

Is Lenin still In?

The 100 years after the October Revolution

By Eric Mann

This month marks the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. As we in the United States try to imagine a revolutionary opposition to the U.S. imperialist system a great appreciation of the achievements of the Russian revolution and the Soviet Union is a critical part of our revolutionary future.

The Russian revolution created the Soviet Union—the first “workers state” and the first successful revolution that survived the world imperialist counterrevolution. The Bolshevik Party (the first communist party) was part of a united front of parties that seized power from the reactionary feudal Tsar in the February revolution of 1917. Then in October 1917 the Bolsheviks overthrew the forces of capitalism and seized state power from the social democratic Kerensky government. The Russian revolution came to power as an anti-war movement against the forces in Russia that wanted to continue World War I—one of the greatest imperialist bloodbaths of all time in which more than 18 million “workers of the world” were sent to their deaths by the capitalist governments of Europe with strong support from their “socialist” parties.

The Bolshevik Party and Soviet State built its own military and police, defended themselves against external and internal capitalist attack, and survived in a hostile world for 72 years—a true miracle against all odds. From the perspective of the world’s exploited and oppressed people this was a profound achievement in human history and offered them an optimistic vision of their own future.

The day before the successful October revolution the entire world was ruled by the U.S. and European colonial and imperialist powers. But the day after the Russian Revolution the communists created a new political momentum and material balance of forces that captured the imagination of workers and anti-colonial

movements all over the world. This was reflected in the Indian independence victory of 1947, the Chinese revolution of 1949, the Cuban revolution of 1959, African independence movements in Ghana, the Congo, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, and Tanzania, the Vietnamese revolution from 1945 until its victory in 1975, and the South African independence movement against apartheid culminating in the victory of 1994.

The Soviet Union was a great friend of Black people in the United States and the pro-Soviet Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) attracted some of the greatest Black political figures in U.S. history—Richard Wright, Claudia Jones, Harry Haywood, W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, William L. Patterson and tens of thousands of Black sharecroppers, domestic workers, auto and steelworkers as well. In 1951, in the midst of a ferocious U.S. war against communists all over the world, Black communists Patterson, DuBois, and Robeson produced the historic and still prescient *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief of a Crime Against the Negro People by the United States*. A reading of that document 66 years later reflects the painful, egregious, and endless war of the U.S. government against Black people and the Black nation today.

Those of us in the United States who participated in the great revolutions of the Two Decades of the Sixties (1955-1975) were all pro-communist and with our own concerns and even criticisms, pro-Soviet. I was blessed to work as a field secretary with the Congress of Racial Equality and work closely with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Later, I was an organizer with the Newark Community Union Project and Students for a Democratic Society and worked closely with the Black Panther Party.

At that time in history we had a sense of history. We saw the United States as what Dr. King called “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world” and saw the peoples and revolutions of the Third World and the socialist and communist nations as our allies in a world united front against our own government. We supported the Cuban revolution and appreciated Soviet support for Cuba and hated the U.S. government and the CIA for working to overthrow the Cuban revolution. We supported the Vietnamese revolution and thanked both the Soviets and Chinese for trying to stop our own government’s genocide against the people of Vietnam and contributing to

the Vietnamese victory as we tried to stop U.S. genocide against Indigenous and Black people inside the U.S. borders as well.

Today, a new generation of organizers and those searching for revolutionary answers, especially those leading heroic struggles in Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities in the U.S. can advance their work by challenging the anti-communist lies of the system, studying the great revolutionary achievements of the Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban, and African revolutions, and in particular on the 100th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution, study Soviet history from the perspective of its friends and delve into the great work of pro-communist Pan African leaders Harry Haywood, Paul Robeson and W.E.B. DuBois. Our only hope is to situate ourselves in the long continuum of revolutionary experiments with a sense of deep appreciation and the most profound opposition to the crimes of the U.S. government throughout its history that continue today

I ask you to go on a journey with me to appreciate, celebrate, analyze, and learn from the key achievements of the Russian Revolution and to see the errors and abuses of that and other revolutions in the larger frame of our own government's role as the World Center of Counter-revolution that has worked to attack, infiltrate, suppress, sabotage, assassinate, invade, and if possible overthrow every successful revolutionary movement and revolution in the world

State and Revolution

The Russian revolution was the first revolution that seized state power, built its own military and police, beat back the capitalists, and was able to sustain its own revolutionary advances against the most reactionary and brutal attacks to overthrow it. It was a "workers state" that was born in the caldron of a world dominated by U.S. and European imperialism—a world capitalist system that was exercising a brutal world colonial dictatorship over the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and Black, Indigenous, and other colonial peoples inside its borders. The Russian revolution came out of the womb needing to defend its very existence from a world imperialist system that carried out counter-revolutionary infanticide as a central tenet of its strategy and existence.

Imagine that in August 1917, while V.I. Lenin was hiding in exile, he wrote *State and Revolution*, arguing that Russian communists had to understand that a revolution involved a forcible seizure of power. Miraculously, only 2 months later the Bolsheviks did just that. Lenin argued that if capitalism ruled through armed force then the only revolutionary possibility was the armed overthrow of the capitalist state.

“if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and “alienating itself more and more from it”, it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this “alienation”

State and revolution and the successful Russian revolution spoke to the direct experience of oppressed people all over the world—even if European socialists, their consciousness already clouded by the super-profits of empire, disagreed.

* In 1492, there were more than 100 million Indigenous peoples in the Americas. They had built complex and advanced societies that had their own conflicts and wars among them but none based on barbarism and genocide—a unique byproduct of Christian European feudal capitalism. The invasion of the Spanish and Portuguese with horses, steel weapons, and even bacteria as weapons of war wiped out entire indigenous societies in decades and in a century reduced the Indigenous population by 90 percent. The Indigenous peoples fought back as warriors but could not defeat the armed states of Spain, Portugal, England, France, and later the United States. I point readers to *[An Indigenous People's History of the United States](#)* by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz.

* In 1796 armed African slaves in Haiti led by Toussaint L' Ouverture miraculously overthrew French rule in Haiti. This was met by the most vicious armed counterrevolution by the French in which L'Ouverture was captured and brought to France where he died in prison. The French imposed the most brutal reparations on the Haitians to pay them back for their loss of human property— reparations that they are collecting to this day as the U.S. dominates Haiti militarily and the people

live under subjugation and poverty. See *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* by C.L.R. James

* In 1863, after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation more than 400,000 Black slaves fled the plantations and joined the Union army where many of them were armed and played the critical role in the defeat of the Confederacy. From 1865 to 1877, a broad united front of radical Republicans, anti-monopoly progressive capitalists, Black freed slaves becoming free peasants, workers, and professionals, and white workers, enforced by Northern troops—state power—imposed what W.E.B. DuBois also called “the dictatorship of the proletariat” over the defeated Southern planters and racists. By 1877 the Republicans, representing northern monopoly capital, agreed to turn the South back to the reactionary Slaveocracy and what followed was a true genocide and re-enslavement of 5 million Blacks. DuBois’ *Black Reconstruction in America* is one of the greatest analyses of the challenges of Black revolutionary strategy and the inherent relationship between Black liberation and anti-imperialism as well as the reactionary nature of white corporate capitalism itself.

* In 1871, the French proletariat rose up in a great revolution, the Paris Commune. Karl Marx called that 30 day rebellion the first reflection of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” meaning that for once the working class armed itself to protect itself against the bourgeois or capitalist dictatorship. The Commune was met with brutal retaliation by the French monarchy and bourgeoisie—with more than 20,000 communards murdered in the counter-revolution.

So, since long before 1492 oppressed people have understood that unless there was an armed force to overthrow the armed forces of the oppressors there was no hope. Thus, when in October 1917 the Bolsheviks successfully seized state power, created their own armed forces, suppressed the armed forces of the occupying powers and reactionary forces in a bloody civil war, the Soviet Union’s successful seizure of maintenance of state power was seen all over the world as a great historical victory—the first time in modern history that the masses of oppressed people had successfully managed to not just overthrow the power of their oppressors but create military structure to protect and maintain a new society.

In that context, the Soviet victory raised the strategic question of control of the army and police for every social movement in the world and was the first revolution that was not immediately overthrown by capitalist powers. This was one reason the United States and the European capitalist and colonial powers sought the overthrow of the Soviet Union from the day it came to power and oppressed people all over the world felt inspiration from its victory. Throughout this essay I will document the consistent, relentless, and ruthless efforts by the U.S. government to overthrow the Russian revolution until yes—from 1917 to 1989—and the anti-imperialist imperative of decent people in the U.S. to stand up to our government's role as the World's Center of Counterrevolution.

The Soviet Union successfully defended its revolution from a brutal world invasion of imperialist countries that included the British, U.S., and Canadians, Indian colonial recruits sent by England, Scots, and 70,000 Japanese troops. It also had to defeat a right-wing assault inside Russia, appropriately called "The Whites!" in a civil war instigated by the world imperialist powers. The Russian Revolution came to power in blood and war instigated against it by the most powerful imperialist forces in the world and won! The Soviet Union was built on military force against military force. Let the record show that the United States, England, Japan, and every other capitalist state " tried to overthrow the Russian revolution and had they succeeded they would have re-established a bloody puppet government as they have all over the world. The October Revolution, led by workers, peasants, and a political party that had never governed and had been underground for a decade, took on the entire world capitalist system—and won!

The Bolshevik Revolution as an Anti-Imperialist Socialist Revolution

The Bolshevik revolution came to power in struggle not just against European capitalism and imperialism but European social democracy—especially the German Social Democratic party led by Karl Kautsky that played a role in provoking World War I. As such, the Russian revolution was not an extension of European "socialism" but its negation.

The Russian revolution was based on Lenin's analysis of *Imperialism: the Highest State of Capitalism* written in 1917. Lenin explained that capitalism in its monopoly

stage—the merger of industrial and finance capital—went beyond the exploitation of the European proletariat to the oppression of whole nations and peoples of the colonies. As such, Lenin argued a world revolutionary strategy should change from “workers of the world unite” to “workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite.” More than that, Lenin argued that significant sectors of the U.S. and European working class benefited from “the super-profits of imperialism” and, without aggressive anti-imperialist socialist/communist parties, would support their own ruling classes in inter-imperialist wars. He argued that the responsibility of workers in “oppressor nations” —England, Germany, France, the United States, Russia, and all those whose capitalist system benefitted from the oppression of whole nations and peoples—was to side with the colonies’ struggle for self-determination and independence against their own governments. Otherwise, the socialist parties of the West would become “opportunists and scoundrels.”

But as World War I approached, the European Social Democrats (who were at the time, the only form of socialists even with many tendencies among them) not just supported but actively participated in their own nation’s division of the world and one of the most bloody and disgraceful world wars—18 million deaths and 23 million wounded. As the winds of war began swirling in Europe, Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and other left socialists aggressively opposed the war and urged workers of the world to build an anti-war movement. But Karl Kautsky, the father of German Social Democracy supported a world war initiated by Germany as did the vast majority of French, Italian, English, Austrian socialists who all capitulated to oppressor nation aspirations and supported their own capitalist classes against each other and agreed to their division of the world—including the colonies. What had happened to “workers of the world unite?” This was a devastating blow to the theory of socialism. So, the Russian revolution also overthrew the hegemony of racist, genocidal, European socialism.

The Russian Revolution came to power by opposing World War I and building the first anti-imperialist socialist movement in Europe. The Bolshevik led Revolution challenged its own nation state and rejected imperialist patriotism with the slogan “Bread, Peace, and Land.” Bread, for the starving industrial proletariat, Land for the starving peasants, and Peace—the most revolutionary demand of all. Russian

peasants and workers in the Tsarist Army mutinied in the midst of a bloody World War and, organized and encouraged by Bolshevik cadre, refused to fight the Germans and deserted the front where they were freezing, starving, and dying. The Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries overthrew a government led by moderate socialist Alexander Kerensky that had come to power in February 1917 but refused to get out of WWI. Instead, the moderate socialists and liberals in Russia continued the brutal war on the side of the British, French, and U.S. against Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and Turkey. The October revolution was the first revolution that came to power by aggressively refusing to fight in an imperialist war while again, all the other “socialists” were sending their own working class to its deaths to support their own capitalists. No wonder the Soviet revolution has such prestige and respect all over the world from the outset.

The Soviet Union pulled its economy out of the world imperialist system and denied markets to U.S., British, French, and other world imperialists that had previously plundered Tsarist Russia

The day after the revolution what in the world was the new Russian revolution supposed to do? The Bolsheviks, as a new ruling party, inherited a nation ravaged by imperialist invasion and civil war. How could they produce an economy and feed its people in the midst of a world war and a civil war? The story of the Soviet Union’s successful experiments and many errors in a rich social practice is truly remarkable. Steven F. Cohen’s [*Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*](#) describes the great debates about how to merge a new socialist, more like a state capitalist at first, economy with limited but critical market mechanisms on the way to a socialist economic system. But the miracle of the Soviet experiment is that it achieved some level of self-sufficiency by somehow getting the workers to work and produce goods and the peasants to farm and produce food and somehow set up distribution systems to get the products to the people while also finding ways to get new capital to rebuild a very backward and war-devastated country. The Soviets embraced the concept of “autarky” —that is a nation that is economically self-sufficient and independent. They used aggressive state power to keep out imperialist investors (while yes, also encouraging some) from infiltrating and taking over their economy. The Soviets used state power at times brutally for what is called “primitive

accumulation of capital” which the capitalist nation states accomplished through violence, war, enslavement, and colonialism and the massacre of entire populations over 600 or more years that continues today. The Soviets built a new economy by forcing the peasants to produce more than they wanted and paying the workers less than they wanted, and somehow producing a surplus of agricultural products that they could export to purchase machinery to expand their economy. The record of many Soviet experiments in building an independent socialist economy in the midst of a world imperialist dictatorship, the exciting achievements of the New Economic Policy under Lenin, and the chilling abuses of forced collectivization is a story worth studying. But clearly, for Third World nations later facing the same problems after nominal independence from their imperialist masters, the fundamental challenge and achievements of the Soviet economy were inspiring. The entire concept of how oppressed people, formerly oppressed nations still surrounded by a world imperialist economic and political system, could use the state to seize its own resources, collective a lot of production and distribution, and raise the standard of living of an entire people in ways that capitalism did not and could not to this day led many Third World leaders to great gratitude to the Soviet model.

Many years later, in 1947, Winston Churchill, the arch-imperialist former Prime Minister of Great Britain, derided the Soviet Union as an “Iron Curtain” keeping the Eastern European nations out of the influence of the Western “democracies.” To some degree that was true. The Soviets tried to build a wall to keep out capitalist infiltration and re-colonization and built an international alternative “socialist bloc” that took more and more of the world out of the capitalist orbit. This was an amazing achievement that of course led to U.S. and European wars against the Soviet Union from the day it was born until the day it died.

**The Soviet Union led a revolution inside the socialist movement—
Proletarian Internationalism and workers and oppressed people’s unite**

The victory of the Russian Soviet revolution led to a two-line struggle, a split, in the world socialist movement between the new Communist parties, aligned with the Soviet Union and the old Social Democratic parties centered in Europe. The split between communists and socialists was complex but it was shaped the “communists” who had opposed World War I and supported the formation of the

Soviet Union and the “social democrats” who had supported World War I and opposed the formation of the Soviet Union. Many former socialist parties split in two with the new communist parties attracting the most dedicated, anti-racist, anti-imperialist revolutionaries in every country and by far the greatest representation of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans and soon, Blacks in the United States.

The Soviet Union initiated and built a Communist International—The Comintern—where new communist parties all over the world built the first viable international movements of workers and oppressed peoples against the world organization of imperialism. The Comintern was the first successful counterforce to world capitalism and attracted the best, brightest, and most dedicated fighters in every country in the world. There is a critique that the Soviets dominated the Comintern and exercised predominant and often dictatorial control of the international party line. While there is some truth to that assertion it is often raised to anti-communist caricature. For in fact, there was significant struggle inside the Comintern and like all structures, there was a struggle for political power among communist parties who did disagree on many subjects and while of course courting Soviet approval the more effective ones, such as the Vietnamese Party led by Ho Chi Minh exercised considerable influence on Comintern policies and challenged the great nation chauvinism of the French communists who still supported, or weakly opposed, French control of Vietnam, Algeria, and other French colonies. The Comintern gave far greater voice to the communist parties of the oppressed nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in struggle against the European communist parties and led great struggles against the white chauvinism of the South African and U.S. Communist Parties to give greater voice to Black liberation and Black members. It was of profound attraction that often small communist parties could be part of a world-wide movement and organization.

And again, contrary to anti-communist stereotypes, the Soviets won international leadership by their successful practice and greater theoretical and practical sense of strategy and tactics. Communists all over the world looked up to and admired a communist party that had successfully carried out a revolution, seized state power, pulled their nation out of World War I, built an international communist movement, set up a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and governed a multi-

ethnic nation of 170 million people in a land mass that spanned from Eastern Europe to Asia. Why shouldn't the Soviet Union have great influence in setting the general direction of the world communist movement—as the U.S., England, and Germany set the “party line” for the imperialists?

The Soviet Union became a world university for revolution. If you were a young revolutionary in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Honduras, or a Black revolutionary in the U.S. you could go to the only socialist society that actually existed and be trained in strategy, tactics, and the specifics of your people's struggle for liberation and socialism by the leading revolutionaries in the Soviet Union and the world. As just one example, Ho Chi Minh studied in Moscow during the 1920s and from there launched a struggle against the white chauvinism and pro-imperialism of the French Communist Party where France still colonized Vietnam and more than 50,000 Vietnamese studied in Moscow through the duration of the Vietnam War. In the U.S. many Black communists studied in the Soviet Union where they were given more support for the merger of Black Nationalism and communism than they were in the U.S. Party and came back to the U.S. with more power and prestige to fight white chauvinism in the party and white racism in the U.S.

The Soviet Union Led the Worldwide Struggle against Fascism during World War II

The Soviet Union led the only worldwide movement against German and worldwide fascism while the United States conciliated with fascism and only joined the fight against Germany in World War II as a last resort. Right after the war the United States rehabilitated the fascists in Germany and Japan and turned against the Soviet Union that had sacrificed the most and won the war against fascism.

The Soviet Union and the world communist movement were the first to recognize the danger of fascism in Germany and worldwide and try to build an anti-fascist movement to stop Adolph Hitler. In the early 1930s during the rise of fascism in Germany the German and Soviet communists badly underestimated the power and appeal of Hitler. They believed that world revolution was on the horizon and as such, they refused to build a united front against Hitler with the Social Democrats

who they saw as their primary competition (and the Social Democrats were sectarian towards the Communists as well.) The Comintern put forth the arrogant and sectarian slogan, “After Hitler, Us” meaning that after the people saw through the fascists they would turn to the communists and socialist revolution. Needless to say this was a terrible misassessment. “After Hitler” was the mass murder of Jews, Gypsies, and yes, communists.

Recognizing this grave mis-assessment the world communist parties began an international campaign, reflected in a major theoretical and strategic paper, The United Front Against Fascism by Georgi Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern, written in 1935. The Soviet Union encouraged world communist parties to build broad alliances with capitalist governments and social democratic forces and yes, many communist parties moved in more “reformist” and conciliatory directions out of a true terror that the Soviet Union and the world would be taken over by a uniquely reactionary, racist, and murderous form of capitalism led by Adolph Hitler and the German Reich. (As the Comintern argued against mechanical application of the theory, they reprimanded the U.S. Party for portraying U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal as a form of fascism as “partial to hackneyed schemes” Instead, they called on the U.S. Party to defend and ally with Roosevelt against “the most reactionary circles of American finance capital who are attacking Roosevelt and stimulating and organizing the fascist movement in the United States” which they did.

But these efforts by the Soviet Union and the world communist movement did not sway the capitalist powers of the West to build a united front against fascism with the communists. Many histories of this period make clear that United States, England, and France saw the Soviet Union and communism as the far greater danger and hoped that Hitler would invade the Soviet Union—as many Western capitalists shared Hitler’s hatred of both Jews and communists. And again, Nazi Germany was a capitalist country and many U.S. capitalists saw fascism as a commercial opportunity. There were strong pro-fascist forces in the United States including Henry Ford, Alfred P. Sloan head of General Motors, and Joseph Kennedy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s U.S. ambassador to Great Britain from 1930 to 1940.

In September 1938, while the Soviets offered massive numbers of troops to fight Hitler in Poland, the British (along with French and Italians) negotiated what came to be called The Munich Agreement with Germany agreement. This allowed Hitler and the Nazi's to annex the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia while the Czechs were not even allowed at the meeting—as British Prime Minister Neville Chamber claimed he bought “peace in our time.” After another year of unsuccessful overtures to the Western capitalist powers and aware that the Western capitalists wanted Hitler to invade the Soviet Union, in August 23, 1939, Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with the Nazis. This was denounced by capitalists all over the world as the Soviets tried to buy time before the inevitable Nazi invasion. The entire story of the Soviet's efforts, mostly unsuccessful, to get the U.S., Britain, and France to stand up to Hitler is a tragic story of Western “democratic” conciliation with fascism. Only the Soviets were ideologically opposed to fascism, saw the grave danger, and did everything they could to build a world movement against Hitler that eventually did succeed.

In September 1939 the German's invaded Poland and the Western allies began World War II, and the Soviet Union joined the allies shortly after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 while the United States did not enter the war until the December 11, 1941 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the Germans, under pressure from their Japanese allies, declared war against the United States. For the United States to act as if it was a leading anti-fascist power is just not true. As usual, the U.S. watched the rise of German and Japanese fascism, stayed out of the war as long as possible, and then came in to help win the war and then take over the world at the war's end.

The Soviet Union was the main force to defeat Hitler in World War II—sacrificing 20 million of soldiers and civilians during the long German invasion which the U.S. and British welcomed—hoping both sides would eventually kill each other off.

The oppressed people of the world and those Jews who survived owe their existence to the heroism of the Soviet people in spite of the cynicism and betrayal of the United States, England, and pathetic France that capitulated to the German invasion in weeks—with many of the French people willingly supporting the Nazi Vichy occupation government.

Throughout the war, communist parties all over the world called on the United States and Britain to open up “a second front” against Hitler in Europe and yet both countries delayed—again hoping that Hitler would destroy the Soviet Union. Then, the Soviets began to defeat Hitler in the long Russian winters and the Soviet Army began to march eastward. Then, the “Allies” realized that the Soviets and the communists might take over all of Europe with communist parties in every country having the great prestige of leading the resistance against Fascism and only then did the United States finally take great risks. The United States, led by General Dwight Eisenhower, led a bloody and heroic battle on the beaches of Normandy, France in June 1944, in which 160,000 allied troops won a decisive battle in the and began to march on the Germans from the West. This also forced the Germans to move some troops from the Eastern front and helped the Soviets beat back the German invasion. Still, as just one measure of the supreme sacrifices the Soviet people paid in the fight against world fascism, the Soviet Union suffered the deaths of 10 million soldiers and 14 million civilians whereas the United States suffered 416,000 military deaths only 2,000 civilian deaths. The world owes the Soviet Union a profound debt for being the primary force to pay the price to defeat Hitler.

The United States violated every concept of international “law” and human rights by dropping a nuclear bomb on Japanese civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

On August 7, 1945 the U.S. dropped nuclear weapons, The Atom Bomb, on Japanese civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They killed more than 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 80,000 in Nagasaki; roughly half of the deaths in each city occurred on the first day in which people were incinerated instantly and virtually all of them were “civilian non-combatants.” And that does not count the long term cancer deaths of those exposed to the massive radiation. And yet, a study of his horrific act indicates it was not really used to defeat the Japanese as much as to terrorize the Soviet Union since Japan was ready to surrender. And even if Japan had not yet been ready to surrender the use of atomic weapons against civilians is not an acceptable “act of war” —and a massive violation of international and human rights treaties principles none of which constrain U.S. military actions—as the Indigenous, Vietnamese, Iraqis and so many other can testify.

U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower opposed using the bomb, “It wasn’t necessary to hit them (Japan) with that awful thing.’ knowing full well the Japanese were ready to surrender. Historical accounts indicate that the United States and U.S. President Harry Truman already saw the communist Soviet Union not the Japanese as their main enemy even though the war was still going on against Japan. They withheld all nuclear information from the Soviets and did not want the Soviet Union to come into the war against Japan because they feared Soviet influence in Asia after the war. Truman, and many other Democratic anti-communists, also wanted to terrorize the Soviet Union because they feared Soviet influence in Europe.

When they learned of the U.S. nuclear attack on Japan, and no the Soviets were not informed, Stalin and the Soviet leadership were in shock and massively depressed. They saw this as a provocation against the Soviet Union, which of course it was—an effort to get Japan to surrender before the Soviets became involved in the war, and to terrorize the Soviets in negotiations over Eastern Europe where, yes, the Soviets wanted pro-Soviet governments to protect them from a third German initiated and U.S. conciliated world war. Gar Alperovitz’ book *Atomic Diplomacy* goes into brutal detail about the cynical calculations of U.S. decision-makers who saw the Atom Bomb as a weapon against the Soviet Union. The masses of Soviet people, already traumatized by the murderous German invasion, were truly terrified of a U.S. nuclear attack—which of course was exactly what the U.S. ruling circles, Harry Truman, Averell Harriman, Henry Stinson and all Cold war Democrats wanted to accomplish.

Right after the war the U.S. abandoned its Soviet allies and rehabilitated the Nazis—including bringing Wehrner Van Braun, a leader of the Nazi military during W.W. II, to build their “space program.” Then, right after the war, with the Soviet economy decimated, the United States gave no aide to the Soviets who had sacrificed 20 million people in the fight against fascism. Instead, the U.S., through the vaunted Marshall Plan, invested \$13 billion to rehabilitate the Nazis in Germany and Japan and rebuild their economies along capitalist lines in order to reintegrate them into a world capitalist orbit and prevent the rise of socialism and capitalism in Europe and Japan. It is very sad to hear liberals and even socialists today say, “We need a Marshall plan for the cities, we need a Marshall plan for the

environment” when in fact the Marshall plan was little more than an anti-communist subsidy for the fascist states that provoked World War II.

The United States Finally Finds a War It Wants to Fight—the Cold War against the Soviet Union and world communism

As World War II was finally over in 1945, the United States began a new war against the Soviet Union and the world communist movement and liberation movements all over the world—the so-called Cold War. This was reflected in attacking, repressing, arresting, imprisoning, and assassinating communist and pro-communist people in every capitalist country who had risked their lives in the fight against Fascism. As just one example, in Greece, right after WWII, the British (with U.S. support) re-occupied Greece and restored pro-nazis and monarcharchists and yes, the King, to power and organized a mass murder of Greek anti-fascist, pro-communist forces.

The Soviet Union had to rebuild its economy and society after the shambles of World War II

The Soviet Union that had illusions of significant U.S. aid after the war, suffered massive destruction and starvation imposed by the German invasion. How Soviet Union rebuilt its economy after World War II from scratch (after having to rebuild it after World War I and the revolution) and was able to provide food and social services in the face of a U.S. confrontation is a miracle of socialist development and reflects the superiority of the socialist system.

In the United States the Democratic president Harry Truman, Republican president Dwight Eisenhower, Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy, Democrat Bobby Kennedy who worked for McCarthy and Republican Congressman Richard Nixon, attacked communists in every aspect of U.S. society. In 1947 they passed the Taft Hartley law that denied communists the right to be elected trade union leaders—because the communists were winning many of those elections. They passed the Smith Act that allowed them to imprison many of the leaders of the U.S. Communist Party.

In 1951, the U.S. government framed and by 1953 executed Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in a horrible show trial that mimicked Hitler's attack on Jews and communists. The Rosenbergs were human rights and peace movement heroes who, like many communists and non-communists in the U.S. nuclear program, wanted the U.S. to get nuclear weapons to fight fascism— but also wanted to help the Soviets protect themselves against the U.S. nuclear attack. There were many people in the U.S. nuclear program who saw themselves as friends of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union and were terrified when they realized the U.S. would turn against the Soviet Union and might use nuclear weapons against the Soviets. There were not just communists but left liberals in the U.S. nuclear program who wanted to help the Soviet Union get information to build its own nuclear weapons out of self-defense against the U.S. government. The debate about whether the Rosenbergs did or did not divulge any specific U.S. nuclear secrets avoids the question of the moral imperative people have to divulge information about their government's violations of human rights to an international audience—debates that took place when Daniel Ellsberg divulged The Pentagon Papers exposing U.S. atrocities in Vietnam, and Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning released information about U.S. atrocities in Afghanistan and throughout the world. In the case of the Rosenberg's the U.S. government fomented an anti-communist and anti-Semitic frenzy against them and executed them as they went to their deaths without recanting, confessing, or apologizing and declared their innocence until the end. The great support Julius and Ethel Rosenberg received from Black communists Paul Robeson and William L. Patterson and their heroic decision to go to their deaths proud and defiant is part of the revolutionary legacy a new generation can only dream of living up to.

The Soviet Union and the CPUSA bravely stood up to terrible intimidation by the United States after World War II and many of us in what was later called the U.S. New Left in the 1960s fought against the House Un-American Activities Committee and the ugly anti-communism of our government. We often became pro-communist before we had even met a communist out of revulsion against the racism and repression of as DuBois called it, "The land of the thief and the home of the slave."

The United States, England, and France double crossed the colonial nations of Asia, African, and Latin America and Blacks who had all contributed to the “Allied victory.”

During World War II, the United States, England, and France, in order to get the support of their colonial subjects, promised them independence after the war against Fascism. Instead, the U.S. and French broke their promises by financing a war against the people of Vietnam that would end up murdering more than 4 million Vietnamese—yes a long-term war crime and genocide. How the French capitulated to the Nazis and then were rewarded by recolonizing Vietnam and Algeria with U.S. support is just one of the many horror stories of world imperialism and the crimes of our own government. The United States, as part of its victory, replaced England and France as the world’s greatest colonial power but often preferred to allow the British and French to do the colonial dirty work with U.S. funds—so that the U.S. CIA orchestrated and supported the British overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad in 1953 and paid most of France’s military costs in Vietnam until its final defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1955 after which the U.S. got involved directly.

The Soviet Union was the best friend of colonial peoples and was a critical material force in every Third World anti-colonial and socialist victory.

As the U.S., England, and France continued to subjugate and terrorize Third World peoples the Soviet Union supported the liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America with economic, military and political aid. Without this essential Soviet support, the Chinese, Korean, Cuban, Vietnamese, South African, and virtually every Third World Revolution would have faced even greater and possibly insurmountable odds. The Soviet’s defeat of Hitler and support for Eastern European revolutions prevented the U.S. from massing forces to stop the Chinese revolution. The Soviets and East Germans gave weapons and support to the Cubans, were critical to Nasser’s building of the Aswan Dam, gave weapons and training the South African African National Congress. By contrast, the United States supported gangsters and rapists in Cuba, death squads in El Salvador, and the Apartheid government in South Africa. The Soviets asked, as you should

yourself, “which side are you on.” For us in the United States who see our own government attacking and assassinating Third World revolutions and revolutionaries today we need to have a greater appreciation of what a powerful countervailing power the Soviet Union provided for oppressed people all over the world and what a great defeat it is that it no longer exists to provide that help. If anything, that places even greater responsibility on all of us in the U.S.

The Soviet Union and the world communist movements were the best friends of Black people, recruited and trained the most brilliant Black organizers and intellectuals, challenged white chauvinism and racism inside and outside of the communist parties.

Upon the creation of the U.S. Communist Party 1919 the new, overwhelmingly white party, tried to grapple with the white chauvinism and racism of the U.S. Socialist Party from whom many of its members had left—but not with great success or significant changes in its worldview. Both socialists and communists did not want to face the central role of racism and national oppression in the formation of the United States and the active role that so many white workers and white people of all classes played in the subjugation of Black people.

These overwhelmingly white socialist and communist groups argued that “racism” was not inherent in the formation of U.S. capitalism and imperialism but rather, an ideological construct that could be fought in the realm of ideas. When asked why they had attracted and recruited so few Black people both groups essentially blamed “The Negro” for having insufficient socialist consciousness.

Still, it was the Communist Party that began to attract revolutionary Blacks such as Cyril Briggs and groups such as the African Blood Brotherhood who in turn aggressively struggled with the Party to take seriously the rise of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association and to find a synthesis of Black Nationalism and socialism. In 1928 and 1930 the Communist International did a major study of the plight of Black people in the U.S. —*Resolution on the Afro-American National Question*—and a critique of the white chauvinism of the U.S. and South African communist parties. The Resolution concluded that Black people in the United States centered in the Black Belt South were an oppressed nation with

the right of self-determination. Even more importantly, the communists understood anti-Black racism and national oppression in an international context as a national liberation struggle against imperialism.

“The Negro race everywhere is an oppressed race. Whether it is a minority (U.S.A., etc.) majority (South Africa) or inhabits a so-called independent state (Liberia, etc.), the Negroes are oppressed by imperialism. Thus, a common tie of interest is established for the revolutionary struggle of race and national liberation from imperialist domination of the Negroes in various parts of the world.”

U.S. Black communists who had studied in the Soviet Union including Claude McKay, a Jamaican poet, Otto Huiswoud born in Surinam, and Harry Haywood, a former supporter of the Garvey Back to Africa Movement and member of the African Blood Brotherhood, played a major role in this study. But several U.S. communists in the Soviet Union at the time, including Haywood’s brother Otto Hall, did not agree with that line nor did the majority of the Party upon their return. Still, this was a major breakthrough in an analysis of Blacks in the U.S. and represented a major break with the Socialists and yes, most CPUSA members who still saw Blacks and whites as primarily the same with Blacks suffering from “racism” almost as if it was just an attitude that could be ended through the struggle for socialism. By contrast, Haywood and the Comintern argued that Black national oppression in the U.S. was based on a profound material reality rooted in systematic kidnapping, slavery, state violence, and brutal subjugation based on race that created Blacks as an oppressed people and nation inside the borders of the United States.

While the Soviets and a few Black and white members of the Communist Party were the driving force for this point of view, the party never fully grasped or integrated demands for self-determination among most of its members or its practice. But that “line” pushed the Party into a far more anti-racist and pro-Black orientation. One form that took was the CPUSA taking up the struggle of the Scottsboro Boys—9 Black youth falsely accused of raping 2 white women on a train in Alabama in 1931. Their case, thanks to the CPUSA, became a tribunal against racism in the U.S. and the system of trumped up charges, all white juries, lying witnesses, and death

sentences against Black defendants. At first the NAACP and other Negro organizations would not take the case— afraid of images of Black men attacking white women, but the CPUSA took it up boldly and provided legal and political defenses all over the world. Imagine in the early 1930s in pre-Hitler Germany where thousands of pro-communist German workers are protesting against U.S. racism and supporting the Scottsboro Boys, showing the value of an international organization. Many other Black communists including attorney William L. Patterson and the CP organized the International Labor Defense, played a major role in this work and won several key battles in front of the Supreme Court. While later many other civil rights organizations including the NAACP joined the campaign, this put the CPUSA and the Soviet Union on the map in the Black community.

This campaign and the Comintern influence brought some elements of Black Nationalism into the socialist and communist conversation and the socialist conversation into the Black community. Once the CPUSA began to engage Black nationalism and assert special rights of The Negro and Afro-American community it led to a profound and lasting loyalty of Black workers, intellectuals, sharecroppers, and artists so that the CPUSA became known, as the greatest compliment of all, as “the Party of the Negro.”

A study of the history of Blacks in and very close to the Communist Party and the Soviet Union would include Cyril Briggs, Harry Haywood, W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, William L. Patterson, Ben Davis, Claudia Jones, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Lorraine Hansberry, Nina Simone, and Angela Davis. They are just a few prominent Black leaders among thousands dedicated Black communist cadre and friends whose lives were shaped by the Soviet and communist experience and who in turn shaped Black, U.S. and world history. Again, it is important for a new generation of revolutionaries, especially Black revolutionaries, to study the deep impact the Soviet Union and communism had on tens of thousands of Black women and working people who in turn played a major role in reshaping U.S. communism into a more Black and Third World culture and ideology. Martin Luther King Jr. captured this relationship (and by implication, his own politics as well) when he observed, “History cannot ignore

W.E.B. Dubois. It is time to cease muting the fact that Dr. Dubois was a genius who chose to become a Communist.”

The Soviet Union and the world communist movement including the People's Republic of China put international pressure on U.S. ruling circles to grant more concessions to the rising civil rights movement.

After World War II, the United States was terrified of Soviet influence in Africa and Latin America and “Communist China’s” victory and influence in Korea and Asia. As early as 1954, pro-imperialist civil rights leaders like Thurgood Marshall used anti-communism as a lever on U.S. courts. He argued that if the United States, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, did not integrate the schools according to the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause this would be used by “the communists” to discredit the U.S. in the world and especially the Third World—which was true. (Marshall would later work as an informant for the FBI against communists in the civil rights movement). In another example, Clare Booth Luce, a ferociously anti-communist U.S. Ambassador to Italy, told Martin Luther King how much she appreciated him because when the Italian communists attacked U.S. racism she could say, “That’s not true, we have Dr. King.” The growing anti-colonial movements and pro-communist forces in Africa and throughout the world convinced some members of the U.S. ruling class that overt apartheid-like segregation was an international liability and began a bi-partisan movement to remove some of the most overt forms of racial segregation in the South.

There is a moving story in Robin Kelley’s pathbreaking [*Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists and the Great Depression*](#)—a story of a majority Black communist party in Alabama. He describes how Black sharecroppers, terrorized by Klan violence believed that a new civil war was imperative. But as Kelley points out,

What distinguished this new war from the Civil War and Reconstruction was its international dimension. For many Black radicals the Russians were the “new Yankees”, Stalin was a “new Lincoln”, and Russia was a “new Ethiopia,” stretching out its arms stretching out its arms in defense of Black folks” The idea of Soviet and/or Northern radical support provided a degree of

psychological confidence for African-Americans waiting to wage the long-awaited revolution in the South.

And it turned out to be true—as yes, if only 20 to 30 years later, northern Black and white support in alliance with the Soviet Union and pro-communist people all over the world were the additional forces, in support of the heroic Black struggle against feudalism, racism, and imperialism in the South, that temporarily lifted a few of the shackles of U.S. slavery.

Sadly, today, without the threat a Soviet Union and a world communist movement, the U.S. ruling class has worked to gut the 14th Amendment, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act and place 1 million Black people in prison. While the initiative came from right-wing Republicans, note that President Obama and the Democrats, with 8 years in office, never lifted a finger in support of Black people nor initiated one serious civil rights legislative campaign. The role of international communist and Soviet pressure on the U.S. in support of the Black and civil rights movement cannot be underestimated as one of its great achievements. Today, the Black and civil rights movement has to reconstruct an international strategy since the U.S. two-party system has no internal drive to fight racial discrimination let alone national oppression. I urge a new generation of Black organizers to continue your study of the communist and anti-imperialist traditions of the Afro-American people seeking international allies as an important step to reconstruct the international strategy that Malcolm, Martin, SNCC, and the Black Liberation Movement advocated and carried out.

The Soviet Union and the Communists attracted the most dedicated and creative revolutionary cadre all over the world.

In 1989, at a meeting in Los Angeles right after the fall of the Soviet Union, sponsored by the Democratic Socialists of America, I heard a prominent Black socialist chastise the overwhelmingly white group. “Before we celebrate the fall of the Soviet Union we have to ask ourselves why the communists have attracted Blacks and the most dedicated people and we in DSA cannot.”

Communists cadre, trained in Marxism-Leninism, believing in a world socialist revolution, and allied with an actual socialist state, the Soviet Union, schooled in strategy, tactics, and “organizing” were amazing leaders who could mobilize ten, twenty, and eventually hundreds of people per person. [Gus Hall](#), the General Secretary of the CPUSA for most of the later 20th Century, said that Communists’ scientific understanding of the nature of class struggle enables them to be the most effective organizers, a benefit he called the “Communist Plus”. One estimate of CPUSA membership in 1938 was 75,000—if true an amazing number because communist cadre did the work of dozens, worked endless hours, and were as a group brilliant at what they did. Being part of an international movement tied to an actual socialist country, the Soviet Union, a place where they could see socialism first-hand, was a major reason for this sustained morale and productivity among communist cadre.

The Soviet Union without illusions—Soviet errors, chauvinism, abuses and crimes.

Everyone who has been part of the communist and pro-communist camp has been well aware of the challenges and at times horrors of actually existing socialism. The question for those of us in the United States is how much we truly feel and act upon the far greater horrors of actually existing imperialism.

V.I. Lenin was the unique and essential leader of the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik Party. His efforts to theorize, with no historical precedent, the contradictions of governance and force, dictatorship and democracy, markets and socialism in the very early years of Soviet state power was unique, brilliant, and very encouraging. Tragically, he became profoundly ill from strokes that were prompted by gunshot wounds from a Social Revolutionary assassin in 1918 and died in 1922—a devastating blow to the Soviet experiment. By 1922 Joseph Stalin took over the Party apparatus and immediately began to attack Lenin and his legacy. As one example, Lenin had supported what was called the New Economic Policy that allowed market mechanisms in the Soviet Union to encourage peasants to produce for the urban centers. But after his death Stalin moved against many other in the party as well to impose the forced collectivization of agriculture and a class war in the countryside with devastating results. In the 1920s the inner party

struggle allowed some innovations and options that were later closed by Stalin's ascension to dictatorial power.

During the 1930s Stalin's Soviet Union initiated the terrifying spectacle of the "Show Trial" where dedicated communist cadre were forced, under fear not only of their death but the murder of their families and friends, to renounce, recant, and confess non-existent "crimes against the socialist motherland" that broke the back of the moral ascendancy of the party and led to the most profound depression and cynicism in its ranks.

After Stalin's death in 1955, the new party chairman, Nikita Khrushchev in his Secret Speech, recalled Lenin's Testament, a long-suppressed document in which Vladimir Lenin had warned that Stalin was likely to abuse his power, and then he cited numerous instances of such excesses. Outstanding among these was Stalin's use of mass terror in the Great Purge of the mid-1930s, during which, according to Khrushchev, innocent communists had been falsely accused of espionage and sabotage and unjustly punished, often executed, after they had been tortured into making confessions.

Khrushchev criticized Stalin for having failed to make adequate defensive preparations before the German invasion of the Soviet Union (June 1941), for having weakened the Red Army by purging its leading officers, and for mismanaging the war after the invasion. He condemned Stalin for irrationally deporting entire nationality groups (e.g., the Karachay, Kalmyk, Chechen, Ingush, and Balkar peoples) from their homelands during the war and, after the war, for purging major political leaders in Leningrad (1948–50; and in Georgia (1952). He also censured Stalin for attempting to launch a new purge, the Doctors' Plot, 1953, shortly before his death and for his policy toward Yugoslavia, which had resulted in a severance of relations between that nation and the Soviet Union (1948). The "cult of personality" that Stalin had created to glorify his own rule and leadership was also condemned.

The process of Soviet experiments in socialism and the abuses of the Soviet state dictatorship are the subject of another important interrogation. For clearly, as the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1955 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 it could not

tolerate “socialism with a human face” and out of fear of a U.S. invasion but also its own internal dynamics of empire and great nation chauvinism began a long decline that led to its overthrow by its own people in 1991. And yet, the efforts of both Khrushchev and later Mikhail Gorbachev to carry out both Glasnost and Perestroika are critical experiments in self-corrections of the Soviet model—something no ruling party or class or group in the United States has every considered to liberalize let alone revolutionize U.S. imperialism.

The Anti-racist, anti-fascist, anti-imperialist legacy of the Soviet Union shapes It's Historic Legacy

What is the continent of the grand October revolution today? Could it be “... the world's last cosmopolitan enjoying its postmodern *holiday from history*? ... the lost Atlántida or mythical Arcadia— a Hegelian *end of history* world? ... a mix of the endemically domesticated Marx-Engels grand utopia and Kennedy's dream-world “where the weak are safe and the strong are just” – as prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic asks in his brilliant critics of Europe's philosophy of history?

If we understand the world socialist and communist movement as a continuum, then the great achievements and heroism in the Soviet experiment far outweigh its structural problems— especially as the U.S. government waged a war against the Soviet Union for the entire 20th century and is the greatest danger to peace, economic justice, and human rights in the world.

For us in the United States, as we debate the Soviet experience on the 100th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution, we also have to focus on an even more pressing question —what do we really think and feel about our own government. In any discussion of the future of the U.S. left and any socialist possibility, I think the strategic imperative of a United Front Against U.S. Imperialism should shape that conversation. For any possibility of socialism must begin by closing down all 800 U.S. military bases all over the world, stopping U.S. fossil fuel emissions, stopping U.S. interventions in every country and revolution in the world, and facing squarely that U.S. society has been built on genocide both past and present. We all must face the challenge to fight that system day and night and find the courage to frontally challenge U.S. imperialism in all of its manifestations—including the privileges

many of us receive from the empire. As just one chilling example, U.S. fossil fuel emissions threaten massive death to 1 billion people in Sub-Saharan Africa in the form of droughts, floods, desertification, and famine.

And as we work to figure out our own forms of organization and struggle, a reading of the history of the Soviet Union and the communist experience places real challenges that we have to face.

As the U.S. has moved to a police state all over the world and inside its borders, and more than 1 million Black people are in prison what is our plan to confront the U.S. army and the police state?

If we believe a systematic revolutionary struggle is needed, what are the plans to build a disciplined organization that the communists were able to do? And what sacrifices are each of us willing to make for the revolution?

And as we talk about socialism and revolution, I think it would be most helpful to talk about “Anti-imperialist socialism’ and even an “Anti-imperialist eco socialism” —rather than a “21st century socialism.” While that may not be the intention, for some it reflects a rejection of the hundreds of millions of people who gave their lives to fight for actually existing socialism in the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st century and see a great continuity of those centuries of struggle to shape our work today.

I think that Black revolutionary thought and the very impressive work of Black communists and friends of the Soviet Union can be a critical building block for that conversation. I have compiled some quotes by the great Black pro-communist Paul Robeson who addressed the question of his own allegiances in the most direct and revolutionary manner. After World War II, Robeson, seeing the danger of a U.S. war against the Soviet people, argued that Black people should not fight in a U.S. war against the Soviet Union. For that he was punished by the U.S. government and driven into exile in his own land. Robeson stood up to the fascists with full revolutionary clarity.

“Yes, all Africa remembers that it was [Soviet ambassador]Litvinov who stood alone beside Haile Selassie (emperor of Ethiopia) in Geneva in 1935 when Mussolini’s

sons flew with the blessings of the Pope to drop bombs on Ethiopian women and children. Africa remembers that it was the Soviet Union which fought the attempts of the Smuts to annex Southwest Africa to the slave reservation of the Union of South Africa... if the peoples of the Congo refuse to mine the uranium for the atom bombs made in Jim Crow factories in the United States; if all these peoples demand an end to floggings, an end to the farce of 'trusteeship' in the former Italian colonies.... The Soviet Union is the friend of the African and the West Indian peoples."

"In Russia, I felt for the first time like a full human being. No color prejudice like in Mississippi, no color prejudice like in Washington...My father was a slave, and my people died to build this country, and I am going to stay here, and have a part of it just like you. And no Fascist-minded people will drive me from it. Is that clear?"

"Whatever has happened to Stalin, gentlemen, is a question for the Soviet Union.... You are responsible, and your forebears, for 60 million to 100 million black people dying in the slave ships and on the plantations, and don't ask me about anybody, please.

As we try to rebuild a U.S. New Left at a time of such profound international ecological, spiritual, economic, social, and political crisis I hope that we in the United States study the history of the Russian revolution, and the century of communist parties that it generated, with respect, affection, introspection, self-criticism, and from there, of course, innovation. It was Dr. King, continuing Robeson's tradition, who spoke out against the U.S. genocidal war in Vietnam, called the communist revolutionaries in Vietnam his brothers and sisters, confronted "the cowardice in my own bosom" for not having spoken out forcefully against the war, and called the U.S. government, "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world."

In that context, I thank the Russian and Soviet people for the great sacrifices they have made to move history forward. On this, the 100th Anniversary of the October Russian Revolution, I want to challenge myself to be a better revolutionary and a better organizer.

Eric Mann is a veteran of the Congress of Racial Equality, Students for a Democratic Society, and the United Auto Workers and the prolific author of several books. Early version of this text “The 100th Anniversary of the October Revolution: the Great Breakthrough in Anti-Imperialist Socialism” was posted for FastCapitalism.

