

New Epoch Makes New World Possible

The current economic crisis is more than a cyclical recession, depression, or even Great Depression. This crisis is a stage in the final stages of capitalism. In the wake and undertow of capitalism's demise, billions of people worldwide are suffering.

Society in transition, as one economic system comes to an end and another begins, is extremely unstable. All political activity must be guided by an understanding of both the opportunities and dangers created by this instability and the leap or revolutionary change from one form of human organization to another, from one society to another.

Understanding the ultimate and underlying causes of the changes in the economy arms us and provides the foundation for political strategy and activity. In this article we will review the roots of a process that began over sixty years ago, and in observing how this process has been unfolding – the process of cause and effect – we will understand that the massive changes experienced so far have set the stage for even greater changes to come.

We are on the verge — in fact have already begun to experience — a dramatic leap in societal disruption caused by a new generation of electronic means of production. The automation of the factory floor and the replacement of unskilled and semi-skilled human labor in manufacturing and industry is almost complete.

The next stage, robots replacing humans in service and professional jobs, has already begun. Minimum wage, temporary and part-time workers in the service industry — already part of the new class created by electronic technology — will lose what little they have and flood the ranks of the permanently jobless.

TECHNOLOGY AND JOBS

The central relationship of capitalism is that between capitalist (owner of the means of production) and worker (whose labor is the only means of survival). Capitalist pays worker; worker buys products. This relationship is constantly being affected by changes in technology in production. The spinning wheel, the steam engine, and electricity all created new conditions of work, new jobs, and new relations between capital and labor.

The capitalist class is revolutionary, constantly innovating as each capitalist scrambles to survive in a competitive market where increased productivity and lower labor costs are key to success. Such competition led to the changes in the means of production that drove the expansion of capitalism from tiny manufacturing centers in England through the stages of heavy industry, imperialism and this era's globalization.

These early stages of innovation were labor saving, expanding the labor force and markets.

Competition drives capitalism to introduce new technology even when the consequences of that new technology create conditions that make capitalism itself untenable. The introduction of electronics into production is labor replacing rather than labor saving and thus challenges the fundamental relationship of capitalism, that between worker and capitalist.

CRISIS AND INSTABILITY TODAY

Today's jobless "recovery" from the recession only benefits corporations and the financial sector and even for them it is a futile attempt to hold on to something that is no longer viable, a temporary and unstable respite from the inevitable end of capitalism.

This so-called recovery will never produce full employment, because the private sector will not and cannot provide humans with jobs to produce what robots and computerization can produce cheaper and more effectively. In May of this year, for example, the private sector added only 41,000 jobs, fewer than March or April, not even enough to provide jobs for estimated 100,000 new entrants to the labor force each month.

Earlier this year the *New York Times* reported, "Automation has helped manufacturing cut 5.6 million jobs since 2000 – the sort of jobs that once provided lower-skilled workers with middle-class paychecks." The article quoted Allen Sinai, chief global economist at the research firm Decision Economics, "You basically don't want workers. You hire less, and you try to find capital equipment to replace them." ("Despite Signs of Recovery, Chronic Joblessness Rises", Feb 20, 2010)

HISTORY

Computerized automation of industrial production has fundamentally challenged capitalism. The process of development has been uneven; cause and effect not immediately revealed; and even now when the transformation of society is evident everywhere, many serious observers of society dismiss the seminal importance of computerized production.

In the 1950's Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, said the "automatic machine" was the equivalent of slave labor and that any labor which competes with slave labor must accept the economic consequence of slave labor. He was prescient in anticipating the social impact of the electronic technology (cybernetics) which has caused widespread permanent unemployment, driving down the value of labor-power and consequently driving down wages; and creating

slave like conditions for workers in minimum wage, temporary and part-time jobs. These objective conditions are creating a new class.

In the 1970's American workers began to feel the severe impact of the new technology as the major industrial giants such as auto, steel, and rubber closed plants and reopened new ones with labor replacing technology. A GMC advertisement aired during the 2010 NBA playoffs of a Sierra being assembled robotically showed how completely robotics have replaced human labor in industry. (See: *Automation and Robotics News*, collected and compiled by Tony Zaragoza, <http://academic.evergreen.edu/z/zaragozt/arnewsarchive.html>; "No Humans, Just Robots," <http://singularityhub.com/2010/02/11/no-humans-just-robots-amazing-videos-of-the-modern-factory/>)

THE CRISIS TO COME

ATM machines replace bank tellers; self serve check out at supermarkets replace cashiers. These are the harbingers of the future when Wal-Mart, Target and every big box store will be introducing totally automated inventory management systems.

As described by Marshall Brain in his *Robotic Nation* internet series, mobile pick-and-place robots will locate every product through RFID tags. They will be able to restock from warehouse and stack items on shelves. All maintenance, customer assistance, shopping and check out will be automated. He predicts that the transition will take about five years, eliminating ten million jobs.

And that is not all. At least 50 percent of jobs today are in fast-food restaurants, retail stores, delivery companies, construction, airlines, amusement parks, hotels and motels, warehousing and so on. All are prime targets for robotic replacement. Brain projects that taken all together about 50 million jobs will be lost due to automation by mid-century.

(Marshall Brain, *Robotic Nation*, www.marshallbrain.com/robotic-nation.htm).

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Computerized production and robotic automation frees us from backbreaking labor and opens the opportunity to fulfill our unlimited potential for creativity and social development. Under the economic laws of capitalism, however, where jobs are the nexus to all that provides for our health and well being, we are faced with destruction and misery rather than freedom.

To resolve the jobs crisis, some call for a new New Deal, which was intended to save capitalism by stimulating demand to kick start investment and hiring. WWII, not the New Deal, created the conditions that ended the Depression and catalyzed the post war expansion.

Now, neither war nor a New Deal will create the conditions for the private sector to hire human labor that robots can do cheaper and more efficiently. The private sector, while demanding bailouts and using its control of the State to feed its insatiable demand for greater corporate welfare, will not be providing jobs.

The struggle for survival of the jobless is not the struggle of worker against employer, but a struggle to demand that the State provides what the private sector is not providing. None of the practical and economic problems of the jobless and the part-time, temporary and minimum wage workers can be addressed except in the political struggle over which class the government will serve.

The government intervention in the economy in the interests of the capitalist class and private property opens the door for a political struggle in the interests of the people. Bail out the financial sector? Or bail out

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Editorial: The Irresistible Nature of Truth

‘But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments, of their duties and obligations... This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people was the real American Revolution.’

— President John Adams, letter to prominent Baltimore journalist and newspaper editor Hezekiah Niles, February 13, 1818

It is perhaps difficult today to understand the profound effect the American revolution had on the world’s imagination. The world was set on fire by the prospect of throwing off the shackles of the old order and creating a world based on liberty and equality. World capitalism’s nascent development worked against the constraints of the old feudal order, but economics on its own could never be enough. In the end people make history. President John Adams’s letter to the Baltimore journalist Hezekiah Niles did nothing more than state what every revolutionary knows: it is ideas that change the world.

The article Thomas Paine, “Lessons of an American Revolutionary,” evaluates Thomas Paine’s indispensable role as a propagandist of the revolutionary ideals and vision of the American Revolution of 1776. The power of his writings coupled with the historical changes underway inspired all who sought to

overturn tyranny and create a new world. He deliberately wrote for a mass audience, seeking to influence minds toward not simply a break with England but for a society without want and one based in democracy and human rights. Indeed, he popularized the concept of revolution as a political concept signifying liberation from oppression, and he called for revolution as the necessary condition for the establishment of a just civilization. These ideas mobilized thousands to break with the old order and stand as a beacon to revolutionary movements throughout the world, then and since.

Paine wrote at the beginning of the rise of the capitalist system, as its representatives were fighting for political supremacy and independence from the old feudal world order. Today, we face a different situation all together, but the revolutionary role of the human mind remains the same today as it was then.

Revolution is set in motion first in the economy with the introduction of some means of production that revolutionizes how goods are produced. The article, “New Epoch Makes New World Possible,” examines the electronic technology that is the foundation of the revolutionary changes of today. No longer confined to industrial production, electronic production is spreading rapidly through every sector of the economy. What could free workers from back breaking toil, the capitalists have turned only into the means of greater profit, eliminating jobs, spawning unemployment and poverty, and giving rise to a growing dis-

content.

But this labor-replacing technology is revolutionizing more than production. It is striking at the heart of capitalism – the system of production and distribution and everything that is based upon it. A vision of a society where all can be provided for has moved into the realm of practical reality. Production without labor inevitably calls for distribution without money, making a cooperative, communist society for the first time in history a practical solution to the concrete problems of a crumbling system.

Revolution starts with a change in the economy, but that revolution can only be completed through a battle for ideas that focus and sharpen the mind along the path to the ultimate goal. The combatants must clearly understand their situation, a vision of what is possible, and the steps to go about realizing it.

“Understand this Moment, Stay on Course” addresses the roots of the current crisis, examines the stages and dimensions of the revolutionary struggle and draws conclusions for what we can expect in the coming period and where revolutionaries can concentrate their energies to make a difference. Today, that concentration is along the line of the program of the mass of dispossessed and in every practical struggle that reflects that.

The article, “Struggle for Revolution to Make Reform Possible,” shows that structural reform of the system is no longer possible. Electro-mechanical means of production was the basis for reform under capital. That foundation is now being destroyed by electronic production. The only “re-

forms” we will be able to achieve are through a social revolution that restructures society to be compatible with the electronic labor-replacing means of production.

How is this to be done? Revolutionaries fight from within the arising struggles to wring every concession from the capitalist class, while disseminating the ideas that will answer the questions of cause, strategy, and the way forward.

To influence the direction of things, revolutionaries must influence the social activity of the combatants. Otherwise, the inevitable upsurges and struggles will never be able to move beyond where they are at that moment of their uprising. “Agitation and Propaganda: What is Needed Today” shows that agitation and propaganda today must focus on the real cause of the crisis, demanding that the government be forced to act in the interests of the people. It must inspire with a vision of the new society that is possible and offer a means of achieving that vision.

Revolutionaries throughout our country’s history have fought to fulfill that first promise of the American Revolution of which Paine so eloquently wrote. The privilege and duty of completing the work of those who came before us now lies on our shoulders and our ability to make truth shine through. As Paine wrote all those years ago “Freedom had been hunted round the globe; reason was considered as rebellion; and the slavery of fear had made men afraid to think. But such is the irresistible nature of truth, that all it asks, and all it wants, is the liberty of appearing.” (*Rights of Man*, 1791)

EDITORIAL POLICY

Rally: to bring back together and put in a state of order, as retreating troops [to return to attack]

Comrade: a person with whom one is allied in a struggle or cause

Rally, Comrades! is the political paper of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. In this period of growing motion and developing polarization, *Rally, Comrades!* provides a strategic outlook for the revolutionaries by indicating and illuminating the line of march of the revolutionary process. It presents a pole of scientific clarity, examines and analyzes the real problems of the revolutionary movement, and draws political conclusions for the tasks of revolutionaries at each stage of development in order to prepare for future stages.

It is a vehicle to reach out and communicate with revolutionaries both within the League and outside of the League to engage them in debate and discussion and to provide a forum for these discussions. Articles represent the position and policies of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America.

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LRNA: WHAT WE STAND FOR

Tens of thousands of socially conscious people declare themselves revolutionaries in opposition to the degenerating social and economic conditions. The League’s mission is to unite these scattered revolutionaries on the basis of the demands of the new class, to educate and win them over to the co-operative, communist resolution of the problem.

The demands of this new impoverished class for food, housing, education, health care and an opportunity to contribute to society are summed up as the demand for a co-operative society. For the first time an objective communist economic class is forming to become the foundation for a communist political movement. A new fascist state form, the naked rule of corporate power, is arising to oppose this motion.

Society must take over these corporations or these corporations will take over society. The new class must have political power to achieve these goals. In the effort to achieve this political power the League supports all political organizations and sections of society that fight against the growing poverty, social and ecological destruction, fascism and war.

Nothing can be accomplished until the American people hold a vision of where they want to go and what they want to be. Creating and imbuing them with such vision is the overriding task of revolutionaries and the foundation of our organization.

Destruction of the ecology, the threat of nuclear war and the looming pandemics are calling the very existence of the human race into question. The battle is class struggle. The war is for the existence of humanity.

We in the League face the future with confidence. We call upon all revolutionaries to abandon sectarian differences, to unite around the practical demands of the new class and to secure that imperiled future.

Understand this Moment, Stay on Course

Our country is entering a volatile and difficult phase of its social and political life. People across the vast spectrum that makes up this country are being forced into economic distress they had not envisioned for themselves and their families. Political debate and discussion are polarizing — but not necessarily along clear class and political lines.

The current moment is one of a cyclical crisis of overproduction within an ongoing economic revolution and the first stages of the fight for program within an emerging social struggle. This moment poses to revolutionaries critical questions of direction and adds urgency to our tasks.

THE SITUATION WE FACE

Even before the financial crash of 2008, decades of labor-replacing technology, downsizing, and outsourcing had already permanently displaced millions of workers and cost millions of middle-income jobs and generous benefits. By the mid-1990s, for example, approximately one half of all manufacturing workers were temporary or contingent workers.

The loss of jobs and benefits is easily measured — and painfully suffered by millions of Americans. Among the world's 21 most “economically developed” countries, the U.S. has the third highest rate of poverty. Only Mexico and Turkey have higher rates. The average math test scores of U.S. school children rank 16th among these 21. The American Society of Civil Engineers notes, “broken water mains, gridlocked streets, crumbling dams and levees... from failing infrastructure have a negative impact on the checkbook and on the quality of life of each and every American.”

More difficult to measure, but just as devastating, is the effect of the economic revolution on how the basics that society needs — such as education, health, utilities, transportation — are distributed to society. Services and social infrastructure used to be public, because society needed them for its development and capital needed them in order to get able-bodied workers to the factories. The distribution of these goods and services is now being privatized, because the corporations need to make profit off of every facet of life.

The crash and economic crisis express an intense moment in the economic revolution that introduced labor-replacing technology into production and diminished the value of all commodities, including labor power.

At the same time, the crash and economic crisis express a typical cyclical crisis of overproduction. This includes the over-extension of credit to stimulate the purchase of surplus homes and other real estate and the over-inflation of their prices through the issuance of risky high interest loans. Lenders got the government to relax the rules on lending, thus allowing the banks to make loans that could not be repaid. What started out as a crisis of over-production of housing

and a mortgage lending crisis rapidly spread throughout the world economy.

Capitalism has always had recurring crises of overproduction. It is caused by the overwhelming contradiction that the capitalists are constantly expanding production of commodities under conditions of limited demand because of the lack of purchasing power on the part of the working class and other sectors. These crises always appear in the form of an overproduction of commodities, huge inventories of unsold goods, a sharp fall in prices, curtailment of production, skyrocketing unemployment, lowered wages and benefits, breakdown of credit, stock market crashes, and ruined lives. The net result of this crisis has been the loss of jobs, thus exacerbating and prolonging the crisis because there is no means for people

Further deterioration of the economy will draw more sections of society into social struggle. Contention over class interests will manifest itself in mass struggle. Ultimately, out of the turmoil will come a polarization of class interests and programs.

who are unemployed to buy the over-produced commodities.

As cyclical crises continue, the capitalists take advantage of the low prices by raising labor productivity through the renewal of their plant and equipment. This creates a demand for new means of production and the market revives and a new boom cycle begins. This boom-to-bust cycle is repeated every ten or twenty years, thus the term cyclical crisis. The Great Depression of the 1930s occurred during the industrial era and started with a stock market crash and spread into industry. However this current crisis is occurring under different conditions — on top of an ongoing economic revolution — and as the United States is losing its economic power on the world stage. The recovery might be short and not very deep; it will potentially lay the groundwork for a much deeper crisis to follow in the near future.

CURRENT POLITICAL MOMENT

In September 2008, the U.S. government, the Federal Reserve Bank, and private financial corporations worked as one to save the global system of exchange. The bailout redistributed trillions of dollars from the public to private interests in the financial industry. But it was more than a bailout. Punctuating the ongoing merger of the government and the corporations in the interests of private property, it was a step in the development of fascism, the reorganization of the state to protect private property under new conditions. The government's 2009 bankruptcy reorganization of GM and

Chrysler wiped out jobs for thousands of workers and benefits for hundreds of thousands more.

The government had to intervene. The movement of people for what they need now confronts a political obstacle. The polarity between the government and corporations on the one hand and the widening movement of people for the necessities of life is shifting to predominance.

In response to the economic revolution, scattered struggles are spreading. These are struggles over how to solve the problems of society — problems of the environment, utilities, health, education, housing, for example. They are not necessarily explicitly “workers’ struggles.” Nor are they a struggle for political power.

The financial crash and bailout unleashed

attention, and implosion. In this sense, we can anticipate a period of social struggle when all of society is forced into struggle against the effects of the economic revolution, but is not yet shaped by a clear or predominant ideology or direction.

On the more or less subjective level, the social response has to go through a stage of mass struggle. The history of the U.S. is not the same as that of Europe, where the term “mass struggle” originated and referred to the presence of various classes within the general “toiling masses.” But the term is useful here to refer to the process out of which eventually emerges — or erupts — the predominance of understanding of common interests. For example, the social response reaches a certain level of understanding that the corporations are jerking us around, that the government has to serve the public, not the corporations. Of course there is no guarantee that mass struggle will take shape along such clear lines. But there is bound to coalesce some anger on the part of the masses of people against the obscenely richest one percent of the population and the power they hold over the rest of us — some sense of “us vs them” — but it is too soon to say how this will take shape.

In the real world, the proletarian movement, social struggle, and mass struggle are not separate categories or sets of struggles. But understanding them as abstractions equips us to assess trends as they are emerging.

Perhaps the clearest example of the organic relation of social struggle and mass struggle in U.S. history is the struggle of the African American people for freedom and equality. This struggle went on for over 100 years, at most stages under bourgeois leadership. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, all sections of the African-American population were in motion. This broad social struggle shaped the social discourse of the time and drew other sections of society into motion.

Then in 1965, in Watts, California, the proletarian element among the African American population asserted itself as the driving force of that social struggle and aimed its fire against the state. The proletarian demands rose to predominance. The wrath of the movement was aimed at the state; the people held the streets for nearly a week. What was once a social struggle without a political target now took a dramatically political course. In response, of course, every arm of bourgeois rule was wielded to put the bourgeois forces back in control of the broader movement. The Watts Rebellion had unleashed mass struggle and set the pace for every battle at that time.

STRUGGLE EMERGING TODAY

Government action — and its perceived state of dysfunction — is shaping the envi-

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Agitation and Propaganda: What is Needed Today

The capitalist system of production and exchange and the entire economic system is breaking down, and an objectively revolutionary movement has begun. Little by little the movement is being forced to move its demands from the economic to the political sphere. All sections of society are being drawn into political discourse. In order to protect private property and stabilize the economy, the government is forced to begin playing a role in managing the economy and instituting nationalization in some form. The need for nationalization is objective — each class needs nationalization in its own interests. Because of this, nationalization becomes a battlefield on which the question of whose interests the state will serve is fought out. The economic crisis and the government's intervention on behalf of the capitalist class to stabilize the economy are drawing people into politics and opening the door to a political struggle over class interests.

Sections of the new class — that new group of workers created by electronics in production — are beginning to awaken. The political and economic middle that formerly tied the working class to the ruling class is being destroyed; formerly stable workers are losing everything and being thrown into motion. As it is forced into the ranks of the dispossessed, this former "middle class" becomes the key link that can pull the rest of the class forward. For the new class created by electronics to succeed in their struggle to have their needs met, the class has to become conscious of itself as a class and be formed politically. It is on the battlefield of nationalization, in the fight over whose interests the state will serve, that the class can become class-conscious and form itself politically.

Whether the class becomes conscious de-

pends on the ability of revolutionaries to do effective agitation and propaganda. We should bear in mind that the same people the League is trying to reach are also the target of fascist propaganda, and they could be won to fascism. Objectively, the ruling class needs to win the workers to fascism in order to maintain private property. A subjective fascist movement is being developed to carry out the fascist agenda. The fascists use the ideology of white supremacy and put forward propaganda that is anti-government, anti-Obama, anti-immigrant, anti-socialist, etc. Among other things, they seek to turn the workers against any notion that the state should intervene in the economy on behalf of the people. If we don't propagandize and politicize the leaders of the masses, other forces will.

MASTER ART OF POLITICS

The problem is that while people are objectively moving toward a communist resolution to the crisis, they are subjectively moving in another direction, and you can't lead people who disagree with you. Revolutionaries have to unite the subjective and the objective — unite what people believe in with what they're trying to do objectively. The next stage of the League's development is to begin influencing social activity. How can the leaders of the class be influenced and brought together around some kind of program? How can people be convinced that their enemy is the system of private ownership and not simply greedy corporations, convince them that their actual program is to abolish private property?

This process of influencing the leaders involves mastering the art of politics, the art of using the spontaneous motion to achieve our

political goals. The example has been given of the abolitionists during the Civil War. They were dealing with northern workers who favored the union but opposed ending slavery. Through skillful agitation and propaganda, the abolitionists persuaded the northern workers that the survival of the union depended on destroying not just the slave power, but the system of slavery.

What should be the nature of the League's agitation and propaganda today? Agitation and propaganda have to be merged. Our propaganda can't be abstract and theoretical, and our agitational activity can't be devoid of propaganda. It is possible today to propagandize as we agitate. We can teach people broader lessons through using specific examples. Today it's possible to show that communism is a practical solution to the crisis. To merge our agitation and propaganda we need to use current examples, such as the ecological disaster from the Gulf oil spill, to illustrate the lessons we're trying to teach.

AGITATION AND PROPAGANDA TODAY

What is needed is specific programmatic agitation and propaganda that is along the line of march toward revolution. That line of march is from scattered economic struggles to united political struggle. Our agitation and propaganda has to propose concrete answers to real problems while also politicizing people — making them see that they are involved in a fight for political power — and moving them forward along the line of march. Nationalization in the interest of the people is the next step along the line of march. The League needs to explain the real cause of the crisis and demand that the government be forced to act in the interests of

the people. We need to concentrate our efforts in those arenas — such as water, health care, budget cuts, education, etc. — where the objective antagonism between the classes makes it possible to bring the political edge to the fore in the struggle.

League agitation and propaganda also has to offer the revolutionaries who are our audience a vision of what they are fighting for, a vision of the new society that is possible with the new means of production.

The League participates in the practical struggles in the key arenas not only as activists but as propagandists. League members participate in the practical struggles of the class in order to position themselves to carry out the League's mission "to unite these scattered revolutionaries on the basis of the demands of the new class, to educate and win them over to the cooperative, communist resolution of the problem." This practical activity sets the context for our propaganda. If people's minds are not changed in these practical struggles, nothing has been won.

Agitation is uniting with the general direction people are heading and propaganda is an intellectual development. Propaganda is winning people over to communism. One is concrete. One is abstract.

League propaganda also has to be effective. It has to be put in terms that reflect American history and the psychology of the American people. We must be students of American history, and look carefully at what flows from American history in determining what is the next necessary step.

Editor's Note: This report was presented at a conference of the LRNA Agitation Propaganda Department, May 2010.

New Epoch Makes New World Possible

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laid off workers and foreclosure victims? Nationalize in the interests of private property? Or in the interests of the people?

VISION OF THE FUTURE

The ability of the computerized, robotic, electronic means of production to provide abundance to satisfy all human needs without human labor is incompatible with capitalist relations of production. Thus, society is experiencing tremendous instability and is in the process of revolutionary change.

The ruling class and the State, intertwined and entangled, face the challenge of holding on to the wealth and power that they now have, while preparing for something new, a revolutionary change to a new form of private property. They are moving toward fascism in an attempt to stabilize an inherently

unstable situation.

Confronting them is a revolutionary class created by the new means of production. The demands of this new class for food, clothing, housing, education, peace and health care are revolutionary demands. This social force is capable of bringing about the reorganization and restructuring of society in the interests of the world's people, so that the means of production are communally owned and the abundance is distributed according to need.

This will not happen automatically. It must be consciously fought for. Thus, revolutionaries must arm the class with a vision of the new society, and with the knowledge of its class interests to prepare for the difficult stages it must go through in its quest for the power to direct the revolutionary restructuring of society made possible by the new means of production.

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Thomas Paine — Lessons of an American Visionary

America and the world are entering another great era of revolution. Economic revolution — the destruction of the old industrial forces of production by modern electronic technology — is irreversible. Social revolution is polarizing society more and more into two new classes — the super-rich, supra-national financiers of Wall Street on the one hand, and millions of dispossessed workers on the other. Completion of the revolutionary process requires organizing and developing the revolutionary political consciousness of the dispossessed — the only social force capable of reorganizing society along the cooperative lines necessary to correspond to the new forces of production.

This task requires us to wage a war of ideas. We are at one of those critical turning points where once again the battle for the soul of America is breaking out. Efforts are underway to build a mass movement for fascism and wrap it up in the trappings of patriotism. In this environment, victory in this war of ideas requires us to revisit and study the revolutionary nature of the ideas that shaped our country.

The quintessential American patriot and revolutionary was Thomas Paine, the English immigrant who settled in Pennsylvania in 1775. “The country, into which I had just set my foot, was set on fire about my ears,” he wrote. In fact, it was Paine who actually first coined the name “United States of America.” His ability to grasp and articulate America’s cause of independence — and its revolutionary spirit — points the way for us today, in a time of even greater social dislocation.

The ruling class has been struggling to deconstruct and recast Paine’s ideas in an attempt to legitimize a fascist corporate dictatorship. Genuine study of Paine shows that their effort cannot succeed. Paine dedicated his life to defense of the small producer: the artisan, farmer, tradesman, laborer, and poor. His vision was of a world without kings, a world without privilege and oppression. Once understood, it can never be twisted to enshrine today’s global corporations as an expression of traditional American values.

DEDICATED TO REVOLUTION

Thomas Paine dedicated his life to the advancement of the great world revolution that broke out in 1776. He was an active leader in both the American and the subsequent French Revolution, and strove mightily for revolution in England — from where he was ultimately exiled after conviction for “seditious libel.” The ringing defense of revolution in the U.S. Declaration of Independence drew on the revolutionary spirit created by the publication and mass dissemination of Paine’s *Common Sense* in early 1776. “A nation has at all times an inherent indefeasible right to abolish any form of government it

finds inconvenient, and establish such as accords with its interest, disposition, and happiness,” he wrote.

In Paine’s day (as in our own) it was the enemies of democracy and revolution who made mindless appeals to “tradition” and “precedent.” As Paine pointed out, it was not whether ideas were new or old that was important, but whether they were right. When Edmund Burke argued that the people lacked rights because their ancestors had forfeited them, Paine mocked him as advocating

Above all, Thomas Paine celebrated and embodied a revolutionary spirit of freedom, and stamped it irrevocably on the character of the American people.

tyranny beyond the grave. “The circumstances of the world are constantly changing,” he wrote, “and the opinions of men change also; and as government is for the living, and not for the dead, it is the living only that has any right in it.”

BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION

It is good that Paine recognized this, because while his politics were brilliant, they were circumscribed and limited by the content of his time. The revolutions that he led were bourgeois revolutions. They were designed to free the nascent capitalist economy of the day from the shackles of Old World feudal trade barriers, taxation, and oppression. Paine was a student of his contemporary, economist Adam Smith, and he wholeheartedly embraced Smith’s doctrine of the market as an invisible hand. “All the great laws of society are laws of nature,” Paine wrote. “Those of trade and commerce, whether with respect to the intercourse of individuals or of nations, are laws of mutual and reciprocal interest.”

Although Paine spoke out against slavery, he was active in Pennsylvania and failed to grasp the stranglehold that slavery was imposing on America’s fledgling republic even in the eighteenth century. He could not predict the invention of the cotton gin and its explosive impact on the subsequent growth of slavery. Neither could he foresee the enormous concentration of capital and the mortal threat it posed to democracy, even after slavery was overthrown. What he did observe was the capitalism of small producers that predominated in his lifetime, and he believed its expansion would lead to universal prosperity and peace.

In spite of these limitations, Paine’s ideas have nothing in common with the corporate apologists who attempt to twist his doctrines to fit their modern agenda. His treatise on the

Rights of Man was the first great manifesto written in defense of what we now call human rights. It served as the bible for the English working class movement for over a hundred years. While he bitterly opposed taxes for support of monarchy and war, he equally forcefully fought for the taxes, loans, and currency reform necessary to support the revolutionary army and the normal civilian functions of government. He later went further and proposed progressive taxation to finance a visionary program of entitlements to

food, shelter, and employment for the poor, social security for the elderly, and public education for children and youth.

Paine understood even in his day that human society required definite limits to property rights. “It is a position not to be controverted,” he wrote in *Agrarian Justice*, “that the earth, in its natural uncultivated state, was, and ever would have continued to be, the COMMON PROPERTY OF THE HUMAN RACE.” Paine’s view was that cultivation of land gave it an added value that should accrue to the person who cultivated it, or to one who inherited or purchased it. However, this created an unforeseen and adverse effect. “The landed monopoly has dispossessed more than half the inhabitants of every nation of their natural inheritance, without providing for them, as ought to have been done, an indemnification for that loss; and has thereby created a species of poverty and wretchedness that did not exist before. In advocating the cause of the persons thus dispossessed, it is a right and not a charity that I am pleading for.”

Paine proposed a National Fund created with inheritance taxes to compensate all without land with a substantial payment at age 21 and an old age pension to commence at age 50.

VISION AND PROPAGANDA

Although capitalism and its politics have by now been transformed completely — and capitalism has in fact arrived at the end of its life — Paine’s vision of a world without want is as fresh and revolutionary today as it was when he first wrote it. “When it shall be said in any country in the world, my poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am a

friend of its happiness: when these things can be said, then may that country boast its constitution and its government.”

Ultimately, Paine’s greatest contribution was that he actually invented the art of modern political propaganda. He was the first to deliberately write for a mass audience, and as a result he developed an entirely new political language and discourse. He literally transformed the meaning of words such as republican, democrat, and revolutionary into positive terms. Before Paine, “revolution” was primarily an astronomical word denoting a cycle. Paine popularized it as a political concept signifying liberation from oppression, and called for revolution as the necessary condition for establishment of a just civilization.

Common Sense made the American revolution possible by identifying its cause and galvanizing the population around it, even after the fighting had already begun. “Had independence been delayed a few months longer,” he later wrote, “this continent would have been plunged into irrecoverable confusion: some violent for it, some against it, till, in the general cabal, the rich would have been ruined, and the poor destroyed.”

Above all, Paine celebrated and embodied a revolutionary spirit of freedom, and stamped it irrevocably on the character of the American people. He knew there could be no freedom without economic freedom, and in his day capitalism offered that promise. Today that economic freedom can only be realized in a cooperative society where the means of production are owned and controlled by the public. Paine’s spirit will serve us well in the gathering battle for that freedom and against modern-day corporate fascism:

“We have too high an opinion of ourselves even to think of yielding again the least obedience to outlandish authority.”

MAJOR WRITINGS BY THOMAS PAINE:

Common Sense 1776

The Crisis 1776-83

The Rights of Man 1791-92

The Age of Reason 1794-95

Agrarian Justice 1797

BIOGRAPHIES:

Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, 1976 and 2005

Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*, 2005

Struggle for revolution to make reform possible

In order to state quickly and simply what may be quite complex ideas or formulae, every craft or trade, every field of science, every area of inquiry must develop its “language.” This language is a set of terms that are accepted short cuts. Problems inevitably arise when people begin to mean different things by this “language.” Social science, including the science of the revolutionary movement, is at best an inexact science and thus, the science most prone to mean different things by the same terms.

The League of Revolutionaries for a New America (LRNA) strives to apply the fundamentals of science to understand the process of social development. Essentially this means putting the objective factors first. Our “political” language reflects this. Sometimes we find ourselves using the same words with comrades and friends but meaning different things, since one approach proceeds from objective factors and the other approach from subjective factors.

As our country slides into crisis and more people are pulled into the struggle, the words in our “revolutionary language” take on real and concrete meaning. In the interest of clarity and unity we need to restate our understanding and meaning of terms that are commonly used in the movement and are beginning to be used by the masses.

One of the most commonly used (and misused) terms is reform. The dictionary states that reform is “an improvement or amendment of what is wrong.” Reform means to restructure. This restructuring is to change the social relationship between classes. Reform and concession are not the same thing. Wrestling concessions from the state or from an employer is the content of most social struggles. We know from experience that concessions are taken away as soon as the militancy and vigilance of the people subside. Reforms are generally quite permanent.

To grasp the importance and meaning of reform or restructuring we must first have some understanding of the structure — in this case, society. Society is the totality of the relations between classes and groups in a community. The base of society is the economy. The economy is the totality of production and distribution of the wealth created by that society. The creation of that wealth depends on the level of development of the means of production. Humanity is always striving for cheaper and easier ways to produce social wealth. Consequently the tools — the means of production — are constantly developing in incremental, quantitative stages until a qualitative leap takes place.

On the other hand, privileged, controlling classes and groups have a stake in keeping

social relations just as they are in order to maintain their privileged positions. As the means of production evolve, a corresponding, deepening contradiction develops with the static and immobile society. As favorable conditions emerge, social struggle develops that ends with a quantitative leap in the social relations, which bring a reformed society into line with the level of development of the means of production.

The most recent example of this is the African American freedom struggles. African Americans have always struggled for freedom and equality. No matter how heroic their struggle and sacrifice, they could not gain their freedom so long as such a great part of the economy was tied to the backward tools of labor-intensive Southern agriculture. Its mechanization provided the foundation for corresponding change.

Much more was needed. Over a million Black soldiers served in the war for democracy and against fascism. They came home imbued with military organizational principles and determined to put an end to their second-class citizenship.

The Cold War put the American ruling class on the defensive. Their every attack against the Soviet Union was countered by exposure of the lynch mobs, the police brutality, the exploitation and reckless destruc-

tion of African American life (See Mary Dudziak’s *Cold War Civil Rights*). The exploding liberation movements in the colonial world became the context for the unparalleled determination and heroism that marked the movement.

These major factors and many lesser ones converged as the gigantic Freedom Movement that began the restructuring of American society. The quantitative development of the means of production was central and key to this quantitative development of society.

Some organizations take the position that reform comes when enough people demand it. They place the subjective factor first.

LRNA has often stated that there are no reforms left in capitalism. We say that because there can be no further development of the electro-mechanical means of production, which is the basis for reform under capital. The tools, the means of production, are in a qualitative leap from electro-mechanics to electronics. We are in an economic revolution. We are at the end of an epoch and any further social reform will come as a result of social revolution that restructures society to become compatible with the new electronic labor-replacing means of production. This is why we struggled for reform when it was possible and necessary. We struggle for revolution in order to make reform possible.

Understand this Moment, Stay on Course

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ronment in which a modern-day Watts can usher in real mass struggle. The emergent expressions of mass struggle today will have a different foundation. The Civil Rights Movement and Watts Rebellion expressed the expansion of the system; today we are seeing the stages of its objective destruction.

And mass struggle will take a different form. Fascist agitation appeals to the fear and anger in the wake of the financial collapse and bailout and paves the way for the fascist reorganization of society that is already underway. At the same time, social problems cannot be solved so long as the government serves the corporations, not the public.

The driving force of mass struggle today is also bound to be different. The dispossessed have the skills and occupy the place in society that make it possible for them to play that role as a driving force. But direction is not guaranteed. On the one hand, the political direction of this section is up for grabs — and are the target of some powerful, dangerous, and disorienting agitation. On the other hand, the overwhelming character of their demands is proletarian. While some among these dispossessed still have the hope and possibility of getting a decent job in a slight economic upturn, or starting some little business in the crevices of an economy in crisis, most will have to cast their lot with those masses of workers being expelled permanently from the productive economy.

With its appeals to the “middle class” and for “small government,” most of the current populist agitation has a murky but strong class kernel and programmatic edge. Although the lines are not clearly drawn at this point, the current rumblings express the preliminary agitation for and contention among different class programs. In the meantime, with its dangerous manipulation of fear and confusion, the ruling class practices the art of politics and relies on the spontaneous movement to accomplish its political objectives.

Although it is still relatively early in the process, across the political and ideological spectrum, more are drawn into activity. On the one hand, for example, the Tea Party movement expresses how the economic crisis and bailout is radicalizing new sections of the population and propelling them into political activity. Fascistic agitation appeals to the ideological roots of the country, particularly the anti-government and individualist strains.

On the other hand, thousands in California have taken to the streets to protect the right to public education. From elementary school children to college professors and administrators — all strata are involved. The governor tries to deflect the anger from the state legislature, but the struggle expands.

In neither case is the ideology cohesive. The vast and diverse awakening gives a sense of both the social and mass struggle in the offing. Further deterioration of the econ-

omy will draw more sections of society into social struggle. Contention over class interests will manifest itself in mass struggle. Ultimately, out of the turmoil will come a polarization of class interests and programs.

Revolutionaries will be able to seize the potential of the objective character of the current revolutionary process. Like in no other revolution we have seen before in history, the character of the developing revolution is proletarian. Similarly, there has never been an antagonism between labor-replacing technology and a social system in which profit depends on the employment of labor, the expulsion of sections of the U.S. work force from productive life and employment, the cheapening of the labor that is still employed, nor the formation of a class that is objectively communist. The new class can accomplish its political development within the broader process of society beginning to fight out the resolution of the social effects of the economic revolution.

Nor is the polarization likely to be fought to an ideological conclusion within the current political party system and the grip it holds on the thinking of the populace. The developing polarization within and perceived ineffectiveness of the Democratic and Republican parties are setting the stage for the breaks in the continuity of the current political party system. Whether and when the polarization is expressed in the formation of a centrist party, a “social democratic” party

or a fascist party or some combination, some sort of political party realignment would set the conditions to accelerate the political polarization and political formation of the class.

Social struggle is a necessary phase from which can emerge a mass struggle with some broad, general understanding of “the 99% vs the 1%” or “us vs them.” Although we cannot predict any timetable for such a process, each stage of the revolutionary struggle has the potential to go faster than the last.

The actual resolution to each social calamity — from education to the environment — is the abolition of private property. The program of the new class can emerge within the phases of mass struggle — as the actual resolution to concrete problems.

Our country is headed for a period of struggle that is difficult to imagine after almost 40 years of calm. There will be breaks in continuity, moments at which revolutionaries will have the opportunity to influence more broadly and profoundly than in the past. With an understanding of the stages and phases of the revolutionary struggle, we can better focus our work and accomplish our mission.

Political Report of the Standing Committee of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America, March 2010