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★ Working to Extend Democracy to All ★

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DIALECTICAL & HISTORICAL MATERIALISM: THE SCIENCE OF REVOLUTION

The tool of analysis is for us a further development of the historical materialist method, the dialectical method. We will not even waste our time debating the values of Marxism with those who are essentially hung up on white people – hung up to the point of ideological blindness. We understand the process of revolution, and fundamental to this understanding is this fact: Marxism is developed to a higher level when it is scientifically adapted to a people's unique national condition, becoming a new ideology altogether. Thus was the case in China, Guinea-Bissau, Vietnam, North Korea, the People's Republic of the Congo and many other socialist nations [during the revolutionary era of the 20th century]. For Black [New Afrikan] people here in North America our struggle is not only unique, but it is the most sophisticated and advanced oppression of a racial [and] national minority in the world. We are the true 20th [and now 21st] century slaves, and the use of the dialectical method, class struggle

and national liberation, will find its highest development as a result of us. This dialectic holds true not only for Marxism, but for revolutionary nationalism as well; it holds true for concepts of revolutionary Pan-Afrikanism; it is true on the theoretical basis in developing revolutionary [New Afrikan] culture. All of these ideological trends will find their highest expression as a result of our advanced oppression.

*- Message to the Black Movement:
A Political Statement from the Black
Underground – CC – BLA*

By Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, 2006

Introduction

Karl Marx developed the scientific method of analysis, which came to be called Dialectical Materialism (DM) by those who came after him. As an analytical tool, DM provides a method for understanding the laws of material existence and for changing material conditions by acting within these laws. Historical Materialism (HM) is the application of DM to the study and understanding of social development and history.

Marx's Teachings

Marxism developed during an era of struggle between the philosophical schools of rationalist versus materialist thinking. Marx was able to merge the best of both schools, drawing dialectics (study and analysis) from the rationalists and materialism from the materialists.

The most advanced rationalist thinker during Marx's time was George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the most advanced materialist then was Ludwig Feuerbach. But both schools of thought were tied up in and hindered by traditional idealistic and theological influences.

Marx's Dialectics

Hegel saw the "idea" as an absolute and as the creator and center of the material world. From Hegel's thinking Marx seized on the pertinent role of the "idea," but found it to be "nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought."

Marx understood that the brain – the very medium of our thoughts and ideas – is itself a material construction, it grows and develops with and as a result of material conditions without which it would cease to be and could not generate thoughts. Purged of metaphysical influences, dialectics regards nature as a connected and unified whole, as a combination of organically bound phenomena that are interdependent and affect each other's development. Therefore, no activity in nature can be understood if it is isolated from surrounding phenomena.

Metaphysics teaches that nature exists in an absolute and unchanging state. The dialectical method teaches that nature remains in a state of constant change, development and renewal. This can be seen through scientific and even general studies of nature and natural processes. Nothing remains the same.

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Everything is in a state of either growth, relative equilibrium or decline, but is never stagnant. All matter is in a state of constant motion through increases or decreases in quantity.

But dialectics doesn't merely see things in a state of motion where there is only increase or decrease in quantity without fundamental changes in quality. This means that phenomena moves and develops not in straight lines but in spirals. These qualitative and overlapping changes are seen as leaps. An example of change from quantity to quality can be seen in how all matter changes in quality, according to the quantity (increase or decrease) of temperature, from gas to liquid to solid.

In recognizing the continual growth and development of all material processes, dialectics recognizes that at the root of all motion are internal contradictions – opposite forces operating inside of things, pulling back and forth between their poles for control. Such polar forces can be seen competing, merging and changing positions in everything; negative and positive, light and dark, sickness and health, hot and cold, birth and death, pain and pleasure, advancement and decline, old and new, contraction and expansion, electron and proton and etc.

This is the unity of opposites that operates within all phenomena large and small, known and unknown. Without one, the other could not exist, nor could the matter or phenomenon exist that they combine into. Because of the constant struggle between such opposite forces, everything remains in constant motion. Because of this constant motion and resultant change, dialectics recognizes that there are no unchangeable absolutes, and therefore continual study and experience of these material processes is the only source of proofs, "truth," and understanding.

Many people today see, in an abstract and unconscious way, the value of studying the history and development of things in order to determine and understand how they reached their present state, in order to attempt to determine what their potential for future change and development might be. But in order to really accomplish these ends, they must understand and practice this method in the comprehensive manner of Marxist dialectics.

Without proper analysis of material conditions and their internal and external contradiction, it is impossible to develop a proper understanding of them. Lenin

stated:

"...in order really to know an object we must embrace, study, all its sides, all connections and "mediations." We never achieve this completely, but the demand for all-sidedness is a safeguard against mistakes and rigidity."

This scientific method of all-sided analysis, which is not the method of lazy or idealistic minds, can be applied to all areas of existence; mental, emotional, social, physical, etc. Dialectics "...takes things and their perceptual images essentially in their interconnection, in their concatenation, in their movement, in their rise and disappearance." (Marx and Engels)

The term dialectics comes from *dialego* (Greek) which means to debate or discuss, and was in times past the pastime of philosophers, who would engage in debates to overcome the arguments of their opponents that contradicted their own. The ancient philosophers who practiced this "art" thought such introspection and debate conducted without practice and experiment in the material world was the best method of discovering "truth."

Most social, economic, political, cultural and historic theorists today continue in this tradition to a greater or lesser degree. However, the Marxist approach advanced dialectics as a method of understanding reality in relation to existing phenomena and its internal and external contradictions, allowing "truth" to be determined and proved through the test of material practice. In essence, Marx's dialectical method is the opposite of conjecture, idealism and metaphysics.

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

"Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations...."

"One has to "leave philosophy aside" ... one has to leap out of it and devote oneself like an ordinary man to the study of actuality, for which there exists also an enormous amount of literary material, unknown, of course, to the philosophers."

"The question whether objective

truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e.: the reality and power, the this-sidedness [Diesseitigkeit] of his thinking, in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question."

— *Karl Marx*

Marx's Materialism

Feuerbach's materialism, rather than perceiving physical phenomena simply as it is, was, like Hegel's concept of the "idea," marred by traditional metaphysical idealism. But as Engels pointed out, Marxist philosophical materialism "...means nothing more than simply conceiving nature just as it exists, without any foreign admixture."

Idealists claim only our consciousness really exists and the real world, therefore, exists only in our minds. However, Marxist materialism recognizes that the world of matter, nature and being is an actual world that exists independent of our consciousness. Matter is primary, since it is the source of all we know, feel and think, whereas consciousness is secondary, since it is a product of and reflection of matter that actually exists in the physical world. The brain is of material construction. Without it, we'd have no thoughts and no mechanism with which to process thoughts into physical actions – so how can we separate or raise our consciousness above matter? "It is impossible to separate thought from matter that thinks. Matter is the subject of all change," – Marx

On a grander scale, there is a dialectical relationship between universal consciousness and physical matter. In physics, this unity of opposites was proven by the physicist, Albert Einstein, (who was a Marxist), in his famous formula $E=mc^2$, or that energy is matter moving at great speed; light, electricity, magnetic force, etc. are examples of this. Indeed our brain signals, which communicate thoughts or messages – and can transmit them to be acted upon in the physical world – are electrical impulses of matter in motion.

Marxist materialism solved the problem that philosophers had long disputed – the relation of thinking to being, spirit to nature. "Matter is that which, acting upon our sense organs, produces sensations... Matter, nature, being, the physical – is primary, and spirit, consciousness, sensation, the psychical – is secondary." (Marx)

“Is there such a thing as objective truth, that is, can human ideas have a content that does not depend on a subject, that does not depend either on a human being, or on humanity? If so, can human ideas, which give expression to objective truth, express it all at one time, as a whole, unconditionally, absolutely, or only approximately, relatively? This second question is a question of the relation of absolute truth to relative truth. ...for dialectical materialism there is no impassable boundary between relative and absolute truth.

“From the standpoint of modern materialism i.e., Marxism, the limits of approximation of our knowledge to objective, absolute truth are historically conditional, but the existence of such truth is unconditional, and the fact that we are approaching nearer to it is also unconditional. The contours of the picture are historically conditional, but the fact that this picture depicts an objectively existing model is unconditional. When and under what circumstances we reached, in our knowledge of the essential nature of things, the discovery of alizarin in coal tar or the discovery of electrons in the atom is historically conditional; but that every such discovery is an advance of “absolutely objective knowledge” is unconditional. In a word, every ideology is historically conditional, but it is unconditionally true that to every scientific ideology (as distinct, for instance, from religious ideology), there corresponds an objective truth, absolute nature. You will say that this distinction between relative and absolute truth is indefinite. And I shall reply: yes, it is sufficiently “indefinite” to prevent science from becoming a dogma in the bad sense of the term, from becoming something dead, frozen, ossified; but it is at the same time sufficiently “definite” to enable us to dissociate ourselves in the most emphatic and irrevocable manner from fideism and agnosticism, from philosophical idealism and the sophistry of the followers of Hume and Kant. Here is a boundary, which you have not noticed, and not having noticed it, you have fallen into the swamp of reactionary philosophy. It is the boundary between dialectical materialism and relativism.”

– V. I. Lenin

Holding that thought is a product of matter, Marxist materialism understands that the material world and its laws are fully knowable. That by testing our knowledge of nature by experiment and practice, we can learn and know objective “truth.” Nothing is unknowable. There are only things that are as yet unknown, but which we can learn through the scientific approach of dialectical experiment and practice.

Marxist materialism therefore opposes idealism, which believes that the world is beyond our ability to know, and therefore we can never really grasp objective truths or change conditions. This idealist view is non-dialectical and non-materialist. It ignores the proofs of developing physical science and provides only a method of abstractly interpreting the world, but none to change it. It therefore ignores, avoids and fails to understand in worldly social relations the importance of “revolutionary, practical – critical activity.”

In essence, idealism leaves people feeling helpless to understand and change conditions. We can see the importance of Marxist dialectical and materialist philosophy to those who aspire to change and improve social conditions. It provides the fundamental approach for developing revolutionary theory based upon physical reality, instead of attempting to interpret the world idealistically, based upon creations of the mind and imagination that are unrelated to material reality.

Dialectical Materialism

DM is a scientific tool that allows us to consciously understand and change material conditions by coming to “know” the laws governing the physical world, and prove or disprove our knowledge by applying it through practice and experiment. As the scientist knows, it is the result of physical experiment that ultimately proves or disproves the “truth” of his/her theory – “the rat is always right!”

How indeed do scientists approach studying and solving problems in the material world? They begin with using their perceptual senses to observe some phenomenon and its internal properties as it interacts with its environment and other phenomena, and then they analyze the data accumulated from these observations. Through this process of observation, scientists accumulate a quantitative amount of perceptual knowledge about the object(s) of their study, and at some point, a qualitative leap takes place, and they begin to

make conceptual connections and develop theories, ideas and predictions about the observed thing(s), its development and its nature.

In order to prove or disprove these theories, ideas and predictions, the scientists begin to design and perform experiments that will add to their conceptual knowledge. It is only by acting out their ideas in practice that “truth” can be determined. The science surrounding particular things or phenomena is then advanced. This is the essence of DM, the scientific approach to study and practice.

Likewise, any genuinely revolutionary people and/or party must base their revolutionary practice on study and application of the laws of social development, and not upon the conjecture, morals, reason or good intention of individuals. This is because social life in this material world is a material thing. And just as with all material phenomena it is knowable and changeable according to correctly understanding and acting within its governing laws and contradictions.

“Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract – provided it is correct – ...does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it. The abstraction of matter, of a law of nature, the abstraction of value, etc., in short, all scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely.”

– V.I. Lenin

DM realizes that, like all processes, social development repeats stages previously passed through, but on a higher level – in spirals not circles. These leaps in cycles of development are the dialectical transformation of quantity into quality, namely revolution. They are the result of the contradictions within a thing or process that act on and are acted upon by external contradictions. It is the law of motion expressing itself. By understanding this law, we can act upon and within the internal contradictions of a thing – our society – to bring about fundamental changes in its quality – through revolution. As Mao Tse-tung observed: “Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world...”

Historical Materialism

HM is DM applied to the study and un-

understanding of social development and history. Marx saw that the past philosophical approaches to understanding history and social development were not scientific but were inconsistent and incomplete. He therefore applied DM to the study and analysis of society and history. In doing this, Marx saw that the very core of human society is the struggle for survival, which expresses itself in the systems of social production. These are the relations that a given people engage in to work up and extract survival necessities from nature for social consumption and use. In these productive processes, people become involved in definite relations that are necessary and independent of their will. These relations are the economic basis, the foundation, and root of every society. It is upon these economic foundations that the society's social institutions or superstructure (political, legal, religious, ethical, cultural, etc.) are built.

"The application of materialist dialectics to the reshaping of all political economy from its foundation up, its application to history, natural science, philosophy and to the policy and tactics of the working class – that was what interested Marx and Engels most of all, that is where they contributed what was most essential and new, and that was what constituted the masterly advance they made in the history of revolutionary thought."

– V. I. Lenin

Based upon advances in the technologies used to extract survival necessities from nature, the quantity of production increases (or has the potential to do so) and this creates a conflict with the existing social institutions, which have become a fetter on further development and represent outmoded social relations. This dialectical relationship (contradiction) between the developing productive forces and decadent relations of production and distribution creates a revolutionary situation.

In other words, when the economic foundation advances and changes while the social institutions and those running them attempt to remain conservative, and rigid, there inevitably develops a social-economic demand for overthrow of these old and outmoded institutions and those running them. New and progressive institutions and leaders are called forth which will be compatible with the changes in the mode of production.

Based upon these processes of social-economic development, HDM holds that

human societies have developed through several transitional stages, beginning with the primitive communal, to the slave, to the feudal, to the wage-slave or capitalist system. Modern imperialism, or monopoly capitalism, is the highest stage of capitalist development. From here, society is ripe to make the leap to communism, or classless society, by passing through the transitional stage of socialism.

"[T]he history of one human group or of humanity goes through at least three stages. The first is characterized by a low level of productive forces – of man's [and womyn's] domination over nature; the mode of production is of a rudimentary character, private appropriation of the means of production does not yet exist, there are no classes, nor consequently, is there any class struggle.

"In the second stage, the increased level of productive forces leads to private appropriation of the means of production, progressively complicates the mode of production, provokes conflicts of interest within the socio-economic whole in movement, and makes possible the appearance of the phenomenon 'class' and hence of class struggle, the social expression of the contradiction in the economic field between the mode of production and private appropriation of the means of production.

"In the third stage, once a certain level of productive forces is reached, the elimination of private appropriation of the means of production is made possible, and is carried out, together with the phenomenon 'class,' and hence of class struggle; new and hitherto unknown forces in the historical process of the socio-economic whole are then unleashed.

"In politico-economic language, the first stage would correspond to the communal agricultural and cattle-raising society, in which the social structure is horizontal, without any state; the second to feudal or assimilated agricultural or agro-industrial bourgeois societies, with a vertical social structure and a state; the third to socialist or communist societies, in which the economy is mainly, if not exclusively, industrial (since agriculture itself becomes a form of industry) and in which the state tends to progressively disappear, or actually disappears, and

where the social structure returns to horizontality, of a higher level of productive forces, social relations and appreciation of human values."

– Amílcar Cabral

Class Struggle

Each of the social-economic systems, after the primitive communal and preceding communism, are distinguished by class divisions, and consequently class struggle.

"Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes...

"The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

"Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possess, however, this distinctive feature: It has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other – bourgeoisie and proletariat."

– (Marx & Engels)

The Communist Manifesto

This basic contradiction within the capitalist system, between a small exploiting class that privately owns the socially produced wealth and means of production (land, tools, factories, railroads, natural resources, and the labor power of the workers), and the exploited majority (who must sell their labor power to survive) who are the producers of society's wealth, is the basic contradiction in capitalist society, manifested in the class struggle.

However, as Lenin pointed out, the capitalist class consolidated its forces and began to exploit the whole non-industrialized world to feed the industries of the imperialist countries with cheap raw materials and capture markets for their products, transforming the class contradiction into an international one.

Imperialism, as the highest form of capitalism, represents the concentration of the fundamental contradiction within capitalism; with the people and nations

exploited and oppressed by the system at one pole and the monopoly capitalists and their henchmen at the other. Within the 3rd world countries, the struggles against colonialism and neo-colonialism take the form of national or “New-Democratic” revolution.

Whereas, in its ascendancy the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) was revolutionary, sweeping away pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and their accompanying superstructure through “Liberal Democratic Revolution,” under imperialism the bourgeoisie becomes thoroughly reactionary, promoting fascism and defending the remnants of feudalism, even slavery, under the banner of “Anti-Communism.” “Democracy” is no more than a window dressing to conceal its deeply reactionary essence. Therefore, the proletariat must lead the fight to continue to sweep away feudalism and patriarchy along with imperialist domination in order to set the stage for socialist reconstruction.

This has application as well for the internal colonies and oppressed nations and nationalities within the imperialist countries. Inside Amerika, the struggle against national oppression by New Afrikans, Indigenous People and others, is revolutionary class struggle and part of the international struggle to overthrow imperialism.

But even after socialist revolution, class struggle continues and in fact intensifies. Because socialism is a transitional stage from capitalism to communism, the class struggle can go forward or backwards to capitalist restoration. The continuance of aspects of the bourgeois mode of production and bourgeois social relations and culture regenerate the bourgeoisie, most particularly within the upper ranks of the Party and State.

These elements, together with the overthrown bourgeoisie, will stubbornly resist the advance towards communism as “going too far” and will attempt to rig up a new capitalist system under the cover “socialism.” Mao Tse-tung was the first Marxist-Leninist to truly recognize this phenomenon. This is what actually occurred in the post-Stalin Soviet Union, in other socialist countries, and in China after Mao’s death in 1976. But, Mao pointed to the Chinese Communist Party headquarters as the place where the most dangerous capitalist-roaders lay hidden and through which they could easily rig up a new capitalist system if not stopped.

This leap in historical and dialectical

materialist understanding was the basis of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in which Mao urged the Chinese people, and particularly the youth, to “Bombard the Headquarters!” and continue the march towards communism.

Mao made several advances in Marxism by applying HDM to the particularities of his own country and the struggle of a colonized people against imperialism. While he acknowledged that the contradictions of capitalism made the proletariat the only class capable of leading genuine all-the-way revolution against the bourgeoisie, he saw that China was an overwhelmingly peasant society with only a very small proletariat. Therefore, he reasoned that the peasants must be the main force in the revolution but led by a revolutionary proletarian party. This approach deviated from earlier applications of Marxism-Leninism, which focused solely on organizing the urban workers.

Based upon the material reality of China’s prevailing mode of production (broadly semi-feudal with small capitalist enterprises under foreign imperialist domination), he led the Chinese people’s struggle for national liberation as a “New Democratic” revolution to achieve national independence and free the peasants from semi-feudal domination. Then with political independence achieved, he led the workers and peasants in the socialist reconstruction of People’s China.

Mao’s advances of Marxism-Leninism, which included developing the theory and practice of waging “People’s War,” are still relevant today. In Nepal, India, Peru, and the Philippines and other 3rd World countries, Maoist parties are leading “New Democratic People’s Wars” against imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and the remnants of feudalism. All around the world, anti-revisionist communist parties and organizations basing themselves on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, as the concrete application of HDM in this epoch, are struggling to develop revolutionary theory and practice as part of a growing international united front against imperialism.

“The fortunes of the African revolution are closely linked with the worldwide struggle against imperialism. It does not matter where the battle erupts, be it in Africa, Asia or Latin America, the mastermind and master-hand at work are the same. The oppressed and exploited people are striving for their freedom against exploitation and sup-

pression. Ghana must not, Ghana cannot be neutral in the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor.”

– Kwame Nkrumah

Like every existing thing, imperialism exists as part of and within a dialectical relationship: that relationship being characterized by overdevelopment and underdevelopment, by a new world order and a new level of chaos and disorder. Wealth is drained from the exploited 3rd World countries which lack an autonomous and independent infrastructure and are made dependent through debt to U.S.-dominated structures like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While the U.S. itself has become the world’s greatest debtor nation and continues to borrow to finance its military aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mao characterized this period as one of “Great disorder under Heaven,” but he also predicted that “The future shall be bright.” Whatever setbacks that have or will occur, revolution is still the main trend in the world today.

We must therefore arm the masses with the correct and scientific method – HDM – so that they can analyze and determine how to arrive at that bright future, becoming the masters of their own destiny. Armed with this knowledge, they will become that conscious social force capable of taking history into their own hands and bringing an end to this epoch of exploitation! ●

“Theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses!” —

Marx and Engels

“Thought without practice is empty – action without thought is blind!” —

Kwame Nkrumah

Dare to Struggle – Dare to Win!

All Power to the People!



Art by Chris Garcia [There were 104 American’s killed by police in August.]

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

INNOCENT WOMAN FREED AFTER 17 YEARS IN PRISON

A Los Angeles County judge, calling the case a failure of the criminal-justice system, threw out the murder conviction of 59-year-old Susan Mellen, convicted on testimony of a witness later known for giving false tips to law enforcement.

By Linda Deutsch, Associated Press

A woman who spent 17 years in prison after being convicted of murder in the death of a homeless man was exonerated on Oct. 12th by a Los Angeles County judge who said she should not spend another minute behind bars.

The courtroom audience applauded after Superior Court Judge Mark Arnold overturned the conviction of Susan Mellen.

Mellen, 59, had entered the courtroom in tears, and her children also cried. The judge said Mellen had inadequate representation by her attorney at trial.

"I believe that not only is Ms. Mellen not guilty, based on what I have read I believe she is innocent," he said. "For that reason I believe in this case the justice system failed."

"Thank you, your honor; thank you so much," Mellen said.

"Good luck," the judge told her.

She was released Friday evening from a Torrance courthouse. She said she did not feel anger despite her ordeal. "I don't understand how they kept me — how they put me away," she said. "It's crazy. It was cruel punishment."

Mellen's case was investigated by Deirdre O'Connor, head of a project known as Innocence Matters that seeks to free people who are wrongly convicted.

O'Connor said earlier that she found that Mellen was convicted in 1998 of the 1997 killing based solely on the testimony of a notorious liar.

Mellen, a mother of three, was sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole.

The witness who claimed she heard Mellen confess was June Patti, who had a long history of giving false tips to law enforcement, according to documents in the case.

Patti later moved to northwest Washington state, where she was involved in more than 2,000 police calls or cases in the county before her 2006 death. Patti as a credible witness was a "laughable" idea, the director of the Skagit County public defender's office recently told the Los Angeles Times.

Three gang members subsequently were linked to the 1997 killing, and one was convicted of the crime. Another took a polygraph test and said he was present at the bludgeon killing of Richard Daly and that Mellen was not there.

In a habeas corpus petition, O'Connor said the police detective who arrested Mellen was also responsible for a case in 1994 that resulted in the convictions of two men ultimately exonerated by innocence projects.

Mellen's three children, now 39, 27 and 25, were raised by their grandmother and other relatives. They said they never told friends where their mother was or that she had been convicted of a crime she did not commit.

Asked if Mellen planned to sue anyone, her attorney said she had some legal recourse, but they hadn't decided whether they would take action. First, they planned to file to have her declared factually innocent. •

THE U.S. SOLDIER WHO KILLED HERSELF AFTER REFUSING TO TAKE PART IN TORTURE

By Greg Mitchell

Alyssa Petersona was a young soldier who died eleven years ago last month. Appalled when ordered to take part in interrogations that involved torture, refused, then killed herself a few days later. Peterson, 27, a Flagstaff, Arizona, native, served with C Company, 311th Military Intelligence BN, 101st Airborne. Here's what the Flagstaff public radio sta-

tion, KNAU: Peterson objected to the interrogation techniques used on prisoners. She refused to participate after only two

... she had been "reprimanded" for showing "empathy" for the prisoners.

nights working in the unit known as the cage. Army spokespersons for her unit have refused to describe the interrogation techniques Alyssa objected to. They say all records of those techniques have now been destroyed. The official probe of her death would later note that earlier she had been "reprimanded" for showing "empathy" for the prisoners. One of the most moving parts of the report, in fact, is this: "She said that she did not know how to be two people; she... could not be one person in the cage and another outside the wire." On the night of September 15th, 2003, Army investigators concluded she shot and killed herself with her service rifle." •

PA STATE LEGISLATION TARGETS MUMIA'S ABILITY TO SPEAK!

By Noelle Hanrahan, Prison Radio

The Pennsylvania Senate will soon vote on House Bill HB2533 and Senate bill SB508. The Governor has pledged to sign it. This bill will make it illegal for prisoners to speak publicly AND allow the AG or DA to sue prisoners and the folks that assist them. This legislation was fast tracked in direct response to the positive support Mumia received for his Goddard College commencement speech.

This legislation was created to silence political prisoners like Mumia Abu Jamal, Kerry Shakaboona Marshall, Bryant Arroyo and Russell Shoatz whose can be heard around the world, in spite of their physical captivity. Consider how much their voices have contributed to our intellectual heritage and collective growth. Consider all that we have learned about prison conditions and prisoner rights viola-

tions from those imprisoned.

This repressive legislation could set far-reaching precedents severely limiting freedom of speech and our collective ability to take on the state. We need supporters go to Harrisburg to show physical support and accompany members of the MOVE family as they meet with legislators. If you can attend and/ or volunteer as a driver, please respond to this email or call 267-259-1740. With enough support, we will rent vans from Philadelphia and NY. Tentative Philadelphia departure 7:30am.

Pennsylvania legislators are trying to stop prisoners from speaking about their ideas and experiences. Last week, PA Representative Mike Vereb introduced a bill (HB2533) & SB508 called the "Revictimization Relief Act," which would allow victims, District Attorneys, and the Attorney General to sue people who have been convicted of "personal injury" crimes for speaking out publicly if it causes the victim of the crime "mental anguish."

The bill was written in response to political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal's commencement speech at Goddard College, and is a clear attempt to silence Mumia and other prisoners and formerly incarcerated people. We believe that this legislation is not actually an attempt to help victims, but a cynical move by legislators to stop people in prison from speaking out against an unjust system.

"The bill was written in response to political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal's commencement speech at Goddard College..."

While to us this seems like a clear violation of the first amendment, unfortunately the PA General Assembly doesn't appear to agree, and they have fast-tracked the bill for approval and amended another bill (SB508) to include the same language. The legislation could be voted on as early as Wednesday.

If this bill passes, it will be a huge blow to the movement against mass incarceration. People inside prisons play a leading role in these struggles, and their perspectives, analysis, and strategies are essential to our work. Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people who write books, contribute to newspapers, or even write for our Voices from the Inside section would run the risk of legal consequences just for sharing their ideas. ●

EDITORIAL 3-11

"Wrongfully convicted man cleared after 28 years in prison." Too often I read some variation of this headline. In this case David McCallum termed his mid-October release in a "bittersweet moment" after 28 years in prison. In October of 1986, McCallum and his friend Willie Stuckey were sentenced to 25 years to life for the kidnapping and murder of a 20-year-old man. There was no physical evidence at all in the case. Willie died in prison, an innocent man.

Of the thousands of prosecutor's offices in the U.S., only 12 of them have set up procedures to go over old cases to search for injustices. This is how Mr. McCallum was found to be innocent. The prosecutors from one office took thirty old cases and reviewed them for critical errors; ten of those convictions have since been overturned—yeah, a third of the cases they reviewed were bogus convictions.

The Money

When the history of the California prisoners' rights struggle is eventually recorded, let it be known that the death of the *Rock* newsletter was caused by only one thing—a complete collapse of prisoner contributions. For the October issue, which was mailed out to readers in mid-September, I received one \$15 subscription and a total for the month of 17 stamps—worse than even the previous month.

Today I spent \$294 for postage (600 forever stamps). I'd already spent \$156 for printing this issue. Now toss in some address labels, sealing dots, and a couple of other things and we are well over \$500 as the cost of my putting this issue of the newsletter in to your hands. I'm going to give you the December *Rock*, and if after that contributions don't pick up I'm done.

You've tapped out the last of Mark Cook's money (he has spent over seven thousand dollars of his own money supporting your struggle, and he recently had to give up his apartment move into a tiny assisted living space because he's broke), and now you've about emptied my pockets.

Dear friends, this November issue and next month's December issue represent the last thousand dollars I have to give you. There is no more. There will be no January 2015 issue of *Rock* unless you in there step up money and stamp contributions considerably, and then keep them coming all the way until this struggle is finally resolved, one way or the other.

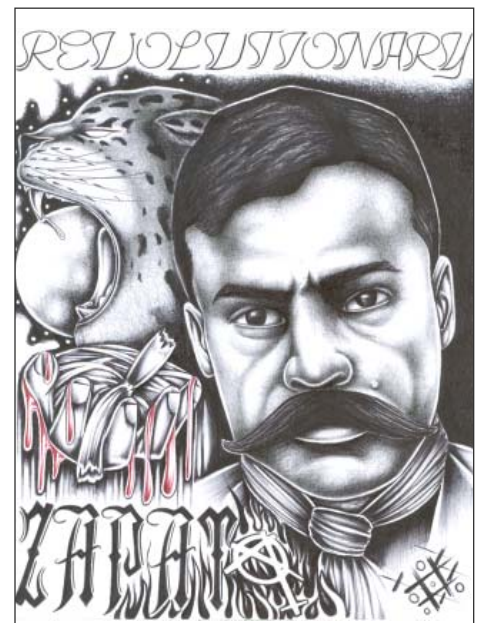
I am so done begging you for money each month. *If the money is not here, neither will be the newsletter.* Instead of putting the *Rock* out monthly, *I'll just wait and send it out when you've finally paid for an issue. It may come out only every six months, or never again. Outside readers, please do not contribute. I do not want your money. Prisoners must pay for this newsletter or I let it die. Prisoners must learn total self-reliance in all areas--Juche in our revolution.*

On Materialism

On the front page of the very first issue of *Rock* (Volume #1, Issue #1) was an article by a California prisoner named C. Landrum titled "The Road Ahead." The article applied the science of dialectical and historical materialism to the prison construct as it existed within the California prison system at that point in time, and indeed, today. Here we are, some three years later, and it is time to once again revisit the subject of dialectical and historical materialism. This time the analysis of this important political and philosophical topic will be presented by a Texas prisoner named Kevin "Rashid" Johnson.

As most of you already know, slavery is legally sanctioned in America today. The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery for all except those convicted of a crime. As a result of this 2.3 million of U.S. citizens have been held in a condition of state sanctioned slavery, systematic disenfranchised, and worse.

How big a deal is it? This is how big it is. If ex-prisoners in just Florida alone had been permitted to vote in the 2000 presi-



Emiliano Zapata by Chris Garcia

dential election, George W. Bush would never have been president—millions of Iraqi civilians would still be alive, not to mention the tens of thousands of dead and wounded Americans. If prisoners had the vote, not just absentee ballots but the right to vote in the communities where their census is taken, where they are incarcerated, then the local politicians in these remote areas would be seriously wooing the prisoners' ballot. When that day comes there will be some measurable change.

In this day and age who in their right mind would oppose a peaceful mass struggle by prisoners against the scourge of slavery? Who is against giving all age-eligible citizens their human right to vote? Talk about having justice on our side! But where is our struggle for these basics of democracy? It is lost in the alienation that has been conditioned into us.

Every time you turn on your radio, television, or pick up a newspaper, magazine, etc., on some level you are being told what to think. The cumulative effect of this incessant bombardment is adjustment oriented politics. Yes, even as you read this I too am working to twist your thinking in a certain direction, to wrap your mind around the concept of prisoner empowerment and progressive change. This is what I do, I am a propaganda officer for a non-existent revolutionary prisoner rights movement.

Yet the article on page one does not attempt to teach you *what* to think. Rather, its purpose is to start the process of teaching you *how* to think—how to apply the science of dialectical and historical materialism to the prison construct. Rashid's article is an introduction to that science; a jumping off point from which you can start implementing the process of constructive personal and social change.

Like any science, the content in this article will require some study on your part. The information is not going to passively wash over you, like some television program or fiction novel, you are going to have to do some actual mental work.

Unlearning old idealist thinking patterns and replacing them with materialist methods and analysis is not easy. But the reward of being in touch with the material realities around you, and in finally understanding the world, the whole global construct, is the reward at the end of the rainbow. There is also the additional satisfaction of being on the side of justice, democracy, and truth—on the side of poor and oppressed people everywhere.

Newsletter Stuff

My original plan for this issue was to include an "Essay on Strategy" in this space. I pulled the article because I felt it was a minor variation on the theme "you out there fight my battle for me."

We out here in minimum custody are to amplify your collective voices, not replace them with ours. It's your struggle, you fight it. We'll support you.

Instead of trying to organize us, how about you all organize yourselves in there? From that will flow a peaceful struggle, and from that struggle will grow the needed outside support.

I've been trying to educate prisoners on this point for a long time. In *Prison Focus* #37 (Summer 2011, p 29) I said, "Your struggles in there should in no way rely on those of us doing volunteer work on the outside. If you're going get it together, do it without any thought to prisoner-support organizations. Indeed, outside support is something that you should plan to grow from scratch, starting with your own friends and family members on the streets."

As a direct result of your struggles on the inside, the support for your struggle on the outside has grown. If you want that outside support to grow even more, you must struggle even more—not merely delegate the work we should be doing out here in order to fight your fight for you.

Back in 2011 (*Prison Focus* #36, Winter 2011, page 2), in response to a letter from a white gang member in California's prison system, I said:

"Over the last thirty plus years the prison gang shot callers, black, white, and in between, have led prisoners to their knees. They've destroyed what generations of prisoners before them fought and often died for, and replaced it with artificial divisions and inter-cine warfare—with drugs and thugs, and oh yes, the SNY yards. And now you ask me how we can come together against our common oppression if I disagree with what these terrible wrongs have done to the prisoner's movement?"

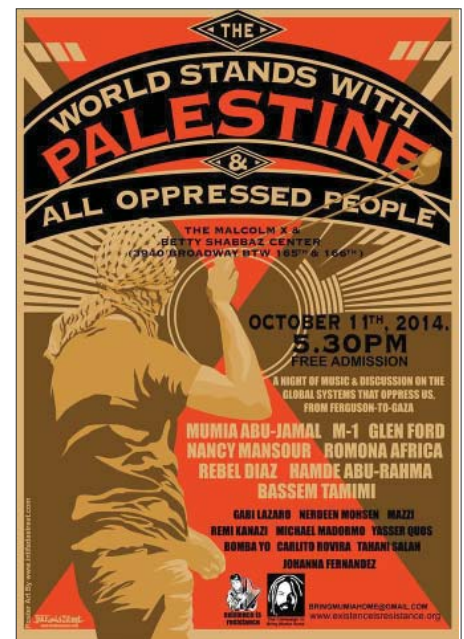
"A part of me believes that California prison history has passed beyond the old shot callers, and that if there is to be any rebirth of resistance to oppression on the inside it will come by others who see the bankruptcy of the path of artificial divisions and narrow self-interest. On the other hand, a part of me feels it may be possible for the

old guard to enter into common cause with other races and ideologies for the greater good. But to do so they would have to follow the words of Malcolm X, 'What you and I need to do is learn to forget our differences...We have a common oppressor, a common exploiter, and a common discriminator.... once we all realize that we have a common enemy, then we unite on the basis of what we have in common?'"

The gang leaders did come together in what has since become known as The First Great Hunger Strike. The conditions are still ripe for prisoners to make gains on all fronts. The existing bad economic situation on the streets is yet another ally. With right on our side, and some 25 million friends, is there any reason why prisoners cannot build a national struggle aimed at rectifying this terrible situation on the inside?

Is the color of some ass-hole's skin or the region he comes from more important than our common cause—is it more important that what is right and just? These artificial divisions are all that stand between you and the unity needed to start this glorious work. It is time to set aside those old childish games, time to stop playing at being the man's fool. It is time for you to put on your big girl panties. It is time to implement All for One - One for All.

The system has stolen your sense of responsibility; to take it back all you need do is exercise it! The process starts by talking with each other. Then studying, together or separately. Planning and peacefully implementing soon follow. Take what is yours, take responsibility! We are indeed our brother's keeper. ●



BOOK REVIEW: DAVID GILBERT'S "OUR COMMITMENT IS TO OUR COMMUNITIES"

By Ed Mead

"Many humane and thoughtful people recognize that mass incarceration is not an effective strategy for fighting crime: the whole approach reinforces the might-makes-right values that generate violence; demeaning and often brutal prison conditions undermine prisoner 'rehabilitation'; resources that should go to positive programs for the youth get siphoned off by the prison industrial complex. But the current system is definitely not 'misguided'; it's very successful in its actual goal: keeping oppressed communities in a perpetual state of chaos and agony."

And so begins David Gilbert's pamphlet "Our Commitment is to Our Communities," which I will review for you here. Like most of readers, I try not to be too judgmental. Yet being less judgmental is a goal I rarely reach. There are people I look down on and others I look up to. Although I've never met David Gilbert in person, he is a progressive political prisoner who I've looked up to and admired for more than forty years.

First a little confession. Mark and I were at the print media conference in Portland, OR, last month where we were pimping the *Rock* and doing education on the three California prison strikes. On the drive from Seattle down to Portland I learned of David's new pamphlet and discovered that I could download it from Amazon.com for free if done within the next two days. I downloaded the pamphlet in Kindle format and read it to my comrades during the drive.

At the conference, when Mark and I were not speaking (we had one small workshop), we'd be working behind the prisoner support propaganda table. And next to our table was the table of a leftist publishing company. I told the person at that table about the new David Gilbert pamphlet, and that he could download it for free from Amazon. This guy, a book publisher, gave me a look of disgust. I could see the wheels turning inside his head, "He downloads free litera-

ture from the enemy Amazon rather than paying for it? What kind of progressive is he?" I didn't tell him that I bought twenty other copies at retail and have since sent them in to some of the prisoners I correspond with.

I am not going to go into all of the areas the pamphlet covers, suffice it for me to just focus on just one of the many areas this pamphlet touches upon—prison statistics on the number of prisoners confined in the U.S. In 1970 there were about 300,000 prisoners in the U.S. Today there are over 2.3 million Americans lockup in U.S. prisons and jails. Another 7.3 million on some sort of judicial supervision, like probation or parole, and 14.7 million citizens who are formally convicted individuals who have lost some or many of their rights as a result of said conviction.¹ Yet in some places those numbers are contested. Here is just one area in which David's pamphlet is such a delight. He addresses these issues.

He points out that "readers should be alert to a possible confusion between the numbers given for those in prison and those incarcerated, and also between numbers and rate. I think the best readily available statistic to indicate the scope of the problem is to compare the numbers of those incarcerated—people in prisons and in jails—on a given day, which is the comparison I provide in my article. And, the number behind bars is even a bit higher; we also care about the 70,000 in juvenile facilities, the 34,000 being held in immigrant detention, and those incarcerated in military brigades, on Indian Reservations and in U.S. territories. That brings the total up to 2.4 million."

David notes that there are over a hundred progressive political prisoners in the U.S. and defines them as "anyone who's incarcerated as a result of her or his political positions or actions, usually as part of an explicitly political group. There's quite a range, including people we refer to as "Prisoners of War" because they were captured as a result of the just struggles for Black, Native American, Puerto Rican, or Chicano liberation; ex-Panthers who were framed (some are still in from the 1970s); anti-imperialists fulfilling our responsibility under international law to oppose racist and repressive regimes; working-class

militants opposing capitalism; more recent environmental and animal liberation cases; nonviolent civil disobedience against nuclear weapons and/or drone attacks; grand jury resisters; those who expose government surveillance; people imprisoned for militant demonstrations (such as against the G-20 meeting in Toronto); those entrapped by agents trying to undermine such protest; those being framed or entrapped due to the prevailing Islamophobia."

David's new pamphlet touches on a number of important issues. For example, the Occupy Movement. He says: "...the Occupy movement was a breath of fresh air. It broke through a media juggernaut that totally mis-defined the issues. After 30 years of mainstream politics totally dominated by racially coded scapegoating—directing people's frustrations against criminals, welfare mothers and immigrants—finally a loud public voice pointed to the real source of our problems. Their efforts to be more democratic and less sectarian than earlier movement generations were important, if uneven.

"At the same time, a spontaneous and predominantly white movement will inevitably have giant problems of internalized racism and sexism. That will undermine us if we don't take it on in a conscious and open-hearted way."

When the interviewer asked how people can best contribute to radical social change today, David responded in part by saying: "I salute those who are out there organizing and protesting. They're grappling with many issues—how to have both democracy and effective organization, how to build coalitions and deal with the plethora of urgent issues, how to best deal with internalized racism and sexism ... and a whole lot more." The pamphlet deals with a number of issues of importance to prisoners. I would suggest that you order a copy of your very own. The pamphlets can be ordered by sending five bucks (plus three dollars for Canadian shipping²) to:

Kersplebedeb Press
CP 635601
CCCCP Van Home,
Montreal, Quebec
Canada
H3W 3H8 •

The Prison Art Website is Gone

Due to medical problems I will not be able to continue the Prison Art website. I have been running the website since 1999 as a service to prisoners, and I do feel bad about closing it. If you want to sell the art of a loved one inside you should do a Google search for "prison art" so you can find other sites that sell this art.
Ed Mead

1. For a list of the rights lost as a result of a criminal conviction read "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander.

2. You can probably save on shipping costs by ordering from Amazon or some other U.S. book outlet.

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The Rich Get Richer!

On October 14th Fed Chair Janet Yellen said that "Income inequality in the United States is near its highest levels of the past 100 years." If the growth of inequality were to proceed at last year's rate, the richest one percent would control all the wealth on the planet within 23 years.

Important Notice

Articles and letters sent to the *Rock* newsletter for publication are currently being delivered and received in a timely manner. Please do not send such materials to third parties to be forwarded to *Rock* as it only delays receiving them and adds to the workload of those asked to do the forwarding.

Letters sent to *Rock* (located in Seattle) in care of *Prison Focus* (located in Oakland) can take over a month to reach us. Send *Rock* mail to this newsletter's return address.

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NO SHOUT OUT BOX

To all readers, who together
during the month of October,
donated a total of seventeen
stamps and one \$15 check.

**We can't "Rock on!"
Not on that.**

Ed Mead, Publisher
Rock Newsletter
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COMMUNICATION IS A HUMAN RIGHT