

Guns and the Working Class

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"[T]he nowadays common view that modern weapons have for the future made street-risings impossible is probably wrong. Modern weapons have to be used by

police or soldiers, who may still be subverted, even in the atomic age."--Professor of history at Harvard University, Crane Brinton, who from 1942 to 1945 was Special Assistant to the Office of Strategic Services in the European Theater of Operations, in his 1965 book, The Anatomy of Revolution (pg. 88)

In the wake of the recent mass killing in Newtown, Connecticut, carried out by weapons the private ownership of which is protected (according to some) by the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution, there is now a large public debate about whether such weapons should be banned or their ownership more tightly restricted. The argument for banning or more strictly controlling these weapons is, of course, that they can kill a lot of people very quickly so why in the world would any sane society want them to be available for some deranged person who could use them to kill lots of innocent people? A related argument is that guns of all kinds are dangerous objects that sometimes accidentally kill innocent people, for reasons such as the gun going off

unexpectedly or a child gaining access to it, and this risk, some say, outweighs the value of a good guy with a gun being nearby to stop a bad guy with a gun in a home invasion, a rape, a mass killing or some similar criminal situation.

This article is about whether it is a good idea or a bad idea for the present-day American working class to be armed. This article is not about whether eight-year-old children or mentally unstable or psychopathic people should be armed; even ardent defenders of the right to bear arms would agree they should not be. Nor is this article about whether criminal gangs should be armed (about which see more below*).

The "guns are dangerous" argument versus the "a good guy with a gun protects against a bad buy with a gun" argument can be argued either way with statistics and anecdotes, and there are good people on both sides of the issue. But the Founding Fathers thought the importance of the 2nd Amendment had nothing to do with protection against criminals; they saw the right to

bear arms as the only way for ordinary people to defend themselves against an oppressive government.

The fact that our United States government is indeed oppressive, and that the police departments are an instrument of oppression that uses armed violence or the credible threat of armed violence routinely, cannot be denied and is discussed [here](#) in the case of the Boston Police Department (known as one of the least oppressive and least racially biased in the country) and [here](#) regarding United States police departments generally. Whatever the merits--pro or con--of the Founding Fathers' arguments about the right to bear arms being important to protect against tyrannical government, one thing is for sure: tyrannical government is as much a legitimate concern today as it was back then.

[This list of quotations](#) from many of the Founding Fathers makes their reason for defending the right to bear arms--to defend against tyrannical government--very clear. Ben

Franklin put it this way: "Those who beat their swords into plowshares usually end up plowing for those who didn't." Thomas Jefferson said, "What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance. Let them take arms." Even if guns are too dangerous and the prevalence of bad guy criminals too low to justify making guns omnipresent, the Founding Fathers' argument would nonetheless tip the scales in favor of the right to bear arms--if that argument still made sense in the 21st century. But does it still make sense?

The Founding Fathers lived at a time when the arms of even the state's best equipped military forces were not substantially different from the arms that private individuals could obtain. Today it is very different. Handguns and semi-automatic rifles are no match for the 82nd Airborne Division's weapons of tanks and missiles etc. If the Founding Fathers' argument has been rendered moot by the modern state's military

might, then the right to bear arms is much harder to defend against those worried about fatal gun accidents and deranged mass killers with semi-automatic rifles.

What About the 82nd Airborne Division?

Despite the tremendous power of the U.S. military in contrast to even the famous "well regulated militias" of the 2nd Amendment, however, the words of Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson cannot be dismissed; in fact they are arguably more relevant today than ever. The reason for this is not that guns and semi-automatic rifles can defeat the 82nd Airborne Division. The reason is that, as I discuss below, the right to bear arms will help Americans persuade members of the 82nd Airborne Division (and the rest of the Armed Forces) to join them in removing our 21st century tyrants from power.

The United States is essentially a dictatorship of the rich. A ruling plutocracy of billionaires and

their obedient corporate managers and politicians call the shots. They are making our society increasingly unequal and undemocratic. They are stripping us of the liberties that we once took for granted, such as *habeas corpus* (the right to have a court examine the lawfulness of one's detention, won in the year 1679, and abolished in the United States by the [National Defense Authorization Act of 2013](#)). This dictatorship of the rich has pushed economic inequality to obscene levels, has left more and more Americans unemployed or working at jobs that pay too little, has driven homes into foreclosure, deprived families of adequate medical care, saddled young people with huge student loans, caused environmental disasters like BP in the Gulf, and sent loved ones to kill or be killed in wars based on lies. The future holds misery for the many and privilege for the few. These and other problems are part of a system in which money is power and most people don't have any. The powerful men and women who run our world were not elected and cannot be unelected. They

can only be removed from power by revolution, a revolution to break the power of the ruling elite and create a society run by and for the people: a true democracy.

But where do privately owned guns fit into the scenario of a revolution? Can privately owned guns defeat the 82nd Airborne Division? No. But who's to say that the 82nd Airborne Division (or at least a substantial part of it) won't disobey orders to attack their neighbors and friends and relatives in a broad, popular mass movement with the revolutionary aim of creating a genuine democracy and removing the plutocracy from its undeserved and illegitimate power? Who's to say these soldiers and sailors and marines will not use their ferocious weapons to defend that movement against those who would attack it? Who's to say, in other words, that the vast majority of Americans cannot gain the support of enough members of the armed forces to prevail against those who would continue to fight to keep the plutocracy in power? There is no reason why this

cannot happen. What it requires is building a mass revolutionary movement that makes its aims for a more equal and democratic society widely known, a revolutionary movement that members of the armed forces will see is both morally right and also determined enough to be worth supporting despite the personal risk in doing so, the risk that if they refuse orders to attack the revolutionary movement and the plutocracy remains in power they will be severely punished.

The Role of Guns in the [Revolutionary Movement](#)

How will members of the armed forces know that the revolutionary movement is so determined to win that it makes sense to refuse orders to attack it and instead to defend it? One indication that the revolutionary movement is determined is if it uses arms in self defense when it makes sense to do so. Which raises the question, does it ever make sense to do so, given the overpowering force of the 82nd Airborne Division? The answer

is yes, sometimes it does. The reason is that violence always occurs in a political context in which each side in the conflict must, in deciding whether or not to use violence, consider the political consequences--will it increase or weaken the support one has from the broader public.

The ruling class knows that when working class people in a particular location have a lot of public support in that region (even if people elsewhere don't support them), then it might be politically counter-productive to employ the full violence of the U.S. military to defeat these people when they're fighting for some limited non-revolutionary demand, even if they have resorted to violence themselves. If the wider public saw the National Guard, for example, ordered to attack armed working class people fighting for what most people believed was a just cause, the result could be even greater public support for the people attacked by the National Guard, decreased support for the government, and--most

dangerous of all for the ruling class--increased numbers deciding that a revolution is necessary. The political cost of ordering the U.S. military to attack Americans is often so great that the ruling class decides not to do it and instead to let an armed working class struggle win, at least in the short term.

This is why working people in the United States have often in the past been able to use violence in self defense advantageously. Labor strikes sometimes involved workers using arms or other forms of violence. In 1921 in West Virginia coal workers on strike defended against cops and goons with an armed rebellion in what is known as the [Battle of Blair Mountain](#). During the General Strike in San Francisco of 1936, dockworkers used threats and physical violence to deter scabs. The anti-Vietnam War movement included American GIs fragging (killing by grenade) gung-ho officers who ordered them to risk their lives attacking the Viet Cong. The Civil Rights Movement against Jim Crow laws and

racist police harassment involved Martin Luther King, Jr. seeking a [gun permit](#) to carry a gun for self-protection (the permit was denied) and using armed guards to protect himself from racist thugs, and it involved armed stand offs between blacks and racist cops as when the Black Panthers stood their ground with rifles against the police of Oakland, California.

DID YOU KNOW AMERICAN VETERANS FOUGHT TYRANNY AT HOME IN THE BATTLE OF ATHENS?



In 1946, American WWII veterans organized an armed revolt and used rifles to overthrow brutal politicians and police, in order to ensure honest elections. After authorities locked themselves in the local jail, veterans suspicious of foul play gathered weapons and exchanged fire from across the street. The authorities surrendered and the citizens of Athens, Tennessee set up their own government.

[To read about the Battle of Athens, [click here](#)]

Here is [one person's account](#) of how auto workers used violence in the course of winning the right to have a union in the Great Flint, Michigan Sit Down Strike of 1936-7:

"GM's security forces tried to enter on Jan. 11 1937 and were repulsed by workers inside the plant using fire hoses (this is January, in Michigan, mind. It was probably well below freezing) and chucking car parts at them. The cops responded with tear gas. The wives and members of the women's auxiliary broke out windows to help clear the gas out of the plant. Then the cops showed up, tried a few more times (the union members outside the plant shouting over a PA system warned the workers where the next wave would come from and generally directed the battle) and, frustrated, the motherfuckers fired almost point-blank into the crowd of union supporters. The union's sound truck battery was running low. Things were looking grim for our heroes.

"Then this bad-ass broad stood up and grabbed the mic.

"Cowards! Cowards! Shooting unarmed and defenseless men! Women of Flint! This is your

fight! Join the picket line and defend your jobs, your husband's job and your children's homes!"

"The battle continued. Shortly thereafter, the faint sound of singing and marching could be heard. A group of four-hundred women, red-caps shining in the dark, led by a bearer of the American flag and bearing homemade clubs were singing 'Hold the Fort'. (This was later rewritten for a union version). It was the Emergency Women's Brigade, formed of the wives, sisters and girlfriends of the striking union workers. They pushed through the police (who were for some reason reluctant to shoot women in the back), marched up to the plant and turned around to face the cops, brandishing whatever they'd had at home that could be swung. People were cheering their fucking heads off. The cops looked around, turned tail and left.

"And that is how the strikers won 'The Battle of Bulls Run' (Bull being slang for a cop at the time, Bull's Run a famous Civil War battle). Sixteen

strikers had been wounded (mostly from gunshots) and eleven police hurt by the two-inch metal door hinges thrown by the sit-downers from the roof of the plant. Thankfully, there were no deaths."

The Civil Rights Movement in the American South is known to most people as a nonviolent movement. But the fact is that black people in the South, before and during the Civil Rights Movement years, used guns in self defense against the KuKluxKlan and racist police, and Jim Crow would never have been abolished otherwise. One can read this hidden part of our history in books such as *Negroes with Guns* (online [here](#)) and *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (online [here](#)) and "The Deacons; the black armed Christians who protected MLK, civil rights supporters before Black Panther" by Michael Eli Dokosi (online [here](#).)

As in the past, there will be times in the course of building the revolutionary movement when working class Americans will find it advantageous to use violence (with arms if they have them) in self-defense. Not only will the appropriate use of arms** make it possible to defend against ruling class attacks, it will also make it more evident to members of the armed forces that the revolutionary movement is determined to win and worthy of their support in a showdown with the plutocracy.

The overwhelming military superiority of the U.S. armed forces compared to ordinary people with privately owned guns is a fact, but this fact does not mean that the right to bear arms is no longer important as a defense against tyranny. Guns in the hands of ordinary people will very likely enable them to defend themselves against the ruling class in pre-revolutionary times, and to succeed in persuading members of the Armed Forces to support the revolutionary movement in

revolutionary times, as I discuss in ["How We CAN Remove the Rich from Power."](#)

* According to the [Justice Department](#), "Street gangs, outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs), and prison gangs are the primary distributors of illegal drugs on the streets of the United States." And according to [this report](#), gang activity accounts for an average of 48% of violent crime in most jurisdictions, and up to 90% in some jurisdictions. As discussed [here](#), gangs are essentially the way the illegal drug business is conducted, and because it is illegal it must rely on illegal violence to compete and enforce contracts as opposed to relying on the state's legal violence or credible threat of violence as legal businesses do. Furthermore, the reason poor people, disproportionately blacks and Hispanics, go into the illegal drug business is because for many of them the only alternative, in our society of class inequality, is to settle for a minimum wage job with no future that is disrespected by

everybody; the "drug business," in contrast, offers the lure of an opportunity to rise up in the business and obtain great wealth and prestige. The root of the problem of gang violence is class inequality; the solution is to abolish class inequality, and whether the working class should be armed for this purpose is what "Guns and the Working Class" is about.

** [Here is a video](#) showing cops beating up a black youth. And [here is a video](#) (go to the 33:15 timepoint) of a former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury (and former editor of the Wall Street Journal) saying that Americans should fight back--violently--against the cops when they attack people this way.

Postscript: Another extremely informative article about gun control is ["The Rifle on the Wall: A Left Argument for Gun Rights"](#) by Jim Kavanagh.

Postscript: On March 28, 1,500 armed citizens took to the streets, set up roadblocks, and arrested

local officials. Read more [here](#) and [here](#). This illustrates how the real solution to crime is not a central government but the people armed.

Postscript: [Video: Mexican Vigilantes Stand Up Against Crime](#) This is about ordinary Mexicans forming local assemblies and democratically forming armed militias (they use a different name) to defend their communities against the extreme violence (murder, rape, kidnapping, extortion for 'protection') of the big drug trafficking criminal organizations that, as the book *Narcoland: The Mexican Drug Lords and their Godfathers* by Anabel Hernandez documents in great detail, control the Federal government of Mexico.

This video gives a sense of what revolutionary violence in self-defense looks like.

The apparent explicit aims of this effort are described by the participants extremely modestly, to restore peace and stop criminal violence. But the implicit aim is clearly to shape

society by the values of common decency shared by most ordinary Mexicans, and to remove from power those with the opposite values--i.e. an egalitarian revolution. This movement will be strengthened by making its implicit aims explicit.

At the end, one learns of the efforts of the Mexican ruling class to control and neutralize these revolutionary efforts of ordinary Mexicans. Time will tell what will happen. Whatever happens, the effort of these people to take up arms in defense of decency is very inspiring.

Postscript: Read Chapter 1 in *Negroes With Guns* (online [here](#)) to see how violence in self-defense PREVENTED bloodshed. Read "The Resistant Spirit" (online [here](#), but scroll down to find it) to read a sharp criticism of the philosophy of nonviolence.

Postscript: [Here is an article](#)--one of countless others like it--about how police thugs terrorize ordinary Americans. [Here's](#) another one.

Postscript: [This video](#) is about how the *per capita* homicide rate in the United States compared to other nations is low (in the [bottom half](#) of all nations) even though the *per capita* rate of gun ownership is exceedingly high. The video also points out that the murder rate in American cities is very high in some cities with stiff gun control laws and exceedingly low in some places where there are no such laws and gun ownership is exceedingly high.

Postscript: [This video](#) is a woman's testimony to politicians about how her parents died because of a law banning her having a gun in her purse, and about how the 2nd amendment is not about hunting but enabling people like her to defend themselves against people like the politicians she was addressing.

Postscript: [This video](#) is titled "How to stop a mass shooting in less than 30 seconds."

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