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Summary: Presented at the Chicago Convention of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization; examines the N. Korea summit, Trump's and the European far right, the Middle East, and the fate of 2 societies that underwent actual revolutions, South Africa and China. A slightly abbreviated version appeared in *New Politics Online* on July 20, 2018 - Editors

War, Imperialism, and Class Polarization on a Global Scale: From East Asia to the Middle East and from South Africa to Europe

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Today's Nuclear World, Capital, and the State

In January, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved their famous “Doomsday Clock” on the danger of nuclear holocaust to “two minutes to midnight--the closest the Clock has ever been to Doomsday, and as close as it was in 1953, at the height of the Cold War.” This resulted, they wrote, primarily from Trump’s threats of “fire and fury” against North Korea and his vow to upend the Iran nuclear pact, and also from North Korea’s continuing weapons tests and “Russia’s deployment of a new ground-launched cruise missile” (“It is 2 minutes to midnight: 2018 Doomsday Clock Statement,” Jan. 25, 2018). Even after tensions eased with North Korea, the administration continued plans for an estimated \$2 trillion buildup of US nuclear weapons. While some of this began under Obama, according to arms control expert Lawrence Wittner, Trump's escalation includes plans for “low-yield” nukes that the military could use under a new “nuclear posture” that “lowers the official threshold for use of U.S. nuclear weapons,” allowing the military to “employ them in response to non-nuclear attacks upon civilians and infrastructure, including cyberattacks” (“Trump’s Getting Us Ready to Fight a Nuclear War,” *History News Network* 6/18/18). Related to this is a massive buildup of US naval forces in what the Pentagon is suddenly calling the “Indo-Pacific,” and which is clearly aimed at

China as a rising power (see “Tomgram: Michael Klare, Is a War with China on the Horizon? *TomDispatch* 6/19/18)

This brought to mind the sixtieth anniversary of Raya Dunayevskaya’s *Marxism and Freedom*, first published in 1958 during the most fraught days of the Cold War, when threats of nuclear annihilation filled the discourse and Marxism had to be reconceptualized for our time as Marxist-Humanism. One of the book’s greatest achievements was its development of the theory of totalitarian state-capitalism for the nuclear age, in terms of the Hegelian absolute, of life “in an age of absolutes, on the threshold of absolute freedom out of the struggle against absolute tyranny” (p. 24). Nothing signified the absolute development of the contradictions of capitalism more than nuclear weapons, which threatened, then as now, to wipe humanity off the face of the earth at the same time that new, humanist liberation movements were developing everywhere, from civil rights, to African liberation, to the peace movement itself.

Just as the Great Recession a decade ago bared the danger of outright systemic collapse after decades of complacency about the underlying stability of the capitalist system, Trump’s wild nuclear threats last fall laid bare the fact that we are still in the nuclear age, wherein a single leader can order mass destruction far beyond anything even Hitler carried out.

Since those wild threats of last year, Trump has held his photo op with Kim Jong-un, but who besides his apologists believes that peace is at hand on the Korean peninsula and in the region? At the same time, the Trump administration continues to move closer toward war with Iran, continues to support Saudi Arabia's murderous war on Yemen, while accelerating its war at home against immigrants by forcibly separating thousands of children from their parents in a policy reminiscent of slavery or the Nazi concentration camps.

All this thrashing about is no sign of US strength, as Trump's supporters would have it, for the ascendancy of such a retrogressive figure to the top of the political system signals instead the first modern democracy's degeneration toward corruption and barbarism, that is, toward fascism. Fortunately for us, Trump may have come to power too early. Hard-won democratic institutions and norms, though attenuated by decades of imperialist war abroad, political opportunism, and rampant economic inequality at home, still stand in his way at a time when we are also experiencing levels of mass mobilization for radical change not seen in decades.

Underlying all this is the US's economic decline relative to rising powers, especially China, and US failure to provide any kind of secure economic existence for the majority of its people. To give one shocking example, as the World Health

Organization reported on May 30, “China has overtaken the United States in healthy life expectancy at birth” (Reuters, “China overtakes U.S. for healthy lifespan: WHO data” 5/30/18)

To be sure, Russia and especially the US remain the world’s most important nuclear powers, with the arms trade another area in which they are still the global hegemon. However, if present trends continue, the US will be surpassed by China in these spheres as well, just as the US surpassed Britain and Germany a century ago. For as Marx wrote in his 1880-82 *Ethnological Notebooks*:

“The seemingly supreme independent existence of the state itself is only an *illusion*, since the state in all its forms is only an excrescence of society. Just as the state only *appears* at a certain stage of social development, the state will also disappear when society reaches a stage of development that until now it has not reached... fundamental error... that *political superiority*, whatever its peculiar shape, and whatever the ensemble of its elements, is taken as something standing over society, resting solely upon itself.... For example, *better armaments* depend directly on *improvements in the means of production*....” (Krauer edition, pp. 329-30).

Thus, the fundamental economic weakness and stagnation of the US, Russia, Western Europe, and Japan are the most important lens through which to grasp the wild gyrations of

Trump and so many other retrogressive developments in these societies. However, the economy is not the only lens. The dimensions of world politics and of social movements of resistance cannot be reduced to underlying economic circumstances, with theory as a mere “photocopy” of material reality, as the pre-dialectical Lenin wrote in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* of 1908. For as Marx wrote famously in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, certain developments of human creativity can be “out of all proportion to the general development of society, hence also to the material foundation” (Nicolaus trans., p. 110). As to the sphere of the state and politics, for long periods, the state can even seem to be suspended above the various social classes. As Marx wrote in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the modern state “restricts, controls, regulates, oversees, and supervises civil life from its most all-encompassing expression to its most insignificant stirrings” (Marx, *Later Political Writings*, ed. Carver, p. 68).

In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx analyzed Bonapartism, a modern form of authoritarianism with all too much relevance in the era of Trump. He also wrote of history repeating itself, in Hegelian terms, “the first time as high tragedy, the second time as low farce” (p. 31). To be sure, this farce was not mild or gentle, as many lost their lives, were tortured, or forced into exile. What was farcical was the new Bonapartist order’s claim to any kind of legitimacy

besides that of the cynical and corrupt exercise of power. This contrasted to the real tragedy of the French Revolution of 1789, where lofty emancipatory aims crashed down into a tyranny of a different sort.

The Trump-Kim Photo Op

The concept of history repeating itself as low farce is instructive in terms of Trump and Kim vs. Nixon's famous opening to China in the 1970s, to which Trump's supporters have tried to compare it. The Nixon-Mao rapprochement was a real opening for US imperialism, which could henceforth play China off against the US's main rival Russia, all the while seeming to make a move toward peace while also escalating the bombing of Vietnam. And it was a real tragedy for the global left of the time, whether very objectively in how Mao threw his weight against Vietnam and later against the Black liberation movements of Southern Africa, or more subjectively in how China's rapprochement with Nixon sucked the wind out of the sails of the still large Maoist legions of the New Left and the Black Panthers, leading to a rapid decline of the left at the very time Nixon was being driven out of office after Watergate. Thus, Nixon's China diplomacy helped extricate the system as a whole from the socio-political crises of the 1960s, not to speak of how it eventually led to the massive profits global capital accumulated on the backs of Chinese workers.

(At another kind of subjective level, these developments of the 1970s were positive for the left in the sense that Marxist-Humanism made some gains in this period when the left was in disarray and many were questioning their previous assumptions. But this could not stem the overall reactionary tide of the 1970s, which ended with what we now call neoliberalism under Reagan. We are in another such period today, where large parts of left organization and theory have been upended by events, as a result of which many opportunities await Marxist-Humanism.)

But to return to Nixon and Trump, the bumbling Trump's North Korea visit is an example of low farce. The photo op with Kim Jong-un has temporarily lessened nuclear tensions in East Asia, no small thing given Trump's 2017 threats of outright nuclear war. And here the pressure of the South Korean people must be acknowledged in helping to bring the region back from the brink.

But it will also allow Trump to concentrate on warmongering against Iran and most of all, his war on the American people. To be sure, Trump has zigzagged chaotically over the past 18 months, from speaking of "fire and fury" to annihilate N. Korea in a nuclear attack, to the current charm offensive.

Nonetheless, three large continuities can also be discerned:

1. Disdain for other liberal democracies -- Western Europe, Japan, Canada -- as seen in the blowup at the G7 meeting. This is in keeping with his own authoritarian politics and with his tilt away from neoliberal free trade.
2. Affinity not for dictators in general, but for Putin in particular, and those others, from Duterte in the Philippines to Orban in Hungary, who exhibit clear fascist tendencies. This is not some idiosyncrasy of Trump, but part of a global trend of the right and far right gravitating toward Russia under Putin. It can be seen in Orban's Hungary, Italy's new nationalist government, in France's far right and mainstream conservatives, and in Bavaria's Christian Social Union in Germany. This explains why there has been so little resistance to Trump's pro-Russia stance from the Republican party in the US, which is undergoing before our eyes a similar evolution.
3. A politics of distraction, scandal, and polarization along racist, xenophobic, and misogynist lines that covers over the deep economic malaise underneath a slightly growing economy wracked by unprecedented inequality and tepid profit rates.

And for Kim's North Korea, there was no talk of any opening in terms of freer expression or action by the Korean people. This is especially true for the North Korean working

class, which suffers under the world's most repressive dictatorship, which allows them to starve as it goes all out for nuclear weapons. What may be on the agenda if the rapprochement holds is the hyper-exploitation of a demographically young labor force by multinational corporations. There are also reports of large unexploited deposits of iron ore and rare earth minerals, crucial for military electronics and communications (Alexandra Stevenson, "What If North Korea Opens Its Economy, Even a Little" *NY Times* 6/15/18). But if Trump's erratic moves toward North Korea constitute an attempt to stave off the rise of China in the region, such a relatively minor event will not alter very much the tectonic plates of global economic and political trends.

Nor should we let down our guard concerning the continuing danger of nuclear war in the region. If Trump thinks that North Korea will actually give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for a few small gestures like cancelling war games, he is sorely mistaken. For unless the US decides, at least implicitly, to recognize North Korea as a nuclear power, no resolution is in sight. And North Korea's holding onto its nuclear weapons could easily lead to greater militarization by a Japanese government that is already moving in that direction.

The Better to Attack Iran?

Trump was elected on a platform of military confrontation with Iran, in this case a policy that “mainstream” Republicans like John McCain (“bomb bomb Iran”) share with our demagogic president. Trump abrogated the Iran nuclear agreement on May 8 and has appointed ultra-hawk and Iranophobe John Bolton National Security Adviser. One is tempted to conclude that Trump has feinted peace toward North Korea the better to plan an outright war on Iran. Whether the US attack comes sooner, later, or not at all, Trump has ratcheted up sanctions on Iran and is pressuring Western European governments and firms also to cut off Iran. So far, European political leaders have held out, but it is unclear if they can or will apply sufficient economic pressure on Europe-based corporations to force them to keep up their economic relations with Iran in the face of US threats of secondary sanctions.

At the same time, Iran is seething with internal unrest, especially since the street uprisings of last winter when government buildings were burned and crowds shouted “Death to the Dictator.” Women’s protests over compulsory head covering have also continued, but a harsh crackdown has targeted even their lawyers in recent weeks. A steep currency collapse has only heightened social tensions.

Some Iranians believe that they can use Trump’s hostility to the regime to help them overthrow it. This is illusory, as it is likely that Trump’s threats will trigger a nationalist backlash

in defense of the homeland. This happened when the US encouraged Saddam Hussein to attack Iran in 1980, and some oppositionists discredited themselves permanently by allying with Saddam.

Elsewhere in the Middle East: War and Counterrevolution

As we meet today, the Syrian civil war has been going on for seven years. The world has watched passively, or worse, aided the Assad regime as it has massacred 500,000 of its own people and created 13 million internal or external refugees, in other words, a majority of the prewar population of 22 million (Phillip O'Connor, "Most displaced Syrians are in the Middle East, and about a million are in Europe," PEW Research Center, Jan. 29, 2018).

With strong support from Russia, the Assad regime has retaken Deraa, the city where the uprising began, creating an additional 320,000 refugees stuck in a burning desert at the border with Israel and Jordan, neither of which are admitting them. It is becoming increasingly clear that Assad plans to change the demographic makeup of the country by preventing most of the 13 million refugees from returning, thus tilting the makeup of the population away from Sunni Arabs (75% of the prewar total) toward Christians (8%) and his own Alawite sect (11%). This is seen in the April 2018 Law No. 10, which allows the regime to confiscate land, homes, and crops of "absentees," and which has already

begun to be applied in areas of Damascus and in some rural areas as well (“The Regime Begins to Reap the Rewards of Law No. 10, Syrian Observer, June 19, 2018). At the same time, some remnants of the 2011 revolution are still holding out, as are the leftist-oriented Syrian Kurds. Throughout the civil war, Russia, Iran, and their Shia militia allies like Hezbollah have taken part in war crimes on a massive scale, while the US and Western Europe have wrung their hands while failing even to exert serious pressure on Assad and his allies. Nothing better reveals the fact that there are several forms of imperialism and subimperialism, not just ones emanating from the US and Western Europe. The war has also revealed the ultimate similarity of aims of all these powers, none of which have wanted to see the actual dismantling of the Assad regime. Syria will continue to test the left, as seen in the walkout at the Left Forum in New York in June over their slating of Assad apologist and Green Party leader Ajamu Baraka as a keynote speaker, a walkout in which we are proud to have participated.

In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has won a hotly contested election that will consolidate his authoritarian rule.

However, regime manipulation of the electoral process probably means that his 53% tabulated support is in reality considerably less than a majority. Moreover, for the first time the Kemalist nationalists agreed to unite with the leftist pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party. This suggests that

the opposition will continue to struggle in a situation where the economic situation is deteriorating, 100,000 political prisoners remain in jail, and Erdogan has announced further military incursions into Syria to attack the Kurds.

In Yemen, Saudi and Emirati forces have laid siege to the port city of Hodeida, the main point of entry for international aid for a population threatened by hunger and cholera, in what is being termed the world's worst humanitarian crisis. This comes after years of merciless bombings by the Saudi air force, aided directly by the US military. The anti-Saudi forces, the Houthi militia, which are almost as reactionary, are steeped in a dogmatic form of Shia Islam.

In Gaza, a new stage of Palestinian resistance has unfolded in the face of Israeli massacre, as thousands of nonviolent protestors have surged against the barrier that walls them into a concentration camp like existence. While the spring 2018 protests began as a grassroots effort, the extent to which the rightwing Hamas movement has taken it over is unclear. More significantly, the abstract maximalist slogans about return of "all" land going back to 1948 undermines the stated Palestinian aim of coexistence rather than destruction of Israel. Overall though, the creativity of the youth, the prominence of women in the demonstrations, and their overwhelmingly nonviolent character show that a truly mass movement has come into existence. It is something that has

the potential to shake up what has seemed to be a dire and hopeless situation for Palestinians, especially after Trump unconscionably recognized the whole of Jerusalem as the sole property of Israel by moving the US Embassy there.

But what of countries where revolutions have actually succeeded in bringing leftwing groups to power? Have they begun to achieve a humanist alternative to capitalism? Since so many revolutions of the past 75 years have had a national element, it is important to remember a distinction Marx drew between what he termed “narrowly national [*étroitement national*]” movements and national revolutions that were “reforming and democratic,” i.e., ones that put forth issues like land reform even when it targeted the indigenous upper classes rather than just a foreign enemy or occupying power ((Marx, “[On the Polish Question],” *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 6, p. 549, trans. slightly altered on basis of French original in Rubel, *Karl Marx Oeuvres* IV (1994), p. 1001).

South Africa and the Limits of Political Revolution

Next year South Africa will mark 25th anniversary of the end of apartheid, a great revolutionary victory of the last century comparable to the dismantling of chattel slavery in the US. But this year, while South Africans finally got rid of President Jacob Zuma, he has been replaced by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) with someone equally

inimical to the interests of the working class, Cyril Ramaphosa.

South Africans forced the resignation of the notoriously corrupt Zuma after months of street protests and unrest. Zuma had entered office promising to stem the rampant economic inequality that has wracked post-apartheid South Africa. In recent years, South Africa has placed at the very top among the 158 countries measured by the World Bank's Gini index of economic inequality, with a far worse score than other major countries like Brazil, Mexico, or even the US.

How can this be in a country that has one of the most democratic constitutions in the world, where the freedom of the press and assembly are well established, and where the political leadership comes from the ANC, which long espoused socialist as well as democratic goals and demands?

But what type of socialism was that of the ANC? Unlike many other African liberation movements, the ANC had a stronger trade union base and a substantial number of Communist Party members, some of whom formed part of the ANC leadership. This led to constant redbaiting by the apartheid regime, which made it easier for the US and other Western imperialists to support the regime for many years, including CIA help in the 1962 arrest of Nelson Mandela. It also resulted in two additional problems for the revolutionary movement once its power grew and the

transfer of power to the Black majority began to be negotiated. First, the Communist Party, as was typical of Moscow-line parties, held to a two-stage theory of revolution wherein the so-called democratic revolution had to be consolidated and then, much later, the social revolution. This, not just the neoliberal atmosphere of the 1980s and 1990s, gave an ideological justification for the kind of class compromise that took place in South Africa. Second, the presence of avowed Marxists in the ANC gave it left cover for these very class compromises, which leftwing and militant elements of the trade unions and the overall anti-apartheid movement might not otherwise have accepted.

In a road not taken, martyred Black Consciousness Movement leader Steve Biko not only opposed Russian as well as US imperialism, but also wrote of “a socialist solution that is an expression of Black communalism” (“Steve Biko Speaks for Himself,” *News & Letters*, Nov. 1977).

Veteran Africa scholars John Saul and Patrick Bond have explored these kinds of issues in their comprehensive 2014 book, *South Africa. The Present as History: From Mrs Ples to Mandela and Marikana*. They trace the process of what Marxist-Humanists (here following Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks) call transformation into opposite. In South

Africa, this was long and complex, going all the way back to the apartheid days. Here are some of the key junctures:

1948: The white Nationalist minority installs apartheid or complete segregation, at a time when many African countries were moving toward independence and Black rule. In these days the ANC fights back hard, enacts the pro-socialist Freedom Charter, but is crushed by the early 1960s, with key leaders like Nelson Mandela in prison, and others in exile. International capital and the Western powers go along with apartheid, while Russia and China aid the ANC, which the government brands “communist.” It was a very successful capitalism, for a while.

1976: The spontaneous Soweto uprising, inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement, pits unarmed youth against the state, with thousands killed. International capital and the Western powers hesitate a bit in their support, especially after several neighboring southern African countries achieve Black majority rule, at a time when Mao’s China sides secretly with South Africa while the Russian-backed Cuban forces help repel their last-ditch intervention attempting to block the independence of Angola. By the 1980s, mass strikes and street unrest have made South Africa almost ungovernable. Also during this period, ANC exile leaders meet with representatives of big South African capital, reassuring them that they only have a political revolution in mind and that their property will be safe.

1991: Apartheid collapses as Mandela is released from prison and by 1994 an ANC-led government is in power. In the interim, the ANC gets the mass community organizations that had mobilized the masses against the system to disband and coopts the labor movement. This decade is the high point of neoliberalism globally and the ANC leadership goes along with that trend, meeting criteria set by the International Monetary Fund. A new constitution establishes a formal democracy, including women's rights and gay rights, while the immensely popular Mandela gives the new system a positive face to the masses and home and the international community.

2012: The Marikana strike of platinum miners at a Lonmin Corporation mine demanding raises above their miserable wages is suppressed, with 34 workers killed by police, and with top ANC leaders condemning the strikers as reactionary elements. Today, unemployment stands officially at 27%, with most of the wealth controlled by the still mostly white top 10% of the population (Peter Goodman, "South Africa's Unemployment Rate Is 27%," *NY Times* 2/16/18). The major city of Cape Town is threatened with complete loss of its water supply due to climate change and poor planning.

Who is the country's new president, replacing the corrupt Zuma? None other than Cyril Ramaphosa, the onetime founding leader in the 1980s of the National Union of

Mineworkers, which played no small role in bringing down the apartheid system in this mineral-rich country. After liberation, Ramaphosa was sidelined from the top leadership and instead went into business, partnering with old white-owned capital. Today, he is a billionaire who holds an interest in Lonmin and who strongly condemned the 2012 strike. As Patrick Bond writes of Ramaphosa's ascent to the presidency, "Indeed a wicked combination of patronage politics and neo-liberalism is likely to continue" ("Cyril Ramaphosa relaunched neo-liberalism," *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal* 2/28/18).

What better example is there today than Ramaphosa of the transformation into opposite of someone who was once a revolutionary? What better example is there of a country where a merely political revolution has led to continued oppression, with Black faces replacing white ones, at least in the political sphere if not at the summit of the capitalist class itself?

To be sure, independent leftists and trade unionists are regrouping, with some unions breaking with the ANC and township unrest continuing. At present it is an uphill battle, but the first steps are being taken, above all recognizing the situation for what it is.

And what of China, site of one of the greatest social revolutions ever, often ranked in its impact alongside the

French and Russian revolutions, but which from 1949 ended up with a totalitarian state-capitalist regime?

Where Is China Going?

Since the 2008 Great Recession, the Chinese economy has continued to grow, but at around 6-7%, about half that of the previous “boom” period.

This, plus selective but severe repression under the increasingly authoritarian Xi Jinping, has limited the effectiveness of NGO-supported labor organizations. At the same time, however, a wide and deep pattern of labor unrest has developed over the past two decades (Hao Ren, ed., *China on Strike*, Haymarket 2016). Even the 2015 crackdown on human rights lawyers, including those supporting labor NGOs, will not wipe out this kind of resistance. For as Marx noted in the climactic conclusion of *Capital*, Vol. 1, the modern working class is “trained, united, and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production” and is therefore its living negation (Fowkes trans., p. 929). Because of this, the class struggle cannot be abolished even if labor organizations are repressed.

However, the dramatic restructuring of the Chinese economy since 2008 has created challenges for that kind of spontaneously developing working class action and organization. Alongside the old industrial economy with its

massive factories, a new Internet-based “platform economy” is emerging, similar in some ways to the “gig economy” in the US. As China scholar Chin Kwang Lee writes, “In 2015, of the estimated 10 million people involved in e-commerce giant Alibaba, 80 percent were self-employed.” This has led to a more “atomized, informal, and precarious workforce” (“After the Miracle: Labor Politics under China’s New Normal,” *Catalyst* 1:3 Fall 2017, p. 111). Creative new forms of solidarity will have to be constructed.

The regime has courted Chinese nationalism and nostalgia for empire, also openly validating Confucianism alongside Mao Zedong/Deng Xiaoping thought. Xi Jinping has called for a Confucian-style “harmonization” of social conflict, while creating a type of cult of personality around himself not seen since the time of Mao. Most shockingly, he engineered the end of the ten-year term limit, in place for over 2 decades, for himself.

Xi’s appeal to Confucius is not as new as it seems either, however. For as Dunayevskaya noted in the 1963 appendix to the Japanese translation of *Marxism and Freedom*, later published as chapter 17, Mao departed from his ideological mentor Stalin on two issues: (1) the [paramount] role of the army, in and out of state power; and (2) “Thought Reform” (p. 299). In discussing Mao’s concept of thought reform, wherein “class enemies” are supposedly converted by ideological conditioning, Dunayevskaya writes that such

notions show that Mao was “permeated to the marrow of his bones... with Confucianism” (p. 306) and that “he is so blind to the actualities of the class divisions tugging at his rule that he believes in ‘a [Confucian] world of Great Harmony,’ where all contradictions, of course, ‘complement each other’” (p 308).

Still, the open appeal to Confucius by the current Chinese leadership shows a retrogression, in the sense that Xi has put aside everything that was genuinely revolutionary about Mao’s legacy, such as the radical transformation of the prerevolutionary patriarchal family and the uprooting of some of the most blatant forms of women’s oppression. Not to speak of the ever-increasing concentration of wealth at the top. However, in continuity with the Mao era, the working people’s standard of living is being held down, the better to foster capital accumulation, but with some of today’s accumulation going to private profit.

Despite these deep contradictions, Chinese state-capitalism retains a dynamism that places it on track to surpass the US as the world’s hegemonic capitalist power, a process that is only being hastened by the erratic, destructive rule of Donald Trump.

Back to Europe and the US

The ascendancy of Trump was preceded by the rise of authoritarian politics in some of the core liberal democracies

of Western Europe. Decades ago, the neofascist National Front was already surging in France as a strong minority party, while Jörg Haider's Freedom Party briefly participated in a national coalition in Austria. Since Trump's inauguration, the floodgates have opened. Most dramatically, Italy elected a far-right government in March, resulting in a refusal even to let a shipload of desperate refugees land their boats, a clear violation of international law. Late last year, the mainstream Austrian conservatives were taken over by a far-right leadership, which is in coalition with the Freedom Party. In Germany last year, the neofascist Alternative for Germany garnered 13% of the vote, while rightwing Christian Democrat Horst Seehofer of Bavaria almost brought down the coalition government this summer. Again, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment are the main mobilizing factor. To the east, Hungary and Poland have gone even further to the right, with deeply authoritarian regimes establishing themselves at a very fast pace. To one degree or another, these far-right parties and regimes have also attacked neoliberalism and have, with the exception of Poland, shown an open affinity with Putin's Russia. Here too, they have echoed and sometimes anticipated Trump.

The left is by no means dead, however, especially in the UK, where Jeremy Corbyn continues to surge. In France, the new centrist party of Emmanuel Macron held off the

National Front in last year's elections, albeit with a strong challenge from leftwing populist Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Two types of struggles illustrate both the possibilities and the challenges facing the Western European left. In France, a protracted strike by railway workers against Macron's austerity measures seems to have faltered, in contrast to a similar movement in 1995 that forced the government to back down by convincing other workers and the public that breaking their relatively high wage and benefit packages would downgrade society as a whole (Cole Stangler, "French Labor Derailed," *Jacobin* 6/22/18). Italy illustrates a different type of movement, from the deepest layers of immigrant labor, where the leftist USB union saw one of its organizers murdered a few weeks ago. Soumayla Sacko, an immigrant from Mali, toiled in the fields of Calabria in southern Italy for paltry wages while living in a shantytown. After Sacko's death in an apparently racist incident in the community, other agricultural workers, both migrant and Italian born, were able to hold a rally and then a protest strike of 2000 workers, which gained national attention for their cause (Aboubakar Soumaoro, "The Murder of a Trade Unionist," *Jacobin* 6/10/18).

Everywhere today, the challenge facing these forms of subjective resistance is how to unite this kind of struggle with those like the French railway workers strike. Steps have been taken along those lines, but they need to be deepened

in the spirit of the Marxist-Humanist concept of “Black masses as vanguard” in the US, and linked to a Marxist critique of capital that also projects a viable and humanist alternative.

While the neoliberal version of state-capitalism may be waning, we remain in the era of state-capitalism, a global stage born in the 1930s that succeeded the monopoly capitalism of Lenin’s day. This goes far beyond Bonapartism, which appeared fifty years earlier, at the dawn of industrial capitalism in France. The monopoly capitalism of Lenin’s time could coexist with political democracy at home while conducting a murderous imperialism abroad. But at the later stage of state-capitalism, capitalism inside the most economically developed countries tends in another direction, as Dunayevskaya wrote sixty years ago in *Marxism and Freedom*:

“State capitalism is not a continuous development of capitalism in the sense of a development without breaks. It is a development through transformation into opposite. Capitalism lived and progressed by free competition. Hence, it found its fullest development under a democratic bourgeois or parliamentary democracy. State capitalism means, and can only mean, bureaucracy, tyranny and barbarism as could have been seen in Nazi Germany and can be seen in totalitarian Russia. One would have to be blind

not to see elements of it everywhere, including the United States” (p. 258).

The long relative prosperity of 1945-75 papered some of that over for a time, but only after tens of millions had been killed in the most destructive war the world had ever seen, most of them civilians, and many of them deliberately murdered in death camps or through nuclear weapons. Today we will not progress, as old Hegel wrote, without “staring the negative in the face, and lingering with it” (*Phenomenology* ¶ 32).

Those kinds of dangers are self-evident in Trump’s US, as well as globally, which has been the subject of this report. How can we as Marxist-Humanists insert ourselves into this situation in ways that help us not only to resist the present retrogression on all fronts, but also to pose a truly humanist alternative to capitalism that is rooted, as such an alternative must be, in the legacy of Marx and Dunayevskaya, and in the best writings of Lenin, Luxemburg, and Fanon?

