

THE CLASS STRUGGLE CHRONICLE

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**Partner
of
Exploitation**

OPPRESSION



SOLIDARITY FOREVER!



The Louisville Workers Brigade is an association of working people dedicated to educating, supporting, and uniting working class forces in the Louisville community. We organize with union and non-union workers alike.

The Brigade **educates** workers by organizing regular Educational Presentations which focus on Labor and Working Class history and issues and by producing easy-to-read literature for working people.

The Brigade **supports** workers through aid during strikes, by platforming workplace grievances, by providing counsel to workers exploring options to organize their workplaces, and through organizing solidarity actions for workers.

Lastly, the Brigade **unites** workers by breaking down the divisions which the owning class has used to divide workers against each other and by organizing regular Community Socials where working people can meet other workers in the community and can begin to build ties of solidarity with one another.

The Brigade proudly continues the legacy of Class Struggle Unionism which understands that our present economic system is design for the minority owning class to become unbelievably wealth off the labor of the majority Working Class. We reject the false notion of “peaceful coexistence” between these two rival classes whose interests are diametrically opposed to one another. Instead, we seek to heighten this class conflict by empowering workers to secure economic, political, social, and cultural power for themselves through struggle.

Though we organize in the greater Louisville community, the Brigade stands in solidarity with the diverse International Working Class and we oppose all social chauvinisms and bigotries which divide workers against each other, including sexism, misogyny, queerphobia, racism, and nativism. We believe that Working Class Liberation must always be synonymous with Women’s Liberation, Black Liberation, and Queer Liberation and support the struggles of exploited and oppressed peoples everywhere.

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Oppression: The Partner of Exploitation

The Louisville Workers Brigade

February 1, 2025

The Louisville Workers Brigade takes a class analysis in all that we do. This means that we see the exploitation of working people by the owning class as the central, primary, and fundamental issue within our present society. This does not mean, however, that we ignore oppression in society. We are not class reductionists. We realize that there have been groups before, and perhaps there are still some in existence, who take this unscientific view and the Brigade would repudiate such a position, insisting that exploitation and oppression are partners to one another within our present economic ordering, both serving the purpose of strengthening the power of the owning class. We firmly believe that any truly working class organization should tackle and combat both forms of injustice.

To clarify our position, we want to begin with an explanation of both terms, exploitation and oppression.

When the Brigade speaks of exploitation, we are referring to the fact that working people, under our present economic system, create value and wealth by their labor that they do not receive; instead, they are given a wage (or salary or commission) that represents only a fraction of that value; the lion's share of that value goes to their employer who does not labor themselves, but makes their illegitimate claim to that value simply by virtue of owning the business itself. This theft is called exploitation. The Brigade recognizes exploitation as the chief issue in society because we have studied the history of human development and see that it is the evolution of production that has most shaped societies, communities,

nations, and peoples. We identify class, more than any other distinction among peoples, as the primary driver for injustice in the world. And, finally, we acknowledge that exploitation is the common denominator for all working people, regardless of age, race, nationality, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

When the Brigade speaks of oppression, we are referring to the various social, national, racial, and gendered injustices that favors one grouping of people over another. The most common forms of oppression within U.S. society include racism, misogyny, queerphobia, nativism, and the like. The Brigade recognizes these social chauvinisms as tools for the owning class to divide working people against each other, to solidify and fortify their power and hegemony. All of these forms of oppression are made possible by the division of society into classes and are rampant within our current economic ordering. In times of economic crisis, when working people begin to organize and to demand a new economic ordering free of exploitation, the owning class will methodically inflame and enlarge the oppression of the most marginalized communities within society, shifting blame from the system itself to a social scapegoat; this process—when coupled with increased political repression, corporate consolidation of power, and nationalist fervor—is called fascism.

While the Brigade centers our organizing around the workplace, the site of exploitation, we do not ignore the various manifestations of oppression in our society. In fact, we

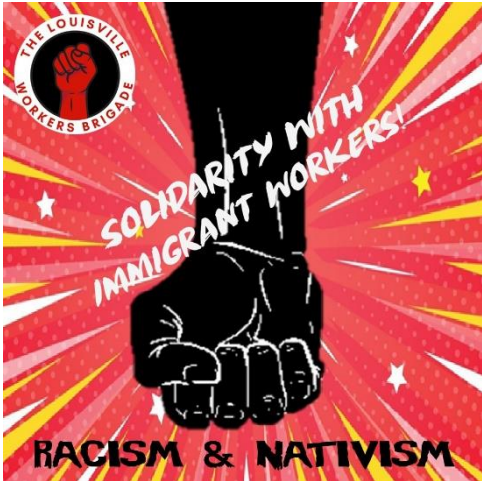
recognize that activism against oppression is often the entry point for many budding left-progressive individuals, including for some of our own organizers. We firmly stand for Black, Women's, and Queer Liberation, for a free Palestine, for universal healthcare, for prison abolition, and for climate justice. The Brigade seeks not to isolate these struggles from each other, though. We do not believe the various oppressions can be addressed, or even understood, in isolation. Instead, we believe a clear understanding of class is necessary to see how these forms of oppression have thrived and how they can be combatted. Lastly, we believe the ultimate abolition of oppression is intricately and inseparably tied to the abolition of exploitation.

Just as exploitation—via alienation, the erosion of workplace conditions, and the depression of wages—has real life consequences, often fatal consequences, for working people, oppression also has devastating effects on everyday people. We see, in today's political climate, the patriarchal assault against women's autonomy and rights, the effect of climate change and pollution on the most marginalized communities, the violent and brutal policing of people of color, and the imperial boot on the necks of colonized people abroad. Daily we witness the criminalization of substance users, the dehumanizing of immigrants, and the attacks against Queer people. Oppression, like exploitation, is not just some theoretical concept, but a reality for billions of human beings, suffering and dying because of the systemic failures of our current system. Oppression, then, is the partner to exploitation, both having real and devastating effects on working people.

The Louisville Workers Brigade stands in unwavering solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world. We organize and strive, not only for the

abolition of exploitation, but for the liberation of all oppressed communities. We invite all working and oppressed people to recognize the ties which bind our struggles, to identify our common enemies, to see that our liberation movements depend on one another, and to unite in unbreakable solidarity for our common interests. Together, we, as the working and oppressed majority, can end this current system of injustice, tyranny, and demoralization. We can build a new world that serves our interests.

Workers of the world and oppressed peoples, unite!



Solidarity with Immigrants

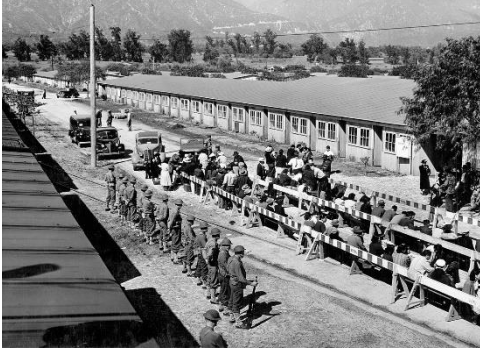
Dalton Nolan

February 10, 2025

The last few weeks have been incredibly dizzying and turbulent for vast swathes of the working and oppressed people in this country due to Trump's string of executive orders. One of the most consequential and most immediate of these executive orders have been related to immigration. In one executive order, Trump declared the situation at the southern border of the US a "national emergency," which would allow the Department of Defense to more intimately work with the Department of Homeland Security to "secure" the southern border, with plans to send troops to the border. This and many other executive orders are a clear coordinated assault on immigrants across the US. With ICE once again ramping up its operations, and now that churches, schools, and hospitals are no longer safe havens, nowhere do immigrants feel safe. Even other ethnic groups are not safe, with ICE racially profiling and detaining members of the Navajo in one of their raids. All of this has predictably caused panic and fear among immigrants in the US, and it is our responsibility as organizers to assist our immigrant brothers and sisters during all of this. However, while Trump and his lackeys represent the most blatant and explicit form of nativism our country has seen recently, such rhetoric is neither new nor restricted to the Republicans, with the US and the Democrats having a long, storied history with nativism stretching far back into our history and that still continues to this day.

One of the earliest legislative attacks on immigrants was the Alien and Sedition Act of 1789, increasing the residency requirement (i.e., how long you have to reside in the US before being eligible for citizenship) for naturalization from 5 years to 14 years, all done to weaken the power base of the other political party of the time—a political ploy common throughout the history of immigration. Moving ahead a few decades, we see the establishment of the Know-Nothings Party, a political party that sought to organize protesters in opposition to Catholics, specifically Irish Catholics, to defend the country against a conspiracy to overthrow US society. In the late 1800s, Chinese immigration to the US exploded, with many of these new arrivals coming here to either join the gold rush or to find work, which usually meant working on the Transcontinental railroad. The sudden rise in the number of Chinese immigrants sparked a reaction that saw Republicans and Democrats vote in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first piece of immigration legislation targeting a specific ethnicity or nationality. In 1919 and 1920, after a series of mailbombings by Anarchists, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer launched a series of raids across the country, arresting suspected immigrant leftists in the US and deporting them, with the aim of "safeguarding" America from the poison of radicalism "brought" to the country by immigrants. This belief in safeguarding America would be the reason given for the later corralling of Japanese-Americans into what were effectively concentration camps under

the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt during WWII.



In the brief history of nativism in the US I've detailed above, one constant in many of these incidents is the ties nativism has to racism. In each example, the "othering" that occurs from nativist rhetoric, pitting immigrants against non-immigrants, often falls back to racial connotations and language, especially in the US. This is most apparent in recent history, where nativism is inseparable from racism. For example, following 9/11, many people of color, regardless of whether they were Arab or not, were routinely targeted and harassed because of the anti-Arabic, anti-Muslim hysteria that the media and our politicians were fueling to drum up support for American intervention in the Middle East. Today, the way that the Republican party and Trump speak about immigrants cements the connection between nativism and racism, with words like "aliens," "criminals," and "invaders" used to create a boogeyman for working people to fear, distracting them from the real monsters—the owning class. This redirection isn't limited to the Republicans. While the Republicans use the immigrants as scapegoats, the Democrats use immigrants as props to redirect working people's attention to the Republicans, with the Democrats only caring about immigrants when Trump was in office but not when Obama was deporting immigrants or when children were still in cages under Biden's presidency. In this, immigrants

become props to consistently misdirect and control working people.



Sidewalk Bubblegum ©1993 Clay Butler

The oppression of immigrants begins not when they enter the US, but back in their homeland before they even leave. Whether they're from the Middle East, Central America, or some other part of the world, the would-be immigrants are forced to suffer from the political, social, and economic fallout from the US "intervening" in their affairs. These "interventions" could be through the International Monetary Fund, an arm of American imperialism, in which much-needed funding is held behind predatory "policy changes" and "economic restructuring" that demand a country open up and submit to American business interests at the expense of the local population. "Interventions" could also be through sanctions or the US invading a country to enforce its demands, effectively ruining the country in the process. Combined with a history of colonial and neo-colonial rule, and we have a situation where most of the world's population is unable to live in the lands they were born in. This is why many choose not to go through the long, complicated immigration process that the US crafted because people can't wait in line to jump through so many hoops when they have children to feed. Even when the immigrants make it to the US for a better life, to a country that

supposedly welcomes all people, they are discriminated against based on their appearance and culture, with many people not wanting to associate with them or demanding they assimilate (e.g., “speak English”). This has left immigrant communities and individuals even more isolated, hurting them in the long run especially when we remember that undocumented immigrants have limited access to life-sustaining services for fear that they’ll be deported. And this lingering fear of being deported by ICE, combined with scapegoating and now quotas for deportations, makes the lives of immigrants more horrifying because, at any moment, ICE officials could come to their church or their children’s school to deport them.



Immigrants are no strangers to exploitation, with it beginning in their mother country. Whether as an individual working for a multinational corporation or simply living within a country ravaged by said corporations, the labor of the would-be immigrants and their friends, families, and communities is taken advantage of by these corporations, with all of them forced to work in hazardous conditions for little pay so that the owners of these companies can make a pretty penny. This is in addition to the land and resources of the immigrants' homeland being uprooted and poisoned by the companies for the sake of ever-greater profits. Yet, once the immigrants flee this nightmare, they enter into a new one in the US. Inside the US, undocumented immigrants exist in a precarious situation in which one wrong move

could lead to them being deported. This means that whatever backbreaking job for little pay they are forced to do, they must do whatever the boss tells them to do under threat of being reported to ICE. Under this “American Nightmare,” undocumented immigrants have limited job opportunities, are forced to work in hazardous conditions, have little to no labor protection, are unable to adequately defend against wage theft or abuse, and are under constant threat of being reported to ICE by their bosses. In addition to this, because of language barriers to understanding what little rights they do have as immigrants and as workers, most immigrants are either disinterested or fearful of unionizing, making it even more difficult for them to combat abuses from their bosses.

Due to centuries of propaganda stoked by the media, politicians, and even corporations, many working people still struggle to identify themselves with immigrants. Working Americans often see the immigrants as too different from them or their struggles as not serious, leading to, at best, apathy or, worse, nativism if they buy into the propaganda. This shouldn’t be the case, as while the non-immigrant doesn’t experience all the obstacles that an immigrant goes through, there are plenty of areas of concern that unite both. Firstly, following 9/11, Democrats and Republicans voted in the Patriot Act ostensibly to combat “terrorism.” The Patriot Act was instead used to create an extensive network of surveillance and to spy on all working and oppressed people alike without any probable cause. The Patriot Act only gained significant support because of the anti-Arab, anti-Muslim hysteria the owning class and its allies created, meaning that they used immigrants as political props in order to then spy on the entire country.



Secondly, as we saw with the Palmer Raids, which targeted immigrants who were often labor organizers and leftists, the new administration isn't opposed to using deportation as a tool to "remove" pro-Palestinian non-immigrant students. In the executive order on the matter, "Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism," no definition of antisemitism is given, meaning that the Zionist definition of "criticizing Israel" and "supporting Palestine" qualifies as "antisemitism" in the eyes of the state. All of this serves to weaken our collective ability to organize against oppression and exploitation and disrupts our ability to stand in solidarity with working and oppressed people here and abroad.

Thirdly, despite differences in customs, immigrants and non-immigrants share the same class interests. As working people, we all want decent housing, access to quality and affordable healthcare, to work in a safe and well-paying job, to have time to be able to relax however we see fit, etc., etc. Ultimately, we all strive for the ability to have self-determination, to be able to choose our own destiny in opposition to the whims of some distant boss who only cares about making money. These are what our class interests are, and they are what unite us in this class struggle. It is through this recognition of our shared class interests that we can begin to build international solidarity. With

international solidarity, like with all other forms of solidarity, the power of each working person is multiplied tenfold, working class militancy is strengthened, and we have the power to fight for our shared class interests in opposition to the owning class.



It has only been a few weeks since Trump was inaugurated, and he has come out swinging. All of this has led to so much hardship for immigrants across the country, and they need our help now more than ever. The first part of assisting immigrants is learning more about their plight, especially important is dispelling the many lies that have been propagated about them for centuries. In addition to learning, it is important to reach out to organizations that provide assistance to immigrants, offering whatever support you can to make sure that they are able to continue providing their much-needed services to immigrant communities. If you join a community defense group that responds to ICE raids, then you must be very careful how you present yourself and act during these encounters. Your community defense group will likely have some training that you'll have to follow, but some key information to keep in mind is that your actions can and will impact the community you're trying to help, you're there to provide whatever support the community deems necessary. The final part of helping immigrants is reaching out to your immigrant and non-immigrant co-workers and community members about the situation. When talking to your immigrant co-workers, you should

provide them with support, both emotional and material, while also giving them important information about the rights they have, which can be found on the ACLU's website at this link: <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/immigrants-rights>. In your discussions with your non-immigrant co-workers, your goal is to get them to care about the plight of their immigrant brothers and sisters by telling them what they're going through, why it's important to care, and what they can do to help.

Recent events have shaken the country to its core, and it is understandable that many people are fearful of what is to come. But it's important to note that we've survived under Trump once before, and nativism isn't new.

The explicit and targeted assault of immigrant communities under Trump is merely just another episode in America's long history of nativism and is one that the Democrats are allowing to happen without any resistance whatsoever. It is for this reason that we cannot allow ourselves to become paralyzed by fear. If the Democrats are not going to challenge this attack on immigrants, then it's up to all of us, working and oppressed people, to do something about it. Through learning about and supporting our immigrant brothers and sisters in their plight, we can make a real difference and, most importantly, build international solidarity. Through this international solidarity, we can march forward, with all working and oppressed people together, toward a world where the concept of "immigration" is a thing of the past and we all live in harmony with one another.



The Working Class Must Smash the Patriarchy

Dalton Nolan

February 17, 2025

For as long as human society has existed, patriarchy has existed alongside it. Under patriarchy, an extra layer of hierarchy exists in which only two genders are recognized—male and female—and one gender dominates the other in all spheres of life. This dynamic leads to the creation of a society in which men and women are divided into clear and explicit roles that serve the interests of the ruling classes throughout history. Though the class system modifies patriarchy, creating a clear distinction in the presentation of patriarchy between the toiling masses and the ruling classes, in general, the gender roles of men and women in society cross class lines. Within patriarchy, men are granted the power of agency and, by extension, the power and recognition to shape the world around them; in contrast, women are to always be the supporters of male development and advancement, sacrificing everything for them. In patriarchal logic, men are the “breadwinners,” and women are the “homemakers,” allowing for a “proper” division of society that creates a group of workers and a group that reproduces the workers. Despite this, the present economic system demands a steady supply of workers in order to maximize profit, and since it takes time to raise a child to become a wage slave, society was *forced* to allow women into the workforce. However, this creates a contradiction: women are supposed to be “homemakers,” according to the patriarchy, but the vast majority of them are workers. This contradiction has been at the heart of the oppression and exploitation of women for nearly two centuries.

The oppression and exploitation of women within class society are extensive. At the heart of their oppression, women are deemed subservient to the men in their lives, whether they be male co-workers, their husbands, their fathers, etc. From this, women are expected to default to male authority and power, meaning that women are to never have any agency of their own, lest they present a challenge to the men in their lives. As a result, the accomplishments or abilities of women are either downplayed or directly opposed. Ultimately, this damages the autonomy of women and adds to the societal pressure for women to be “homemakers,” reinforcing the extremely lopsided sexual division of labor tied to maintaining a family. This reinforcement happens even as women are forced into selling their labor to the owning class, meaning that women are imposed an unbearable workload of being full-time workers, full-time mothers, and full-time wives. This situation isn’t helped by companies’ disregard for the plight of mothers (who they claim to support) when they schedule them 50 to 60 hours a week or are ready to reprimand them for taking time off to care for their sick children. This is all in addition to paying women less than their male counterparts, the societal pressure of keeping them in “female jobs,” and the regular sexual harassment that they can experience from male coworkers and management.

Outside of the workplace, women’s reproductive freedom has been attacked, with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* prompting a wave of highly restrictive abortion laws and outright

bans. This has threatened the health and mental well-being of women in general as many of these new laws disregard the contexts of pregnancy in support of a pro-life agenda at all costs, even if that agenda directly risks the welfare of the mother. To make this worse, women are targets of the highly predatory beauty industry. Under the current economic system, the beauty standards of our time have joined hands with the patriarchy to create an industry that profits off the low self-esteem and self-hate of millions of women as they desperately try to achieve and maintain an unrealistic definition of beauty to feel that they have any worth. In essence, patriarchy's transformation of women into unquestioning servants of men makes them objects that are no different from a commodity to be "purchased," in this case by male attention and respect. The result is the perpetuation of the patriarchy, the beauty industry, and the oppression and exploitation of women. However, the patriarchy affects groups of women very differently, especially when we take into other chauvinist attitudes and beliefs, such as white supremacy. Women of color, even when they attempt to perform femininity as defined by patriarchy, are viewed as lesser than their white counterparts, creating a stratified hierarchy of women in which skin color defines their value and whether they receive patriarchy's favor and protection.

Though the patriarchy's main targets of oppression and exploitation are women, men are not safe from its poison. Yes, patriarchy grants men some benefits, which makes it appear that they should have a vested interest in defending this system, but this narrow analysis ignores the negative impacts the patriarchy has on men. Femininity is rigidly by the patriarchy, so too is masculinity. According to the patriarchy, men must be physically imposing to be able to defend themselves, their family, and their property; men cannot be deeply

emotional unless that emotion is rage or lust; men must pursue women or at least desirable to women; men must become "high-value," meaning they are economically successful, which borders on being a capitalist; and finally, men have to be in constant competition with one another, as they have to prove that they are better than others at performing masculinity. The result of all of this is men who are locked in a swamp of depression and self-hatred as they are unable to perform masculinity the way that the patriarchy defines it. And with the constant demand to compete in the arena of masculinity, men lack the social connections they could use to navigate their emotions. To make matters worse, any attempts to engage in deep platonic gestures are immediately treated as something "sexual" and are derided as "gay," with men distancing themselves from anything remotely homosexual, reinforcing the association of human connection with the lesser. As with women, the patriarchy affects groups of men differently. The intersection of white supremacy with the patriarchy also creates a stratified hierarchy of men, where men of color are given different definitions of masculinity or are entirely barred from being masculine. This is further reinforced by sexuality, with men of different sexual orientations being automatically defined as less masculine if they are anything but heterosexual.

Like women, men, too, have their own predatory beauty industry that exploits their self-hatred and low self-esteem for profit. The male beauty industry is a bit less explicit but still very telling, with ads featuring Olympian-bodied men wearing advertising clothing or cologne. However, there is another more concerning institution that is directly affecting men and reinforcing all the same negative attributes of the patriarchy: the Manosphere. For those unfamiliar, the Manosphere is a male-dominated space on the internet that

promotes masculinity as defined by the patriarchy, misogyny, and even our present economic system, often under the guise of “hustle culture.” There are many entryways into the Manosphere, as many of the issues affecting men are topics discussed ad nauseam by those associated with the Manosphere, such as issues with dating or exercising. However, where other online creators may provide a more balanced or positive take on these issues, the Manosphere doesn't, with its creators twisting all of these topics to reinforce the patriarchy, promote the hatred and demonization of women, and being a “self-made” man through dubious seminars that often are Ponzi schemes. Regardless of the subgroup within the Manosphere (e.g., Incels, Pick Up Artists, online influencers), the Manosphere is an incredibly toxic and dangerous place that overlaps with the far-right, with the same people creating Manosphere content also interacting with and promoting far-right figures like white supremacist Nick Fuentes.

The patriarchy is all about control; it doesn't matter if you're male, female, or gender non-conforming. At the end of the day, the patriarchy forces all of us into narrowly defined boxes that support the “proper” division of society that the owning class wants. Even though the present economic system creates a contradiction in the patriarchy with women entering the workforce, the owning class still benefits from exploiting the labor of women. Under the patriarchy, our lives are based on completely unrealistic metrics that are impossible for anyone to pursue, leading to our physical and mental health declining severely, as men desperately push their bodies to the limit, women are forced to get injections and costly plastic surgery, and gender non-conforming people are violently pressured to be “real” men or women. Finally, the patriarchy breeds

division between men, women, and queer people in different ways, with queer people not even being recognized and respected within the patriarchy. It is for all these reasons and more that the patriarchy must be smashed to pieces. The patriarchy serves no one except for the owning class, who have the wealth and power to ignore the negative effects of the patriarchy while benefiting from its usage as a tool to control and exploit working and oppressed people

Patriarchy is the enemy of all working and oppressed people, regardless of background and identity, for it is a tool used by the owning class to divide, control, and exploit, reinforcing the status quo at the expense of the lives of billions. As such, along with systemic racism, queerphobia, and many other oppressive institutions and systems, the patriarchy must be eradicated. Without the patriarchy, the world that working and oppressed people usher in will be one built upon greater freedom of expression, less stress and fear, and better physical and mental health. In this world, no more will men, women, and gender non-conforming people be forced into narrowly defined boxes and roles. Instead, every single person would have the freedom to decide for themselves who they are, giving them the power to express themselves and their gender however they see fit. With this, there would be less stress to “perform” and less fear of being ridiculed, taking a massive weight off people's shoulders, and sparing their mental and physical well-being from the tolls that such performance demands. In this world, a world built by and for working and oppressed people, we all can live our lives not as caricatures but as our true selves.

Ex-Gay Therapy: A Personal Experience with Oppression

Benjamin Berry

February 24, 2025

The electrode the therapist connected to my arm would shock me whenever he showed gay pornography on the small television screen.

When showing heterosexual images and videos, there would be no shock.

This process was repeated for about an hour during weekly sessions that occurred over a few months.

I'd been referred to this therapist who, I was told, specialized in curing "unwanted same sex attractions," by my "sponsor" in another ex-gay therapy group I was part of.

The electroshock therapy to cure me of being gay began four years after I began ex-gay therapy treatment.

I was just sixteen years-old at the time.

Despite my father's side being devoutly Roman Catholic and my mother's side being nominally Lutheran, religion had never held much appeal to me as a child. I'd been baptized in the Lutheran church that my maternal grandparents helped fund and build and I'd taken R.C.I.A. classes at my father's Catholic parish to receive my First Communion and Confirmation when I was seven years-old. Being preoccupied with my childhood interests of Star Wars, Red Sox baseball, and reading, though, I never enjoyed attending church or learning about religion.

That all changed shortly before Christmas in 2003. I was 12 years-old and had discovered a series of evangelical young adult novels about the end of times. These books sufficiently terrified me about my eternal salvation, so I got "saved" by accepting Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. As my first act of devotion, I decided to read the

entirety of the King James Bible during my winter break.

Just a couple of days in and I reached this passage in Leviticus:

"If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." (Leviticus 20:13)

At 12 years-old, undergoing the beginnings of puberty, and having known of some sort of difference in how I viewed other boys my age, reading this passage made everything click into place: I was the type of person that Bible verse was talking about. The realization was shattering, and my crying woke my mother.

Though I did not know it at the time, my mother's only experience with gay people prior to that night was the brother of one of her close friends: he had died of AIDS over a decade before.

So, when I showed my mother the Bible verse, her immediate response was to ask, with a sickened tone in her voice: "You think you're gay?!"

I nodded my head in the affirmative.

She proceeded to explain, in details inappropriate for a 12 year-old to hear, the "disgusting" ways in which gay men fornicate with one another. After her crash course in the sin of sodomy, she instructed me to go to bed and told me the conversation would continue the next day with my paternal grandmother: the zealous Roman Catholic grandmother who was the Director of Religious Education (D.R.E.) at the family's parish.

The conversation with my grandmother went exactly as I expected it to: she explained "basic biology" and

how two men being together is like trying to connect a plug with another plug instead of an outlet. She outlined “God’s plan for human sexuality” and how homosexuality is an offense against God’s will for humanity. She encouraged me to seek the help of the Church for this “problem.”

Had this conversation occurred just a few months prior, the experience would have still been traumatic, but I might not have sought out ecclesiastical intervention. At this juncture in my life, however, I was a newly minted Christian, someone convinced of the Bible’s infallibility. I was convinced of the truth of my family’s revulsion at my disclosure and knew I needed to change, not just to make myself right with my family, but also—and more importantly—to make myself right with God. I immediately threw myself into religious devotion, orientating myself towards my paternal legacy of strict Roman Catholicism. In an effort to prove my sincerity, I quickly became an even more zealous Catholic than my grandmother: attending Latin Mass each and every day, praying the Rosary daily (sometimes multiple times a day), going to Confession weekly, praying the Stations of the Cross and abstaining from meat every Friday (not just during Lent, but the whole year round), seeking the counsel of a priest as my Spiritual Director, reading the lives of the Saints, and assisting at parish functions whenever an opportunity arose.

To this day, I still run into old classmates and friends from my teenage years who are surprised to find that, instead of a holy and zealous priest, I’ve now become a radical, openly gay socialist. Anyone who knew me when I was between the ages of 12 and 18 knew me as someone who was extremely religious. In high school, I could always be found with my copy of the Roman Missal (the Tridentine “Latin” rite, of course) and the Bible (a Douay-Rheims translation used only by the most conservative, traditional Roman Catholics). Between classes, I would be

thumbing through my Rosary beads in the hallways. At lunch, I would sometimes skip eating to wander around the lunchroom, giving out religious pamphlets and other sacramentals (my favorite was a pamphlet written by St. Alphonsus Ligouri about how few people ever make it to Heaven).

Here’s what those old classmates and friends didn’t see: they didn’t see that, at age 12, I had become sexually active and that each time I “committed the mortal sin of sodomy,” I would feel an overwhelming sense of shame and disgust, necessitating an emergency meeting with a priest to hear my Confession. They didn’t see that, at the age of 13, after a year of intensive prayer and devotion, my homosexuality wasn’t cured, so I was referred, by my Spiritual Director, to my first ex-gay therapy group. All my old classmates and friends saw was a deeply religious young person who was, no doubt, bound for the seminary upon graduating high school.

I was the only minor in my local ex-gay therapy group. We met two to three times a week within church basements in gatherings structured like Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. We even used A.A.’s 12 Steps, modified, of course, for our “addiction” to sexual immorality. Each of us newcomers had a sponsor who guided us, and we were expected to maintain strict “sexual sobriety” which was defined as no sexual activity whatsoever outside of a marriage between one man and one woman. At least ninety percent of us struggled with what we termed “unwanted same sex attractions” and everyone involved in our local group, save one person, was cis-male.

Nearly all of the people I met in my years of ex-gay therapy were adult men, in their thirties and forties (primarily), most of whom were married to women, but who regularly “slipped” and engaged in sexual immorality with other men. In our local group, we had at least two registered sex offenders, including one priest who was found to be abusing altar

boys at the various parishes he had been assigned to over the decades; when I met him, he'd already been caught, though not prosecuted; instead, the Church had laicized him (removed him from priestly duties) and sent him to live a "life of contemplation and penance" in a monastery.

Because sexual abusers of children were sent to the same group as those of us with "unwanted same sex attractions," most of us came to view homosexuality as a pathway to criminality. We viewed engaging in "sexual immorality" as a slippery slope that degrades and demoralizes a person. As a young person, growing up under the Bush regime, my conception of being gay came from these ex-gay therapy meetings, the rantings of far-right politicians and religious figures, and the shady meetups I'd arrange on Craigslist with adult men when I "slipped" into sin. In other words, I quickly resigned myself to the idea that I needed to overcome my abomination or would be consigned to a life of secrecy and misery (and an eternity of hellfire to follow).

Being a minor, I was legally not supposed to attend meetings with registered sex offenders. This problem was ignored by members of my ex-gay therapy group, for they felt it was important that I, as a young person, get help early as opposed to waiting for adulthood as they did. I was barred from attending and participating in certain activities, though. For instance, I was not allowed to attend national conferences of ex-gay therapy groups which required official registration and would, undoubtedly, host a number of registered sex offenders.

Despite claims to the contrary, no one I ever met had actually "overcome" and "mastered" their "unwanted same sex attractions." The breaking of someone's "sexual sobriety" was an almost weekly occurrence at our meetings. At least two people committed suicide during my six years in ex-gay therapy, one of them within a meeting.

My public life as a devout Roman Catholic and my private life as being a member of numerous ex-gay therapy groups continued for another four years until I was 17 years-old and a senior in high school. During those years, my hyper-Roman Catholicism only increased, as did my efforts in my reparative therapy groups. Throughout this time, my "occasions of sin" also increased, especially once I secured my drivers license and gained further independence. I continually suffered from depression, feeling like such a hypocrite as I proclaimed my faith so boldly, yet fell into mortal sin so regularly. It was during this time that I began electroshock treatments as an escalation in my desperation to find a solution to my "problem." It was explained to me then that the treatments, given to a minor, were classified as "illegal, secularly," but "necessary, spiritually." My family, knowing little to nothing of my ex-gay therapy efforts, saw only my hyper-religiousness and thought the "phase" I went through and disclosed to them at 12 years-old had successfully passed.

At 17 years-old, after nearly five full years of devout Catholicism, I came to believe my salvation needed to be found in a different denomination. I began listening to preachers of other churches on YouTube and was captured by the zeal and message of Calvinism. This Gospel of predestination—including mankind's total depravity, God's deep love for His elect (those predestined for Heaven), and God's wrath and hatred for the reprobate (those predestined for hell)—seemed to me, at the time, to be the truth I'd been searching for. I left the Roman Catholic Church and joined a congregation within the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, an ultra-conservative denomination of modern-day puritans. I threw myself into Calvinism as I did with my former Roman Catholicism: switching my Douay-Rheims Bible for an English Standard Version (nicknamed, at the time, "the angry Calvinist Bible"), studying the Protestant

Reformation and the Five Sola's of Martin Luther (my senior yearbook quote was my favorite of the Sola's: Soli Deo Gloria—To God Alone Be the Glory!). As enthusiastically as I once sought to convert my classmates and friends to traditional Roman Catholicism, I now sought to show the world the light of the true Gospel: the reformed faith as revealed in the Holy Bible.

I continued my efforts within my ex-gay therapy circles... and, as usual, was met with bitter disappointment and demoralization as I found, time and time again, that I could not change.

During my teenage years, it was hyper-traditional, far-right religion that kept me within the misery of reparative therapy. Ironically, it was that same hyper-traditional, far-right religion that kept me from committing suicide when times were darkest, for I always felt that to commit suicide was a sure way to secure my spot in hell. There were times I had to end years-long friendships, at the instruction of my ex-gay therapists, because they suspected I had immoral feelings of lust towards said friend. There were nights, after I'd "slipped up" and fell into sin again, that I'd drive around the city, screaming at God and hoping that my car would lose traction and that I'd smash myself into a guard rail.

My experiences with organized religion were, undoubtedly, traumatic and horribly negative. I did go through a fierce "anti-theist" phase in my early twenties where I wrongly labeled religion as the source of all evil in the world. Today, however, I've been fortunate to see the tremendous good religion can do for people and communities. Though not religious myself any longer, I now recognize and appreciate the progressive Catholics (who I formerly labeled as "heretics") who seek to use their religion as an instrument of social justice for oppressed and marginalized communities. In 2020, when I participated in the Black Lives Matter Uprisings, it was a local church—the First Unitarian Church of Louisville—who gave

us protestors sanctuary and food when the cops were patrolling the streets with their guns, tanks, and teargas. I've now read and studied the lives and works of great trade unionists like Cesar Chavez and Dorothy Day who were motivated by their faith to unwaveringly support labor. These lessons and experiences have imparted to me an understanding about religion that I did not have, either as a religious person or in my early years as an unbeliever. Today, I hold deep admiration for my Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim friends who are motivated by their faith to organize for the liberation of all working and oppressed people. I wish I had been introduced to such a progressive form of religion in my youth.

After renouncing religion shortly after graduating high school, I officially came out of the closet as a gay man on February 24, 2010. Today, on the day this article is to be published in The Class Struggle Chronicle, marks the 15 year anniversary of my coming out.

Coming out did not immediately and completely solve years of trauma incurred from six years of ex-gay therapy. That trauma led directly to a period of heavy problem drinking which was addressed through my voluntary admittance into a rehabilitation clinic in July 2010 and years of involvement in our local recovery community. Prior to this, in the short months between my coming out and checking myself into rehab, I attempted to take my own life on three occasions. My experiences with ex-gay therapy will remain with me forever, though the misery of those years has certainly dulled with time; this I attribute to my willingness to share my story for the benefit of others through my activism and organizing.

I wish I could tell you that coming out also purged me entirely of all of my teenage conservatism and reaction. This, unfortunately, is not the case. Even after coming out of the closet, I still held onto some horrible views, including some racial bigotries and even chauvinistic

positions against trans and gender non-conforming folks. Today, it is astounding to me that I ever held these beliefs after going through what I went through and after coming out of the closet; but the fact remains that I did. These views were only eradicated once I developed class consciousness, cultivated an advanced understanding of economic and political theory and history, and, most importantly, began to participate in the liberation struggles of workers, trans and gender non-conforming folks, Black and brown communities, and immigrants.

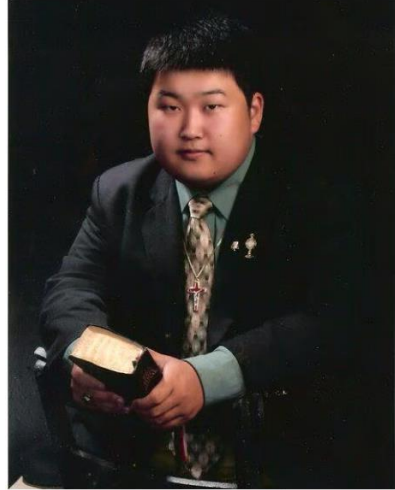
Today, I see the interconnectedness of all of these struggles. I understand how our present economic ordering supports, perpetuates, and inflames these forms of oppression. Most importantly, I recognize the vital importance of working and oppressed people coming together, building bridges of solidarity, to overcome the power of the exploiting and oppressing class.

Though my primary focus today is around organized labor and fighting various forms of oppression based on current conditions and needs—presently, this work has centered around Palestine, undocumented workers, incarcerated human beings, trans people, etc.—I try never to forget the experiences of my teenage years and seek to incorporate those experiences into my organizing work wherever I can.

The oppression of Queer people has certainly not ended in the 15 years since I came out of the closet, and we certainly can see which segments of our Queer community are most heavily targeted in today's political climate. I am disappointed to see so many cis gay men becoming content with our newfound social "acceptance" while trans, Black, women, immigrant, and indigenous communities are still brutalized and oppressed in ways not so unfamiliar to cis gay men if we only look back a couple of decades. The struggle for liberation must always include every component of our diverse working class. I, for one, am not content with a vapid reformism that

welcomes gay people to murder in the military for the benefit of the U.S. empire or has allowed some of our numbers to ascend into the class of exploiters and oppressors. No, our work is not over until the days of exploitation and oppression (of any and all communities) are abolished.

Workers of the World and Oppressed People, Unite!



Me, senior year of high school, shortly before converting from Roman Catholicism to Calvinism (2009)



Me, preparing to attend a rally counterprotesting right wing religious extremists (2023)

The Civil Rights Movement & Anti-Racist Organizing Today

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THE CLASS STRUGGLE CHRONICLE

The Class Struggle Chronicle is the publication of **The Louisville Workers Brigade**. It is a free, worker-run newspaper that circulates both online and physical copies.

The primary purpose of *The Class Struggle Chronicle* is to offer coverage of working class issues, particularly involving organized Labor, in the Louisville, Kentucky area.

We are an unabashedly pro-worker publication, seeking to contribute to the class struggle against the owning class who daily exploits, oppresses, and demoralizes laborers here in Louisville and the world over.

We publish articles on topics ranging from union organizing efforts, strikes, worker grievances, worker-related issues, etc. Submissions from Louisville workers are encouraged and accepted, but are subject to review and editing by the editorial staff of *The Class Struggle Chronicle*. Submissions can be sent to csc@louworkersbrigade.org.



To Educate.

To Support.

To Unite.



THE PREAMBLE OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LOUISVILLE WORKERS BRIGADE

The establishment of the Louisville Workers Brigade is an outward, physical expression of the rising class consciousness of the working masses and the intensification of the class struggle between this majority working class against the ruling minority owning class. This intensification of class struggle—a result of the brutalized working class standing firm and using its position as the producer of all things as leverage—must be strengthened further.

The only hope the working and oppressed masses have is to organize into a cohesive, united collective—regardless of industry, employment status, race, nationality, sexual orientation, etc.—to oppose the more powerful and resourced owning class. This is the mission of the Louisville Workers Brigade: to build unity and power among working people, pushing for stronger union contracts, broader union representation, and a return to radical rank-and-file organizing that secures the most gains and victories for our class. We are not separate from the existing trade unions, but seek to educate and empower union members and non-union members alike, so that they can better participate as workers in the economic, political, and social spheres of our community. As workers ourselves, we remain intrinsically tied to and committed to the conditions of the working masses, not only in this country, but in all countries. This is why we dedicate our time, resources, and experience to the aims and goals of this cause. Only through an unwavering devotion to solidarity with all working people of this world can the workers of all countries fight for their collective empowerment and liberation.

www.louworkersbrigade.org

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