

U.S. Conjunctural Analysis

Introduction

We are in a new phase of imperialism ushered in by the 2008 financial crisis. US power is in decline. The most stalwart voice for Western Imperialism, The British magazine *The Economist*, noted in its September 17, 2016 Leader, that today's rise of tech oligopolies and their avoidance of taxes etc. has cast the shadow of "1917 and all that"! How fitting that this year marks the 100th anniversary of the Great October Revolution!

The workers and dispossessed of the world suffered a defeat and crisis that was symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The international agenda of 1990's was dominated by US capitalist hegemony under the guise of neoliberal globalization. There were subsequent critical articulations against the US proposal to dominate the South: most notably the World Social Forum and subsequent People's Movements Assemblies (fully supported, it should be noted, by Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution). The rise of popular movements and progressive governments in Latin America altered the balance of forces and were a beacon of hope everywhere. Brave and heroic Cuba endures!

The actual existence of socialism in Latin America, in the age of "There Is No Alternative", has had a real effect on political environments elsewhere. In the first years of the 21st century Latin American leftists, including Evo Morales, Manuel Correa and Fernando Lugo, took inspiration in the Venezuelan experience to shift from the exclusive terrain of protest politics to making concerted attempts to take power via elections. Subsequently, Left activists from Spain, France, Greece and Germany came and spent time in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and were in many cases involved in forming new political parties and movements in their respective countries that clearly derived inspiration from Latin America's left experiences, a fact which they often recognized quite openly.

Yet all serious struggles involve contestation. The US government (National Endowment for Democracy, USAID etc.), US & European foundations (Open Society, Omidyar, Ford & Rockefeller etc.) and international NGOs aligned with Western

interests, have - since the early 80s - been funding and training what they and liberal partners promote as legitimate “civil society” to promote the Washington Consensus playbook, buy off and corrupt a generation of youth with narcissistic individualism and undermine the left. The left governments in Latin America have been consistently attacked and undermined by US imperialism. The anti-globalization movement became infiltrated. Even the term “social movement” became co-opted!

180 million workers went on strike in India on September 2, 2016 - the greatest strike in human history! Feminist and dignity movements are evolving everywhere, some led of course by bourgeois elements, yet in Brasil, women militants challenged capital and seized land and occupied buildings owned by the mining company Valle.

Capital moves 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, relentlessly and virtually. It's representatives traverse the globe unhindered. The global working class, poor, marginalized and dispossessed must urgently create a new form and wave of internationalism to rally its forces and build capacity to move from the defensive to the offensive. Ironically, our class faces challenges similar to those faced during the birth of the first International.

The rise of Digital Monopoly Capital and other growing internal contradictions of capital

A new form of capital, Digital Monopoly Capital, threatens extinction or subordination for nearly all other segments of capital including banks, the historic embodiment of finance. Five US Silicon Valley technology firms (Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook)—the top five corporations in the world ranked by stock value, displacing banks and energy companies from the list—are now simultaneously Department One and Two oligopolies. For instance, Google's share of all searches is 80% on desktops and 95% on mobile devices. Five of the wealthiest eight individuals in the world (who collectively own 426 billion dollars and have as much wealth as the bottom 50%) established their wealth through technology monopolies. We are faced with a sick frenzy of who will become the world's first trillionaire.

Intellectual property rights and behavioral surveillance technologies are

fundamental to this new accumulation model. A new round of privatization and enclosure is in the offing, marketed as “smart cities,” where large tech firms take over the management of cities’ infrastructure and public services based on the efficiencies in areas they can deliver like energy consumption, traffic management etc. The underlying technologies: billions of sensors (the so-called Internet of Things) and advanced software (Big Data et al) are resulting in an even greater intrusion into every personal and minute detail of life. Multi-generational and life-time entrenched class privilege is cleverly codified.

Even more alarming is the proliferation of the first successful form of artificial intelligence - so-called machine learning. It is tremendously powerful, useful and seductive. It will lead to the medium term elimination of huge segments of unskilled, semi-skilled and even skilled labor—perhaps an even greater impact on labor than has resulted from the last 30 years of technology innovation. But this technology also presents a danger of enabling large scale behavioral modification and the marginalization or usurpation of human agency itself.

Digital Monopoly Capital now plays three nearly independent roles. First, it is both the dominant force in the intelligence functions of the deep-state and increasingly important it is critical to mass scale psychological behavioral control. Second, it is a dominant part of culture, communications and the ideological forces of the superstructure. Third, as we have noted, it is dominant in the base of the economy. Previous monopolies had no such extensive and wide control of society. This form of capital represents a clear and present danger to humanity.

Technology is not neutral: it reinforces existing class inequalities. Certain technologies are so advanced and dangerous, often highly centralized and concentrated, that even if private property and the profit motive were abolished they may need to be fundamentally reengineered, slowed down or abolished. The negative consequences are often not immediately understood. They cannot be left to just technologists or scientists to decide how they should be used, but need social control; the people must decide how, when and if such technologies can be used. Examples include transgenics, human cloning and certain kinds of machine learning.

The so-called engine of efficiency—capitalism—is in reality a huge engine of waste

and misappropriation of labor time and surplus, and produces false scarcity. Capitalism falsely claims that profitability is the right measurement and hides its lies in many ways including ignoring externalities such as the cost of environmental plunder, waste and human misery.

Lean production methods were touted as a great advance. They “optimize” the supply chain. But in reality some of this was based on massively artificially low energy prices that were established by war and military subsidy. Importing Fiji branded bottles of water over vast oceans of water in half empty container ships is sheer nonsense. Lean was used to deindustrialize large economies like South Africa from 20.9% in 1994 to less than 11% today. This is greed and geo-political force and terror in action not “efficiency”.

FAO reports last year that the world, with a population of about 7 billion, produces enough food to feed 13.7 billion people despite 1 billion hungry and malnourished, another 1 billion at the edge. With the explosion of ethanol production for fuel, the poor and dispossessed of the world are being forced to compete with cars for access to staple grain crops. Capitalism’s drive to produce exchange value over use values has reached absurd proportions and immoral contradictions. We produce more than enough food to feed every person on earth but billions starve to preserve profitability.

We are quickly reaching the limits of the planet’s capacity to absorb the ravages that capitalism is wreaking in terms of global warming, air and water pollution, soil exhaustion, ocean acidification etc. without causing a truly massive climate refugee crisis. The physical planet might be fine but human survival is not guaranteed.

The working class will have to develop new strategies and tactics for this new world. The time has long since passed for us to determine a new demand to replace the 8-hour day. The near elimination of human labor requires us to once again dare to dream and define a liberating future.

The post 9/11 state

Capitalism and imperialism have always been violent. The aftermath of 9/11: the perpetual war on terror, the Patriot Act etc. result in a qualitatively different form of

the deep-state. The Military Industrial Congressional complex identified by Eisenhower in the 1950's extends into the Digital Industrial Security Complex. Intelligence functions grow exponentially, five million US citizens with security clearance spy on the world. Millions of sub-contractors now perform core state functions: from front line mercenaries to system administrators. The NSA sublimates the intelligence functions of the four other imperialist powers that are part of the "Five Eyes" into its nexus. Critical parts of UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand state are now funded vassals of the US state.

Every TV, cell phone, laptop and Internet connected device, even when turned off and disconnected is a spying device. The mission of the CIA, "Collect It All", is to gather all data on every citizen in the world from birth to death. No child with any form of electronic device is safe in their own bedroom or bathroom.

Citizens lose both privacy and all pretense of the right to privacy. A million top security clearance bureaucrats read their emails, collect all their photos, watch them secretly on their video cams, listen to them in their living rooms, and analyze their networks of friends. The right to forget is eliminated. The citizens' behavior is both observable and controllable, explicitly as well as surreptitiously. A science fiction nightmare becomes reality. The world owes Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and others a huge debt for exposing this.

The US technology sector, back to the days of Bell Telephone and the transistor, IBM and mainframes, and the design and protocols for the Internet, was always funded and deeply connected to the US military. So, it comes as no surprise that post 9/11 the tech sector fuses itself to the core of the state. The sheer volume of the data they collect has required the outsourcing of both the storage and the analysis of that data to Silicon Valley firms. Even five million spies cannot possibly analyze that amount of big data, so machine learning is now applied to find patterns, identify suspects, modify behavior and put names on the weekly Tuesday drone-assassination list.

The US government protects the monopoly positions of key tech firms like Google domestically (e.g. via the FCC to weaken net neutrality) and internationally (e.g. via economic blackmail to enforce draconian intellectual property rights protection

guised as “free-trade” extensions to GATT etc.). As a quid-pro-quo, the tech sector (for a handsome fee) provides key technology and support including digital infrastructure such as the Amazon cloud for the CIA as well as the creation of powerful software to analyze big data by Palantir (co-founded by Peter Thiel) for “clients” such as the CIA, DHS, FBI, NSA, Marine Corps and Air Force. Indeed, when their previous favorite Hillary Clinton lost the election, they pivoted within days to sponsor 150 Republican Senators and Congressional representatives at a far right think tank dinner. Google has already become the largest lobbyist in Washington.

The history of the East India Company reminds us that this form of symbiotic relationship of state-sponsored business monopolies is indeed not new. Apple’s cash hoard, recently standing at \$216 billion, is greater than the GDP of 141 countries. Some have estimated this could represent as much as 7% of world’s free cash. Even *The Economist* recognizes that these Frankenstein-like near feudal-like companies have no predators.

The decline of US power

We are seeing the beginning of the long-term decline of US power. We must note that this is not, in itself, a reason to celebrate. As Marx noted, socialism is not inevitable and there are moments in history when the battle between conflicting classes can result in a period of barbarism, not in outright victory for one of the protagonists. A wide swath of humanity from Libya to Syria, from Sudan to Afghanistan is in a permanent state of humanitarian crisis. Its peoples, land, history and culture are being eviscerated with impunity.

The US’s new military surrogate in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, has a military budget greater than Russia, and is bombing Yemen ports thus putting hundreds of thousands of lives at risk. This is an infuriating example of the moral bankruptcy of their power and rule. The endless war on terror has become a cancer on the human race.

There are three main elements underlying the decline of US power and its ability to maintain “global order”.

First, the general crisis of capital is very severe. It took about 72 months for the US economy to regain the jobs they lost in 2008. This was the slowest recovery since the Great Depression. Eighty eight percent of the job losses of the last thirty years are due to productivity and technology advances, not job “exports” to Mexico and China. Speculative investment like idle real estate in Manhattan is on the rise. The upcoming fourth industrial revolution with technologies like machine learning will continue the massive assault on the need for work and workers. The ranks of the so-called “precariat”— those marginally employed— can only continue to grow even larger. If you delete China’s figures from world economic growth over the last 15 years, there is large-scale stagnation. The US economy is hollowed out. Consumption is credit driven. It is an economy and system in decline.

Second, the US is losing the uni-polar world status that it gained with the defeat of the Soviet Union. The 1990’s and early 2000’s saw the US play a dominant role in geopolitics. To some degree, the return of large portions of Russia to the world capitalist system helped temporarily alleviate the crisis. But now China and Russia are gaining in geopolitical influence at the expense of the US. The US Empire, like many before it, is over-reaching. The United States has more foreign military bases than any other empire in history with over 800 bases located around the world. There are 5 million Americans with security clearance. There is still a dangerous large military industrial digital security complex that both Republicans and Democrats are determined to expand. The March 2017 announcement by the US of enabling THADD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) in Korea is a hugely worrisome provocation of China.

Third, the traditional “hub and spokes” mechanisms of control are in disarray. NATO, the UN, the EU and the OAS no longer function in a manner that the US state and global capital require. Empire over reach became the norm under Obama and Clinton. The restarting of the nuclear weapons race, including Obama’s plans for atomic escalation, including a new generation of weapon carriers, priced at a trillion dollars over the next three decades, the provocations towards China (the so-called pivot to Asia and conflicts in the South China Sea), Iran and Russia, the vast expansion of the theater of war in the Middle East to Syria, Libya and Yemen and the US militarization of Africa are the legacy of Obama and Hillary Clinton. Indeed Obama quietly militarized the African continent, putting nearly the whole of Africa

under U.S. military sway and serving as the first U.S. president to bomb an African country. In 2014, the US conducted 674 military operations in Africa. Trump inherits the work in progress of the state.

The economic and political weakening of the United States, while maintaining military supremacy, means the US continues to have enormous destructive capacity but an inability to stabilize post-war nations as seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. Other mechanisms of traditional control, including dollar seigniorage, and aspects of so-called “soft power” such as NGOs, Hollywood, and corporate and social media remain powerful.

The beginning of the end of the classic form of the bourgeois state

The traditional classical form of bourgeois liberal democratic state ushered in by the French revolution is becoming obsolete. Election turnout is declining across the world, according to the World Bank’s 2017 World Development Report. In fact, in the last 25 years, the average global voter turnout rate dropped by more than 10%. In a growing number of countries, including the US, the largest block of voters are those who do not vote: a large section of the working class do not believe that the vote will result in any significant change. The bourgeoisie is actively and contemptuously dismantling social programs, human rights and civil liberties won over the last 150 years.

The campaign to de-legitimize the state, led by Thatcher and peddled by the World Bank in its 1994 Infrastructure Report, that became prevalent under neoliberalism in the Third World, is now also evident in the internal politics of the US and EU. Social democracy is in decline and disarray. We are witnessing the beginning of the end of the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism. The neoliberal balloon was first punctured in Latin America, beginning with the campaigns and organizing of our popular movement comrades in the 90s; then by the Left governments that took power in the late 90s and early to mid 2000s.

During the post WW2 period, the western elite were focused on rolling back socialism, rebuilding Europe, expanding neo-colonialism and creating ideological hegemony. Today the children of the “cosmopolitan elite”, attending the top universities in the US, are without such focus and are becoming more decadent,

short sighted and ignorant. Even the US Presidency and the UK Prime Minister's office are now mechanisms for personal wealth accumulation in addition to being the head sales office for military contractors. Pay for play was the norm with Clinton and Blair long before Trump. However this does not make our enemy any less dangerous.

The election and the crisis of neoliberalism

The rise of Trump is not isolated: Brexit, Modi in India, Erdrogran in Turkey, Orban in Hungary and Le Pen in France. They all represent a global rise of the xenophobic right in the form of cultural populism or "cruel" populism.

Trump's election (and the rise of cruel populists globally) represents the failure of neoliberalism and a crisis of bourgeois liberalism-humanism. More than any particular section of capital or ideological tendency, Trump represents the collective political failure of global capital, and its leaders in the US. This includes the exhaustion of what the Democratic Party in the US has offered for the last 30 years, which was neoliberalism plus bourgeois identity politics.

It must be said also that Trump has no mandate and was not propelled to victory by a massive racist, xenophobic, reactionary wave of US voters as has often been depicted in the media both at home and abroad. Trump lost the popular vote by 3 million votes. It is due to the peculiarities of US Electoral College system, which was a concession to the former slave states, that he is president today.

Trump was not elected by a wave of angry white working class voters. He received about the same share of white voters as Romney did 4 years ago. In fact, more African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans voted for Trump than Romney. This was also the first election without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act. Our Supreme Court argued that because racism no longer exists in the US, it was no longer necessary. Hundreds of polling stations were closed as a direct result. Hundreds of thousands of usually Democratic voters were disenfranchised. It must also be said that more Americans who were eligible to vote did not vote for either candidate.

Trump's base, besides the usual Republican Party upper-middle class and ruling

elite, was largely drawn from the downwardly mobile former middle class (both workers and petty-bourgeoisie) in the United States. This group saw the privileges it had enjoyed in the immediate post-war period eroded as neoliberal policies took hold at home and the global capitalist crisis deepened. This section of the population was particularly rattled by the 2007-08 crisis and widespread foreclosures, along with the tightening of mortgage and small business credit that came after the crisis.

Neoliberalism has been unable to deliver economic security to this former middle class. Instead it's only been able to offer wage stagnation and underemployment, coupled with growing costs for housing, health care, and education. This has been only partially and temporarily offset by easy credit and growing indebtedness.

Failed by neoliberalism of both parties, some of the downwardly mobile middle was drawn to Trump. He will also be unable to live up the economic promises he's made to this group: a return to the stable and relatively high-wage employment of the post-war period. The economic and geopolitical basis of that arrangement is gone. His ability to make up for that failure through appeals to cultural nationalism will not be able to take him very far. Since the election, Trump was the quickest president to go to majority disapproval since polling began: it took just eight days. The next fastest was almost two years.

Trump also does not have solutions for global capitalism. The chronic crisis facing the capitalist system is of a transnational character: the world commodity glut and slowdown in shipping and trade; still-rampant speculation and bubble tendencies in the financial sector; the failure of neoliberal nation-building programs and the accompanying refugee crisis; the ecological crisis; the epochal shift of political and economic power away from the United States; and maybe most fundamentally, the ongoing creation of an absolutely superfluous section of the working class by the fourth industrial revolution, which the global capitalist class has not yet found a way to effectively manage except through extreme violence and incarceration.

If the global capitalist class is going to resolve these crises in their favor, they have to achieve a level of organization that has eluded them thus far. This project requires what American historian and sociologist W.E.B. DuBois called "intelligent and unselfish leadership." Instead of this, Trump represents the most narrow and

short-sighted responses to the crisis: remove as many barriers to accumulation as possible, withdraw from the project of organizing a transnational capitalist class and state, and manage conflicts and contradictions through violence.

From the very inception of the United States, beginning with the genocide of the Indigenous peoples, thru slavery and Jim Crow, to Hiroshima and Japanese internment, to the Vietnam War to Afghanistan, a virulent, violent and racist ideology has been at the core of America: it is as American as apple pie.

The defeat of Reconstruction in the US South in the 1870s remains the single most important historic event for understanding US politics today. The use of racist terrorism by the paramilitary Klu Klux Klan (KKK) coupled with the maneuvers by Wall Street to divide poor whites and blacks in the US South to crush the advances won by the end of the Civil War has echoes in Bannon and Trumps attempts to reshape the demographics of the US by force in an attempt to re-create an all-class white unity.

Trump is resurrecting the worst of this history. The US far right has had various strands historically: from the days of the KKK, the John Birch Society of the 1960's, the paleo-conservatism of Patrick Buchanan, to the Ayn Rand individualism/US "Libertarianism" (exemplified by Rand Paul, the infamous billionaire Koch Brothers - large funders of the Tea Party, their minion Paul Ryan who is Republican Speaker of the House and a significant section of the tech industry). The new Alt Right rebirths and normalizes dangerous racial-grievance, misogynist, nativist ideology and is represented by Peter Thiel, Milo Yiannopoulos and Steve Bannon.

But let us not get lost in the details of shades of ideology nor mask the raw ugliness of these people and what they represent. The vitriolic hatred for a black President, for Muslims and for Mexican "invaders" is at the core of their emergence. Trump campaigned on a rejection of neoliberal orthodoxies in favor of a racial economic nationalism. He promised to wield the power of the state to protect the livelihoods of white workers. He is pulling the American conservative movement away from the individualism of Ayn Rand and towards a more communitarian "white-skinned" conservatism.

The rise of the so-called "alt-right" in the US requires further analysis, but we should

be sure not to dismiss them as merely racist amateurs. They are extremely well funded, have developed charismatic leaders, have allies in Europe's New Right and have a coherent strategy.

Trump's agenda

Nevertheless, Trump has no long-term solutions to the global crisis of capitalism, in any of dimensions. His economic agenda is focused on removing all obstacles to capital accumulation in the US via the deregulation of financial markets and institutions, rollback of environmental and worker protections, a major cut to the corporate tax rate, and a program of privatized infrastructure investment. These will likely increase profitability for capital circulating through the US economy, but will mostly represent a transfer of wealth and not a program to restore real growth in the productive economy.

On the other hand, he's looking to shore up his support among the middle class by trying to insulate them from the effects of neoliberalism globalization: trade protectionism to try and prop up US manufacturing (a losing proposition); stepped-up deportations of undocumented immigrants and a massive increase in the militarization of the border to prevent further unauthorized immigration; limits on the legal immigration of high-skilled workers (these immigrants currently fill in the ranks of the leading IT companies in Silicon Valley); and the infrastructure program tied to opening up the whole country to unlimited oil, gas, and coal extraction to create largely temporary construction jobs. However, even with these policies, Trump will not be able to deliver on his promises to the downwardly-mobile middle class.

Generally, capitalists with investments in the US are excited about many of these policies, but nervous about the crack-down on immigration (especially the agricultural and restaurant industries, which are completely reliant on this super-exploitable workforce, and the IT sector which relies on legal, high-skilled immigration) and the promises of trade protectionism, which could increase the costs of their imports (especially retail and most sectors of manufacturing) and set off trade wars that compromise their access to foreign markets.

In the US, it is premature to say that Trump represents a definite section of capital.

Nearly every day in the US there is a pitched battle between what is called the Establishment, the Permanent Government (named thus by Bush's former head of the CIA) or the Deep State (as Trump calls it) versus Trump and some of his ideological advisors. The results of his possible impeachment could be worse for both the world and US working class. The battle between the entrenched neo-liberals and the emergent neo-fascist populists will be chaotic. We admit that we do not have yet a proper analysis of the emerging conflicts and strategies of the various sections of global capital.

In terms of foreign policy, Trump's narrow agenda of war against "radical Islamic terrorism" is completely unacceptable to the military, intelligence, and diplomatic establishment in the US and around the world that needs the US state to continue playing the role of global policeman for capitalism. Trump's willingness to cooperate with Russia in Syria and to even hint at questioning his commitment to NATO, and the resulting backlash from the intelligence agencies, is the most visible expression of this conflict.

In general, Trump's "America First" foreign policy - in relation to the Middle East, the South China Sea, the refugee crisis, the ecological crisis, the economic crisis, and so on, represents an abdication of the leading role of the US state in solving the crisis of global capitalism in favor of narrower and more short-sighted policies.

This can be seen not just in relationship to Russia and the Middle East, but also in his move away from multilateral trade deals like NAFTA and the TPP towards bilateral negotiation, his scuttling of the Paris climate accords, his hard line against accepting refugees from the Middle East, his support for Eurosceptic politicians in the EU, and other examples.

On these life-and-death issues of the global capitalist empire, Trump will have to either surrender completely to the deep state, or they will likely take him down - which may happen even if he does surrender, as he is mostly doing as exemplified by his appointing three Generals to his cabinet. If he were a real dictator with a powerful and organized mass base or even a stronger elite base, he could possibly resolve these problems through purges and repression, but he does not any of these things.

The election of Trump has presented the left with opportunities, conundrums and dangers. Like previous populists, Trump has told certain truths about the state. He has denounced the press as liars. He has challenged American exceptionalism by equating American killing with Russian killing, saying “You think our country’s so innocent?”. He has opposed the Iraq war. He has bragged about his ability to buy politicians. He has said that the US intelligence agencies are wrong and should be investigated. Trump’s challenges to bourgeois orthodox fiction potentially represent openings for the left. These challenges, not merely Trump’s racism, fuel the intense hostility to trump on the part of not only the Democratic party but much of the press and the deep state. The left should not be afraid of being falsely labeled “pro-Trump” by building on these cracks in bourgeois ideology.

The poor in the United States

US propaganda has been largely successful in masking both the profound economic problems as well as the possibilities of a popular movement in the US. The reality is that the wages of the bottom 80% of wage earners have been flat or falling since 1973. Easy credit was expanded to give the illusion that Americans could maintain their standard of living. In 2007-2008, that illusion crashed with the global economic crisis.

Today, 1 in 2 people living in the United States are poor or low-income. A study came out from Columbia University in February 2017 that showed that 43% of US children live in families that struggle to feed, clothe and house them. There are 28 million people without health care, more than 10 million homeless people, 64 million workers make less than a living wage, struggling to sustain themselves and their families. There are Wal-Mart workers who get trained when they join Wal-Mart as an employee in how to apply for food stamps and social benefits because they know they pay their workers so little they will not have enough food to survive although five Walton family members, the owners of Wal-Mart, have as much wealth as 40% of Americans. The one percent has more wealth than the bottom 95 percent combined. This is the greatest inequality in US history.

The majority of the people living in poverty in the US are white. Of course, African-American, indigenous, Latino and other people of color are disproportionately poor,

criminalized, and brutalized but the poor in the US are of all races, all genders, all ages, and come from all over - urban and rural, citizen and immigrant.

The example of Flint

The structural adjustment programs that the US has imposed on the rest of the world are now being imposed at home, including the privatization of water. There is the example of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan and what's going on in Flint is happening all across the country. Flint is where the headquarters of General Motors is located. It's a multi-racial town of whites, Blacks, Latinos, and more recent immigrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. It was the home of the 1936-37 Sit Down Strike that impacted labor organizing not just in the US but also across the world.

In the wake of deindustrialization, Flint was taken over by an Emergency Manager in 2002. This means that democratically elected politicians no longer make the decisions that impact the residents that live in their districts. Instead a corporate executive who gets paid hundreds of thousands of dollars decided they should switch Flint's water source from the Detroit water system to the Flint River. The problem with the Flint River, though, was they didn't treat the water properly with the chemical it required and thus corroded the water pipes. Lead and other toxins leached into the water and resulted in permanent brain damage for many. People got Legionnaires' disease. There's an entire generation of children in this city who have been irreversibly poisoned. The response of the state officials who committed this atrocity was to deny and attempt to cover it up.

Shortly after they switched the water source to the Flint River, General Motors started complaining that the water was rusting their car parts. So, General Motors was allowed to return to the Detroit water system. But when moms and their kids complained that their hair was falling out and they were getting rashes all over and that the kids were having behavioral problems and there was an increase of violence because people were losing their minds because they were being poisoned, the Emergency Manager said that people and car parts were like comparing apples and oranges and that what was bad for car parts may not be bad for organs and bodies and brains.

It was in this area of the country, the Rust Belt, or formerly industrialized Midwest that proved decisive to Trump's victory.

The state of popular resistance

While Trump's election has most definitely emboldened reactionary forces in the US, it has activated far larger progressive forces. The millions at the women's marches at Trump's inauguration, and the protests at airports in opposition to the travel ban have been well reported. But much more is happening under the surface. Less well reported was Moral March in Raleigh, North Carolina in February 2017 with over 100,000 people, the largest protest march ever in the history of the US South, an area of key strategic importance for any US movement to be successful. The Moral March comes out of the over decade-old Forward Together, Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, made up of an alliance of almost 200 progressive organizations. They operate from the principle of fusion politics - fusion of both people and causes.

Over 100,000 people of all races, religions, and genders, marched under a banner of anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and anti-poverty, pro-justice and pro-peace program. They are active both on the streets in protest and civil disobedience, as well as in the courts and legislature. Their successful organizing across historic lines of division, especially across racial lines, offers real hope of breaking the "Southern Strategy" which has kept the working class and poor divided for so long. The leadership behind the Moral Mondays movement has joined the call for a new Poor Peoples Campaign and are in the process of scaling up their state-wide successes across the South and throughout the US.

The young militants in the streets of Ferguson shook the world three years ago. They rekindled the sense of resistance and internationalism that is also part of our history. It was the Palestinian people who were the first to respond in solidarity.

There is a growing resistance led by people who are organizing and fighting for their lives, their rights and their deepest values. People are fighting on many fronts of this struggle, including for good affordable homes, water, nutritious food, health, and education, for racial, gender and LGBTQ justice, for a humane immigration system and an end to mass incarceration, for living wages and good jobs, for a healthy

environment, and for world peace. We look to the example of the Forward Together/Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, the struggle against water shut-offs in Detroit and Flint, the campaigns in Vermont, Maine, Pennsylvania, and Maryland to make healthcare a human right, the youth of Ferguson, Baltimore, New York and all over the country, which show the power that comes when we're able to see all the problems our communities are facing as deeply inter-connected and organize on that basis.

There is a growing need and yearning to connect our often isolated battles and begin creating a broader and deeper popular movement with the power and vision to take on not just the rotten fruits of poverty, inequality, and oppression but the national and global systems and structures that produce them. Such a movement is building on struggles now taking place, strengthening our connections to produce the unity that is the only way to move us from merely reacting to different disasters to transforming society. It was a vision of just such a transformative movement that led Dr. King to call for a Poor People's Campaign. It is the same urgent need today that leads to the call for a new Poor People's Campaign to abolish poverty. The leading role of the poor in these struggles is critical to building this movement. History teaches us that successful movements' essential first step is uniting those most affected by the problem.

Another key historical lesson that has emerged from decades of struggle and study is that education and training institutes are indispensable forms of organization in developing and uniting (clear, competent, committed and connected) leaders who understand the need to unite the poor so as to end poverty. This is especially pressing today, while we witness and experience an expansion of poverty in a time of plenty, abandonment in the midst of abundance. As forms of organization, these institutes are inseparable from establishing bases of community and operation, media infrastructure, and other essential elements of building a social movement to end poverty.

The global character of today's crises reveal that more than ever before, the work to abolish poverty in the United States can be won only as part of the struggle against a global order that inflicts suffering and fuels violent conflicts around the world. This means a new kind of unity between the poor in the US and the poor all over the

world must be built, on the basis of what we have in common. Developing that unity among the poor, in the US and globally, begins by learning about and listening to as many movements as possible around the country and the world, developing a shared assessment of the global problems we face, and building forms of mutual support and common action.

A Poor People's Campaign for today requires leaders who are prepared to recognize current limitations, to deepen an analysis of the class enemy, and to develop consciousness of the obstacles and opportunities that lie ahead. Developing political and ideological unity for the movement is an essential component to building cadre - the most advanced levels of leadership within the movement to end poverty who are the teachers that develop other leaders.

Our movements in the US are small and fledgling compared to yours, and we have much to learn from your struggles and experiences. But if the sleeping giant of the working class and poor in the US can be helped to awaken, we can strike a real blow at neoliberalism and imperialism together.