

**THE CLASSLESS SOCIETY**  
and  
**THE DECLINE OF THE  
UNITED STATES EMPIRE**



**2 ESSAYS BY**

**JAMES BOGGS**

*The following two essays are taken out of James Boggs's book *Pages from The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Workers Notebook* released in 1963. James Boggs was a revolutionary marxist and partner to Grace Lee Boggs. Together they worked on many projects. In the 70's they founded the National Organization for an American Revolution. They centered the fundamental change in ourselves and out values that must take place as part of this revolution.*

*A prolific writer and organizer James passed away on July 22, 1993. Readers are highly encouraged to read more of this important black marxist theoretician and revolutionary.*

**This pamphlet was put together by Red Machete. A small communist organization in Portland Oregon training towards building for a new society.**



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# THE CLASSLESS SOCIETY

(1963)

*An excerpt from James Boggs' Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*

**The United States is a Warfare State. The United States is an inseparable part of Western Civilization. The United States is the citadel of world capitalism today.**

**The basic philosophy** with which all radicals have approached the analysis of the United States has been centered around what the workers would do, ought to do, would have to do, etc., usually ignoring the power of the state and the bureaucracy which are today such an essential part of American capitalism; ignoring the fact that when Marx wrote 100 years ago, and even up to 30 years ago, there was no mass standing army, navy, and air force, and no universal draft in this country; and sometimes realizing but more often forgetting that their own ideas are shaped by no less a fact than that they themselves are by-products of Western Civilization.

Today this philosophy is at the crossroads. The emerging nations of Asia and Africa, which have all these years been dominated by a little corner of the globe known as Western Civilization, are clashing head-on with that civilization. The Marxists themselves, who have done very little since the time of Marx to understand the rest of the globe, merely pigeonholing it in their minds as colonial and semi-colonial, must now do some serious re-evaluating.

American Marxists, like Marxists all over the world, believe in Karl Marx's ideology. They believe, first, that capitalist production and capitalist society are organized for the benefit of the capitalists and against the masses; and second, that at a certain stage in the development of capitalism,

**the people living under it will be forced to revolt against it because their conditions will become intolerable and because there will grow up inside this society the embryo of a socialist society, united, disciplined, and organized by capitalist production itself.**

In America, the Marxists have found their role more challenging than in any other place on the globe. For inside this country are all the necessary material ingredients which could make socialism possible, and yet it all seems so remote.

It is not a question of whether socialism can or cannot be imported. It is only the specific conditions of a country at a particular time that make people struggle. The fundamental point is that it is impossible for an American Marxist movement to build itself on the ideas of mass poverty and the abolition of private property which have played such an important role in the development of the European Marxist movements. This alone makes the challenge to American Marxist groups more severe than in any other country. For although the poverty-caused misery of the American masses has by no means been eliminated, it is so dispersed and scattered among various segments of the population that it does not constitute a fundamental and unifying issue to mobilize the masses of the people in struggle.

Thus the question, "What is socialism?" finds the American Marxists constantly seeking a new formula to fit in with the ever-changing conditions of the country. So that today when one asks an American Marxist point-blank, "What is socialism and why should the people struggle for it?" he is baffled and has to fumble around for an answer.

Marx in the 19th century said that there would have to be a transitional society between the class society of capitalism and the classless society of communism. This transitional society, which he called socialism, would still be a class society but instead of the capitalists being the ruling class, the workers would rule. It was this rule by the workers which, for Marx, would make the society socialist. As the ruling class, the workers would then develop the productive forces to the stage where there could be all-around development of each individual and the principle of "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" could be realized. At this point there could be the classless society or communism.

In the United States the forces of production have already been developed to the point where there could be the classless society which Marx said could come only under communism. Yet ever since the Russian Revolution, all kinds of socialists have differentiated themselves from the Communists in terms of political policy and political organization but have never tackled this question of Marxist theory that socialism is just a transitional society on the way to communism and that only under communism can there be a classless society.

How have the revolutionary socialists arrived at just being for socialism while still claiming to be Marxists? The turning point

was the Russian Revolution. If the Russians had never won the revolution, socialism and communism, with communism as the ultimate goal, would have remained a part of Marxist ideology, and Marxist organizations all over the world could have kept on struggling against capitalism without having to clarify what they were struggling for.

It was after the Russian Revolution and on the basis of examining what emerged from it that American Marxists began to split and decline. They were always splitting over the question of the correct policy for the socialist, i.e. the workers', state in Russia—instead of advancing their theory to keep step with the advances of capitalism which, in the United States in particular, were creating the productive forces to make possible a struggle far beyond what was possible in Russia. They tried to make the Russian blueprint fit the United States when the United States was developing productivity to the point where the workers, through economic, political, and social pressure but without political power, were deriving from capitalism the economic benefits which elsewhere the workers would have had to take political power in order to achieve.

What then is still lacking in the United States where capitalism has achieved its highest form? What is it that the American people want, which they find lacking in capitalism, and which will mobilize them to fight against capitalism and for another society, call it what you will?

**A social revolution in the United States has to mean control of production by the producers.**

A social revolution in the United States has to mean production for the use of those who need it. But beyond these goals the social revolution in the United States has to mean the classless society—a society in which the antagonisms and divisions between classes, races, and people of different national backgrounds are eliminated and people can develop among themselves civilized and cooperative relations, relations which are possible today as never before because there need no longer be any problem of scarcity of material goods and services. All the problems of scarcity which up to now have required the exploitation of various races and immigrant groupings have now been outmoded by the technological advances of production.

The horizons which the social revolution in America open up are more tremendous than anywhere else in the world. But the path which the revolution will have to take in this country is also more difficult and vicious than anywhere else in the world. First of all, it is the Warfare State with its huge forces which has to be challenged.

And second, inside each American, from top to bottom, in various degrees, has been accumulated all the corruption of a class society which has achieved its magnificent technological progress first and always by exploiting the Negro race, and then by exploiting the immigrants of all races. At the same time the class society has constantly encouraged the exploited to attempt to rise out of their class and themselves become exploiters of other groupings and finally of their own people.

**The struggle to rid themselves and each other of this accumulated corruption is going to be more painful**

**and violent than any struggles over purely economic grievances have been or are likely to be.**

**James Boggs**, born in Marion Junction, Alabama, never dreamed of becoming President or a locomotive engineer. He grew up in a world where the white folks are gentlemen by day and Ku Klux Klanners by night. Marion Junction is in Dallas County where as late as 1963, although African-Americans made up over 57 percent of the total county population of 57,000, only 130 were registered voters.

After graduating from Dunbar High School in Bessemer, Alabama, in 1937, Boggs took the first freight train north, bumming his way through the western part of the country, working in the hop fields of the state of Washington, cutting ice in Minnesota, and finally ending up in Detroit where he worked for the WPA until the Second World War gave him a chance to enter the Chrysler auto plant. In 1963, drawing on his own experience as a factory worker and radical militant, he wrote these pages.



# THE DECLINE OF THE UNITED STATES EMPIRE

*James Boggs*

History has known many empires—the Sumerian Empire, the Assyrian Empire, the Chaldean Empire, the Egyptian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the British Empire, to name only a few. All these empires came to an end, usually as a result of a combination of military defeat and internal revolt. Now it is the turn of the United States Empire.

For over a century, under the cover of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States has ruled its Latin American domain as Chicago gangsters rule a certain territory, warning all others to keep out.<sup>1</sup> Long before the word "satellite" was used to describe the relationship of the Eastern European countries to Russia, it was obvious that the economic and political life of Latin America revolved around the Yankee sun. What the Asian and African colonies were to the European powers and what Eastern Europe has been to Russia, the Latin American republics have been to the United States. Although independent in name, their economies have been completely at the mercy of Big Brother to the North, and therefore also their politics. They have been kept in the status of countries with one-crop economies, supplying sugar, bananas, coffee, tin, copper, etc., chiefly to the United States, which could therefore control them by manipulating commodity prices and quotas. At the same time the United States has been the largest supplier of Latin American imports of manufactured goods and of investment capital. In fact, 80 percent of foreign capital invested in Latin America, public and private, comes from the United States. When manipulation and control by economic means have fallen short, the United States

has hesitated only a moment before using money and arms directly to prevent and foment, divert and steer revolutions and counter-revolutions, to make and unmake governments. The chief function of the United States government has been to protect the right of firms like United Fruit to exploit the cheap labor and rich resources of Latin America; to maintain in power anti-Communist and pro-United States dictators like Batista in Cuba and Trujillo in the Dominican Republic; and to protect the landowners of gigantic estates from revolt by peasant laborers.

All this time few people in the United States knew anything about this vast continent just below the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande. Those who thought about it at all did so in terms that the movies have made familiar, as the land of bananas and tropical splendor where North Americans can go live it up in the midst of poverty and misery, where Yankee adventurers decide to sell or not to sell guns to rebel generals according to their love or hate for beautiful damsels. Then in 1958 Vice President Nixon was sent on a good-will tour to reassure the South Americans that, despite the billions of dollars of aid sent only to Europe, their Good Neighbor to the North had not forgotten them. When the Vice President was [spat on](#) and [stoned by mobs](#) in Peru and Venezuela, the government and the people of the United States began to realize how overdue was an agonizing reappraisal of their relations with Latin America. It was clear that the Good Neighbors to the South were getting out of hand, and that the winds of change were blowing in Latin America, stirring up revolutions of the masses which were quite different from those of rival factions which the United States had found so easy to control.

The winds of change became a hurricane in the Cuban Revolution. What started out in Cuba as opposition to Batista inevitably became a head-on conflict with Yankee imperialism. All upheavals which had fallen short of social revolution had fallen back into dependence on Yankee imperialism; Venezuela is a good example. Large-scale private property in Cuba, which was in fact primarily United States private property, had to be confiscated before Cuba could be truly politically independent. Going deeper into social revolution meant deepening the conflict with Yankee imperialism and vice versa. This was the path which Castro had to follow whether he wanted to or not.

But Yankee imperialism could not afford to let Cuba set an example in social revolution for the rest of Latin America. Before the Second World War Mexico could get away with the expropriation of foreign oil properties because there was no real danger then that the example would spread. But in 1960, the survival of the Cuban Revolution meant its certain imitation by the rest of Latin America. On the other hand, to have a social revolution in Cuba is practically like trying to have one in one of our 50 states. The Cuban one-crop sugar economy was almost as closely tied to the United States economy as the one-crop auto economy of Detroit is. To reorganize and diversify this one-crop economy required not only confiscation of large-scale United States property. It also required an enormous amount of technical and economic aid. Under the circumstances of United States hostility, this aid could come only from those countries which not only recognized the validity of Cuba's struggles for independence but had reason to welcome them.

In Africa, thousands of miles away from the Cold War powers, it is not too difficult to be neutral. But Cuba, only 90 miles away from Florida, began by being as much an economic, military, and political satellite of the United States as Hungary and the other Eastern European countries are of Russia. Therefore, to break away, it had to have the political and economic aid which Yugoslavia, for example, got from the United States after it broke with Russia in 1948. But Cuba's problem was even more critical. Yugoslavia did not have to confiscate Russian property, and it continued to claim membership in the "socialist camp." Cuba not only had to confiscate United States property. It had to denounce capitalism altogether.

Revolutionaries in the United States hailed the Cuban Revolution as the first socialist revolution in the Americas. The Communist world also hailed it as such. The revolutionaries living under United States capitalism had particular reason to rejoice. United States capitalism, against which they had been fighting all these years and which is the greatest capitalist power of this century, had been challenged. But revolutionaries have many different and conflicting ideas as to what does and what does not constitute a socialist revolution. To some it is a matter of material gains; to others it is the nationalization of property; to others it is the political freedom and organization that the masses achieve and/or the arming of the masses; to others it is the formation of workers' councils to control production; to others it is joining the "socialist camp"; and to still others it is remaining entirely neutral of any bloc. The standards and the procedure used in determining the degree of support and rejoicing are much the same as those which the various revolutionary groupings

have been employing for over forty years with regard to the Russian Revolution.

What these groupings rarely take into consideration is the fact that the world has moved in these forty years far beyond where it was at the time of the Russian Revolution, and that it is today divided into three blocs: the Western bloc, the Eastern bloc, and the neutralist bloc, with the last bloc lacking economic power but wielding great moral power. But moral power is a long-range thing. When a country within either the Western or the Eastern bloc breaks away from that bloc, it must *immediately* face the question of getting aid from the other bloc in order to survive. This reality has to be faced, not from the point of view of North American revolutionaries and their desires, hopes, standards, and morale, but from the standpoint of the country that is making the revolution. In Hungary the revolution was crushed before anyone but the Hungarians had to face the fact that the other Eastern European countries and the Russian people had not come to the support of the Hungarian Revolution, and that therefore the Hungarian Revolution could survive only if it received aid from the Western bloc.

Revolutionaries in the United States are going to be faced with a similar reality time and again in the period ahead as the Latin American revolution spreads. They have no right to use these revolutions to bolster their own morale or to test their own theories about what is socialism. First and foremost, they must take the position that they are *for* these revolutions and that it is the right of all these countries to break away from the power that has dominated them for so long and to govern themselves. They must be *for* all the Latin American countries freeing themselves

from United States domination. And they must be for the people in these countries whenever the latter, feeling that their government is not running the country in the best interests of the people, throw that government out by whatever means they choose to take. The only time when they can legitimately take a position contrary to this is if the revolution takes the form of discrimination against a race or nationality, as for example against the Negroes in the United States or the Jews in Germany. They cannot start with the question, "Where is the revolution going to end?" Any genuine revolution today is going to have to go in a leftward-forward direction because the expectations of the masses everywhere can be satisfied only by permanent revolution in a leftward-forward direction. Except episodically, the direction is not going to be backward because the moment that the revolution goes backward, there is going to be another revolution. Having clarified their minds on this fundamental position, radicals in the United States will no longer have to spend endless hours trying to justify these revolutions as socialist, trying to decide whether they should hold elections or not, whether the people are ready for parliamentary democracy or not.

It is quite obvious that the breakaway of the Latin American satellites will deprive North American capitalists of their main source of super-profit, and there is no reason to doubt that they will try to make their own people pay for these losses. The people of the United States will have to begin facing the fact that their luxurious standard of living has been won, in part, at the expense of the peasants and workers of Latin America. It is unlikely that United States capitalism will be able to arouse the people sufficiently to support an open, large scale invasion of

Cuba for counter-revolutionary purposes. Its strategy is rather to seek to isolate the Cuban Revolution through such measures as the Alliance for Progress. But the Cuban Revolution is not an artificial imported revolution, and the ingredients which set it off exist in all the Latin American countries. This means that, in addition to the Alliance for Progress, which has already become a joke, the United States will be carrying out all kinds of maneuvers and gangster tactics —diplomatic, military, and economic—from the use of warships to the blackmail use of economic aid, as it has been doing in the Dominican Republic and at the conferences of the Organization of American States.

It would be unrealistic to expect the people of the United States to come directly to the aid of the Latin American revolutions on any large scale. The grievances and issues which underlie these revolutions and which propel them to success are in Latin America itself. But there are going to be many, many shameful episodes similar to that of the attempted invasion of Cuba in 1961 which will shake up the people of the United States, make them squirm, and force them to question themselves and their government. The spread of the Latin American revolutions means that before the people of the United States there lies a painful period of decline in prestige and in confidence, both in themselves and in their governments, similar to that which the British have been experiencing with the decline of their empire. All this will help to deepen the general revolutionary crisis in this country.

***James Boggs, “The Decline of the United States Empire,” from The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Workers Notebook (Monthly Review Press , 1963).***

A thick, red, curved graphic that resembles the blade of a machete, positioned horizontally across the bottom of the page. The text is centered within this graphic.

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