

the **SOCIALIST**



ISSUE 4 2015

RADICAL SOCIALIST POETRY



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the SOCIALIST

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EDITOR'S NOTE

With this publication, *The Socialist* continues its popular annual tradition of devoting an entire issue to the arts. This year, it celebrates the vibrant perspectives and artistic styles that comprise contemporary radical socialist poetry.

Class struggle, democratic collectivism and a compassion for all life on our fragile planet may well sum up the socialist inspiration and purpose, and the moral substance of the poetry comprising this issue. With Kalama Platt's *Calavera*, readers take a virtual tour of a capitalist nexus of profit over people, environmental degradation and the political marginalization of indigenous communities. Shannon Hammock's *Young Boy On a Beach* unfolds an intimate and searing tragedy engendered by the war and racism that serves the global capitalist imperial program. John Kaniecki's passion for revolutionary resistance against capitalist tyranny, and his keen appreciation of its history, is reflected in his poem *Tea With Joe Hill*. The piece reminds all socialist activists that, "You'll get heaven when you give them hell." *Writing Accelerates Collective Learning* by Jen McClellan, along with participating writers, recounts a recent "poetry crafting" sponsored by the Party's Los Angeles Local. The event set a comfortable environment for activists to develop a more confident and earnest political verbal style through the vulnerability that comes from a collective discussion of deep personal thoughts and feelings. Connecting that practice with the larger goals of encouraging collective learning, improving "truthful" political communication and creating a supportive and peaceful society resonates with the famous and radical motto of 1960s student activism and feminism, "The personal is political." My contribution uses the famous American Civil War battle of Shiloh as a metaphor for class struggle. It sings of those who arrived in America and were forced into slavery, recalls the suffering of workers, and celebrates the power of human labor.

The Editorial Board is proud to offer these finely crafted and insightful poems to our readers. It hopes that these works will both enlighten and inspire, and by doing so help a little to change the world.

— Jim Marra

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WRITING ACCELERATES COLLECTIVE LEARNING

JEN MCCLELLAN (AND STUDENTS)

YOUNG BOY ON A BEACH

Shannon Hammock had his first poem published when he was in the fourth grade. It was a haiku about the planets. Looking back, it wasn't very good. He now writes much better poetry (at least in his own mind) and poems that are much more political (at least that's what he's told when they are rejected for publication).

My son washed up on the shore today
The cruel sea laid his lifeless body down
On the gentle sand
I wasn't there to hold his head
I wasn't there to tell him he was loved
I wasn't there to protect him
I wasn't there
But a kind, gentle man was
And the world knows him now
I had tears in my eyes
I saw the same picture you saw
That picture
Confirmed my worst fears
I just sat and cried
And another kind stranger asked
"What is wrong?"
I lifted the paper up and answered
My son washed up on the shore today
It's all I could say
The stranger placed their hand on mine
"I think you're mistaken"
All I could say was
My son washed up on the shore today
"That cannot be
The little boy was brown
And you are white"
I know, but
My son washed up on the shore today
"And the boy was Muslim
I can tell
By the cross you wear
That you are not"
I know, but
My son washed up on the shore today
"But he was from Syria
Half a world away"
I know, but
My son washed up on the shore today
"But they found him in Greece
Literally
Half a world away"
I know, but
My son washed up on the shore today
"I do not understand"
I paused for a moment
And agreed
I do not either
But our son washed up on the shore today

CALAVERA

In the 15th year of the 21st Century
Water wars raged, as did fire & flood.
The Calaveras of San Anto Counsel Ciudad,
had jumped at the chance to milk water from blood.
Catrina had laughed...

“Who’s to choose?... Who’s to lose?... Agua es
Vida...” she said.

SA Water System (SAWS) say,
“CA has done it for decades,”
No mention: a “strategy of lies.”
No mention: pumping Mono Lake near dry,
Like Owens Valley before it,
pumping dried land down to storming dust,
and only after 1994 CA Water Board Codes,
did Mono come back, temporarily
until El Drought of Record sauntered into CA
and even then and there, some piped away fears with songs
of “Climate Change Denial,”
and Mono Lake retreated, again.

SAWS say,
“CA has done it for decades,”
No mention of the water spirits that stayed behind
to see Lago y Tierra go dry,
to see emaciated roots rot in gardens’ good earth
Earth, first worked by Pauite ...
Earth, still peopled by ancestors’ parched bones.

Catrina had laughed: “Who’s to choose?... Who’s to lose?... Agua es Vida...”
People say “Our gente built aqueducts and pipelines in CA.”
CoSA say “In SA, on water, we’re 200 years behind LA...”

SAWS say
Owens Valley Water flowed to LA...
Built that City of Bedraggled Angels.
Now we can bottle VR water
for California’s Niagara...
San Anto says, “No!”
But Seguin signs on, (seems to be a few less miles to pipe
before the hill country water hits the bottle for CA Bottling.)

Catrina laughed at that.
For decades,
Catrina La Calavera Garbancera was drinking from LA fountains
eating grapes from the Haciendas Güeras,
picked by Calaveras Workers, the first of us poisoned by pesticides.

Catrina could care less that long before CA’s drought of record,
ecosystems and gardens were sacked when they lost their water.

Catrina turned east
saying “Texas, Tejas, here I come.

Vámonos...”

And for SAWS & Katrina—
It was love at first sight:
Burlison County officials would
pump aquifers down
for a chance to make money on site.
Abengoa from Spain says, Aquí Vengo.
Buy bonds. Let water flow south...

The rocks and elder trees say,
“Applewhite! Déjà vu!—Take flight, this time.”

GEAA, the Edward’s Aquifer acting protectress
says, northeast Bexas County needs protection not pipes...

Then hill country people put up
the good fight.
The League of Independent Voters say
“I oppose the San Antone Hose.”

As Mi Agua Mi Vida
builds coalition, encourages conservation
demands justicia de Agua y Ambiental y Clima
writes petitions, and asks for signatures
Mighty SA begins to freeze in her tracks...

Councilman Nirenberg had asked for water policy analysis,
saying we need research behind our decisions,
but the study up and disappeared.
When complaints were made
“Heretic” was uttered beneath bated breath
but only the crickets crawling the walls remember.

During September ‘s super blood moon eclipse
while the water wizard took skinny dips...
periodistas un/dis covered the missing
Water Policy Analyses
showing that in the Emperors Plans,
his attire had gone missing too:

Vista Ridge was “high risk”
But SAWS poo poed the study,
called Science “a joke,”
called research “gooey” like cookie dough, to
and lechuzas hoo-hooed, sleepily, that day,

“Joke? On You, On Who, On You...”
So it was that Mr. SAWS Fuentes
was flailing his arms
as A & M Lopez took red markers
to Dr. Finch’s et al (degreed all) Water Policy Analyses.

Catrina, La Calavera Garbancera took note of the controversy
took off the rose colored spectacles she’d dawned, and began reading.
She devoured the Analyses, learned pros and cons and in-betweens
of many water alternatives.
She listened to Sierra Club talkers of rainwater harvest,
mitigation banks and berms, recuperating ancient water ways,
She heard Hummel say, “I daydream about all of our historic springs flowing again.”
She read Rice’s Hydrology study showing decline in groundwater and river-flow
if Vista Ridge should really become a “go.”
And she was stricken with recuerdos of her ancianos’ demise
when Lake Owens water went off to LA
and Owens earth was parched for eternity.
Then, she had laughed, but now she is somber
She steps back en la sombra
del valle de los muertos
where she mopes, sin sonrisas...

“Can’t do it again,” she says with resolve
and ran to tell EL SAWS Vista Ridge Hombres,
“Es punto final.”

La Catrina remembered her former self.
Mustering up Mictecacihuatl
Mujer de Mictlan, she exclaims
“Why here in our aquifers,
I’ve been all along. It’s time to keep my house
Clean for awhile,
'cause gente y vidas y agua
are coming and going, dripping through karst
slipping through the sands of ...
‘Time for a walk in the park.”
she declared,
fling[ing] the final parting laugh.

She called the peoples of the aquifers
in newly-formed alliance
to meet en nuestra sueño de un tarde dominical...
This time
the revolution starts with Día Mundial del Agua...
This time we shed our colonialist, conquistador garb,
and treat all as our siblings, our kin,
knowing water runs in us all.

Kamala Platt, Ph.D., M.F.A. is adjunct profesora, artist, independent scholar, concerned (world) citizen and author in South Texas and Meadowlark Center in Kansas; she currently teaches creative writing classes in public schools. Her publications include Weedslovers, Finishing Line 2014; On the Line, Wings Press, 2010 & Kinientos, (compiler) Wordsworth, 1992. She was inspired by Calavera traditions in Mexico City, years back, but wrote her own, only after workshops at Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice in San Antonio.

SHILOH (1862 -)

Sing for me O' Shiloh
Of the lad departed
From the green northern Spring
Sing of the redeemer whose last glance
Was etched on the church's green
For the labor of Liberty
And for those longing to live as one
For the sake of the pilgrim's peace

Sing to me O' Shiloh
Of mansions leeched ivory
By blood's labor sold in the vein
Beneath the weeping cotton
A treasure stolen
Passed to the hands of knights
Each consecrated to their clan
And the vacant blazing cross of their Lord's
estate

Sing in me O' Shiloh
Of the blood's demiurge

Of those driven from the moist Southern
moss
To airless ovens beside Babel's river
Toiling for bread looted by Mammon
Of those starved by the Throne
Tossed to the bark's passage
To a land of golden seduction
And lies cast in green copper

Of those who toiled at the sunrise Pacific
Labored at the sunset of the western rail
Leaving life
To stretch an iron vein that carried their
labor's wealth
To marble castles
On steamy hills
Among the bamboo of their memory
To temples
Upon the ocean's eastern cliff
Now stars on a raptured tourist's map

Sing with me O' Shiloh
My nightmare's tune
Of a vision condemned to the green-glass
altar
Of hope's last reflection
Where priests wrapped in the shaved sheep's
cloak
Cut the measure of my merit
And feast upon the blood of my labor's quest

Yet

Sing through me my Shiloh
Of the bounty that flows
From the thrust of my hammer
The grace of my words
And the magic of my cipher

Sing of me my Shiloh
And of my clan
Daughters and sons of the wage's lash
Creators of worlds yet
With eyes searing grails
Bursting upon the emerald sanctuary
With the vengeance of our blood's birthright
To slash the leach from the vein of Our
Destiny

For now

I sing to you my Shiloh
With the children of Liberty's Spring
Whose journey is charted
By their toil and
For their sake alone

They raise their arms to offer labor's wealth
To all
In homes and towns
Among the moss and gold
To work for their sake
And for sake of the pilgrim's peace

J. Richard Marra lives in Connecticut and is the current Convener of The Socialist Editorial Board. He received his Doctoral degree from Cornell University in 1977, majoring in Musical Composition and the History of Music Theory. While on the Faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, he completed graduate work at Johns Hopkins University, majoring in the Philosophy of Science. He is a member of the Socialist Party USA, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Philosophy of Science Association. He is a 2014 recipient of the Eugene V. Debs Award. To read other essays by J. Richard Marra, please visit <https://sites.google.com/site/thoughtsandthingsjrmarra/>.

TEA WITH JOE HILL

Joe Hill and I had tea
He let his biscuits soak
They say America is free
Man how they love to joke
Ask Sacco and Vanzetti
Ask Red Cloud and Crazy Horse
And the way I see
Is things are getting worse

I said "Joe why ain't you dead?"
Righteousness is like Love my friend
Laughed Joe as he shook his head
Spirits never die and never end
A thousand tyrants and all their force
In truth could never compete
With the Love that is the source
Of one of my melodies sweet
You see death and life they coexist
Some never die and some never live
So songs of revolution will always persist
For unto themselves my songs give

So open your eyes and organize
Never give in to their lies and organize
Do not hate and despise but organize
Raise your voice in mighty cries and organize

Joe slurped the last of his tea
And bid me a final farewell
Above all fight to be free
You'll get heaven when you give them hell

John Kaniecki is a member of the Revolutionary Poet's Brigade and Secretary for Rhyming Poet's International. John volunteers as a missionary in the inner city of Newark, New Jersey, for the Church of Christ at Chancellor Avenue. John is active in the antiwar movement. In particular, John is a strong advocate of the rights of indigenous people. He has two previously published books. A poetry book entitled "Murmurings of a Mad Man" by eLectio Publishing and a science fiction story collection entitled "Words of the Future" published by Witty Bard Publishing. John has been married for almost eleven years to his wife Sylvia.

SOCIAL GUY

It's strange
Being raised a guy;
Society teaches you
To hit
And hit back.

It's drilled into your head;
Control through violence,
Violence through control.

You can feel that
Stiff upper lip
Being welded to your face.

It's strange all right;
You're told that women
Are yours for the taking,
Instead of seeing them as equal human beings.

You're told to swallow
Your own poison
And spit it out
At people you see as lesser.

It's strange
Being raised a guy;
For all the outer toughness
It's just a house of cards,
And if something blows it over

Your world collapses.

Maybe I'm tired
Of being a society guy.
Maybe I'll write, create,
Appreciate some pretty things.

Maybe I'll crack that fragile masculine outer shell
And let the human being within me
Breathe.

I think I'll wear my favorite skirt
As I go about my day,
And with a little luck
The breeze that follows me

Will blow down a house of cards.

FAMILY PORTRAIT

Pt. I: Identity

My grandfather
Shows pictures of the family
To my cousin's friend.

He comes to my picture.
All he says is,
"That's W.T.
He's gay
But we don't talk about it."

He doesn't say
"That's W.T.
He's a writer,
We're all so proud of him."

He doesn't say
"That's W.T.
He's an activist,
He's a young man of principle."

Nope, he doesn't say any of that.
I'm just a faggot
All my life's work doesn't matter.

They don't talk about that either.

Pt. II: Dutiful Son

"Think of your mother.
She has to hear it from grandpa and Uncle Bill
Every time you show up looking like that,
Or when you talk about your writing and activism.

She has to answer for you,
Explain you,
Apologize for you.

Think of your poor mother.
She deals with enough crap at work all day
As it is

Can't you quit being so selfish for once?"

Sure, I can do that.
I'm still young and strong,
And after eight years of silence

What's a few more, right?

Besides
Take it from me,
I speak from too long experience,
Nothing covers up the stains of inner
bleeding
Like a few gallons
Of sweet Carlo Rossi red.

Pt. III: Bargain Love

The best I got
Was "I love you for who you are,
But you know what Pastor Reeves says."

I just nodded and smiled;
Better to receive some scrap
Of acceptance
Than the customary awkward stares and
silence.

I wanted love
Without any buts, amendments,
Or exceptions.

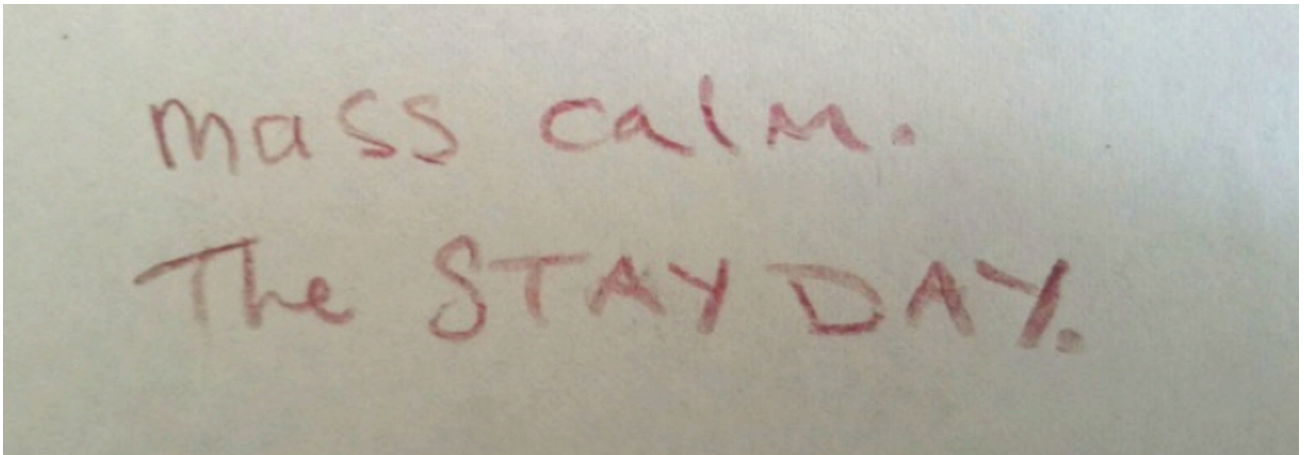
I wanted at least one
To hold the Colors or a sign with me,
To stand on the firing line
And look liberation in the face,
To look out at the world
And bark with heart and soul

"This is my family and I fight for him!"

But I suppose with the right equipment
You can fight your war alone;

Even though you're tired
Of being a solitary warrior.

.....
Walter Beck is from Avon, IN. He's a member of the Indianapolis Socialist Party USA local. A critically acclaimed poet and performer, his poetry and articles have been published in various rags, mags, and journals all over the country and in Canada and the UK. In addition to his poetry and activism, Walter is a member of the Indianapolis Rocky Horror shadow cast Transylvanian Lip Treatment, and can sometimes be spotted in his drag alter-ego, the rock n roll revolutionary Cher Guevara.



WRITING ACCELERATES COLLECTIVE LEARNING

The Los Angeles Local's September Freedom School was a poetry crafting. I arrived early to set up and had a discussion with an artist named Michael about our vision for California and our generation. We talked about various ways a person can work towards peace and away from what seems to be a world of unrest.

While he was showing me some of his drawings he stopped at this one in particular he wanted to show me.

"Oh!" I said, startled. "I dreamt that once."

"Really?" he asked.

"Yeah. I was with a whole society of people and we were migrating. At one point we were scaling cliffs and switchbacking. Then we came to this huge body of water and we went under the water but we could breathe and we were moving under these giant arches under a bridge, just like in your drawing."

"Well, you should have it then," he said handing me the drawing. "But how about if instead of it being about mass migration it be about a mass calm?"

"Definitely," I agreed.

The authors from this event decided they wanted to share their poetry with others so as to practice the theme of the event, which was how writing accelerates collective learning. When we take the time to transfer our thoughts onto a page, we can communicate with each other in a way that augments verbal conversation. And when we do so creatively, we take an important step towards being truthful activists by letting ourselves be vulnerable. It is my hope that as you read these you make some connections within your own life, find yourself wanting to share these poems and ideas with others, and perhaps even do some creative actions with your community!

Jen McClellan writes, reads comic books, skates, eats, sleeps, and poops in the 34th district of Los Angeles. She is studying English and teaching Supplemental Instruction at CSUN, until she becomes a high school English teacher. She is an active Socialist Party USA member and will be hatching plans over the next five years to run for State Assembly.

WHY WE WRITE

I write because my livelihood depends on it
I write because if it's not in writing it never happened
I write because I have to, but most importantly I write because it matters, and freezes time
I write to remember (Mariana)

I write because it's easier to look at the paper than into your eyes
I write because you and yours have written enough about me and mine
I write because my pencil doesn't stutter or stumble over words
I write because I want to get it right (Charisma Charisma)

I write because I feel an apocalyptic angst for humankind that is generally unhealthy for me unless I release it creatively
I write because I don't see a therapist but I probably should
I write because it helps me to appreciate the writing of other writers and art of other artists, you know, it helps me not think "I could have written/painted/drawn/sculpted that"
I write because I believe I have some ideas and attitudes that would actually benefit the resistance, or at least affect the resistance somehow ... hopefully (Brandon Youndt)

I write because the world around me is fast, complex, and chaotic and when I feel tired, lost, or unable to progress, I come to a bookstore for serenity and inspiration
I write because without writers bookstores would be very different
I write because then I don't feel like I'm going to explode (Jen McClellan)

I write because I'm a storyteller
I write because the world needs changing
I write because I have a lot to say (Gene Warren)

I write because I need a storage for my emotions and ideas as new ones come
I write because my ideas are so huge I can't really understand them without visualizing them
I write because I discover myself (Sammy Flores)

I write because I want to slice
I write because words open eyes
I write because the pen can lie
I write because words don't die (Anonymous)

I write because they are not right
I write because it works
I write because it gives my convictions clarity
I write because it's a war of ideas (Anonymous)

I write because
there are some things I need to say
the rage is boiling in my veins
without it, my soul dries up and withers
for me there ain't no other way (Jose Cordova)

TRYING TO SLEEP IN CHAOTIC CONDITIONS

The directions for this were that the first person writes one line, the next person writes a line based on the previous line, then folds over the paper so the next person only sees the line from the person before them.

Loud music in bed keeps thumping and bumping
The din of argument circles the street lights
Casting a shroud of sound on restless hearts
Confusion of clear thought inbound
The only breath was never found
Wanting to hear only one sound
I drank my Nyquil like a parched Tyrannosaurus
Only to discover that it didn't help for shit
I realized this was not for me and I had been on the wrong path
I decided at that moment, who needs sleep anyway,
and I went to the demo And after the demo I went to the dentist
It hurt, yeah ... but it couldn't compare with our outrage in the streets

MY (PERSON'S) SHOES

For this one we were practicing recognizing oppression and resistance through the possession of someone we relate to.

My father's shoes are perfectly unscuffed subliminal lies
My father's shoes bear the weight of his overburdened expectations
I do not fit into my father's shoes
My mother's shoes are on the side of the road
My mother's shoes matched her Sunday dress My mother is driving barefoot and naked and I
am protesting my seatbelt (Jen McClellan)

My sisters' shoes are sandals
The sandals are almost as open as their minds
These sandals look exactly like what Jesus wore on his feet
My sisters traveled across the country to speak about immigration
They would protest as xenophobiacs circled them chanting offensive slurs
As if there were a crucifixion about to take place
My mother's mind full of stress
My mother's stomach never full
Always going full speed just to get home at seven
Three kids, one cat, one dog, and a garden to feed
This was easier as she had already mothered six siblings
A system that failed her, excused men of leaving their families
Set to believe men are evil
I hope to make her proud one day (Sammy Flores)

My mother's jewels beg for attention
My mother's jewels glare at her in the night
My mother's jewels cut conversations into pieces
My mother's jewels are worth nothing (Anonymous)

My mother's perfume accented her beauty but was mostly just skin deep
She looked like a movie star
My mother's church never fit me
I was in my forties when she first said, I love you
Still I have fond memories when I was little
Then she died and never fully understood me (Gene Warren)

My furniture maker's shoes are tiny, tattered, full of holes
My furniture maker's shoes are underpaid, overworked
My furniture maker's shoes are plywood, not even plywood, just the plys,
 waiting to be stuck together with toxic adhesive and sent across
 the ocean on plumes of fossil fuels
My furniture seller's shoes walk on polished concrete
My furniture seller's shoes are still underpaid, overworked, but less so, I think
My furniture seller's shoes are the plywood with the veneer, so you can't tell they're
 plywood they fool you into thinking they're maple or oak or walnut even, but
anyone who knows anything about wood, its weight or color or texture, knows
that they ain't maple or oak or walnut
My furniture's shoes are kinda shitty
They've got a lifespan of maybe 4 years
But damn those shoes were cheap (Brandon Youndt)

My neighbors' bags hold all his possessions in the world,
sheltering them from the other homeless poor, from the rain, and good when he has to go
My neighbors' bags don't match, a mishmash of rags, plastics and luggage.
Whenever he finds, whatever has function, it shows how how knows to survive the cold and the
way we all ignore.
My neighbors' bag's full of ragged clothes and other things I don't know,
scream to me from inside "This is torture, I don't want to live this way no more." (Jose Cordova)