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*A Marxist-Leninist-Maoist journal for
contending schools of revolutionary thought*

Co-Editors D. JIN · J. MOUFAWAD-PAUL · M. VAN HERZEELE
Advisory Committee SONNY AFRICA · AMIT BHATTACHARYYA
JULIE DE LIMA · K. MURALI · STEVEN OSUNA · LARISSA WYNN

material.contact@protonmail.com

[@Material_JNL](https://twitter.com/Material_JNL)

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Editor's Note

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“Truth is on the side of the oppressed.” – Malcolm X

When *Material* launched in the fall of 2023 our hope was to provide a space for various materials (essays, interviews, literature, art) that could contribute to a revolutionary discourse—and support revolutionary struggles—in a time of crumbling neo-liberalism and the rise of various forms of reactionary capitalism. By the time our second issue was released in 2024 we were witnessing a genocidal colonial war in Gaza, supported by the imperialist bloc, that continues to this day. Now, in 2025, the grossest forms of senile capitalism are emerging again, with the second Trump regime seeking to outdo the first in its proud embrace of imperialism, settlerism, white supremacy, and its hatred of life, science, and literacy. But in these times people are also resisting: Israel’s brutal colonial war, despite its genocidal excess, still faces a defiant Palestinian resistance; the US was forced to exit its war upon Palestine’s staunchest supporter, Yemen, due to Ansar Allah’s military acumen. Other examples abound; if human history is to continue, then its continuance will be secured by those masses struggling against capitalism’s stranglehold on reality.

Thus, it is worth noting that 2025 also marks the centenary of the birth of three great revolutionaries: Patrice Lumumba, Frantz Fanon, and el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz, commonly known as Malcolm X. This third issue of *Material* is dedicated to their shared anniversary, inspired by their theoretical and practical work against the capitalist monstrosities of settler-co-

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lonialism and imperialism. We are still learning from their legacy, especially since colonialism and white supremacy remain rampant, structural features of global capitalism. Indeed, despite the time elapsed between their time and ours, it remains the case that the most “successful” settler state is now celebrating the open racism Malcolm X castigated, even inviting Afrikaners to resettle in the US. As Fanon once argued, despite “condemnations of race prejudice” (as the US once did in its self-proclaimed “post-racist” days), “in reality, a colonial country is a racist country.”¹

This issue is thus inspired by the legacy of these revolutionaries, the resistances they inspired, and the ongoing resistances of the current conjuncture. First of all, we have Saïd Bouamama’s article *Settler Colonialism and Fanon* which, noting the legacy of these three revolutionaries, examines the connection between Algeria (past and present) and Kanaky (French “New Caledonia”). Next, we have *Prisons, the Black Liberation Movement, and the Struggle for Palestine* by Ahmad Sa’adat, writing from the perspective of the political prisoners about the continued relevance of Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party. Thirdly, we have an interview with Butch Cottman, a Maoist activist elder, about his experiences during the high tide of Black revolutionary nationalism in the US. Our archival texts this issue are Lumumba’s historic *Speech at the Opening of the All-African Congress*, held in 1960 in the Republic of the Congo’s capital, Kinshasa—then called Leopoldville—and Francis Jeanson’s *Logic of Colonialism*, the latter introduced by D. Z. Shaw. Additionally, we have included a series of 15 photos by Algerian artist Ammar Bouras, depicting the political situation in Algiers in the early ’90s, a period marked by renewed political activity in the country. Finally, we have an interview with the Proletarian Party of Purbo Bangla (PBSP), conducted just after the 2024 mass protests in Bangladesh, which not only sheds light on a lesser-known history and struggle but also demonstrates that resistance is happening, and continues to happen, in every corner of the globe.

If the possibility of human existence seems bleak now, let us not forget that it seemed no less bleak to those figures born 100 years ago, all of whom died young, murdered by the forces of reaction. Lumumba, assassinated by the CIA—with the aid and knowledge of the Belgian State and its king Baudouin—and dissolved in a vat of acid. Fanon, harassed to death

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 39–40

by the same CIA as he was receiving treatment for leukemia in the US. Malik el-Shabazz, gunned down by Nation of Islam assassins in the pay of the FBI. And yet all three of these revolutionaries never gave up hope, never ceased struggling, because they knew a better world was possible. Their lives are a testament for us, demanding we follow their example. As Fanon wrote, at the end of his great work, “for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new human.”²

D. Jin

J. Moufawad-Paul

M. Van Herzeele

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 316.

Settler Colonialism and Fanon

Saïd Bouamama

The year 2025 marks the 100th anniversary¹ of the birth of the Guinean and Cape Verdean Amilcar Cabral, one of the many as-yet little-known revolutionary intellectuals in the field of national liberation processes and struggles. The year 2025 will also mark the centenary anniversaries of the African-American Malcolm X (May 19), the Congolese Patrice Lumumba (July 2) and the Martiniquan and Algerian² Frantz Fanon (July 20). These four anniversaries take place in a historical sequence in which from Kanaky to Palestine, via Western Sahara, Polynesia, Mayotte, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, etc., the question of direct colonization remains unanswered. Above all, they are taking place at a point in the global imperialist system when new colonization processes are unfolding. From Libya to Syria, from Sudan to the Democratic Republic of Congo,

¹ Amilcar Cabral was actually born on September 12, 1924.—Ed., *Material*.

² Born in Martinique, F. Fanon was legally French by birth. Upon joining the FLN, he symbolically and politically rejected this French nationality. In his writings, he refers to himself as Algerian. For example, in *Year V of the Algerian Revolution*, he writes: "What we Algerians want," "our struggle," "our cause," or even "our Revolution." Fanon died before independence and was never officially granted Algerian nationality. However, he was a representative of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic [GPRA], indicating that he was considered Algerian by the authorities of the new state.

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balkanization and chaos are being promoted as a strategy for maintaining the bond of total dependence—in other words, colonization under new masks.

Unsurprisingly, in the same historical sequence, popular mass movements are developing, reviving the concepts, demands, figures, and aspirations of the 1950s to 1970s (i.e., the period associated with the Bandung Conference³), armed independence struggles, Pan-African congresses, the tricontinental movement, the denunciation of neo-colonialism, and so on. The yearning for Bolivarianism in many Latin American countries and movements for Pan-Africanism in many African countries, the return of expressions such as “neo-colonialism,” “second independence” struggles, “patriotism,” the rediscovery and vindication of the figures of Cabral, Keita, Sankara, etc., by many African and African youth movements and among those in the diasporas—all of these express the opening of a second phase in national liberation struggles. This opening follows several decades of global counterrevolution in the wake of the upheaval in the balance of power in favor of hegemonic US imperialism after the demise of the USSR.

Of course, this new phase is far from homogeneous. Each national situation has its own specificities, linked to national history and to the class configurations that have crystallized since formal independence, i.e., since the substitution of neo-colonialism for direct colonization. The above-mentioned consciousness-raising processes are still fraught with ideological confusion and political illusions. This in no way diminishes their importance or the transformative force they carry. Historical necessities take the paths they can. Great qualitative leaps in emancipation never take a “pure form.” They come about in whatever way they can, depending on the legacy and transmission of past struggles, the state of the global balance of power, the existence or non-existence of an anti-imperialist movement in the imperialist centers, the degree of organization of the bearers of these new aspirations and their integration within the working classes, who remain among those who have a vested interest in breaking free from

³ The Bandung Conference of 1955 was a landmark gathering of 29 newly independent Asian and African nations. It was a powerful act of decolonial solidarity. Rejecting Cold War binaries, it fostered South-South cooperation, challenged Western imperialism, and laid the groundwork for the Non-Aligned Movement, advocating for economic self-determination and anti-colonial resistance.—Ed., *Material*.

colonial dependence. Of course, the other classes that have crystallized since formal independence may have an interest in loosening the colonial stranglehold—but only the working classes have a vital interest in breaking it completely. In these periods of renewed struggle, it is essential to take account of the lessons of the past.

This conclusion applies to all forms of colonization and is all the more relevant for settler colonialism, such as that being practiced in Palestine, Western Sahara, or Kanaky. Frantz Fanon's thought and practice are particularly relevant to these types of colonization. Both were developed in the context of the colonial settlement of Algeria.

On Colonization in General. . .

Current definitions of colonization tend to be purely descriptive. As a result, they often underplay what is the driving force behind colonization: the total dependence of a social-national economy on the needs of another national economy. It is this process of dependence that distinguishes colonization in the age of capitalism from other territorial occupations that have marked the history of mankind.

From its very beginnings in the fifteenth century, the new capitalist mode of production, which emerged in Europe in the midst of the feudal regime, was characterized by a tendency to expand. The laws of profit and competition drive towards expanded reproduction, i.e., the annexation and destruction of other modes of production and their social relations, and with them the cultures and superstructures that accompany them. Aimé Césaire sums up this logic of enlarged reproduction:

[W]hat, fundamentally, is colonization? . . . To admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its

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history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies.⁴

Faced with competition from other capitalists, each owner of capital is forced to expand quantitatively in order to survive. To do so, they constantly seek out cheaper raw materials, more profitable technologies and new markets. In other words, capitalism can only function by expanding.

This process of expansion is all-encompassing. It involves both the destruction of a national formation's existing modes of production (France, England, etc.) and the violent conquest of its first colonies. These two types of expansion are inextricably linked. The "colonization of the New World" boosted the primitive accumulation of capitalism in Europe. For this reason, capitalism and colonization are two facets of the same process; they are consubstantial. This same logic also led to the proliferation of slavery to supply labor to the mines and plantations of the colonies, on the one hand, and to racist theorizations which legitimized both such slavery and colonization ideologically, on the other. Capitalism, colonialism, slavery, and racism thus emerged in the same historical sequence (15th–16th century). Together, they form a coherent system.⁵ For this reason, colonization must also be defined as a process of universalization of the capitalist mode of production and its relations of production.

This second definition completes the first, but does not replace it. The capitalism imposed by force in the colonies is not, unlike in Europe, the result of the internal dynamics of the colonized nations. It is not the result of the social contradictions at work in their history. In fact, as Cabral rightly said, colonization is the violent interruption of that history. It follows that the national liberation struggle constitutes a renewal of that history:

[N]ational liberation is the phenomenon in which a given socio-economic whole rejects the negation of its historical process. In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history

⁴ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 32–33.

⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism is a System*, speech given at a meeting "pour la paix en Algérie" ("for peace in Algeria") in 1956.

through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected.⁶

The extension of the capitalist mode of production through colonization leads to a process of global unification, though not homogenization. It unfolds, explains Samir Amin, on the basis of a structuring of the world into dominant imperialist centers and dominated colonial and semi-colonial peripheries.⁷ Colonial peripheral capitalism is dependent, the development of its productive forces limited, its class configurations specific, and so on. Recognition of the dependent nature of colonial capitalism led Frantz Fanon to warn of the danger of applying schemes developed in Europe to the colonies:

In the colonies the economic substructure is also a super structure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.⁸

... To Settler Colonialism

The above definitions of colonialism take different forms, depending on the specific characteristics of the colonial power, as well as on the state of the balance of power and resistance. Amílcar Cabral distinguishes between direct colonialism (“a power made up of people foreign to the dominated people”) and indirect colonialism (“[an] indirect domination, by a political power made up mainly or completely of native agents; this is called neocolonialism”⁹). With regard to direct colonization, he highlights three possible scenarios: the complete destruction of the social structure of the colonized people, its partial destruction, and its preservation but confinement to zones of relegation and reservations. While we agree with Cabral’s

⁶ Amílcar Cabral, *The Weapon of Theory*. Address delivered to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America held in Havana in January, 1966.

⁷ Samir Amin, *Unequal Development. An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1976).

⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 40.

⁹ Amílcar Cabral, *The Weapon of Theory*.

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presentation, we believe that this triptych can be reduced to a duality: settlement colonialism, which covers the first and third cases, and exploitation colonialism, which covers the second. French-administered Kanaky, with its system of segregation based on reserves for the Kanak population up until 1946, and Algeria, with its massive seizure of indigenous lands, are both part of the same settler colonialism, which is the subject of Frantz Fanon's theses.

Amilcar Cabral underlines the inevitable genocidal tendency of settlement colonialism, painfully recalled last year by the genocide being suffered by the Palestinian people.

[The] total destruction [of] the social structure of the dominated people [is, he stresses,] generally accompanied by immediate or gradual elimination of the native population and, consequently, by the substitution of a population from outside.¹⁰

In Kanaky, this genocide is now widely documented. A UNESCO publication from 2008 recalls: "The main island of New Caledonia had at least 100,000 inhabitants in 1800; a century later, only a third of the population was counted."¹¹ A study of Melanesian¹² demography concludes:

The Melanesian population continued to decline. The 1901 census counted just 28,800 Melanesians, a level that was maintained until 1936, before the population began to grow appreciably again.¹³

The genocide is just as well documented in Algeria. Demographer Kamel Kateb, author of the most comprehensive study on the subject, estimates the Algerian population at 4 million at the time of the conquest, and puts the death toll between 1830 and 1872 at 825,000, or over 20% of the total population.¹⁴ Others, such as Djilali Sari, put the death toll at 1 million, represent-

¹⁰ Amilcar Cabral, *The Weapon of Theory*.

¹¹ Ali Moussa Iye and Khadija Touré, *History of Humanity*, vol. 6 (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2008), 1388.

¹² Melanesia includes Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Kanaky, and the Fiji Islands. The term Kanak refers to the Melanesian population of Kanaky.

¹³ Jean-Louis Rallu, *La population de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (The Population of New Caledonia)* (Aubervilliers: Revue Population, n° 4-5, 1985), 725.

¹⁴ Kamel Kateb, *Européens, « indigènes » et juifs en Algérie (1830-1962)*. Représen-

ing a 25% drop in the total population in less than half a century—a process he calls “the demographic disaster.”¹⁵

All instances of settler colonization inevitably tend towards genocide. Whether this tendency becomes a reality, as in the case of the “Indian” peoples of North America or the Aborigines in Australia, or fails, totally or partially, as in Kanaky and Algeria, depends on factors linked to the historical context and the balance of power. The pace of European settlement in Kanaky and Algeria, made possible by the state of French society in the first decades of the conquest (which took place in the same historical sequence for both colonies), was too slow to completely annihilate the survival mechanisms of the colonized peoples.

Yet no effort was spared to accelerate the pace of European settlement in Algeria and Kanaky. They were met with resistance in the form of peasant and tribal uprisings with all their consequences. This was the case in 1878 and 1917 in Kanaky. The same was true of Algeria, where similar insurrections broke out almost every decade until the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition to the feeling of insecurity that discouraged potential settlers, these atrociously repressed peasant uprisings monopolized most of the available colonial budget, leaving few resources to support the installation of new settlers.

The cruel and barbaric nature of the repression of these insurrections is well documented. To cite just one example, let’s consider a practice common to both colonial periods. Ethnologist Jean Guiart recalls it as follows for Kanaky:

In 1878, a bounty was given for each pair of ears of a so-called rebel killed. As the soldiers brought the ears of women and children, it was decreed that the heads should be brought in, and these macabre pieces of evidence were taken into account.¹⁶

Historian Alain Ruscio adds that this practice, known as “essorillement,”¹⁷ was also used during the conquest of Algeria:

tations et réalités des populations [Europeans, “natives” and Jews in Algeria (1830-1962). Representations and realities of population groups] (Paris: INED, 2002), 16, 47.

¹⁵ Djilali Sari, *Le désastre démographique (The demographic disaster)* (Algiers: SNED, 1982), 130.

¹⁶ Jean Guiart, *Bantoustans en Nouvelle Calédonie (Bantoustans in New Caledonia)* (Paris: Droit et Liberté, n° 371, July-August 1978), 14.

¹⁷ *Essorillement* was a brutal French colonial practice of cutting off the ears of resis-

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“Essorillement” had its followers during the war of conquest of Algeria, with French troops and Algerian auxiliaries employing it either out of vengeance, or for financial gain (“ten francs for each pair of ears” of indigenous rebels brought to the authorities).¹⁸

The deterrent effect on potential settlers is just as well researched. Historian Charles-André Julien, for example, gives the following figures for the period 1842–1846: 194,887 Europeans emigrated to Algeria, but 117,722 others left the new colony.¹⁹ In Kanaky, the establishment of the penal colony in 1864 was explicitly legitimized by the need to compensate for the low number of voluntary settlers.

We do not recall these colonial atrocities for their own gruesome sake. They simply illustrate the total violence that colonization implies. You cannot forcibly replace one people with another without logically mobilizing limitless forms of exterminatory state violence. It is not a question of the “excesses” of the colonial settlement project, but of its very nature. That’s why Aimé Césaire is right to point out that the most abominable traits of Nazism have existed and been experienced in the colonies before:

Yes, it would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler inhabits him, that Hitler is his demon, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved ex-

tance fighters, especially in Algeria, as a form of terror, punishment, and trophy-taking. It exemplified the dehumanization and extreme violence of colonial rule.—Ed., *Material*.

¹⁸ Alain Ruscio, *La première guerre d’Algérie. Une histoire de conquête et de résistance* (*The First Algerian War. A Story of Conquest and Resistance*) (Paris: La Découverte, 2024), 394.

¹⁹ Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine* (*Contemporary History of Algeria*), vol. 1 (Paris: PUF, 1964), 250.

clusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of America.²⁰

Total Violence and Colonization

One of Frantz Fanon's essential contributions is to have correctly analyzed the congenital violence of settler colonialism and its effects. All of his analyses are permeated by the thesis of “colonialism [as] violence in its natural state.”²¹ It was this thesis that he developed at the Accra Conference in April 1960, in response to Kwame Nkrumah's faith in non-violence:

The colonial regime is a regime instituted by violence. It is always by force that the colonial regime is established. It is against the will of the people that other peoples more advanced in the techniques of destruction or numerically more powerful have prevailed. I say that such a system established by violence can logically only be faithful to itself, and its duration in time depends on the continuation of violence. . . . No, the violence of the Algerian people is neither a hatred of peace nor a rejection of human relations, nor a conviction that only war can put an end to the colonial regime in Algeria. The Algerian people have chosen the unique solution that was left to them and this choice will hold firm for us.²²

This fundamental thesis of Fanon's posits two key political and strategic conclusions. The first is that colonialism cannot be reformed; it can only be destroyed. The second, reformulated decades later by Nelson Mandela:

[I]t is always the oppressor, not the oppressed, who dictates the form of the struggle. If the oppressor uses violence, the op-

²⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 36.

²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 61.

²² Frantz Fanon, *Why We Use Violence*. Address to the Accra Positive Action Conference, April 1960.

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pressed have no alternative but to respond violently. In our case it was simply a legitimate form of self-defense.²³

For Frantz Fanon, physical violence is only the most visible part of a deeper violence that is nothing less than the total destruction of the historical and national identity of the colonized people:

The officials of the French administration in Algeria, committed to destroying the people's originality, and under instructions to bring about the disintegration, at whatever cost, of forms of existence likely to evoke a national reality.²⁴

At the same time as physical violence, settler colonialism deployed legal, symbolic, and cultural violence, all of which converged with the former to completely destroy the very idea of an Algerian or Kanak people. Physical genocide is inevitably coupled with cultural, historical, and political genocide. Colonialism, however, is not content with this violence against the present reality. The colonized people are therefore portrayed ideologically as arrested in its evolution, impervious to reason, incapable of directing its own affairs, requiring the permanent presence of outside leadership.

The history of the colonized peoples is transformed into meaningless unrest, and as a result, one has the impression that for these people humanity began with the arrival of those brave settlers.²⁵

Beyond the physical suffering and grief, the process of colonization requires the production of "self-shame" and an inferiority complex. This dimension of Fanon's analysis is essential for understanding the mutations within a settler colonialist project, when it realizes that total physical genocide is no longer possible, even in the long term. Since the goal of total destruction is impossible, it mutates to maintain the relationship of domination. Instead, the aim becomes the development of an attitude of "collaboration" by the dominated people who take part in their own subjugation, with the hope of improving their condition in the long term. In an article entitled "Decolonization and independence" pub-

²³ Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), 537.

²⁴ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965), 37.

²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Why We Use Violence*.

lished in *El Moudjahid* on April 16, 1958, Fanon responds to De Gaulle's promises of an "economic, social, and moral renewal plan" [for Algeria] in the following terms:

French colonialism will not be legitimized by the Algerian people. No spectacular undertaking will make us forget the legalized racism, the illiteracy, the flunkeyism generated and maintained in the very depth of the consciousness of our people. This is why in our declarations there is never any mention of adaptation or of alleviation, but only of restitution. . . . The Algerian people has refused to let the occupation be transformed into collaboration.²⁶

These words are, in our view, essential for all the current French colonies (euphemistically renamed "Overseas Departments or Territories") and, in particular, for Kanaky. The purpose of this euphemized colonial terminology is to anchor the idea that decolonization is possible without independence. If, for Fanon, formal independence is not enough to achieve real decolonization, the latter is impossible without independence. Formal independence is a necessary but insufficient condition for real decolonization.

The Resistance of the Colonized

The total violence of colonization, whether in Algeria, Palestine, or Kanaky, is both physical and symbolic, economic and cultural, political and social, religious and civil. In the literal sense of the term, it's about substituting one society for another, replacing one people for another, destroying a history to justify an illegitimate present. The victims of these settler colonial projects have only one choice: resist or disappear. To date, the annals of humanity know of no example of a people having chosen to disappear. Resistance is inescapable, in multiple and evolving forms.

Fanon brilliantly describes the mutations in the forms of resistance as colonial domination of the colonized society takes hold. The first forms of resistance were logically dependent on pre-colonial social and economic formations. Consequently, they were agrarian and tribal, communal and local, insurrectionary and guerrilla. These represent two different eras in

²⁶ Frantz Fanon, "Decolonization and independence," in *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 101–102.

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the history of mankind, two different models of collective identification (the tribal confederation for the colonized, the nation-state for the colonizers), two different types of military technology, two different conceptions of war. Despite the imbalance of forces, this primary resistance of a society that refuses to disappear, and which harnesses all its energies to survive, will have a lasting influence on colonized peoples. Of course, the colonizer's military superiority leads to the enforcement of colonialism, but as a response, a sense of collective dignity becomes deeply entrenched among the oppressed and is passed down through the generations.

In Algeria, as in Kanaky, the transmission of the history of resistance to conquest and then colonization was the subjective foundation on which the subsequent revival of the anti-colonial struggle was built. Memory is thus an important form of resistance, as Frantz Fanon explains:

The memory of the anti-colonial period is very much alive in the villages, where women still croon in their children's ears songs to which the warriors marched when they went out to fight the conquerors. At twelve or thirteen years of age the village children know the names of the old men who were in the last rising, and the dreams they dream in the *douars* [are] dreams of identification with some rebel or another, the story of whose heroic death still today moves them to tears.²⁷

The book by Alban Bensa, Kacué Yvon Goromoedo, and Adrian Muckle, *Les Sanglots de l'aigle pêcheur. Nouvelle-Calédonie : La guerre Kanak de 1917* underlines the same mobilization of transmission and memory as a tool of resistance:

Defeated by arms, decimated, dispersed and yet still standing, it was to words and writing that they entrusted the task of preserving the memory of this time.²⁸

In Algeria, as in Kanaky, storytelling, song, poetry, and legends were the mainsprings of survival in the face of the bulldozer of colonial settlement.

Another mutation of resistance described by Fanon concerns the multiple dimensions of identity. These are the site of a double movement: root-

²⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 114.

²⁸ Alban Bensa, Kacué Yvon Goromoedo, and Adrian Muckle, *Les Sanglots de l'aigle*

edness and expansion. The process of tying one's people back to its roots comes first, because the colonized perceive the danger of disappearance, and react by fully immersing themselves in everything that makes up their historical identity, their cultural specificity, and their social, religious and civilizational differences. Almost instinctively, they draw back on their values, their ancestors, their religion, etc., to maintain their existence in the face of multi-faceted genocide. Women wearing the veil becomes a form of resistance, as does fleeing all contact with the colonial power and its institutions, reinvesting in the *djemaa*²⁹ and religiosity, and so on. Explaining the colonizer's determination to unveil Algerian women, Fanon explains:

The (colonial) administration specified:

"If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight."³⁰

The same logic of rooting oneself in old customs and tradition as a form of resistance and survival can be found today, for example, in the workings of the FLNKS.³¹ To the incomprehension of many Western activists, the appointment of delegates to various organizational bodies mobilizes, among other things, the question of respect for customs. Anthropologist Isabelle Leblic recalls that at a small FLNKS convention of the Centre-Sud region, the delegates in charge of defining the criteria for nominating candidates for regional elections decided on the following criteria:

be an active militant, have a good knowledge of customs and be well connected to them, be capable of defending FLNKS posi-

pêcheur. Nouvelle-Calédonie : la guerre Kanak de 1917 (The Cry of the Osprey. New Caledonia: The Kanak War of 1917) (Toulouse: Anarcharsis, 2015).

²⁹ The Djemaa is a customary political institution made up of representatives of all the families in a village and in charge of decisions concerning the community and its internal and external relations.

³⁰ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 37–38.

³¹ The Front de Libération Kanak Socialiste (Kanak Socialist Liberation Front, FLNKS) is an alliance of pro-independence parties and organizations. Founded in 1984, it currently comprises the Union Calédonienne (UC), the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RCO), the Union Progressiste en Mélanésie (UPM) and the Palika (Kanak Liberation Party).

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tions, be representative of the region and respect the principle of non-accumulation of political mandates.

Describing the start of the various meetings, she explains the essential nature of the moment dedicated to perform customs:

It's custom, the moment of honoring customs. In the empty space in the middle of our circle, packs of cigarettes were piled up, as were sticks of raw and compact tobacco, a few CFP franc bills,³² and above all "manus," those long, thin pieces of cloth that symbolize the ties between people. Each of the participants brought these objects with him or her. They are a sign of the respect we all owe to each other, and to this land, the land of the valley that welcomes us.³³

To this first change in identity, that of deepening one's roots, was grafted a second, which involved expanding one's self-image and that of the group to which one belongs. The colonized, in a context of settler colonialism, very quickly become aware of the impossibility of sustained resistance on the basis of tribal organization, or even on that of a tribal confederation structure. Faced with the colonizer, the process of national identification, already more or less in place depending on the country, inevitably accelerates. Frantz Fanon sums up the process as follows: "The mobilization of the masses. . . introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history."³⁴

Similarly, in her description of the use of customs in the political life of the FLNKS, Isabelle Leblic mentions a difference with the mobilization of these same customs in everyday life:

³² The CFP franc is a colonial currency that keeps French Pacific territories economically dependent on France by restricting monetary sovereignty and facilitating resource extraction through French-controlled financial policies.—Ed., *Material*.

³³ Isabelle Leblic, « De la démocratie à la base : coutume et militantisme kanak dans les années 1985–1986 » ("Grassroots Democracy: Kanak Customs and Activism in 1985–1986"), in Jean-Marc, *François Mitterrand et les territoires français du Pacifique (1981–1988). Mutations, drames et recompositions ; enjeux internationaux et franco-français [François Mitterrand and the French Pacific Territories (1981–1988). Changes, Tragedies and Rearrangements; International and Intra-French Issues]* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), 314, 316.

³⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 93.

The only notable difference between the two types of gathering lies in the fact that for the political ones, the “arrival customs” most often end with the raising of the flag of Kanaky.³⁵

The question of mobilizing the armed struggle stems both from the realization that the so-called peaceful struggle has proven inefficient and from the prevailing balance of power.

We emphasize these changes in identity and the work of transmitting resistance because they constitute a subjective heritage on which subsequent resistance is built. They make the latter inescapable. There is no third alternative to colonization: either colonialism is destroyed, or the colonized people disappear. The contradiction is entirely antagonistic, concludes Frantz Fanon:

On the logical plane, the Manicheism of the settler produces a Manicheism of the native. To the theory of the “absolute evil of the native” the theory of the “absolute evil of the settler” replies. The appearance of the settler has meant in the terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals. For the native, life can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler.³⁶

The Centrality of the Peasantry

In the majority of incidences of settler colonialism, the countryside and villages are the main location for the processes described above. However, this is not the case in other contemporary situations, such as, for example, in Canada or the US. As societies that are primarily agrarian and communitarian, countries that have been and/or are being colonized by settlers feel the destructive impact first and foremost in the countryside, where the vast majority of the population lives. What the Algerian geographer Djilali Sari called “the dispossession of the *fellahs*”³⁷ and the Algerian film-maker Lamine Merbah called “the uprooting”³⁸ took the form of a large-scale pro-

³⁵ Isabelle Leblic, “Grassroots Democracy: Kanak Customs and Activism in 1985–1986,” 316.

³⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 93.

³⁷ Djilali Sari, *La dépossession des Fellahs*, ENAG, Algiers, 2012.

³⁸ *Les déracinés*, directed by Lamine Merbah, Algiers, March 1977.

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cess of land grabbing by settlers, which caused the destruction of the material foundations of peasant collective life. In Algeria, as in Kanaky, the colonial question was triggered by the question of land. Frantz Fanon concludes that the peasantry plays a decisive role in the anti-colonial struggle that it constitutes its centrality. “[I]n the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain,”³⁹ explains Fanon, describing the attitude of these rural masses to colonization:

[T]he mass of the country people have never ceased to think of the problem of their liberation except in terms of violence, in terms of taking back the land from the foreigners, in terms of national struggle, and of armed insurrection. It is all very simple.⁴⁰

In Kanaky, too, the peasantry is the primary social base of the independence movement. Nearly 70% of the country’s Melanesian population is rural. Colonial land theft has led to a steady decline in Kanak subsistence farming as a proportion of national agricultural production. “More than 80% of New Caledonia’s agricultural production is carried out by European farmers, located in the south of the archipelago, in Nouméa’s⁴¹ peri-urban ‘green belt,’”⁴² as sociologist Marcel Djama summarized in 1999. One of the colors of the Kanak flag, green, symbolizes the rural roots of the independence movement. At the time of its creation in 1984, the FLNKS explained the presence of this green color on the national flag as follows:

It’s the color of the plant kingdom and of living waters, it represents “green pastures,” food, the peasantry, the rural environment. It’s the color of nature’s awakening, the awakening of life, of hope, of remedies. It’s the emblem of salvation.⁴³

It was also the peasant origins of the urban “lumpen proletariat” that led Frantz Fanon to see it as possessing significant revolutionary potential,

³⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 61.

⁴⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 127.

⁴¹ Capital of Kanaky.—Ed., *Material*.

⁴² Marcel Djama, « Transformations agraires et systèmes ruraux mélanésien en Grande Terre de Nouvelle-Calédonie » (“Agrarian Transformations and Melanesian Rural Systems in the Grande Terre Region of New Caledonia”), in *La Revue d’ethnologie - JATBA*, no. 41-1 (Paris: 1999), 210.

⁴³ Proposition de loi du pays relative au drapeau de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (“Draft

making it the “urban spearhead” of the struggle. These peasants, driven off their land, accumulated on the urban outskirts, unable to occupy any professional position due to the dependent nature of colonial capitalism. The agricultural overpopulation was not transformed *en masse* into a proletariat, but instead turned into a “lumpenproletariat”:

The men whom the growing population of the country districts and colonial expropriation have brought to desert their family holdings circle tirelessly around the different towns, hoping that one day or another they will be allowed inside. It is within this mass of humanity, this people of the shanty towns, at the core of the *lumpenproletariat*, that the rebellion will find its urban spearhead. For the *lumpenproletariat*, that horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their clan, constitutes one of the most spontaneous and the most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people.⁴⁴

The situation is hardly any different in contemporary Kanaky. The rural exodus to Nouméa has led to the buildup of a poor Kanak population, including that of a lumpenproletariat. Thousands of Nouméa’s Kanak inhabitants now live in shacks set up on public land in the capital. These “squatters” survive by scrapping and subsistence farming. Unsurprisingly, these Nouméa “squats” were important areas of mobilization during the insurrection that shook Kanaky from May 2024 onwards. The board of directors of the Société des océanistes presents the situation during these popular revolts:

Many of those who are now referred to as rioters come from marginal and excluded populations made up essentially of Kanak and other Oceanians. These poor populations, including a *lumpen* proletariat, have emerged with the massive urbanization of Greater Nouméa over the past thirty years. They are the forgotten cast-

Bill on the Flag of New Caledonia”), introduced by the FLNKS group before being registered as “Proposition no. 116,” of December 1, 2022, by the Congress of New Caledonia. The fight continues to have the FLNKS flag adopted as the country’s official flag.

⁴⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 129.

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aways of the Matignon and Nouméa Accords.⁴⁵ How many of them would have stayed, or even returned, to their villages if they had been able to find the means to live in decent conditions? From now on, they too must be considered citizens in their own right.⁴⁶

This reading of the class structure of settler colonies is, of course, a political statement against a dogmatic reading of Marxism that seeks in an embryonic proletariat the social and offensive basis of the national liberation struggle. Fanon even considers that this proletariat, weakly developed due to the very nature of colonial capitalism, enjoys a social position incomparable to that of the other components of the colonized people:

[I]n the colonial territories the proletariat is the nucleus of the colonized population which has been most pampered by the colonial regime. The embryonic proletariat of the towns is in a comparatively privileged position. In capitalist countries, the working class has nothing to lose; it is they who in the long run have everything to gain. In the colonial countries the working class has everything to lose; in reality it represents that fraction of the colonized nation which is necessary and irreplaceable if the colonial machine is to run smoothly.⁴⁷

Some have interpreted Fanon's analysis as a total rejection of the Marxist approach, whereas the whole of his argument aims to underline the importance of taking into account the specificities of colonial capitalism (dependent and outward-oriented to serve the interests of the metropolitan economy), in order to understand settler colonialism. Moreover, Fanon is not the only theoretician of national liberation to have reached this conclusion. Amílcar Cabral, for example, considered that he had initially dogmatically applied certain European approaches to the question of national

⁴⁵ The Nouméa Accords (1998) were a French strategy to delay decolonization in New Caledonia, granting limited autonomy while maintaining economic and political control. Despite promised independence referendums, France's influence ensured continued dependence.—Ed., *Material*.

⁴⁶ Motion by the Board of Directors of the Société des Océanistes, available on the Société des Océanistes website: <https://www.oceanistes.org>. Consulted on January 22, 2025.

⁴⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 108.

liberation, which led the independence movement to a dramatic impasse. This courageous self-criticism led him, like Fanon, to advocate the centrality of the peasantry in the struggle for national liberation:

I cannot presume to organize a Party, to organize a struggle, in accordance with what I have in my head. It must be in accordance with the specific reality of the land. . . . [A]t the start of our struggle, we were convinced that if we were to mobilize the workers in Bissau, Bolama and Bafata to go on strike, to demonstrate in the streets, to challenge the administration, the Portuguese would change and would grant us independence. But it is not true. In the first place, the workers in our land do not have the same strength as in other lands. Their strength is not so great from the economic point of view, because the great economic strength in our land lies basically in the countryside.⁴⁸

The Ambiguities and Contradictions of the Petty Bourgeoisie

Fanon died too soon to be a witness to the Algerian independence he fought so hard to achieve. He was, however, a witness to the first national independence movements in Africa, and with them the rise of the national petty bourgeoisie, often at the head of pro-independence organizations. As the itinerant ambassador for the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) in Africa from the spring of 1960, he had the opportunity to observe from close quarters the first steps towards independence, from the Congo to Senegal, from Liberia to Guinea, and from Mali to Ghana. Bitterly, he noted the complicity of certain African countries in the isolation and assassination of Lumumba:

The great success of the enemies of Africa is to have compromised the Africans themselves. It is true that these Africans were directly interested in the murder of Lumumba. Chiefs of puppet governments, in the midst of a puppet indepen-

⁴⁸ Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 45.

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dence, [faced] day after day the wholesale opposition of their peoples.⁴⁹

For Fanon, the African complicity in the Congolese tragedy confirms his observations, made in regard to a host of African countries, of an independence thwarted by the introduction of a new type of colonialism: indirect colonialism, colonialism mediated by African elites who became stewards of the interests of the former colonizer, neo-colonialism, etc. Popular hopes and expectations placed on the country's independence began to be dashed as soon as the new governments took their first steps:

The discontented workers undergo a repression as pitiless as that of the colonial periods. Trade unions and opposition political parties are confined to a quasi-clandestine state. The people, the people who had given everything in the difficult moments of the struggle for national liberation wonder, with their empty hands and bellies, as to the reality of their victory.⁵⁰

To understand this historical sequence where national independence was achieved for so many countries, we need to distinguish, as we mentioned earlier, between independence and decolonization. It was precisely in order to avoid genuine decolonization that certain African countries' independence was unexpectedly promoted by the French colonial power itself after 1956. A decade earlier, at the Brazzaville conference in February 1944,⁵¹ the latter still asserted that

The aims of the civilizing work accomplished by France in the Colonies, rule out any idea of autonomy, any possibility of evolution outside of the French imperial bloc; the eventual

⁴⁹ Frantz Fanon, "Lumumba's Death: Could We Do Otherwise?," in *Towards the African Revolution*, 194.

⁵⁰ Frantz Fanon, "This Africa to Come," in *Towards the African Revolution*, 186-187.

⁵¹ The Brazzaville Conference was a French colonial meeting that rejected independence for African colonies while offering limited reforms. Held by the "Free French" government, it aimed to secure colonial loyalty during WWII, maintaining economic and political control under a rebranded imperial framework.—Ed., *Material*.

constitution, even in the far future, of self-government in the colonies is ruled out.⁵²

In an attempt to eliminate any hope of independence, massive repression had become the norm. This was the case in Algeria on May 8, 1945,⁵³ in Vietnam in September 1945,⁵⁴ and in Cameroon in 1947.⁵⁵ But just over a decade later, it was the French government that advocated autonomy for the colonies of French West Africa (AOF) and French Equatorial Africa (AEF), starting with the granting of autonomy in 1956 and independence in 1958. Between these two historical sequences lie the victory of the Vietnamese independence fighters at Dien Bien Phu, the outbreak of armed struggle in Algeria and Cameroon, the Bandung Conference, and the Anglo-Franco-Israeli defeat in Egypt during the nationalization of the Suez Canal.⁵⁶ Fear of the radicalization of national liberation struggles led the colonizer to adapt in order to maintain his position, and to pro-

⁵² Charles de Gaulle, « Discours de Brazzaville, 30 janvier 1944 » ("Brazzaville Speech, January 30, 1944"), given during the French African Conference in Brazzaville. In Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time. Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 137–138.

⁵³ The Sétif and Guelma Massacres of May 1945 saw French forces brutally repress pro-independence protests in Algeria, killing tens of thousands. This massacre exposed the myth of France's "civilizing mission," reaffirming colonial rule through extreme violence and foreshadowing the Algerian War (1954–1962).—Ed., *Material*.

⁵⁴ The 1945–1946 Haiphong and Hanoi Massacres were the French government's response to Vietnamese demands for independence. French forces bombed Haiphong and massacred civilians in Hanoi, killing thousands. This brutal repression marked the beginning of the First Indochina War, exposing France's refusal to relinquish its colonial grip.—Ed., *Material*.

⁵⁵ In 1947, French forces violently suppressed a growing independence movement in Cameroon, particularly the uprising in the Western region, using mass arrests, torture, and executions.—Ed., *Material*.

⁵⁶ In a decisive act of defiance against British and French imperialism, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, previously controlled by the Suez Canal Company, which was dominated by British and French interests. This move aimed to reclaim Egypt's sovereignty over a vital resource and fund the construction of the Aswan High Dam, following the withdrawal of Western financial support. The nationalization sparked the Suez Crisis, where Britain, France, and Israel launched a military intervention. However, international pressure, particularly from the United States and the Soviet Union, forced a ceasefire.—Ed., *Material*.

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mote formal independence, backed by economic and military agreements that reproduced colonial dependence in a new guise.

Describing these “puppet” forms of independence, Fanon compared them in 1958 to real independence, i.e. independence that went as far as real decolonization:

True liberation is not that pseudo-independence in which ministers having a limited responsibility hobnob with an economy dominated by the colonial pact. Liberation is the total destruction of the colonial system, from the preeminence of the language of the oppressor and “departmentalization,” to the customs union that in reality maintains the former colonized in the meshes of the culture, of the fashion, and of the images of the colonialist.⁵⁷

The reference to “departmentalization” indicates that Fanon was not fooled by the new colonial discourse of 1946 regarding the “four old colonies,” Guadeloupe, Martinique, Reunion, and French Guiana, later extended to include Kanaky and Polynesia. Although he had been so inspired by Césaire’s work, Fanon distinguished himself from him by rejecting the “realism” that had led Césaire to accept the logic of departmentalization in place of the goal of national independence.

Three years later, in his masterpiece *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon offers us a thorough analysis of these post-independence “puppet” regimes. He defines the class nature of the new rulers of these “puppet” states:

The psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry; and it is only too true that the greed of the settlers and the system of embargoes set up by colonialism have hardly left them any other choice.⁵⁸

He describes the type of economy this new ruling class implements once in power:

The national economy of the period of independence is not set on a new footing. It is still concerned with the groundnut harvest, with the cocoa crop and the olive yield. . . . [N]ot a single

⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, “Decolonization and Independence,” in *Towards the African Revolution*, 105.

⁵⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 150.

industry is set up in the country. We go on sending out raw materials; we go on being Europe's small farmers, who specialize in unfinished products.⁵⁹

Politically, he characterizes the social and political function of the new rulers, namely to serve as intermediaries and business agents:

The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary. Seen through its eyes, its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism. The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner.⁶⁰

Concrete reality has proved Fanon right in the cases of many African countries. Independence was often just another scramble for colonial assets. Wealth accumulated in the space of a few months. This wealth was then considerably increased by further accumulation carried out by the state apparatus. In short, the process of crystallization of social classes, previously all compressed by colonialism, suddenly accelerated to give rise to a commercial comprador bourgeoisie and a class of large landowners. Unlike Fanon, we characterize the social strata installed in power by the colonizer as predominantly petty-bourgeois, and at best middle-bourgeois in the case of landowners. The process of neo-colonization is, in our view, precisely the transformation of these social strata into comprador (commercial and agrarian) social classes.

Fanon draws a political balance sheet for this process, warning of the nature of nationalist organizations, their programs, and their social bases. There is no possibility, he stresses, of an "independent" capitalism emerging in former colonies. The petty bourgeoisie engaged in the national liberation struggle must choose between betraying their ideals and betraying their class interests:

⁵⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 151-152.

⁶⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 152-153.

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[T]he historical vocation of an authentic national middle class in an underdeveloped country is to repudiate its own nature in so far as it is bourgeois, that is to say in so far as it is the tool of capitalism, and to make itself the willing slave of that revolutionary capital which is the people.⁶¹

Such “betrayal” does not happen spontaneously. It can only be the result of a democratic political organization with a program and a social base in the popular classes (peasantry and working class), and instituting grassroots control of its leaders.

Amílcar Cabral came to the same conclusion in his thesis on the “class suicide of the petty bourgeoisie,” which he presented at the 1966 Havana Tricontinental Conference:⁶²

In order not to betray these objectives, the petty bourgeoisie has only one road: to strengthen its revolutionary consciousness, to repudiate the temptations to become “bourgeois” and the natural pretensions of its class mentality; to identify with the classes of workers, not to oppose the normal development of the process of revolution. This means that in order to play completely the part that falls to it in the national liberation struggle, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing *suicide* as a class, to be restored to life in the condition of a revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which he belongs.⁶³

The colonizer did not remain inactive in the face of this choice. As independence approached, it multiplied the number of overtures, bureaucratic bodies, commissions, special offices, etc., with the aim of bureaucratizing the pro-independence political organizations and thereby steering them in the direction of neo-colonialism. In Kanaky today, the institutionalization

⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 150.

⁶² This was a historic gathering of revolutionary movements from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, held in Cuba. Organized by Fidel Castro and the Cuban government, it aimed to foster solidarity among these regions in their shared struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. The conference emphasized the importance of armed struggle, anti-imperialist unity, and support for liberation movements, particularly in Africa.—Ed., *Material*.

⁶³ Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 136.

and bureaucratization of a significant part of the petty-bourgeoisie is juxtaposed with the radicalization of the popular movement. The lessons of Fanon and Cabral sound a warning and a call to vigilance.

The 100th birth anniversaries of Lumumba, Malcolm X, and Fanon are taking place in a world where the anti-colonial struggle is being revived (as witnessed by France's troubles in West Africa and the October 7 operation in Palestine), while the imperialist offensive is taking shape with the multiplication of wars (Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, etc.). Against this backdrop, Fanon's message is undeniably modern. Whether on the nature of colonial oppression, its links with capitalism and imperialism, the resistance it inevitably provokes, the attitude of different classes and social strata towards it, or the link between independence and decolonization, between decolonization and socialism, the possible dead-ends and contradictions of national liberation struggles, etc., Fanon's works remain a must-read for anyone wishing to bring down the colonial system, which persists by constantly donning new masks. As long as our world continues to be structured between a dominant imperialist center and dominated peripheries, Fanon, Malcolm X, and Lumumba will remain relevant.

About this issue's art. . .

The fifteen photographs reproduced in these pages are drawn from 1990–1995. *Algérie, chronique photographique*, a body of work by Algerian artist and photojournalist Ammar Bouras. Captured in black and white during the years that led Algeria from political upheaval into civil war, these images document more than events: they bear witness to a moment of intense collective contradiction—where mass mobilizations, political rupture, repression, and resistance collided. With a materialist attention to the conditions of visibility and the politics of memory, Bouras' work resists both erasure and abstraction. In the words of historian Malika Rahal, "to trigger the camera and capture an image—even a blurry one—is an act of resistance, a refusal to be perpetually paralyzed by violence." This selection reactivates that gesture, placing it in dialogue with this issue's reflections on anti-imperialist revolutions and movements that were betrayed—in the Congo, Algeria, and elsewhere—and our duty to understand their causes and mechanisms.



















Prisons, the Black Liberation Movement, and the Struggle for Palestine¹

Ahmad Sa'adat

It is an honor to write an introduction to this book by a great leader of the Black liberation struggle in the United States, Huey P. Newton. From inside the occupier's Ramon prison, on behalf of myself, my comrades and the Palestinian prisoners' movement, we extend our clenched fists of solidarity and salute and arms of embrace to our Black comrades whose struggle for liberation in the belly of the beast continues today against fierce repression.

From Ansar to Attica to Lannemezan, the prison is not only a physical space of confinement but a site of struggle of the oppressed confronting the oppressor. Whether the name is Mumia Abu-Jamal, Walid Daqqa, or

¹ This text was written by Ahmad Sa'adat—imprisoned leader of the Palestinian national liberation movement and General Secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. It was originally published in French as the preface to *Premiers Matins de Novembre* Éditions's publication of Huey Newton's *Revolutionary Suicide* (2018). Translated from French by the Material editors.

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Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, political prisoners behind bars can and must be a priority for our movements. These names illustrate the continuity of struggle against our collective enemy—their legacies of organizing that reach back to the anti-colonial liberation movements of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s to today. Political prisoners are not simply individuals; they are leaders of struggle and organizing within prison walls who help to break down and dismantle the bars, walls, and chains that act to divide us from our peoples and communities in struggle. They face repeated isolation, solitary confinement, cruel tortures of the occupier and jailer who seek to break the will of the prisoner and their deep connection to their people.

So when we witness the escalation against our movement as we see today in the Philippines, as we see the murderous and orchestrated attacks on our Palestinian resistance, as we see the criminalization of Black people and movements, it is clear that we are still facing the situation that Huey Newton identified and confronted. We are still seeking to defend our peoples from the relentless assaults of capitalism, Zionism, and imperialism and their police and military forces. We have not yet been able to realize our dreams and transform the prisons into museums of liberation. Revolutionaries across the world struggle and dream for this future, in every movement of oppressed people. Indeed, when we speak of the prisoners' movement, we are in essence speaking of Resistance.

Prisons exist for a reason, for the needs and interests of those with power. And when there are prisons to lock up the people, there is occupation, colonialism, oppression—where there is occupation and colonization, there will be prisons and all of the laws and legal frameworks erected to legitimize exploitation, oppression, and injustice and criminalize resistance and liberation. From the Fugitive Slave Acts of the 1800s to the “terrorist” lists that seek to criminalize and isolate the resistance movements of the peoples of the world, these are reflections of a war on the people. We salute sister Assata Shakur, still struggling and free in Cuba, while facing renewed threats and “terrorist” labeling to justify hunting down this global symbol of freedom.

This also clearly illustrates that the struggle, the cause, and the movement of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Movement are not a closed file. It is an open file, an ongoing struggle and a continuing movement for justice and liberation. As I write today, the revolutionary

Prisons, Black Liberation and Palestine

Palestinian Left, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), is marking its 50th year of struggle, a time for both celebration and review of this legacy in order to sharpen and strengthen our march toward revolutionary victory. Similarly, we have just passed the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party, whose vision for revolutionary change continues to be just as relevant today.

This is a legacy that is carried on both with ideas and with people themselves, whose histories of struggle continue to animate and inspire their communities. You could pass by the first prisoner of the PFLP somewhere on the streets of Berlin, still organizing Palestinians. You could feel the legacy of the Black Panther Party and the continuing Black struggle on the streets of Chicago, Oakland, and Harlem. There are people who carry within them the legacies of struggle as a human treasure. The experiences of the elders of our movement, especially those who have come through prison, stand alongside the ideas passed down through writing, books, and literature in carrying on—from one generation to another—the trajectory and path of struggle toward a future in which youth are coming forward to lead Black and Palestinian revolutionary struggles for liberation.

Every political prisoner, whether they are currently in prison or not, carries within them the dream and reality of liberation and what it can and must mean in practice. Today, when we look at the Black Liberation movement or the Indigenous and Native struggle in the United States and Canada, we are talking about the same camp of enemy that we confront in occupied Palestine. The bullets that assassinated Malcolm X or Fred Hampton could have been used to kill Ghassan Kanafani or Khaled Nazzal or Mahmoud Hamshari, and today we see the same tear gas and bullets shipped around the world for use against the people. We see corporations like G4S² profiting from the attacks on our movements and the mass imprisonments of our people and US, European, and Israeli police forces exchanging training with one another to escalate racism, “counter-insurgency,” and repression on the streets of our cities, camps, and villages.

In our circles here in prisons, we always hope and wish to communicate to movements elsewhere and political prisoners everywhere. We want to share our experiences with one another to strengthen all of our movements for liberation and the movement to free our prisoners. Political prisoners

² A multinational private security company based in London.—Ed., *Material*.

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have a firsthand experience of confrontation, and the experience of the prison can be a transformative one for a political prisoner. It is not an individual experience but a collective one; the heroism of a prisoner is not simply to be in prison but to understand that they carry with them the leadership of a movement and a continuing struggle in a new location, which continues to have international reverberations. Georges Ibrahim Abdallah today is struggling in Lannemezan prison³ just as Mumia Abu-Jamal is struggling in Mahanoy.⁴ The heroism also does not come simply for one who has spent years in prison and is now released, but rather by being a veteran of struggle who continues to carry the message of liberation for those who remain.

The political prisoner is not weak and is not broken, despite all their best efforts. The responsibility of the political prisoner is to safeguard the flame. This is not a role that we have sought out or worked for. But now that we are in this position, we must hold our position to set an example, not to our people, who are rooted and steadfast, but to the enemy, to show that imprisonment will not work to defeat us or our people. We carry a cause, not simply an individual search for freedom. Israel or France or the US would free us, or Georges Abdallah, or Mumia Abu-Jamal, if we were willing to become tools of the system or betray our people. But instead, the prisons have generated striking examples of a culture of resistance—from art, to literature, to political ideas.

Today, our movements and the revolutionary movements around the world are facing very difficult times. However, these difficult times can also hold value if we look more closely; we are paving the way for new generations of revolutionaries around the world who can still carry the demand for socialism, for people's democracy, for an alternative world. In the era in which Newton wrote, movements and prisoners shared experiences and communicated through letters, books, and art, often smuggled out of or into prisons, passed censors and iron walls. Today, with all of the great revolutions in technology, political prisoners are struggling to have

³ In Southwestern France.—Ed., *Material*.

⁴ In rural Pennsylvania, US.—Ed., *Material*.

their words heard at all, denied access to even telephones to speak with our families and loved ones.

Why do we still consider and read and reprint the writings of Huey Newton today? Fundamentally, because his analysis and that of the Black Panther Party was right and continues to be right, valid, and essential. Today, when we see the ravages of US imperialism, the threats of Trump against the world, and the shooting down of Black people on US streets by cops, then the fundamental correctness and necessity of the Black Panthers' work is underlined. Today, when popular movements are under attack and liberation struggles labeled as "terrorist" and criminalized, we see a massive coercive attack on our peoples. Prisons are only one form of coercion in the hands of the occupier, colonizer, capitalist, and imperialist; stripping the knowledge of the people and imposing new forms of isolation are yet additional forms of coercion.

The imposition of consumerism, the stripping of peoples from their humanity, the isolation of peoples are all forms of coercion alongside the prisons that act to undermine our movements, our peoples, and our visions of liberation. They want to see all of our movements isolated from one another, through the terror of the "terrorist" list and the silence of solitary confinement. Capitalist and imperialist media blankets the world, so even here in Israeli prison we hear about the latest technologies in the US while the repression of Black people is rendered invisible. But the reality today is that every day, a little Huey or Assata or Khalida or Ishaq is being born, who can carry forward the vision of their people.

Huey Newton and the Black Panthers stood for socialism, for social justice, against racism, imperialism, and war, from the streets of Oakland to the refugee camps of Lebanon. Huey Newton said, "We support the Palestinians' just struggle for liberation one hundred percent. We will go on doing this, and we would like for all of the progressive people of the world to join our ranks in order to make a world in which all people can live."

Of course, I cannot speak as an expert about incarceration in the United States today. But just looking at the numbers is a stunning illustration of what is deeply wrong with the system. As Palestinians, we also face an experience of negation, of attack on our existence, as being treated as lesser or non-humans for our designated racial identity. We understand through our own experiences how occupation and capitalism are all about profit

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and the example that US prisons are creating for the world, where prisons are seen as a source of cheap and coerced free labor as well as profit for capitalism. We see how incarceration is used to control, divide, and threaten communities and peoples under attack. Incarceration means a lot of money for corporations at the same time that it means a direct threat to Black children and their futures. And this is the “security solution” that Trump and US imperialism is marketing to the world as a solution to the crisis of capitalism, a solution built on bloody and brutal exploitation.

Here in our cells, we can feel the reverberations of these attacks and their physical impact, in the invasions and inspections of the special repressive units of the occupier. We also see the potential and indeed, the necessity, for movements to rise inside prisons together with those on the outside. We see thousands of people sentenced to massive sentences of 20, 30, 40 years in prison and even more, stripping people’s freedom and taking people’s lives. Resistance is critical and it must have a real impact on people’s lives. Our sacrifice in prison has meaning when it can lead to fruit for the poor and liberation for our peoples. Our struggle must impact people’s lives in a material way.

From Ireland to the United States to France to Palestine, political prisoners continue to be leaders in movements fighting racism, imperialism, and colonialism. We also see the prisoners of the Palestinian movement facing political imprisonment around the world in the jails of the enemy—from the heroic Ramea Odeh forced from the United States to the Five prisoners for Palestine, called the Holy Land Five, held in extreme solitary confinement alongside Black strugglers, for engaging in charity work for our people, to our dear comrade Georges Abdallah who has suffered for 34 years in French prisons.

The prisons and the political prisoners are also an example of the power and necessity of “breaking the law.” The law—the law of the imperialist and the colonizer—is used to steal the rights and resources of our people and also to justify our imprisonment and repression and criminalization. Through the collective “breaking” of the law and its power to define justice and injustice—when people, collectively, confront and “break” the law, not merely as individuals but as a collective power—it loses its claim

Prisons, Black Liberation and Palestine

to legitimacy. Breaking the law—the law of capitalism, imperialism, and exploitation—must become the norm, and not the exception.

Political prisoners are jailed because they fear our actions and they fear our ideas, our power to mobilize our peoples in a revolutionary way against their exploitation and colonization. They fear our communication and they fear the powers of our people. They fear that if we come together, we will build an international front for the liberation of oppressed peoples. They know, and deeply fear, that we can truly build an alternative world. For them, this is the terror of defeat, but for us, and for our peoples, this is the hope of freedom and the promise of victory.

Ahmad Sa'adat

Ramon Prison

November 2017

Interview with Butch Cottman

The following is an interview conducted with Butch Cottman in the beginning of 2025. Butch has been an organizer and planner for the last 50 years and considers himself a revolutionary communist whose practice has been in the Black Liberation movement.

Material: *Can you talk about when, why, and how you were politicized? In particular, how and why did a career army man end up a revolutionary and a Maoist?*

Butch Cottman: I was conscious of politics as something I ought to have some ideas about. And some practice. Because I became conscious in 1964. I had left Asia. I had been in Korea when John Kennedy got killed, and I had been in Asia, before the Gulf of Tonkin incident.¹ I'd been in Vietnam and Laos.

Material: *What were you doing?*

Butch Cottman: I was doing stuff that soldiers did. I was a scout and a pathfinder and that meant I was sneaking and slipping and sliding around other people's country. Looking for other people to kill. That's what the scout does. Looking for roads and maps and bridges and potential land-

¹ Gulf of Tonkin incident—An incident where the US's secret military operations in the northwest part of the South China Sea was discovered by the North Vietnamese, which triggered a confrontation initiated by the US.—Ed., *Material* (as all following).

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ing zones, potential fire bases. That's what a pathfinder does. But I was in the airport going back to United States when the Republican National Convention in 1964 was on television. And George H. W. Bush, George Bush senior, was on the TV. I didn't know nothing about it except that the leading Republican was the guy who eventually got the nomination, who was an outright fascist.² The name's not coming to me now, but Bush was running as a so-called moderate candidate for the Republican nomination, and he was on TV making his presentation of himself. And he was saying, just as I began to pay attention, "Segregation now, segregation today, tomorrow, and forever" or some shit like that. And I thought to myself, "We're overseas killing strangers for these motherfuckers. And here in 1964, when people in this country are dying for the right to vote and all the stuff that comes with that, this motherfucker is proclaiming himself an arch-racist." I hadn't had a deliberately or activist-inspired political thought before that.

I was just beginning to get a little disenchanted with the Army, but I had no alternative plan. I was good at soldiering. It wasn't that I was more competent than other people, but it was less stressful for me than other people. There were guys around me who were smart and fitter, but under pressure, I seem to do better than other people. So it made it a little easier for me.

So, I gradually got to the point where I realized I was unlikely to make a career of the Army, even though there were very few comparable civilian options at that time for Black men without a college education, or any like marketable industrial skills, any machine tool skills or any shit like that. There just wasn't much for you to do, except hunt and look for some kind laboring job, which is what I ended up doing anyway. But, I began to feel like, no, I wasn't going to stay in the army. And then, in 1965, when I was for the most part in Fort Hood, Texas—the war was getting hot and we were training young guys to go to Vietnam. And a young white kid from somewhere in the South asked me, because I was pretty well thought of at that time as an NCO—I just made sergeant—what the war was about, and why we were going over there to fight. And I had never asked myself that question. I guess I, like most people in the Army, especially people who were regular army who were volunteers, thought, "Well, it's just like

² Barry Goldwater.

just what we do.” He asked me and I told him as best I could, that I guess we were mercenaries. I guess that we were going over there cause that’s what they paid us to do. I certainly didn’t think that the Vietnamese were gonna sail their *sampans*³ to San Francisco and Los Angeles and attack us. Why were we going them 10,000 miles to be killing strangers? You know, that was the best answer I could come up with. But it stuck in my back of my mind that he had asked that and that I didn’t have an answer that was suitable, even for me. So when I was promoted to sergeant, it came as a complete surprise to me, and as far as I know, everybody around me. It was only in the last ten years that I’ve come to understand why it happened.

Material: *What’s your understanding now about what happened?*

Butch Cottman: My understanding now about why it happened is that John Kennedy, before he was killed, had ordered the army to promote some Black guys—Black “men,” because the army back then was overwhelmingly men in those days. Because Black soldiers had the highest rate of reenlistment of any other demographic in the service. And had the lowest rate of getting promoted and getting promoted in a timely manner. And he thought that this is some civil rights shit that he could correct administratively: find some Black men and promote them.

Cause how I got promoted was: I was coming from the motor pool one day in Fort Hood—and looked like I was coming from the motor pool, covered in grease and grime, you know. And one of the guys in my outfit saluted me on the way up to the barracks. And I returned the salute. And then an officer who was parked in a vehicle across the street got out and approached me and wanted to know, “Why did that man salute you?” And I said, “I don’t know, I guess he respects me. He thinks I’m a pretty good soldier.” And he said, “Well, were you an officer, once?” I said no. And he asked, “What’s your name” and blah, blah, blah. And then he got back in the vehicle. I didn’t give him much more thought. The business about asking if I was an officer made sense to me because this was the beginning of the regime of the guy who was secretary of defense, the one who came from General Motors, what’s his name.⁴ And a lot of men who had been promoted had gotten field-grade promotions in the Second World War,

³ A traditional wooden boat found in Asia.

⁴ Charles Wilson.

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and in the Korean War were being forced either to leave the service or to return to their last enlisted grade, because they hadn't gone on and got some college credits, they hadn't got college degrees, which was supposed to keep them in the service. And between the wars there were seen to be too many officers, too many senior enlisted men. And now three years later in Vietnam, they'd been sucking those guys out the grave because that's how badly they needed combat leaders.

But he was looking for promotable people because that's what he was told to do. Because when I got a letter ordering me to report to the promotions board for a hearing, I thought, "Oh, boy, somebody downstairs had a nervous breakdown."⁵ And I went straight to the first sergeant. I was like, "Sarge, what is this?" And my first sergeant was a good guy, levelheaded, easygoing, country gentleman. But, I wasn't one of the guys who was tight with him.⁶ And I don't know what it's like now in the army, but in those days, if you was a young soldier and you were going to get promoted and you were gonna stay in the service and do well, it was a big help to have a senior non-commissioned officer to, in today's expression "mentor you." To tell you what to go through, to tell you what the politics of the job was, and who could be trusted in leadership. I didn't have no shit like that. So at the time that I got promoted, I had just about concluded that I was not going to stay in the service.

Material: *So you couldn't answer the question about why, and you were having questions at the time that they were trying to promote you.*

Butch Cottman: At the time they were trying to promote me and also at the time that the war was building up. Also at the time that the Civil Rights Movement was building up. Overseas, you didn't get no real news about the Civil Rights Movement. But in the States, if you come in the barracks in the evening, you watch the national news like everybody else, and you had a slightly different perspective because you were *in* the Army.

But you could see they were drafting people left and right, snatching them off the street. And you could tell they was building up the numbers and stuff like that, but you had, unless you watched the news, no sense of

⁵ Meaning, it was completely illogical or out of the blue for him to get promoted.

⁶ Close with him.

what the Army's plans were for these people. Because there was still a big army in Europe, you know, so there were plenty of places to send guys.

Material: *What was the thing that pushed you over the edge to make you decide to leave the army and leave that career?*

Butch Cottman: Well, when I came to believe that I should be doing something different. I had no opportunities. I had nobody to help me in civy street⁷ and nothing like that. But I no longer trusted the army to treat me fairly. Because even the process of me getting promoted was just so obscure or mysterious. I mean, nobody in my outfit would think, "Cottman, I put your name in for being promoted."

The first sergeant was just as baffled by this shit. I mean, he had apparently been told something, but what he assumed was that once I got promoted, I would reenlist. That's what they all assumed. "He's a good soldier. He knows how to do this. If the men trust him," you know, I was an effective squad leader. And the men did trust me. So in terms of their perspective, there was no reason for me not to go make a career out of it. *If I had lived*, which is unlikely as a scout, yeah, I probably would have done well, especially if I found somebody to mentor me and get me the next couple of promotions.

I remember one sergeant telling me, "reenlist," because "smart as you is, you'll go to S2 or some shit like that." Well, S2 was squadron- or battalion-grade intelligence, non-CO.⁸ It's a cushy job, but they don't give it to poor niggas. We're talking about 60 years ago. For instance, if you was a congressman's son and you got drafted, they sent you to S2 to make sure you got out the shit alive. Because there were a lot of places to hide people. If your family was influential, you could get drafted and never get out of Washington DC, because they made sure that you were looked out for. At the same time, the secretary of defense, McNamara, he was rewriting the way things were done, computerized everything.

For instance, there were sergeants who spent the last ten years tending bar at an officer's club or some shit and getting regular promotions. But because they were a sergeant who, somewhere along the line, had served with somebody who's now a general and who was protecting them. Then

⁷ Civilian life.

⁸ Commanding officer.

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under McNamara, all them names went in the computer and, whatever your military occupational service was, your next assignment was to do that work.

So you had guys all of a sudden back in the field trying to squeeze in and out of a tank, whose bellies was bigger than the opening of the tank because they hadn't done a lick of exercise or work. No actual soldiering for years. And they were just furious and upset. But McNamara made it clear, "You gonna do this shit that's on paper, or you gonna get out of the service." And a lot of them was like, "I got 18.5 years, let me suffer through this last year and a half so I get my pension and get out like that." So there was a lot of that going on. If you were a young, ambitious NCO, and you wanted to be a paratrooper, a ranger, and get promoted, you could. Because Special Forces was new and there was no such thing as Special Operations Command, and all that bullshit. But it was open in that part. And there were assignments in Europe and in Asia for you. But then when Vietnam hit, you also at the head of the line to get your ass blown off, because if you were in the field, this is what you were supposed to do.

So, I mean, all of that became untenable, and a little bit of information about the Civil Rights Movement began to leak out and I realized I wanted to know more and do more in that area, and that I needed a life. I needed some kind of working, predictable relationship with women. And I had family. I had a bunch of shit that I didn't have nobody else to handle for me, that made sense for me to get out.

I was still in the Army when Malcolm X got killed. That had turned the temperature up so much on civil rights activity and if you're in the Army and you read in the newspapers or watch TV, you couldn't help but know something was going on that hadn't been going on when I joined the army.

Material: *Were people talking about it? The enlisted men were talking about the Civil Rights Movement, they were talking Malcolm X, and when he was killed?*

Butch Cottman: No. I mean, for instance, you sitting in the day room and it comes on TV. Yes. People talk about it then. I remember we were sitting there watching something and the tone was on TV, "what is it that Black people want?" kind of shit. Which the TV networks was good at acting like, "Y'all just got here from Mars. What is it y'all want?" And, that was

the dialogue on TV, and Sergeant Benton was sitting over in there corner, and he said, “You know, they took this country from the Indians and killed and scattered them to take it. Don’t think for a minute they going to turn it over to y’all.”

I thought about that shit and I thought, “Yeah well, you right.” But there was that level of consciousness. Now maybe in the other outfits were different, but in our outfit, it wasn’t like on the weekends or when we were drinking or something, we were talking about politics or something like that, no.

Material: *All right, so you came out of the Army and you were working laboring jobs. What was happening at that time in Philadelphia? Like what kind of organizing and what kind of organizations were you exposed to then?*

Butch Cottman: I wasn’t initially. I was at Strick Trailer.⁹ And Strick Trailer had a Communist Party USA cell. But they were so fuckin’ far underground that, if you were young and you was asking for questions about the union, if you was the type of person who stood up and asked questions and shit like that, they tried to discourage you, tried and intimidate you.

But I wasn’t one that was scaring. But you wasn’t gonna get very satisfactory answers about shit. If the union leadership thought they could recruit you, you know, make you wanna run, you might do better. But not if you was just somebody just working, especially if you didn’t have no real seniority and nothing like that.

Material: *What questions did you have at that time that they could not give you satisfactory answers about?*

Butch Cottman: About the contract, about working conditions. I worked at Strick Trailer for close to four years, certainly. And every year, a couple guys dropped dead at the time clock—at least a couple, either coming or going. Coming to work in the morning, hit the clock, and drop dead. Going, leaving work in the evening and hit the clock and drop dead or approaching the clock, card in hand, and drop dead. That shit happened regularly, because, you know, it was piecework and the trailers didn’t stop

⁹ Strick Trailer manufactured trailers/containers for trucks/trains.

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moving. And so many of the guys had two jobs and it was that, and you had foremen trying to bully you.

And then there were other guys like me that were young and were veterans or just out of jail, just out of the street, working there, and the foreman would try to bully you and they be like, “Motherfucker, I’ll kill you.” And that was a regular routine. “He threatened to kill me.” “Yeah, be outside after work.” There would actually be guys outside trying to hustle somebody else in their car and get them off the lot to keep them from having a confrontation with security or something like that. Because guys had guns, and it was like, “We took enough of your shit.” And it was that kind of tension in the workplace.

Material: *So the CPUSA was embedded there in the union and they weren’t dealing with this.*

Butch Cottman: I don’t know if they were embedded in the union or not. They may have been isolated. But they had a cell and they had members there. I only knew one guy and he’d been in the CPUSA since the beginning of the Cold War. He’d been a mathematician and a college instructor and he got blacklisted and got a job working on the assembly line, just like me, even though he was at least ten, maybe twenty years older than me.

But he was one of the few that I actually knew was in the CP. I mean, a thoroughly nice person, but, grateful to have a job at all because the blacklist was so deep that he wasn’t going to get no work in academia, or no work in what was fledgling tech shit then. You know, IBM was like, as good as it got as far as technology in 1966 and ’67. And firms like that weren’t gonna hire nobody that came up on the red list, and if you already were hidden in an academic environment with somebody in the administration to protect you, you weren’t gonna get hired at another college, because your name would come up on shit—name and Social Security Number.

Material: *At that time, though, you were conscious of the CP guys, even though they were buried deep and you knew there was a cell there. Were you interested in knowing more about communism?*

Butch Cottman: I wasn’t interested in knowing more about communism for its sake. I was interested in knowing what to do, find some place where

I could express my commitments and ask my questions and get some support, get some deeper understanding about the shit that was going on. So, for instance, the guys was always talking about corruption in the union, about who was getting money on the side, and how—when they got the union to agree to the contract—what the union leadership got as like undercover bonuses and shit like that. I wanted to know why. Why are you talking about that in secret off the side? You know, I'm full of that kind of shit. Guys on the plant floor liked me and liked Ernie [my brother], because they thought we were bright and they saw that we wasn't caught up in street shit. But nobody said, "These guys are potential political activists, let me talk to you, there's shit to do." That didn't happen.

And out on the street, people I grew up with, especially people who were 2 or 3 years younger than me, there was a whole strata of them who grew up under me, who were then in Vietnam. These were the guys who were getting killed from my *alma mater*, from Edison High School and from my neighborhood from 23rd and Diamond. And they were dying by the handful, dozen at a time. And they had brothers and sisters who were also won to the Black Panther Party, because by now, the Black Panther Party is on TV and they have a dynamic chapter here in Philadelphia. I always thought they were kind of childish. But I liked the guy who's the leader here, Reggie Schell. Reggie was always levelheaded, you know, and patient. I mean, extraordinarily so, for somebody who was maybe a year or two older than me. But, I always thought that their program was kind of infantile. I was like this shit ain't going no place, and this shit about confronting the cops—what are you going to do except get killed?

Material: *What was their program here?*

Butch Cottman: It was the same as it was nationwide. They had a food program, and they was supposed to be defending people against police abuse and shit like that. But it got to the point where they couldn't defend themselves. You know, when Frank Rizzo turned on them and humiliated them in public, they didn't have no response.

Material: *When was that?*

Butch Cottman: Frank Rizzo was a police commissioner and then became the mayor [of Philadelphia]. It was all in the newspaper, they had

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them strip naked in the street. One night they raided their house—they all living in the same place. Why you all living in the same place? And they had them out in the street and stripped them naked to publicly humiliate them. “You’re supposed to be a tough guy. We the cops,” that kind of shit. They bragged about being armed, but it wasn’t effectively armed. I’m like, I don’t know shit, but I can tell you motherfuckers how to set up an ambush. How to defend yourself, how to protect yourself. How to have some kind of defense in depth—not to all be in the same room, in the same house. And I mean, come on, that was annoying to me because as little as I understood, I understood that that was a dead end, that what you end up doing is spend all your time defending yourself against that shit.

And if I’m someplace and sending my children to the breakfast program, and then I turn on TV at night and the police is harassing y’all and attacking y’all and pulling you out of cars and beating your asses and shit like that, I’m not going to keep sending my kids around to get involved in that shit. Especially if I have like teenagers who find that shit glamorous, you know, and so that put real limits on what they could accomplish as community organizers.

Material: *I get that perspective probably came to you clearly, because you had spent so many years in the Army and understood what the state was capable of and what an actually organized, armed group of people could do.*

Butch Cottman: Yeah.

Material: *And I get what you’re saying about how the breakfast program with the kids is not going to be effective if they were on TV being humiliated and harassed by the cops. But were there other aspects of their program that seems like you understood to not be viable? That was not going to be successful?*

Butch Cottman: I don’t remember, at least certainly not right now, enough about the other aspects of their program. I didn’t understand how many hungry people there were in the neighborhood and hungry children until the Panthers started the Breakfast Club, and there’d be a line of kids trying to get something before they went to school. And that kind of stuff that they were doing was supposed to make it a safe neighborhood. How to confront the thieves and the addicts and speakeasies¹⁰ and shit like that,

¹⁰ Illegal bars that sold alcohol.

that they was doing to protect the community, to make the police presence uneasy in their community. That was important shit. But they really weren't handling it with enough maturity.

The substance of their program, the Ten Point Panther Program, I don't remember enough of it to remember if I had an analysis of it or if it was a useful analysis. The Panthers' biggest advantage, and their biggest shortcoming was that they were constantly on the news and on the TV. They didn't get a chance to grow organically. They didn't get a chance to have a substantive relationship with their community over enough years where they could figure out how to be a presence in the life of the community. Apart from the shit about the Panthers for Self-Defense, fighting the cops—and shit about fighting the cops was very appealing to young people.

But it was developing at the same time that the drug gangs were developing. Heroin distribution and cocaine distribution was developing that junior Black Mafia and all that shit, the Black Muslims. And I realized a lot of mothers saw that as a more viable option for their son and to some lesser extent, their daughters, than the Panthers. But the Panthers were just always in hot water.

Material: *So you saw this going on and then how did you become exposed to United Progressives?*

Butch Cottman: Well, there was a Black power convention here in '68. I went to that, but I had no idea what was going on. I didn't have any understanding of the forces. I'd try to read the literature and stuff like that.

Material: *But somehow you just decided to go there? Did you have someone take you there?*

Butch Cottman: No, it was on Diamond Street at the Church of the Advocate. You had to be blind, dumb, and stupid not to know that it was in Philadelphia, cause it was nationally in the news, that's how important the Black Power movement was at that time. That was in '68. The only good thing that happened to me is that Boggs's organization in Philadelphia, the Pacesetters, always had a table outside these events, selling or giving away Jimmy's literature.¹¹ They never came in, they never took part. They

¹¹ The Pacesetters were an offshoot of James Boggs's organization out of Detroit.

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never raised no critical questions. As far as I know, they didn't organize at these events or participate on any of the committees, which they should have. But that's just the nature of the local leadership. It was just that petty bourgeois.

But the guy who was the local leader, Bill Gray, Jim Gray, I forget what his name was. He was teaching at Temple [University] at the time. He would see me and I would come over to the table and look at their literature and if they had something appealing I would buy it. And he said to me one time, "You know, you always raising critical questions—you need to have some answers." And that struck me. And he was a real charismatic guy. He could criticize you and have you laugh at yourself. He was that kinda guy. And when he said that, that's when I began to read. That was between '68 and '70. I had already read Mao *On Protracted Struggle* and *On Guerrilla Warfare*. I read that when I was *in* the service. When I was at Fort Hood.

Material: *Really?*

Butch Cottman: Yeah, because that was all that we talked about. Guerrilla warfare this, guerrilla warfare that. Well, you know, and I'm like, "Well, let me find out what the fuck is going on here."

Material: *And that was just in the library?*

Butch Cottman: Yeah, not just in military libraries, in public libraries all over the country. And you could get it in the hardback. When I was at Fort Benning, they didn't have a copy of *On Guerrilla Warfare* because it was always out, because especially young officers were getting ready to get assigned to places with the infantry training school. And I read *On Protracted Struggle* and it read like a Baptist sermon to me. I guess it is fair to say it made a lot of sense to me. Somewhere later down the line I read *On Guerrilla Warfare*. I don't know how much good it did me to read it. But I'm hoping it did some. I guess it affected me in that I soldiered in a more professional way, because I had some sense of the environment. I was in with a lot of guys just who were just clueless, just walking around waiting to get shot.

Material: *So you went to the Black Power conference...*

Butch Cottman: I went to the Black Power conference. You know, I didn't learn much. I didn't think much other than that I began intentionally to study. And somewhere between then and 1970, I read my first copy of *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party* by Jimmy Boggs. I didn't know what to do about it, but I had a friend, Ralph Durham, who was one of the people organizing the Philadelphia Black Political Convention in 1970, and I went there to work with him to help them, met some people, a few of whom I struggled alongside for the next 30 years. But, he was a member of something called the Black Political Forum, which was a really important independent electoral organization at that time. And because of him, I joined the Forum.

Material: *Can you talk about the Forum a little bit and what it was and what it stood for?*

Butch Cottman: The Black Political Forum was an independent political organization who saw its job as educating voters, Black voters, primarily, but not exclusively. About why a person should or shouldn't run for office, what the offices entailed, what the jobs of, say, a state representative or a state senator or city council person actually was, what you were actually expected to do, to accomplish, how a party apparatus worked, how the fact that the Democratic Party was not the same as the government of Philadelphia—the Democratic Party was a club. Stuff that people still understand very vaguely—it's a club you join and it's a club that exists to run people for office and to govern with a certain obligation to the club's members, to solve certain problems for the club members, which if you were a Democrat, you were a club member. The Forum sought to make all those issues clear and simple.

And the Forum had a process for interviewing candidates for office. And if the candidate interviewed successfully, the Forum would encourage people to support them and fund them you know, and work their campaigns and stuff like that. And there were some of us who were Forum members, and if the Forum endorsed you, we would come work in your campaign. And the Forum was very, very well respected for that.

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Material: *And what was in the questions, the interview?*

Butch Cottman: I don't remember well enough for it to be useful, but it was, "Excuse me, what committees are there that a freshman candidate can serve on? How do they choose them? How are they gonna choose you? Which one do you want to be in? What was the likelihood?" In other words, if you campaigning about how you want to do something about school funding—how? You going to be a freshman state representative, what committees you gonna get in? What are your chances of getting on the education committee? How does the education committee affect the budget? How you want to, how *you* are going to get money funneled to Philadelphia, to your district? Those kind of questions, which if people understood what elected officials do, would be seen as common sense. But most people even running for office don't have the presence of mind to realize, "I'm supposed be able to answer these questions," because so little is expected of elected officials. It is, "I get elected, I get a salary. And I get about two years without much accountability until it's time to run again. I'm not *really* expected to solve no problems. I got to be really fairly conscientious to even pretend."

So the Forum made all that kind of bullshit much more difficult. And people, Black and white, came to the Forum for the Forum's endorsement because it was seen as legit. If you were white and you aspired to really be a public servant. And in those days it was white Republicans who came: "I want to be interviewed," because, "I know I can do a better job than these other people. I've actually read what the damn job entails. And I actually know what I'm supposed to do. My education has prepared me for it." We had dialog like that.

You know, I remember a woman who was I think the daughter of a judge, high-level judge, at the state level. I remember she came and sought a Forum endorsement and she answered the question so well and so thoughtfully, so comprehensively, that she blew the rest of us out of the room. And I was saying to myself, "Oh, lord, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. I sure wish there was some way for us to get this woman on TV so people would know, this is what you got the right to expect."

But she didn't have real support from the party. She had the circle of people who supported her father or her grandfather who was a judge. That

could get her access to people like us, to meetings and interviews and shit like that. But she didn't have access to the apparatus in the party that could actually run your campaign and get you elected.

Material: *So how did the Forum get to have that credibility and how did it develop from nothing into an organization where candidates were coming for its endorsement?*

Butch Cottman: History threw them a bone. The Forum came into existence when Black politicians and Black community activists were in rebellion—rebellion may be making it seem too dramatic—against the Democratic Party organization because no Democrats with any integrity or any principles was going to get listed by the party for public office. And you were expected to be completely subservient to the party machinery, and there were just some offices that they just weren't going to list you for? They had *one* Black congressman, Robert [N. C. Nix, Sr.]. And as far as the Democratic Party went, that was going to be enough Black congressmen for the next 50 years. We had one Black city councilman, guy named Edgar Campbell—wasn't gonna be no more, as far as the Democratic machine was concerned. And people were aware that they weren't getting well served by the Democratic Party.

Well, the Forum, the founders of the Forum believed that they could defeat the party's endorsed candidates if they organized and if they worked together and they created the environment. And there were some good, strong Black community leaders who didn't want to buck the Party, and wanted to stay in the party organization. One that came later, and supported me, Reverend Shepherd, was a man out of the Baptist church—he was in a circle of men that founded the Forum, but he opted out. He stayed a party loyalist.

Material: *But the Forum, would you characterize it as a revolutionary organization?*

Butch Cottman: Oh, no no no no, no. And you gotta understand that in 1970, that wasn't really that important. The revolutionaries weren't doing no better than the rest of us, you know. For instance, in Newark, you know, Baraka's gang¹² considered themselves revolutionary and they were doing

¹² Amira Baraka.

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the same thing that we were doing: trying to elect a Black mayor. And they did, but then they collapsed both long before the United Progressives did. You know, on the West Coast you had the same thing happening—electing Black people to office in 1970 was considered revolutionary work. We had no meaningful presence nationwide on the electoral stage. And we were fighting to elect people. The Stokes brothers in Cleveland, the guy in Michigan, who was in Congress forever.¹³ This is around the same time that the guy got elected mayor of Gary, Indiana.¹⁴ That was it, like a *nationwide* event. Gibson, the first Black mayor, Jersey City, all that was new. The presence that Black people have in the electoral life now, that's seen as routine, mundane, that we are *part* of what's retarding the Democratic Party, that environment did not exist. It was revolutionary work to get organized, to oppose the party leadership and get somebody elected for office, to have what was described then as having actual grassroots leadership and elected office to get shit done for the Black community.

That was the phenomenon all over the country. In some states it actually involved blood and guts, like in Texas and Oklahoma. People were going to literally fight. You had a campaign office or something, you had to have 2 or 3 people posted outside with their guns, because the other people who considered themselves Democrats or Republicans was so outraged that you would have the effrontery to do this, that they would come try to set your shit on fire. And this was late in 1970, '71, '72, '73, '74.

So it required far more courage and effective organizing than the way we think of it now. What the Forum did was to make the nuts and bolts of electoral activity more or less common knowledge and to train people to do something about it. And they did that with me to some extent. But, what I was naive enough to think is that they were like strictly about doing this for the community and doing this as a community development project and doing this as principled political activism. That shit dissolved when members of Forum leadership started to try to get themselves elected to office and get their children elected to office. That's when John White, Jr.—his father was the president of the Forum, founding president, and stayed president of the Forum for most of its existence—ran for office. I organized his first campaign, but then he went and secretly organized a

¹³ John Conyers, House of Representatives 1965–2017..

¹⁴ Richard Gordon Hatcher, mayor of Gary, Indiana 1968–1988.

second campaign organization with a group of young, white Democrats up here in this neighborhood,¹⁵ and tried to keep it a secret from me and the members of the forum working on the campaign.

And I'm like, "Come on, explain this to me," you know. And his father stayed mad at me forever because I had the nerve to confront them. And I'm like, "I'm not doing this. If you've got two campaign organizations—if you felt you needed two campaign organizations—you should have come to me, and said, 'this is why I'm doing this, and here, I want to introduce you to these white people.'" They didn't understand they was supposed to do that. I was supposed to be just a loyal minion waiting for them to throw me some crumbs. You gotta understand, we didn't have no big funding. We were people who had regular working-class jobs, doing this shit at night and on the weekends and working ourselves to exhaustion to get it done. John ran for office for the state house and he lost by like 175 votes or something like that. His father never forgave me for that cause that was my fault. The second time he got elected—and then he got elected to city council and then in the state representatives. And he went on to become secretary of welfare.

And then Wilson Good, who went on to be mayor, was vice president of the Forum. He ran for something in 75. I can't remember what it was, but I know he was managing director under Bill [William] Green and then to the Public Utility Commission, and then eventually running for mayor. That was some of the best and brightest that came out of the Forum. And there were other people, like judges that the Forum supported and schooled to prepare for office that did well. But, of course, when the Forum started doing self-serving shit, it began to lose credibility. It began to lose people who actually were working for the Forum's sake, as opposed to working for the Forum because you guys are gonna look out for me when I get elected—people like me. And then it collapsed.

Material: *Did you leave before a collapse?*

Butch Cottman: Oh, yeah, I was forced out. Because I didn't have enough sense to fucking leave when they wanted me to. I was showing up at the meetings, I was doing my committee assignments, making my reports, raising critical questions in the meeting. And they couldn't understand.

¹⁵ Northwest Philadelphia..

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“Why is he still here.” They couldn’t say, “We don’t want you,” because if they had said, “Butch, we’re really sick of your shit,” that would’ve opened the floor to other kinds of conversations that other members of the Forum had questions about. For instance, we had a guy who had been a teacher of mine, a mentor of mine who was in the closet, and all kinds of people who up here in Germantown knew he was in the closet.

I didn’t have a fucking enough sense to know it. And he was a leading member of the Forum. He was on the executive committee. They talked about him behind his back and giggled behind his back and I’m like, “Excuse me, people are asking about this shit in the street. People are asking in the neighborhood, asking me, you know, you gay too?” You know, that kind of shit. “What is our organizational position on this?” And they were angry at me for asking about it because they were using it, holding it over him, and I just thought that was fucking disgraceful.

And I wouldn’t let the shit go. I’m like, “Excuse me, I want this on the agenda. As a member of the Forum, I’m not going to keep doing this and pretending I don’t know, pretending that you guys don’t know and pretending that I don’t know he’s in the closet.” And then, you know, I mean, the woman I was with at the time, Willa Mae, who was, like, as good and pure a Christian ever gave breath to. But she’s the kind of person who simply does not gossip. She’s a member of this sorority that Kamala [Harris] is in. She’s an AKA,¹⁶ which is about as good as it gets as far as Black professional women goes. She was treasurer of the local chapter for years. But Willa Mae is the kind of person, the kitchen would be filled with people, she’s sitting there, they’d be gossiping and she can sit there for 2.5 hours and not open her mouth, because that’s just her temperament. And that’s how I realized that George was known to be in the closet. And people pretended they didn’t know because he was a school administrator. Because she come home one night and we getting ready for bed. And she said, “I was on City Line Avenue, and I saw George, and the guy who was his longtime lover, crossing City Line, and baby, I think they were drunk.” And I said to myself, “Well, if Willa Mae know, then I’m a fool because this mean pretty much everybody else in the world who knows anything

¹⁶ Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.

about the Philadelphia school district or politics in Germantown and stuff like this has heard before.”

But, it was a real important lesson to me about politics and about people’s idea of ethical living. Cause to me it was just disgraceful. I mean, it took a long time to realize that something was actually wrong with me, not wrong with them, because so many of them thought it was all right to talk about him behind his back, you know, to bully and abuse him behind his back because, you know, he had a public reputation to defend family and all that shit and to not have a conversation in the organization, no matter how bizarre you thought of it.

What do we do about this as a phenomenon in the organization? I wasn’t like, you know, no mature, experienced political thinker, no philosopher or nothing like that. But it was like, “Excuse me, people are talking about us, people talking about him. How do I keep a principled relationship with him and with this organization, if we don’t make a decision about this?” They never would.

Material: *So you were forced out over that question?*

Butch Cottman: Yes, that and other questions.

Material: *And then by that time you had heard about UP?*

Butch Cottman: By that time I was a member of UP.

Material: *So how did that happen and what drew you to them?*

Butch Cottman: When I joined the Black Political Forum, UP’s leaders, Melvin, William, and Oum Harrison joined Black Political Forum around the same time. They were just beginning to get involved in electoral politics. And they were trying to learn, how do you do this? And inside the Forum, we were almost always on the same side of issues. And because I was stupid and couldn’t keep my mouth shut, I was the one, they would, “Butch, ask them this, Butch, ask them about that,” and they used me just like everybody else and they’d be sitting there grinning and I’d be making everybody miserable, asking uncomfortable questions. They loved that shit. But I began to understand what they were about. Cause their electoral plans, they always couched as organizing activity. And we not trying to make nobody rich and famous and we trying do this, that, and the other

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thing to get these resources and get these questions and this work done in our community. And we wanna use this electoral campaign, running for office—if we win, we’ve got the following list of things to do. If we don’t, we’ve got the following list of things. They posed it like that.

Material: *And that resonated with you.*

Butch Cottman: And that resonated with me. They were just getting into electoral activity, but they were doing real grassroots community organizing. They had created the Brickyard Youth Council, which was to make it possible for kids to get back and forth to school safely, and kids to use the playgrounds and the Boys and Girls Clubs without the kind of shit that’s on the news every day with the shootings in this neighborhood.

Material: *How did the Brickyard Youth Council work?*

Butch Cottman: Well most of the United Progressives were from the Brickyard and had been more or less involved in street shit themselves before they got politicized. Not all of them, but many of them. And they had a feeling about who needed to be confronted, who needed to be supported, what neighborhood organizations did the United Progressives need to be in as representatives of the Brickyard Youth Council, so they would get adult support and get support from other community members. And they made a decision about, “Well, what was the most important thing for us to do?” And it was to make it safe for kids get back and forth to school. And they did, and it was overwhelmingly successful.

Most of the kids in lower Germantown, central Germantown, went to Germantown High School. Kids went to other schools, but that was the high school. They would have kids from the west side of Germantown and from the Brickyard, the east side, as far down as Berkley Street walk out to Germantown Avenue and walk up Germantown Avenue, escorted by the members of the Brickyard Youth Council. And their thing was, you walk with us, nothing gonna happen to you. We’re gonna protect you. And that was a promise they made not just to the kids, but to the parents. So you would have kids, the kind of kids whose father had been walking them to school with his pistol to keep the kind of shit that’s happening now from happening to them, when all of a sudden, father walks them out to the

avenue, see the members of the Youth Council, shake their hand, hug and go on home, cause my kid's safe with them.

And that evolved to the point where people would mention the Brickyard Youth Council work in church—people were praising the Brickyard Youth Council in community meetings and stand up testifying and crying, and calling on the Lord and stuff like that, because all of a sudden kids who were involved in nothing were involved in the Boys and Girls Club, involved in the Settlement youth programs because the Brickyard Youth Council made it safe.

Material: *Can you go back and talk about how/when United Progressives was founded? What kind of political influences and ideology they came from and what they saw their purpose as?*

Butch Cottman: I can, as best I know. They were an offshoot of Jimmy Boggs's organization, the Pacesetters, here in Philadelphia, and they had a youth group, if I remember correctly, called the Groovers. Two other grassroots youth groups joined the Groovers and then had left the Groovers because they felt that the Pacesetters was holding them down. They wanted some actual practice, some commitment to change in their community and stuff like that.

It's hard to read a *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party*, and not be won to it, to be like "let's do that," especially at that time. So, they were doing, in the beginning, youth-oriented organizing. And created Brickyard Youth Council trying to win youth to progressive politics, trying to confront evildoers in the community. They were kicking in the doors of speakeasies and drug houses and shit like that. They were confronting cops in the street about being on the take and doing the dirty work of other gangsters in the neighborhood: Fucking with people, beating people, arresting people because the people were getting between them and the money. That was a big part of their agenda.

Material: *What was it about James Boggs's writing and what he was talking about, that crystallized stuff for those guys and for you in such a way that you were able to then put that into some kind of practice?*

Butch Cottman: His analysis. His analysis seemed to be so simple, so insightful, and just so plain good sense. It didn't require no sophisticated

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understanding of Marxism-Leninism. It was: this is the circumstance in the United States at this time. These are the circumstances in the American centers at this time. And, yeah, well, that was pretty much the circumstance here. And this is the future that's emerging. And if you want to make revolution, these are the things that you should be doing. If you're Black and you live in the urban center, the city is the Black man's land at this time. And politics is the highest calling. And, in other words, if we make the case for Black political leadership in the urban centers, we're making the case for an American revolution. If we're winning people to that, then we leading people in the direction of creating a revolutionary force in the urban centers, not on the margins, not just some shit that's about protecting people from the police, but about some shit that's preparing people to govern.

And the idea was certainly new to me that Black people could govern or *should* be at the governing center, should be making the case for the future of American life from the *center*, not from the margins. Not from using oppressed minorities out there, and we going to make a revolution in order to do you a favor. But *you* will make revolution in order to make America a different place. And we got leading ideas, and we have disciplined cadres, and we have folks that will go down fighting. That explained a role for Black militants like myself, and for white militants as well, because the CP was in collapse and there was no effective organizations anymore, like Students for a Democratic Society or the Weather Underground. It gave you a picture of what they could do and the future that James posited as possible and necessary.

In other words, what to do about education, what to do about industry. James argued that the principal contradiction in American life was political backwardness as opposed to technological super-advancement, which lord knows has played itself out. And that if you are going to make a revolution, you gonna have to overcome political backwardness and you will have to harness technological advancement in the service of revolution.

In other words, what the Marxists call the productive forces *at this stage*. Not at the stage of a hundred years ago—in this day. How to harness it so it is in the service of people. Now in China they seem to have a glimpse of that, even in a capitalist China. Here, we got a few people, arguing for it. But we have no organization making the case for it. Bernie Sanders comes

close. Bernie ain't pretending to be a Leninist, but he's the best we got right now. So, I'm saying the *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party* just made for what was, for me, undeniable good sense. And they were the only organization that I knew of trying to live the *Manifesto*.

I'm not saying there weren't others around the country, but they were dynamic and there was nobody to tell me about it. Mostly they listened to Jimmy and sold his literature. He was never very good at picking followers that were militant. They had some petty-bourgeois shit going on and certainly here in the Delaware Valley. You know, pussy, fast cars, good jobs that kept them out of trouble, that kinda shit.

Material: *One of the main things that really struck me when you talked about UP was the commitment to study. And I think you credited the influence from Bogg's organization and his analysis to really draw you guys to commit to study. But also the fact that you really demanded of yourselves, and the people who were involved, to have your own analysis and to be capable of articulating your own analysis. Can you talk some about that?*

Butch Cottman: The way I remember, the commitment to study came out of the Pacesetters, out of the Groovers, and out of our study itself. I mean, Chairman Mao's thing about studying with determination is hard to get around. Amilcar Cabral said the same thing: Study. Keep learning. Don't stop. Ho [Chi Minh] said something along that same line. So if you were serious about internalizing that shit, the responsibility to study was undeniable. And the UP's one thing that it was respected for, was that it had study that everybody was expected to participate in, and everybody was expected to have a basic understanding of *On Practice, On Contradiction*, the *Five Essays*. And to have a basic understanding what a democratic centralist organization was. People read about it, a lot of people understood it as an abstraction, but not a lot of people understood it as: "This is a way for me to live." And that was one of the things that forced me to study more.

And also, because, especially when the UPs broke up, when we created Black Political Study for Social Change, I ended up leading the study for a long time, trying to make it clear and useful to people who did not think of themselves as revolutionaries and other people who came from other organizations and wanted a more substantive understanding of this stuff.

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Other organizations that had collapsed, or they had left or there was some shit, you know, there was a lot of that going on then. And so I spent so much time trying to explain to people, that I had to be constantly reading and writing to strengthen my ability to make this shit useful. And at the same time, growing my own capacity for a useful analysis and to explain that analysis to ordinary people. Because we had people come into our study group and into our circle of friends who have been in activist organizations, maybe since the early, mid-'60s, some from—what was Malcolm's group?—the Organization of African Unity. But they'd never done no meaningful study of this shit. And today their understanding of Marxism is very poor and their understanding of what dialectical and historical materialism is supposed to provide *you*, is very poor. So I was forced to try to get a meaningful, a literate grasp of those things.

Material: *How did you do it? I remember we've had conversations before where you were like, most people are accustomed to doing what you call kitchen table politics. So how do you move in an organized study group away from kitchen table politics to having a dialectical-materialist analysis?*

Butch Cottman: You take the same issues that you bring to the kitchen table and you examine them as political phenomena. You don't allow people to get up from the table thinking this is just a personal problem. This is something wrong with me. You make it clear, through exposition and through examples, that this is some shit that's affecting the world. This is some shit that you didn't create. And this is a problem that you not gonna solve by yourself. The shit that you complaining about at home is the shit that's poisoning the world, poisoning the water, the air, and creating Luigi Mangiones, a national hero, even though the bourgeois press don't want to acknowledge it. But I sure hope Luigi got some people on the outside that's lining up the next CEO.

To make people understand the bread and butter issues at *your* house are bread and butter issues *around the world*, and that the same people that profit from your misery—and there *are* people profiting from your misery, no matter how alone you feel, no matter how helpless you are, there are people who are making fortunes off your misery and they're making fortunes off other people's misery. Somebody is making a fortune off this shit in Palestine. So trying to make that a deliberate growth process to moving

from the kitchen table as a personal problem, to the kitchen table as a universal problem; the contradictions in your life are contradictions in the world. And having people talk about themselves and come up with their own examples was what we did in the study group.

Material: *Did you struggle at that time with trying to support and enable women to speak out and have their opinions?*

Butch Cottman: Oh yes. Well when we created the Black Political Study for Social Change, organizations were coming apart all around us. But at the same time, there were women who had been in organizations who had been in, like, subordinate roles. In other words, she's not a chair, but she's doing all the chair's work. And they found out about our study group and we had a reputation—me, Oum, and another dear comrade who is dead, Butch Simmons, who had come from the African People's Party, of being principled. Just being decent guys who had been in leadership of the organization. Everybody who didn't know me certainly knew Oum, and Butch was a real patient and level-headed guy, who was a teacher, and had been forced out of the African People's Party. So the three of us made a pretty good team.

Material: *The study group was an actual study group of United Progressives?*

Butch Cottman: No. This was a study group that we formed. United Progressives had its own study history which many of the themes and stuff we transferred. But when United Progressives had a coup and fell apart, and Oum and Melvin were forced out and I left, we created something called the Black Political Cadres for Social Change. And the Black Political Cadres for Social Change had a study group called Black Political Study Group for Social Change. I'm sure at home I've got some of what we used to send out, cards like when people do wedding invitations, for when the study was gonna start. This was way before email.

Black Political Cadre for Social Change took off and was far more successful than we had expected, because we had created it to make sure *we* had a study environment. And the people who were trying to support were part of that study environment. But they got so that a few who had been in other organizations and other kinds of work and stuff like that wanted to know what we were doing and wanted to study with us.

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Material: *And especially to some of these women who had been parts of other organizations.*

Butch Cottman: Yes, there was a circle of women who were teachers and parents at the African Free School, the Nidhamu Sasa, which used to be on Queen Lane on the West Side Germantown. And when we created a study group, they took the attitude that “We don’t have to take this shit off these men, we’re gonna have to learn how to do this shit ourselves.” And as a group, some of them joined the study. So we had to really up our game as far as explaining what the shit was and not allowing people to slip into talking about cliché shit. And trying to make them understand that this is some shit that will teach you to think with precision.

So we’re not only doing that, but we’re teaching them how to run a meeting, just simple stuff. Your turn to chair next week. You’ve got to know what a minority view is and that you may be right, but if you hold a minority view, you got certain shit to do. How to function in an organization. We had to make all that part of the curriculum.

Material: *Because these women were part of organizations where they were behind the scenes playing a support role, but not necessarily learning how to chair a meeting?*

Butch Cottman: And even if people learned how to chair a meeting, people were abusing it, people who were veteran activists was exploiting them. So they had some anger about that. And their understanding of the problems that an organization is supposed to solve, and the issue at the center of it is how you supposed to give leadership, how to give principled leadership in an organization, that was very poorly understood. So talking about how to run a meeting, how to understand the contradictions, how to make an agenda where those contradictions are represented and people are forced to grapple with them—all was shit that we tried to study. And a lot of the time we spent talking about what we would all call personal problems. A big part was they were so unused to expecting their voice to be heard, to expecting their interest to be represented effectively that, that even in our circle, they had to be literally pulled off the sidelines. And “Excuse me, next week, you will have to chair the meeting. So now this is Sunday. Wednesday you and I gonna talk, so that you have some un-

derstanding of what your concerns are. And so that you don't be terrified when next Sunday, *you* have to chair this meeting." And there was a lot of that that had to be done.

Material: *And it was successful? Women developed and started chairing meetings, became more vocal and opinionated and able to articulate their own ideas and assessment and analysis?*

Butch Cottman: To some degree. Yeah, I think *they* would say it was successful. Now, the problem with that is that the world was changing at the same time. So jobs they had, roles they had, all that shit was in flux. Because you're talking about the mid-'70s to early '80s now. So the situation they may have been in 1973 to '74 might have changed completely by 1980. So I'm sure some of them would say they got stronger and more confident and able to see themselves in a different light in the world.

Because the world changed, a lot of them got out of politics completely. Maybe they was in this because their man was in this, and, well, in 1980, they might have a different man, or different experience and decided to give up on politics. And that happened a lot. A lot of working women were glad. "I'm so glad you don't want to do that shit no more. I'm so sick of those damn meetings." They didn't necessarily dislike me when they would say that, but they disliked that life. They didn't see where it was taking them: when you in America, you need a job, your kids need to go to school. "I need you to be working because I want to send my child to private school." Well, one might want to send his child to private school, the other might have an ideological problem with that. "I chose to be in public schools, how are we going to make public schools work better?" And she'd be like, "I don't hear that shit. I just got to worry about *my* child." There was a lot of that going on at home.

Material: *That leads to another question I had, which is that way back when you were still in the Army, you read On Protracted Struggle and you said it read like a Baptist sermon. But I also remember you talking about in UP, that people were working themselves to the bone night and day—as you say, working-class jobs at night, or maybe during the day, and then political work at night. And you would bring up in meetings, how are we going to sustain ourselves?*

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Butch Cottman: I brought up in one meeting. At its most dynamic, in United Progressives, *everybody* was expected to have a job and everybody was expected to handle their finances. You know, buy a little house, do something, manage yourself, manage your relationships so that people didn't have negative shit to say about you, so that you weren't getting evicted or whatever. You were expected to have actually a grownup's life.

Material: *And the organization helped with that or no?*

Butch Cottman: The organization helped with that, and you had to *account* to the organization for that. So yeah, if you needed a house, the organization would help raise money, help you save money. The woman I was with, Willa Mae, she was well known to be good at bookkeeping. I mean, I had like a couple friends that Willa Mae saved their money when they was trying to save money for a down payment for a house. And it'd be like, if Willa Mae got your money, that was your ass—you was not going to touch it. And when you came time to make a settlement, Willa Mae would cut you a check. If you asked Willa Mae to manage, well that shit was managed to death.

Material: *But you had people in the organization that were good at specific things and you helped each other in that way?*

Butch Cottman: Yeah. Even if they weren't good at it, they did the best they could. Lord knows I wasn't, but we'd do stuff like, if you're trying to raise money to buy a house or get a down payment, we had parties, old time rent parties. And if you trying to raise money for your settlement, and there were another half a dozen of us, we'd all commit to tithe. We all gonna put \$20 a month or \$100 a month or whatever we could towards your settlement, and I don't remember anybody complaining about it. If they had complaints about it, it was secret, but it was seen as an obvious benefit.

Material: *And the flip side being, you had to keep your shit straight and be accountable to the organization?*

Butch Cottman: I don't know if it was the flip side, but it was certain that was an expectation of you anyway. And other people who were outsiders were impressed by it. I remember when my brother's girlfriend was like, "I didn't know people lived like that anymore." But rationalizing it as

political activism, that part fell largely to me because, once again, I was, for the most part, the leader of the study. In other words, what did this accomplish other than to get her a house? What did this accomplish? I'd explain how if we can get her to do this for herself, we can get the neighbors to do it, we can get the lady with them six children that's terrorizing the neighborhood to buy that ramshackle joint she's renting. And lighten her burden and make an ally of her and her kids. Trying to make that shit useful and sensible to people and practical was a big part of the study.

I was working at night, and a big part of the reason I was working at night was so I could study at night. Because part of that time I was working in the day too, working for the school district. But working at night and working at a youth facility, once the kids was asleep at night, my time was my own, and I could sit up and read and that was a big help for me. Because all this time I'm trying to understand, the classics of Marxism-Leninism—I mean, I'm in a meeting trying to explain to people the labor theory of value. Fuck if I know what I'm talking about. But the labor theory of value, and price, wages and all that kind of shit. So I'm developing as a Marxist.

Material: *Through having to lead this group?*

Butch Cottman: But also trying to hold our group together when the world is changing outside of me, and I don't have the tools for that. Oum left our group and joined MOVE,¹⁷ and that was really hard on me. Butch Simmons left Philadelphia without saying anything to us about it. Bought a house in South Jersey, moved out of North Philadelphia, into the house in South Jersey and wanted me to come and maintain a friendship with him and his wife and kids, independent of political work, and I wasn't gonna do that. You know, cause I'm like, "Why you didn't talk to us about any of this?" Well what it boiled down to was he was just tired of radical politics. He had been in three organizations in the time I knew him. He'd been in the group that's been in TV now, Joe Wallace's group in Florida, was in the African People's Socialist Party in college. Then he'd been in African People's Party, which is Max Stanford's group in Philadelphia, and he'd been forced out of that cause he'd been in leadership and there was a

¹⁷ A "back to mother Earth" communal organization with members of African descent, originally founded as Christian Movement for Life.

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leadership fight. Then he'd been part of us, come into the United Progressives, just as United Progressives was collapsing, you know, so his wife was tired of this shit as well. Even though they stayed good people, you know, right until they both died.

Material: *So you were in a meeting and you asked this question about how people were going to sustain that level of political work. You saw the world was changing.*

Butch Cottman: I was in a meeting—it was a meeting of the whole assembly of United Progressives—and I asked, “How are you going to continue to do this work at 50 years old, when this work is so daunting now?” Because people were working jobs, raising families, sending their children to school, doing organizing work in the evening, doing fundraising stuff on the weekends, having fundraising parties, doing electoral activity. If you was supporting or doing something, then the whole organization was supposed to turn up. You were literally *on* seven days a week. If you took a Sunday off, you didn't have any trouble finding anybody, because everybody was home in bed. It wasn't like we're going to run to Dorney Park¹⁸ with the kids, no, people were just *done*. So I asked that and nobody answered. Nobody had no answer. Years later, people told me they remembered that question.

Well, no, people didn't have an answer in the meeting. People had an answer in life because people just, the minute a crack appeared in the leadership—there was fissure between Oum and Melvin and Emmanuel Freeman and them—there were probably like a dozen people who just jumped ship. A dozen people out of the 35 or 40 members of the core organization, just: “I'm out.” No explanation. Just stopped showing up. The larger organization, the Northwest Action Coalition, which was essentially an electoral organization that supported campaigns, turned out people for election day and raised money—that organization transformed from mainly a volunteer organization of militants, of which there were hundreds in those days, to an organization of people who had a stake in electoral activity because they had jobs and their interests in it and they had ambitions themselves.

¹⁸ An amusement park in the greater Philadelphia area.

So it changed radically. It didn't go out of existence. It became the organization that they don't acknowledge now, which elected Mayor Parker.¹⁹ The press don't know no better, so they talk about this northwest organization, but this started out as NWAC, the Northwest Action Coalition, which was created by the United Progressives to do the electoral work of electing principled candidates for office. When you're running on a shoestring and need lots of volunteers and lots of people with commitment—and I'm talking about people used to pool their money to rent hotels so they could pay somebody to watch their kids while they worked, on election day and the day before. You would have women working, two days before election day and making sandwiches and getting the literature packets together and doing all that shit so that on election day, the hundreds of people who were in NWAC could turn out, to get out on the polls and do that shit for free. Nowadays, people won't even discuss it for free, because they don't see that as having no movement. For instance, it was a big issue in this Kamala Harris thing. Philadelphia's got a reputation for turning out grassroots organizations and doing elections, so Harris's people come here and everybody in the world knows she's got a billion dollars campaign fund, but they come here and want to know who's gonna work for free.

And my friend was fielding them phone calls, every day up until 2, 3 days before election day. And, of course, he's cussing and raising hell, "The fuck makes you think people gonna do this shit for free? When people all over America know y'all got \$1 billion. And y'all should have contacted us a month ago. You knew this shit was a mess a month ago. Why?" That's the same conversation they're having now. We used to have the same conversations then, but for a different fundamental reason. Because then, what we would be arguing about would be, yeah, we got a reputation for doing this work, but we want somebody at the center, sitting with y'all when y'all are making decisions. That was a hard part for them to get their heads around. Young people weren't supposed to want that.

Material: *So in terms of the idea of protracted struggle, no one had an answer for you at the time. And then the world changed. I remember one time when we were talking about this, you were saying that there were many people in the organization who were convinced, the revolution was going to happen immi-*

¹⁹ Cherelle Parker, Philadelphia Mayor since 2024.

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nently, and that was part of the reason why they didn't have to think about protracted struggle.

Butch Cottman: Or that wasn't part of their idea of protracted struggle. Their idea of protracted struggle was next month or next year, not 20 years from now or 30 years from now.

Material: *Can you talk a little bit about how the world changed? I remember you've talked in the past about how the crack epidemic hit the neighborhoods in the early '80s and decimated the neighborhoods. Can you talk a little bit about how you saw things changing and how that impacted the work that you specifically, but also your organization, had been trying to build for so long.*

Butch Cottman: Well. The world changed, but it wasn't all drugs and murder.

The civil rights movement and the Black Liberation movement opened a lot of stuff up. And the kind of people that were activists and the organizations that I was a part of and on the fringes of and had knowledge of... satisfying your career aspirations began to make a lot more sense than being a Black militant in the political wilderness. So, for instance, people who were stalwarts and reliable people in organizations, just based on the work that we had done and the work going on in the larger world, suddenly had career opportunities.

I remember one guy wanted to be a professional photographer. Another one, Lamar Williams, wanted to be a filmmaker. I don't know if he ever made a film, but he went off to pursue that. And I know the two women I knew him to be involved with, one of the biggest things in their relationship was helping him make a career as a filmmaker. People got something as simple as a job at SEPTA,²⁰ which, you have to understand what the world was like in 1970, 72, 73. You know, one or two Black bus drivers and subway drivers. People got a job at SEPTA, which means they had an actual job for the rest of their life. They had a pension, they could get a mortgage. They didn't need the movement for that.

People who had been teaching, working as substitutes. Suddenly somebody was forced to look at their resume and realize, "Oh, he's got some administrative credits." So they out of the classroom and then they're a school principal or vice principal or something like that. So they left the

²⁰ The public transportation system in Philadelphia.

movement for those kind of opportunities. Those opportunities broke out all over the spectrum, with the possible exception of doing industrial labor, doing the kind of shit that I was doing because I didn't have no other skills and no other credentials. But even *I*, with a little luck might have gotten a civil service job. And then I'd have had a job with a pension—I'd have been at the low end, but that wasn't what I wanted. For my sanity's sake, I had to do something to make the world better. I'm trying to stay sane. I'm trying to stay out the penitentiary, which was *real* work for me. Just like some people left the movement for the church and for the mosque, because they were trying to stay sane. They were trying to make the world make some sense to them. And trying to have some peace of mind. I stayed *in* the movement for those reasons.

So, there was that and then there was the sociopathic shit. There was the drugs and criminal shit that was emerging in the neighborhoods at the same time. There was much more access to electoral life. People who may have in 1965 or '70 come into a radical organization, could now get elected to an organization, to public office without us. Dwight Evans, Pennsylvanian congressman from Philadelphia, was one of those people. Could get elected to public office, could have a career in politics on a public payroll for the next 30 years. And he wasn't the only one like that. Hardy Williams²¹ the same way, and there were others.

But the undercurrent of Black radicalism didn't go away, because we still had two Black political conventions here. The struggle against Frank Rizzo and the forces against him called the Black People Convention. And that thrust me back in the center of stuff like that. Just working the convention. I wasn't deliberately, "I'm going in and taking over." Just people see me show up for the meetings and give me shit to do and I found myself at the center of the convention movement, which puts me at the center of the foundation of the National Black Independent Party. That was 1979, 1980. Which, there was a national constituency for that, but there was just no prepared national leadership. I mean, the national leadership was a mess. They were very good at traveling around the country and raising the banner of a national Black independent party. That this was the party that was called for before by the Black Assembly. But then when it came down to working through the contradictions of how you build a national

²¹ Pennsylvania state senator 1983–1998.

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organization with all these different tendencies from around the country, and how do you get it to survive this initial period? They wasn't prepared for that. And so that didn't last but for about five years.

Material: *What you're describing is that the real material gains that the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Liberation Movement forced upon the society then change the material conditions by which you can organize a revolutionary party and movement. And I think that kind of change has only become more exaggerated since those times. And I think that is why that is, I've seen in almost every imperialist country I've been in, people struggling with, how do we as people who think of ourselves as communists or revolutionaries or Maoist or whatever, who want to change the world... How do you do that in these material conditions? And I don't know if you have any insight about that.*

Butch Cottman: Oh, always do! Not worth a damn.... Well, for me, the problem hasn't been how do you do it? Because that's a problem for everybody. The problem has been, who do you get to work through this with you, that has the patience and the introspection and the personal discipline to work through this with you, to assemble of group of people around you to do this? And, to do that same thing that we had to do in 1974, which is, what are the kitchen table politics that *require* a revolution to solve? What do you have to do to win people to doing and being to make the world better, even a little better? And how do you assemble a group of people that's willing to work it through over the long run? To be there at that kitchen table in the end?

Every time I see Bernie Sanders on TV, I think of when Bernie Sanders was a college runner. Bernie Sanders is three, four years older than me. But when I was in high school, track and field was a big sport in Philadelphia. Track and field had the kind of following in the Delaware Valley that say basketball has now. And the indoor season was so important that kids like me were hooky²² school to go to the indoor track meet. Bernie Sanders was one of the four or five top milers in the country. And believe it or not, then he had reddish brown, flops of curly hair. And his running was just like his politics. He wasn't the fastest one ever, but he was the most dogged. If Bernie was behind you, you wasn't going to break him. But you better not falter, not a step. I mean, he was fun to watch because he was not gon-

²² Not going to school.

na to quit. He wasn't gonna stumble. He wasn't gonna get tired. But if *you* got tired, if you would stumble, that was your ass.

Material: *So we gotta do politics like Bernie Sanders ran the mile?*

Butch Cottman: If we going to succeed in this environment, I mean right now we got fascists in the White House, but we also got opportunity. Bernie Sanders spent the last 10, 15 years teaching us how to make an issue out of politics. He talked about this Luigi Mangione shit, in 2010, 2012. I loved it when he stood up on Fox TV, talking about, "Excuse me! Come on here. Who loves their insurance company? Raise your hand, if you're actually crazy about your insurance company." And this was a Fox TV audience, and they didn't have shit they could say. Because he knew insurance companies ain't shit. And he got a dozen reasons for making a case for universal health insurance, for single payer health insurance. So much so that he forced it onto the national agenda. Now, of course, and I thought it was an important lesson, Obama took the playbook from what's this guy who just retired from politics, Mitt Romney, who as governor of Massachusetts took and created welfare for insurance companies and then called it, you know, publicly supported welfare. But still kept the insurance companies from ripping off tens of thousands of people.

And Luigi Mangione got tired of that shit and said, "Here, take this motherfucker." But Bernie Sanders opened people's eyes. That was some shit that the Communist Party USA didn't have enough sense to do. In other words, what are the things that people are angry about, seem to be angry about? What are the things that make ordinarily sensible people a Trump voter? What are class politics in this era? I'm not trying to endorse Bernie's personal electoral aspirations. I'm trying to endorse Bernie's understanding of class politics in this era. And what it means to do, I mean, because the trade unions ain't really doing shit, in terms of a militant confrontation. Now this shit with people striking at Starbucks. Yes, they zillionaires, but if Starbucks goes out of business today or tomorrow, and some of them go without coffee. . . [what's the consequence?]

I struggle with my daughter about that shit every day. She gotta get in the car and go someplace to get her special coffee. And I'm like, baby, we got coffee in the house. I said, "Well, what we gotta do for you to save money?" And I mean, we poor. But my point is, there's so many issues,

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much more significant than that, and that the Bernie Sanders approach should be the approach of a national movement, should be the approach of a popular left.

We ain't Lenin, this ain't Russia. The country would have to collapse in a way that right now is unimaginable, to create an environment where a Leninist clique could take over. And it's America. This ain't feudal Russia. When the shooting starts in America, everybody got a gun. So it ain't like your Bolshevik clique or your long lost regiment from the czar's army is going to take over the city and take over the railroads. What they're going to do is get trapped in the railroads and every fucking civilian that's got a gun shooting at them. What I'm saying is we could have a coherent left at least as dynamic as the French left. The one thing the French left has not forgotten is that they need a mass base. When I saw those damn farmers dumping that shit in front of parliament and setting it on fire, I said, "Lord have mercy. That's the level I wanna be at. Here take this motherfucker." I can just imagine what it smelled like. Where you come from with 1,000 pounds of shit in the back of your tractor. How angry you guys would be and how many enablers do you have to have a thousand pounds of shits in the back of your tractor. You drive 200 miles to Paris, you confront the national police on the steps of parliament, dump that shit in front of them at their feet and set it on fire.

That's kitchen power carried to a revolutionary level. In other words, "We tired of this shit and we got the power to do something about it." We don't have no scenario like that in here in this country. Trump might give it to us, he might make a mess of things sufficient to. . . but still leadership would have to surface. Organizations would have to surface. I'm not aware of any.

Material: *It's a mess. That's the thing, some people say it: this isn't czarist Russia or this isn't feudal China so we can't use the same practices. But people are still trying to do the copy paste, if not from the red guards in China, then from the Panthers, like we gotta recreate this sort of dynamic and there's so little, one, ability to really assess what is actually happening right now for people in a relevant way, and, two, to have some creative thinking about what to do about it.*

Butch Cottman: Well remember now, Mao wasn't an instant winner. It wasn't like, let's all go over to Mao's house, he'll tell us what to do!

Material: *No, he tried some shit and failed.*

Butch Cottman: Yeah, yes, he did. He wasn't always in the majority, the people didn't always vote for his shit. And were like shut the fuck up.

Material: *But then they all got slaughtered.*

Butch Cottman: Had to get worse. Yes. But at the same time it was getting worse in Germany, there was a hugely successful, communist party in Germany and Austria, you know, in France at the end of the First World War, but they didn't win, and we gotta figure out, well, what was it they *didn't* get right. You're right. There's going to be some cutting and pasting and you have to be lucky enough to get a leader that's a genius. A Mao would not only have to emerge, but he'd have to survive.

When Lenin died, he left the worst possible scenario for an emerging Soviet Union with both Stalin *and* Trotsky. Just Stalin was meaner and crazier and more ruthless. But Trotsky wasn't far behind. There would be no Red Army without Trotsky. There would be no socialist state without Trotsky. So I'm saying is, as backward as Russia was, the formation of the Soviet Union was touch and go.

America's backward, but it's a peculiarly American backwardness. I don't want to live to see a shooting war in America, cause it's going to be a bitch if it comes to that. But I would love to live to see a vibrant left contending for the people's voice and contending for power. And, you know, either socialism or barbarism. Either a vibrant left is going to have to emerge or a barbaric right is going to consolidate itself and figure out what to do. They gonna have an answer for poor people and Black people and brown people. They making it clear now, "We're gonna put all you illegal immigrants out. We're gonna catch you motherfuckers eating our cats and dogs and run you outta the country." I mean it's crazy. And now what I'm amazed at is how rotten civic edu-

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cation is in America, that you could even sell people some shit like that about eating cats and dogs.

Material: *So we've been talking a long time, but I wanted to ask, if you were running your study group now, how would you provide the materials for people to understand their own issues in this context, to make the abstract shit relevant given the world around us now?*

Butch Cottman: When the study group was alive and well, we had a reading list. Was it any use to anybody other than me? I could not tell you. But I can dig it up for you. I haven't had but maybe one person come to me and say, you know, "I really learned from you. I read some of that stuff that." I had one person come to me to say, "I really benefited from what you taught me." And she ain't tryin to do no militant shit, and she a tech entrepreneur. And like she said, "I know you said change yourself to change the world, and I've been trying Mr. Butch."

And I didn't have the presence of mind and say, "Thank you, JC, I'll keep on struggling."

Speech at the opening of the All- African Conference in Leopoldville¹

August 25, 1960

Patrice Lumumba

Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear comrades,

The fighting Congolese people are proud and happy to receive their brothers-in-arms in their country today.

For my government, for us Congolese, your presence here at such a moment is the most striking proof of the African reality whose existence our enemies have always denied and are still attempting to deny. But you,

¹ The name of the Congo's capital during Belgian colonization, officially renamed Kinshasa in 1966 by the US-backed dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.—Ed., *Material* (as all following).

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of course, know that that reality is even more stubborn than they, and that Africa lives on and fights. She refuses to die to justify the arguments about the backwardness of our history, a history we have made with our hands, our skins, and our blood.

It is at conferences such as this that we first became conscious of our character, of our growing solidarity. When at our first conferences, which were held in various cities in Africa, we brought up the problem of decolonization, the imperialists never expected we would be successful. However, since the first Conference of the Peoples of Africa in Accra² in December 1958 we have traversed the entire road of the liberation of our continent together.

You will recall the upsurge of the liberation struggle of the peoples of Angola, Algeria, the Congo, Kenya, Mozambique, Nyasaland³ and Rhodesia⁴ after the Conference in Accra, and of Ruanda-Urundi⁵ today. You will remember that a decisive step forward was taken after that historic Conference. Nothing, neither bullets, nor repressions, could stop this popular movement.

The work of this Conference is aimed at accelerating the movement for the independence of the African continent.

Ministers, dear fighters for the freedom of Africa, it is your duty to show the world and those who sneer at us that nothing can deter us from liberating Africa, which is our common aim. We can achieve this aim only in solidarity and unity. Our solidarity will have meaning only when it is boundless and when we are convinced that Africa's destiny is indivisible.

² The 1958 All-African Peoples' Conference in Accra, hosted by Kwame Nkrumah, was a landmark gathering of African and diaspora leaders committed to ending colonial rule. It united voices against imperialism and laid the groundwork for coordinated liberation struggles, asserting Africa's right to self-determination and sovereignty.

³ Nyasaland was the name of a British protectorate in southeastern Africa. After its independence in 1964, it was renamed Malawi.

⁴ Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was a settler-colonial state where a white minority regime, backed by British imperialist interests, suppressed African majority rule through 1979.

⁵ First colonized by Germany, the territory of Ruanda-Urundi was transferred to Belgian control as a part of the Treaty of Versailles after World War I, before becoming the two independent states of Rwanda and Burundi in 1962.

Speech at the opening of the All-African Conference

Such are the deep-going principles of the work you will have to do. This meeting will prepare the ground for a Summit Conference at which our countries will have to speak on:

1. The unqualified support of all the African states in the general struggle for a Pan-African bloc;
2. A policy of neutralism with the purpose of achieving genuine independence;
3. The breaking down of colonial barriers through cultural exchanges;
4. Trade agreements between the African states;
5. Africa's position with regard to the European Common Market;
6. Military cooperation;
7. The building of a powerful radio station in Leopoldville with the aid of all the African states;
8. The creation of a research center in Leopoldville.

Ministers, you have come into contact with the reality of the Congo here, in the very heart of the crisis that we shall have to resolve.

Your confidence in the future of our continent will unquestionably help you to complete your work successfully. Your principal purpose is to prepare a meeting of our heads of state, who will indeed establish African unity, for whose sake you have responded to our appeal.

You know the origin of what is today called the Congolese crisis,⁶ which is actually only a continuation of the struggle between the forces of pressure and the forces of liberation. At the very outset of the Belgian aggression, my government, the guarantor and representative of the sovereignty of the Congolese nation, decided to appeal to the United Nations. The UN has responded. And so has the free world. Belgium has been con-

⁶ The Congo Crisis (1960-1965) followed Congo's independence from Belgium, when nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba sought to assert real political and economic autonomy. Belgium and Western powers, particularly the US, backed secessionist movements in mineral-rich Katanga and supported a coup led by Joseph Mobutu, fearing Lumumba's alignment with the pan-Africanist movement and the Eastern Bloc countries. Lumumba was captured and assassinated in 1961 with Belgian and CIA involvement, turning the crisis into a powerful example of Cold War imperialism sabotaging African self-determination.

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demned. I went to New York to show world public opinion the moving forces of the Congolese drama.

Upon our return from the United States, we replied to the invitation of the heads of the free African states, who publicly adopted an explicit position and unanimously extended to us their fraternal support. From this rostrum I express my gratitude to President Bourguiba,⁷ His Majesty Mohammed V,⁸ President Sékou Touré,⁹ President Tubman,¹⁰ President Nkrumah,¹¹ and President Olympio,¹² whom I had the honor to meet at this decisive moment. I regret that material difficulties

⁷ Habib Bourguiba, the founding president of independent Tunisia, led the anti-colonial struggle against French rule through the Neo Destour party. Though initially celebrated for securing independence in 1956, his later accommodation with Western powers and repression of dissent drew criticism from more radical anti-imperialist circles, who saw his policies as prioritizing national stability over revolutionary transformation.

⁸ Mohammed V, Sultan and later King of Morocco, became a symbolic leader of anti-colonial resistance during French and Spanish rule. His 1953 exile imposed by the French sparked nationwide protests, strengthening nationalist movements like the Istiqlal Party. Restored to the throne in 1955, he negotiated Morocco's independence, though left-wing critics argued his post-independence aligned with imperialist interests.

⁹ Sékou Touré was the leader of Guinea's independence movement and its first president. He famously rejected French neocolonial policies by voting "No" in the 1958 referendum on continued association with France. This bold stance made Guinea the first French African colony to gain full independence, provoking severe retaliation from the French government.

¹⁰ President of Liberia between 1944 and 1971, William Tubman balanced pro-Western policies with support for African independence. His early involvement in the pan-Africanist movement was quickly overshadowed by his close ties to the US and foreign corporations.

¹¹ Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, played a pivotal role in the fight against British colonial rule, leading Ghana to become the first sub-Saharan African nation to gain independence in 1957.

¹² As Togo's first president between 1960-1963, Sylvanus Olympio sought to break Togo's economic dependence on France, implementing policies that prioritized national control over resources and aimed at modernizing the country. His stance against French neo-colonial influence made him a target for French-backed forces, and in 1963, he was overthrown and assassinated.

Speech at the opening of the All-African Conference

prevented me from replying to the invitation of President Nasser¹³ and His Majesty Haile Selassie.¹⁴

All of them, fighting for African unity, have said “No” to the strangulation of Africa. All of them immediately realized that the attempts of the imperialists to restore their rule threaten not only the independence of the Congo but also the existence of all the independent states of Africa. They all realized that if the Congo perishes, the whole of Africa will be plunged into the gloom of defeat and bondage.

That is further striking proof of African unity. It is concrete testimony of the unity that we need in the face of imperialism’s monstrous appetite.

All statesmen are agreed that this reality is not debated but fought for, so that it may be defended.

We have gathered here in order that together we may defend Africa, our patrimony. In reply to the actions of the imperialist states, for whom Belgium is only an instrument, we must unite the resistance front of the free and fighting nations of Africa. We must oppose the enemies of freedom with a coalition of free men. Our common destiny is now being decided here in the Congo.

It is, in effect, here, that the last act of Africa’s emancipation and rehabilitation is being played. In extending the struggle, whose primary object was to save the dignity of the African, the Congolese people have chosen independence. In doing so, they were aware that a single blow would not free them from colonial fetters, that juridical independence was only the first step, that a further long and trying effort would be required. The road

¹³ Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt (1956–1970), was a central figure in the global anti-imperialist movement. He nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, defying British, French, and Israeli forces in a move that became a landmark act of resistance against colonial control. A founding leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nasser promoted Arab socialism, pan-Arab unity, and support for anti-colonial struggles across Africa and the Middle East.

¹⁴ Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia (1930–1974), became a symbol of resistance during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1941), and fought against Mussolini’s forces. As a founding member of the Organization of African Unity, he advocated for African unity and independence. However, his later reign was marked by autocracy, economic inequality, and a failure to modernize the country. His reign came to an end as a result of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution.

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we have chosen is not an easy one, but it is the road of pride and freedom of man.

We were aware that as long as the country was dependent, as long as she did not take her destiny into her own hands, the main aspect would be lacking. This concerns the other colonies, no matter what their standard of life is or what positive aspects of the colonial system they have.

We have declared our desire for speedy independence without a transition period and without compromises with such emphasis because we have suffered more mockery, insults, and humiliation than anybody else.

What purpose could delays serve when we already knew that sooner or later we would have to revise and reexamine everything? We had to create a new system adapted to the requirements of purely African evolution, change the methods forced on us and, in particular, find ourselves and free ourselves from the mental attitudes and various complexes in which colonization kept us for centuries.

We were offered a choice between liberation and the continuation of bondage. There can be no compromise between freedom and slavery. We chose to pay the price of freedom.

The classical methods of the colonialists, which we all knew or still partially know, are particularly vital here: surviving presences of military occupation, tribal disunity, sustained and encouraged over a long period, and destructive political opposition, planned, directed, and paid.

You know how difficult it has been for a newly independent state to get rid of the military bases installed by the former occupying powers. We must declare here and now that henceforth Africa refuses to maintain the armed forces of the imperialists in its territory. There must be no more Bizertes,¹⁵ Kitonas,¹⁶ Kaminas,¹⁷ and Sidi Slimanes.¹⁸ We have our own armies to defend our countries.

¹⁵ The Bizerte military base in Tunisia was controlled by France until 1963, symbolizing continued colonial domination, even after Tunisia's independence in 1956.

¹⁶ Located in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Kitona Air Base was also a key strategic site during the Cold War, used by both Belgian and later other Western military forces.

¹⁷ The Congolese city of Kamina hosted a significant military air base during the Congo Crisis, used by Belgian forces to support secessionist movements in the Katanga province.

¹⁸ The Sidi Slimane Air Base in Morocco, used by French forces during the colonial

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Our armed forces, which are victims of machinations, are likewise freeing themselves from the colonial organization in order to have all the qualities of a national army under Congolese leadership.

Our internal difficulties, tribal war, and the nuclei of political opposition seemed to have been accidentally concentrated in the regions with our richest mineral and power resources. We know how all this was organized and, in particular, who supports it today in our house.

Our Katanga¹⁹ because of its uranium, copper, and gold, and our Bakwanga²⁰ in Kasai, because of its diamonds, have become hotbeds of imperialist intrigues. The object of these intrigues is to recapture economic control of our country.

But one thing is certain—I solemnly declare that the Congolese people will never again let themselves be exploited, that all leaders who will strive to direct them to that road will be thrown out of the community.

The resonance that has now been caused by the Congolese problem shows the weight that Africa has in the world today. Our countries, which only yesterday they wanted to ignore as colonial countries, are today causing the old world concern here in Africa. Let them worry about what belongs to them. That is not our affair. Our future, our destiny, a free Africa, is our affair.

This is our year, which you have witnessed and shared in. It is the year of our undisputed victory. It is the year of heroic, blood-drenched Algeria, of Algeria the martyr and example of struggle. It is the year of tortured Angola, of enslaved South Africa, of imprisoned Ruanda-Urundi, of humiliated Kenya.

We all know, and the whole world knows, that Algeria is not French, that Angola is not Portuguese, that Kenya is not English, that Ruan-

era, became a key site for military operations, even after Morocco's independence in 1956, until its closure in the 1960s.

¹⁹ Katanga, a mineral-rich province in the Democratic Republic of Congo, became a focal point of imperialist intervention during the Congo Crisis. After Congo gained independence in 1960, Katanga's secession, backed by Belgian interests and Western powers, was a direct attempt to maintain control over its vast natural resources.

²⁰ Bakwanga, the capital of the former Kasai-Oriental Province (or "East Kasai"), was a significant site of resistance during the Congo Crisis. The region, rich in resources, became a target for neocolonial exploitation.

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da-Urundi is not Belgian. We know that Africa is neither French, nor British, nor American, nor Russian—that it is African.

We know the objectives of the West. Yesterday they divided us on the level of a tribe, clan, and village. Today, with Africa liberating herself, they seek to divide us on the level of states. They want to create antagonistic blocs, satellites, and, having begun from that stage of the cold war, deepen the division in order to perpetuate their rule.

I think I shall not be making a mistake if I say that the united Africa of today rejects these intrigues. That is why we have chosen the policy of positive neutralism, which is the only acceptable policy allowing us to preserve our dignity.

For us, there is neither a Western nor a communist bloc, but separate countries whose attitude towards Africa dictates our policy towards them. Let each country declare its position and act unequivocally with regard to Africa.

We refuse to be an arena of international intrigues, a hotbed, and stake in the Cold War. We affirm our human dignity of free men, who are steadily taking the destiny of their nations and their continent into their own hands.

We are acutely in need of peace and concord, and our foreign policy is directed towards cooperation, loyalty, and friendship among nations. We want to be a force of peaceful progress, a force of conciliation. An independent and united Africa will make a large and positive contribution to world peace. But torn into zones of hostile influence, she will only intensify world antagonism and increase tension.

We are not undertaking any discriminating measures. But the Congo is discriminated against in her external relations. Yet in spite of that, she is open for all and we are prepared to go anywhere. Our only demand is that our sovereignty be recognized and respected.

We shall open our doors to specialists from all countries motivated by friendship, loyalty, and cooperation, from countries bent not on ruling Africans but on helping Africa. They will be welcomed with open arms.

I am sure that I shall be expressing the sentiments of all my African brothers when I say that Africa is not opposed to any nation taken separately, but that she is vigilant against any attempt at new domination and exploitation both in the economic and spiritual fields. Our goal is to revive

Speech at the opening of the All-African Conference

Africa's cultural, philosophical, social, and moral values, and to preserve our resources. But our vigilance does not signify isolation. From the beginning of her independence, the Congo has shown her desire to play her part in the life of free nations, and this desire was made concrete in her request for admission to the United Nations.

Ministers and dear comrades, I am happy to express the joy and pride of the government and people of the Congo at your presence here, at the presence here of the whole of Africa. The time of projects has passed. Today Africa must take action. This action is being impatiently awaited by the peoples of Africa. African unity and solidarity are no longer dreams. They must be expressed in decisions.

United by a single spirit, a single aspiration, and a single heart, we shall turn Africa into a genuinely free and independent continent in the immediate future.

Long live African unity and solidarity!

Forward, Africans, to complete liberation!



















Introduction to “Logic of Colonialism”

D.Z. Shaw

Francis Jeanson (1922–2009) is not a well-known figure in the English-speaking world. He was a French philosopher who entered the public eye with the publication of *Sartre and the Problem of Morality* in 1947.¹ He soon joined the editorial teams of *Les Temps Modernes* (the existentialist journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others) and the publishing house *Editions du Seuil* (known for its association with the left-Catholic journal *Esprit*). From 1947 to 1955, he published numerous books and articles on existentialism, as well as several texts on Algeria and French colonialism, which culminated—during that period—with a book co-authored with Colette Jeanson, *L’Algérie hors la loi*. In 1956, Jeanson took up the cause of Algerian liberation, working for the *Fédération de France* of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN). The “Jeanson network” of “porteurs de valise” (suitcase carriers)

¹ This remains the only book by Jeanson to be translated into English, although it appears to be out of print. See *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, trans. Robert V. Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

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was founded in October 1957. Members of the network smuggled funds collected in France to the FLN and published an underground journal, *Vérités Pour*. . . . Incidentally, the network was responsible for securing Fanon's passage from France to Tunisia in 1957.² Jeanson spent several years underground, evading arrest even after the Jeanson network was broken up by French police in February 1960. In October 1960, he was sentenced in absentia to "ten years in prison, a 70,000 *franc* fine, five years of exile, and a loss of. . . civil rights."³ He remained underground until he was granted amnesty in 1966.

In 1952, Jeanson published three essays, in quick succession, that deserve wider recognition. In the spring, he published a preface to the first edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, by the then little-known author Frantz Fanon.⁴ In May, his scathing review of Albert Camus's *The Rebel*, which precipitated a public break between Sartre and Camus, appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*.⁵ Then, in June, again in *Les Temps Modernes*, he published the text that appears here in English translation, "Logic of Colonialism." While they address three seemingly different concerns, in my view, they are theoretically intertwined.

Let us begin by sketching one of the intellectual horizons for Jeanson's work. During this period, which lasted until 1956, the existentialists

² Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, trans. Nadia Benabid (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 97–98.

³ Marie-Pierre Ulloa, *Francis Jeanson: A Dissident Intellectual from the French Resistance to the Algerian War*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 214.

⁴ My translation of this preface, along with a translation of an extract from his 1965 postface to *Black Skin, White Masks*, and essays by Jérôme Melançon, A. Shahid Stover, and myself, is forthcoming in *Sartre Studies International* (2025).

Jean Khalifa and Robert J. C. Young date the publication of *Black Skin, White Masks* to between April and June of 1952. See the chronology of *Alienation and Freedom* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 779. Extracts from Jeanson's preface were published in *La République algérienne* on April 11, with the far more compelling title, "Opprimés noirs, oppresseurs blancs" ["Black Oppressed, White Oppressors"]. See David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (London: Verso, 2012), 532, note 28. *La République algérienne* was the journal of the *Union démocratique du Manifeste algérien* (Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto).

⁵ An English translation of this essay and Jeanson's subsequent response to Camus are included in *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, edited by David A. Sprintzen and Adrian van den Hoven (Humanities Press, 2004).

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associated with *Les Temps Modernes* (LTM) cast themselves as fellow travelers with the communist movement. Their line—more or less shifting over time and not always clearly articulated—is characterized by: first, opposition to capitalism and American imperialism (as evidenced in Jeanson's essay); second, a working assumption that the French Communist Party was the legitimate representative of the French proletariat due to its mass base; but also, third, a refusal to cede intellectual independence to party orthodoxy.⁶

Along these lines, in April 1952, Sartre led off a special issue of *Les Temps Modernes* dedicated to a critique of French media with the essay "Sommes-nous en démocratie?" ["Is This Democracy?"]⁷ There, Sartre announced that *Les Temps Modernes* would produce a thoroughgoing investigation into the workings of French democracy, concerning the gap that exists "in the essential domains (the press, colonial administration, the justice system, the police, parliamentary assemblies, etc.)," between principles and actual fact.⁸ There are many ways this discrepancy could be interpreted: as the result of the gap between republican ideals and the imperfections of human nature or as the inevitable historical decline of any government. Given that he criticizes the myth of historical progress—a myth that is tied to the historical rise of the bourgeoisie—at the beginning of the essay, it is worthwhile emphasizing that Sartre rejects the reformist position that the gap between principle and fact, namely, the gap between democratic ideals and imperfect institutions, is the result of external factors interfering in democratic mechanisms that ultimately could be identified and fixed within the parameters of liberal-bourgeois social relations. Instead, Sartre holds that the gap between principle and fact is an irreparable, internal contradiction of bourgeois society produced by its class character; "we will see that the ceaselessly increasing gap in certain domains, between

⁶ The latter two positions are evident, for example, in Sartre's "Portrait of the Adventurer" (1950). See Sartre, *We Have Only This Life to Live: The Selected Essays of Jean-Paul Sartre 1939-1975*, ed. Ronald Aronson and Adrian van den Hoven (New York: NYRB, 2013), 198-209.

⁷ An essay important enough to Sartre that it is included *Situations, VI: problèmes du marxisme*, 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 69-76.

⁸ Sartre, "Sommes-nous en démocratie?" 73.

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facts and principles, manifests on the contrary the resistance of the *real*,” that is, the emergence of “an organized and self-conscious working class.”⁹

Jeanson’s “Logic of Colonialism” introduces a special thematic section of the June 1952 issue of *Les Temps Modernes*—which bears the same title as Sartre’s aforementioned essay—dedicated to criticizing so-called democracy in the French colonies (although it largely focuses on North Africa). Jeanson, too, observes the “gap” in the French colonies. He argues—against the reformist position—that the colony cannot be compared to the metropole; instead, colonial administration is the negation of democracy, not merely the insufficient application of metropolitan institutions and principles to the colony. The so-called “gap” arises, instead, because French colonial institutions are structured to *prevent* a challenge from the “popular democracy” of the colonized. Just as Sartre concludes that the “gap” between principle and fact can only be surpassed by the destruction of bourgeois democracy, Jeanson contends that “before they may even become conscious of their political importance, the masses, by their mere existence, already pose problems for which there is no possible solution within the framework of the colonial system.”

But Jeanson is no mere acolyte of Sartre. A contemporaneous critic notes that *Sartre and the Problem of Morality* established Jeanson’s reputation as the first comprehensive “interpreter. . . of Sartrean thought: still the work of a disciple, but of a disciple who uses the instrument to continue his meditations, even to precede the master.”¹⁰ In this case, “Logic of Colonialism” precedes Sartre’s first systematic statement on colonialism by nearly four years.¹¹ Several of his observations are noteworthy, but I will only mention two here. First, Jeanson argues that western anti-communist strategy has come to “overdetermine” the “capitalism-racism complex” of colonialism in ways that reinforce, endanger, and modify its characteristics, appearance, and purpose, while lending a new “higher” justification to the masters of these western colonial outposts. Here, he

⁹ Sartre, “Sommes-nous en démocratie?” 75.

¹⁰ Jean Lacroix, “Francis Jeanson, *Signification Humaine du Rire*,” *Esprit*, 172 (10) (October 1950), 588.

¹¹ See Sartre, “Colonialism is a System,” in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2006), 36–55.

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borrowes the concept of overdetermination from Sartre's analysis (in *Antisemite and Jew*) of how Jewish people may come to internalize antisemitic stereotypes, and how this internalization may lead them to alter their beliefs and actions. (Sartre's discussion also influenced Fanon's analysis of antiblack racism.) In "Logic of Colonialism," though, Jeanson uses the term in a less precise sense to mean that the characteristics of "classical" colonialism (capitalist exploitation and racism) have been modified by, and can no longer be interpreted without reference to, western anticommunist strategy. Second, he contends that nationalist movements in the colonies cannot merely be harnessed by communist blocs; indeed, these movements have a unique orientation which constitutes "the only real response" to the reality of the colonized. He even notes, in passing, that "popular democracy when it is in the Chinese style" (embodied, he suggests later, in the struggle in Vietnam) "poses more difficult problems for Moscow than in its European forms."

These observations, in my view, contribute to understanding his other works from his period. For example, his scathing condemnation of Camus's anticommunism concludes by hinting at his concern, expressed in "Logic of Colonialism," that anticommunist strategy is being deployed to shore up colonialism.¹² And Jeanson's approach to nationalist movements has striking parallels to what he describes, in his preface to *Black Skin, White Masks*, as the "revolutionary attitude" of Fanon, "whose relationship to current [Marxist] orthodoxy seems to imply not a state of rupture and hostility but the most fruitful of tensions."¹³ As evidence, he cites the following passage from Fanon:

We would not be so naïve as to believe that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can change reality. For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight. He will embark on this struggle, and he will pursue it, not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but

¹² Jeanson, "Albert Camus, or The Soul in Revolt," in *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, 101.

¹³ Jeanson, "Préface à l'édition de 1952," in Fanon, *Oeuvres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), 53.

quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger.¹⁴

Is it not striking that only a few years later both Fanon and Jeanson ended up fighting, in their own respective ways, for Algerian liberation? Jeanson's writing is sometimes uneven, as he lacks the mastery of literary and philosophical style possessed by Sartre, Beauvoir, and Fanon. Nevertheless, "Logic of Colonialism" remains a document of remarkable clarity, and sometimes prescience, concerning the struggle against colonialism.

¹⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), 224, translation modified.

Logic of Colonialism¹

Francis Jeanson

The studies and documents that make up this collection cannot make any claim to being exhaustive.² Perhaps there was no need to throw oneself into a kind of asceticism. . . . That was indeed our opinion. The fact of the matter is that we still had to agree, at the end of the day, to this narrow limitation. If North Africa is relatively privileged here, the immense Black continent was assigned an already smaller place, while Madagascar must be content with a few allusions, and nothing is said about the Caribbean. As for Vietnam, in any case, this country could not be examined by our inquiry: the state of war and the intervention of French troops to impose the government of Bảo Đại cancel out a priori any interrogation on the type of implementation of our “western” democracy there.³

¹ “Logique du colonialisme,” *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 80 (June 1952), 2213–2229. Translated by D. Z. Shaw and Jérôme Melançon.

² Translators’ note: Jeanson’s essay introduces several essays collected under the theme “Is This Democracy?”: Claude Gérard, “Pacte colonial et démocratie,” Jacques-H. Guérif, “La naissance du prolétariat marocain,” Claude Bourdet, “Les maîtres de l’Afrique du Nord,” and a collectively authored piece, “Ce mâle empire...”

³ North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), so-called “Black Africa” (the former French West African colonies), Madagascar, the Caribbean (including Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint-Barthélemy, and others), and Southeast Asia (notably Vietnam and the wider region once referred to as “Indochina”) were all once part of the French colonial empire.—Ed.

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It is true that there is already an abundant documentation of the various territories referred to as the French Union.⁴ Our task, since we could not cover everything, was rather to avoid geographical dispersion in favor of an attempt—more partial but without a doubt more productive—to grasp and illuminate various aspects that seemed essential. As such, the selected contributions might already be quite sufficiently instructive; at least they open certain paths for reflection rarely taken by those who dabble in anticolonialism. There will surely be objections to the strict economic reductionism that Marxists impose upon the phenomenon of colonial oppression; it would be correct to add that opposition to this reduction easily falls into the inverse error, which puts the economy between parentheses. The problems of industrialization, with the proletarianization that they imply, constitute a decisive test for the colonies. These still quite limited phenomena, of the type that Guérif⁵ raised in the constitution of a Moroccan proletariat, already unequivocally show the total lack of preparation of the settler elite and the administrations that it controls; their radical ineptitude in their leading role in countries where the masses begin to influence public life and can no longer be treated as a merely passive instrument in the service of exploiters by divine right. Before they may even become conscious of their political importance, the masses, by their mere existence, already pose problems for which there is no possible solution within the context of the colonial system. The astounding power—which allows a handful of settlers to use the structures, specific to each territory, to their profit, to oppose themselves successfully to the decisions of the metropole⁶ and, in Tunisia, for example, to prohibit all real change, as trifling as its scope may be—this astounding power is already diminished when we recall that Tunisia is practically owned by half a dozen financial groups, in terms of its agriculture, mineral resources, industry, transport. But it appears absolutely comprehensible

⁴ From among the most recent works, we point to the special issue dedicated to *Work in Black Africa*, which has just been published under the direction of Pierre Naville, by *Présence Africaine* [n. 13 (1952)].

⁵ Translators' note: see footnote 2.

⁶ *La métropole*—mainland, white, European France—occupies the symbolic and political center of the Republic, consolidating its identity, authority, and resources. In contrast, the term *outré-mer*—literally “beyond the sea”—marks the so-called overseas territories as peripheral, racialized spaces, lingering remnants of empire. Far from neutral descriptors, *métropole* and *outré-mer* reflect and reinforce a colonial logic embedded in French language, one that naturalizes the hierarchy between the imperial center and its dominated margins.—Ed., *Material*.

once one dismantles, as Claude Bourdet does here,⁷ the mechanism according to which the decisive influence of such groups is exercised simultaneously on local administration, Parliament, and the French ministers. And it is yet again the same predominance of the considerations of high finance that Claude Gérard⁸ denounces when, in regards to Black Africa, he evokes the existence and weight of institutions such as the “États Généraux de la Colonisation.”⁹

Except for the very beginning of each colonial enterprise, colonization has established social structures characterized both by a system of capitalist exploitation and by racist contempt everywhere. We can question the relationship between capitalism and racism, endeavor to explain one by the other or to grasp an original dialectic between them—in any case, it would be absurd to believe that we get closer to colonial realities when we gloss over one or the other; whatever their genesis may be, today they appear inextricably linked. There is no lack of evidence [concerning this point], starting with the complete failure of communist parties, which, in North Africa for example, seem barely consistent throughout their own propaganda. . . or the intentionally confusing maneuvers relentlessly employed by the settler elite, official circles, and the press that they control. From this perspective, the confrontation between the reproach of collusion with communism (which is regularly invoked to compromise native [bourgeois] parties) and the consistency with which North African communism itself admits to underestimating these national movements¹⁰ and to failing to

⁷ Translators' note: see footnote 2.

⁸ Translators' note: see footnote 2.

⁹ Translators' note: The “Estates General on Colonization” gathered in Douala, Cameroon in September 1945 and again in Paris, France in July 1946; it brought together the main economic stakeholders in France's colonies. They opposed the results of the Brazzaville conference and the transformation of the Union française adopted by the French Constituent Assembly, which granted unequal voting rights to the residents of what were no longer colonies, but overseas territories (Territoires d'Outre-Mer). Paul Isoart, “L'élaboration de la Constitution de l'Union française: les Assemblées constituantes et le problème colonial.” In *Les chemins de la décolonisation de l'empire colonial français*, Charles-Robert Ageron, ed., CNRS Éditions, 1986, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.editions-cnrs.445>.

¹⁰ In this passage, Jeanson highlights, among others, the limitations and contradictions of the French Communist Party (PCF) in relation to the struggle for Algerian independence. While the PCF condemned colonial repression, it refused to acknowledge the necessity for the Algerian people to wage a revolutionary armed struggle against French imperialism. Jeanson thus denounces a “colonial-reformist” stance which, in the name of republican legality, ends up denying the Algerians'

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efficiently penetrate the masses that they represent—is quite rich. But it is more concerning to note that this self-critique is not directed at the one aspect on which it could have a useful effect: by denouncing tactical errors, it obscures a fundamental error in the very analysis of the situation. The nationalism of these peoples is not a brute force, a type of natural energy, an energetic potential that can be used at will, if only certain tactless approaches could be avoided. It is a movement that has its own orientation, which no doubt constitutes the only real response to the reality they endure.

Once we accept that this movement is not reducible to class struggle and that it does not entirely lend itself to being accounted for within the schemas of current Marxist orthodoxy, we still must extract the essential aspects to consider them one by one. However, it would be useless to try to reduce its complexity to some synthesis between the aspects “capitalism” and “racism.” Moreover, national movements in the colonies define themselves, today, in relation to the international context. The pressures and the temptations to which these movements are exposed, towards America or towards Russia, are a part of the realities of the problem—but so is their repugnance toward any decisive option in favor of either of the two “blocs.” As already in the case of the peoples of Asia, the accession of the peoples of Africa to their majority—their entry into the world—is bound to be accomplished in ways that are as perplexing for official Stalinism as for the paternalism into which the far left of our governments is hesitantly venturing, quivering. By all appearances, popular democracy when it is in the Chinese style poses more difficult problems for Moscow than in its European forms; Africa, as well, may undoubtedly hold surprises for the prospective fools who would believe it is easy to process.

The fact remains that the present situation is characterized by the growing influence of anticommunist strategy on the classical colonial phenomena that result from the capitalism-racism complex. The intervention of this powerful factor, which has only become substantial over the last few years, should not be considered as simply adding to the effect of ordinary factors: on some points it seems to reinforce this effect, on others it would tend to endanger it, and, in any case, it profoundly modifies its characteristics, appearance, and purpose.

Capitalist exploitation and racist contempt, more and more overdetermined by the fine tuning of an anticommunist strategy on a global scale—such ap-

actual right to self-determination. In 1956, the PCF went as far as voting in favor of granting “special powers” to the French army during the Algerian war.—Ed., *Material*.

pear to be the dominant traits of the field of forces to which, explicitly or not, any partial analysis of the conflict between the colonial system and democratic principles refers. We will only attempt, in the few pages that follow, to assemble the most significant aspects of colonial situations and their rapid development today, in relation to these axes. Colonialism, which believed itself to be eternal and aimed to be static, is suddenly entering a period of molting—as if it had only had a prolonged adolescence until now, such that we must wait to see it finally enter adulthood.

“Faced with Russian, American, and British imperialisms that no longer bother to conceal themselves, it is time for a French imperialism to arise. Its substance exists, rich and varied. It only lacks spirit.”¹¹ The last words of this remarkable text should not be understood, obviously, in a pejorative sense. The editorial team of *France Outremer* did not mean to stigmatize any lack of inspiration or absence of humor in the conduct of our grand colonial strategy. It was simply, in the month of the Nativity, awaiting a joyful advent: that of a doctrine which would finally proclaim, to the world, the existence of a system that is already inscribed in reality. Giving it form would allow French imperialism, already so “substantial,” to manifest its true power. The time is past for these almost self-shaming policies, paralyzed by some absurd concern for discretion and seemingly afflicted by a modesty complex; it will be important from now on for imperialism to have the courage of its convictions.

In the face of this, our undertaking has a great chance of appearing pointless. However, it is doubtlessly just as logical, in the context of an inquiry into the function of democratic institutions, to find out what becomes of this function in colonized countries—and it is doubtlessly more honest to truly face the problem than to declare it immediately resolved, even based on the most obvious evidence.

It is appropriate then to render oneself systematically incredulous against one's strongest convictions. Never mind that colonization and democracy have so far appeared to you incompatible, mutually exclusive. Act as if this were not the case and take up the very moderately audacious working hypothesis that the implementation of the principles of democ-

¹¹ *France Outremer*, December 1951.

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racy must involve a significantly greater gap in the *outré-mer* than what we see in the Metropole,¹² at different levels of public life. From there, plunge into the documents, absorb the official declarations without wavering, scrupulously assemble all the facts however noteworthy, question everyone no matter their opinion, force yourself day after day to read every opinion piece—and when you are finally at the end of your efforts and at the point of concluding, you will need to admit that the very meaning of your research collapsed along the way. The famous “gap” was only a myth, the distance between the two planes becoming altogether impossible to determine if it turns out that one of the planes doesn’t exist.

But perhaps this absurd research was not entirely pointless and perhaps it only lost its original meaning to take on another. At least it already seems that it constitutes, precisely, the most striking *reductio ad absurdum*. We meant to judge the various conditions of public life in the *outré-mer* countries, and we certainly expected to find them “lacking” *in relation to democratic principles*. But it turns out that just as we would want to point out such conditions, we are not able to find any condition that appears to be justifiably comparable to these principles, any condition which we could be convinced represents, even at any stage of deterioration, democracy at work.

Thus we shall need to invert our perspective. The colonial phenomenon does not necessitate the perversion of democracy—its rotting out—but its pure and simple negation, its total refusal, under whatever disguise it sometimes uses (and less and less necessarily so) to conceal itself. Colonization not only appears in its essence as *antidemocratic*, but we notice that after having been openly and deliberately so during its *belle époque*, it went through a kind of infantile disorder—a crisis of bad conscience, an itch for a verbal democratization—a disorder from which it is just barely recovered in the present period. Thank heavens, it is now in recovery and at the point of returning to its full energy. If you still see it perform some gesture lacking in assurance here and there—a hesitant gait, a look of concern on its face—do not be worried: colonization itself is surprised to feel so powerful again, so free to act and speak according to its heart. Hence some vertigo and some visual disturbances; it is a simple matter of getting used to the return to broad daylight.

¹² See footnote 6.—Ed., *Material*.

Can we, however, ignore the movement of democratization begun by the *oultre-mer* French policies during the years immediately following the liberation of Metropole soil? The freedom of the press has been proclaimed nearly everywhere; the natives have become voters and even French citizens—or at least “citizens of the French Union”; local assemblies have been instituted, certain territories have even been promoted to French “departments.”¹³ Along these lines, we could mention other provisions that express a clearly democratic inspiration.

Let us take an example. The case of Algeria, which is bound to comprise the best possible outcome for this general tendency, will consequently provide us with its most decisive illustration. The history of Franco-Algerian relations, after more than a century of official camouflage and persistent illusions, is, of course, beginning to be somewhat known: there was the conquest, with its deplorable reasons; then “pacification” with its raids, its destruction of villages by the dozens, its *enfumades*¹⁴ of entire tribes; then the period of peaceful exploitation, with its more hidden, nearly normalized violence, and its recourse at all times and to every degree to arbitrariness. Finally, there was World War II, the Atlantic Charter,¹⁵ Roosevelt’s declarations and the great thoughts born of the Resistance. And doubtlessly, it hardly matters that the structures of Algeria had been, up to that point, entirely antidemocratic; the only question is if real modifications have been brought about since then and if this colony is today truly the

¹³ Translators’ note: In 1946, following the work and advocacy of the *oultre-mer* members, the National Assembly put forward a law that transformed Guadeloupe, Martinique, La Réunion, and French Guiana from colonies into departments. This placed them outside the reach of the Ministry of the Overseas (*ministère de l’Outre-mer*) and colonial governors, and within the scope of the Ministry of the Interior, meaning that most of the laws that applied in France also applied there. Algeria would also have three departments: Alger, Oran, and Constantine (the rest being governed militarily).

¹⁴ Translators’ note: the term “enfumade” refers to the practice, during the conquest of Algeria, of French forces setting fires just outside caves to suffocate whole communities of native Algerians, regardless of whether they were fighting or simply fleeing colonization.

¹⁵ Translators’ note: Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt issued the Atlantic Charter in 1941, setting out a post-war path to a different world order. The Charter is a declaration on the rights to self-determination and development for all peoples.

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equivalent of a French province. Let us refer then to the very text that was conceived expressly to establish this sort of peaceful and legal revolution: the *Statute of Algeria*, passed by the French Parliament in September 1947.

“Article 1. Algeria constitutes a group of departments endowed with civil personhood, financial autonomy, and a particular organization.” *In other words*, these “departments” are not true departments.¹⁶

“Article 2. Real equality is proclaimed for all French citizens. All French nationals of the departments of Algeria enjoy, without distinction of origin, race, language, or religion, the rights related to French citizenship and are subject to the same obligations.” *Hence this consequence*: the Algerian Assembly—which is “charged with administering, in accord with the Governor General, the interests proper to Algeria” (Article 6)—“is composed of one-hundred and twenty members: sixty representing the citizens of the first college and sixty representing the citizens of the second college.” (Article 30). These French citizens between whom “real equality” has been proclaimed are nevertheless divided into two electoral colleges, so that a million and a half Europeans have the same number of representatives as eight million natives. This precaution could be judged sufficient; just in case, another is taken: “at the request of either the Governor General, the Commission of Finances, or one quarter of the members of the Assembly, the vote can only be passed [*acquis*] after a delay of twenty-four hours and by a two-thirds majority of members unless a majority can be found in each of the colleges” (Article 39).

An analysis of the other articles would be no less instructive. But it is not necessary to go any further to observe that the negation of democracy is included here in the law that claimed to institute it. Indeed, Metropole institutions are never considered to be directly applicable in the case of colonial territories; it is necessary to subject them to a “transposition,” which aims to adapt their content to colonialist demands, while maintaining the democratic phraseology. From its very first lines, the *Statute of Algeria* displays its true project, which is to fully safeguard the structures of colonial oppression. It does even better: it goes as far as giving them a foundation in law, under the most decisive relationship, since the settler

¹⁶ It is remarkable moreover that Parliament, having to choose between “overseas departments” and “French departments,” believed it had found a solution in opting for “departments”—full stop.

elite finds in it its traditional conception of Algeria as its “preserve”—legalized and passed under a “democratic” veneer. It is a “preserve” completely independent from the Metropole at the financial level and only recognizes the latter’s authority when it obtains some favorable commercial measure or the support of its armed forces during times of trouble. This *separatism* can sometimes resort to the most violent measures, from the resignation of the mayors of Algeria—as happened when the settlers set out in 1936 to defeat the project of Blum-Violette¹⁷—to the massacre of some twenty thousand natives in May 1945,¹⁸ which had the precise goal of rendering any realization of the hopes conceived by the Algerian people in the euphoria of the victory over fascism impossible. And it is indeed in working under the atmosphere created by these “riots,”¹⁹ that two years later the Algerian settlers, using the methods of influence analyzed here by Claude Bourdet,²⁰ maneuvered the government and French Parliament into the adoption of the current Statute when (then Council president) Ramadier’s intervention prevented the report on a bill approved by the Commission of the Interior.²¹ A similar maneuver made it possible to avoid casting light on the events of May ’45—by obtaining the recall of the commission of inquiry appointed by the second Constituent Assembly before any actual work was done.

Facing vague Metropole desires for democratization and as a counter-attack to the growing consciousness of subjugated peoples, “revolts” of the same order in some territories have been provoked, or at least favored, and then submitted to the most monstrous forms of “repression”: we have

¹⁷ Translators’ note: In 1936, during the Popular Front in France, Léon Blum’s government prepared a bill on the basis of suggestions by Maurice Violette, a past governor of Algeria. This bill sought to give French citizenship to a relatively small number of Indigenous Algerians, without requiring that they renounce Islam.

¹⁸ Translators’ note: Here Jeanson refers to the massacres committed by France in the Sétif, Guelma, and Kherrata regions of Algeria, immediately following the liberation of France.

¹⁹ One also employed the term “rebellion.” But there were 102 Europeans killed and for the most part, during the course of the first day, while the massive operations against Muslim populations continued for the next eight days.

²⁰ Translators’ note: see footnote 2.

²¹ The same Ramadier came to rightly declare, on January 21, 1947, before the National Assembly: “The French Empire has disappeared to make way for the French Union.”

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not forgotten, among other things, the sinister Malagasy affair of 1947.²² In each case, the objective was to slow down the rising action of native political movements provisionally and to “prove” that these rebellious barbarians were not ready for democracy. Hence the adoption of these rigged laws, which apparently were meant as a decisive step toward democracy in various French colonies, but which in each case entailed exactly the provisions most likely to prohibit any real democratization. The “gap” was of the sort instituted at the very level of legality, and the play of democratic institutions did not risk being distorted by the actual context, because there were indeed institutions—but they were not democratic.

The fact remains that their function was nonetheless hastily paralyzed. Rightfully considered by the natives as a colonially “imposed charter” that went against all official promises and the most solemn assertions given over the previous few years—the *Statute of Algeria* has been ceaselessly treated with derision for nearly five years by the very people who have been charged to enforce it. It is true that—up to a certain point and in a very crude fashion—appearances have been kept up. For example, elections have been held and the Algerian Assembly has been created. But these elections have been so completely fraudulent that it has become customary, even within the colonialist milieu, to consider them as mere formalities for which the results are known in advance; in fact, they are actually nominations. We know the means: classical forms of corruption, the authoritarian preparation of the list of candidates, pressures exercised locally by chiefs and administrators of mixed communes, the deployment of forces and the atmosphere of repression around polling stations, an obligation on the voter to vote without a secret ballot, the provocation of incidents that serve as a pretext to expel the delegates of opposition parties or even the total evacuation of the polling station, the stuffing of ballot boxes and, finally, the pure and simple falsification of results. As for the Algerian Assembly, we understand that most of its members are no longer very sensitive to the many breaches it imposes upon its own rules. Its commissions are constituted exclusively according to political affiliation.

²² Translators’ note: The word “Affair” here is a much-used euphemism to speak of the repression of an insurrection and of a following massacre perpetrated by the French army, much like what would eventually be called the “Events” of Algeria in reference to the war.

Venality, even if illiterate, is preferred to competency, which does not offer the same guarantees of “loyalty” to the Administration.

Let us recall again that the administration of the Algerian Assembly is fairly constantly carried out by Government-General appointed civil servants. . . . We can point to many scandals—no enumeration can render the feeling one gets from this Assembly’s meetings; it is necessary to have followed a few to truly measure the abject derision of this “democracy” that France has accorded to Algerians. And it is within this atmosphere, both farcical and sinister, that we must hear the resounding bitter protest of a “nationalist” delegate: “When one has a majority, one acts more elegantly!”

It is true that the settler elite is not tranquil. No supremacy appears sufficient anymore, ever since the democratic *terms* were officially introduced in its domain. Since his arrival in Algeria, Governor-General Naegelen had been carefully indoctrinated; if one meant to democratize the Muslim masses, it was advisable above all to take them in hand as firmly as possible²³—hence the “elections” we witnessed and the atmosphere of repression that soon set in. But when Naegelen intended to take hold of a little of the authority he had largely conceded to the administration, when he wanted to draw the benefits that he had expected for himself from the operation and proclaim finally that thanks to him²⁴ Algeria was restored to order, ready for a democratization “that respects French sovereignty”—this great servant of Algeria was made to see that he was becoming burdensome and that wise masters do not bear bad servants. And so there was much haste to organize the famous “conspiracy” of April and May 1950—which

²³ Translators’ note: In this essay Jeanson is using the term “Muslim” to evoke and challenge the French convention of referring to Arabic Algerians, regardless of religion, as “Muslims,” as opposed to “Algerians,” which referred to white colonists. In “Cette Algérie, conquise et pacifiée,” he notes that he uses the term “Arabs” in these pages, and for the same reasons that of *Muslims*, to designate native Algerians regardless of their true origin. The reality is certainly more complex. But, on the one hand, this simplification is readily made by the French of Algeria. . . on the other hand, when the latter are concerned with distinguishing Arabs and Berbers (of Kabylia or M’zab), the aim is generally to grant to a minority group certain qualities that they are thus all the more comfortable to deny to native populations taken as a whole.” See Francis Jeanson, “Cette Algérie, conquise et pacifiée,” *Esprit*, 166 (4) (April 1950), 617–618.

²⁴ He knew he was waiting for a seat in the National Assembly, while his “special mission” in Algeria could not be renewed indefinitely.

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descended into farce, but which could just as well have precipitated a new May 8 in Algeria. . .

At the present time, the commitments, even the most precise, which the Statute has created, are still waiting to be respected. By way of example, Article 53 calls for the suppression of “mixed communes,” domains of the most complete arbitrariness—the application of this measure being subject to “decisions of the Algerian Assembly.” But as the *Union démocratique du Manifeste algérien*²⁵ (Ferhat Abbas) had submitted a proposal in 1949, the Administration opposed it three months later with a counter-project. Finally, the question was buried, the majority having decided, in complete contradiction to not only Article 53 but the formal provisions of Article 52, that it lacked the qualification to make a decision. There is an analogous situation regarding the separation of Church and State, similarly planned for in the Statute: the proposal that the UDMA submitted a year ago has not yet been discussed—a delay that is quite understandable when one knows what an extraordinary means of pressure on the Muslim masses is created by the Administration’s hold on the tangible forms of religious life. In the same manner, the plan for complete education directed by the decree of November 27, 1944 (the execution of which Article 47 of the Statute conferred on the Governor-General, thus placing it outside the control of the services of National Education) has been the target for the last five years, of systematic torpedoing under the cover of an equally wretched rigging: very few new classrooms are built, but all the old rooms are split. In other words, they are utilized by twice as many students and the classes that previously were held over the course of a whole day are today held over a half-day. This allows for the production of fully satisfying statistics—and for reducing the education budget, as was done during 1951–1952 by five percent. Correlatively, the budget of General Security has increased to one sixth of the regular budget (10 billion of 60).

In April, *Les Temps Modernes* spoke of the Metropole press: the *outrémer* press would merit an equally important study but would definitely be sharper. To stay with the case of Algeria, let us recall that of the five daily newspapers—*Alger-Républicain* (communist), *L’Echo d’Alger* (reactionary

²⁵ Translators’ note: The UDMA (in English, Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto) was a political party created to work toward Algerian independence and elected representatives to the French National Assembly in 1946.

and Petainist), *Dernière Heure* (evening edition dependent on the *Echo*), *Le Journal d'Alger* (pseudo-moderate), and *La Dépêche quotidienne* (organ of Henri Borgeaud²⁶)—four are colonialist and all are below mediocrity.²⁷ However, the latter is noticeably the worst; each month its owner sacrifices a respectable number of millions for a circulation that has become absurd. As for the other three colonialist papers, they now belong to Blachette, who was already owner of the *Journal d'Alger* and who last October purchased a fifty-two percent share of the *Echo*. Blachette, to whom gubernatorial services had granted the rights to exploit the immense alfa grass fields in the South free of charge, is one of the two or three men who have the means to make it rain or shine in Algeria.²⁸ His present projects consist of keeping the *Echo* on its usual line, the suppression of *Dernière Heure*, and the assignment of the *Journal* to a seemingly pro-Muslim policy. . .

In the background, the police carry on their work and justice continues to renounce itself. The recent trial—mostly in closed proceedings where approximately sixty militants of the MTL²⁹ accused of participating in the famous “conspiracy” of 1950³⁰ were tried—has given Claude Bour-

²⁶ Translators' note: Borgeaud was a *pied-noir* (settler) who made his fortune in agriculture based on his family inheritance, was elected to various political offices, generally on the left, and controlled much of the commerce in French Algeria. He founded *La Dépêche Quotidienne d'Algérie* after failing to purchase *L'Écho d'Alger*.

²⁷ Translators' note: With this comment and juxtaposition, Jeanson is directly criticizing communist movements connected to the French Communist Party (PCF). The Party had been and would continue to be criticized for its colonialist stance as can be found in Aimé Césaire, “Letter to Maurice Thorez,” Chike Jeffers, transl., *Social Text*, 28 (2), 145–152.

²⁸ On January 11, 1944 in the Consultative Assembly, Charles Laurent, president of the Commission on the Purging of the Press, declared: “In Algeria, the press is owned by three families, who moreover have ties between them. In Morocco, it is in the hands of one man [reading *homme* in the place of *komme*]. The Tunisian press is owned by the Railroad Company.” Eight years later, it is difficult not to take the complete existence of such a state of affairs as conclusive.

²⁹ Translators' note: The Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés démocratiques en Algérie (in English, Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties) was a party created by the fusion of the Parti du peuple algérien (Algerian People's Party) and the Amis du manifeste pour la liberté (Friends of the Manifesto for Freedom). It organized the protests that led to the 1945 massacres.

³⁰ Twenty-four Algerians who have been held in preventive detention since 1945 were called to appear in February 1952.

det³¹ the occasion to say all that could be said, in particular, on the methods of obtaining “confessions” and the compiling of “dossiers.” We will only recall that Bourdet suggested at the end of his article that the Administration attack *L’Observateur*. But it would seem that the Administration did not take issue with this description of its actions.

Such is democracy in the most “democratized” of our colonial territories.

It is not necessary to evoke worse examples. We can however conclude that the so-called “exceptional” measures have become so normal in the “outre-mer” that the officials responsible for French policy no longer even seem bothered to have to take up or to cover up the most monstrous of them: the Tunisian affair³² is sufficiently eloquent in this respect.³³ It is even striking that on this point some of its aspects, which are not even the most minor, seem to have been thrown into the shadows by the light cast on the others. Has attention truly been paid, in particular, to measures taken by the Administration against the civil servants guilty of having participated in the strike on April 1st? It is possible that certain penalties have been thereafter lifted or at least reduced.³⁴ But the mere fact that this recourse has been allowed, speaks volumes about the real implications of the “democratic” arguments in the name of which the method of direct

³¹ Translators’ note: see footnote 2.

³² See note 34.—Ed., *Material*.

³³ Concerning which *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien* has just supplied a remarkable and comprehensive exposé, based on excellent documentation: *Le Drame Tunisien* (Journal number 34).

Translators’ note: Jeanson likely refers here to the repression of nationalist movements and particularly brutal violence in early 1952.

³⁴ In any case here is what a French professor in Tunisia *who had not taken part in the strike* wrote me on April 6th: “Late in the evening, and only by radio broadcast, General Garbay delivered a warning, announcing serious penalties. The strike took place peacefully—semi-successfully (and not as a “total failure” as the papers announced). I don’t have sufficient information concerning the group of functionaries; but as it stands in the teaching sector:

1. some interns (few, it seems) were purely and simply dismissed;
2. other interns, more numerous, were suspended on April 6th (the beginning of Easter vacation) and reinstated on the 21st—which means they lost fifteen days of pay and, without a doubt, all the seniority they would have accrued;
3. a professor, Merlen, and two teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Jacquinot, were suspended from duty and are outstaffed to [*remis à la disposition*] the French government;
4. finally, all striking appointed functionaries, French and Tunisian, are suspended from their duties and will go before a Disciplinary Board.”

administration against certain peoples is obstinately practiced, despite the worst warnings. For it is obviously in order to force Tunisians into democracy that their representatives are arrested and taught the beauty of the state of siege, civilian mobilization, and collective responsibility; it is to save Moroccans from feudalism that the Residence of Rabat, which has learned nothing since Lyautey,³⁵ refuses them basic liberties while relying more than ever on the most corrupt among the greatest feudal lords. After all this, the lack of political maturity is calmly invoked to justify maintaining authoritarian structures, the only guarantee of an authentic step forward on the path of progress. Hence, it is necessary to conclude that the democratization of a country essentially requires its strict dependency on another. It matters little that democracies are colonialist; they can only be so, and this is clear, democratically.

It is racism—the deeply-rooted conviction of their racial superiority—which ordinarily allows the great majority of settlers and colonial administrators to maintain a relatively “good conscience,” even as they foster the most abject forms of oppression or as they become its accomplices by neglecting to protest. Today, of course, racism gets bad press and nobody readily defines themselves as racist. But the very people who for the past few years have denied being racist are doing so in terms that show rather the full survival of the phenomenon.

In any case, they can easily protest; they now have another justification at their disposal. Franco’s theses, from an uneasy formulation in the atmosphere of 1944–1945, have become the fundamental theses of an Atlanticized Europe, the catechism of its circles of leadership. It is henceforth understood that a healthy policy is an anticommunist policy and that evil has its seat in Moscow. Pétain³⁶ was a sage (the settlers of North Africa, at least, never doubted it), Hitler had it right, and American power, if ill-advisedly directed against him during the last war, is today the only one that can keep communist undertakings in check. Every adversary of French

³⁵ Translators’ note: Maréchal Lyautey was a general in the French Army and a colonial administrator in Morocco (and a member of the Académie française). He was notably a practitioner and theorist of colonial rule and counterinsurgency.

³⁶ Translators’ note: Maréchal Pétain was Prime Minister of France and head of the collaborationist French state under Nazi occupation.

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sovereignty, every opponent, is communist. Colonial oppression is no longer oppressive—it is *defensive*. It aims to keep entire populations sheltered from evil. Repression is no longer repressive; it *heals* these populations by killing the germ of evil within them, whenever there is reason to fear that they have been subjected to its harm.

Supported by racism, camouflaging racism, and replacing racism when it comes to supplying justifications, anticommunism henceforth authorizes the most arrogant attitudes and the most criminal behaviors. Not only are the lords of colonization in charge of souls locally, within their fiefdom, but each one of them can consider himself invested in a kind of higher mandate: a supreme mission has been entrusted to him; he holds one of the outposts in the grand strategy that assures the definitive triumph of the forces of Good across the world. For this reason, as a soldier for a cause, he is accountable, a demanding discipline informs all his acts; but the superior authority to which he is accountable is not clearly defined, and he feels a harsh imperative weighing on him which, in the final reckoning, only comes from within. By virtue of Stalin's name alone, colonialism becomes its own god and forges for itself—beyond the long-standing jests of the civilizing mission—a terrible morality of humanity's salvation through a crusade against the Soviet Union.

For once, however, colonialism, at the very time it recovers an exceptional power, seems to be the first dupe of its new attempt at mystification. In its traditional form, it was not, after all, absolutely inconceivable that colonialism might come to recognize the necessity of certain arrangements: I mean that it is difficult to provide fanatics of reformism proof that it would never come to recognize it. Now, there is no longer any proof to supply. French colonialism, turning to imperialism to draw on new forces, has chosen suicide. The American strategy, to which it has naively rallied, involves the negation of its privileges in the short term, the liquidation of its sovereignty. Nothing inclines these outdated despots toward competition with private American capital; with their present political options, everything tends to prohibit once and for all the recourse to reasonable solutions, which perhaps might have permitted them to survive for some time. By believing that they are rearming themselves, they are only hand-

ing over power and rendering a situation more contradictory and more untenable than it already was.

We knew, for example, that the Algerian economy had long constituted a challenge to common sense. And the inexpiable buffoonery of accredited commentators (the most recent being probably Pierre Frédéric³⁷) would change nothing of the fact that in Algeria, production has not been driven by the real needs of the country but by the immediate interests of its effective owners. The result is that the cultivation of vineyards has been prioritized over wheat, even though the diet of the native population is based on grains, and that the amount available per individual has dropped over the last fifty years from four hundred kilograms to less than one hundred and fifty. But wine, quite simply, sold better. We knew, also, that capital invested in the colonies was not intended for their development but only to start and maintain a circuit of exploitation; that this exploitation itself was almost never rational, operating, above all, according to the calculation of the greatest profit in the least amount of time; and, finally, that Metropole capitalism, by transposing its already weakening dynamism to the colonies, degraded it into a nearly total statism—by its concern to not give space for any massive proletarianization, but also by choosing the easiest option. After all, this exploitation, which creates nothing, was certainly profitable for the time being. Nevertheless, it took on the risks of catastrophe, since it limited itself, in avoiding the true problems, to making their peaceful solution more difficult and more improbable every year.

Between 1944 and 1947, colonialism fought triumphantly against democratic principles and the idea of freedom. But soon the violent realization in different parts of the world of certain “popular democracies,” coinciding, in Asia, with a powerful desire for emancipation from western imperialism, the sudden emergence of a Vietnam capable of holding French troops in check—in sum, the constitution of a powerful bloc, determined to struggle by all means against traditional capitalism and successful in standing up to it, was going to lead colonial capitalists to choose suicide for fear of death. Against this bloc, which was Evil itself, another

³⁷ *Le Monde*, April 3rd, 4th, and 5th, 1952.

bloc—at least as powerful, and without a doubt probably more so—stood up. This could only be the Good. They rallied to it without delay.

But Europe had also just rallied to it—a Europe which no longer had the least confidence in itself and whose dreams were divided between African exoticism and salvation by America.

What the Planning Commission could not secure in a national capacity—the beginning of a rational process of industrialization—was thus accomplished in the private sphere, by the influx of capital, indeed even industrial plants, which no longer felt secure on the European continent. Economic liberalism, from which came easy colonial domination, was going to turn against colonialism, now exposing it to the disadvantages of competition—and, more distantly, to the horrors of class struggle. *Eurafrica*—a conception “made in Germany,”³⁸ and which already seduced the White House in the interwar period—was once again on the agenda. But by all appearances Africa will not be the field of expansion for Europe, and “Eurafrica” is already but a euphemism, under which Europeans are called to discover each day the true reality a little better—some kind of “Amerfrica”. . . The transfer of Indochinese capital is nearly completed, while that of European capital is in progress. Moreover, do the current colonial owners think they can resist the wave of private investment rushing in from America in aid to underdeveloped countries?

They chose to have American power on their side. But without a doubt they ignore what nourishes this power and that, when one calls upon the Armies of the Good, it is necessary to expect also that they do not come without baggage. They have bet on the Atlantic system, but they have not seen that the system’s own strategy, in progressively displacing its center of gravity from Europe to Africa, sounds the death knell for *their* Africa. In the same issue of the luxurious review *France Outremer* in which we noted the awaiting of a true *French imperialism*, the Air Force general Piollet, inspector general of the Outre-mer Air Force and member of the Superior Air Council, was asked to show “how western Europe can have a chance of success in playing the role of outpost for the Atlantic Pact, in the imperious condition of shoring up by the whole African continent, closely joined together on the political level and meticulously equipped on the technical level.” Subject to this reservation, the general assured that “Africa allows for

³⁸ Translators’ note: English in the original.

all maneuvers, both to Europe and to Asia,” and that its essential characteristics dispose it to a crusade, as least as much as to defense: “its size alone defends it from surprises from adversaries and allows offensive operations directed against these adversaries to prepare in the greatest secrecy.” We will have moreover guessed that Africa can, obviously, play this role “only on the express condition that it is wholly linked to the policy—and to the political choice—of the West.” But we should not be concerned by that, because the matter just happens to be in our hands: “Fortunately, almost all of Africa, by virtue of treaties of alliance, is under the jurisdiction of protectorates or colonial pacts of three already closely-knit powers within Europe: Great Britain, France, and Belgium.”

Hence we must doubtlessly conclude that colonialism, crossing into adulthood, has become doddering and works toward its own ruin. But we see that its suicide does not benefit its victims and that it is not accompanied by any repentance; it is marked by the same anti-democratism and the same negation of the human which already characterized its entire existence. Similarly, but on a more modest scale, a defeated Hitler dreamed of annihilating all of Germany before disappearing under the ruins of Berlin.







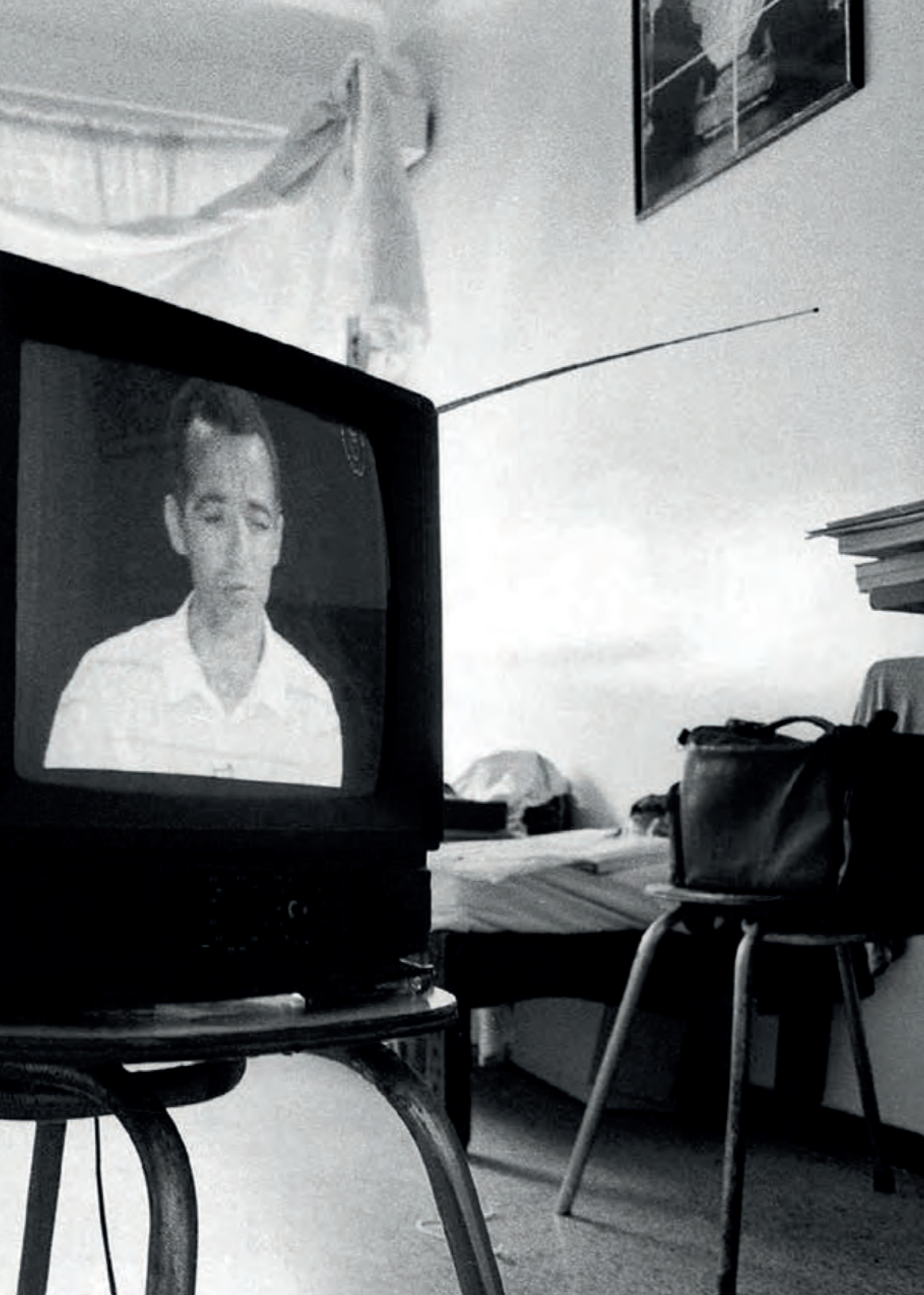


PIERRE SALINGER
ERIC LAURENT
**GUERRE
DU GOLFE**
LE DOSSIER SECRET













Interview with the Proletarian Party of Purbo Bangla (PBSP)

International Department, 3rd Week of October, 2024

Material: *Could you tell us about your party—its foundation, history, and ideological basis, as well as its recent developments?*

PBSP: In the 1960s, the international communist movement split during the great communist debates. On one side was the Khrushchev-led revisionism of the Soviet Union, and on the other was Mao Zedong's revolutionary line and ideology. From the very beginning, our party embraced Maoism—at that time referred to as Mao Zedong Thought—as the third and higher stage of Marxism. However, the adoption and application of Maoism in our country's Maoist movement faced various weaknesses. This caused early fragmentation of the Maoist movement in our region.

Our party was founded by Comrade Siraj Sikder in 1971 during the turbulent times of the war when the Pakistani rulers imposed a brutal genocide on the people of East Bengal. In response, the masses of East Bengal took up arms to fight for independence from Pakistan and establish a new state. Before this, in 1967, Comrade Siraj Sikder formed the “Mao Zedong Thought Research Center,” an ideological study group aimed at

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studying and mastering Mao's Thought and forming a cadre group of Maoist followers.

It's important to note that several other Maoist centers were also forming at the time, but due to various ideological weaknesses and deviations, no unified Maoist party emerged. Our party was part of this broader process. Subsequently, in 1968, Comrade Siraj Sikder founded the East Bengal Workers Movement as a preparatory organization for establishing a revolutionary Maoist communist party. Through both theoretical and practical struggles, the East Bengal Workers Movement advanced the process of party formation. On March 25, 1971, when the Pakistani army initiated mass killings and the bourgeois nationalist party, the Awami League, fled to India, the East Bengal Workers Movement called for the seizure of arms and the formation of armed forces. Under the leadership of Sikder, a temporary base was established in the Peyarabagan region of Barisal. Amidst the war against the Pakistani military, on June 3, 1971, the Proletarian Party of Purbo Bangla (Purbo Bangla, meaning East Bengal) was formally founded at a representative conference held at Peyarabagan. Comrade Siraj Sikder was elected as the party's chair.

Meanwhile, Awami League loyalists who had fled to India returned as "freedom fighters." Alongside the Pakistani military, they also launched attacks on our party. Internationally, the war in East Bengal was part of the larger inter-imperialist conflict. On one side were the US-led imperialists and the Pakistani army, and on the other were Soviet social-imperialism and Indian expansionism. Faced with attacks from both the Pakistani military and Awami League loyalists, our party was forced to retreat from Peyarabagan in June 1971. At that time, we denounced the expatriate government of the Awami League formed in India as Russian-Indian stooges, despite their posturing as patriots. We adopted the line of waging a self-reliant liberation struggle free from all imperialist powers, including the US and Indian expansionism, to achieve a national democratic revolution.

However, due to various ideological deviations within the Maoist movement in East Bengal, including within our own party, our struggle faced significant setback. On December 16, 1971, backed by the Soviet Union and India and acting as their agents, they created the new state.

After the state of Bangladesh was established on December 16, 1971, our party analyzed it as a sham independence. In 1972, we held our first

Interview with the Proletarian Party of Purbo Bangla

party congress where Comrade Siraj Sikder was elected as the chairman of the central committee. From 1973 to 1974, armed revolutionary uprisings took place across the country, especially under our party's leadership. During this period, Sheikh Mujibur's Awami League was moving towards one-party, BAKSHAL, authoritarian rule, establishing the Rakkhi Bahini, a brutal paramilitary force, with direct Indian support. Around 30,000 Maoists and leftists were massacred during this period.

This repression weakened our revolutionary struggle. On January 1, 1975, Comrade Sikder was arrested and assassinated while in custody the following day. The state fabricated a false story about his death, which the people rejected. After his death, the party faced internal crises, a split, and ideological debates, leading to the collapse of the central leadership structure.

By the late 1977, Comrade Anwar Kabir assumed leadership of the party's central committee, forming the Highest Revolutionary Council (SBP). He has led the party for nearly five decades, navigating through various internal and international struggles. He initiated the process of summarizing the party line and struggles from 1968 to 1976 based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM). At the same time, he exposed and fought against the revisionism of the post-Mao Chinese Communist Party and the Three Worlds Theory. In addition, he waged a theoretical and ideological struggle against the Hoxhaite line, culminating in his famous book *In Defence of Mao Zedong Thought*. This work effectively buried the Hoxhaite influence from a theoretical standpoint in our country and upheld the banner of Maoism.

Under the leadership of Comrade Anwar Kabir, the party spearheaded a nationwide armed revolutionary uprising during 1987–88. Many sincere Maoist groups and individuals, previously divided, united under this center. The Hoxhaite factions were defeated in practice and became isolated from the masses. In 1984, the party joined the international center RIM (Revolutionary Internationalist Movement), aimed at building a Fourth International. The party's second national congress was held in 1987 in the

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a guerrilla region, which was a significant success. Comrade Anwar Kabir was elected as the party's general secretary.

However, alarmed by this revolutionary upsurge, the ruling classes and the state apparatus, under the military dictatorship of Ershad,¹ launched a comprehensive campaign across the country to crush the party and the people's war. This resulted in significant losses for the party, with key guerrilla regions falling out of its control.

In this challenging context, the party held its 3rd National Congress in 1992, aiming to synthesize the lessons from the above-mentioned setbacks. However, this synthesis was incomplete and marked by certain deviations. Shortly after the 3rd Congress, a major two-line struggle emerged within the party, centered on the summation of past struggles and failures. As a result, by 1998–1999, the party split into three different factions. Under the leadership of Comrade Anwar Kabir, the process of summarizing the party line and struggles continued. This culminated in the National Representative Conference of 2011, where the “New Thesis” was adopted, encapsulating four decades of experiences of the Maoist movement in the country, as compiled by Comrade Anwar Kabir.

In 2017, the 4th Congress was held. During and after the Congress, based on the New Thesis, the party developed a new strategic plan, a comprehensive document synthesizing five decades of military line, an initial analysis of the new political economy, and a program for the New Democratic Revolution. Additionally, documents addressing Chinese social-imperialism and advancing the ongoing international line struggle were drafted. Alongside this, a tactical line for combating the ruling Hasina-Awami fascism was formulated and implemented. In this way, the party distilled over five decades of experience of the Maoist movement in our country, presenting it as the guiding line for both the party and the broader Maoist movement here. Efforts are underway to revitalize Maoist activities among students and youth, mobilize workers along Maoist lines, organize the women along the revolutionary stream, organize progressive intellectuals opposed to imperialism, and build movements among op-

¹ Hussain Muhammad Ershad, a military officer, was president of Bangladesh from 1982–1990 after seizing power against President Abdus Sattar. He subsequently declared martial law and suspended the Constitution. Ershad was eventually forced from power by a popular mass uprising led by bourgeois parties.—Ed., *Material*.

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pressed national minorities in both the hills and plains. Above all, under the leadership of the party, rural-based protracted people's war, centered on agrarian revolution, is being developed. The protracted people's war is principal and urban-based mass movement is secondary. In rural areas, the mass movement is also very important, but in support of the people's war.

Material: *Although limited and biased, there was some coverage of the student protests in Bangladesh in the recent months, triggered by the state's intentions to increase or change the quotas for hiring in the public sector. Could you explain the quota system and why this one policy change set off such a firestorm of actions in response?*

PBSP: The quota system was first introduced in 1997, during Hasina's initial term, to reserve public sector jobs for the children of Awami freedom fighters. After returning to power in 2009, Hasina intensified her agenda of monopolizing the state apparatus through the "Awamisation" process. This culminated in the 2014 sham elections, where the Awami League won almost all parliamentary seats without opposition. In 2011, the quota for freedom fighters was extended to include their grandchildren, raising the freedom fighter quota to 30%. Prior to this, 26% of jobs had already been reserved for marginalized communities, though in practice, these too were often appropriated by Awami League loyalists. As a result, 56% of public sector jobs became tied to quotas, effectively securing them for Awami League supporters. This left only 44% of jobs available for recruitment based on merit and qualifications. However, due to Hasina's authoritarian regime and the pervasive corruption, bribery, and control by syndicates, even this limited 44% was beyond the reach of educated children from the middle class, lower-middle class, and working peasant families.

As a result, the future of meritorious students increasingly becomes bleak. A portion of them, even while still in their student years, are drawn into gang activities, extortion, drugs, and online gambling such as casinos. Some, unable to cope, even resort to suicide. A large number of these students fall victim to the curse of unemployment; many are forced into low-paid jobs in NGOs or privately-owned companies. Others, in desperation, attempt to migrate abroad, only to perish at sea or suffer imprisonment, ultimately becoming part of the exploitative imperialist labor market. In

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essence, for those students excluded from the quota system, their lives lose meaning, and their future becomes aimless and uncertain.

The job market for educated and skilled individuals, especially young people from all backgrounds, remains extremely limited. This is a reflection of the severe unemployment crisis under the current system. As a result, frustration and resentment have been building among a large section of the youth. Under Hasina's fascist regime, widespread corruption, rising prices of essential goods, and mass repression have further fueled the growing discontent. The frustrations of the youth have merged with the broader discontent simmering across all sectors of society. Various social classes and groups were already engaged in movements against these injustices, and the Hasina government responded by adopting fascist methods of suppression.

Due to the high likelihood of losing in any fair election, the regime intensified its brutal repression not only against the general people, but also against its bourgeois opposition. This relentless crackdown forced even its bourgeois rivals to engage in desperate struggles, heightening the political crisis.

Any form of protest against this unrestrained plunder, exploitation, and oppression was met with brutal repression, including extrajudicial killings in so-called "crossfire," abductions, and attacks or "legal" actions against dissenters. Initially, the regime targeted Maoist revolutionaries for assassination, but later, even individuals who criticized the government on social media began to disappear.

In such an atmosphere, a vast number of underprivileged students and unemployed educated youth were poised to erupt in anger, seeking meaning in their lives and liberation from oppression. The demand for quota reform became a rallying point for widespread protests. This issue represented a culmination of 16 years' worth of pent-up anger against fascism, and it was this frustration that sparked the outburst of resistance.

Material: *What was the make-up of this movement, i.e., who was involved, and why? Was it just students and students of a certain class background? Did other sectors join and did most of the ordinary people in Bangladesh, in the cities and countryside, support the students and their actions, even their violent ones?*

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PBSP: In 2018, students from Dhaka University initiated the quota reform movement. Participation from general students gradually increased. At one point, under the pressure from the movement, Hasina's government announced the abolition of all quotas as part of a new deceitful tactic. The students temporarily achieved a victory, but the government continued to plot against them.

In 2021, the fascist Hasina government took steps to reinstate the quota system through a High Court ruling, leading to a new phase of the quota reform movement. The students intensified their protests, continuing to push forward.

To suppress this movement, the fascist Hasina regime unleashed the Chhatra League, followed by the police firing indiscriminately—the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and army personnel—initiating a massacre. In response, parents and poets, artists from music, cinema, and theatre, writers, and intellectuals rallied to support the students.

In the context of the quota issue, the students' movement against the fascist Hasina government garnered support from all opposition political parties, political student organizations, and the urban and lower-middle-class populace. Initially, while a significant portion of the working class did not participate, the situation changed when Hasina's fascist thugs from the Chhatra League openly attacked the students with weapons, aided by the police, culminating in the public murder of at least six individuals on July 16. This brutal escalation transformed the movement from one focused on quota reform into a broader political struggle against Hasina's fascist regime.

As a result, impoverished citizens began to join the movement in large numbers, although the working class and peasants as a distinct social class did not participate as extensively, because the students did not have any program or demands that included them. Nonetheless, their support for this political movement became integrated into the overwhelming support by the majority of the population, rendering it unstoppable. In response, the government resorted to widespread shootings and repression, recognizing that this movement was jeopardizing their grip on power.

However, significant fractures began to emerge within the ruling class, particularly with the army withdrawing its support at the beginning of

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August. Even though they had not been very active in the massacres on the street after they were deployed in late July to assist the police (and their paramilitary wing, the RAB), this shift gave immense momentum to the street protests, ultimately leading to Hasina's downfall.

It can be said that nearly everyone in the country expressed enthusiastic support for the movement. The violence perpetrated by the state was met with a general acceptance of the violence conducted by the protesters among the populace. Attacks on police forces were conducted by people, and the masses supported those attacks, because it was the police who conducted the genocide from the beginning. And it should be noted that, during Hasina's regime, police became more seriously hated by the people. People largely approved of the targeting of Awami terrorist cadres, despite many student leaders and bourgeois parties condemning these actions. It is also important to note that without such violence, the ousting of Hasina's Awami fascism would have been unattainable. The "peaceful" movement promoted by the bourgeoisie and so-called apolitical students would not have yielded any results.

Material: *How was this massive protest the same as and/or different from previous ones?*

PBSP: In the past, the anti-Ayub Khan² military regime uprising in 1969 during the Pakistan era was primarily an anti-imperialist, anti-nationality oppression, democratic movement, with leftist and Maoist revolutionary parties and organizations playing a leading role. The patriotic, progressive peasant leader Maulana Bhashani was a key motivator, and there was active participation from students, cultural activists, progressive leftist writers, intellectuals, and the working peasantry.

In the anti-military authoritarian movement of the 1990s, the opposition began with leftists and Maoist revolutionary political groups. But after sometime, comprador bourgeois parties joined and gained leadership. They posed the only demand as the ousting of the military ruler Ershad. The uprising was led by political parties of the bourgeois class, along with their leftist allies. While some revisionist leftists participated in

² Mohammad Ayub Khan was the second president of Pakistan from 1958-1969. He took power by organizing a military coup to oust President Iskander Ali Mirza who had imposed martial law. Ayub Khan was forced to resign in 1969 after a mass uprising of students and workers.—Ed., *Material*.

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the uprising, the Maoists maintained a separate stance, firmly supporting a democratic revolution against all forms of imperialism, including that of the United States and Indian expansionism. At that time, our party was also leading a forceful armed struggle in the countryside.

This time (in 2024), the student movement emerged with the demand for reforming the job quota system, presenting itself as “non-political.” The leadership of the uprising was in the hands of “non-political” students and teachers, along with NGO leaders, all of whom were shaped by capitalist-imperialist education and morality. Political parties and organizations, while not in the lead, joined under the student banner, participating massively in the uprising for the sake of overthrowing fascism. Ultimately, the movement led to the downfall of Hasina’s fascist Awami regime. In the final stages of the uprising, there was significant and militant participation from urban poor and working-class youth, though there was still minimal involvement from workers’ organizations or the broader peasantry from rural areas.

In summary, the current movement, while one of the three major uprisings in the country’s history, was more backward in political vision compared to the 1969 and even the 1990 uprisings. The participation of the working class and the peasantry, as well as the inclusion of their agenda, was minimal. However, in terms of violence, this movement was more intense—both from the government and the people themselves—demonstrating that in the current social context, no movement can advance without violence. This has opened a space for popularizing the politics of people’s war.

Additionally, the role of women in this movement was significantly larger, which is connected to the increased participation of women in various sectors of society. This increased involvement is expected to have a positive impact on future people’s movements and serve as an obstacle to the further development of religious politics in the country.

Another notable aspect of this movement was the significant role played by students and people from the hill regions, a dynamic not seen in pre-

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vious movements. This indicates that the hill people are becoming more involved in national politics, expanding their influence.

On the downside, this movement saw greater involvement of religious political forces than in any previous uprisings, which could lead to substantial challenges in the future.

Material: *There have been some stories about people on the streets, armed with only sticks fighting back in bloody battles with the police and the military, even as the people around them were being mowed down by indiscriminate gunfire. This seems to indicate that the quota increase policy was probably the spark that set off a fire that was ready to ignite. Can you give an overview of the overall situation in Bangladesh and the general historical background that led to the overall situation, including:*

- *Basic historical events, including the Liberation War and its international context;*
- *History of the left/communists before and after independence;*
- *Current domestic conditions, current international conditions.*

(Is there an element at play where the world has seen the mass murder/genocide of the Palestinians and the subsequent exposure of the impotence and myth of international justice/morality—which then made it less risky for the state to do the same in Bangladesh?)

PBSP: You are correct; the situation was on the verge of explosion. The quota movement has served as a matchstick in this volatile scenario. At the same time, the state's rapid descent into reckless public killings, the brutal assault on students in the streets, and the murders of children, teenagers, and women—all reminiscent of the situation in Palestine—have further ignited tensions.

As previously mentioned, following its separation from Pakistan in '71, the newly formed state of Bangladesh was seized by the Bengali comprador bourgeoisie. For the past 53 years, this class has governed the country—oscillating between one-party fascism, military dictatorship, parliamentary authoritarianism, and aggressive Bengali nationalist fascism under various guises. Most recently, the Awami League, led by the self-proclaimed agent of India, Sheikh Hasina, ruled continuously for nearly 16 years. Through various conspiracies, manipula-

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tions, deceit, and trickery, they maintained power via sham elections, while denying the voting rights of those who believe in bourgeois electoral democracy.

Corruption and nepotism have been rampant, while market prices remain uncontrolled due to party syndicates. The police's genocide of the aggrieved populace over the quota issue became the spark. People across all political spectrums—right, left, Maoist, religious, and civil society—have erupted in protest. It's a situation where no established party or leader is visible, yet there is widespread unrest and rebellion, with demonstrators taking over Sheikh Hasina's government residences, "Gonobhaban."

Our country's true name is Purbo Bangla (East Bengal). This refers to the eastern region of the Bengal province in British India, while its western part is now included in India. East Bengal is officially known as "Bangladesh," a name established during the creation of the state in 1971 with the direct intervention of India and its local collaborator, the Awami League.

Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has functioned as a semi-colonial, semi-feudal state. Within Pakistan, there were also nationality oppressions inflicted by the ruling elite upon various nationalities, with East Bengal (renamed East Pakistan) being the primary focus of this oppression. The ruling elite in Pakistan was predominantly based in West Pakistan and largely comprised non-Bengalis. Despite being incorporated into a religion-based Pakistan, a Bengali nationality movement rapidly emerged in East Bengal. This movement exploded with the famous Language Movement in 1952,³ led by leftist groups and progressive students, along with broad, nationalist, educated middle class people and intellectuals.

However, in the 1960s, a powerful nationalist movement also emerged under the leadership of the rising bourgeois party, the Awami League. They engaged in conflicts with the Pakistani ruling elite over the share of power

³ After India was divided in 1947 and Pakistan was created, Purbo Bangla became a province of Pakistan. From the very beginning, Pakistani rulers, who were mainly from the west, suppressed the Bangali Nation. One of the aspects of Nationality oppression was the suppression of the Bangla language, making Urdu the only state language (although Bangla Pakistan's main language). In opposition, students and intellectuals demanded Bangla be one of the state languages. In 1952, this movement erupted into a nationwide upsurge, which culminated on February 21, 1952. The rulers responded by firing and killing many people, before finally surrendering to the demand. This became known as the Historic Language Movement.

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of Pakistan, as Bengalis constituted the majority of the population in all of Pakistan (approximately 54%).

In response to the oppression and exploitation by the Pakistani rulers, the entire populace and significant political parties organized ongoing movements. Among these were anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles led by leftists/communists, alongside the Bengali nationalist movement represented by the Awami League. In this context, a great mass uprising occurred in 1969, forcing the military ruler Ayub Khan to resign, though he passed power to another military ruler, Yahya Khan.

In the aftermath of the mass uprising of '69, a general election was held in Pakistan in '70, in which the Maoists did not participate, as by that time they had moved towards armed politics. At that time, the Maoist left was quite strong, openly led by Maulana Bhasani. The Maoists, under Bhasani's leadership, boycotted the election, while the pro-Soviet factions were weak. As a result, the Awami League achieved an outright majority across Pakistan, creating the possibility of power shifting into the hands of the Bengali bourgeoisie. The Pakistani ruling elite feared this reduction of their entrenched power and began plotting new conspiracies.

This ultimately culminated in the brutal genocide that began on March 25, 1971, when the Pakistani army launched an indiscriminate attack, killing hundreds of thousands of people within just nine months. In response to this atrocity, the entire nation took up arms to seek independence from Pakistan. However, the Awami League quickly faced defeat and fled to India. India seized this opportunity to dismantle its perennial rival, Pakistan. Lacking support from the United States, India struck a deal with the then Soviet social-imperialists and launched an attack on Pakistan. With the support of the Awami Liberation Army, Indian-backed forces established the state of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971.

During the Liberation War, various Maoist factions were active. They fought not only against the Pakistani army but also against the Awami Liberation Army, which was supported by India and Russia. These Maoist groups were divided across multiple fronts and exhibited various political and military missteps. Naturally, they faced defeat, allowing the Awami League to take power with India's backing.

From that time onward, the Awami League has been identified as a collaborator of India. Although they initially gained some support from the

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populace in '71 and shortly thereafter, they quickly revealed themselves to be a fascist party. In the first half of the seventies, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was its leader. In response, nearly all bourgeois, leftist, and revolutionary parties in the country organized movements against him. Our party, led by founder-chairman Comrade Siraj Sikder, launched a strong armed struggle nationwide. However, the Mujibur government suppressed this movement through brutal repression, resulting in the martyrdom of Sikder. The party became battered and fragmented.

Taking advantage of this situation, finally a military coup in August 1975 killed Mujibur, along with his family, except his two daughters—one of them is Hasina. The military's seizure of power received popular support because the people sought liberation from Mujibur and Awami fascism. From among these military rulers, a main bourgeois party, the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), emerged, which was somewhat opposed to the Awami League and India and had ties to the United States.

At one point, the BNP government was ousted, and in the 1980s, Ershad's military dictatorship seized power. Throughout the 1980s, a strong anti-military-rule movement emerged. Our party, under the leadership of Comrade Anwar Kabir, also developed a robust armed struggle nationwide. The party also played a significant role in the ongoing mass movement. Initially, the ruling class brutally suppressed our struggle, but due to changes in the global situation, a mass movement led by the bourgeois parties—Awami League, BNP, and Jamaat⁴—managed to oust Ershad in 1990. This marked the beginning of 15 years of parliamentary authoritarianism, during which the Awami League, under Hasina's leadership, formed government once, and the BNP, under Khaleda Zia, formed governments twice.

In response to the changing global situation, a military-backed government, with support from India and the United States, took power in 2007. Two years later, they brought the Awami League to power through an election. Since then, the Awami League had consolidated its power with direct support from India, destroying the bourgeois electoral system and imposing widespread repression—murder, abduction, and legal harassment—against revolutionary, leftist, progressive, and other main bourgeois rivals.

⁴ Jamaat-e-Islami is a bourgeois political party and the largest Islamist political party in Bangladesh.—Ed., *Material*.

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Various sections of the population, including bourgeois political parties, have staged numerous movements demanding a credible election. However, the Hasina government has ruthlessly suppressed all dissent.

Currently, a significant aspect of the domestic situation is that the fascist Awami League is cornered, although they continue to conspire to regain power through Indian support and their influence in various sectors. Of this, the current ruling section is also fearful. Consequently, they are attempting to remove Awami-aligned individuals from high positions.

At present, if an election would held, there is a possibility that the main bourgeois party, the BNP, could come to power. However, the current ruling forces do not entirely favor this outcome, even though some BNP-affiliated individuals are present among them. Those who have come to power represent a different faction of the ruling class, commonly referred to as the “Third Force” in the country. This faction includes elements of the military, a significant portion of the bureaucracy, Western-leaning NGOs, and the Western-aligned section of the bourgeois intellectuals. They consistently attempt to discredit the two major bourgeois political parties, a process known as the “Minus Two Formula” in Bangladesh.

It's true that the people have directly experienced the power and governance of the major bourgeois parties, and they are dissatisfied and disillusioned. At the same time, it's also true that no other bourgeois party except the main two bourgeois parties, BNP and Awami League, has a strong base among the people. There are some Islamic religious parties, those have some organizations, but they are not so strong to take power. On the other side, people also do not look favorably upon military rule. Hence, this third force seeks to stay in power through various civilian guises. They are utilizing a section of student leaders under the banner of “apolitical” organizations and are supporting various Islamic political and non-political forces. They do not aim to fully remove the Awami fascists either, as that is beyond their capability. It is also said that the current army chief himself is aligned with Hasina, Awami League, and India. Something that was also observed during Ershad's military regime and the two-year pseudo-military government of 2007.

One possibility is that this government may wish to remain in power for some time to solidify their achievements. They will likely try to prevent the BNP from gaining an absolute majority. On the other hand, the

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BNP, along with some Islamic parties and bourgeois democratic/reformist groups, is pushing for swift elections. These tensions within different sections of the ruling class are increasing and are expected to escalate further. A coup or counter-coup could occur, and eventually, they might hold an election after some time.

The ongoing international situation is significantly influencing both the recent upheaval and the current political landscape. Over the past 15 years, the Awami League has enabled a section of the bourgeois ruling class to accumulate substantial wealth. India seeks to control Bangladesh through this faction while simultaneously exerting considerable pressure on the current government to keep them in check, particularly to prevent the rise of Chinese influence.

The current government heavily relies on the US and Western powers as a safeguard against India. Yunus [please see below], for instance, is a favored figure of these Western entities. However, the domestic economic situation is dire, with the government needing China for financial support and development activities. China is eager to take advantage of this opportunity. India is feeling uneasy about the Awami League's dismal situation, because the AL is most dearest to her. However, as long as the government remains dependent on the US, India is unlikely to be too dissatisfied, although they will oppose any significant increase in Chinese influence. These dynamics have led to growing divisions and conflicts within different factions of the ruling class.

The condition of the people is grim, with rising prices of essential commodities. Power shifts in various sectors are ongoing. There is unrest among the working class, and the military continues to oppress national minorities in the hill regions. Although the government has dismissed a few high-ranking police and bureaucratic officials, the Awami League had entrenched itself so deeply within these institutions that they are now barely functioning. Their non-cooperation is becoming evident. Nevertheless, the people are relieved to be temporarily free from Awami fascism, though disillusionment is also growing. The phrase “whoever goes to Lanka becomes Ravan” (an analogy for corruption upon gaining power) is

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resurfacing. Some have even begun to express nostalgia for the previous regime, suggesting “things were better before.”

The current government is very weak, with little internal strength. Though a section of the student movement that propelled them to power remains with them, many are becoming disillusioned. Even political forces that once supported this government are gradually becoming critical.

In Palestine, the genocide that is happening—it’s not that Hasina didn’t want to do the same. But she couldn’t deploy the military for such a massacre. If she had been able to, the situation would have been different. However, the military withdrew their support from her. As mentioned earlier, various bourgeois factions and international forces have influence throughout the state apparatus. Particularly due to Hasina’s brutal fascist killings, the desperate struggle of students and the masses, and the participation of all bourgeois parties as well as all political parties in anti-Hasina movements, it was impossible for Hasina to deploy the military for such mass killings. Otherwise, it seems unlikely that she would have hesitated to carry out the same kind of destruction as in Palestine. However, while India might have supported it, the United States would likely have opposed it. This is the difference with Palestine.

Material: *What were the events that led up to the beginning of the massacre? Can you describe some of the actions of the people and of the state? What was the tipping point for the state to begin the mass slaughter? Do you know how many people were killed and injured in the end?*

PBSP: Although the protests were initially confined to demonstrations and rallies, on July 14th, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in a public statement, indirectly referred to the quota reform protesters as “descendants of Razakars” (“Razakar” is a term in Bangladesh used as a derogatory political insult. It refers to those who collaborated with the Pakistani military during the 1971 genocide, engaging in mass killings, looting, rape, and oppression. They were branded as traitors and rapists).

On July 15th, across various parts of the country, the ruling party’s student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), launched violent attacks on students and protesters using rods, sticks, hockey sticks, machetes, and firearms. At the same time, the police, instead of protecting the people, resorted to brutal measures—using batons, rubber bullets,

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birdshot, sound grenades, tear gas, and indiscriminate beatings. Even in hospitals, where the wounded were receiving treatment, BCL members carried out attacks on the injured protesters. Dormitories were blockaded, with students beaten and some female students assaulted.

In an attempt to suppress the growing resistance, the government ordered the indefinite closure of almost all educational institutions.

This repression, however, only intensified the movement. By July 16th, the protests escalated. More protesters took to the streets, and the movement spread into educational campuses and residential halls. On the same day, in Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur, a student named Abu Sayeed was shot and killed by the police while standing unarmed fearlessly in front of the police firing. His death acted as a spark, igniting protests across the country. In response, demonstrators began to engage in counter-violence.

State infrastructure, which symbolized oppression, became targets of the protesters' rage. They partially damaged the Bangladesh Television (BTV) building, the Jatrabari flyover, the Expressway toll plaza, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) office, the Disaster Management Building, and even set fire to parts of the Metro Rail project—all symbols of Hasina's "Development."

The government realized that the movement was no longer confined to demands for quota reform. Instead, it has grown into a broader political struggle, calling for the trial of Hasina's cabinet and gaining the support of the entire political spectrum. The government became fearful. In response, they embarked on a brutal campaign of mass violence to maintain their grip on power.

By July 19th, despite deploying the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), other Awami League affiliates, the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and police forces, and even shutting down the internet, the government failed to suppress the protests. In desperation, a nationwide curfew was imposed, and the army was deployed with orders to shoot on sight. What followed was a massacre, with indiscriminate gunfire aimed at quelling the uprising. Government forces fired on street demonstrations from helicopters as well. Though this state violence mo-

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mentarily subdued the movement, by that time, political forces and large sections of the public had already mobilized.

There are indications that the military itself may have opted for a passive stance. Meanwhile, various segments of the ruling class—including former military and civilian bureaucrats, university professors, lawyers, journalists, NGOs, intellectuals, and artists—took to the streets in opposition. Women, laborers, and even many parents joined the mass resistance against Hasina’s increasingly fascist rule. The spontaneous outpouring of people in protest alarmed the government. In response, they chose even more violence to secure their power.

Alongside the 20,000 injured students and protesters, around above 700 were killed. The police filed over 500 cases and arrested more than 11,000 people. In addition to the students, 113 others, including children, pedestrians, and street vendors, lost their lives, with many from the working class among the victims.

The movement intensified, focusing solely on the demand for the government’s resignation. During this period, the military took a passive stance. Seizing the opportunity, protesters launched direct attacks on the police, setting fire to numerous stations and outposts, seizing weapons, and even freeing prisoners and arms from some jails. In retaliation, some of the armed thugs from the ruling party, who had attacked the protesters, were beaten to death and hung from bridges. Additionally, statues and posters of ruling party leaders were destroyed.

By August 4th, Awami League leaders began fleeing the country. On August 5th, millions of students and citizens marched into the capital, Dhaka, advancing toward the Prime Minister’s residence, “Gonobhaban.” By 2:30 PM, Sheikh Hasina, with the help of the military, fled to India.

Material: *To what extent were Left forces present in the student movement and the protests on the street?*

PBSP: Initially, the presence of leftist forces in the student movement was limited. However, as the situation escalated, all leftist groups—except some pro-government so-called left parties (known to be pro-China)—became actively involved. These independent leftist forces, through their national organizations, student unions, and cultural bodies, organized rallies and protests. In response to the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)

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and police attacks on the quota reform protesters, Maoist and other leftist student groups held torchlight processions, rallies, and demonstrations. They joined the mass non-partisan protests, using the opportunity to put forward their political ideology.

Despite their organizational weaknesses, Maoist and other leftist factions remained politically and ideologically active throughout the movement. They too became targets of violence by the BCL and police, reflecting the broader repression faced by any opposition to the ruling regime. Although smaller in numbers, these leftist forces contributed significantly to the movement, offering a radical critique of the state's authoritarianism and aligning with the broader struggle against the Awami League's authoritarian practices.

Material: *What is your party's assessment of and relationship with the student protests?*

PBSP: The student movement began during a period of intense repression under Hasina's fascist regime, when public outrage was at its peak. The students raised demands for the complete abolition of all quotas in government jobs, insisting on merit-based recruitment. This was a bourgeois demand, promoting the narrative that prioritized merit over the quota system. They popularized the bourgeois slogan of "no quotas, only merit."

In contrast, we called for the complete abolition of the "Freedom Fighter quota" and a rational reform of the other quotas. Ultimately, the student movement converged on our demands. It was from this position that we engaged with the protests. When the government conceded to the demand to abolish freedom fighters descendant quota system amidst the massacre of students and the wider public, we declared that while the movement had achieved victory, the blood had not yet dried. Thus, we argued that the student uprising must be transformed into a struggle to overthrow Hasina's fascist regime.

As the movement for Hasina's ousting gained momentum, we presented a tactical program for the formation of a temporary people's government, representing anti-fascist political forces and the oppressed classes and professions. Although this proposal was unlikely to be effective in the prevailing circumstances, it played a crucial role in revealing the character

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of a potential new government. Additionally, it contributed to educating a progressive segment of society.

Our party engaged in some limited armed propaganda in rural areas, destroying a few abandoned police stations and launching attacks on some Awami League leaders. However, given the rapid changes in the situation and our relatively weak position, these actions were insignificant compared to the huge spontaneous movement and violent activities of the people.

Our assessment has been and continues to be that the students' movement is a democratic, issue-based struggle. While bourgeois students are present, all forces opposed to Hasina's fascism came together within this movement. There was a possibility that the movement could stall if the demands were met or due to government repression. Opposition bourgeois parties would likely try to transform it into a platform for ousting the government, and Maoist and anti-imperialist left groups could also find opportunities to organize and develop their struggles.

The students' shift towards the goal of overthrowing the government was primarily driven by the indiscriminate massacres carried out by the fascist Hasina regime in the name of suppressing the student movement, as well as the solidarity and active involvement of all political parties and organizations opposed to fascism. Many of the so-called "apolitical" students, having been educated under bourgeois and religious influences, might fall under direct imperialist intervention or be used by opposition bourgeois and religious fundamentalist groups like the BNP and Jamaat.

We have been involved in this movement with the aim of overthrowing Hasina's fascist rule and creating opportunities for an anti-imperialist democratic politics that can serve the needs of a new democratic revolution.

Material: *Did the protests and the massacre drive more young people to the Left?*

PBSP: In the act of indiscriminately firing upon the protesting students, the student wing of the ruling party and state forces killed ordinary people. As a result, the public rallied in greater support for the students, intensifying the movement. However, this violence did not lead the students to adopt a more leftist ideology. The main leaders of student activists, who believed in capitalist-imperialist reforms, opposed the political framework that linked them to the working class and peasantry, revolutionary politics,

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and popular power. They also maintained a check on the politics of all opposition bourgeois parties, including the BNP and Jamaat, in an effort to bring a “Third Force” to power. This situation has persisted even after the formation of an interim government. Nevertheless, those who participated in this movement for a truly independent and democratic state, free from fascism, imperialism, and Indian expansionism, have found renewed motivation to organize and equip themselves in the revolutionary spirit of Maoism and anti-imperialism, more so than ever before.

Material: *Why did Hasina flee? Has India indicated that it will try to intervene more overtly in the ongoing situation?*

PBSP: In the face of a mass uprising by the student and citizenry, as the police and RAB were overwhelmed and retreated, the military, under Sheikh Hasina’s orders, refused to open fire on the agitated public, following a cunning plan orchestrated by American imperialism behind the scenes. At this point, Hasina became frightened, fearing for her life amidst the public outrage. She did not want to be captured and killed by the people or face trial. Moreover, with her power stripped away, her priority was to secure any resources she could take with her and maintain control over the embezzled wealth to ensure her own safety—this was the most convenient and secure option for this anti-people, traitorous dictator. The power structure supporting Hasina collapsed during the peoples uprising, rendering her inactive and without any means of survival. This was the primary reason for her flight. Additionally, she hoped that India would provide her with security, future plans, and assistance for her rehabilitation.

India has already intervened overtly, sheltering the fugitive and reviled Hasina. From there, she is also engaging in activities against the country and its people. At the same time, India is negotiating with the current government. It is possible that India could provide support to change the power dynamics held by the fascist forces that remain in power or exert pressure on the current government to create a situation where the Awami League can recover. This would at least allow them to participate in any upcoming elections. In this way, India is executing a dual conspiracy. The

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understanding between the US and India, mainly to resist China's influence, will also play a significant role in this context.

However, given the current sentiment of the people against the Awami League, Hasina, and India, direct intervention may not be seen as a favorable option for India. They are likely to adopt a more prolonged process, knowing that the current government is neither revolutionary nor a government of the people; they are dependent on the US, and there are many pro-India elements within the existing power structure. As long as this government does not become too close to China, it seems unlikely that India will engage in major destructive actions.

Material: *Why did the military give over power (at least in appearance) to an interim civilian government?*

PBSP: In terms of structure, the military served as the protector of Hasina's fascist regime. However, in the context of the mass uprising, American imperialism supported resistance against Hasina's fascism. At the same time, it was a challenging task to gain support from lower-ranking officers for the brutal massacres of the populace. Additionally, there were always rival bourgeois forces like the BNP or Jamaat, as well as anti-India and US-aligned support within a segment of the military. There has been an ongoing debate at the international level regarding whether to send Bangladeshi troops to the United Nations peacekeeping forces, which has significant implications within the military, as they prefer to focus on their own benefits rather than military rule.

After Hasina's fall, the state, ruling class, and their imperialist masters found themselves in a crisis. They did not want to bring the military to the forefront but also didn't want to grant too much space to civilian political forces. Furthermore, there is a strong tradition of anti-military rule movements among the people of this country. Consequently, the military is running the country by putting forth a segment of NGOs, intellectuals, former bureaucrats, and some student groups that supported the uprising.

Now, direct military rule is not the preferred option for the US because they understand that, regardless of the circumstances, the spirit of the recently concluded mass uprising was one of "democracy," not another form of fascism or military rule. Accordingly, the US and mil-

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itary-bureaucratic elements have planned their approach. In a critical situation that goes against American imperialist plans or lacks their support, the military does not have the capability to control state power. Therefore, they have handed over power to an interim government led by Dr. Yunus, who is favored by the US and the West.

Another reason is the public sentiment. At least at this moment, neither the protesting populace nor any political force would support direct military rule—this is something they have taken into account. However, it does not mean they won't want to seize that opportunity later. Already, discussions about this are taking place within the country. Among educated middle-class and bourgeois analysts, debates are going on both in favor of and against this, which is expected to intensify in the future.

Material: *Historically, when appointed civilian governments take power after a revolt or coup, the leadership of the mass movement that led to the fall or collapse of the government is often coopted and used to stabilize and re-consolidate bourgeois power. Has this happened in Bangladesh as well? Are there leaders or prominent people in the movement who have taken a different stand, against this new interim government formation?*

Who is Muhammad Yunus? What is his background? At first glance, he seems to be a darling of the West, a Nobel Laureate who has a strong base in the petty-bourgeoisie intellectuals. Who is behind his power and his ability to stay in power? Aside from the Hasina faction, are there other factions within the bourgeois class that are vying for control of the state?

PBSP: Here too, various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois political forces that were in favour of the uprising have assisted and assisting the state and the interim government in stabilizing and consolidating their power. However, as time passes, differences in positions within the interim government are becoming apparent among them. While some want to prolong this government, many, especially the main bourgeois party BNP, will oppose it. It seems that a faction is also working directly to bring about military rule.

Muhammad Yunus is an economist; more precisely, he is a banker, referred to in Hasina's words as a moneylender. However, this bank is, in his words, "the bank for the poor." Traditionally, banks lend to the wealthy. Yunus demonstrates that the poor also have the "right" to access loans, and

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that the poor repay loans better than the wealthy. This is known as microcredit—giving small loans to the poor and collecting them in tiny installments along with interest.

This work has been praised highly by imperialists, as it claims to eradicate poverty among the poor in Third World countries without revolution. As a result, he has gained immense significance within American and Western circles. For this, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. He began his microcredit work in 1976 and has primarily worked in our country for nearly 48 years. Dr. Yunus's work in Bangladesh has been evaluated as a means of poverty alleviation and establishing social and political peace by the imperialists. In reality, no one can claim that his work has brought any peace to the lives of ordinary people in Bangladesh, let alone among the broader middle class or wealthy individuals.

Generally speaking, Dr. Yunus is not very popular or well-known among the basic people. The American/Western propaganda abroad does not reflect the situation in the country. However, among some educated circles, he holds a bourgeois public opinion as the only Nobel laureate. As an individual, he has many personal friends among Western imperialist intellectuals, including former US President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton.

During Hasina's final term, Yunus was persecuted because Hasina believed that his role was a reason for Western resentment toward Hasina. Hasina propagated that the US was trying to establish an "apolitical" interim government through Yunus after removing Hasina. Yunus had always claimed that such propaganda was not true and that he had no political ambitions. However, Hasina's assertions have turned out to be correct.

The ruling elite in Bangladesh consists of two major bourgeoisie parties: the Awami League and the BNP. Additionally, there are several powerful and influential religious parties and organizations, including Jamaat. To control these entities, imperialists have sought to bring forward civil society with the assistance of military bureaucrats as another front. Since 2007, Western imperialism has been pursuing this effort with Yunus at the forefront. This is the reason for Yunus's conflict with Hasina, who is pro-India. Other bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties are not particularly fond of him either. However, after the ousting of Hasina's fascism, during a time of power vacuum, they have accepted such an "apolitical" interim figure over at least a direct military rule. They hope that he will

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step aside after handing over power to an elected government through an election, especially the BNP, which anticipates forming a government by winning in the elections.

However, various factions of the bourgeois class have begun to fight for control of the state. It is not yet the time to definitively determine what the outcome of this will be.

Material: *What do you project to happen next? For the students? For the Left?*

PBSP: During the interim government's tenure, it is anticipated that there will be some opportunities to develop organizational struggles and propaganda, leveraging the bourgeois democratic openings and the ongoing weaknesses of the state apparatus. The so-called apolitical student movements have highlighted the vulnerabilities of the mass uprising, which has increased American imperialism's interference. It has already become apparent that the new rulers will not do anything beneficial for the oppressed working class, peasants, and the nation. This creates an opportunity for the left to present an anti-imperialist democratic agenda and to establish revolutionary politics aimed at empowering the working class, peasants, and middle class.

However, a complete military rule could also emerge in the future. This would present different challenges and opportunities for the development of revolutionary struggles. In this context, the tradition of the people's movements against military dictatorship in this country will play a role in the development of revolutionary forces. Notably, the issues of the working class are evolving, and peasants are facing crises. Therefore, there will be opportunities to develop class-based movements.

Material: *What is the work ahead for the Left?*

PBSP: The primary task for the left, particularly for the Maoists, is to fully overthrow Hasina's fascism and to present an anti-imperialist democratic agenda. This involves exposing the anti-national and anti-people activities of the new ruling class formed by remnants of Hasina's regime, which has come to power with the backing of American imperialism in the name of establishing democracy. It also entails building a revolutionary struggle to

establish the power of the oppressed working class, peasants, and national minorities.

Already, movements have emerged demanding overdue wages and improved conditions for garment workers, as well as protests by rickshaw pullers. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, there is a movement demanding the withdrawal of covert military rule and the establishment of autonomy for indigenous peoples. Movements against the ban on student politics in educational institutions have also started. Furthermore, there are conditions for protests from peasants regarding the lack of fair prices for their crops and demands for lower prices on fertilizers, oil, electricity, irrigation, and agricultural equipment.

Additionally, in rural areas, there is an opportunity for landless and poor peasants to organize movements for government *khas* land⁵ and water bodies against the landlords, usurers, and moneylenders. In other words, the left must move forward with the fundamental agenda of a new democratic revolution.

⁵ Khas land is land that is not owned by anyone and, by law, should be distributed to poor peasants. In reality, these lands are seized by the powerful and wealthy classes in rural areas. Government officials and police are bribed to help the semi-feudal landlords or the wealthy to seize these lands.—Ed., *Material*.

Submissions Process

We invite scholars, militants, activists, and artists to submit their work to *Material* for future issues. We are looking for articles (historical, philosophical, journalistic, literary criticism, etc.), poetry, art, and short fiction. Although we are happy to consider work by people from different progressive anti-capitalist traditions, all submissions will be submitted to a review process by scholars/organizers in the relevant fields.

For prose submissions (articles, essays, fiction) please format your work in a standard Word or Open Office page, double-spaced, with a limit of 8000 words. Poetry submissions should be no longer than 3000 words, spaced and arranged according to how the author wants the poem to appear on A5 dimensions. Visual art (photographs, drawings, etc.) can be submitted in any image format but should be 300 dpi, 148x210 mm minimum. Do *not* submit PDF files and please use Times New Roman, 12 point. Scholarly work that requires citation should use footnotes and *Chicago 17th Edition* rules for formatting.¹

We are happy to receive responses to any work in previous issues. If accepted, they will be published on the *Material* website: materialjournal.net/submissions. All guidelines detailed above apply.

Please note that all submissions that do not follow these guidelines will be returned.

All work should be submitted to material.contact@protonmail.com. If you have an idea of something you would like to write for us, you can also contact us at that address.

¹ You can find the Chicago Manual of Style at chicagomanualofstyle.org.

