

THE PSYCHOSIS  
OF IMPERIALISM

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BY THE  
KITES EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

As the crisis of the world capitalist-imperialist system deepens and the bourgeoisie has no resolution, and in the absence of an international communist movement posing a revolutionary alternative, not just individuals but *whole classes are losing their damn minds*. The COVID-19 pandemic—not so much the virus itself, but the accompanying social instability, failed government policies, and mass discontent fueling conspiracy theories—pushed things over the edge, and the psychosis of imperialism is setting in.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious signs of the psychosis of imperialism are the alarming number of mass shootings and the widespread popularity of Donald Trump. Mass shootings are often carried out by people steeped in white supremacist, misogynist, and/or fascist revanchist ideology married to reactionary NRA-style gun culture, who are fertilized by the proliferation of pornography and violent video games that raise children and teenagers to find enjoyment in the degradation and dehumanization of others (especially women). The growth—numerically and in irrationality—of “Trumpists” underscores the attractive force of right-wing conspiracy theories and fascist revanchism today. Many of those Trumpists are part of sections of the petty-bourgeoisie more likely to have been negatively affected by pandemic restrictions—the small businesses they owned had to shut down or restrict their operations. They reacted to any real or imagined government impositions on their way of life with a “give me liberty and give me death” mentality. They got roped into conspiracy theories that take a grain of truth—Jeffrey Epstein really did procure underage girls for sexual exploitation by members of the bourgeoisie—and use it to obfuscate the deeper workings of capitalism-imperialism. Since the Trumpist form of class insanity is likely more obvious to our readers, let us move on to another form of class psychosis, that of the liberal petty-bourgeoisie.

The liberal petty-bourgeoisie in the US first lost their minds when Trump got elected. Their holy church of bourgeois-democra-

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<sup>1</sup> An acknowledgment here to the comrade who coined the term “psychosis of imperialism” many years ago.

cy had failed them, and they did not know what to do about it, briefly taking to the streets in protest, and then resigning themselves to an uneasy faith in their failed saviors, the Democratic Party. Lucky for them, an additional false prophet had been added to their alter over the last decade: *postmodernist wokeness*, with which they could pose as saints abstaining from the oppressive realities of the world through reciting the right scriptures (woke language) and ridding themselves of guilt by filling the collection plate (donating to Black Lives Matter).<sup>2</sup>

When COVID-19 hit, the liberal petty-bourgeoisie was the least affected by it yet the most alarmed about it. Since they tend to work white-collar, professional, and intellectual jobs, they could by and large work from home, or even escape to vacation homes, and get everything they needed delivered, safely quarantining themselves while leaving the proletariat to deal with a deadly disease. Yet they developed a cult of social distancing and treated getting COVID-19 as some personal moral failing.<sup>3</sup> They blamed Trump and his unmasked followers for the pandemic and found themselves in denial when Biden proved no better, and in some ways worse, at curtailing the spread of COVID-19 than his predecessor. They lost their minds with Trump, found religion with Fauci, adopted “trust the science” as their catechism, and lost their minds again when that “science” (i.e., CDC guidance) told them “now you only have to quarantine for five days if you catch COVID.” Nevertheless, the liberal petty-bourgeoisie remains in an abusive relationship with the liberal bourgeoisie (not unlike the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys getting thrown under the bus by Trump over January 6<sup>th</sup>).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To put it another way, what has white allyship achieved over the last decade other than giving money to grifters, including many white grifters?

<sup>3</sup> That’s not to say masking and physical distancing are not necessary measures to lessen the spread of COVID-19, just that the liberal petty-bourgeoisie’s attitude to them was cultish and hypocritical (how many of them decided that taking off a mask to go eat brunch with their friends at their favorite restaurant was somehow exempt from their mask absolutism?).

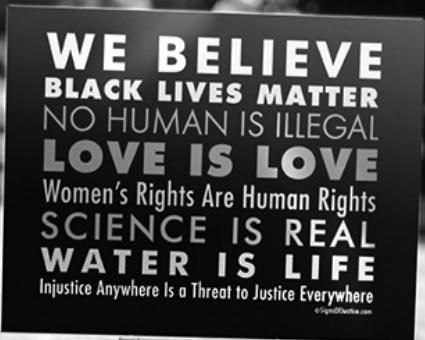
<sup>4</sup> While Trump has skated free of any liability for January 6<sup>th</sup>, Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and others who were egged on by Trump to storm the Capitol are receiving short prison sentences.

Meanwhile, the proletariat had to face the worst of the pandemic. They staffed the hospitals that were overflowing; they suffered from rapid viral spread in prisons, with New York state prisoners being used, like slaves, to make hand sanitizer; they went to work at meat packing plants that became vectors for viral spread; they transported and delivered the necessities and playthings of life; they shuttled people around via ride apps; and in so many other ways subjected themselves to far higher risk of COVID-19 so that capitalism-imperialism could continue functioning and the privileged classes could maintain their lifestyles at a safe distance. The children of the proletariat were shunted into highly automated online schools with little to no hands-on support and often without fair access to the devices needed to attend remote classes.<sup>5</sup> Pre-COVID-19, public and especially charter schools were already moving what passes for education in the google direction, such as replacing math class with computer games, essentially preparing the proletariat to work for Uber and Amazon, and COVID-19 gave those schools an excuse to deepen this dehumanization. The combination of economic insecurity, loss of recreation (Chicago at one point had parks shut down but bars open), and social isolat-

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<sup>5</sup> A new study reveals a significant increase in adverse mental health symptoms and other health indicators among children and adolescents during school closures. See R. Viner, S. Russell, and R. Saulle, et al., "School Closures During Social Lockdown and Mental Health, Health Behaviors, and Well-being Among Children and Adolescents During the First COVID-19 Wave: A Systematic Review," *JAMA Pediatrics* (2022, Vol. 176(4), 400-409).

The psychosis of imperialism illustrated: on the left a protester finds the Foo Fighters and Madison Square Garden guilty of crimes against humanity (without any sense of irony), and on the right the totem of contemporary petty-bourgeois liberalism, declaring moral superiority without changing a damn thing.



tion during the first years of COVID-19 worsened social problems among the people, from drug addiction to abuse to suicide. The proletariat got the worst of it all, but lost its mind the least.

That the proletariat is less infected with the psychosis of imperialism than other classes, however, should be no consolation for communists. Some members of our class are taken in, or at least impacted, by right-wing conspiracy theories, fascist revanchism, liberal bourgeois-democracy, and postmodernist wokeness. For example, older Black proletarians are likely to talk about “the system” when railing against injustices, but some younger Black proletarians might put the blame on “Karens.” Conspiracy theories of the *Behold the Pale Horse*<sup>6</sup> variety have long been popular in prisons, and, among some proletarians, have been merged with those of the QAnon variety. And as crime and gun violence in proletarian neighborhoods make news headlines, politicians like New York Mayor Eric Adams, who advocates a modified return to Giuliani-era policing, can potentially gain a foothold among some sections of the masses.

Even if the majority of the proletariat can see through these forms of imperialist psychosis, that does not mean they can cut through it all with a revolutionary road forward. And that’s not their fault, for what they lack is a communist leadership with the adequate reach and organizational strength.

## CUTTING THROUGH IT ALL

One of the challenges before us today is showing how to “cut through it all,” and by this we mean how to cut through the divide between liberal and conservative-now-fascistic sections of the bourgeoisie and the sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, labor aristocracy, and bourgeoisified workers who constitute the subaltern

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<sup>6</sup> A conspiracy theory book that has been popular inside US prisons for decades, has fueled the militia movement, and has been referred to as the “mother of all conspiracy theories.”

classes beholden to bourgeois hegemony.<sup>7</sup>

Neither side of the bourgeoisie has a solution for the crises before it, and the perpetual rivalry between the two sides serves as an effective foil. Both sides can amp up their bases and score electoral victories by painting the other side as a grave danger. The political representatives of each side of the bourgeoisie appeal to the class interests and cultural preferences of different subaltern classes, and so the rivalry between the two sides remains crucial to maintaining the allegiance of the subaltern classes. And the bourgeoisie does not, at present, need to impose one uniform mode of rule over all of society, but can practice liberal tolerance and postmodernist weakness in some places and for some sections of people, draconian repression for others, and Christian fundamentalist laws for others. Analysis that fails to comprehend the flexibility of bourgeois rule will miss this fact.

Over the last decade or two, fascist ideology and politics have made substantial inroads among certain sections of the people, and in some imperialist countries, sections of the bourgeoisie have supported fascist politicians. Moreover, the bourgeoisie is not a puppet master, and must take into account, utilize, and cannot simply turn off the drive towards fascist revanchism among some classes and social groups. For example, the bourgeoisie as a whole, including its liberal sections, needs the police to protect its social order and keep down the proletariat and oppressed nationalities. For the police to perform that function, openly white-supremacist and reactionary ideology must be allowed a considerable degree of free reign among the police. Members of the liberal bourgeoisie may find those ideologies and the people beholden to them deplorable—it's hard to imagine Hillary Clinton having a friendly dinner

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<sup>7</sup> “Subalterns” is among the terms used by Italian communist Antonio Gramsci that have been grossly misinterpreted by petty-bourgeois academics. Gramsci used *subaltern* to describe classes who were junior partners of the bourgeoisie, like how in British military terminology a subaltern is a junior officer. Don’t learn Marxism from petty-bourgeois academics.

with Officer O’Malley<sup>8</sup>—but they need them to keep their system functioning. The police may at times exert their class outlook in ways that conflict with sections of the bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie cannot neatly sew up this contradiction.

That aside on the police is helpful background to understanding why the liberal bourgeoisie has been “spineless” in the face of the growth of fascist ideology and politics. It’s not that they never clamp down on reactionary movements (the Congressional hearings on the January 6th assault on the Capitol; Trudeau’s repression of the Freedom Convoy protests). But they do not, at present, have the necessity or freedom to move decisively against fascist forces inside and outside of government. That is why there is no effort on their part to abolish the US Senate or the Electoral College, despite the fact that both institutions only serve to prop up reactionary and fascistic politicians and politics—after all, both institutions were created to ensure the equal power of slave-owning states.

The liberal bourgeoisie’s “spinelessness,” in turn, cascades down to the sections of the petty-bourgeoisie that follow in its wake. Those sections of the petty-bourgeoisie used to justify their political sterility with their faith in the church of bourgeois-democracy. But as bourgeois-democracy has increasingly failed them and is under assault by fascist elements, postmodernist woke ness has stepped into the breach to aid bourgeois-democracy in keeping the liberal petty-bourgeoisie under bourgeois hegemony. One example of this development is that the liberal petty-bourgeoisie used to be firm advocates of “free speech,” but now frequently advocate censorship of views that conflict with postmodernist woke values, with a group-think mentality reminiscent of religious cults.

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<sup>8</sup> For those unfamiliar with this reference, in the mid-2000s, proletarian youth in New York referred to any and all police as “Officer O’Malley,” including right to their face, in wonderful everyday acts of defiance. Whoever started the “Officer O’Malley” slang, it was an insightful way of highlighting how the NYPD in some ways still functions like a bunch of racist Irish street thugs.

Postmodernist wokeness has rendered the liberal petty-bourgeoisie an even more ineffectual political force that did its faith in the Democratic Party, as evidenced by its weak responses to the Trump presidency and the 2020 rebellions against police brutality. Large sections of the liberal petty-bourgeoisie now obsess over language policing, real or imagined emotional trauma in response to injustices (rather than stopping the injustices themselves), and advancing their careers through displaying proper diversity, equity, and inclusion credentials. The liberal petty-bourgeoisie has miserably failed to take any substantial risks or make any serious moves to fight fascist encroachments (exhibit A: widespread capitulation to the US Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade among the liberal petty-bourgeoisie, with the exceptions of high school students and retirees) or win real victories in the struggle against the police killing of Black and other oppressed people.

Without a class-conscious section of the proletariat able to cut through the middle of it all, where does the growing polarization in imperialist society leave people? One telling example is the revolt of Chinese residents of San Francisco against postmodernist wokeness. The San Francisco Bay Area has long been a center of radical politics and culture, from the militant longshore workers' struggles to hippies, from the Berkeley Free Speech Movement to the Black Panthers in Oakland to the gay liberation movement. But in recent decades, the incursion of tech capital has rendered it almost unlivable for proletarians, turning whole sections of the Bay Area into gentrified playgrounds for the new tech bourgeoisie and their petty-bourgeois compatriots. Combined with the overall gutting of social welfare in the US and the opioid crisis, the result is mass homelessness, public drug use and abuse, and petty crime.

Caught in between the new aristocracy and the no-longer-working class is a class segment of Chinese immigrants and their descendants, who have been part of San Francisco for decades. They often occupy a class position above Black and Latino proletarians, but still having to work long hours for low pay,

sometimes by way of “self-exploitation” in family-owned stores. Like in NYC, Chinese families in San Francisco have found ways to utilize the public school system to facilitate the upward mobility of their children, using merit-based admissions for selective enrollment schools, which pave the way for attending top universities. Then the San Francisco Board of Education tried to take away that possibility.

The San Francisco Board of Education had already made headlines for trying to wash away a historically significant Popular-Front-era mural that gave an honest depiction of the founding of the United States. Even while San Francisco had lower COVID-19 cases than other cities, its Board of Education moved slowly to reopen the schools, but put energy into changing names of schools that were deemed racist by a study it commissioned. The study, finished in 2020, proposed renaming one-third of San Francisco public schools, including those named after Abraham Lincoln, the conservationist John Muir, and sitting US Senator Dianne Feinstein. As a US Senator, Feinstein undoubtedly enforces white supremacy, but two facts reveal the hollowness and hypocrisy of renaming the school that was named after her. (1) All the members of the San Francisco Board of Education most likely voted for her multiple times. (2) Although Feinstein is reportedly quite senile, *she still occupies a position of power in the ruling class* whether or not a local school displays her name.

“Westward Vision,” a panel from the communist painter Victor Arnautoff’s *Life of Washington*. Arnautoff was commissioned by the Works Progress Administration to paint a mural cycle for the opening of San Francisco’s George Washington High School in 1936, and produced a subversive depiction of the founding of the US. The San Francisco Board of Education first tried to have the mural painted over, and then concealed from view, before a judge intervened.





Many Chinese parents were undoubtedly annoyed by the Board of Education's concern for the names of schools over the quality of education, a perfect example of postmodernist wokeness's concern for language over material relations and the liberal bourgeoisie only delivering symbolic reforms rather than ones that provide real material benefits for the masses (free healthcare, for example). But what really enraged Chinese parents was when the Board of Education tried to move away from merit-based admissions to selective enrollment schools because the merit-based tests are racist (they are). The Board was effectively going to take away a crucial tool that Chinese families used for upward mobility.

On top of the education question, following the onset of COVID-19 and after the 2020 rebellions, many Chinese families found themselves in the crosshairs of a rising crime wave, including a nationwide spike in anti-Asian hate crimes. Given where they lived and worked, they were caught between the impoverished sections of the proletariat and the wealthier sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, essentially constituting a buffer that enabled the wealthy to avoid dealing with the social problems created

by poverty. In 2019, Chesa Boudin, who disappointingly chose a very different life path than his biological or adopted parents,<sup>9</sup> was elected San Francisco District Attorney. When Boudin took office in 2020, he was heralded as the most radical of all the recently elected “progressive prosecutors.” Rightly or wrongly, he was blamed for the rising crime wave and for failing to address homelessness and drug use.

The actions of the woke Board of Education and the progressive prosecutor set the stage for a reactionary *and completely understandable* revolt by Chinese voters in San Francisco. They used the power of community organizing, California’s ostensibly democratic (in actuality quite reactionary) recall laws, and Republican money to stage a recall campaign that ousted the Board of Education and then kicked Chesa Boudin out of the District Attorney’s office. Their justifiable grievances with the failures of postmodernist wokeness and “progressive” bourgeois-democracy to deal with their real problems pushed them towards a reactionary resolution. We can only expect more of this in the future, as the actions, inactions, and politics of the liberal bourgeoisie push sections of the popular classes into the outstretched arms of fascism.

Obviously the only real and permanent cure for the psychosis of imperialism is proletarian revolution. Up until that cure can be administered, two treatment plans can diminish the psychosis of imperialism so that the patient (the popular classes) can find the strength to escape from their strait jackets (bourgeois ideologies).

The first treatment plan is for communists to mount major political interventions that mobilize the masses to transform the political landscape and clear a path forward. For example, when millions of people were heartbroken and outraged over the mass shooting of

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<sup>9</sup> Boudin’s biological and adoptive parents were, respectively, Kathy Boudin, David Gilbert, Bernardine Dohrn, and Bill Ayers. All were part of the heroic, if strategically misguided, Weather Underground organization and made great sacrifices, especially Kathy Boudin, who was in prison for 23 years, and David Gilbert, in prison for 40 years.



The brutal massacre of 19 students and two teachers in Uvalde, TX was the latest in a string of horrific mass shootings across the US and Canada. The police not only failed to prevent the shooting, but also failed to intervene to stop the shooting in progress for over 45 minutes.

school children in Uvalde, Texas, and thousands of protesters gathered outside the subsequent National Rifle Association (NRA) convention, what if revolutionaries had organized that outrage into a force determined to *physically shut down the NRA meeting* and run its members out of town? Yes, the NRA crackers and the police protecting them might have taken down some on our side, but the stakes are too high not to be taking bold and decisive actions like that right now. Or what if states in the US that have banned abortion were flooded with serious organizers determined to unleash the fury of women against the Christian fascists, inside and outside of government, who want to impose archaic forms of patriarchy over women? Couldn't such a force potentially overturn those abortion bans through mass resistance (and no shortage of arrests)? What if, as COVID-19 vaccines were rolled out, people in their millions were mobilized to demand that the pharmaceutical companies—who received massive government funding so they could massively profit from COVID-19 vaccines—make their vaccines *open source* so that oppressed countries can cheaply and quickly manufacture them and so that these vaccines can be assessed by scientists who don't work for Big Pharma or federal government agencies, which would help answer un-

derstandable skepticism about what the pharmaceutical companies have cooked up?<sup>10</sup> We could give plenty more examples of where a political intervention could transform the landscape, but the point here is to emphasize the potential and necessity to lead masses of people in *bold actions* that can *force* the bourgeoisie to make moves they do not want to make, and doing so in ways that bring the proletariat's class interests to the fore without picking one side or another in the conflict within the bourgeoisie.

The second treatment plan is the creation of what comrades in Canada have called a *proletarian media empire* that can show people, through concrete exposures concerning current events, how the functioning of the capitalist-imperialist system is behind all the injustices in the world. Such a proletarian media empire would have to be worlds apart from all the Leftist media today that only resonates with a select group of people. It would have to develop a broad reach and literally compete with the bourgeois media in order to train the masses of people in proletarian class-consciousness. With that consciousness, people would begin to develop immunity to the barrage of bourgeois ideology, whether in the form of conspiracy theories, fascist revanchism, liberal bourgeois-democracy, or postmodernist wokeness, that right now has them losing their minds.

Neither of these treatment plans, let alone the cure, for the psychosis of imperialism can truly be developed without the leadership of a communist vanguard party, and there is not such a party in Canada or the US today. We will have much to say about the need for a communist vanguard party, especially by way of lessons we can learn from past communist organizations in the US and Canada, in the next two issues of *kites*. In this issue, our content focuses on analyzing several of the crises rocking capitalism-imperialism and fostering the psychosis of imperialism we speak of.

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<sup>10</sup> This approach draws on the analysis made in “Worsening crisis under US-Duterte regime is generating greater resistance,” *Ang Bayan*, published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Special Issue, 26 December 2021.

Our editorial for the 2022 International Women's Day, titled "Between Gilead and OnlyFans: Notes on the Oppression of Women in 21st-Century Capitalism-Imperialism," seeks to cut through both archaic forms of patriarchy and more modern ones of the reactionary "sex work is work" variety and point to a path for women's liberation. We were fortunate to be able to pair this editorial with an interview we conducted with Coni Ledesma of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, titled "It is only in participating in the revolution that women can work for their liberation."

In Canada this past winter, the so-called Freedom Convoy besieged the Trudeau government in Ottawa. While Leftists and liberals alike wrote the Freedom Convoy off as a bunch of fascist yokels, comrades Jorge, Paul, and Arthur conducted social investigation among those gathered in Ottawa to learn their motivations and researched the class and political forces at play within the convoy movement. They discovered deep fissures within the ruling class beneath the surface, and many people from the popular classes with legitimate grievances about the Canadian government's handling of COVID-19 who were being drawn towards libertarian and reactionary politics, who could potentially be moved in a different direction if there were a political force with the will and ability to move them. The result of their work, "War in the Enemy's Camp: An Investigation into the 'Freedom Convoy' Movement," is perhaps the most in-depth piece of communist journalism by comrades in North America for the last decade or more.

Another crisis that has created widespread confusion and plenty of bad takes is the war in Ukraine. In "Contested Nation: Ukraine and the Present War Amidst Great Power Politics and Inter-Imperialist Rivalries," F.O. Marthoz cuts through all the faulty analysis out there, from Western and Russian bourgeois media to Leftist nonsense, to show the imperial rivalries at work behind the war. To make a materialist analysis, Marthoz digs into the history of Ukraine as a nation before, during, and after the Soviet Union and the various political forces involved in that history and the current war. In the course of addressing the Ukraine war and the pletho-

ra of bad takes on it, Marthoz's article helps clarify crucial matters of communist principle with broader relevance, including the national question, revolutionary defeatism, and the responsibilities of communists as inter-imperialist contradictions create greater dangers and opportunities.

In "Seven Theses on Imperialism and the Drug War," Aiyanas Ormond makes a class analysis of the drug economy, examines the drug war's effect on the proletariat and the role of drugs in society, and suggests ways revolutionaries might develop mass struggle against the bourgeoisie's drug war.

The final two contributions in *kites* #7, departing from the main theme of crises in the capitalist-imperialist system, distinguish real revolutionary communism from the paltry politics of postmodernism and the Left. "Tin-Man Maoism" is a back and forth between Tyler's summation of the now defunct so-called Maoist Revolutionary Party in Philadelphia and responses from Kenny Lake of the *kites* Editorial Committee. "Key Words: Communist vs. Leftist and Postmodernist Conceptions" is aimed at helping would-be revolutionaries sharpen their understanding of communist principles.

Finally, to wrap it all up, we're excited to present the stunning artwork of comrade Ruby Lois, whose contributions to *kites* #7 capture everyday moments of struggle and resilience in the lives of proletarian women.

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As the crises of the capitalist-imperialist system continue to proliferate and intensify, and the psychosis of this system has whole segments of society losing their damn minds, the need for concerted political intervention of communist revolutionaries becomes ever more urgent.

What does it mean to seize upon the multiplying opportunities? It means would-be communists getting their shit together by closing ranks, and struggling for the ideological, political, and or-

