

Democracy and Elections 2018:

What did the mid-term elections tell us about the impulse for democracy? How is the growing awareness that American politics is not democratic shaping politics?

Sponsored by: The League of Revolutionaries for A New America (LRNA) in Oakland

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Study participants: Below are the study questions we will be looking at together on December 1st. We are also attaching some articles and video clips that can be read and/or viewed before the study session that should help us in our thinking. The study assumes that all of us have analysis of the Mid-term elections and what they tell us about the thinking of the country as it gets expressed in elections. We will be reading and viewing some of this on December 1st. The main reading we recommend doing in advance (at least) is **Democracy: A Revolutionary Cause** listed as (a) for each question. (see text below). We look forward to hearing your thinking!!!

Given the elections we have just been through and your work with others:

Study Question #1: What are the problems or mis-conceptions with American Democracy?

a) Democracy: A Revolutionary Cause: (from: *May/June 2013 Rally Comrades Vol23 ed3* rallycomrades.lrna.org/2013/05/democracy-a-revolutionary-cause/) **(see text below)**.

b) Video: First World Problems - Why is There So Much Poverty in America?

<https://youtu.be/aj7I31bDHGU>

c) **Video: Barely Half of 30-Year-Olds Earn More Than Their Parents** <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-american-dream-is-fading-and-may-be-very-hard-to-revive-1481218911>

Study Question #2: Why is the new class a revolutionary social force today? Why is it important that the conscious revolutionaries understand this?

- a) Democracy: A Revolutionary Cause: (from: *May/June 2013 Rally Comrades Vol23 ed3* rallycomrades.lrna.org/2013/05/democracy-a-revolutionary-cause/) **(see text below)**.
- b) Excerpt from: Revolution and the Tasks of Revolutionaries. **(see text below)**.
<http://rallycomrades.lrna.org/2018/05/revolution-and-the-tasks-of-revolutionaries/>

Study question #3: What is the possibility of democracy considering the changing economic conditions, and political conditions?

- a) Democracy: A Revolutionary Cause: (from: *May/June 2013 Rally Comrades Vol23 ed3* rallycomrades.lrna.org/2013/05/democracy-a-revolutionary-cause/) **(see text below)**.
- b) **What Americans Don't Know About the Constitution:**
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3230 A public opinion poll conducted during the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution in 1987 found that most Americans were woefully ill-informed about the content and meaning of the document. Only a bare majority knew that the purpose of the Constitution was to create a federal government and define its powers. Nearly half believed that the Constitution contains Karl Marx's phrase "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."
- c) **From: "The Future is Up to Us: A Revolutionary Talking Politics with the American People," Nelson Peery (p. 127)** "We have the economic foundation today to give everyone in the U. S. the fundamentals for a cultured, orderly, decent existence. Everybody tonight could go into a nice home; tonight everybody could eat a sumptuous, healthy meal; tonight everybody could go to the opera. The material wherewithal exists right now. It will be expanded and made better, but we don't have to create it...This country is already industrialized. We don't need a state that is the owner of all the means of production to guarantee their development. I think the state as we know it today will collapse almost immediately. We need a government that regulates things, but not people...That's the kind of government that we are going to have, a government that organizes the distribution of the necessities of life, but is not ordering people around."

Full texts for above Questions:

Democracy: A Revolutionary Cause:

The American people have a long history of fighting for the ideal of democracy, of rule by “we the people.” When they kicked off the chains of monarchy in the Revolutionary War and found in the Civil War to end slavery, they were led by an ideal and a vision of democracy. Yet this has never found its completion, and cannot, under the capitalist system, which is based on class domination and exploitation – incompatible with true democracy and equality. Today as the capitalist system crumbles, destroying society, people are becoming aware that this ideal so valiantly fought for has become little more than a vote for a ‘lesser evil’ candidate – all beholden to corporate interests.

Under capitalism, there has been as much democracy as could be allowed as long as the ruling class maintained its domination and the system of private property. In an era when labor power was needed by the corporations to produce goods, a certain amount of democracy was permitted, and in fact was needed to keep social peace and the system functioning. With the introduction of the new labor replacing and labor-eliminating technology

— computers, automation, and robotization — these relations are being broken, as capitalism, the economic system based on one class profiting off the labor of another, objectively destroys itself.

While the American people hold this ideal of democracy as their highest value, and have been willing to repeatedly fight for it, the structure of capitalism only allowed it within certain boundaries. Two hundred and even a hundred years ago, the large number of Americans who were property owners, of small farms and businesses, made democracy based on small capitalist enterprises possible, with many people having some stake in the capitalist system. Since then, the consolidation of economic production in the hands of a few monster corporations has forever put an end to this.

In the past, “bourgeois democracy” allowed for certain rights and an illusion of fairness. Economic rights were never guaranteed as a part of this — that is, rights to the necessities of survival: housing, food, medical care. These things were always sold for profit; however, a majority of workers were able – through selling their labor – to buy these basic things. This kept the system going and ensured a measure of social peace.

The struggles between workers and capitalists were mainly over how much of the fruits of their labor would be kept by themselves, and how much expropriated in the form of profits (a form of theft) by the capitalist class. In fact, the super-exploitation of weaker and poorer parts of the globe allowed for a section of workers to live relatively stable lives, with the ownership of some personal property and the prospect of a better life for their children.

With the introduction of computerized automation in production, which is accelerating ever faster, the basis of capitalism is being destroyed, and the result is social destruction. As Marx and Engels so poetically described it in *The Communist Manifesto*, “all that is solid melts into air.” The introduction of this automated, labor-replacing production, by destroying the basis of capitalism, is also breaking apart capitalist relations. No institution built on this collapsing foundation can remain standing, including that of bourgeois democracy, with the laws, traditions, and institutions that in the past upheld these class relations.

People are waking up to the reality that what they thought of as democracy is being dismantled. They are seeing that no matter who they vote for, the results are basically the same: the stripping of civil and constitutional rights and due process, attacks on workers’ rights to bargain collectively, and the takeovers of local towns and cities by non- elected bodies, as in the “Emergency Financial Manager” in Michigan and the Rust Belt. The legislative creation of corporate personhood and the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision, which allows corporations a free hand at buying elections, represents a huge step toward the imposition of fascism — the merging of the corporations and the government.

For Question #2

Militarized police forces act as occupying troops in poor neighborhoods, where they kill at will. The criminalization of the poor and dispossessed – from the various laws against homeless people’s acts of survival (sleeping, begging, etc), to the rise of the privatized prison industry that profits on slave labor – all represent this move toward a fascist police state.

The stirrings in the form of resistance to the takeovers of local governments, the people’s occupation of the Wisconsin State Capitol, the rise of the Occupy movement with its anti- corporate message, and the surge of interest in creating a Third Party, are understood as true exercises of democracy in the best American tradition.

With the latest drastic budget cuts and abandonment of the poorest workers, the legislative administrators of the capitalist system are showing their hand: that those of us they no longer need to exploit for our labor are expendable, and won’t be housed or fed or kept alive, much less given any civil or human rights.

(For question #3)

No democracy is possible under these conditions. True and universal democracy can only exist in a society where people have full economic and

political rights, based on public ownership of production and distribution — “to each according to need” — not for the private profit of the few.

People are beginning to join their scattered struggles under the banner of a vision and understanding that the only possible alternative to this exploitive dying system is one based on cooperation. The struggle for reform and for democracy is now in reality a revolutionary one — to remake society along cooperative and truly democratic lines.

Excerpt from: Revolution and the Tasks of Revolutionaries.

As society struggles to reorganize itself, it is the task of revolutionaries to unite the thinking of the workers with the vision that the qualitatively new means of production makes possible...

Revolutionaries seek out the social force that, due to its position in society, can overturn the existing relations, and organize a new society that is capable of using the new means of production, to carry human progress forward. Today, a new class of workers is being created by the new electronic means of production. This new class is emerging as that force. Their demands for the basic necessities of life are at the center of the rising social struggle of the millions affected by these changes. The destructive consequences of the ongoing introduction of the qualitatively new means of production makes it more and more clear that the demands of the new class also represent the interests of society as a whole.

The process of the new class forming itself into a class, conscious of its interests and purpose, takes place in stages. In their struggles, now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real significance of their battles is their ever- expanding connections and experience of their common interests, and the introduction of new ideas that illuminate their fight. This organization of a class (and ultimately a political party that expresses its interests) is continually being upset again and again by the competition and division cultivated by the ruling class. But resting on the objective changes taking place in society, this movement continues to rise up again, stronger and mightier. Revolutionaries participate in every stage of the struggle to introduce the new quality - the new ideas of consciousness of class, a vision of a cooperative society, and a strategy to achieve that vision.

Ultimately, the historic task of the new class is to overturn the existing property relations, and to create the cooperative, communist society, that the qualitatively new technology makes possible. To accomplish this requires

a broad acceptance of communism as the practical means of reconstructing society; a broad core of conscious communists firmly embedded within the movement, who can influence the developing movement; and a communist political party that reflects the interests of the objectively communist class. Such a party would not be an ideological party, but a party that would lead the conscious and uncompromising fight of the class for the attainment of political power.

The Fight for a New Society

The movement is going toward communism. Its demands are coming into conflict with the State, which is standing in the way of the workers securing the basic necessities. This movement is in fact, if not in understanding, already struggling to transfer capitalist property to itself, in order to feed, clothe, house and care for itself. It is in the process of the movement's realization that the State will not redress its grievances, that the demands for new solutions are already arising.

Revolutionaries do not have to direct the movement, or pull it in a certain direction. Revolutionaries proceed from the recognition that the movement has an objective goal. We take the actual struggle of the revolutionary section of the class as the basis for our program, and push from within the movement for its accomplishment at each stage of development. In every struggle of the class, revolutionaries show the class a vision of the cooperative society that is possible, and a strategy to get there.

Extra:

Optional video suggestions: (Please view if you have time)

https://youtu.be/-Ey__4-CvAM

<https://youtu.be/s7tWHJfhiyo>

<https://youtu.be/7wC42HgLA4k>

What Americans Don't Know About the Constitution:

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3230 A public opinion poll conducted during the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution in 1987 found that most Americans were woefully ill-informed about the content and meaning of the document. Only a bare majority knew that the purpose of the Constitution was to create a federal government and define its powers. Nearly half believed that the Constitution contains Karl Marx's phrase "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

From: “The Future is Up to Us: A Revolutionary Talking Politics with the American People,” Nelson Peery (p. 127) “We have the economic foundation today to give everyone in the U. S. the fundamentals for a cultured, orderly, decent existence. Everybody tonight could go into a nice home; tonight everybody could eat a sumptuous, healthy meal; tonight everybody could go to the opera. The material wherewithal exists right now. It will be expanded and made better, but we don’t have to create it...This country is already industrialized. We don’t need a state that is the owner of all the means of production to guarantee their development. I think the state as we know it today will collapse almost immediately. We need a government that regulates things, but not people...That’s the kind of government that we are going to have, a government that organizes the distribution of the necessities of life, but is not ordering people around.”