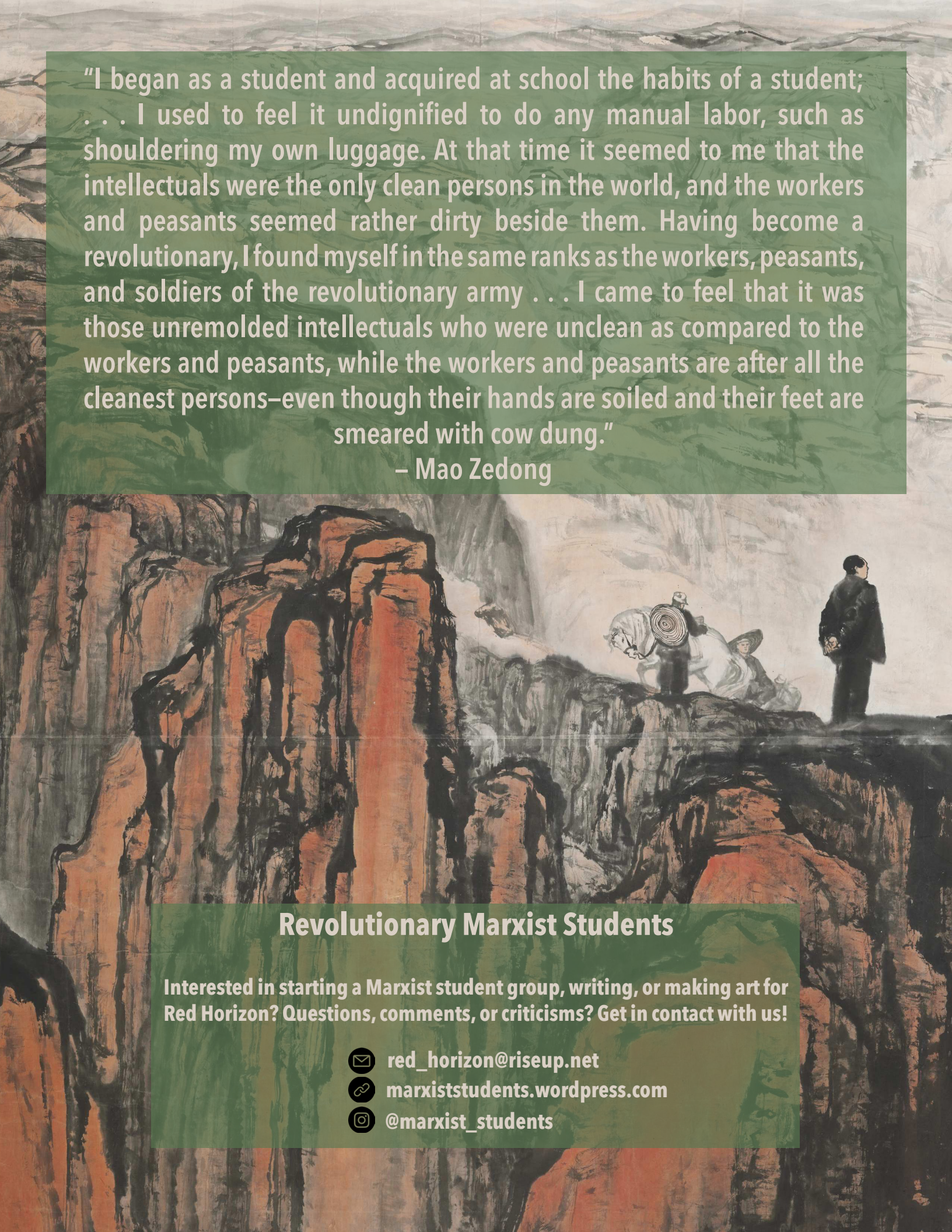
“It's really easy to have the sentiment that paying attention to mass suffering around the world is too much emotional labor for someone to spare in their day, they have classes to go to, they have tests to take, they have a job, family they worry about, and it's really hard to muster the energy to care about what corporations are doing on the other side of the world. But this is how capitalism and how the ruling class operates on this very insidious individualizing, where if we're made aware of pain around the world, our reflexive position is defensiveness and guilt. It doesn't feel good to think about those things. So, we either assume we have to carry the entire weight of human suffering on our shoulders, or we just have to numb ourselves. And so, activism is construed in terms of personal sacrifice,

like using a straw that disintegrates into your latte, or spending money you can't afford on sustainably sourced produce. Which isn't to say that ending exploitation will not mean sacrificing comfort, because it will entail a radical change in the way people live. But those two options of total martyrdom as an individual and turning a blind eye are not the only options we have. The absolute least we can do is shame Columbia for walking arm in arm with weapons dealers, with the people who design and orchestrate this exploitation of the working class of the world in its most violent incarnations. But to be really clear, the violence is everywhere, the steps that we take are a start and they're necessary but as long as the university exists in its

present form it will be the enemy of the people. We can't let reforms be the end of the battle and we can't let them replace the need for revolutionary change."

Overall, this protest was a real success and we plan to carry out similar protests in the future. We hope that they can serve as an inspiration to other students around the country to take a stand against these sorts of recruitment on campus, and work to expose the roles their universities play in U.S. imperialism.





"I began as a student and acquired at school the habits of a student; . . . I used to feel it undignified to do any manual labor, such as shouldering my own luggage. At that time it seemed to me that the intellectuals were the only clean persons in the world, and the workers and peasants seemed rather dirty beside them. Having become a revolutionary, I found myself in the same ranks as the workers, peasants, and soldiers of the revolutionary army . . . I came to feel that it was those unremolded intellectuals who were unclean as compared to the workers and peasants, while the workers and peasants are after all the cleanest persons—even though their hands are soiled and their feet are smeared with cow dung."

– Mao Zedong

Revolutionary Marxist Students

Interested in starting a Marxist student group, writing, or making art for Red Horizon? Questions, comments, or criticisms? Get in contact with us!

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