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LEFT



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From the National Director

Building a Powerful Antiwar Movement

By Maria Svart

On the anniversary of the start of the 2003 Iraq war this spring, I looked back at the pictures of the massive worldwide protests. Millions of people were in the streets, but they weren't enough to stop the bombing. The U.S. war machine ground forward.



In strategic campaign terms, we had a clear demand (don't invade) and target (George W. Bush), but we didn't have *leverage*. DSA's theory of power is that if we organize poor and working-class people in three different arenas—the formal political system, our communities, and our workplaces—we create real leverage and something greater than the sum of these parts.

Imagine if in the lead-up to the Iraq War we had built an antiwar base of poor people in open rebellion in both urban and rural areas, demanding social programs instead of bombs; if we had built a coalition of elected officials willing to argue and vote against nationalistic calls for war; and if we had built up a base of workers, especially in strategic industries, confident enough to strike against the war and demand conversion of their jobs from military production to production for domestic use meeting human needs. Imagine if those protests had been more than symbolic and we had been able to stop the gears of the economy and governability of society.

As we go to press, National Security Advisor John Bolton is concocting a case for us to attack Iran. At the same time, we can take inspiration from international solidarity. This spring, Bernie Sanders organized fellow senators and then representatives in the House to pass the historic War Powers Resolution against participation in the Saudi-led war in

Yemen, although it was vetoed by Donald Trump. More recently, on May 20, dock workers in Genoa, Italy, refused to load electric generators onto a Saudi Arabian ship carrying weapons. "We will not be complicit in what is happening in Yemen" said the union leaders. Earlier, the ship had been unable to load weapons in France because of protesters.

We, too, can, and must, help build a mass movement saying no to the wars among the rich. Through all of our work, whether workplace or community organizing or in the electoral arena, we can talk about U.S. foreign policy. To think about how, I encourage you to register for our national reading group of Jane McAlevey's *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*. We'll have three sessions covering different chapters of her book. Go to dsausa.org to see the schedule and join one or all three. Whatever the issue, this basic reality is true: the capitalist class has the money, but we have the people. We have the power, if we organize.

National Convention Countdown

Every two years, we gather in convention in different parts of the country. This year, we're meeting August 2 - 4 at one of the two union hotels in Atlanta, Georgia, to debate political ideas, share organizing skills, and make decisions about our future. ❖

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Cover art by MB Dallocchio

DATES TO REMEMBER

June 13: The national office will release a compendium of proposed resolutions and constitutional/bylaws amendments.

By July 2: Any member or group of DSA members in good standing may submit amendments to proposed resolutions and constitutional and bylaws changes.

By June 16: National Political Committee nominees must complete a candidate questionnaire.

By June 23: Chapters must report convention delegate election results to national office, including delegate contact information and requests for full or partial relief from travel share requirements.

For more details and to sign up for frequent convention updates:

www.dsausa.org/national-convention/

War is a Racket

We need international resistance

By Chris Lombardi

Fifty years ago, the peace/antiwar movement in the United States was at its height. Led by priests, poets, politicians, and pranksters, it included a wide range of class, race, and gender perspectives from the boiling-hot sixties. I was seven years old, but felt enough of its backwash that by the time I was twelve, I was already a self-declared democratic socialist and a budding anti-militarist.

A couple of decades later, I edited the 50th-anniversary edition of the *Objector*, the magazine of the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors. I included resisters of numerous wars, asking “Where were YOU in 1968?” Many of the Vietnam vets I met through CCCO were also counselors for the GI Rights Hotline. One day, I joked with that group, “If we’re ever going to have a revolution, it’ll come from antiwar veterans.”

That sentiment has animated much of my professional life since, and I knew I needed such voices when I agreed to guest-edit this issue of *Democratic Left*. Working in the spirit of the general who taught us that the U.S. military are “gangsters for capitalism,” I recruited Joe Kassabian, a newish member of DSA’s Veterans Working Group (VWG), to help me dream possible articles and authors. And everyone I asked delivered, so we ended up with many more good pieces than would fit in these pages. You can find the rest in Democratic Left Online.

VWG members in this print and online issue include Spenser Rapone, called the “Commie Cadet” by the press for his West Point resistance, and Stan Goff, whose books have transmuted his Vietnam experience into potent commentary. Griffin Mahon gives us a look at the younger vets who mostly make up the VWG.

We are thrilled to include Rosa del Duca, whose journey to conscientious objection is the heart of her book and podcast *Breaking Cadence*, and Jonathan Wesley Hutto, whom I met when he founded the 2007 Appeal for Redress, wherein active-duty servicemembers called for withdrawal from Iraq.

But this issue is about creating a socialist *inter-*

nationalism. Thus, we have Charles Lenchner with his own dissenting-soldier testimony, and Rohini Hensman, who reminds us that “Capitalism is global.”

Our own fate depends on the success of anti-authoritarian and anticapitalist struggles in other countries, and therefore international solidarity is a must for all socialists. David Swanson of World Without War talks about fighting to close U.S. bases around the world. Lion Summerbell takes on the

terrifying reality of AFRICOM; Meredith Tax makes essential links between climate, global solidarity, and promising experiments like Rojava. Matt Meyer of the Fellowship of Reconciliation shows how to support nonviolent action instead of sexy-looking armed struggle. Vivian Rothstein distills the lessons from the Vietnam-era work of Students for a Democratic Society. And DSA’s own Rossana Rodriguez, recently elected to Chicago’s city council, recalls the 1980s/90s movement that kicked the U.S. Navy out of Vieques.

In lieu of a chapter roundup, we focused on the Veterans Working Group, but we want to publish a chapter roundup of antiwar activities. Please contact us with some updates we can post online.

May a thousand anti-imperialist organizing projects bloom! ❖

A member of Democratic Left’s editorial team and editor of DSA Weekly (now part of DL Online), Chris Lombardi is a working journalist and



author of the upcoming New Press book I Ain’t Marching Anymore: Soldiers Who Dissent, From the French and Indian War to the Forever War.



Art by MB Dallochio

All articles except that of the national director represent the opinions of the authors and not necessarily of DSA. For statements from DSA working groups and the National Political Committee, go to dsausa.org.

Satyagraha for 21st-century Socialists

It's time for a revolutionary nonviolence that will rock the world

By Matt Meyer

As end-of-empire America lashes out in terror both domestic and foreign, the U.S. Left faces a seemingly unprecedented urgency. With the fate of the planet at stake, it is harder than ever to sit still amid abstract debates about the meanings of nonviolence and violence; strategy and tactics; socialism, democracy, and revolution. How then, to take a long view of history without missing the needs of the moment?

For this organizer-academic who cut his teeth in the early 1980s, the need is clear for relevant dialogues on 21st century dialectics—and careful use of the words we choose.

Defining Terms

Nonviolence (a term some have called “a word seeking to describe something by saying what it is not”) is used in a variety of ways. For some, nonviolence is strategic and revolutionary, for others principled and philosophical; it can be a way of life or a mere tactic. For most practitioners, it is a tantalizing combination of the above. And for far too many, it connotes passivity and an inability to move beyond reformism, at least on the mass level.

Violence, as we know too well, goes far beyond war to include domestic violence, random street crime, repression, and poverty—responsible for more death than most other forms combined. Despite the ferocity of structural violence, however, many even on the Left seem to connote violence with images of angry “mobs” of young men with guns.

Armed struggle may be seen by some as the only method of revolution—while there are few critiques of such leftist militarism. Where is the necessary dialectical analysis of revolutionary nonviolence and the mildly tactical armed actions? Or about the “diversity of tactics” included in the antifa movement’s “black bloc” events? Trying for some, I wrote about a very small demonstration held a few years ago in the Bronx, NY:

Though far to the north of that now-historic original site of Occupy Wall Street (OWS), a contingent

of OWS folks, especially associated with the People of Color caucus, the Anti-Racist Allies group and working with the Stop “Stop and Frisk” campaign (targeting abusive and brutalizing cops), were a key part of this mobilization. At the time, the New York Police Department was stopping and frisking almost 2,000 black and Latino young people on the off chance that they might have some criminal intent. So many pointless encounters led to increased numbers of unarmed young people being shot by the police.

After the police-involved death of Ramarley Graham, demonstrators marched around the precinct and the neighborhood—not looking to be antagonistic, but neither were they subdued: They chanted “NYPD . . . Guilty!” and “F**K the Police.”

Some complained that the language was too rough, as they feared that it could escalate the anger. The mobilization organizers encouraged community members to speak out about what they experienced. One after another young person, mother, local business owner, or teacher testified to the terror of “stop and frisk” and NYPD terror. One of the “Stop and Frisk” organizers noticed an officer who began to cry as she heard the barrage of community fury. The organizer,

who had seen this officer at previous demonstrations, approached her: “Do you know the writings of James Baldwin?” he asked.

She did. She knew that Baldwin’s classic *The Fire Next Time* spoke not only of the frustrations of African Americans throughout U.S. history but also referenced the biblical reference, often used in spirituals: “God gave Noah the rainbow sign: No more water but the fire next time.” If we do not set right the wrongs of today, and properly vent and process the feelings of the moment, we will pay dearly in the future when tragedy befalls us again. The officer and the organizer didn’t have a wonderful epiphany or come to some great unity, but they did share a moment in the midst of the madness.

I don’t tell this story here to suggest that the police are not part of the massive repression of people of color or that we should always be yelling curses at them or other “opponents.” The Trump debacle

“How, then, to take a long view of history without missing the needs of the moment?”

has led to far too many calls for muted living-room “conversations” with right-wing populist neighbors, shorn of the passions of righteous indignation against the evils of our times. It’s about the simultaneous leveraging of rage and communication, about the forging of nonviolent direct action spaces as complex as are our times.

Focusing Energy for Change

With all the shouting and anger, cursing and grief, testifying and dialogue, militancy and uncertainty, these complexities are the epitome of what nonviolence has got to look like if it is to have any relevance in the years ahead.

If we are to draw any lessons from Occupy, the Movement for Black Lives, the Bernie campaigns, the new Poor People’s Campaign, and other U.S.-based initiatives of the past decade, it is that the energy for such change is in the air. The *passion* is there, as is the boldness to go out and do something. The *problem* is that society here is structured, with people carefully culturally and repressively contained, such that building actual movements is more difficult than ever.

Swiss political economist Christian Marazzi put together in five short chapters an interpretation of the global crisis that doesn’t view the current moment as a shocking response to failures in the “system.” It’s called *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* and describes the intensified stratification between rich and poor as a continuation of the process of capital accumulation that requires the violence of re-colonization, increased inequality, and a world of poverty. The increased (and for some genocidal) cutting of basic needs and services from the people who produce most of what we use in the world is not a temporary thing. It is not, as some economists argue, a “correction” to ensure future widespread prosperity; it is a permanent way of life designed by the ruling class in late-stage capitalism.

Adhering to (or debating about) old-school false dichotomies like the nonviolence-violence debate is as useless as trying to solve the arguments of our grandparents, as ridiculous as spending time trying to decide whether Gandhi was a saint.

Perhaps the best assessment comes from Native American author-activist Margo Tamez (Lipan Apache). Tamez reminds us that border walls infringing on people’s land are hardly a Trump invention, and that, “Our allies have to be better-trained and well chosen.” We must figure out how to come together across generations, racial/ethnic divides, genders and sexualities and faiths. Listening to and respecting elders, especially from African-heritage peoples as well as from Indigenous, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Latinx peoples, means listening to

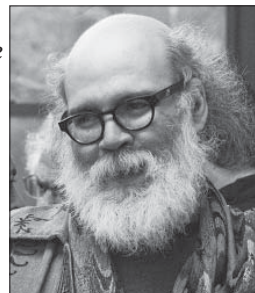
and working to free the still-languishing political prisoners of past decades. Out of these passions, this love for the people, the merging of Martin and Malcolm and Ella and Queen Mother Moore must come a revolutionary nonviolence that will rock the world.

Respecting and representing the new generations from these same communities means, among many other things, working for reparations and resistance before reconciliation, for truth-telling first ... before the peace and harmony sharing of safe space.

These are not just demands and needs to be called out for the government or the powerful: These are power dynamics and consciousness that must permeate all that we do. We must understand that oppression anywhere breeds inequality everywhere. It also breeds ineffectiveness, whether in society as a whole or in grassroots social change groups.

We can and must turn our money and our bodies away from the creators and promoters of war—from the banks and taxes and armies, from their corporate owners and police forces. We can and must choose constructive programs that will rebuild our broken communities. Together, we can create beloved communities, where revolutionary nonviolence is no blast from the past but our current work, with definitions and practices for a new day being born. ❖

Matt Meyer is the recently elected secretary-general of the International Peace Research Association. He is national co-chair of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) USA, and former Chair of the War Resisters League. His most recent book is White Lives Matter Most and other “Little” White Lies.



DSA International Committee

This committee helps DSA and its members connect and build in solidarity with like-minded activists, workers, movements, and parties worldwide.



international.dsausa.org

Born to be Militaristic

Male violence, misogyny, and war

By Stan Goff

When I arrived in Vietnam in 1970, members of my platoon had lost a friend to a booby trap just two weeks before. I was smoking dope in a guard bunker when a group of them went into the outskirts of Bongson and gunned down an old woman who was hoeing in her garden. They called it “killing a dink for Jojo.”

My new colleagues had detonated a grenade as a cover story—the old woman “threw” the grenade at them. The grenade burst knocked her into the dirt. They then pumped M-16 rounds into her and dragged her up the bulldozed hill to our platoon perimeter, her ankles tied by her blouse. It made a mess of her body, eyes and teeth stained with blood and dust, head bouncing off rocks.

The battalion commander flew out for five minutes to congratulate the platoon on its enemy “kill.” Three days later, with the corpse bloating inside a poncho on our landing zone, a South Vietnamese lieutenant was escorted into the perimeter. The body was that of his mother. She’d been missing, and he’d heard about the kill. He screamed at us as they took him away. We didn’t speak Vietnamese, but could imagine: “Murderers! Liars!”

I’d volunteered to be the boy hero fighting alongside other virtuous American soldiers just like in the movies. But the South Vietnamese army lieutenant knew. Murderers. Liars. Earlier that week, my new buddies had called me a “fucking missionary” for giving C-ration gum to the kids who hung around the camp.

Within three months, I, too, was a hardened racist, a malignant, skinny 19-year-old affixed to an M-60 machine gun. War doesn’t ennoble anyone. And war is gendered male. Benito Mussolini, a macho wannabe not unlike Donald Trump, called war the male equivalent of motherhood. War is gendered ... all the way down, even though some women are now in armed service.

Masculinity is a lifelong project for most men. We are trained for it from birth. Military institutions and practices have been developed over cen-

turies within this “masculine” sphere. Combine institutional history and gender indoctrination, and we have a self-reproducing feedback loop. Adding a few women has done little to change war or military misogyny, because women in combat succeed by becoming what I call “honorary men.” All must conform to a historically male/masculinized institution and practice, including its moral grammar of counter-empathy, compartmentalization, and the willingness to lie and murder for the greater good.

What do I mean by moral grammar? Regardless of what “just war” theorists say about the *possibility* of war being just, the reality is that war—all war—always targets civilians, always involves “collateral damage,” always involves the moral degradation of its practitioners, and *never* concludes with the expected results.

Modern imperial war, war to control peripheries, is the same: The soldier’s responsibility is to *control* a population, and this relation requires that soldiers first *objectify* the population (calling them “targets”), then *dehumanize* them (“gooks,” “dinks,” “hajjis”). Acknowledgment of targets’ basic humanity can only lead to cognitive dissonance.

The moral grammar of war is gendered masculine because institutional history and male socialization make it so. Some male soldiers come to enjoy war and killing, more than you’d like to know. The way we conduct war changes, the tactics change, but the moral grammar of contempt for human life, compartmentalization, cold instrumentality, and total lack of accountability stay the same.

War compels its participants to do bad things . . . and we become what we do.

Masculinity thus understood is *the exercise of brutal power*, and this exercise morally degrades all of us.

Masculine Violence and Capitalism

Let’s drop back a few centuries and look at liberal (capitalist) philosophy in formation, where the masculine-conquest trope reigned supreme. The philosophers René Descartes and Francis Bacon be-

“The idea of cleansing the social body with killing is as common as air.”

queathed us a (very male) conquest-inflected division between Man (they meant males) and Nature—the cosmic Subject that *subdues* the cosmic Object. Bacon equated science to torturing “witches” (his female stand-in for objectified “Nature”) for their secrets, something with which he had firsthand familiarity. As sociologist Maria Mies says, modern imperial ideology then “defined women and colonies into nature,” rendering them the Objects of masculine conquest. Mother Nature is a woman—wild and unruly—requiring the guiding hand of Man to subdue her, not unlike the husband’s responsibility to guide the formation of a dutiful wife. These associations are built into our gender-formative national imaginary.

So is “redemptive violence.”

The idea of cleansing the social body with killing is as common as air. Redemption is a spiritual concept. War is holy in our culture, as evidenced by our civic worship of flags, soldiers, generals, and weapons.

War (conquest) and misogyny go together. Thought exercise: Courage is not exclusively *masculine*, and vulnerability is not exclusively *feminine*, but they are gendered that way. Men or women (or anyone) can be courageous or vulnerable, sometimes at the same time. But the association of courage with masculinity or vulnerability *with* femininity reproduces and reinforces patriarchy. In a strange paradox, where masculinist culture valorizes courage and holds vulnerability in contempt, it takes courage for a man to show vulnerability. He risks being called a pussy or bitch, in other words, a woman.

War Inheres with Misogyny

Women may be fighting in the endless wars of the United States, but war remains *inherently* misogynistic because it evolved within and through patriarchy and tends powerfully to reproduce it. Women in the military know that military culture is hostile to women. It is an ideal rape demographic (lots of men between 18-40), and women in the military experience the predatory male gaze from every direction, every working day. They are constantly

reduced to sexual objects (or judged on their suitability as sexual objects) by colleagues and are still concentrated overwhelmingly in occupational specialties apart from combat (though only about one out of four soldiers of either gender is in combat arms).

We may not fight with pikes and hammers anymore, but the mentality of the soldier has trans-geographic and trans-historical features discernible in all war, which to a substantial degree accounts for the sustained correspondence of patriarchy with war. Across centuries and continents, war is:

- coldly instrumental and brooks no moral reservations;
- requires abject obedience and the outsourcing of moral decisions; and
- requires some (still overwhelmingly male) soldiers to kill—and killing changes people. Not for the better.

Empire is *materially* established by exploitative flows between imperial cores and subjugated colonies. But imperialism is *sustained, nourished, and mobilized* by conquest masculinity. Oftentimes, our arguments against imperialism dash against this rock: Masculinity is self-protective, paranoid, and fragile, and so it must be walled in by a psychological fortress. Although there are many generational differences in constructions of masculinity and of hegemonic masculinity, from when I shipped out to Vietnam, this one stubborn thread persists, whether in “real life” or “virtual reality.” And the Left is not immune from adolescent macho fantasies that look a lot like war, even if they play out on computer screens and in chat rooms rather than through the grit and grief of battlefields. ❖

Stan Goff is a career veteran of the U.S. Army, a writer, and an activist. He is a Christian pacifist, a “subsistence” socialist, and a member of Huron Valley DSA. His latest book is Tough Gynes—Violent Women in Film as Honorary Men.



National DSA Convention

August 2-4, 2019 • Atlanta, Georgia

For convention updates: www.dsaua.org/national-convention/

Y'allidarity Forever!

Climate, Solidarity, and Resistance

Paradigm for a socialist foreign policy

By Meredith Tax

The newly empowered U.S. Left needs a foreign policy. But what should it be?

In a 2018 article in *In These Times*, I laid out the main points to consider: (1) climate change; (2) the emergence of a post-cold war socialist paradigm; (3) a response to this late stage of capitalism, in which the world is governed by a globalist system of economic rule that has superseded the national state; and (4) the corresponding growth of a new fascist international, sometimes operating as a populist movement and sometimes capturing the state.

Since then, the situation has gotten slightly more hopeful and definitely more dire.

Let's begin with climate change. Global warming has already put the survival of many species and low-lying regions at risk and made the future of human civilization an open question. It has endangered people's livelihoods all over the world while their physical security is also being threatened by wars, authoritarian governments, and fundamentalist movements. Facing so many dangers, many see no choice but flight. This means we have entered a time of unprecedented migration. The walls being thrown up to exclude migrants have already produced the most severe human rights crisis since the Second World War.

Climate change is an issue around which people can unite across borders in opposition to both fascists and neoliberals. It provides a framework in which socialists can bring together domestic and foreign policy, the ideological and the practical, the personal and the political, and loudly challenge all those who don't care. The Green New Deal is the policy expression of this framework, the most holistic approach to public policy to hit Washington in decades.

But Washington is not the only or even the best laboratory in which to develop a holistic approach to social change. Smaller, less highly visible spaces are better for experimentation, and it is no accident that a new socialist paradigm is most advanced in fragile, war-torn but autonomous spaces such as Chiapas and Rojava (the majority Kurdish region of Northern Syria), as well as municipal enclaves such as Jackson, Mississippi, and Barcelona, Spain, where people are working out in practice what twenty-first-century socialism could look like. Their

paradigm begins with bottom-up local democracy and an aversion to statism. It fully integrates women into governance structures and makes their liberation central to its idea of revolution. Pluralistic and secular, it emphasizes ecology, sustainability, and economic cooperation.

Because these communities are at the crossroads of socialist foreign policy and climate change, we must support and defend them. Rebuilding the U.S. Left should entail close communication with people in Rojava, Chiapas, Barcelona, and other places experimenting with new forms of direct democracy, so that we can see what works for them and what doesn't, and how the new paradigm combines democratic renewal with work against climate change.

In Rojava, for instance, the Internationalist Commune has initiated a tree-planting campaign to restore sustainability to long-neglected agricultural land that has been devastated by war. Their work is outlined in a book prepared by the Commune called *Make Rojava Green Again*. In Mexico, newly elected president Andrés Manuel López Obrador wants to bring high-speed trains into the Mayan areas to encourage tourism and industrial development. Mexican environmentalists say this will be an ecological disaster, and the Zapatistas, whose bottom-up democracy, feminism, and emphasis on autonomy have much in common with Rojava, are going to fight this plan with everything they've got.

We need to act in solidarity with them and with other indigenous communities fighting climate change and deforestation, such as the Ecuadorian tribes who recently filed a lawsuit against a government plan to permit oil exploration on protected lands; the native tribes under intensified attack in Brazil since the election of Jair Bolsonaro; the First Nations women's movement in Canada, Idle No More; and the activists from our own Dakota Access Pipeline protests, who continue to be persecuted and to fight back. Solidarity with these communities will enable us to bridge issues of democracy, minority rights, and climate change and link our foreign and domestic policies.

Though support for most of these struggles is barely a blip in the consciousness of the U.S. Left, support for Rojava involves U.S. troops and has therefore become contested. In December 2018, after a call from Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



Rally called by the Emergency Committee for Rojava on Jan. 27, International Kobane Day, in New York City's Union Square. The slogans were "Defend Rojava" and "No U.S. Complicity With Turkey's War on the Kurds." Photo by Meryl Tihanyi

gan, U.S. president Donald Trump announced that he was withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria. This sudden declaration freaked out both the Pentagon and Congress to the point that many came out more strongly than before in support of the Kurds as our only reliable ally against ISIS (Islamic State). This support was certainly not because of Rojava's socialist ideas.

In response to Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from one of the very few places on earth where they are on the right side—acting as a buffer to keep Turkey from a genocidal invasion of Rojava—the U.S. Left predictably split: Some in the peace movement cheered Trump while others were appalled. The disagreement was such that the DSA International Committee could not reach agreement and issued two different positions, while others, such as John Nichols in a December article in *The Nation*, simply ignored Turkey's threats and focused on the fact that Congress had never authorized U.S. troops in Syria.

Some on the Left regard U.S. imperialism as uniquely evil and dangerous, and any U.S. action as incomparably more threatening to world peace and human rights than anything that could be done by lesser powers. Rather than seeing international politics as a complex arena with a number of powerful players and their proxies, they see it as a battle of good against evil, with the United States as the bad guy and anybody who opposes it, from Putin to the ayatollahs, as good guys. Their grandiose view of U.S. capacity is the mirror image of the imperial narcissism of the far Right. One leads to isolationism, the other to militarism.

Yes, the U.S. military must be restrained and closely scrutinized by Congress. But we cannot simply withdraw from the world. In the lead-up to the Second World War, the United States, controlled by

isolationist conservatives, did what many on the Left advocate today—nothing. Were they right? I don't think so. Entering the war against fascism was the right thing for the United States to do, just as it was right for the international Left to send volunteers to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Isolationism is also a big problem in facing the climate crisis. When the end of life on earth is a real possibility, the United States cannot afford to stay home and play dumb.

We face a devastating planetary crisis at a time of political polarization and concentration of wealth and power in a few hands. We have two adversaries, who sometimes collude and sometimes collide: the globalists who have looted the world, and a growing axis of fascists and fundamentalists. To survive, we will need breakthroughs in both science and politics. Such wisdom is most likely to come from new places, from the unnoticed and unheard, from movements of minority peoples and women, from radical experiments in building egalitarian and ecologically sustainable societies. A socialist foreign policy must be based on supporting these sites of new knowledge and uniting everyone who can be united against the financiers, corporate hacks, fundamentalists, and fascists who are willing to let the planet die as long as they can preserve their own power and their illusion of invulnerability. ❖



Meredith Tax's most recent book is A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight the Islamic State. She is on the steering committee of the Emergency Committee for Rojava, and was cofounder of the International PEN Women Writers' Committee.

The Enemy's Enemy is Not Your Friend

Let's not be cheerleaders for non-Western imperialism

Rohini Hensman is a Sri Lankan scholar-activist who has long been involved in the labor, feminist, and anti-imperialist movements. Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker interviewed her by email about her recent book, Indefensible: Democracy, Counter-Revolution, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism.

Could you say a few words about your background and how it has informed your criticism of apologists for authoritarianism and imperialism?

I was born in Sri Lanka, and my parents were socialists who were ardent anti-imperialists. My father was extremely knowledgeable about anti-imperialist struggles going on all over the world, and both my parents believed it was important to support them. But this was part of an outlook that always supported the oppressed and opposed authoritarianism. For example, my mother stood up for the rights of women and girls, although it was only much later that she called herself a feminist. Both my parents opposed Sinhala nationalism as well as Tamil nationalism (which were extremely authoritarian) and supported workers' rights. Although they were great admirers of the Chinese revolution, they were also anti-Stalinists, perhaps because Trotskyism was stronger than Stalinism on the Sri Lankan Left. So I grew up critical of both Western imperialism and Stalinism. Later on, as I became independently self-identified as a Marxist and feminist, I became more critical of Maoism than my parents had been. But much of what I learned from them shapes my politics today—for example, that socialists need to confront all imperialisms and not just Western imperialism, and that authoritarian regimes in non-Western countries must be opposed.

You steep your analysis in a long theoretical tradition of anti-imperialist thought. What does this tradition offer us in understanding and responding to ostensibly left-wing apologists for non-Western imperialism?

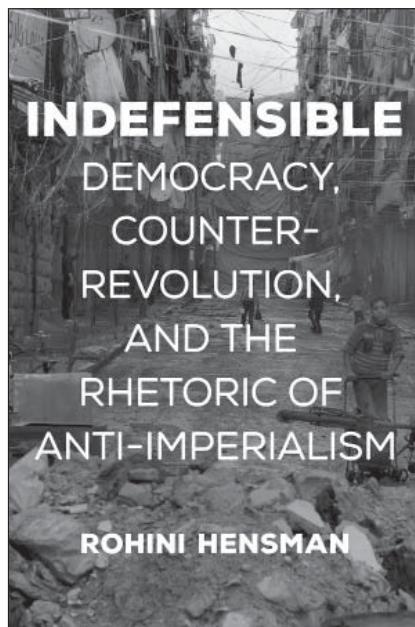
I mainly draw on Marxist analyses of imperialism in arriving at my own positions. Although Lenin

conflated two stages of capitalism when he wrote that finance capital was an integral element of imperialism, I think he was correct when he insisted on the right of Russian colonies to national liberation even after the Russian revolution. He spent the last years of his life in a bitter confrontation with Stalin on this issue, and once he died, Stalin went ahead with his plan to reduce the former colonies of Tsarist Russia, including Georgia and

Ukraine, to the status of colonies in the Soviet Union. I see Russia as the most important example of non-Western imperialism, and it's astonishing to me that people who claim to be Marxists and Leninists completely ignore Lenin's scathing criticisms of Great Russian chauvinism in post-revolutionary Russia, a chauvinism that assumes Russia has a divine right to dominate the colonies it inherited from tsarism and even move beyond them. This imperialistic nationalism is alive and well in Putin's Russia. In my view, those who claim to be anti-imperialists but support Russian imperialism and the despotic regimes it sponsors are pseudo-anti-imperialists.

To what extent do you think excusing non-Western imperialism actually manifests a form of racism?

The first time this struck me was when the Arab uprisings started, and I noticed that a section of the Left lumped together the attack on Iraq by U.S.-U.K. imperialism with the uprisings in Libya and Syria, falsely claiming that the uprisings were simply examples of imperialist intervention. This happened despite the fact that we saw huge crowds on television chanting, "The people want the downfall of the regime!" But to this section of the Left, apparently, the peoples of these countries are too backward to fight against an oppressive dictatorship or to want democracy, and those massive crowds simply showed that they were fools being manipulated by Western imperialism and Islamist fundamentalism. This attitude also extends to East European peoples, as in the case of the Maidan movement in Ukraine. In both Syria and Ukraine, they condemned popular uprisings as imperialist interven-



tions but had no objections to the intervention of Russian imperialism to crush the uprisings. What is this if not racism?

I believe that the failure to show any solidarity with these peoples fighting against authoritarianism and imperialism shows a patronizing or even contemptuous attitude to them. The unspoken assumption behind the position that, “We will support you only if you are fighting against Western imperialism,” is that, “The struggles of non-Western peoples are of no importance unless they are opposing *our* enemies, *our* states.” There is no feeling that they are part of our own struggle.

What do you think motivates the apologists for authoritarian and imperialist regimes who claim to be on the Left?

I think in some cases it is simply ignorance about what is happening combined with the ways in which these regimes make sophisticated media and social media interventions to propagate their own narrative. In other cases, these apologists are neo-Stalinists who are still stuck in the view that Russia can do no wrong, even though Putin has abandoned all pretense of having any affiliation to Marxism or Leninism and openly aligns himself with the far Right in Russia and around the world.

This section of the Left influences a circle that is much wider than that of old-time Stalinists. Many people who have been involved in opposing Israeli war crimes in Palestine and U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and have the attitude that Western imperialism is the main enemy, fall prey to neo-Stalinist propaganda. And I do believe that a few of these neo-Stalinists receive something in return for propagating the half-truths and outright lies of the authoritarian and imperialist regimes they serve.

It seems that this support for authoritarianism leads to a blurring of the line between Left and Right. Do you think this is the case? Is there reason to see this as part of a left-wing authoritarianism that finds affinities with the Right on the issue of imperialism?

Look at the people and parties that admire Bashar al-Assad or have visited him: former KKK leader David Duke, the white supremacists demonstrating at Charlottesville, British National Party leader Nick Griffin, Greek fascists of Golden Dawn, the French National Front, the Belgian Vlaams Belang—all of them are neo-fascists who see their own politics reflected in Assad’s ruthless totalitarian regime. Yet at the same time you find people who are seen to be on the Left, figures like Seymour Hersh, Robert Fisk, David North and Alex Lantier of the World Socialist Web Site, and Max Blumenthal supporting Assad by spreading his propaganda. You find the



“Democracy is an essential step on the road to socialism.”

same convergence between the extreme Right and people seen to be on the Left like John Pilger supporting Putin’s imperialist annexation of Crimea.

I believe that this section of the Left does not understand that democracy is a precondition of socialism. Thus, anti-democratic counter-revolutions like those carried out by Assad and his allies in Syria and Putin in Ukraine constitute a setback for any prospect of socialism.

How do we combat this tendency?

There are many ways, but I’ll mention just three. The first is to pursue the truth by subjecting everything you hear or read to critical scrutiny, whether it comes from mainstream Western media or sources that are critical of Western media. The second is to understand that democracy is not a gift of the bourgeoisie but something that is fought for and won by working people, that it is an essential step on the road to socialism, and we must do everything in our power to defend and promote it. And the third is that socialism in one country is a pipedream, because capitalism is global. In every country, our own fate depends on the success of anti-authoritarian and anticapitalist struggles in other countries, and therefore international solidarity is a must for all socialists. ❖

Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker’s most recent book is The Political Thought of African Independence: An Anthology of Sources. With Michael J. Thompson, he is co-editor of the forthcoming A Heritage for Our Time: The Principles and Politics of Democratic Socialism.

Drones over Djibouti

With 34 military bases, the U.S. is scrambling for influence in Africa

By Lion Summerbell

For most Americans, the 2017 death of four Green Berets in a remote village in western Niger begged a very simple question: What were they doing there? Quite a bit, as it turned out, though the grander “why” remained unclear.

The incident prompted several rounds of hand-wringing and soul-searching, which culminated in a new National Defense Strategy, released by the Department of Defense last year. It was a radical document, ending in one fell swoop the decades-long “war on terror.” Henceforth, geopolitics would be guided by a new paradigm: “inter-state strategic competition.” This February, at a hearing of the Senate’s Armed Services Committee on proposed staff cuts at U.S. Africa Command (or AFRICOM, as it is informally known), the DoD offered the public a first glimpse at this new strategic reality. The irony of the occasion—the return of great-power rivalry at a discussion of U.S. military policy in Africa—could not have been lost on its participants.

Created in 2008 by the Bush administration, AFRICOM is a latecomer to the Pentagon’s system of unified regional commands. It has since made up for lost time. Today it is the second most expensive unified command after CENTCOM (which covers the Middle East and Central Asia) and oversees the largest number of combat operations.

Until now, these missions were carried out by various special operations forces: Rangers, Green Berets, and so on. Deployed on a short-term, tactical basis, special-ops troops exemplify war-on-terror thinking. Public awareness of their activities is necessarily limited, relieving the DoD of the obligation to justify its presence in any given region. The secrecy that led even relatives of the dead soldiers to wonder why they were in the line of fire is now over.

At the hearings in February, the DoD made it clear that “[What] we really need are some predictable general purpose forces that can do things with regular armies on a somewhat episodic but yet

predictable [sic] basis,” said AFRICOM commander Thomas Waldhauser.

Currently, AFRICOM, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, borrows most of its conventional forces from U.S. Europe Command (EUCOM). What Waldhauser was signaling was that AFRICOM’s objectives could only be accomplished with a real and abiding U.S. military presence in Africa.

The committee, for its part, sympathized. Chair Jim Inhofe (R-OK) suggested creating a “Security Force Assistance Brigade” or SFAB, dedicated solely to Africa. SFABs, officially classed as “advisory units,” are identical in composition and armament to a standard 800-person Army combat brigade. They are a clever way to disguise boots on the ground. He also favored moving AFRICOM’s headquarters from Germany to Africa. The idea has been floated several times over the past decade, but cooler heads, fearing “perceived colonialism” on the part of the United States, have always prevailed.

It was noteworthy, then, that this time, no one in the room seemed worried.

The idea of moving AFRICOM comes at a time when the military is heavily invested in African real estate. At least 34 sites, largely in East and West Africa, are under its direct supervision. One, at Agadez in Niger, is reported to have cost over \$100 million, a price tag comparable to some of the fortified megabases the United States operates in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But nowhere has the Pentagon invested more in guaranteeing “predictability” than in Djibouti, at Camp Lemonnier. With 4,000 military personnel and private contractors stationed there at any given time, Lemonnier is now the largest U.S. military base on the continent, and among the largest in the world. It has even spawned a subsidiary facility at nearby Chabelley Airfield, with one of the largest military drone operations in the world, deployed recently and infamously to support the horrific Saudi-led invasion of Yemen.

This buildup is said to be part of an aggressive

“Henceforth, geopolitics would be guided by a new paradigm: ‘inter-state strategic competition.’”

war against al-Shabaab, a radical religious militia whose aim is to reconstitute Somalia as an Islamic state. One wonders if Somalian instability really demands such expensive attention. Piracy is a persistent problem, and both Kenya and Ethiopia, staunch U.S. allies with large Muslim populations and largely non-Muslim governments, have no interest in a radical Islamic state across their borders. But these are important regional considerations, not supraregional ones. Even the war in Yemen will eventually end. The logic of Lemonnier lies elsewhere.

Lying on one side of the Bab-el-Mandeb, the straits that control entrance to the Red Sea, anywhere from 12% to 20% of world trade passes by Djibouti every year. That includes around five million barrels of oil a day. As it happens, in 2017, the People's Republic of China built its first overseas military headquarters anywhere in the world near the port of Doraleh northwest of Djibouti City—right beside those straits.

The Chinese state has invested heavily in soft-power projection over the past two decades, and nowhere more so than in Africa. Twelve percent of the continent's industrial production now flows through Chinese businesses, and the People's Republic of China has signed more than \$500 billion in new construction and procurement contracts with African governments since 2013. It has spent generously on its Doraleh facility, too—\$590 million by some estimates—and is negotiating for exclusive use of

the port after Djibouti's government seized control of it from Dubai-based DP World.

"At this point in time, it's too early to make that leap," Waldhauser told the Armed Services Committee when asked if Doraleh signaled a shift on China's part from soft- to hard-power diplomacy. But, he added, "Djibouti is not the first, and it won't be the last port."

Speaking to the Heritage Foundation last December, John Bolton, Trump's national security advisor, was crystal clear about Washington's interest in the region. "[T]his is a very important point for the U.S. and the West as a whole to wake up [to]," he said; if Djibouti leased the port to the PRC, "the balance of power in the Horn of Africa, a major artery of maritime trade between Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia would shift in favor of China." We should be under no illusions as to what this kind of language means coming from someone like Bolton. The race to keep our place in the sun is on, and men like him, men for whom career and conflict are hopelessly blurred, do not intend to end up in the shade. ❖

Lion Summerbell is a writer from New York. A longer version of this piece will be published at DL Online.



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No War, No Empire

DSA's Veterans Organize

By Griffin Mahon

John Valdespino joined the U.S. Army in 2014, after two years of not being able to find a job that could pay the rent. He quickly regretted his decision, and in the aftermath of the 2016 elections, he began listening to and reading analyses of U.S. politics from a leftist perspective. Since then, he's begun organizing as a socialist in his community. And he's joined the DSA Veterans Working Group (VWG), a national DSA working group made up of both former U.S. armed forces service members and family members of current and former service members. The working group's purpose is to agitate against the increasing militarization of U.S. society and the bloody, cynical role of the United States in overseas conflicts.

The VWG includes former officers and enlisted personnel from all branches. Most served during the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but a few are veterans of conflicts in the 1990s and even of the Vietnam War, when there was a nationwide antiwar movement. The VWG has worked with other DSAers to produce literature opposing the privatization of the Veterans Administration and publicizing the widespread water contamination that affects communities surrounding military bases.

Most members of the VWG joined DSA for the reasons 55,000 others have in the last three years: national media attention, electoral victories and local campaigns, and a growing belief that another world is possible and that we need to be involved in the growth of a socialist movement that will achieve it. Seeing the growth of DSA was not the only source of radicalization for VWG members. While still in uniform, many began to wonder whose interests

they were serving. They may have enlisted out of patriotism, or for economic or educational reasons, or a combination of all three, but as time went on, experience showed them that the wars are being fought for naked profit.

Historically, socialists have viewed soldiers and sailors as "workers in uniform," because after they left the service, they would be forced once more to sell their labor for a wage. This picture of the class basis of the military has changed in the United States since 1973, when the draft was ended. But the strategic implications remain unchanged: The support of members of the military, and especially rank-and-file enlisted and junior officers, is key to ending U.S. imperialism and shutting down the nearly 800 overseas bases that the military currently maintains.

Of course, not every member of the military is a disgruntled comrade-in-waiting. As with any profession, people join

the military for a variety of reasons, some of them overtly reactionary. However, nobody should have to sign up to kill or be killed just to receive an education. We know that the military is a hotbed of nationalism, racism, and sexism. Its upper ranks provide loyal servants in the state bureaucracy and the military-industrial complex. And we also know that socialist organizers have a role in changing both conditions and minds.

DSA should advocate for the democratization of the military, as it does for the rest of society. Service members should be allowed to organize unions and should be allowed to be politically active, both of which are federally illegal at this time. When ser-



Logo design by Kyle Conrad

“The support of members of the military is key to ending U.S. imperialism.”

vice members aren't allowed political freedoms, it's the politics of the capitalists, generals, and admirals that reigns supreme. Officers should be elected, and officers-in-training should not enjoy special privileges such as the service academies and Reserve Officer Training Corps. DSA should encourage and offer legal help to support dissent and disobedience within the ranks. Many groups on the Left today have an older cohort of members who became active in the antiwar movement after experiencing the solidarity of civilian socialists. DSA can recreate bonds like this today in order to strengthen the socialist movement.

Alex McCoy, a Marine veteran, served from 2008 to 2013. As an embassy guard, he spent a year each in Saudi Arabia, Honduras, and Germany. Alex is now a staff organizer for Common Defense, a grassroots organizing group aiming to make anti-imperialism a topic of debate in the 2020 presidential elections. Common Defense has endorsed democratic socialist candidates such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, and Kaniela Ing, and runs an organizing program called the Veterans Organizing Institute, which some members of the VWG have attended. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have both signed Common Defense's pledge to "end the Forever War."

How should DSA relate to other antiwar or veterans' organizations? Most official Veterans Service Organizations, McCoy observes, are increasingly either captured by conservatives, deal narrowly with benefits and don't address foreign policy, or are politically paralyzed by their nonpartisan status. Other, more activist groups, such as Veterans for Peace and About Face, do community-building and protests, but can't engage in electoral politics because of their legal status. And some, like Service Women's Action Network, focus on engaging with D.C.'s elites, an approach opposed to DSA's bottom-up theory of change. It makes sense for DSA to cooperate openly with these different groups on shared tactical goals, but to maintain an independent and socialist antiwar presence.

Most VWG members are active in their local chapters, some of which have their own antiwar working groups. The overlap between many socialist campaigns and anti-imperialist goals are numerous—and so are the organizing opportunities:

- The defunding and privatization of the Veterans Administration—the largest government provider of healthcare in the country—is just one recent example of the attacks on public goods that characterizes neoliberalism. Every waiting room in a V.A. facility contains possible organizing partners.
- Counter-recruiters can deter students from sign-

ing predatory contracts to join up after high school and instead convince them to become active union members.

- Actions supporting the Green New Deal must grapple with the fact that the U.S. military is the largest single consumer of energy in the world.

Rich Madrid, a Surface Warfare Officer (ship driver) from 2005 to 2015, now lives and works in Olympia, Washington, where he is a member of the local Olympia DSA chapter. There are Army, Navy, and Air Force bases within 30 miles of Olympia. This means that there are many disaffected current and former service members who have intimate knowledge to share about U.S. imperialism.

Only 40% of the people who have served in the military since the attacks of September 11, 2001, have been deployed overseas, and far fewer of all military personnel see combat. But the damage that U.S. forces have done abroad is incalculable.

The United States invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, long enough ago that high-schoolers born on that date can now enlist. That the United States continues to occupy countries in the Middle East nearly two decades later is not only a moral failing or a tragedy of humanity; it is a political decision. Wars abroad are an assault on the working classes of other countries. Socialists in the United States have an obligation to demand and bring about an end to all foreign conflicts. There is only one way to "support our troops":

Bring them home! ❖

Griffin Mahon is an at-large DSA member who helped start the Fredericksburg, Virginia, DSA chapter. He is a former midshipman. For more information, email dsaveterans@gmail.com.

VISIT DL ONLINE

Looking for the other articles about militarism and imperialism described on Page 3? Find them online at the *Democratic Left* site, where you'll also find regular columns, a running tally of books recently published by members, and socialist slants on current events. If you want to pitch an article, you'll find a submission form and guidelines.

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