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The Return of John Brown:

White Race-Traitors in the 2020 Uprising

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An earlier version of this essay was published at *Ill Will Editions*, September 4th, 2020, illwilleditions.com. The authors have since made some minor edits and additions, which we publish here as a pamphlet.

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Dedicated to all the martyrs of the 2020 Uprising

uphold the racial order. This means joining the mass struggle, fighting the police, burning cop cars, burning police stations, burning courthouses, and committing to the uprising.

For revolution to emerge, a revolutionary alliance must develop between all sections of the proletariat, in opposition to the middle classes and bourgeoisie of all identities. The formation of this proletarian alliance will be on terms so different from what most understand solidarity to mean, that it will look like a monster to most, including the left. It will require strategy, organization, tactics, and politics which most of the U.S. left is unprepared for. This does not mean that we have to stay this way.

Some people will look at these rebellions and continue to think exactly as they thought before. They have nothing to learn from this experience. Riots, looting, and arson have accomplished more in one summer than what activists have been able to accomplish in decades. This summer has transformed an entire generation. It is not the NGO's, nor the left, nor even the revolutionary left, which has done this. It is thousands of brave young people acting on their own initiative, their own perception of what makes sense, what feels not only logical and powerful, but what a *dignified* response to state slaughter looks like. They are the ones we pay homage to. And to our fallen comrades.

If a revolutionary praxis will emerge, it will emerge from the fires of these rebellions. Now, with a new recession, masses of people out of work, tens of thousands on the verge of eviction, and a pandemic that is getting worse, the crisis giving rise to the riots is only becoming more entrenched. Despite the push towards reformism and the spectacle of the election, the struggle continues.

We welcome the proletarian monster.

The Return of John Brown:

White Race-Traitors in the 2020 Uprising

“What is the prognosis? ... The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure.”

—Frantz Fanon

THE SUMMER OF 2020 HAS BEEN A SUMMER OF MASS REVOLT. What started on May 26th as a Black-led rebellion in Minneapolis following the police murder of George Floyd, rapidly swept across the country. While this uprising was initiated by young black people, people of all colors quickly joined in. This revolutionary multitude attacked police officers, set fire to police stations, cop cars and banks, looted and redistributed goods.

This first week was Act I. Because the state was caught by surprise, this was the most widespread and intense of all the phases of the uprising. This initial rebellion was inevitably repressed by the police, military, vigilantes, NGOs, and politicians. However, this process of decomposition was uneven—in some places, we began to see a simultaneous process of recomposition. Seattle CHAZ attempted to pre-figure a world where police did not exist. More riots erupted on the streets of Atlanta following the police murder of Rayshard Brooks on June 12th. In Portland, militants battled with federal

agents for several weeks. This was Act II.

Then there was Act III. On July 25th revolutionary abolition surfaced once again, taking the offensive in solidarity with the struggle in Portland. Riots took place simultaneously in Portland, Richmond, Eugene, Seattle, Oakland, Los Angeles and Aurora. In Atlanta, people busted out the windows of an ICE/DHS office. In the days that followed, solidarity marches across the country quickly turned into street riots. Back in Portland, militants continued to clash with federal agents, laying siege to a federal courthouse. Then, on August 10th, in response to more police violence, caravans of looters from all over Chicago ransacked high-end stores in the downtown section of the city.

This brings us to Act IV. Towards the end of August, a new round of rebellions kicked off after the police murders of Trayford Pellerin in Lafayette, Louisiana, and Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin. In Kenosha, where rioters burned down a department of corrections building, an armed vigilante murdered two protesters. In Portland, an anti-fascist—Michael Reinoehl—shot a killed a member of Patriot Prayer during street battles between Trump supporters and Black Lives Matter protesters. Michael Reinoehl has since been murdered by the police.

Mostly recently, a new round of riots has erupted throughout the country following a grand jury decision that failed to convict the police that murdered Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky. During the uprising, two police officers were shot in downtown Louisville. This is Act V.

As we noted in the “Theses on the George Floyd Rebellion,” these waves of riots coincide with other forms of struggle: a wave of wild-cat strikes in “essential industries”; struggles within the carceral state, including prisons, jails, and migrant detention centers; and a movement around housing. More than any other form of struggle, however, it is the street riots which have been the most disruptive and radicalizing, and which have involved the largest numbers of people.

Actual people make revolutions, not saints and angels.

7. The historical moment that sheds the most light on the current white proletariat is the era of the Civil War. This history powerfully informs the trajectory of what will come. The Civil War and Reconstruction are the unfinished business of this land.

8. Only crisis, civil war and revolution can smash the alliance between the white proletariat and capitalism.

Conclusions

“And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms.”

—Sylvia Wynter

The Black proletariat initiated the uprising, but it can’t defeat capitalism on its own. In this essay, we have explored how the white proletariat is a piece of the puzzle. Another piece, which we have not yet examined, is the Latinx proletariat. Another piece is the Indigenous proletariat. Another is the international proletariat. There are many pieces in the puzzle of revolutionary strategy. How they come together was revealed in the experience of the 2020 uprising. As of this writing, the riots continue to emerge.

Capitalism has been chipped away at the wages of whiteness for decades now. As a result, more whites are joining the struggle against racial capitalism. But there is no guarantee of what will happen with the white proletariat. While there are revolutionary currents within it, its history is constituted by racism, and it has a lot of work to do to convince other proletarians that it is committed to revolution. This will require dedication of the likes we have never seen. It must be made clear, however, that the point of such an orientation isn’t to assuage a guilty conscience. There is a lot of abstract and shallow accounting of how whiteness is to be overcome through guilt, self-sacrifice, charity, and interpersonal behaviors, but the clearest road ahead is when whites strategically attack the institutions that

Theses on the White Proletariat

1. White people, like all people, are divided by politics and class. These divisions were revealed through the recent uprisings, which showed us that there are whites who are willing to go the distance, and there are whites who are willing to violently defend capitalism and the state.

2. We need a revolutionary strategy for white workers not in spite of, but precisely because of their racism and counter-revolutionary potential. Enrolling the white proletariat into a white supremacist alliance has been a crucial tactic of American capitalism, for the simple reason that white workers have always been the largest demographic in this nation. A successful proletarian revolution requires breaking up this alliance.

3. The white proletariat has revolutionary potential, but this potential is simultaneously inflected with racism and anti-Blackness. This contradiction takes the form of a civil war within the white proletariat. This civil war is defined, on the one hand, by solidarity with the rest of the proletariat, and on the other hand, by investment in the system of whiteness.

4. The so-called 'white outside agitator' is the name for a living creature who breaks the spell of a united white bloc of civility, protocol, and allegiance to capitalism and the state. It reveals that there are white people who are not invested in whiteness.

5. As more white race-traitors emerge, they too will be hunted down and murdered. In this sense, law and order is not only about disciplining Black and Brown proletarians but also white race-traitors. This is the revolutionary fate of all proletarians who pose a threat to the racial order.

6. The white proletariat is not frozen. It can change, evolve, and break from its history of settler colonialism, racism, and imperialism. We do not need romantic illusions to see this.

Experiencing this has been unlike anything we've experienced before. In the nerve-centers of the American empire, disparate fractions of the proletariat came together to attack the police and storm the commercial corridors of dozens of cities. In the "Theses," we argued that the self-activity of the Black proletariat is the driving force of this revolutionary trajectory. In this essay, we explore the role of the white proletariat in this process.

Like all working class people in the US, white workers have been battered by deindustrialization, austerity, the financial crisis of 2007/2008, the disappointment of the Obama and Trump Presidencies, and now, COVID-19. The other key dynamic is the opioid and suicide epidemic, which has devastated the white proletariat for almost two decades. It is in the context of these crises that we must situate the contemporary white proletariat.

Hearing the battle cry of Black Lives Matter, a significant number of poor and working class whites joined the rebellions. Anyone with a basic understanding of the history of the United States recognizes the significance of this event and all the potentials, contradictions, and dangers that it raises. There is nothing more dangerous to the American bourgeoisie than a multi-racial class struggle. And there is nothing more dangerous to the class struggle in the US than the treachery of the white proletariat, which, over the course of its history, has forged an alliance with capital and the state. While the material basis of this cross-class alliance is deteriorating, and fissures are emerging, it continues to be the glue that holds U.S. society together.

The road ahead is filled with possibilities, but also mortal dangers. Friends can quickly become enemies, and long-standing enemies can become dedicated comrades. Although history can serve as a guide, if a successful revolution is to take place we will have to charge into the unknown. To become stuck in the patterns of history is to create another prison for ourselves. The George Floyd uprising and the rebellions which have followed give us the tools to finally break down not only the prison of racial capitalism, but also the prison of history.

Reactions

Our focus on the white proletariat will anger and shock many. We will be accused of paying too much attention to whites. There will be many reactions from many angles. But the reactions that really concern us come from three places within the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) left. The first comes from BIPOC radicals who cannot, on principle, stand any discussion of poor and working class whites, which they regard as an attack on their BIPOCness. Because of their experiences in a racist world, these people tend to categorically hate all white people.

The second reaction comes from BIPOC militants worried that the rebellion will be betrayed, especially in majority white cities like Kenosha, Seattle, Portland, and Minneapolis. Such comrades might have white working class comrades, and have a perspective that includes them in a revolutionary process, but are nonetheless skeptical of focusing on the white proletariat because they don't want to lose sight of the proletariat of color. This is understandable. We can only ask that BIPOC comrades with these concerns read this text in its entirety, judge it for what it says, and see this moment as a potential break from the norms of history. A serious discussion of the white proletariat does not have to take anything away from the proletariat of color.

The third reaction comes from BIPOC radicals who recognize the white proletariat, but think that it is eternally lost to racism, settler colonialism, and empire. This is also an understandable position to have in this racist country and there is no point in trying to convince BIPOC comrades otherwise. It is only through the experience of fighting alongside white proletarians that BIPOC comrades will come to see the strategic error of lumping all of them together in a counter-revolutionary bloc.

While recognizing these concerns, we nonetheless believe that if revolution is on the horizon, our strategy must take white people into account, rather than discarding them. The first and most obvious reason is that they constitute a gigantic part of the U.S. popu-

national bourgeoisie of the Third World. Whether in the Haitian Revolution, the US Civil War, the Mexican Revolution, the Chinese Revolution or elsewhere — every appearance of the proletarian monster was grotesque and terrifying, because it undermined the boundaries of society.



Brown's entire strategy was to provoke a civil war, and to drive the country into a war of liberation. If this were the 1850s, how many of us would support the strategy of escalation that Brown engaged in during Bloody Kansas? How many of us would support the raid that Brown and Harriet Tubman planned on Harpers Ferry?

Historically, the white proletariat has only figured things out when objective circumstances dragged it through mud and blood. The US Civil War forced it to fight against slavery; the Great Depression forced it to join black workers in the CIO; World War II forced it to shoot fascists in Europe; the Vietnam war taught it the cruel lessons of American imperialism. The pattern is the same. Crisis educates the white proletariat. Left to its own devices, it will not figure out the riddle of America.

There is no denying that a large section of white workers might reach the most counter-revolutionary and racist of conclusions from such a crisis, but there is no other way. Crisis, struggle, and polarization are inevitable within capitalism. Revolutionaries need to reckon with this reality and act accordingly.

The monster

The insurrectionary alliance that temporarily emerges through riots and uprisings is unrecognizable, frightening, scandalous, monstrous. It upends all the historical and contemporary notions of solidarity, politics, and organization. It displaces the leadership and control of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes. The left does not understand it, and quite clearly sees it as a threat. The left has become so divorced from proletarian life, from proletarian forms of knowledge, from proletarian culture, that when the proletariat finally takes the lead in this country, it can appear only as an abomination to be contained and disciplined.

We have seen this happen many times throughout history. The Bolsheviks who crushed the Kronstadt rebellion and the Makhnovshchyna offer only the most famous examples. Fanon and CLR James noted the same counter-revolutionary dynamics among the

lation. According to the US Census, this country is 60.1% European-white. Let that sink in. The next largest group is Latino at 18.5%, followed by Black or African American at 13.4%. Next is Asians at 5.9%, and Indigenous people at 1.3%. In other words, there are more white people in the country than all non-white people combined. It is unclear how a revolution could succeed unless it develops a strategy that splits the whites and includes some of them in the revolutionary struggle. While the idea that white people are immutably racist is understandable, it leaves the question of how to deal with this massive segment of society unanswered—that is, other than by means of race wars or racial balkanization that would only end up reinforcing white domination and the genocide of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color.

A blurred understanding

There is a common understanding of white workers that arrives to us over-determined by liberal and conservative media outlets. For instance, it is assumed that a white worker is someone who listens to Fox News or Rush Limbaugh, which in turn become proxies for white working class consciousness more generally. At the same time, we hear liberal media tell us that working class whites are uneducated, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, etc. a talking point that is then uncritically repeated by leftists of every stripe.

The conceptual tools that encourage us to view white workers as fundamentally reactionary — white privilege, settler-colonialism, anti-Blackness, the labor aristocracy — are powerful because they are rooted in historical reality. But what happens when whites act in a revolutionary manner? Are we able to recognize when these analytic tools no longer function, and instead block our ability to see what is happening? While we should not discard them, we believe that Black Marxism provides other means for making sense of this situation.

Black Marxism positions itself in relation to whites in a strategic manner. In *The Black Jacobins*, CLR James showed how, during the Haitian Revolution, an insurgent army of ex-slaves played different

(European) colonial powers against one another, while forging an alliance with poor whites in the French Revolution in order to overthrow slavery in San Domingue. In *Black Reconstruction*, W.E.B. Dubois showed how, during the American Civil War, slaves took advantage of the U.S. army's occupation of the South, and the fact that white soldiers were deserting the Confederate army. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon showed how the National Liberation Front welcomed white Algerians into its ranks as militants behind enemy lines who were taking part in the struggle against French colonialism. The list goes on. The Black proletariat needs to once again develop a strategy concerning the white proletariat, to exploit similar opportunities and establish a better position for itself in the class struggle.

The ethical commitment of the Black Radical Tradition

It is not at all clear, given the current theoretical environment, how white workers could fit in a revolutionary strategy. It has become a commonplace to position white workers as privileged anti-Black colonizers, and blood suckers of the global proletariat, thereby generating an awkward relationship to the question of solidarity. When this analysis goes so far as to become quasi-ontological, it is unclear how the white proletariat could ever break out of its complicity with racial capitalism.

While one of the central virtues of the Black Radical Tradition is the liberation and love of Black people, this tradition also encourages the love and liberation of all people. Chapter 7 of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*, offers a good example. Here Robinson argues that "Blacks have seldom employed the level of violence that they (the Westerners) have understood the situation required." He then goes on to ask some very powerful questions: "Why did Nat Turner, admittedly a violent man, spare poor whites? Why did Toussaint escort his absent 'master's' family to safety before joining the slave revolution? Why was 'no white person killed in a slave rebellion in colonial Virginia'?" He reminds the reader that these are not mere anecdotes, but a pattern repeated throughout the centuries: "The people with Chilembwe in 1915 forcibly-marched European wom-

is that of the white proletariat. Will it join the revolutionary struggle? Or will it defend class society? In Portland, white militants are fighting the state, on a local and federal level. BIPOC militants are taking notice, watching, seeing if these whites are serious. The historic question for revolution in the US has always been: will white proletarians fight alongside Black proletarians and other proletarians of color? Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, Kenosha are answering that question in the affirmative.

Majority white cities saw some of the most militant rebellions of this cycle so far. How do we explain this? The answer is that these cities have the weakest Black middle classes, weakest Black NGOs, and the weakest Black Democratic Party institutions relative to other cities like NYC, Atlanta, Chicago, Philadelphia, or Baltimore. In Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland, and Kenosha, the Black counter-insurgency has been sufficiently weak enough that these cities have produced the high points of the uprising.

The revolutionary crucible of the white proletariat

Even with the current uprising, however, the sad reality is that race-traitors represent a minority of the white proletariat. For the most part, the white proletariat remains unconvinced by what it has seen. It is a stubborn class that must be dragged into learning the truth. This is not an endorsement, but a recognition of a historical reality.

As a class, the white proletariat will not learn its true interests from the public education system or the media. It will certainly not learn its true interests through activist organizations, Marxist or Anarchist magazines, newspapers, lectures, conferences, study groups, etc. The reality is that it is only through the bitter experience of more crisis and more struggle that the white proletariat will succeed in becoming revolutionary.

Noel Ignatiev was correct that whiteness must be abolished, and that it will take millions of white race-traitors to accomplish this. But the only way this will occur is through the lessons of crisis. John

during the era of Black chattel slavery. The old racist story goes that slaves were happy until white abolitionists from the North excited them to revolt. Then, after the defeat of chattel slavery, the story went that white Northern communists disturbed the peace, once again putting wild ideas of equality into the hearts and minds of Black people. Today, the white outside agitator returns in Minneapolis, Detroit, Richmond, and elsewhere. In this narrative, it is white people who are burning courthouses, attacking cops, and looting businesses. Taking the lead from the Black middle class, the middle classes, NGO's, and Democrats of all stripes resurrect the same argument dear to the slave owners and the segregationists of yesterday, finding solace in their delusion that it is white agitators who are the active and driving force of history.

There is one current of outside agitators, however, that must be taken seriously. This is the racist white outside agitator. The middle classes have jumped on this, arguing that it is white racists who are burning down buildings, destroying Black owned businesses, and pushing the country closer to another civil war. It is possible that a tiny layer of racist whites have used the riots to practice urban warfare. However, this alone cannot explain what is happening. It is not mobs of white racists who are attacking the police and capitalist property. It is a multi-racial proletariat led by the Black proletariat.

Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland, Kenosha

In a Washington Post Op-ed, E.D. Mondaine of the Portland branch of the NAACP, mobilized the white outside agitator narrative to explain what is happening in Portland. He has called the Portland rebellion a "white spectacle." His critique hits on Naked Athena, the Wall of Moms, and the siege of the Federal Building. Mondaine argues that, instead of rioting, we should take the cause of Black Lives Matter into boardrooms, schools, city councils, the halls of "justice," and into the "smoky back rooms of a duplicitous government." This is clearly a counter-insurgency strategy which could only ever lead to the end of the movement.

The question that has haunted the prospect of revolution in the U.S.

en and children to the safety of colonist settlements." In more recent times, during clashes between fascists and anti-fascists, we've seen a similar dynamic: during violent confrontations, Black militants have saved white fascists from being beaten to death in the street. This recently happened during George Floyd solidarity protests in London, but has happened before in the US. Our point here isn't to argue for non-violence, but rather to highlight the sort of deep ethical commitment that, in opposition to the pathology of race, orients itself instead around the transformation of humanity.

In her essay, "1492: A New World View," as well as in other essays, Sylvia Wynter examines how modern divisions of race, gender, and nation—divisions formed through the colonization of the Americas, the rise of the Atlantic slave trade, and the globalization of capitalism—are normalized and reified as subjectivities. As she sees it, however, the goal is neither to celebrate these subjectivities nor to deny them, but rather to break down the field of power that reproduces them. For her, "the general upheaval of the 1960s made possible a new opening" that challenged the historical and social basis of these "symbolic representational systems." We would imagine that, for Wynter, the present revolts also constitute such an opening.

From slavery to the 2020 uprising

The bourgeoisie has expended considerable effort to divide the proletariat in all kinds of ways, through separations of gender, race, nationality, etc. In the U.S. the division of race has been particularly powerful. The history of multi-racial class struggle is a fraught and contradictory one, but it does exist.

Before the establishment of the U.S. and the widespread development of the racial order that haunts us today, white servants, alongside African and Indigenous slaves, fled colonial farms and joined Maroon communities. In *the Dragon and the Hydra*, political-prisoner Russell Shoats describes how "indentured European workers, who had escaped that status... allied themselves with both Amerindians and Africans who had also escaped from slavery and servitude, all of whom combined into Maroon communities in areas that are

now part of the United States.” From these early class solidarities, racial divisions began to develop following Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676. This was a multi-racial class war against the colonial elite, but it was also premised on settler colonialism against Indigenous people. In response to this rebellion, the colonial elite implemented laws that deepened racial divisions. New slave codes cut off previous legal avenues to freedom. Interracial marriage was criminalized and subsequent laws abolished Black people’s right to vote, hold office, and bear arms. The Atlantic slave trade continued to grow, and as the price of a slave diminished, more Africans were enslaved than ever before. By the time of the American Revolution, Black chattel slavery had become a widespread institution, while white indentured servitude, by contrast, was on the decline.

It was not until the rise of militant abolitionism and the Civil War that whites would once again join Black people in a common struggle. Thousands of whites would give their lives in a conflict that ultimately resulted in the overthrow of Black chattel slavery. Of course, as before, this was a contradictory process. Letters from white soldiers show that most of them were racist. Nonetheless, through their resistance, Black Americans transformed the war for the Union into a war to abolish slavery, and in the process, pulled the white proletariat closer to the struggle for freedom and revolution. While the white working class was not necessarily interested in abolishing slavery, white workers played an important role in slavery’s downfall throughout the course of the war.

Following the Civil War and the defeat of Reconstruction, the Populist Movement emerged as a left-wing agrarian movement that included a layer of African-American farmers. This movement was also contradictory — here too, most of the whites involved were racist. Nonetheless, Black farmers and sharecroppers carved out a space for themselves within this movement, most notably in the form of the Colored Farmers National Alliance and Cooperative Union.

In the 1900s, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) attempted to forge a relationship with Black people in the South before

understanding of said forces. This is to be expected, it is the norm of society — but it poses a serious challenge to the development of a revolutionary movement.

Because of its separation from BIPOC revolutionaries, the white ultra-left is struggling to overcome the political counter-insurgency that is raging throughout the country. The white ultra-left is largely silent in most protests, which are dominated by reformists. When it’s time to riot, it does what needs to be done, but the political gains all continue to fall to the counterinsurgent activist middle classes, who instrumentalize the riots as leverage for the reorganization of capitalism. Meanwhile, revolutionaries have almost no political impact.

This division is proving to be costly. Crews of white race-traitors cannot intervene in meaningful ways without being accused of being outside agitators, putting people in danger, speaking out of turn, etc., a dynamic that has sidelined a large section of the revolutionary milieu and has the effect of transforming revolutionaries into foot soldiers for NGOs and the Democratic party. Until BIPOC comrades, and specifically Black comrades, emerge to challenge the Black led counterinsurgency and the BIPOC middle classes more broadly, it is hard to imagine how white revolutionaries will succeed in avoiding these pitfalls.

The return of the outside agitators

The middle classes and bourgeoisie who believed they had firm control over the proletariat cannot fathom what is now taking place. They cannot conceive of why masses of people would revolt against society. Instead, they assert that white outside agitators are behind the riots. Of course, those of us on the ground know that Black proletarians usually initiate the most insurrectionary tactics. But the myth of the outside agitator persists, and it is a powerful myth, designed to obscure the revolutionary nature of the uprising. Because of the hegemony of this myth, it is necessary to dissect it further.

The narrative of the white outside agitator first begins to take shape

amounts to an almost religious belief that whites can never change. As noted above, there are legitimate reasons for this belief, but it also generates major ethical and political problems regarding any strategy for revolution. Obviously, considerable sections of the white proletariat are racist, and we must be ready to engage them in battle. But if racism is not something innate, natural, and permanent, as the fascists maintain, then it means that these very same racists are capable of change.

While this might sound like we are advocating non-violence, downplaying racism, or arguing for some essential class unity, nothing could be further from the truth. Violence with racists is inevitable. But there are enough of them, and they have enough guns and support from the state that we cannot defeat them on military terms alone. Confronting them on the streets is important, but in the long-term we must also try to convince some of them that their commitment to whiteness only subordinates them to the bourgeoisie. This will be a slow, difficult, even dangerous process, but it can be done. Daryle Lamont Jenkins, an anti-fascist militant from the One People's Project, for example, convinced several white nationalists to abandon their racist affiliations, and facilitated their development into anti-racist militants. Many will justifiably not want to do this work — it is not for everyone. But it is important work, nonetheless. This work will not happen through some woke NGO workshop or Marxist journal, but through political experiences in mass struggles and conversations with other proletarians.

The white ultra-left

This exposes a longstanding problem in the US revolutionary left. On average, the revolutionary left reflects the segregated world of racial capitalism. While the ultra-left has correctly oriented itself towards the riots, and is in sync with the Black proletariat in highpoints of struggle, the white ultra-left returns to a segregated way of life during times of quiet. The paradox remains: the highpoints of struggle reveal the real relationship between revolutionary forces, but during most of our everyday lives all the diseases of racial capitalism continue to shape our relationships and common un-

being eventually crushed. In Philadelphia in the 1910s, they organized a powerful labor union among Black and Irish dock workers, the Local 8. Later, on in the 1930s the Communist Party made inroads with Black proletarians, but quickly lost respect on account of its popular front politics, which shut down anti-racist struggles in an effort to support the Allies during World War Two. With the explosion of mass struggles in the 1930s, Black and white workers temporarily came together in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). But with the exception of the IWW, various kinds of racism coursed through all these struggles. In many ways, class struggle among white workers assumed the form of anti-Blackness, a fact which culminated in Black workers calling the United Auto Workers union (UAW) "You Ain't White".

When the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power exploded on the scene in the 1960s, white workers were largely absent from the urban rebellions that took place. Although Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition formed alliances with white proletarians, overall, this effort did not generalize. The Black proletariat, unable to find an accomplice in the white proletariat, was forced to look outwards, to national liberation struggles in the Third World.

What can this history tell us about the present moment? One of the dynamics that it reveals is that the destinies of Black and white workers are tied together. The popular assumption is that BIPOC have had a deep history of solidarity in the U.S. While it is true that non-Black people of color were not involved in the enslavement and mass murder of Black people to the same extent as white people, this alone does not ensure that solidarity is a de facto political reality. There is no automatic unity among any of the racial formations in the U.S. proletariat. However, if there is any group that has fought and died alongside Black people in this country, it is white people. Black proletarians have made alliances with white proletarians either objectively as in the case of the Maroon communities and U.S. civil war, or on purpose via the original IWW or CIO. No doubt, the class struggle did not automatically defeat racism and anti-Blackness among white workers. This is precisely why we need to develop a revolutionary strategy concerning the white proletariat.

The return of the white proletariat

Following the lead of the Black proletariat in the George Floyd uprising, the white proletariat exploded back on to the stage of history. Whereas the white proletariat largely did not participate in the black urban rebellions of the 1960s, today there is a new generation of white millennials and Gen Z proles fighting and dying alongside Black proletarians in the streets. What do we make of this? How do we relate to white proletarians in these struggles? Can the forms of oppression they face be given a voice? Or does this inevitably lead to white supremacy?

Taking a cue from C.L.R. James, Noel Ignatiev warned against the dangers of trying to win over white workers at the expense of setting aside the demands of Black liberation. The critique of whiteness that Noel outlines in his 1972 essay, “Black Worker, White Worker,” seems to be playing itself out today in the broader BLM movement. Without endorsing every aspect of BLM’s program, anyone can see that it is more radical than that of Bernie Sanders or the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). In terms of mass politics, BLM is the most radical anyone has gone in this country in generations. It would be a catastrophic mistake to water down BLM in order to win over more whites.

At the same time, much of BLM’s framework remains trapped in the past. The proletariat that Ignatiev was working with is different from the one that exists today. We have seen a hardening of the class divide between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, including between the Black proletariat and the Black bourgeoisie. The white proletariat has also experienced this process of class immiseration. In the 1960s, it was riding the post World War II economic boom. But the current white proletariat has suffered decades of deindustrialization, austerity, the opioid crisis, the 2007/ 2008 crisis, and now the pandemic. As demonstrated by the rebellions, the glue of whiteness can no longer be counted on to hold all whites together. The 2020 uprising revealed a layer of white proletarians who we can describe as race-traitors. This layer does not identify with the structures of power that uphold a white dominated racial order. This fact

has yet to be integrated into a revolutionary strategy.

For the most part, however, the white proletariat and the Black proletariat remain deeply divided. The fact that a substantial number of white workers are fighting under the banner of Black Lives Matter is an important development, but many obstacles still stand in the way of a revolutionary alliance. As long as the Black proletariat is convinced that the white proletariat isn’t willing to fight racism to the finish, the horizon and possibilities of struggle will remain limited. The white proletariat has much work to do on this front.

If the Black and white proletarians are unable to form a revolutionary alliance, sooner or later the Black proletariat will have to stop fighting or, just as tragically, make alliances with other classes: the Black middle class, the white middle class, or even the white bourgeoisie. This is already happening within the NGOs and the Democratic Party. The white proletariat, in turn, will continue to uphold its own alliances with bourgeois society, further blocking the development of a revolutionary class struggle. In this way, the destinies of the Black and white proletariat are sealed together by the noose of racial capitalism. This is the paradox of Black liberation in the United States.

The white racists

The return of the white proletariat has also included the return of white racists. This should come as no surprise. *Just as a Black led multi-racial uprising was opposed by a Black led counter-insurgency, the emergence of white race-traitors has been matched by racist whites.* As the rebellions continue to flare up, more and more white vigilantes are stepping forward to violently defend capitalist property, resulting in a rising death toll among anti-racist militants, including a number of whites.

On one level, it is clear that armed self-defense is necessary. However, the larger question remains: what is our overall strategy?

Among the middle class left, much of what passes for anti-racism