



THE RED PHOENIX

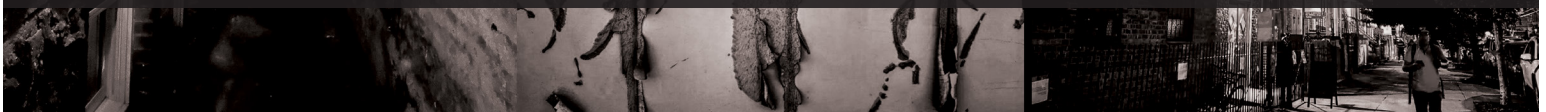
NEWSPAPER OF THE AMERICAN PARTY OF LABOR

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**WORKERS' LIVES MATTER!
PROTECT DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS!**



RAMÓN LIVED, RAMÓN LIVES, RAMÓN WILL LIVE FOREVER



Dear friends and comrades,

A strong and powerful proletarian heart has ceased to beat. On December 30th, our brother and comrade Ramón Pebenito lost his battle with cancer.

His life was devoted to serving the people and fighting for the rights of the marginalized and oppressed. Comrade Ramón was the best of what we are. We are heartbroken with grief, but we vow that Ramón's legacy of love and courage will live on in everything we do.

Ramón Pebenito, PRESENTE!

Alfonso Casal, National Chair of the American Party of Labor

Ramón V. Pebenito, born June 13th, 1983, was the son of Filipino immigrants to the United States. After earning his Bachelor's degree from George Mason University in 2005, he traveled abroad as a graduate student and saw firsthand the treacherous allure of social democracy in its European bastions as well as the ravages of open capitalism in the post-Soviet states of Lithuania and Hungary. Ramón worked with the International Labour Organization in Switzerland as a graduate intern researching social security law, health care, workers' compensation, and pension systems in the Balkan countries. Personal exposure to the housing conditions that were standard in several Eastern European nations deeply affected Ramón's perception on the shortcomings of revisionism and the utter abandonment of entire nations by imperialism in the 21st Century. Ramón returned to the United States and continued his education, earning a degree in Economics from the New School for Social Research in New York City. He involved himself in popular struggles serving as the District Policy and Organizing Director for the campaign of State Senator Julia Salazar, representing a diverse NYC community of Black and Latino working class families. He was also active in organizing public housing tenants to elect Jabari Brisport to the State Senate of New York, and he was one of the activists who led the occupation of City Hall in 2020. With a growing disillusion in reformist and revisionist tendencies in other organizations, Ramón joined the American Party of Labor that summer.

Ramón served as the secretary of the APL's New York City Division and was an active member of the Party's Oppressed Nationalities Commission. Ramón never slowed his practical activity, continuing to write articles and participating in demonstrations in New York, representing the party slogans of "Community Control of the Police Now" among others. Comrade Ramón worked to build mass organizations for housing justice and youth programs, including training with the Brooklyn Eviction Defense group and as a Community Advisor for the Bushwick Food Co-op. In his own words, "Food insecurity is a moral question of our time. Oppressed Black American, Latin American, Asian American, and immigrant families simply can't afford fresh, nutritious, sustainable vegetables and fruit. As the new Community Advisor, I'll fight to expand Bushwick Food Co-op across our most vulnerable North Brooklyn neighborhoods."

In response to several shootings in Hope Gardens, the largest public housing program in Brooklyn, the APL's New York Division organized Left Hook NYC, a youth boxing program where inner city kids and teens can utilize a safe environment after school to build community and establish friendships with peers from various neighborhoods, out of the scope of dangerous activities in the

streets. In the words of comrade Ramón, as founder and head coach of Left Hook, the project's mission is, "Building boxers. (re)Building community." In the final year of his life, Ramón worked for the Co-op Rideshare Service as an Organizing Director, helping to coordinate and organize workers in the rideshare industry to win better conditions and labor recognition in NYC.

More than the ideal communist organizer, Ramón Pebenito was a truly dynamic and inspirational character, representing the best not only of his Party but his class as well. Aside from his love for his communities he was passionate about boxing, street photography, music, and cuisine. For Ramón, the work of building socialism was not a weekend extracurricular, but his true full-time job and life's purpose. His comrades in New York and across the nation enjoyed the benefit of his friendship and personal solidarity, a precious resource for all in this time of reaction and pandemic. Our comrade devoted his life to the struggles of the working class and oppressed peoples, not just in the United States but the world over – a true citizen of the world. Comrade Ramón was the best of what we are.

"Make love, class war."



Ramón coaching his boxing students at Left Hook NYC.

RAMÓN LIVED, RAMÓN LIVES, RAMÓN WILL LIVE FOREVER



Ramón with Amazon Labor Union founder Chris Smalls.

"Our comrade Ramón was the beating heart of the American Party of Labor in New York City, but those he inspired will work every day to honor his work and be teachers, communists, and friends in his example. Bella ciao brother, thanks for always pushing me forward and encouraging me to be the best communist I could be."
—John Palameda

"Ramón was a stalwart revolutionary and activist. He was in my class in the party's educational course, we would talk on the phone for hours, and when I went to NYC for May Day, he guided me through the city and saw me safely home. The American working class has suffered a dear loss and I have lost my friend, teacher, and comrade. We will never forget you and your accomplishments Ramón. Hasta la victoria, mi hermano, siempre."
—Red Nesbitt

"We initially bonded as two disabled people in the constant struggle for self-advocacy. He does everything he can to assist anyone in need; he even helped me fight my landlord from 3000 miles away. I can depend on him whenever I need someone to listen, and his advice is always so level-headed. Ramón is compassionate yet ferocious, as every communist should aspire to be. I am lucky to call him my friend and comrade."
—June Vass

"To me, Ramón was a teacher. Whenever I talked or asked questions about my short and staggered dives into economic works such as Capital, he always made himself eagerly available to discuss and strengthen my understanding, and the understandings of so many learners in the party. He did everything he could to build up his comrades, and that is paramount to the very definition of a good communist."
—Andi E.



A photo taken by Ramón, December 3, 2021.

"If there's a heaven, then Ramón is convincing the angels to go on strike against their boss. We lost a friend and a revolutionary to cancer. He fought for workers and their children, for their housing, their food security, and for their education and self-confidence. He was strong, honest, fun and lovable. Ramón rejected the phrase 'I can't' and when he was in your corner you could see all the weak spots in any obstacles or system and he could show you what you had to do next. I pity the people who never met him and I envy those who were closer to him. Rest in peace, comrade."
—Sebastian Lemba

"He was a literal super hero. Standing up for community, an absolute genius, and a ray of burning passion. His revolutionary spirit will live on in all of us."
—Max N.

"I feel like every person he spoke to or inspired with his work is feeling this loss. He was a special person and we are lucky to have known him. We bonded over boxing... Every time I train now, I know I'll just see him and it'll push me to never quit and never settle. Ramón makes me want to be all I can. When someone asks who my favorite boxer is, who my inspiration is – Ramón Pebenito."
—Devin B.



"Communist Cosmonaut," a photo by Ramón, 2020.

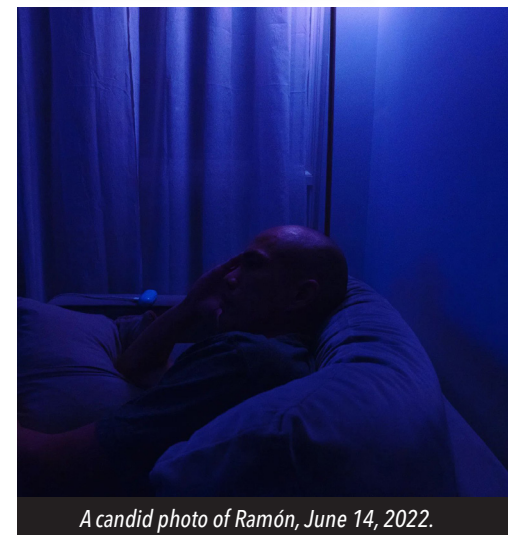
"He absolutely helped me get over my 'I'm new so my input doesn't matter as much' mindset. I'm so proud to have known him, even if just in a short time."
—Nadya H.

"Ramón was a great teacher and inspirer. He did everything in his power to move people to action. Action, based in proper theory, is where revolution really exists! He wanted us to become dangerous to the capitalists, and liberators for the working people. Even after he has left us, as I go through old messages, Ramón continues to be the great inspirer of the Ohio division, and of the party at large. I'll miss you, old friend."
—Robin H.

"Ramón was a sharp-witted, quick-witted, and valiant warrior. He had just joined the APL ranks when I first met him. He began to grasp the knowledge of Marxism-Leninism both with practice and theory in such a short time that after a while he began to teach young people. Ramón was a unique one. I will never forget a phrase which has a strong explanatory power, that I learned from him: "White Indifference, Black Emergency." It was as if something had slipped into this Filipino guy from the soil where Malcolm X was buried while he was still in embryo.

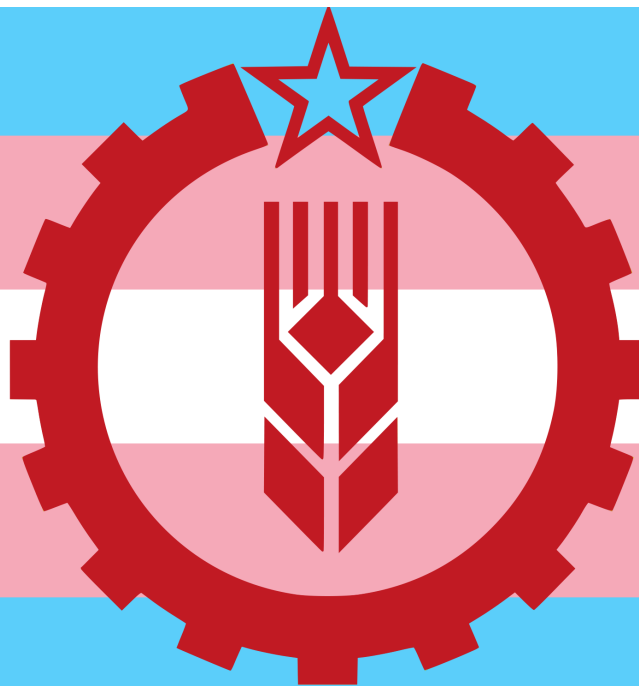
Death is a strange thing. A week will pass without Ramón, a month, then a few months, then a year. Then every time our hand will go to the phone to call Ramón, that darkness will sit in the heart. Ramón is no more. Getting used to the absence is dialectical after all. Colliding with the reality of absence once more every time. The more the heart beats, the more and more the heart breaks. But he won't be forgotten, his conscious will remain.

Such beautiful people are commemorated, children are named after them, novels, poems and articles are written about them, and laments are made. Presumably, such beautiful people, revolutionaries, remain like this in talks, consciousness and slogans. My handsome brother.. You ran away to leave us so early. As the poet, Enver Gökçe says: "Death, let your name be treacherous!" Farewell my thoughtful-faced comrade."
—Ekim Kılıç



A candid photo of Ramón, June 14, 2022.

AMERICAN PARTY OF LABOR: NATIONAL CALL TO DEFEND TRANSGENDER AND GENDER-NONCONFORMING PEOPLE



In an announcement two weeks ago, Donald Trump revealed a plan that he would enact if he were to be re-elected to President. This plan includes the banning of gender-affirming care for transgender youth, distorting it as "child abuse," "mutilation," "insanity," and promised to "end programs that promote the concept of sex and gender transition at any age." Trump revealed that his plan includes suing doctors for providing gender-affirming healthcare, suing teachers for implying the existence of transgender or gender-nonconforming people under the charge of sex discrimination, and a return to enforcing Trump's interpretation of Title IX, which means schools will be compelled to engage in anti-trans practices.

The American Party of Labor condemns this scheme by Trump, condemns Trumpite neo-fascism, urges the progressive and revolutionary forces in the United States to unite and defeat this resurgence of reaction, and stands in defense of the rights of trans and gender-nonconforming people.

In recent years, the reactionary forces within the United States have been building up their power to attack many marginalized communities. One of the many communities being harshly targeted by this dangerous growth of neo-fascism are the transgender and gender-nonconforming communities. These attacks are growing in number and scope evidenced by the 390 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills introduced in 2021, and 315 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills introduced in 2022. At the end of 2022, Texas, Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, and more had already pre-filed bills for the 2023 legislative sessions that will attempt to restrict and ban gender-affirming healthcare. Shockingly, in the first two months of 2023, 340 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills have already been introduced in state legislatures across the country, 25 more than in the entirety of 2022.

There have also been several successful attempts at banning or limiting resources for the transgender and gender-nonconforming communities. Arkansas explicitly allows private insurance companies the right to refuse to pay for gender-affirming healthcare, nine states explicitly exclude gender-affirming care through state Medicaid, and fifteen states exclude gender-affirming care from state employee health benefits. Utah became the first US state in 2023 to

outright ban gender-affirming care for trans and gender-nonconforming youth.

These legal attacks from the government are fueled by and reinforce rhetoric leading to literal attacks on transgender and gender-nonconforming people. In 2018, 16.5% of hate crimes were motivated by anti-LGBTQIA+ bias. The Human Rights Campaign declared that 2021 was the most fatal year for transgender or gender-nonconforming people with 57 fatalities, up from 44 in 2020. UCLA's School of Law found that LGBTQIA+ people are four times more likely to be a victim of a violent crime than non-LGBTQIA+ people. In the first two months of 2023 alone, at least four trans or gender-nonconforming people have already had their lives taken by hate.

The American Party of Labor sees these efforts by reactionary and growing fascist forces within the US as posing an ongoing and direct danger to the health and livelihood of the transgender and gender-nonconforming communities as well as others in the LGBTQIA+ community.

An attack on any segment of the working class is an attack that will negatively affect the proletarian class struggle. This growing danger to sections of the working class cannot be allowed to continue. Without the health, safety, and lives of LGBTQIA+ comrades, the struggles of the multi-ethnic and multi-national American working class, women, immigrants, the disabled, and youth will be deprived of numbers, experiences, and resources, and the overall struggle for a better world would be greatly robbed of unique experiences and lives.

The American Party of Labor, in light of these attacks, urgently calls upon the progressive and revolutionary forces to organize in defense of the transgender and gender-nonconforming peoples, to build alliances, support systems, and community organizations that will be able to push back against the growing threat to the very lives of these communities.

***Trans Lives Matter! Gender Non-Conforming Lives Matter!
LGBTQIA+ Lives Matter!***

WHY IT MATTERS: THE NEW BALANCE OF POWER IN GOVERNMENT

By Mike B, Red Phoenix correspondent, Ohio.

The dust has settled from the farcical election of Kevin McCarthy to the position of Speaker of the House. That left the current state of the American government more dysfunctional than ever. McCarthy's Republican Party, cascading ever farther to the right, is now beholden to a small clique of overtly neo-fascist legislators. They are bent upon imposing socially conservative laws and penalties upon working and poor Americans, as well as instituting fiscal policies aimed at collecting and concentrating unimaginable quantities of wealth in the hands of the ruling class.

The United States Supreme Court, dominated by an ultra-right majority, is on a parallel course relative with Congress, overtly attacking civil liberties and explicitly expressing their intent to further tear away the legal precedents which protect some of the country's most vulnerable people. These right-leaning "justices" of the country's highest court have issued a de facto ban on abortion in the United

States and appear poised to strike at the most fundamental rights of LGBTQIA+ people, people of color, the power of collective bargaining, and access to healthcare, benefits, and entitlements.

As the two above-noted branches of American government work in tandem, ideologues at local and state levels – from school boards to city councils and from city halls to state legislatures – are doggedly advancing the neo-fascist agenda through the tactics of exaggeration, fear-mongering, and outright dishonesty. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has particularly excelled at these practices, moving aggressively and with great fanfare to promote and enforce anti-gay and anti-trans policies and to promote sentiments and laws that assail the fundamentals of science and the credibility of common sense.

Donald Trump and the subsequent metastasis of his carefully cultivated cult of the individual have effectively unified neo-fascism in America into

a cohesive political movement. This movement threatens to first exert influence and control on every facet of daily life, and to eventually rule by means of overt repression. It is bolstered and amplified by a confederation of media platforms and personalities – from mainstream outlets like Fox News and Elon Musk's Twitter to the likes of Alex Jones and his ilk – who perpetuate Trumpian mythology, clouding the minds to poison the judgement of those who are susceptible to their messaging.

Even if Trump's renewed run for control of the executive branch proves unsuccessful, history has shown that fascism – and its Trump-era ideological successor, neo-fascism – will not simply wither and fade away by themselves. Moreover, this destructive and barbarous movement cannot and will not concede defeat through losses at the ballot box. The persistence of these ideologues and their murderous aspirations threaten the lives and livelihoods of all who oppose them, and that is precisely why this matters.

RAIL COMPANIES, PROFIT, AND THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

By Ian Ocx, Red Phoenix correspondent, Texas.

On Friday, Feb. 3rd, the city of East Palestine, Ohio experienced the result of corporate greed when a train derailed in the area, igniting a fire that burned tons of toxic vinyl chloride into the region's atmosphere in what will certainly be a devastating environmental and ecological tragedy for much of the population of the United States, as the derailment, spill, and ignition of the vinyl chloride threatens to poison rivers, farmlands, and animal life. These events were quickly followed by train derailments in South Carolina, Texas, and Michigan, quite literally days apart. This is by no means a coincidence of fate but is the result of rail companies spending years valuing profit over human life and lobbying against many planned safety regulations that would slightly impede their profit margin.

The lead-up to these devastating events can be traced back nearly a decade to 2014 when oil train spills hit a record level high. In response to pressures applied by environmentalists and labor rights advocates, the Obama administration began proposing safety improvements targeting trains carrying toxic, hazardous, and flammable materials. However, after much lobbying from rail companies and other industries, the improvements implemented by the Obama administration failed to truly combat the problem at hand and focused solely on trains carrying crude oil. This allows for exemptions from regulations for trains carrying other forms of hazardous and flammable materials, like the vinyl chloride seen in

the Ohio derailment. Later, under the reactionary presidency of Donald Trump, rail companies lobbied against many of the freshly enacted regulations, and in 2018 several regulations that would have required upgrading to more modern braking systems were repealed.

Much of the United States' train braking system still relies on technologies developed in the late 1860s. These old designs do not account for making quick emergency stops and often do not function properly considering that the weight load for trains and other technologies have increased since the braking systems' initial introduction. Many labor organizers and rail workers have argued that the braking system should be replaced with more modern ECP braking which focuses on an electronic signal, versus the currently used air-brake system. The ECP braking would be safer and provide more opportunity for trains that needed to stop suddenly such as in the case of an emergency. However, the accumulated cost of refitting trains with the more advanced braking systems, along with repairing damaged rail tracks to ensure their proper application, was clearly deemed too much of an expenditure. Instead, rail companies refused to invest in safety and chose to endanger their workers and the communities in which they operate. It is also worth noting that Norfolk Southern, the rail company responsible for the derailment in Ohio, initially supported the use of ECP brakes but never implemented them because they believed the cost of implementation outweighed the benefit of their use.

Rail workers last year were planning a massive strike to find some redress for their unsafe working conditions. Greg Regan, the president of the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO said, "The massive reduction in the workforce, attendance policies that encourage people to come to work when they're sick or exhausted, lack of access to [paid] leave, the stress that is constantly put on workers because of how lean the workforce has become, it creates a negative culture in terms of safety." But as the historic rail workers strike was being planned, President Biden and his administration fought on the side of the rail industry and aided in crushing the chances of a workers' strike and thus the workers' hopes for better living standards and safer conditions. These actions – directly siding with negligent rail companies – explicitly enabled the conditions which have caused the recent train derailments across the country. They will inevitably lead to even more disaster unless dire action is taken, but the lackluster response from the Department of Transportation headed by Pete Buttigieg once again proves that bourgeois institutions are not equipped to protect workers, their families, or our communities from the destructive nature of capitalism. Only in a society where workers are in control of their daily lives, working conditions, and safety protocols will communities and environments around the country be safe. Until that day dawns, rail companies will continue to prioritize lining their pockets with money instead of the safety of the public and planet at large.

SWANS PROTECTING ABORTION RIGHTS BY ALL MEANS NECESSARY (1/2)



By Ben Rizzo, Red Phoenix correspondent, Florida.

Long-established rights to abortion and reproductive healthcare are under attack as never before in America. The U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision of June 2022, which overturned its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that had established a right to the safe, legal termination of a pregnancy, has left it up to the states to pass any abortion restrictions they see fit. Many states with governments dominated by right-wing, Christian fundamentalists – emboldened that a shift in the court's composition to a two-thirds conservative majority (thanks to three justices appointed by Donald Trump) would eventually lead to the destruction of abortion rights – had already passed a flurry of new laws greatly restricting access to the procedure. Among these were Florida, where during the Spring 2022 legislative session, the Republican majority easily enacted a measure, signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis, that limited almost all abortions after 15 weeks.

Now in a post-Dobbs world, Florida's leaders are ready to double down on their efforts to control people's wombs. Florida Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples) has said that she would like to see the abortion limit lowered to 12 weeks during this year's legislative session, which begins March 7. In addition, DeSantis has already indicated an eagerness to sign a so-called heartbeat bill that would ban abortion after six weeks (which is sooner than many people realize that they're pregnant). "I'm willing to sign great life legislation. That's what I've always said I would do," proclaimed DeSantis at a press conference when asked if he would support such a measure. Abortion rights in Florida seem to be careening toward obsolescence at the same time that people from neighboring states with more restrictive laws flock to Florida for terminations. In response, in recent months there has been an upsurge in clinic defense activity meant to ensure that reproductive rights can be accessed without the harassment and danger posed by the anti-abortion fanatics who often surround clinics.

One example of a group in Central Florida that has stepped up to fill that security breach through clinic defense is SWAN – Stand With Abortion Now – a name inspired by the beautiful swans found in Orlando's Lake Eola Park. Recently, the Red Phoenix spoke with organizers from SWAN to learn about their activities and goals. That interview can be found below. In some cases, the responses may be from more than one member of group, in which case their first initial has been used before their response.

The Red Phoenix: What does SWAN stand for?

SWAN: Stand With Abortion Now

RP: How long has it been in existence?

SWAN: Since June of 2022

RP: What was the impetus behind its formation?

SWAN: The overturn of Roe v. Wade was the main reason for the formation of SWAN.

RP: What activities is it engaged in?

SWAN: [Our group] primarily functions as a clinic escort and defense group. SWAN's main focus is to protect our clinics' patients and staff from harassment and invasion of privacy from right-wing, Christian nationalist protesters who yell, lie, and film outside of the facility. However, we also provide resources to the unhoused community that continues to grow in the surrounding downtown community. We've also just recently obtained Narcan [Naloxone] to provide overdose reversal assistance to anyone in the area who may be at risk. First and foremost we are an abortion rights advocacy group.

RP: What type of people comprise SWAN?

SWAN: There're all types of people in SWAN. We accept all genders, races, religions, etc. The only folks we don't accept are fascists.

RP: Besides defending reproductive rights does it have a political agenda / ideological orientation?

SWAN: Primarily we're an abortion rights advocacy organization, but we also explore the intersecting issues that relate to abortion access and recent attempts to restrict it.

RP: What do you see in the future for abortion rights in Florida?

SWAN "T": Governor DeSantis is a blowhard but at his core he is a sniveling coward aching for donations and political capital. He has indicated his willingness to further restrict abortion access in the state, but I think it's unlikely he'll do it unless he feels it will give him an edge in his upcoming presidential race against Donald Trump. Abortion restrictions are hugely unpopular, and DeSantis is almost certainly aware of this. The deciding factor may be how strong his gerrymandering efforts really have been.

SWAN "K": What I would like to see and what I think will happen [to] abortion rights in the state of Florida are unfortunately very different. I would love for there to be more access, a lift on the 15-week ban, as well as better healthcare for patients in general. Unfortunately, with the way the Florida government is run and the insane gerrymandering throughout the state, I don't believe that will happen. I think things could possibly get more draconian. Thinking about the future of abortion rights in Florida seems like a slippery slope down a hill of uncertainty, frustration, and fear. As of right now there are less than 10 legitimate abortion centers in the state of Florida. I'm definitely afraid of what's going to happen here. I do know that regardless of what happens, SWAN and other abortion advocacy groups will be here to aid in any way we can to ensure patients get the care and support they need.

(Continued on next page)

SWANS PROTECTING ABORTION RIGHTS BY ALL MEANS NECESSARY (2/2)

SWAN "W": Florida has become a safe haven for abortion access in the South, however, personally I do not see it remaining that way for any substantial amount of time. Right-wing law makers have increasingly been pushing extremism on social issues to distract voters from their economic failures.

Unfortunately for marginalized groups of people who are impacted by these issues like abortion bans, "Don't Say Gay" bills, and the "Stop Woke Act," social issues are all the two parties are able to take wins and losses on due to their joined allegiance with capitalism. No true economic equality or wins can be made without disrupting the ruling class, so the threat of losing our rights must continue to be dangled in front of voters by faux progressive political leaders but never truly secured to motivate them to continue to participate in voting. Meanwhile, right-wing leaders are able to successfully destroy rights such as reproductive freedom to benefit their wealthy interests and win for their religious base. Florida has failed their people in housing, hurricane recovery, healthcare, and education. All of that is inconsequential though for the political right if they are able to win the religious majority with an extreme pro-birth stance, which they are surely doing.

RP: What type of response have you gotten from the public?

SWAN: We've gotten pretty much nothing but support and love from the community. We've been able to grow a tremendous audience on social media and have gotten material support from the local community as well. Our TikTok follower count is over 125,000 as of right now and continues to grow. We continue to grow in membership as well. Our mailbox continues to be filled with items on our wish list from folks who want to offer support.

SWAN "K": The response from the public has been overwhelmingly positive with a few bigots here and there. I think it's been a long time since such a loud and proud escort group has existed in central Florida. Of course there are the fringe comments that will occasionally come in to our social media accounts, but those are few and far between. I think on the whole, the public and patients are glad we're here.

RP: Have there been any interesting incidents or responses?

SWAN "T": Every day we cover clinic escorting duty is always interesting. We have a group of regular protesters who show up, but sometimes there will be new ones as well. We also get traveling anti-choice protesters. Our TikTok is full of the crazy antics of both our volunteers and the protesters we oppose. On Halloween, SWANs conducted clinic defense in costume. We were able to fund a patient's abortion via a fundraiser on TikTok live. We've had to call police because protesters have trespassed on the property. It really runs the gamut.

SWAN "W": I always think it's interesting that sometimes people think this cannot be real. They think our engagement with the anti-abortion protesters must be scripted. They cannot believe that these people would come out here and say the horrific things they do.

It really can be unbelievable and so I understand the confused response. That's why it's so important that we do the work that we do. It's SO important to show that these people are real. They exist. They are in our community. And it's not just one rogue church. These people exist everywhere and they torment people seeking healthcare across the nation.

RP: What are SWAN's long term goals?

SWAN: The complete and total protection of abortion rights, access, patients, and workers, not only for us but for all people who can become pregnant everywhere.

RP: How many people are in SWAN?

SWAN: More than we thought we'd have when we started. I don't want to give an exact number.

RP: What type of responses have you gotten from other reproductive rights advocates (i.e. Planned Parenthood), the clinics, etc?

SWAN: Some abortion rights advocacy groups take issue with our methods. There's been a longstanding tradition of clinic escorting that enforces non-engagement with protesters. We specifically do not abide by this rejection of any and all methods by which to conduct clinic escorting and defense. Our volunteers can and will engage with anti-choice protesters if it means we can better protect our patients and facility. Some organizations have decided not to work with us for that reason. However, we have the support of the clinic we defend and multitudes of patients that we've served, and that's enough for us.

RP: What, exactly, is SWAN's position on abortion rights?

SWAN: [Our group] is a proud advocate for abortion for any reason. SWAN believes that abortion is essential healthcare. Abortion is not shameful or embarrassing. Abortion is not something that should be stigmatized or hidden away from public discussion. Abortion today is something that should be celebrated due to modern methods that keep it an extremely safe option. Safe abortion allows patients to make a family planning choice without fear for their lives or well-being. SWANs are proud to help keep abortion accessible and safe.

RP: Does SWAN intend to get involved in electoral activities (supporting pro-choice candidates, etc.)?

SWAN: This has yet to be decided.

RP: Is there anything you would care to add?

SWAN: If you want even more info on SWAN, check out our TikTok (@swanofcentralfla) and our website (www.swanoflando.org).



LOS ANGELES JURY STANDS UP TO KILLER COP

By V. Valentino, Red Phoenix correspondent, California.

The family of Cesar Rodriguez, a police brutality victim in Los Angeles, forced a civil jury trial and won on January 20th after a grueling fight that lasted five long years. Despite what should be considered a victory with a unanimous decision by the jury, Long Beach officer Martin Ron will likely walk away with little more than a slap on the wrist. The failure of the courts to convict killer cops – as we have seen in the cases of Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Breonna Taylor, and countless others – and the continued enabling of police brutality, is exactly why Americans must establish community control of the police. It is clear today that based on the public mistrust of police, now is the time for real effective change in order to not only hold officers accountable for their crimes, but to set policies to prevent such abuses from happening in the first place.

In 2017, Long Beach police officers confronted 23-year-old Cesar Rodriguez after he failed to pay the \$1.75 fare to board the Blue Line train at Wardlow Station. The officers attempted to conduct a search and seizure of Rodriguez whereupon a struggle ensued after the victim strove to flee the scene. Officer Martin Ron tackled Cesar near the platform, leaving his legs hanging over the ledge. The northbound train struck him and he was trapped between the train and the platform for 25 minutes until firefighters finally freed him, but Rodriguez' life could not be saved.

Local activist and community organizer Cliff Smith, who attended the court proceedings in support of Rodriguez' family, observed that "of 53 potential jurors, some 15 openly stated negative experiences with the police." One person was acquainted with Paul Rae who was killed by East L.A. Sheriffs in 2019, another was kicked in the back and onto the street



The mother of Cesar Rodriguez, Rosa Moreno, in front of an altar made in honor of her son, February 2021.

after being arrested for marijuana possession, and another was a doctor who dated an LASD deputy who cheated on her three times. Despite many vain attempts to rationalize the actions of the accused, Smith reported that the jurors felt that those who took an oath to serve and protect were also subsequently trained to lie. Half of the potential jurors raised their hands when the defense attorney asked whether or not Cesar's family was deserving of compensation.

An LA County Superior Court jury issued a \$12.2 million compensation to the family in a verdict against officer Martin Ron for negligence that led to Rodriguez' death. Arnoldo Casillas, attorney for Cesar's family, shared the following statement online: "Ultimately, although the verdict is historic, it's a hollow victory for Cesar's mother, Rosa Moreno, and his family. Despite that the jury unanimously concluded that the cop's negligence killed Cesar, the officer will not be punished meaningfully." A life was taken for a crime amounting to a \$1.75 fare theft,

and yet the person responsible will be unlikely to ever see the inside of a jail cell.

This is precisely why we have a need for community controlled police. A directly elected civilian council would likely ensure that persons like officer Martin Ron are not only stripped of their badge, but also subject to the same consequences as everyone else. This can only be achieved if we the people have final authority on legal recourse and full access to all investigations regardless of the degree of misconduct. Furthermore, all current and former law enforcement agents must be excluded from serving on such a board. A system of checks and balances enforced by civilians would reassure the populace that they have the last word regarding who is entrusted with the duty of keeping them safe. Hiring and firing power of all law enforcement officials must be subject to the discretion of said council as well as determining policy and budget.

The fact that the majority of police brutality cases are settled out of court and never brought before a jury is an affront to the justice system. Cesar's case would not be making headlines if those entrusted to uphold the law were not in a position above the law. A gross revision of policy is sorely needed to make law enforcement subject to the will of the people and not vice versa. Every dollar spent must provide assurance that our wishes are honored. Furthermore, every superintendent, chief, and police officer must be elected by civilians to ensure that cases like Cesar's don't continue to multiply as they have been for decades. Perhaps the verdict carried out in LA County Superior Court this January will serve as a sign of better things to come. The time is long overdue.



Demonstrators act as pallbearers for victims of LYPD officers, Sept. 8, 2020. (Photo: Madalyn Amato /Daily Forty-Niner)

THE POLICE SYSTEM SUBVERTS THE OPPRESSED TO ASSIST IN ONGOING OPPRESSION



Tyre Nichols, 29. (Photo: Kris Volker)

By Hari Kumar, Red Phoenix international correspondent.

From all the untold and unnamed before and in between these names – Emmett Till, Rodney King, Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd – in 2023, add Tyre Nichols.

After George Floyd's death progressives the world over hoped things for Black people in the hands of American police would improve. But we knew that without an ongoing working peoples' and progressives' mobilization, the outrage over Floyd's death would not lead to adequate change. After public pressure, the bodycam footage of the brutal death of Tyre Nichols at the hands of five Black police officers in Memphis was finally released. It horrifies us again. But what else should it do? We describe the events briefly, and then reiterate why reformist measures, while needed, will not lift this oppression from people of color in the US.

"The police officers kicked Tyre Nichols in the head, pepper-sprayed him and hit him repeatedly with a baton, even as he showed no signs of fighting back. At one point, after Mr. Nichols stood up, one officer struck him with at least five forceful blows while another held Mr. Nichols' hands behind his back. Soon, Mr. Nichols, 29, was on the ground – not far from the home he shared with his mother and stepfather – crying out in anguish: 'Mom, Mom, Mom.'" (*New York Times*, January 28, 2023)

That the officers are Black themselves merely shows how the police system subverts the oppressed to assist in ongoing oppression. As Mr. Nichols' mother RowVaughan Wells said:

"To the five police officers that murdered my son, you also disgraced your own families when you did this. I'm going to pray for you and your families, because at the end of the day, this shouldn't have happened. This just shouldn't have happened. We want justice for my son."

Mrs. Wells was extraordinarily gracious. While not wishing to add any hurt, prayers are not enough to change the systemic issues here. Although these police officers were quickly dismissed and charged with second degree homicide, the officers may yet escape just conviction. That will in part depend on whether a special grand jury is convened to hear their case. That system has long been abused and enables the authorities to escape just desserts. As the American Bar Association told a hearing in 2000:

"The grand jury is a unique body in our legal system. It possesses awesome powers: The grand jury's work is conducted in secret... Courts do not generally supervise its work closely... But the grand jury has also come under increasing criticism for being a mere 'rubber stamp' for the prosecution without adequate procedural safeguards. Critics argue that the grand jury has largely lost its historic role as an independent bulwark protecting citizens from unfounded accusations by the government."

Both the police and the legal systems are stacked against Black victims, other people of color, and the working class as a whole. In "The German Ideology" Marx and Engels warned that the law is only the expression of the will of the ruling class; it becomes the law of state: "The individuals who rule in these conditions – leaving aside the fact that their power must assume the form of the state – have to give their will, which is determined by these definite conditions, a universal expression as the will of the state, as law, an expression whose content is always determined by the relations of this class, as the civil and criminal law demonstrates in the clearest possible way."



This pan-US struggle pits the Black working class against the police. But Black workers have not been silent over the US in the last 50 years. As Yale University historian Elizabeth Hinton points out, Black populations have mounted repetitive resistance, nearly always precipitated by police violence:

"These types of uprisings have been a nearly perennial occurrence in the United States for more than fifty years. In the month following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., black uprisings erupted in more than 125 cities, leading to 50 deaths and more than 15,000 arrests. In the years that followed (1968-72), at least 960 segregated black communities witnessed 2,310 separate incidents of what journalists and state security officials described as 'disturbances,' 'uprisings,' 'rebellions,' 'melees,' 'eruptions,' or 'riots'... this type of collective violence almost always started with contact between residents and the frontline representatives of the state—the police—and then quickly moved to other institutions."

Marxist-Leninists understand that while resistance is primarily voiced by Black Americans it is also loudly echoed by people of all races – including many who are white. Such solidarity recognizes the validity of Marx's dictum as declared in *Capital Vol 1*, "In the USA, every independent workers' movement was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin."

Dr. Martin Luther King prophetically recognized toward the end of his life that only "social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention. There is no other answer. Constructive social change will bring certain tranquility; evasions will merely encourage turmoil."

But capitalism does not easily hear such words. The more far-sighted capitalists recognize there must be changes if the system is to survive. But again: "capitalism would not be... etc!"

The problem facing the working class and its supporters is that there is no viable organized Marxist party to fight for a socialist path. Decidedly, Biden and the Democratic Party do not fill the role. They may make some reforms which we willingly take, but they are always far short of what is needed: a determined workers' party, both in theory and practice, that can assist in forging the necessary links between all sections of a divided class of workers.

INFLATION AND RECESSION, THE CYCLICAL CRISIS OF CAPITALISM (1/2)

By Victor Vaughn, National Secretary of the American Party of Labor.

The prices for things keep rising: why?

Nothing is untouched by inflation, not even books.

The Economist recently reported that some publishers are actually starting to shrink the white space between characters and run text closer to the ends of the pages in books printed for popular consumption. This is in order to cut costs, because the paper British publishers use has increased 70% in price in the past year.

Since then, Google trends clearly show a huge spike in the number of people searching "what is inflation?" This is hardly a shock, given how often politicians and economists talk about inflation as some inexplicable, incurable plague.

Looking around, it's not hard to see examples of inflation. After all, the price of nearly all commodities has skyrocketed since 2021.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported consumer prices rose 6.5% since December of 2021, and that only covers outright price increases for commodities. Just as many companies are quietly downsizing products while keeping the prices the same, a long-running phenomenon known as "shrinkflation." In fact, there's now even an official shrinkflation Subreddit for people to document the shrinking size of products. Just recently, Gatorade reduced its 32 oz. bottle to a 28 oz. bottle by introducing a new design.

What is inflation?

One of the oddest things about modern economic life is the tendency of the price of all commodities to rise over time. In 2023, 1 U.S. dollar buys you the same amount of stuff as 3 pennies did in 1904. This persistent increase in the level of consumer prices, or decline in the purchasing power of money, is what we call "inflation."

What makes inflation happen?

Inflation can happen in any economic system. It goes as far back as paper and tokenized money itself, to the stamped metal tokens of ancient times. Inflation is caused by an increase in the money supply, either directly by the issuing of more banknotes and coin, or indirectly by the granting of bank credits. Any system where there is an increase in the circulation of money can experience a fall in the value of that money, no matter how that society produces goods.

Capitalist theories of inflation

While it's possible for any economy to experience inflation, it's only under this stage of monopoly capitalism where it's taken on a "universal" and "chronic" character. Controlled inflation of about 2% per year is considered the "model" for all nations to strive for. This idea comes from the bourgeois economist John Maynard Keynes, who argued for a small amount of controlled inflation and for some small increments in wages and some social spending. All as a means to save capitalism, since if workers do not buy the goods they themselves have produced – as they simply cannot afford it – capitalists are in a bind.

Many capitalist economists, academics, and politicians would be happy with 2% annual inflation to continue on forever, because they describe this as the "normal and desirable" state of affairs for a thriving free market economy. This is because inflation encourages spending, and therefore drives consumption in favor of the capitalist class.

How does inflation encourage spending?

When inflation is high, it's perceived by some workers as better to spend money now than to save it, since money in savings will simply be devalued over time. This causes an immediate effect in the economy when people realize the cost of a certain commodity is going to go up, and that it's better to buy it now. Deflation, the opposite of inflation, is a reason not to spend money. When the value of money goes up, people hold onto it instead of spending it, which holds back economic development in general.

The Keynesian theory follows that workers benefit from small-to-moderate amounts of inflation, since economic growth drives an increase in the demand for labor.

This creates an odd paradox: as inflation rises, unemployment rates become lower and prices rise for all commodities, including labor, since under capitalism labor is a commodity to be bought and sold like any other.

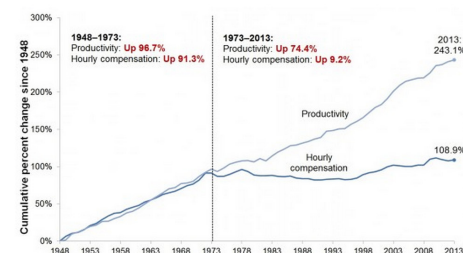
Keynesians often argue that data shows that as inflation rises, unemployment rates become lower and prices rise for all commodities, including labor, since under capitalism labor is a commodity to be bought and sold like any other. This is the so-called "Phillips Curve." However, more recent data appears to contradict this view. Even pro-capitalist economists such as Paul Krugman, a "soft" Keynesian, agree.

Nonetheless, this supposed link between low

unemployment and inflation is a convenient myth. It allows Central Banks and capitalists to continue to justify raising unemployment overall. From the capitalists' viewpoint, higher unemployment (i.e. the reserve labor army) enables them to lower wages because of "competition."

The flaw in the logic

The capitalist class uses inflation as a means to manage wages in relation to their own profits. The main myth the capitalists push is that wage demands from the working class cause inflation and push the cost of everything up. But wages don't keep pace with inflation the way they're supposed to according to this myth, even though labor is now more productive than ever before. The Economic Policy Institute reported that hourly compensation rose just 9% from 1973 to 2013, while productivity increased 74%.



A graph showing the disconnect between productivity and typical worker's compensation, 1948-2013.

This is not to mention that any actual rise in wages is usually depressed beneath the increase in prices. So even if they rise nominally, real wages actually fall since their purchasing power is decreased. This means that the working class bears the brunt of inflationary pressure.

Inflation is really about keeping business profitable, since ordinary people who save money are punished, but debtors and private business owners benefit. Some stockholders – those in an industrial base or in businesses relying on selling commodities – make gains from increased business profits. Bondholders lose money because fixed percentages diminish in buying power over time, since the future value of the money is reduced by definition. So financiers and stockholders in financial affairs lose money. Debtors also indirectly benefit from inflation, in that over time their debts are reduced in value.

Fictitious capital

Throughout history most currencies, including the U.S. dollar, were linked to valuable commodities like gold or silver so that the maximum amount in circulation was dependent on a government's precious metal reserves. This controlled runaway

INFLATION AND RECESSION, THE CYCLICAL CRISIS OF CAPITALISM (2/2)

inflation. But there is simply no longer enough gold in the world to return to the gold standard without a massive shrinkage in the money supply. In fact, no country in the world is on the gold standard today. The last to abandon it was Switzerland, over two decades ago.

The fuel that runs the modern post-WWII global economic system is what Marx called "fictitious capital," meaning money thrown into circulation as speculative capital without any material basis in commodities or productive activity. These include things such as stocks, shares, and bonds that are issued by private companies.

The calls of free market ideologues for a return to the Gold Standard are simply not based in reality: the creation of this "fictitious capital" has been the engine driving the entire global capitalist economy since the Great Depression. Not tying the currency to gold allows the government to adjust the amount of money in circulation and interest rates. A state returning its currency to being backed by precious metals cedes control of the money supply during an economic crisis.

The rate of inflation is not linked to wage increases, but to the money supply as a matter of government policy, through which the capitalist class attempts to keep up the general rate of profit. In simple terms if the Central Bank printed more money, when released into the general circulating pool it would "cheapen" the money.

In the United States, the Federal Reserve raises and lowers the interest rate at which banks borrow and lend money to one another. Central Banks elsewhere attempt to do the same. Raising the interest rate increases the cost of borrowing, which cools down the creation of new fictitious capital, which slows inflation.

Inflation is easing, recession is likely coming, and corporate profits are at all-time highs

An article in the Wall Street Journal on January 15th reported that economists still expect a recession in the near future. The good news is that inflation was measured at 6.5% in December, down from its peak of 9.1% in June; the bad news is that the "soft landing" promised by politicians and economists is looking less and less likely. The WSJ surveyed 71 business and academic economists, who collectively forecasted a 61% probability of recession in the next 12 months.

It's almost impossible to find a single business or political leader not bracing for a recession, which

workers are simply asked to accept as inevitable. This is all part of the cyclical crisis of capitalism, or "business cycle" of boom and bust. Inflation and recession are inseparably linked:

"The business cycle arises from the 'distance' that opens up between the production and the consumption of a commodity, bridged by debt, and the huge mass of fictitious capital which builds up on the basis of the credit system. As this mass of paper value and speculative capital grows, the system becomes more and more unstable, the recession more devastating. Tweaking the interest rates and money supply to stave off this crisis is like driving a Formula One racing car; the central bankers of the capitalist powers are very skilled at the art, but the task of avoiding a crash gets harder and harder and fictitious capital circulates around the world in greater and greater masses."

Inflation peaked at 9.1% back in June, 2022. Fittingly, the Wall Street Journal reported that job gains were well in excess of what was expected, bringing unemployment to its lowest in 53 years. Meanwhile after that same jobs report, stocks closed on a severe downturn, causing worries of a recession.

This is that same paradox at the heart of capitalism in practice: like any other commodity, low unemployment means a rise in the value of labor, which means workers will expect more wage increases, and that means it will eat into profits of private business owners.

Thus, something that should be good economic news – record low unemployment – is considered a disaster heralding recession.

How the capitalist class exploits inflation

Companies claim these recent price increases are necessary and are just passing costs onto customers. The problem is corporate profits are somehow still hitting record highs since the pandemic, to the tune of \$2.08 trillion, an increase of 80% in the last two years.

This represents a change of strategy on the part of the capitalist class from the time-honored tactic of suppressing wages, to raising prices. Apologists will likely say that prices are just keeping up with inflation because the costs of production have gone up, but all available data says that these record profits disproportionately come from increased prices. The Economic Policy Institute confirms this is "not normal:"

"Since the trough of the COVID-19 recession in the

second quarter of 2020, overall prices in the NFC [non-financial corporate] sector have risen at an annualized rate of 6.1%—a pronounced acceleration over the 1.8% price growth that characterized the pre-pandemic business cycle of 2007–2019. Strikingly, over half of this increase (53.9%) can be attributed to fatter profit margins, with labor costs contributing less than 8% of this increase. This is not normal. From 1979 to 2019, profits only contributed about 11% to price growth and labor costs over 60%[.]"

Even more disturbing, the Wall Street Journal itself is even forced to admit that average wages have "showed no corresponding leap" to keep up with inflation. Predictably, the WSJ spun this into a positive step to keep the economy growing, blaming the current inflation rate on wage increases.

Even the most business-minded individual will have a hard time coming to a conclusion other than an additional \$0.8 trillion of wealth has been looted from the economy overnight, by the private sector price-gouging goods at more than the rate of inflation in order to avoid the social unrest associated with cutting wages.

And this is the central point: inflation is portrayed as something to be managed as part of a growing economy. But in reality under capitalism, it is weaponized to reorganize wealth allocation in favor of the capitalist class.

In the end, this was the real flaw in Keynesianism from the start.

Perhaps Karl Marx said it best in the manuscript for the second volume of Capital, in which he famously scribbled the following note:

"Contradiction in the capitalist mode of production: the labourers as buyers of commodities are important for the market. But as sellers of their own commodity—labour-power—capitalist society tends to keep them down to the minimum price.

—Further contradiction: the periods in which capitalist production exerts all its forces regularly turn out to be periods of over-production, because production potentials can never be utilised to such an extent that more value may not only be produced but also realised; but the sale of commodities, the realisation of commodity-capital and thus of surplus-value, is limited, not by the consumer requirements of society in general, but by the consumer requirements of a society in which the vast majority are always poor and must always remain poor."

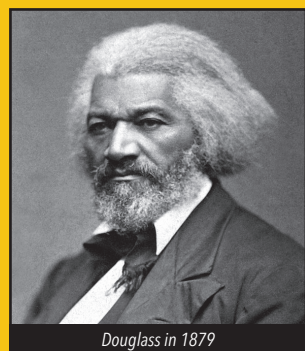
About the Red Phoenix

The Red Phoenix is the mass voice of the American Party of Labor, published and printed bi-monthly. It is a newspaper dedicated to providing a creative and original insight on what is happening in the United States of America and around the world. Along with analysis of important news, events, reviews, and commentary, the paper also includes interviews and letters from workers across the country. The goal of the Red Phoenix is to provide a platform for working people of all kinds, without the biases and mitigation of corporate media.

The Red Phoenix is aimed at revolutionary and progressive-minded people, activists, workers, and others who are fighting in firm opposition to the war against the poor and the oppressed. Our political stands are taken from a revolutionary perspective and our writing serves as a medium of expressing that sentiment.

The Red Phoenix was founded in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, as a way to give a platform and voice for working class people left outside popular media narratives. During the Trump presidential campaign and the George Floyd Movement, the Red Phoenix grew to have correspondents across the country seeking to interview workers, analyze the resurgent labor movement, and agitate for a true workers' democracy. In our era of misinformation and rising fascism and union-busting, the need for true working class stories, under the "blue and red" mythology, has never been greater.

To help us with our work by subscribing, donating, or submitting your own articles for publication, please contact our editors at RedPhoenixNews.com



"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."

Frederick Douglass (c.1817–1895)

From a speech in 1886, on the 24th anniversary of Emancipation, Washington, D.C.

About the American Party of Labor

The APL is a revolutionary working class organization. Our aim is to abolish the capitalist system and replace it with a socialist, working democracy, a system based on the principle laid out by Marx, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." There can be no true freedom or democracy when billionaires have more wealth than the bottom 90% of Americans.

★ **An Anti-Revisionist, Internationalist Party:** The American Party of Labor is a dedicated anti-revisionist party, opposed to concessions to capitalists, and critical of all imperialist actions by the US, Russia, and China. The APL is an observer member in the International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations (ICMLPO), and participates in the international anti-revisionist struggle.

★ **A Party of Working Class People:** The American Party of Labor is made up of workers fighting for workers' rights. Many of our members are in active union and unionization struggles, and we all do our political work after clocking out.

★ **A Party of Equals:** The APL is active in the fight for the rights of women, oppressed nations, the LGBTQIA+ community, and immigrants, and for the community control of police departments. In 2019, the APL was a founding member in the National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression.

★ **Forever Anti-Fascist:** We uphold the anti-fascist legacy of the Marxist-Leninist movement. Members of the American Party of Labor are active in movements against the Far-Right on college campuses, and the barbaric treatment of immigrants at the border.

Who can join? How do I get involved?

Every working person who is open to our plan for change, agrees with our Program and Platform, and is over the age of 18 is welcome to apply.

To look at our joining procedure, activity, membership FAQ, and more, please visit:

AmericanPartyofLabor.com

You can find everything that you should know about us here, and you can contact us and connect to members in your area.

If we don't have a presence in your city, we'll get to know you and help you establish one.

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Editorial Board: Victor Vaughn, Alfonso Casal, Hari Kumar, Benjamin Rizzo, John Palameda, Sebastian Lemba, June Vass, Mike B.

Managing Editor: June Vass

Staff: Red Nesbitt, Ian Ocx, V. Valentino



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Why are we Marxist-Leninists in the USA in the 21st century?

There is an important fundamental difference between Marxism and other so-called anti-capitalist or "third way" theories. Marx, unlike many thinkers of his day, did not see a problem with capitalism that could just be mitigated. Instead, he and his compatriots analyzed capitalism itself to understand how the system worked. Marx's ideas for revolution are based on that analysis, and the experiences of the struggles in Europe of 1848. Solutions to the problems of capitalism can only be reached by understanding and observing the system itself, textured with the political reality of the country and historical struggles. This is why we think revolutionary history is worth talking about, and making part of our platform.

Regarding the regulation of capitalism and emergent social democratic reform movements, it is not uncommon that capitalist states restrict the private sector for various reasons. The problem is that political power is still stacked in favor of the ruling class; they have every avenue and all the resources necessary undo reforms and regulations. What truly led to the collapse of the socialist bloc was not that these nations pursued communism, which was ultimately too radical, but rather that these nations pursued market style reforms until they had more or less become capitalist countries. As we have seen in the US, liberal victories are short-lived.

Today, social democratic movements would have us do much the same, if not less – regulate capitalism, nationalize some industry, and try to maintain a welfare state – without expropriating the ruling class, without giving the nation a clear direction for the future, and worst of all, without putting the working class in power. We cannot face climate change, resurgent fascism, police brutality, the exploitation of oppressed nations, and the threat of American imperialism around the world without a revolutionary, centrally organized movement.



**PEACE,
EQUALITY,
SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY**

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