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A *New Politics* classic:
Staughton Lynd and the Labor Movement

NewPolitics

An Independent Socialist Journal

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Winter 2023

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From the Editors

AS WE ENTER 2023, THE WORLD is no less chaotic and crisis-ridden than it has been over the last three COVID pandemic years. After 6.4 million deaths worldwide and more than a million in the United States, COVID remains a serious threat. Thanks to vaccinations and treatments, in some countries there is a falling death rate, though millions are still unvaccinated and the danger of new, resistant variants remains.

The climate crisis continues unabated. At the COP27 conference held in Egypt, the major polluters failed to take action to reduce global warming. The conference did adopt a “loss and damage” fund for developing countries that contribute relatively little to climate change but are disproportionately affected by it, but there is no guarantee that the wealthy countries will fund it adequately. In this issue, in a section called Interviews with Activists, Phil Gasper interviews Alyssa Battistoni on the climate crisis. Our Champion of Justice, Egyptian Alaa Abd El-Fattah, a leader of the Arab Spring, then a political prisoner, began a hunger strike in April 2022, and a water strike in November to coincide with COP27.

Russia’s war on Ukraine, now a year old, continues to grind on, with thousands dead, millions displaced, and horrendous destruction. The possibility of a European war and the use of nuclear weapons remains a danger. Russia continues to carry out large-scale bombing against civilian infrastructure, leaving millions without heat, electricity, or water in the winter. European nations cut off from Russian fuel face rising prices, energy shortages, and blackouts. The war has divided the left around the world

and in the United States between those who, like us, support Ukraine’s right to defend itself and procure arms to do so, and those who call for an immediate ceasefire in place, a position that would mean a Russian victory. In this issue, we publish a statement on Ukraine by the newly formed Ukraine Solidarity Network (U.S.) and an interview with historian Serhiy Hirik on the role of antisemitism in Ukraine.

Ukraine is not the only humanitarian catastrophe. At the moment, while there is a truce between Ethiopia and Tigray, one cannot count on peace. And in Sudan, since the coup of October 2021, more than 14 million are in hunger, but there continues to be hope among grassroots activists, a topic taken up in our pages by Muzan Alneel.

Fascism has re-emerged in Europe. In Germany, neo-Nazis planned to attack the legislature and overthrow the government. (Sound familiar?) In Italy the far right has come to power electorally. In this issue Stefanie Prezioso analyzes the persistence of Fascism in Italy: “A Century After the March on Rome: Fascism from Past to Present and Back.”

In the Western Hemisphere struggles against authoritarian governments and criminal activity continue. In Haiti popular resistance to political corruption and gang violence continues under the threat of another possible foreign—U.S. or U.N.—intervention. Simón Rodríguez Porras takes up all of this in “Haiti: A Crisis Caused by Imperialism and Its Oligarchic Cronies.” In Guatemala, elite families and part of the political class continue their assault on justice and democracy. In recent years, scores of land defenders, activists, journalists, judges,

and anti-corruption prosecutors have been forced into exile or imprisoned. Dawn Marie Paley traveled to Guatemala to speak with Isabel Solís, a Mayan activist involved in struggles for land rights.

At the same time, we see mass popular protests in Iran and China. In Iran since September, there have been huge protests triggered by the murder of a young woman by the morality police. Saeed Rahnama writes about this in “Iran: Secular Revolt Against Clerical Tyranny.” In China deaths in a building fire in Xinjiang’s capital of Urumqi blamed on rigid COVID restrictions triggered national demonstrations against the government’s zero-COVID policy. Some protestors called for freedom and democracy, Xi Jinping’s resignation, and an end to the Communist dictatorship. China has quashed the protests and loosened its restrictions, but without a high-quality vaccine and with many unvaccinated COVID cases are exploding.

There have also been important developments in another Asian country, covered in this issue by Donald C. Wood in his “Abenomics and the Liberal Democratic Party: Bad Politics for Japan.”

In the United States, the Democrats claimed a victory in stopping a threatened “red wave,” kept control of the Senate, and lost only a few seats in the House, though enough to put them in the minority. Yet Donald Trump remains a force in the Republican Party, Trumpist white nationalists have won elections to Congress and to state offices, and the far right and its armed militias continue to thrive. Dan La Botz analyzes the election in detail, arguing that we are “Not Back to Normal.”

Faced with a possible railway strike in November, Joe Biden, who promised to be the most labor-friendly president in history, invoked the Railway Labor Act, persuaded Congress to prohibit a strike, and imposed a contract without the workers’ central de-

mand, paid sick days. A separate bill giving railroad workers seven paid sick days also passed in the House, though as expected died in the Senate. Five of six members of “The Squad” of progressive and supposedly socialist Democrats voted to impose the contract. Three of those are DSA members: Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman. This has led to a debate in DSA, though the organization is unlikely to abandon its electoral strategy of working in the Democratic Party.

In another article focusing on the domestic scene, Elizabeth Rappaport discusses the deeply troubling implications of *Moore v. Harper*, a case just heard before the Supreme Court.

In this issue we have a section on history and theory. John Marot writes on “Old Bolshevism, New Bolshevism, and Lenin’s April Theses.” Sam Farber reflects on Trotsky’s *Their Morals and Ours*. Wayne Price discusses “Conceptions of Dual Power and Prefigurative Politics.” Uditha Devapriya explores the little-known time “When Sri Lanka operated Workers’ Councils.” We are also pleased to be able to publish “An Appreciation of Saidiya Hartman,” an excerpt from Enzo Traverso’s new book, *Singular Pasts*.

Staughton Lynd, the civil rights, anti-war, and labor activist died in November. We publish a reflection by Dan La Botz and reprint a review by Lynd on the labor movement.

In our book reviews, Tess Sheldon gives us her impression of Nadina LaSpina’s book on disability, *Such a Pretty Girl*; Rosemary Hennessy takes up Frieda Afary’s *Socialist Feminism*; Michael Broz reviews Neil Faulkner’s *Alienation, Spectacle, & Revolution*; Dan Davison examines Michael Chessum’s volume on Corbyn and the left; and Peter Ranis reacts to Russian activist Ilya Budraitskis’ book, *Dissidents Among Dissidents*.

The 2022 Midterms

We Are Not Back to Normal, We Are Facing Normalization

DAN LA BOTZ

MUCH OF AMERICAN SOCIETY breathed a great sigh of relief after the November 8 midterm elections, as it became clear that there was no Republican red tsunami—there was hardly even a red ripple—and that many of Donald Trump’s handpicked candidates for major office had gone down in defeat.

The party in power usually loses in the midterms, sometimes by as many as 50 or 60 House seats¹ as well as several in the Senate, but the Democrats kept control of the Senate and even briefly gained a seat as Georgia Senator Rafael Warnock won reelection (a gain undone by Senator Kyrsten Sinema resigning from the Democratic Party and declaring herself an independent). Despite the fact that Republicans won more House votes than Democrats, 51 percent to 48 percent, Republicans only won control of the House by a few seats. I heard several friends, and overheard strangers, saying, “Thank God! The Democrats stopped the red wave.” There was a great sense of relief, even pride, that the American people had not been as bamboozled by Trump, Fox, and far-right social media as we had feared. After all, a Republican victory would have meant a push for a national ban on abortion rights, attacks on trans rights in particular and LGBTQ rights in general, greater restrictions on voting rights, reductions in spending on Social Security and Medicare, a general attack on the working

class, together with the rhetoric of racism and misogyny, the encouragement of white nationalism and replacement theory, and flirtation with far-right armed militias and political violence like that of January 6. And it would have been a spectacular launch for Trump’s 2024 presidential campaign. But it didn’t happen. Phew!

Put in more theoretical terms, many feared that American democracy—with all of its many flaws, from the role of money to the restriction of voting rights—would be replaced this year or in 2024 by an authoritarian right-wing politics tending toward fascism, as embodied in Donald Trump. The Democratic Party campaigned on defending democracy and abortion rights, as did the party’s progressives. The Democrats held the line, but the Republican threat, the peril of another Donald Trump presidency, and the menacing growth of far-right political movements riddled with white nationalists and neo-fascists remain.

We are not back to normal, rather we are facing normalization, the continued mainstreaming of far-right politics in the Supreme Court, the Congress, and in state governments, in the media, and in society as a whole. Yet at the same time, we have real successes by progressives and socialists in the Democratic Party, and by Greens, that provide something of a counter-tendency, though the labor and social movements that stoke that trend are small.

More than ever, our elections are dominated by money, really big money. The mid-term was the most expensive

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such election in U.S. history, with the two major parties together spending more than \$16.7 billion. The Republicans spent \$4.6 billion, compared to the Democrats' \$3.9 billion, while other groups put up billions in dark money. Billionaires contributed to both parties, with their money making up 20 percent of all Republican, and 14.5 percent of all Democratic, contributions. The Democrats' biggest donor, George Soros, gave \$128.5 million to his own political action committee, Democracy PAC, though only \$15 million was actually dispensed, while the Republicans' biggest donor, Richard Uihlein, gave \$80.7 million. Democrats tend to receive more small donations than Republicans, but they get big ones too. With all of the money spent on the election and all of the rallies, door-knocking, and phone calling, this was a high turnout election by U.S. standards: 47 percent of eligible voters cast ballots, almost as many as in 2018.

Trump and the Republicans

The Democrats can thank Trump for much of their success. Biden's approval rating before the election was only 40 percent, but Trump's was even lower at 32 percent. Trump had endorsed more than 200 far-right candidates, all of them election deniers who claim he won in 2020, many anti-vaxxers and Q-Anon supporters: a congeries of reactionary characters, creeps, and kooks. Twenty-seven of his most prominent candidates running for Senate, House, governor, or secretary of state lost their contests, and it was this that caused the Republicans to have such a bad day November 8,² for which Trump is now blamed by some Republican politicians and right-wing pundits. We are naturally gleeful to see the Republicans fail and to witness Trump being blamed. Yet right-wing Republican Governor Ron DeSantis won a smashing victory in Florida, and

Governor Greg Abbott won easily in Texas. Both campaigned on banning abortion, banning books, denying medical services to transgender children, and of course the ever-popular right-wing bogeyman, illegal immigrants.

Altogether, 13 Trump-endorsed candidates won major office, such as senator and governor,³ and the *New York Times* reported on November 10 that it had "identified hundreds of Republican candidates who questioned the 2020 election who were running in major midterm races. ... At least 200 won. Most of this group made statements that cast doubt on the 2020 election, often repeatedly. About three dozen, or 16 percent, were more direct and denied the 2020 results outright." (Another 120 election doubters and deniers lost their elections.) More than a third of the members of next year's House have questioned or denied the 2020 election, the *Times* reported. The *Washington Post* stated that about 60 percent of election-denying Republicans won their races, and the *New Republic* added that "about 70 percent of Republicans in the House are election deniers who will happily work to overturn the 2024 election given the chance." Many Republican victories were the result of gerrymandering and voter suppression.

So, while we may take satisfaction that several of Trump's major candidates failed, many Trumpists will be serving in the new Congress. Two of them, Republicans Derrick Van Orden of Wisconsin and George Santos of New York, were present at the January 6 insurrection and attempted coup at the Capitol, while the cartoonish, looney, and dangerous Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and the vile fascist Paul Gosar of Arizona give talks to white nationalist groups. These far-right representatives are connected to the movement of right-wing armed militias who played a central role on January 6 and

the sorts of people who planned to kidnap Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer. The far-right Freedom Caucus has 44

The midterm was the most expensive such election in U.S. history.

members in the House, or more than 10 percent of that body's 435 representatives. Republican Senator from Missouri Josh Hawley, who raised a fist in solidarity with the January 6 insurrectionists, declared after the election, "The Republican Party as we have known it is dead," and what he seems to want to replace it with is a far-right radical party linked to armed militias—storm-troopers, as they used to be called.

The Republican Party is in trouble, still dealing with Trump's outsized influence and with rebellious right-wingers in the party, some of whom worked to deny Kevin McCarthy the role of speaker of the House in a 188 to 31 party conference vote when he needs 218 of the whole body to become speaker. Similarly in the Senate, Mitch McConnell faced opposition from 10 senators but won the election for minority leader with 37 votes in favor. The Republicans will have a hard time maintaining party discipline, and the Democrats may or may not succeed in peeling off a few to pass some legislation to elect a moderate Republican speaker or even a Democratic Party speaker.

Meanwhile, just a week after the election, Donald J. Trump, speaking at Mar-a-Lago before a friendly crowd devoid of any Republican politicians or opinion makers, announced that he would be a candidate for president for the third time. Given his egomania, and his hope for presidential immunity in the criminal investigations

he is facing, this was no surprise. Looking forward to the presidential primary, some polls show Trump leading, others indicate DeSantis is ahead; *FiveThirtyEight* thinks Trump would win. But he will face greater challenges than in the past. Several of his multi-billionaire donors, including Blackstone CEO Stephen Schwarzman; Thomas Peterffy, chairman of Interactive Brokers; billionaire Ken Griffin; industrialist Andy Sabin; and Ronald Lauder, heir of Estée Lauder cosmetics, have indicated they won't be backing him anymore. Rupert Murdoch, owner of Fox and many other outlets, has turned his back on Trump. His paper the *New York Post* ran a front-page headline, "Florida Man Makes Announcement" and buried the story of Trump's announcement in the middle of the paper. His daughter Ivanka Trump says she will not be his advisor as in the past. Still, few Republican politicians have broken with him, fearing his huge and loyal voter base. He could well come back; it depends on how the Republicans do in Congress, how the Democrats manage, and what sort of broader opposition develops. And it depends on us.

The Democrats and Their Progressives

The Democratic Party's success was best represented by John Fetterman, the party's candidate for the Senate in Pennsylvania. Fetterman doesn't call himself a progressive, and with good reason. He opposed Medicare for All, supports fracking, and gives unwavering support to Israel. But he did show Democrats how to reconnect with the party's traditional working-class base.

Fetterman, standing 6'8" tall, covered with tattoos, and wearing a hoodie, ran on working-class issues, saying, "The union way of life is sacred, and as a public servant, I have always stood up for workers. I have walked picket lines with striking workers, attended countless rallies in support of

unionization efforts, and have even asked my campaign email list to donate directly to unions' strike funds. I'll take this fight for workers with me to Washington." When he suffered a stroke in May that affected his speech, he nevertheless continued his campaign. His Trump-endorsed opponent,

The Republican Party is in trouble, still dealing with Trump's outsized influence and with rebellious rightwingers in the party.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, is a carpetbagger who moved from his home in New Jersey to run in Pennsylvania. A quack who promoted pseudo-scientific remedies, faith-healing, and the paranormal, he peddled "miraculous" weight loss drugs and other snake oil, and as a frequent guest on Oprah Winfrey's show became something of a household name. In the end Oprah endorsed Fetterman, who crushed Oz with a vote of 51.1 to 46.5 percent.

In his victory speech Fetterman declared, "This campaign has always been about fighting for anybody who's gotten knocked down that ever got back up. I'm proud of what we ran on: protecting a woman's right to choose, raising our minimum wage, fighting for the union way of life, health care as a fundamental human right; it saved my life and it should be there for you if you ever should need it. Standing up to corporate greed, making more things right here in America, right here in Pennsylvania, and standing up for our democracy." His stand for abortion rights mattered. Seventy-seven percent of young women voted for Fetterman, 5

percentage points more than the national average for Democrats.

The Democrats, under attack from the Republicans on the questions of inflation, crime, and immigration, fought on two major issues: the defense of democracy and abortion rights. The latter in particular played a central role in the Democrats' success in preventing a Republican sweep. The U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, overturning *Roe* and ending federal protection of abortion rights, motivated many women to turn out and vote against the Republicans. An analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation found, "Nationally, nearly half (47%) of all voters say the Court's decision had a major impact on which candidates they supported in this election, including almost two-thirds (64%) of those who voted for Democratic House candidates." In addition, "About four in ten (38%) voters overall said that the Supreme Court decision ending the constitutional right to an abortion had a major impact on their decision about whether to vote in this year's election. The share citing the decision as a major motivator was highest among Black women under age 50 (61%), Hispanic women under age 50 (58%), those who voted for Democratic Congressional candidates (56%), first-time voters (54%), voters under age 30 (53%), and those who said they were angry about the Supreme Court's abortion decision (55%)." Bernie Sanders, writing in the *Guardian* of October 10, 2022, said he thought it was a mistake to make abortion the leading issue and thought the economy was more important, but he was proven wrong. Women's concerns, their votes, and those of their allies were largely responsible for the Democrats' success.

One sees this too in state propositions. Three states, Vermont, Michigan, and California, voted to codify abortion rights in law, and Kentucky voters turned down

a measure that would have further and drastically restricted abortion rights there.

Young voters represented only 12 percent of the midterm vote, fewer than in recent elections, but about 64 percent of them voted for Democrats over Republicans.

As in the past, the Democrats relied on the votes of people of color, even if support from Latinos and Blacks has been slipping: In this midterm, 80 percent of Blacks, 77 percent of Asians, and 56 to 60 percent of Latinos voted for Democrats, according to AP VoteCast. The African American Research Collaborative found that also 65 percent of Native Americans voted for Democrats. Women, especially young women often driven by the abortion issue, played a central role in the Democratic success, with a CNN exit poll showing 72 percent of women aged 18-29 voted for Democrats in House races nationwide. Labor unions mobilized their members as usual to vote for the Democratic Party, knocking on doors and making phone calls, getting out the vote on election day, and even providing rides to the polls in some cases. Unions like the Service Employees, teachers (both NEA and AFT), and non-federal public employees make a considerable contribution to getting out the vote. But we know that no matter what their leaders say, many white male voters in industry and construction, in unions like the Steelworkers and the Carpenters, cast their votes for Republicans.

Democrats did surprisingly well at the state level. They flipped at least three statehouses and held their majorities in several other state legislatures where they were being challenged. Democrats took control of both houses in Michigan, of the Senate in Minnesota, and of the House in Pennsylvania. In Vermont the Democrats and the Progressives, a local left party, took both houses. Democrats also blocked Republican legislative super majorities in

North Carolina and Wisconsin and held on to majorities in five other states. Control of state legislatures gives a party control of legislative redistricting and can determine a state's political future. Democrats also flipped the governors in Maryland and Massachusetts.

In New York, Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul just barely won reelection, and the Democrats did poorly after redistricting, losing four congressional seats. Hochul would not have won without help from the Working Families Party, which came to her aid to stop the election of the right-wing Lee Zeldin, who had been endorsed by Trump. Plus the WFP needed 130,000 votes to stay on the ballot. The collaboration paid off for both. Hochul won by 350,000 votes, 250,000 on the WFP line. Democratic socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has called for a root-and-branch reorganization of the state party.

Within the Democratic camp,
progressive candidates did well.

"It's no secret that an enormous amount of party leadership in New York State is based on big money and old-school, calcified machine-style politics that creates a very anemic voting base that is disengaged and disenfranchised," said Ocasio-Cortez. "We need to rebuild the party apparatus from the bottom up." It will be a challenge.

In Los Angeles, progressive Karen Bass became the first woman and the second Black person to be elected mayor, defeating the billionaire real estate developer Rick Caruso, who put \$100 million of his own money into his campaign. Caruso had called for beefing up the police department and launching a war on the homeless, while

Bass, a social worker, called for addressing the causes of homelessness.

While we're happy to see Trump and the Republicans defeated, the Democrats represent no great alternative. Without a doubt, Biden and the Democrats' social and economic policies, such as their handling of COVID, were far more humane than Trump and the Republicans. Still, the Democratic Party failed over the last 40 years to keep its promises to its constituents, the union workers, women, Blacks, and Latinos who for so long voted for it. The Democrats, when they held the majority in Congress, never succeeded in codifying abortion in federal law, never passed the labor law reform they had promised since the 1970s, not only failed to create a civilized justice system but promoted massive incarceration that particularly affected Black communities, and failed to create a humane immigration policy. The Democrats cannot represent working people because of their greater commitment to capital. Like the Republicans, they largely depend for their financing on mining, oil, manufacturing, services, and high-tech corporations. Scores of Democratic Party senators and representatives are corporate lawyers, or were until they became professional politicians. Committed to capitalism at home, the Democrats are equally dedicated to imperialism abroad, as witnessed by their support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the long history of military interventions in Latin America, and their relationships with Israel and the petrol-monarchies of the Middle East.

The Progressives, Socialists, and the Greens

Within the Democratic camp, progressive candidates did well. "There's no question that this will be the most progressive Democratic caucus in decades," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, chair

of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, which has more than 100 members. Progressives were newly elected in congressional districts in Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Florida, Hawaii, California, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. Jayapal said that of the 18 candidates the Progressive Caucus endorsed in this cycle, 15 won their races. Maxwell Alejandro Frost, age 25, the first member of Generation Z to be elected to Congress, ran on the issue of health care for all and defeated his Republican opponent 59 to 39 percent. Summer Lee, backed by the Democratic Socialists of America, won her Pennsylvania race, overcoming the campaign by AIPAC, the pro-Israel group that spent \$4 million to defeat her. Greg Casar, who has emphasized police reform, affordable housing, and immigrant rights, won 72 percent of the vote in his Texas district. And, with Senator Bernie Sanders' endorsement, Rebecca Balint won in Vermont.

The Democratic Socialists of America, the country's largest socialist group, down from 90,000 members a few years ago to 67,000 dues-paying members today, remains committed to running socialists and endorsing progressives in the Democratic Party, but is opposed to running on a socialist ticket. DSA endorsed more than 35 candidates for local, state, or national office, and 16 won. DSA candidates Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Cori Bush, and Rashida Tlaib, all of "the squad," all won reelection. Eunisses Hernandez and Hugo Soto-Martínez defeated incumbents to win seats on the Los Angeles City Council. Darrin Madison and Ryan Clancy will be going to the Wisconsin State Assembly, Elizabeth Fiedler and Rick Krajewski will join the Pennsylvania state legislature, and Javier Mabrey and Elisabeth Epps will join the legislature in Colorado. In New York, voters elected Sarahana Shrestha and Kristen Gonzalez to the statehouse. Three

other new DSA state legislators are Erika Uyterhoeven in Massachusetts, Gabriel Acevero in Maryland, and Rachel Ventura in Illinois.

The Green Party, which has ballot access in many states and represents the most significant political alternative to the left of the Democratic Party, continues to run candidates despite constant attempts by the other parties, particularly the Democrats, to drive them off the ballot. Greens in 2022 (including spring local elections and special elections) ran 155 candidates in 26 states, winning 31 of the races, and at least 14 of 28 Green candidates for various county, city, school, and special districts were elected on November 8. Greens currently hold at least 136 local offices across 19 states. In campaigns for major office, the Greens ran ten candidates for the House and four for the Senate, winning between 1 percent and 3 percent of the vote. In statewide contests, Green candidates generally got less than 1 percent. Driven off the ballot in New York, the Greens got 10,000 write-ins in the state on November 8.

To improve its electoral chances, the Green Party is fighting for ranked choice voting, says Howie Hawkins, eco-socialist and Green Party presidential candidate in 2020. “We worked for ranked choice voting in 2020 in 24 local jurisdictions. We come out of the 2022 election with ranked choice voting in three states and 115 local jurisdictions. Ranked choice voting is a reform we are winning.”

The Missing Elements

With the government now divided—a Democratic president and Senate but a Republican House—it seems that we will see a return to legislative paralysis. Especially in a time of economic uncertainty because of rising inflation, this sort of situation breeds political cynicism and demoralization. And that may continue to fuel the growth of

the right.

While the Republicans have been stopped for now, and while there are important gains for progressives, democratic socialists, and Greens, what is missing from

The Democrats relied on the votes of people of color, even if support from Latinos and Blacks has been slipping.

the scene are labor and social movements that might provide the social power to transform American politics. The one social movement that did matter in 2022, the reproductive rights movement that appeared after the *Dobbs* ruling in June and that held hundreds of demonstrations throughout the country, drawing in hundreds of thousands of new women activists, had a tremendous impact on the election and may be what saved the Democrats from the threatened red wave. The uptick in labor, best represented by the organizing at Starbucks and Amazon, is still too small and not yet successful enough to spark a broader labor upsurge. The Black Lives Matter movement that brought between 15 and 25 million people into the streets in 2020 subsided, surprisingly without creating a new independent Black organization. Other movements remain too small and too sporadic to bring much to the broad left at this time.

At the same time, the socialist movement that might offer a vision and strategy to such groups is too small at the moment and, more important, lacks a commitment to socialism from below. The growth of campism and even neo-Stalinism in the contemporary left is disheartening and dis-

orienting. The idea that there is no socialism without democracy and no democracy without socialism is held only by a handful of small groups and publications.

These two problems—the lack of a mass movement and the lack of leftist organizations committed to socialism from below—are the fundamental problems that leave us facing a Republican Party normalizing right-wing views and a neoliberal Democratic Party that serves as a poor alternative. We who stand for socialism from below have to take on those two problems.

NOTES

1. The Democrats lost 50 seats in one mid-term of Clinton's presidency and 60 in one of Obama's. See www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/seats-congress-gainedlost-the-presidents-party-mid-term-elections.
2. Where Trump's candidates lost: **Senate Races:** Mehmet Oz, defeated in Pennsylvania by John Fetterman; Don Bolduc, defeated in New Hampshire by Sen. Maggie Hassan; Leora Levy, defeated in Connecticut by Richard Blumenthal; Gerald Malloy, defeated in Vermont by Peter Welch. I'm not sure it's worthwhile (or fair) to include races in overwhelmingly blue states (VT and CT). Some candidates Trump endorsed in the primaries and played a real role in getting them nominated (Oz, Bulduc) and for the winners Vance. This is different from him chiming in to endorse the obvious choice. **House Races:** Bo Hines, defeated in North Carolina's District 13 by Wiley Nickel; Steve Chabot, defeated in Ohio's District 1 by Greg Landsman; Madison Gesiotto Gilbert, defeated in Ohio's District 13 by Emilia Sykes; John Gibbs, defeated in

Michigan's District 3 by Hillary Scholten; Yesli Vega, defeated in Virginia's District 7 by Abigail Spanberger; Karoline Leavitt defeated in New Hampshire's District 1 by Rep. Chris Pappas; J.R. Majewski, defeated in Ohio's District 9 by Marcy Kaptur; Sandy Smith, defeated in North Carolina's District 1 by Don Davis; Robert Burns, defeated in New Hampshire's District 2 by Ann McLane Kuster; Sarah Palin, defeated in Alaska's At-Large District 2 by Mary Peltola; Jim Bognet, defeated in Pennsylvania's District 8 by Matt Cartwright. **Governors races:** Tudor Dixon, lost to Governor Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan; Doug Mastriano, lost to Josh Shapiro in Pennsylvania; Lee Zeldin, lost to Governor Kathy Hochul in New York; Dan Cox, lost to Wes Moore in Maryland; Geoff Diehl, lost to Maura Healey in Massachusetts; Tim Michels, lost to Governor Tony Evers in Wisconsin; Darren Bailey, lost to Governor J.B. Pritzker in Illinois; Scott Jensen, lost in Minnesota to Governor Tim Walz; Mark Ronchetti, lost in New Mexico to Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham; Derek Schmidt, lost in Kansas to Governor Laura Kelly. **Secretaries of State:** Kim Crockett, defeated in Minnesota by Steve Simon; Kristina Karamo, defeated in Michigan by Jocelyn Benson.

3. Trump candidates who won major offices: Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, Nevada Governor-elect Joe Lombardo, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, North Carolina Senator-elect Ted Budd, Ohio Senator-elect J.D. Vance, Florida Senator Marco Rubio, Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley, Utah Senator Mike Lee, Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson, and Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose. I'd only include Lombardo, Vance, and Johnson, which were competitive races.

Moore v. Harper

A Case that Threatens Democracy

ELIZABETH RAPAPORT

MOORE *v.* HARPER IS ABOUT WHICH organs of state government get to weigh in on congressional redistricting. In high school civics terms, it's about checks and balances. More precisely, the question posed to the Supreme Court in this case is whether the U.S. Constitution permits state courts to constrain the district map-drawing power of state legislatures to prevent extreme gerrymandering. Before readers roll their eyes about the tedium to follow or lick their chops in anticipation of some dry and technical paragraphs, let me assure you that this is a high stakes case. Alarmed by the propensities of the conservative majority on this Supreme Court, conservative Federalist Society luminaries have joined forces with progressives in opposition to the actions they fear this Court may take. A broad coalition spanning the ideological spectrum of the legal establishment has filed briefs in the case. All plead with the Supreme Court, "Please, NO!" In practical political terms, there is the potential in *Moore v. Harper* for this Court to do the job of entrenching minority Republican rule that was flubbed by assorted would-be insurrectionists in the wake of the election of President Joe Biden.

1. How *Moore v. Harper* found its way to the Supreme Court's 2022-23 Docket

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Following upon the 2020 census, the Republican-controlled North Carolina state legislature passed a new congressional districting plan. The plan is a rather extreme example of gerrymandering. Although the voters of the state are fairly evenly split between the two parties, the new plan would all but guarantee 10 of 14 congressional seats to the Republican Party. Gerrymandering is of course a time-honored practice of both parties. North Carolina like some other states places some limits on gerrymandering in its state constitution. Voters groups asked the state courts to hold that the legislature's redistricting plan violated the state constitution. The NC Supreme Court did so. After an intransigent state legislature refused to revise its redistricting plan, the NC Supreme Court authorized a substitute plan, following statutory procedures for doing so. Stung, the Republican legislators took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court. (Moore is the speaker of the NC house of representatives, Harper denotes a collection of NC civic and voters' groups.)

In *Moore v. Harper* the NC legislature argues that the federal Constitution gives state legislatures plenary (unlimited) and exclusive power to draw congressional district lines. Accordingly, they asked the Court to adopt a reading of the federal Constitution that would deliver that result. On this reading state courts cannot review a redistricting plan to determine whether it respects the limits that the state constitution places on gerrymandering. The

U.S. Supreme Court declined to intervene before the pending 2022 election. The plan authorized by the NC Supreme Court was left in place for the 2022 election. But four members of the U.S. Supreme Court (Justices Alito, Thomas, Gorsuch, and Kavanaugh) expressed interest in the theory of constitutional interpretation on which the NC legislature relied. They found it intriguing and deserving of a serious hearing. Four members of the Court is what it takes to grant *certiorari*, *i.e.*, to secure a place on the Court's discretionary docket. The NC legislature was handed a gilt-edged invitation to take the so-called Independent State Legislature Theory to the high court. And they did.

Alarm bells went off in the legal world. Readers may recall a flurry of media coverage of the Independent State Legislature Theory (ISLT) during the insurrectionary aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. Wild-eyed Trump lawyers dragged the ISLT in from what was routinely described by establishment commentary as the far fringe of constitutional discourse. ISLT put a thin veneer of legitimacy on their efforts to supplant lawful slates of presidential electors with slates pledged to Donald Trump. The theory has far-reaching implications beyond the issue of whether state courts may play a role in congressional district line-drawing that is squarely before the Court in this case. These include allowing presidential electors pledged to mirror the popular vote in their state to be supplanted by slates of electors chosen by state legislatures exercising their plenary power. If the Court buys into ISLT, it could in time apply the principle to other areas of election law, including presidential elections. There is concern that even a partial victory for ISLT in *Moore v. Harper* could be a camel's-nose-under-the-tent prelude to more or worse in redistricting or other areas of election law. There is concern that the conservative

majority on the Supreme Court is a pretty wild-eyed bunch themselves.

In *Moore v. Harper* the NC legislature asks only that the Court free the legislature from any check by the state courts and the state constitution in redistricting. The best outcome for American democracy would have been for the Court to decline to take the case. This would have been a clear signal that the Court is not going to indulge ideas of insurrection by legal proxy. However, the Independent State Legislature Theory is catnip to the conservatives on this Court—and there are six of them.

II. Originalism and the Independent State Legislature Theory

As is well known, some of the conservatives on the current Court are doctrinaire originalists and all are influenced by originalism. The currently favored version of originalism is textualism. A textualist interpretation looks to the public or common meaning of a key term or phrase at the time of the drafting and ratification of the Constitution. For evidence of meaning a textualist will also look to traditional practices these usages reflect or to which they give rise. Paraphrasing Justice Kagan at her confirmation hearing, virtually all judges are originalists to this extent. Where originalists depart from other judges is in freezing the meaning of the Constitution at the time of the founding. An originalist will be unmoved by any argument or evidence marshalled to show that the Constitution should be read to take account of changing conditions. Change, they believe, requires amendment of the Constitution where legislative branch action is insufficient to effect the desired reform. In this way the judiciary respects the boundary between its role, which is to interpret and apply the law, and that of the legislature. Sceptics and opponents argue that this is

not an accurate portrayal of how judges, including originalist justices, do or could do their jobs.

Twenty-first century cases involving the Second Amendment “right to bear and keep arms” provide good examples of originalism at work. In *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) the conservative majority abandoned the idea that the Second Amendment tied gun rights to the need to raise or maintain a “well ordered militia” to the military prerequisites of the state. *Heller* held that there is an *individual* right to keep arms in the home. Last Term in *NY Rifle and Pistol Ass’n. v. Bruen*, the Court held that the right to “bear” arms included the right *to carry arms in public*. The *Bruen* case was the site of warring histories of gun rights in distant times. The liberal justices did not concede the nature of colonial and early republic understandings and practices to the conservatives. They also warned that minimizing the ability of the government to regulate gun ownership and use in contemporary America was a terrible idea. The conservatives were unmoved by the practical consequences of this profound shift in constitutional interpretation of the Second Amendment. They preferred the personal and permissive reading of gun rights to the social and restrictive reading of constitutional history.

III. *Moore v. Harper*

In *Moore v. Harper* ISLT gets its chance to go mainstream. The Elections Clause of the U.S. Constitution gives to state legislatures the power to regulate federal congressional elections subject to being overridden by Congress if Congress chooses to act. The text unambiguously states that “the legislature” has this power:

The times, places and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each state by the legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by law make or alter such regu-

lations, except as to the places of choosing Senators. (Art. 1, section 4, clause 1)

The text of The Elections Clause says nothing about state constitutions or state courts having a role in drawing the lines of congressional districts. Nevertheless, state court review of gerrymandering under state constitutions is part of our election landscape; it is the way the game has been played. In *Moore v. Harper* the NC state legislature wields ISLT in hopes of sweeping state courts out of the game.

The implications of ISLT exceed the gerrymandering of congressional districts at issue in *Moore v. Harper*. Most dramatically there is the question of appointments to the Electoral College. Their votes ultimately decide presidential elections. The Electors Clause of the U.S. Constitution (Art. II, sec. 1, clause 2) states in the pertinent part that “Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct” its slate of electors. The text of the Electors Clause does not include the familiar method followed by the states of certifying electors bound by state law to vote for the winner of the popular vote in their state. The text refers only to the “Legislature.” Applied to the Electors Clause, ISLT means state legislatures could conceivably choose a slate pledged to a candidate who lost the popular vote in that state. This was the gambit of the coup plotters unwilling to accept the defeat of Donald Trump in 2020. Any constitutional provision or state law to the contrary would be void. The Electors Clause is not before the Court in *Moore v. Harper*. A victory for ISLT in this case could encourage proponents to hope for further useful vindication of the theory at the Supreme Court in the future.

With six conservatives on the Court, each side in *Moore v. Harper* understands the strategic importance of persuading conservative justices of its rendition of the place of ISLT in constitutional history. This case

was briefed and argued to persuade committed originalists. Lawyers arguing against ISLT must overcome the plain language of the text of the Elections Clause. Lawyers arguing for adoption of ISLT as the correct constitutional reading must overcome its apparent novelty. It has sparse provenance in constitutional history and none in Supreme Court precedents. The briefs and

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oral arguments of opposing sides were exercises in constitutional history.

Constitutional history *should* give the victory to the opponents of ISLT. In summary the argument goes as follows: “Legislature” in the Elections Clause means “a law-making body constrained by the state constitution that created it and subject to judicial review.” The Elections Clause should not be read in pristine isolation but in light of the way “legislature” is treated throughout the document as subject to the check of judicial review. Similarly, references in the Constitution to Congress and its powers are informed by constitutional provisions that constrain its lawmaking powers, such as the president’s veto power. There is overwhelming historical evidence that the founding generation and subsequent generations understood “legislature” in this fashion. State court judicial review of legislation was practiced from the earliest days of the Republic.

However, as I listened to the oral ar-

guments on December 7, I heard two of the most conservative justices, Alito and Gorsuch, clinging to the few shreds of evidence that could be adduced to support ISLT against the weight of the record. The three less doctrinaire conservatives, Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Kavanaugh and Barrett did not appear to be so blind to the obstacles to concluding that history and tradition support ISLT. Some of their remarks suggested an interest in finding a middle course between shutting the courthouse door on ISLT and endorsing it completely.

Oral argument was pervaded by an eerie air of willed unreality as the lawyers and judges debated the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century provenance of ISLT. Less than two years ago some state and federal office holders tried to install Donald Trump for a second term in defiance of the popular vote using ISLT as a legal fig leaf. These worthies are still at it, some openly in league with white supremacists and neo-fascists. Never heard at oral argument was this reality-based description of the proceedings: the NC legislature is asking the Supreme Court to facilitate Republican state legislators’ pursuit of Republican control of Congress through aggressive gerrymandering. We have two major parties in the United States neither of which has been a fastidious practitioner of electoral democracy. At this moment one of them threatens to overturn the whole electoral appellation.

Three Justices made some reference to contemporary politics, all careful to avoid challenging the tacit agreement that the plain meaning of the text in constitutional history was the order of the day. Gorsuch remarked very briefly that the “political salience”¹ of their decision would depend upon whose ox was gored. Thomas picked up the metaphor, asking a lawyer for Harper whether he would be in court making the

same argument “[if] the state legislature had been very, very generous to minority voters in their redistricting.”² Justices Gorsuch and Thomas want us to know that they are onto the partisan game of the Harper litigants. Justice Kagan gets closer to the reality outside the marble halls of the Supreme Court. While Gorsuch and Thomas acknowledge the existence of partisan politics, she alludes to the political moment we are in now. She asks a Moore lawyer whether he has something to say about the “big consequences” of adopting ISLT “at exactly the time” when checks on partisan activity “are needed most.”

It would say that legislatures could enact all manner of restrictions on voting, get rid of all kinds of voter protections that the state constitution, in fact, prohibits. It might allow the legislatures to insert themselves, to give themselves a role, in the certification of elections and ... the way election results are calculated. So ...in all these ways, I think what might strike a person is that this is a proposal that gets rid of the normal checks and balances on the way big governmental decisions are made in this country. And ...you might think that it gets rid of all those checks and balances at exactly the time when they are needed most, because legislators, we all know, have their own self interests.³

But she does not press for a responsive answer.

IV. How Will the Justices Rule in *Moore v. Harper*?

The short answer is that we don’t know. I would observe that the stakes are high for the Court’s conservatives as well as for electoral democracy. In overturning *Roe v. Wade* or foisting a decision on the country that makes adequate gun regulation impossible, the conservatives were fulfilling ideological

ambitions of decades long standing. ISLT has no such standing. It does not have deep roots in conventional conservative jurisprudence. It is a creature of the radical right of this moment. If the Court were to decide to hobble the ability of state courts to restrain gerrymandering it will be seen as a frank alignment of the Court with the radical Republican project of locking in minority rule. When the conservatives overturned *Roe*, they did what the conservative movement had been promising to do since 1973. Chief Justice Roberts was the lone conservative on the Court unwilling to vote his heart in *Roe*. The Chief, an institutionalist, did not want the Court to take the hit to its prestige entailed by the unpopular move of abolishing at one go reproductive rights enjoyed for 50 years. *Moore v. Harper* is a nakedly political case that tests the Court’s willingness to tip the scales in favor of an increasingly radical Republican Party. How many, if any, conservative justices are ready to depart from establishment legal conservatism to align with and provide a constitutional gloss for subversion? We are in a new political environment in the United States after the failed coup in January 2021. Only a scattering of Republicans in elected office has broken with the coup plotters, hardly enough to call a rump. *Moore v. Harper* asks the conservative justices which side are you on? They can declare for one or the other or find some way to try to equivocate.

The decision likely will be handed down in the spring or early summer of 2023.

NOTES

1. Oral Argument Transcript at 54, www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/argument_transcript/2022.
2. *Ibid.* at 94.
3. *Ibid.* at 49-51.

Building a Movement for Climate Justice

An Interview with Alyssa Battistoni

Alyssa Battistoni teaches political theory at Barnard College. She is the co-author of *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal* (Verso 2019) and is currently writing a book titled *Free Gifts: Capitalism and the Politics of Nature*. Phil Gasper spoke with Alyssa on behalf of the *New Politics* editorial board on November 4, 2022.

Phil Gasper: Well, thanks so much for agreeing to do this interview. I wanted to start with the current climate crisis. The Washington Post recently called the climate news “grim” and there’s been a lot of focus on what has changed in the last 12 months and in the last few years, since the Paris Agreement several years ago, and since COP 26 in 2021. As we’re talking, we’re waiting for COP 27 to start later this month. But even some of the people who had been optimistic in the past about what’s taking place at the international level seem to be less so now, because the gap between where we are and where we need to be seems to be so big, and governments certainly are not living up to the pledges which they’ve made in the past.

Alyssa Battistoni: I think you’re right. Last year’s COP 26 in some ways felt like a big disappointment, or underwhelming in some way, because after the Paris agreement and then the drama around Trump pulling out, there was some hope that with a non-Trump President, the United States might be involved in a different way. But I think that in many ways, it shouldn’t be surprising, insofar as the COPs have never

really been where the forefront of climate action is happening. I think they’re important as a place where governments are making commitments that climate activists can use to hold governments accountable, and to point to exactly to that gap you just described, between what we need to do, with what governments have committed to do, and then what they have actually done. All of those things are important. It is also the one annual time when everyone talks about climate change for a week, so it creates some global attention for protests and so on. But I think that’s just not been where the political energy is coming from. And so, in some ways the kind of disappointments are not surprising.

One thing that is interesting in this moment is that even as there’s perhaps a growing disenchantment with some of these processes, a number of liberal climate commentators are probably more optimistic because they think green capitalism is finally moving into gear. There’s been this surge of interest in ESG investing—in environmental, social governance investing—which is supposedly a green investment. Here in the U.S., we’ve seen the passage of the IRA [Inflation Reduction Act], which amounts to state-driven investments in green capital. We can talk about the deep inadequacies of those—I think ESG in particular is just greenwashing—but there’s a mood amongst some people that, OK, finally green capitalism is shifting into gear and that will solve this problem. I think that is wildly over-optimistic. But it’s interesting

to see the different directions that climate opinion is moving after a very bleak point last fall. On the one hand, it seems that very few people think we're now going to stop at 1.5 degrees (°C) of warming—I think *The Economist* just had a cover on this¹—but [they say] it's fine, [because] we're also not going to hit five degrees. We'll probably hit somewhere in between, maybe it stops at three—which is absolutely catastrophic! But because the very upper bounds of temperature rise seem more unlikely, for some people that seems to be a sign of optimism. I think that's a very low bar for what we're taking as signs of optimism.

In any case, it'll be interesting seeing what happens at COP 27. I don't expect that much to come out of COP 27, to be honest. One thing I want to keep an eye on is how the loss and damage framework moves, because there have been some interesting developments and that has gained greater prominence as a version of what we might call climate reparations. And so, whether that can gain more traction this year could be interesting. But I think the expectations are lower and that seems good to me.

PG: *You mentioned The Economist saying goodbye to 1.5 degrees. That target came out of the Paris Agreement in 2015—the recognition that 1.5 degrees was what the goal should be. Previously it had been 2 degrees. Now it looks like there's slippage on that. It becomes an aspiration rather than a real target. What's the difference between 1.5 and 2 degrees of warming? How much worse would hitting 2 degrees make the crisis that we're facing?*

AB: I don't have these numbers off the top of my head, but I would say it is very significant. There is a reason why a number of developing countries have made the slogan “1.5 to stay alive,” because any more warming will have quite serious repercussions. And that seems all the more true the



Alyssa Battistoni

more we learn about climate sensitivity: we are already seeing more severe impacts at a lower degree of warming than were anticipated. We're already at 1.1 now and we're seeing the kinds of impacts that we would expect at a higher level of warming. So that suggests that the lower end actually is very important and that the gap between 1.5 and 2 might be even more significant than we think, particularly when you take into account things like feedback loops.

PG: *So, it's a big deal. And three degrees would not just be an incremental change in what the consequences will be. It takes the danger into a new level of magnitude—the number of people who are going to die and the wider effects on the ecosystem. Earlier you mentioned the strangely-named Inflation Reduction Act, which was actually largely a climate bill. That was supposedly the big achievement of the Biden administration this year with respect to climate issues. Could you talk a little bit about that? At the time when it was passed, there was a lot of trumpeting about how this was the most money that the United States had ever committed to dealing with the climate issue—which is true, but it's still tiny in terms of what needs to be done and is arguably being spent in the wrong kinds of ways as well.*

AB: It is the most money spent and yet it is pretty low. The bar is very low for climate policy. There hasn't really been any significant climate policy at the federal level in the United States, so just doing anything at all makes it the biggest climate bill ever. The IRA provides about \$370 billion in investments for various policies, most of which are some form of either subsidies for green manufacturing or tax credits on electric vehicles, things like that. It's much bigger, for example, than the Obama administration stimulus, which put around \$90 billion into solar research and development—and that actually did help grow the U.S. solar sector, and brought down the cost of solar. So it had some effects. But elements of the IRA are a scaled-up version of that, with some elements of industrial policy—light. It is really a bill for green capital. It is oriented towards jump-starting private industries and supporting mostly better-off green consumers—people who can afford to buy a new electric car or renovate their homes. There are some subsidies for used vehicles, or for people who own their home and want to put solar panels on the roof, things like that. That's better than not doing anything, but it's a really far cry from what I think a lot of climate advocates in the United States were hoping for. It is certainly a long shot from, for example, the Sanders campaign proposal for \$16 trillion of spending on a Green New Deal. That's a pretty big gap. It's even a lot lower than Biden's own initial Build Back Better framework, which was going to spend, counting generously, maybe \$1 trillion on climate over ten years. And so the IRA is down to a third of even that.

So it's a really, really big gap quantitatively, in terms of sheer spending, but also a qualitative difference in terms of the kinds of investments. What I find most frustrating and disappointing in the IRA is the shift from the public-investment oriented framework of the Green New Deal, which

was centered around building out public goods and services and infrastructures—things like public transit, potentially things like dense social housing, which could both reduce energy use, transition away from fossil fuels, and improve quality of life in ways that also meet the needs of working people, rather than just funneling the money to green investors and hoping that the goods will eventually trickle down. Maybe you can buy a cheaper EV in ten years or so. So, it really is a really big gap [between] those two visions of what a green political economy looks like. The Green New Deal vision was to be doing things that would both meet immediate needs and tackle broader social issues of economic and racial inequality in the United States. The idea was to make climate an issue that is connected to people's daily lives. And the IRA is simply not doing that at all. It's not the scale, it's not the speed, it's not using the power that I think that the federal government could have to spend a lot of money and go out and do big public-works projects quickly. Instead, it's hoping the private sector will invent some things and gradually get them out to consumers, and eventually those goods will outcompete fossil fuels on the market. There's no sticks at all, right? There are only carrots for green investing. No sticks for things that we are trying to stop.

PG: *No emissions targets.*

AB: No emissions targets. No restrictions on fossil-fuel extraction. In fact, there are—as many people have pointed out—some concessions to the fossil-fuel industry in terms of expanding drilling permits and expediting pipeline approval, and things like that. So, there are a bunch of things in the bill that are, that are compromising with the fossil-fuel industry. Again, this is a model built around the hope that green tech will eventually out compete fossil-fuel based technology. I think that's a slower

and worse way to actually cut emissions, particularly at this point. I also worry that it's not doing the political work that we would want climate politics or climate policy to do in terms of building a popular movement, a broader working-class movement, for further climate action. The IRA has a very small constituency, which is again green capital and well-off green consumers like homeowners again in contrast to the Green New Deal vision of building a broader movement around climate. So, I worry about that and what that will mean for the possibilities of doing more in the United States.

PG: Let's talk a little bit about building this broader movement. Of course, most of that is going to have to come from outside of the political establishment, even the left wing of the political establishment. But the way I look at it, a radical version of the Green New Deal—the kind that Sanders was proposing—offers a stepping stone to help build that kind of movement, because it connects the climate issue, as you said, with issues which are of concern to people in their everyday lives. And it provides the opportunity to push things much further. I mean, sometimes the left critics of the Green New Deal say the whole point of the original New Deal was to rescue capitalism during the Great Depression, which is true. But it also included a lot of reforms that most people on the left would support and we're still fighting to save. And the same thing is true of the Green New Deal. There really isn't just one Green New Deal, there are Green New Deals—or the slogan is used by a variety of different people. In some versions, it really is just about how do we use public spending to resuscitate American capitalism or global capitalism? But in other versions, you can see it as a stepping stone to doing something more radical. But to become that steppingstone, it requires the sort of political energy that you are talking about. It's going to require connecting with movements across the United States and internationally.

So, could you talk a little bit about that? Where are we in terms of building movements of that kind and what are the prospects of strengthening the environmental movement so it can start pushing things further in this direction?

AB: That's a great question and those are great points. There's been a lot of interesting debate around the Green New Deal and the left critics of the Green New Deal aren't wrong. Of course, the New Deal rescued capitalism in many ways. Even the radical vision of the Green New Deal, the one we wrote about in *A Planet to Win*, is imagined as a stepping stone or a way to build movements and hoping to start pointing beyond capitalism—but we don't claim the Green New Deal is itself going to end capitalism. I see it as a pragmatic [step]. How do we build power and movements in the near term, while also trying to bring down carbon emissions very quickly, so we have a world to continue to build anything in? I think it's okay if not everything we're doing is immediately going to destroy capitalism—that's a really daunting task that the left has not yet succeeded in achieving. So given the temporal urgency of climate change, I think we shouldn't put all of our eggs in that basket but should be thinking about how to build in that direction, [winning] non-reformist reforms, and so on.

Again, that's now where things currently stand. There was a moment of building energy around the Green New Deal, around the Sanders 2020 campaign—it was a moment of growth, the culmination of left energy from previous years, where it seemed like a lot might be possible. And there was the idea that in moments of crisis, the door might open wider. So then we had this absolutely massive public health crisis with covid—but instead of having a Sanders administration responding with the Green Deal, we have obviously seen something very different. It's been instructive because there has been a huge amount of spending

on various COVID relief programs over the past couple of years—but most of it has been oriented not towards making longer-term changes but towards getting “back to normal.” Biden himself is not at all on the left or a radical of any kind, but I think he is willing to move with the political winds. He came into office with the idea that “I’m going to do big spending,” relative to other Democrats—he was going to have his FDR moment. That was really dramatically overstated, but he was at least proposing a bigger vision than almost anyone was expecting from Biden. He seemed to have learned some lessons from the Obama administration’s massively failed stimulus program. What I find sobering about that, then, is that there was some evidence that even somebody like Joe Biden—who is as much a creature of the Democratic Party as they come—was in some way responding to left movement momentum. And yet we ended up very, very far from that.

The dynamic we have currently in the United States is that the left has grown a lot; the climate movement has grown a lot; and the Green New Deal really did shift the political arguments that were happening around the climate movement. There were some important coalitions beginning to be built. But what the sweep from 2018, 2019 and rise of the Green New Deal to passing of the IRA in 2022 has shown is that the left has the ability to put ideas out, to have discussion about them, to build some energy around them—but we don’t have the power to deliver on them. When it comes down to it, the IRA was mostly an in-house deal—Chuck Schumer and Joe Manchin hammering things out with a lot of input from green investors who are very interested in having some state funds to help get their businesses off the ground. So that’s telling and it is not very encouraging.

It has been tough to build a genuinely powerful and durable climate movement in

a way that can put pressure on the politicians who are making these decisions. I think we have a lot of good ideas about how to do that, including building more relationships between the climate and labor movements. Obviously, people have been arguing for an environment-labor coalition for a long time, but it’s just very difficult to realize in practice. There’s a chicken and egg problem. You have to have a lot of labor support to get some kind of big green jobs type program, or green transition or just transition program. But it’s going to always be hard to get that support if you’re talking about shutting down fossil fuel industries and routing people into different kinds of jobs, because people have legitimate worries about whether we’re actually going to be able to deliver on the just transition element of creating green jobs that are as good as jobs people have now. These are all pretty well-known issues, and it’s been very difficult to make progress.

PG: I want to pick up on two points. A couple of years ago, Verso published a little book called Levers of Power.² It’s quite a good discussion of what it takes to win left-wing reforms when you’re up against vested interests. One of the issues it looks at is healthcare and how healthcare reforms have been won. And it’s always the case that you’re dealing with political obstacles, but you’re also dealing with entrenched economic interests—in this case the healthcare industry, committed to private ownership and a for-profit healthcare system. It’s even bigger in the case of climate because we’re dealing with the fossil fuel industry, which is possibly the biggest, most powerful industry, and connected very closely with various other areas, like the auto industry and construction and so on. But anyway, Levers of Power makes the argument that we win when we can raise the costs so high that it’s better for them to make the concession, because it will cost them more if they don’t. So that requires building movements which can actually raise the costs for them. And that’s

proven hard. We've barely made any progress in terms of healthcare. We're a long way from Medicare for All. But that same framework applies here as well. So, the question is how do we raise the costs so that we can force them to concede to the kinds of changes that we so desperately need? So that's one point. I also wanted to connect back to labor and the environmental movement, because very often you raise the costs by disruptive mass protests, by strikes, sometimes by sit-ins and occupations of workplaces. That was crucial in the 1930s when the original New Deal was won. You mentioned the difficulties of building that kind of alliance. But how do we go about doing that? Because it does seem that we need the organized working class to be part of a movement that can actually win dramatic changes.

AB: I haven't read the book, but I agree with all of that. I think there are a couple of things that are tricky about climate movements. One strain of climate movement activity, for example, was aiming to raise the costs around fossil fuel infrastructure. A lot of the anti-pipeline movements and anti-fossil-fuel infrastructure movements were effectively doing a version of that—trying to make it very challenging, difficult, and quite literally costly, in terms of delays, to build fossil fuel infrastructure and to shut things down in that sense. It's not a strike per se, but it's certainly an interruption to the business of different kinds of fossil fuel industry activities in terms of being able to move products. So, I think there's a way that some of those actions actually do function in a similar way to the traditional strike, with some important differences. And that model has had certainly a lot of success in blocking the construction of certain pieces of infrastructure—the Keystone pipeline most obviously³—but also in bringing climate change to public attention, raising awareness, and so on.

What's more challenging has been the more constructive element that things like

the Green New Deal are imagining—how we not only stop the fossil-fuel, carbon-intensive infrastructure, but how we also remake existing infrastructure, jobs, built environments, to be low-carbon. There the call is for green jobs that don't exist yet—and it's hard to shut down the factory that does exist to demand the one that doesn't exist. That's a very intense kind of action to take, a very high bar—shutting down production and demanding that your entire job or workplace be transitioned into something else. It's a really different kind of demand than I think we usually see labor movements making with things like strikes and occupations and all of these kinds of familiar tactics within the context of traditional labor campaigns. So there's something that's distinctive about what we would want a climate-labor alliance to do that is genuinely challenging.

One of the things that might be positive about the IRA is that, even if it is mostly spending on green subsidies and tax credits and so on, there will eventually be some green jobs that are created down the road. It will be interesting to see whether and how unions in those sectors are able to become a force and exert power. There will potentially be labor-capital struggles in those sectors and industries if they can be organized. There are challenges there because a lot of green, renewable energy is much less unionized than fossil fuels like coal, which is very heavily unionized. Electric vehicle production is less labor-intensive than conventional auto manufacturing. So, there are going to be real challenges for what some of these labor struggles looks like. But I can at least imagine some exciting labor politics happening down the road.

To return to the question of raising costs, there are real challenges in figuring out how to build a mass movement that can do costly disruption. You see some of this in movements like Extinction Rebellion,

which are trying to shut down daily life—but often without great political analysis or demands.

PG: I think you're right about groups like Extinction Rebellion. They demonstrate the energy, and the desperation, in a way, that a lot of people feel. but they're still groping for a political strategy that can not just shut down a city center for a few hours but help build a political movement that can lead to much bigger changes. In terms of building an alliance with the labor movement, there's one model that I know a little bit about. In Britain there has been a One Million Climate Jobs campaign for several years that many of the big unions have signed onto.⁴ So, at least in terms of political statements, they're on board with a transition. Now that hasn't translated into policy or real shifts in the way that the economy is organized, but it has enabled the beginnings of a kind of environmental-labor coalition to emerge. And last year at COP 26 in Glasgow, many unions were there on the big march. I think it was led by union banners. That's one model of doing this, and there are similar campaigns in other countries. Could we do the same in the United States?

AB: That's a really interesting model and something similar is possible in the United States. The Green New Deal framework has really tried to put green jobs at the center of climate politics: for example, the Sunrise sit-ins in November 2018 had signs calling for a Green New Deal and "Green Jobs For All."⁵ Those were the big demands because I think they rightly realized, and I think the climate movement more broadly has realized, that labor has to be part of the climate movement if we're going to get anywhere. Climate movements have to be connected to both climate justice movements and to labor. So, I think that green jobs were definitely, at least rhetorically, part of the climate program—albeit less with the kind of target you're describing,

which seems really important. Because then we saw the green jobs language taken up by Biden, "When I think about climate, I think about jobs." It was not necessarily entirely co-opted, because politicians will take up movement language and they don't suddenly own that language. But certainly it has been something that Biden talks about with the IRA: "We're creating jobs." The IRA itself is not directly creating jobs, however. It is more like, "Well, jobs will be created somewhere." And so, I think having a demand [that's] ambitious but reasonable and also concrete, would be a great thing to be able to rally around and keep in the public eye.

Again, the really tough question is just getting from the demand to realizing it. Obviously that's a hard thing. But we have had [groups like] the BlueGreen Alliance⁶ and the Labor Network for Sustainability⁷ operating along different points in the spectrum of labor-climate alliance for years. It's been possible to get a number of unions to sign on to climate resolutions and visions, and things like that. But putting things at risk, or using member power to try to win things, is a lot higher bar and is tougher. Those caveats aside, I do think something like what you're describing seems like an important step in going from a nebulous conception of green jobs to more concrete demand that we can see movements using, talking about, organizing around,

PG: With demands for public spending to actually create these jobs.

AB: Yes.

PG: One of the debates on the left of the environmental movement in the last few years has been between advocates of degrowth and supporters of the Green New Deal—at least sometimes that's the way it's posed, that these are two different visions. The Green New Deal is supposedly committed to continued expansion of the economy. Degrowthers emphasize the

need to end the endless cycle of growth and use of limited resources, and so on. Now, my view is that there's got to be a way to meld both of these approaches. We need degrowth in terms of using limited resources that can go along with increased quality of life for the vast majority of the population. And a Green New Deal could be part of the process of shifting us in that direction. So, I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on that debate.

AB: When my coauthors and I wrote about the vision of a radical Green New Deal in *A Planet to Win*, we didn't talk about it in terms of degrowth per se, and we actually tried to remain agnostic on growth/degrowth as a debate. My main concern with the debate is I think people tend to talk past each other a lot and get stuck on the language or definitions of growth. But I think certainly what we were envisioning is compatible with what a lot of degrowth advocates talk about in terms of reducing resource use and resource throughput while increasing quality of life, standard of living, well-being, welfare, all of these kinds of things. And I think there are many ways to do that with less resource use. In fact, I think the United States is a great example of high resource use for a low standard of living for a lot of people. If you're sitting in traffic for hours to get to work or spending a ton of money on gas, especially now, that's not like "Wow, that's really living the dream," because you can't go anywhere without a car. There are so many versions of this that I think you can see in the United States. There's certainly no reason to increase resource use for their own sake.

The other thing that I find challenging about the degrowth debate is that it sometimes seems to me to be a euphemism for talking about capitalism, which is not going to degrow. It's [not] going to degrow in terms of value accumulation and capital accumulation, that process won't stop, but also I see no convincing evidence

that decoupling is possible—that you can continue to grow the economy but decrease resource use. You can have decreased resource *intensity* or get more per unit of fossil fuel—that I think is plausible. But in terms of absolute resource-use decline, I think there's no real evidence to support that. So, I think you do have to talk about capitalism as well, and obviously a lot of degrowth people do—but sometimes the debate about growth/degrowth seems to avoid the elephant in the room.

PG: *Which is capitalism.*

AB: Yeah, exactly. Capitalism is often the elephant in the room of climate debates more generally. Again, the Green New Deal is not itself a program to end capitalism, but it is hoping to do some of that work of trying to move towards less resource-intensive, better, or more "good for people" forms of life, while also trying to build power to [address] this bigger problem.

PG: *Exactly. So, you have a chapter in your book on internationalism. And obviously that's a huge dimension of the challenge that we're facing because this isn't just a problem in the United States or in wealthy countries, it's a global issue. So, that on the one hand, means the challenge is even bigger, because we need a movement that is not just going to change things here, but change things in every other country. But it also opens up some possibilities for international solidarity and building movements across borders. Can you talk a little bit about that aspect of it and how you think internationalism comes in here? And let me add one other point as well. At the top, in terms of governmental relations, we definitely are moving in the wrong direction, with U.S.-China competition and a new cold war (if that's the appropriate term), which makes it even more difficult to come to international agreements that will deal fairly with the problem. With that in the background, what kind of internationalism do you see as a way forward*



to deal with the climate crisis?

AB: We absolutely do need internationalism, there's no getting around it. In the book we tried to talk about some of the political challenges—what are the institutions, what are the ways to actually build internationalism? In an earlier moment you had the Communist Party and other internationalist formations. There are still internationalist labor unions. But I think there were, in previous moments, more internationalist *structures*, and the lack of those is a genuine problem for contemporary left movements.

So in the book we talk about supply chains as being one way to build those connections: from the point of extraction—in the book we talk about lithium extraction in Chile—to say the Tesla factory in California where workers are making electric vehicles, these are all workers and communities living in the extractive zones who are connected by this one particular

supply-chain link. This is a way to think about how that organizing could begin to happen across labor and community struggles

A lot of the movements against fossil fuel infrastructure, a lot of particularly indigenous led [movements], are also engaged in international discussions learning from different tactics and movements. A lot of those movements are themselves plurinational, insofar as they're involving people of different indigenous nations—so there are forms of internationalism there too. The anti-extractive movement more generally is fairly internationalist, not as a fully coordinated organization, but a network of people learning from different kinds of struggles in different places. So those are also some interesting possibilities.

Even with the Green New Deal, I was pleasantly surprised by how many people from other parts of the world were interested in talking about these ideas and trying to develop similar ideas or programs or movements within their own contexts. I was surprised because the New Deal is such an American-centric framework—not that the idea of doing public investment and public goods is a U.S.-specific thing, far from it—but even the rhetoric traveled further than I thought it might. Certainly, we learned a lot from, for example, movements in Brazil for public transit and housing—and those are working-class led movements for services that meet people's needs in low-carbon ways.

We'll see what comes of this, but we're in the midst of the early beginnings of a new pink tide in Latin America, and that could also be potentially an exciting place of possibility for some kinds of green social-democracy type movements. It also seems like another place to look for potential internationalism and movements learning from each other and connecting to one another, and hopefully those of us in other

parts of North America can also learn from and connect to that, though I'm not holding my breath that the United States will elect a leftist.

PG: And we can learn by example and certainly the inspiration is there. Perhaps this is a good place for us to stop. We don't have the institutions on an international level that the left can use. But there's a lot more communication now. And I think some of this can grow if people learn the lessons. As always, nobody is going to come and save us, we have to do it ourselves. It will depend on whether movements on the ground can be built. And I think that's true in Latin America, too. It's great to see the back of Bolsonaro, but Lula is not going to do it for the people of Brazil or the people of Latin America without a massive grassroots movement as well. So, let's hope we're moving in that direction.

AB: I absolutely agree with that. I'm looking forward to seeing what develops and I'm sure we'll have a lot to learn one way or another. It's only a start, but at least it's a start.

NOTES

1. "Say Goodbye to 1.5°C," *The Economist*, November 5, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/weeklyedition/2022-11-05>
2. Kevin A. Young, Tarun Banerjee and Michael Schwartz, *Levers of Power: How the 1% Rules and What the 99% Can Do About It* (New York: Verso 2020).
3. The Keystone XL pipeline was designed to transport tar-sands oil from Canada to refineries on the Gulf Coast of Texas. After a decade of protests by indigenous groups and climate activists, and protracted legal battles, the pipeline was finally denied a permit by the Biden administration. See Melissa Denchak and Courtney Lindwall, "What Is the Keystone XL Pipeline?," Natural Resources Defense Council, March 15, 2022. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-keystone-pipeline>
4. Campaign Against Climate Change: <https://www.cacctu.org.uk/climatejobs>.
5. "Backed by Ocasio-Cortez, Youth Climate Activists Arrested at Pelosi's Office Demanding Democrats Embrace 'Green New Deal,'" *Common Dreams*, November 13, 2018. <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2018/11/13/backed-ocasio-cortez-youth-climate-activists-arrested-pelosis-office-demanding>
6. "The BlueGreen Alliance unites labor unions and environmental organizations to solve today's environmental challenges in ways that create and maintain quality jobs and build a clean, thriving, and equitable economy." <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/about/>
7. "We're building a powerful labor-climate movement to secure an ecologically sustainable and economically just future—from the ground up." <https://www.labor4sustainability.org/>

A Life of Struggle for Land and Community in Guatemala

Interview with Isabel Solís

DAWN MARIE PALEY

ISABEL SOLÍS HAS SPENT DECADES participating in struggles for freedom and in defense of life and communal land in Guatemala.

A Maya Sakapultek and K'iche' woman, she was born in the early 1970s, just over a decade into Guatemala's 36-year-long internal armed conflict. The war in Guatemala included the massacre and disappearance of members of guerilla movements and the organized left and led to the commission of genocide against Maya peoples by the army.

It is in this context that Solís remembers the political activism of her father as part of her childhood in a rural town. His activism was partly focused on searching for and freeing young people who had been kidnapped by the Guatemalan Army. "I remember when my father would come home, and he'd say, 'They won't give us back the boys, I offered my life for theirs, and even so, they won't let them go,'" she told me during an interview in June.

One of the events that marked her childhood was the massacre of more than 15 adolescents, among them her 13-year-old cousin.

She recalls how soldiers had sent a message telling all families to gather at

the Catholic Church and to leave the doors of their houses open. Her father and her brothers went to the meeting at the church. Isabel stayed home, together with her mother, her aunt (the mother of the 13-year-old, who had previously been kidnapped by the army), and her younger brothers. They began to hear gunshots. That was when the massacre of the 15 youths took place. Her cousin was one of the dead.

"From then on, the kidnappings of women, of men, and especially of young people didn't stop, and my father and two of my brothers were kidnapped," she remembers. Back then, in order to leave their community, villagers had to request permission from the army. Her father and one of her brothers were kidnapped after starting the paperwork to leave.

After her two brothers and her father were disappeared by soldiers and members of the Civil Defense Patrol, Solís became a teacher. She began to have more contact with social struggles, popular organizations, and movements, partly due to her mother's role searching for her disappeared brothers and father.

Solís began to organize with the Campesino Unity Committee (CUC) in the late 1980s, helping to build the organization. Later, she helped to co-found the National Indigenous and Campesino Coordinating Committee (CONIC), mo-

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tivated by the struggles of other youth to reclaim their land. She collaborated with CONIC until 2003.

Since then, she has worked throughout Guatemala, providing direct support to activists, most of them Mayan people who have been criminalized or who are political prisoners.

We spoke as we returned to Guatemala City after attending a hearing in the trial of Eduardo Bin, a Maya Q'eqchi' man criminalized because of his organizing work in the department of Izabal, in eastern Guatemala.

Our conversation ranged from the current political moment in Guatemala to the difficulties of achieving peace without the return of lands to Indigenous people, as well as the difficulties associated with, and potential alternatives to, the current system of government.

It was a long, painful, and insightful interview, which has been translated and edited for clarity and length.

Dawn Marie Paley: *To start, I'd wanted to ask you how we can begin to understand the impact the internal conflict in Guatemala had on communal life?*

Isabel Solís: It had a big impact. I remember before, there was community; there was a lot of collective activity, for example, when it was sowing time, everything was collective, entire families, or branches of families, would unite to do everything, including building houses.

All of that was destroyed. Now, there is less collective work, now it is done for wages. The practice of mutual aid changed. Now there are fewer families who practice mutual aid, which means that I will go work for you, and later you will work for me. That was destroyed, and there began to be a lot of divisions between branches of the same family. Those divisions impacted the most

intimate family bonds. That has continued to today, trust is broken, compared to what it was like before the war.

DMP: *Could you tell me about the process through which you began to become involved in social organizations?*

IS: Well, I think I followed in my mother's footsteps a bit, because ever since my brothers and father were kidnapped, my mother began to struggle. She said, "I have to find them, I have to find them, and I'll continue until I find them."

Initially she became part of the Mutual Support Group (GAM), and she would take me to their demonstrations. I learned from them, from rural women who occupied the capitol building and

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who occupied congress, in the middle of the armed conflict.

Later, I also supported the activities of the National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA). By then I was a teacher, so I could help with education, and that's how I became involved. I was 20 years old.

DMP: *In 1996, the Peace Accords were signed in Guatemala. Did that change the context of struggle?*

IS: Yes, it did. There was a group that analyzed the Peace Accords and all of its terms. One of the issues that was of concern to us was the issue of land and Indigenous

people. The proposal was to use the market to solve it, of which we were very critical.

We said that the Peace Accords didn't address our problems and that protests—involving struggles for the land and to recover land—would continue. We didn't stop. I remember one of the key cases then was a community that was recovering [the lands called] Pampas del Horizonte, in the department of Quezaltenango. That was the motor of the struggle for land at that moment.

I was in Guatemala City's Central Park when the final act of the Peace Accords took place. I traveled from my community, we even brought tamales, and we sat and ate there, and everybody was very hopeful and happy. But we didn't agree with the logic with regards to the issue of land, while many organizations did agree to that logic. And they would say to us, "You are screwing up the Peace Accords." They practically blamed us for the lack of compliance with the accords.

I think that that became clearer when extractive projects began to appear in rural areas, first in the department of San Marcos and later in other regions.

The communities that were impacted began to resist extractive projects. However, the organizations were convinced by the Peace Accords, and they began to administer crumbs [little development projects] to quiet groups within the communities, or they just talked and talked as resistance grew in the territories. Repression took place in the places where there was resistance. It is similar to what's happening now, but it wasn't as visible then.

For me, the Peace Accords were a trap, a way of taking away our power and calming things down so capital could be invested into resource extraction.

They take the land away and poverty goes up. That is the key issue, and the proposal for how to deal with that issue

was through the market. Why should I buy back land that was stolen from me? The Peace Accords needed to respond to historic dispossession by returning land to Indigenous communities.

There was a time during which the number of soldiers was reduced, but the soldiers became police and began to work as security guards on many private properties, especially in the Izabal region. I mention that region because that's where I was most active in that period.

The Peace Accords mention Indigenous communities in a very superficial way. They mention the recognition of language, the recognition of our traditional clothing, which is interesting and all, but I can't live on air, speaking my language, or wearing my traditional clothing. Communities must be respected in their entirety.

DMP: *How many years did that sensation of speaking to the void with regards to social organizations last?*

IS: I think that the national organizations, and especially those that were aligned with the Peace Accords, those that believed in peace, began to participate in resistance after around 2012.

After 2004, in the whole Verapaz region and part of Izabal, the communities began the struggle to recover their lands, and a very important movement of communities against mining started to take shape.

In 2005, I was working as a researcher again. I was part of a group of researchers, and we looked at the land reoccupations, and we realized that when communities were evicted from their ancestral lands there was no news coverage. Nobody talked about it.

But the evictions were something that was known in the region, and communities began to organize themselves against the violent evictions. The *campesino* organizations still weren't responding, in fact, they ignored the resistance. Some of them did

intervene and they pushed market solutions, while the communities demanded the return of land that had been taken from them or which was under threat of theft.

DMP: *You were involved in CUC and CONIC, both of which are very important organizations. You decided to leave both. I wanted to ask you about how you perceive the power that these organizations had in a given moment, and what they are like today?*

IS: I think there have been different moments. There have even been different organizations, and each one had its moment of importance. In my way of seeing, I would even dare to say that when organizations become really big and important, they can be maintained through time, but they are weakened when they set their principles and initial demands aside and they begin to participate in party politics. That's when they begin to lose their power, and some even disappear.

For example, there was an organization called CERJ [Council of Ethnic Identities Runujel Junam] that was very interesting, but after its leader became a candidate for a party, over time the organization went dark.

That also happened with other campesino and women's organizations: They had an important and interesting trajectory and then got involved with a party and began to be diluted and disappeared or ended up just as a group of people sustaining the name of the organization or carrying out projects. Which is to say, they become NGOs.

I've got two readings of that. One is that it could be that for most of the members of the organization, the problems they are dealing with could not be solved by participating in the state. I could be right about that, or not, we'd have to look deeper. The other is around the concentration of leadership, leaving one person to make decisions. When that leader leaves for another space,

everything is weakened.

Regarding political participation via parties, after the Peace Accords, there was an interesting experience among the organizations with the New Nation Alliance [ANN], which was interesting for a

Sustaining my own oppressor
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Leftists think the state is power.
But it's not.

while, for about four years. There were a significant number of congresspeople on the left. But I couldn't tell you what they did to benefit the communities.

During that period there were many people and communities seeking to grow their power, and there were regional movements that inspired other regions to create larger and better organizations. One of those was the Council of Peoples of the West [CPO], which was inspiring, but it was also weakened when it joined a party.

There's another example that's worth considering, which is the movement that was built around community consultations. There were more than 60 community consultations, and in all of them, the majority of people voted "no," which is to say, no to mining. That was an interesting movement.

There were organizations that thought that the process would automatically translate to a pool of voters, so many of the leaders sought to become candidates. And it didn't work.

That's interesting because it means the people are saying, "Yes, we are going to defend our territory. Yes, here we are. Yes, we are going to say no to extractive projects.

Yes, we are going to resist. Yes, we will give our lives if that's what it takes [or give up our freedom] because we could end up in jail." A total dedication to the territory, to the defense of life.

But when the conversation began to turn to political participation via parties, and the goal became to be part of the state, the movement and its articulation shrank.

To me, the idea of sustaining my own oppressor doesn't make sense. The state is an oppressive instrument. When the Spanish came and invaded, they pillaged the country and later built the state. The state was built to administer theft. To me,

Abstentionism keeps increasing.
It's a sign that society is waking
up. The more people vote, the
more society is asleep.

the state is not power. Their power was built on theft, and they sustain their wealth based on what they stole and continue to steal from us.

People on the left think the state itself is power. But we've seen that it's not. If we look at the experience of Bolivia, we see that the communities are still being dispossessed and robbed. But if being in the state is the same as having power, Bolivia wouldn't have dispossession, there wouldn't be evictions, there wouldn't be repression.

My thoughts on this come from what I've learned from working with the people and being part of community struggles. For

example, in my community, many people are uninterested in elections, starting with my mother. She says, "I'm not going to waste my time. I'm going to work. The state doesn't give me a penny to eat; I am the one that has to give to the state."

What I'm saying is, how can we continue to sustain a structure that we have characterized as oppressive, repressive, and based on theft? And people from organizations—or people who say they are on the left—are so contradictory, because they say, "Well, we have to learn how the state is managed."

For goodness sakes!!!! How am I going to learn from something that doesn't work? How am I going to learn from the state if the only thing it has done is steal, repress, and exploit??? I've learned more from the communities and from my people.

DMP: *This doesn't surprise me. We're educated to believe the state has always existed, that it will always exist, and that change can only come from the state. What other forms of organization currently exist in Guatemala?*

IS: There isn't one general form of [communal or Indigenous] organization nationally, because the country is structured according to the interests of capital [not according to Indigenous practices]. The other forms of organization that exist are those of the Q'eqchi, Quiche, Kakchiquel, Mam, Q'anjob'al, and other communities.

These other forms of organization aren't based on repression; rather, they are about administering communal life. Gladys Tzul explains these forms in her book.* And I ask myself: Why don't we use these forms on a national level?

One day I suggested just that, to a women's group, when everyone was talking about corruption, saying that with [ex-president] Jimmy [Morales] it didn't work, that when former President Otto Pérez Molina was removed from power,

*Gladys Tzul Tzul, *Sistemas de Gobierno Comunal Indígena: Mujeres y tramas de parentesco en Chuimeq'ena* (Guatemala, C.A.: Sociedad Comunitaria de Estudios Estratégicos, 2016).

the social movement was interesting, but it didn't last. And the current president is the same.

So I said, why don't we think of another way? Why don't we go towards a communitarian model, replicating on a national level a series of councils of women and communities, and we could even reduce the number of elected officials.

If we were to replicate the community system, it would mean no one got paid, it would all be pro bono, which would also mean there wouldn't be fights within and between parties. Why did I say that?!! They told me that I was assuming people's lives were already resolved, that such a thing would be impossible. Some said it was impossible to do such work *ad honorem*.

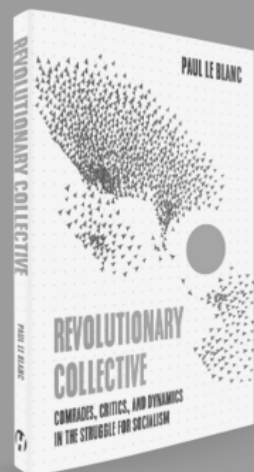
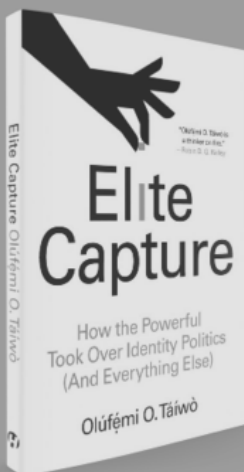
That's when I realized that some aspire

to office because they want a salary and that's why there is corruption. It's become a vicious cycle. The same speeches, and promises of solutions, every four years. That's a narrative that hides the truth or hides the inability to think about and do things in a different way.

DMP: *But maybe in a different space, like a community assembly, your proposal would be received differently?*

IS: Oh, yes, absolutely. My hope is that abstentionism keeps increasing, that gives me hope. It's a sign that society is waking up. The more people vote, the more society is asleep and hope is more distant. To date there's no value given to abstentionism, and no one wants to consider it. Instead, it is frowned upon.

NEW BOOKS FOR CHANGING THE WORLD



Haiti: A Crisis Caused by Imperialism and Its Oligarchic Cronies

SIMÓN RODRÍGUEZ PORRAS

ON AUGUST 22, 2022, COINCIDING with the 231st anniversary of the start of the Haitian Revolution, the most recent wave of popular mobilizations against the pro-imperialist regime of the Haitian Baldhead Party (PHTK) began. High inflation—29 percent annualized as of June—and economic contraction were worsened by the quasi paralysis of the country for more than three months. The government increased the discontent in September, in the midst of the protests, by doubling fuel prices according to IMF recommendations. The worsening of the economic crisis was compounded by the widespread rejection of the *de facto* government; meanwhile organized crime gangs occupy the vacuum left by the collapse of the state. The OAS Secretary General and the UN Security Council then began promoting a new military occupation of Haiti as a response, but there was no agreement among the different imperialist actors and their allies on how to carry it out.

The ruling PHTK is the child of imperialist occupation. It was formed in 2012, a year after the coming to power of Michel Martelly, a singer linked to the residues of the Duvalierist dictatorship overthrown in 1986. Both Martelly and his successor

Jovenel Moïse, the assassinated former president, were declared winners in fraudulent elections. Popular resistance against the PHTK has been significant since the social uprising of July 6, 2018, against the first attempt to increase fuel prices, which forced Moïse to back down. In the following months, a powerful movement was launched demanding justice and the recovery of funds stolen from the Petrocaribe fund, a financing mechanism provided to the Haitian regime by the Venezuelan government.

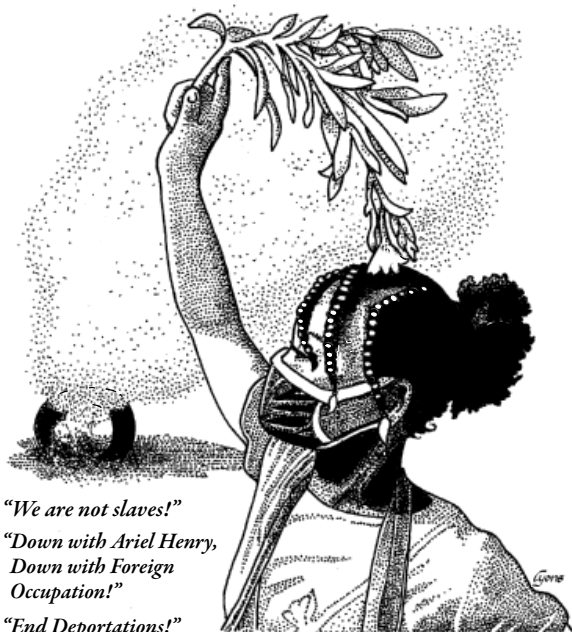
In 2019, general elections were due but Moïse refused to organize them, instead dissolving the lower house of parliament, and dismissing the mayors and most of the senators, by claiming that the mandates of those offices had expired. However, he continued to govern in spite of his own mandate having also expired. In the face of mobilizations against his illegitimate and illegal government, he became increasingly isolated. He broke with his political mentor, ex-president Martelly, and tried to unilaterally impose a constitutional reform to concentrate more power in the presidency and to favor the granting of mining concessions to transnational companies. One of his last administrative acts before being assassinated was to appoint Ariel Henry as interim prime minister. Henry, however, was not able to formally take office, as Claude Joseph was serving as prime minister at the time.

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The Core Group, a sort of colonial supervising body formed by representatives in Haiti of the U.S., Canadian, French, German, Spanish, and Brazilian governments, as well as the OAS and UN offices, decided the succession dispute in Henry's favor. During the few weeks that Joseph was the head of state, he requested a military invasion from the United States. Newly elected President Biden did not grant this request.

The chaos caused by U.S. imperialism in Haiti after three decades of intermittent occupations through the UN, in addition to U.S. defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq, generated hesitation among imperialists regarding a new invasion. The *Washington Post* published an editorial in favor of invading Haiti after the assassination of Moïse, while a different line was expressed by the U.S. special envoy for Haiti, Daniel Foote, when he resigned his post in September 2021. Foote criticized Biden's policy of massively deporting Haitian immigrants back to Haiti and vindicated the effort for a national unity front around the so-called Montana Accord, signed by a wide range of political and social organizations, including political expressions of the bourgeoisie opposed to the PHTK.

During the trials against some of the individuals involved in Moïse's assassination in the United States, prosecutors asked courts to keep the link between the accused and U.S. agencies such as the CIA and the DEA secret. Martelly has long lived in Florida without being bothered, and the businessmen from Venezuela and Ecuador who hired Colombian mercenaries to carry out the assassination have not been arrested



either. At the very least, there would later be indications the U.S. government let the assassination happen, or that it protected some of the perpetrators, because it considered coup rule favorable to its interests. Canada's government, however, did announce sanctions on November 20 against Martelly and two former prime ministers, Laurent Lamothe and Jean Henry Ceant, for cooperating with criminal gangs.

In the midst of the economic, political, and social crisis, the G9 federation of gangs emerged in mid-2020. The government and the UN Office for Haiti (BINUH) hoped it would enable a lasting *pax mafiosa*. In reality, the criminal federation consolidated its positions and went on to dispute territories with other gangs outside its alliance, scaling up the violence. These armed confrontations have left thousands of people displaced in Port-au-Prince. Ironically, the G9 gangs, whose strength is a by-product of the decomposition of a regime that imperialism itself has been

sustaining, are now the alibi used by the UN Security Council to consider a new invasion to repress the popular protests in Haiti and keep the country under foreign tutelage.

The Threat of Military Occupation

Sadly, the Haitian people cannot count on any government for support. The Mexican government of López Obrador has sponsored several Security Council resolutions on Haiti, together with the U.S. government. Between 2004 and 2017, thousands of troops of the UN Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (Minustah) were provided by several self-styled progressive Latin American governments, headed by Brazil's Lula. The main beneficiary of the \$2 billion embezzled from the Petrocaribe fund, provided by the Venezuelan government, was the PHTK regime. The governments of Russia and China voted in July 2022 to renew BINUH's mandate in spite of calls by the Haitian left for them to veto the renewal.

With Ariel Henry's October 7 request for a foreign military occupation to fight against the gangs, the threat was imminent. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres proposed that the Security Council send a "rapid action force" with military personnel from one or more countries but not blue helmets. The U.S. and Canadian governments promoted the option of using troops from Caribbean Community countries. If this option becomes a reality, they would fulfill a role similar to that of the South American center-left governments in the Minustah, which was also originally envisioned as a short-term endeavor.

The official alibi is to combat gangs, but the hypocrisy could not be greater. A good part of the fortune plundered from the Haitian people, from the Duvalier dictatorship to the PHTK, is found in properties and bank accounts in North America and

Europe. Imperialism gets along well with the biggest gangsters.

In 2022, the popular struggle regained its strength. In January and February, large strikes by workers in the textile industry of the SONAPI free trade zone in the capital overcame repression and achieved an increase in the minimum wage, albeit insufficient. How will the current stalemate be broken, in which neither those at the top nor at the bottom manage to take the reins of the country? The North American, Latin American, and Caribbean left have the responsibility of mobilizing solidarity with the urgent struggles of the workers' and popular organizations of Haiti, such as resistance to any imperialist military aggression, self-defense against police repression and the violence of the gangs, the building of international support networks, and the adoption of a transitional program for a way out of the crisis.

Revolutionaries in the region must support the demand that the Core Group, the BINUH, and their puppet Ariel Henry leave. Reparations must be paid by the United States, France, and the UN for the successive invasions, occupations, extortions, fraudulent debts, and crimes perpetrated against the Haitian people. Foreign debt must be canceled, and it's essential to repatriate the fortunes looted from the Petrocaribe fund. Governments of the region should respect the rights of Haitian migrants and stop massive deportations.

The heroic Haitian working people are fighting to take their destiny into their own hands. As the comrades of the Socialist Movement of Haitian Workers put it, "Only the convergence of the workers' and popular forces can close the road to the imperialist attempts to serve the same dish in different packaging!"

A Revolutionary Way of Doing Politics Is Taking Shape in Sudan

MUZAN ALNEEL

FOUR MONTHS AFTER A HISTORIC popular uprising in Sudan in December 2018 and the government repression that followed, the military deposed long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir. Civilian and military forces then governed in partnership, with democratic sectors pressing for an all-civilian government. But then on October 25, 2021, the military launched another coup. Popular pressure forced the military to back down, and a deal was announced to reinstate a military-civilian partnership. The deal was widely rejected by protestors and the general public in Sudan, but it found overwhelming support from the international community. The Sudanese people's rejection of any form of military rule met patronizing statements from international diplomats, such as the UN secretary general's "appeal to common sense,"¹ as he argued for accepting military generals in power.

The continuation of protests rendered that deal pointless, and the prime minister who signed it announced his resignation and left the country. The deal has failed, and so did many other attempts to legitimize military rule in Sudan that came wrapped in different names and with different national

and international advocates. More than a year after the coup, the military generals are yet to form a government and protestors are in the streets chanting against the coup almost daily around the country. The resistance front was sustained and strengthened by new political actors, committed to a revolutionary way of doing politics and providing daily evidence that their way, not the way of backroom elitist agreements, is the path to realizing the slogan of the revolution: freedom, peace, and justice. The evolution of the Sudanese resistance front in the past few years is worthy of serious attention and support. It provides crucial lessons in a world where the questions of revolution are highlighted on a daily basis.

Four Years of Reshaping Sudan

The year 2022 was the fourth year of the Sudanese December Revolution, which was ignited in December 2018 by dire economic conditions and which managed to pressure the military generals into toppling their leader, and the country's president for almost 30 years, in April 2019. What started in December 2018 as spontaneous protests by citizens angered by price hikes slowly moved into more structured forms. For a couple of weeks at the beginning of the month, the protests took place on Fridays, following the pattern of the "Arab spring." This was followed by the grand entrance of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) on the scene. The newly

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announced association of parallel unions of white-collar workers (doctors, engineers, and others) took leadership of the protests and announced weekly schedules, which were followed by thousands around Sudan.

The deal was widely rejected by protestors and the general public in Sudan, but it found overwhelming support from the international community.

Faced by the brutality of the state's tools of violence, the killing of protestors, and violent dispersals of peaceful protests, the SPA called for the formation of neighborhood resistance committees (RCs). These committees were intended to take charge of mobilizing and planning protests in their neighborhoods, in an effort to decentralize protests and minimize the ability of security forces to suppress them all. The committees were a concept that the Sudanese resistance front had experimented with in past decades, but their widespread use after the SPA's call was unprecedented.

The protests grew stronger in the following months, and the state forces struggled to maintain control. The announcement of emergency laws and a nationwide curfew in mid-February 2019 inspired what can only be described as street festivals, which started before the soon-to-be-oust president had even finished his speech. It was clear the people were not leaving the streets soon. In these same months, the SPA issued The Charter of Freedom and Change, signed by the SPA and the major political alliances in the country, who then became known as the Forces of the Charter of Freedom and Change (FFC).

As the protests continued, the SPA called for marches of millions toward military headquarters around the country, to take place on April 6, 2019. On that day, what started as marches of millions turned into sit-ins surrounding military headquarters, and in less than a week the Military Council announced that it was taking power in Sudan. However, protestors were not satisfied with what the Military Council offered, and this was expressed with one word that became the most repeated in chants and discussions around the country for the following months and years: *Madaneyya* (civilian). Protestors displayed their commitment to a fully civilian government by maintaining their sit-ins, by more protests that announced the sit-ins in every city as their destination, and by facing violent attacks from security forces on the sit-ins.

The success and growth of the resistance front culminated in a two-day strike at the end of May 2019 that brought the entire country to a halt. The strike, which closed markets, schools, ports, airports, and even oil production sites, raised the slogan "Madaneyya 100%" (100% civilian). This slogan was the popular response to proposals for power-sharing that were coming out of negotiations between the FFC and the Military Council. A short four days after the end of the strike, in the early hours of June 3, 2019, security forces attacked peaceful sit-ins in 14 cities around Sudan including the capital. Security forces killed more than a hundred people on that day alone, with the bodies of many victims tied to bricks and thrown into the Nile. Dozens were raped and hundreds remain missing to this day. The brutality was designed to ignite fear among the Sudanese population and institute full military control. However, it instead ignited more resistance, and despite a full nationwide internet shutdown for more than a month after the June 3 massacre, the RCs worked and communicated

on the ground, mobilizing protests and organizing for another march of millions. The march's success was undeniable, and so was the public rejection of military rule.

In a clear contrast to public opinion, the FFC chose to re-enter negotiations with the military. A power-sharing agreement between the two sides was signed as a result, and a new transitional government was appointed in August. Although the FFC struggled to convince the Sudanese population that this arrangement could lead to achieving the demands of the revolution, resorting to "stopping the bloodshed" as their main justification, the public was skeptical. Nevertheless, the set-up was widely praised by international actors from regional to Western governments and institutions. These same actors continued to praise the transitional government over the following two years, even as its economic policies copied the previous regime's, which had ignited the protests in the first place.

The year 2020 was rich with economic debates in Sudan, as the government pushed for implementing economic liberalization and minimized the state's role in providing for its citizens. This year also brought Sudan a new peace agreement, not unlike the ones the previous regime signed, giving some governmental positions to the leaders of the armed resistance but producing minimal impact on the lives of people in conflict areas. Most of these renewed old policies were passed on the back of political messaging that characterized any critique of the transitional government as an act of support for the toppled regime.

In 2021, as the economic reality worsened and inflation exceeded 300 percent, tensions between the partners in the government escalated as well. Their disagreements were not related to the people's dire reality or the partners' failure to provide the basic needs of the population but were over government appointments, distribution of

ministries, and other technicalities. The coup that took place at the end of that year came as no surprise to the general Sudanese public nor to the RCs. The protests that started as a direct reaction to news of the coup in the early hours of October 25, 2021, were then led and organized by the RCs. By this point, public trust in the SPA and the FFC had significantly diminished. The committees had the faith of the public: They had spent the previous two years supporting the residents of their neighborhoods as they faced economic hardship, organizing distribution of bread and fuel, and initiating maintenance of public utilities, while also leading protests against the government's divergence from the demands of the revolution and the lack of justice for martyrs killed by the military during the revolution. The RCs had taken on these tasks while carefully phrasing each slogan and demand to avoid being characterized as enemies of the "government of the revolution" and supporters of the toppled regime. The experience, capacity, and trust gained by the RCs in those two years supported their ascendance to the leadership of the resistance front.

In the year since the coup, RCs an-

In the year since the coup,
Resistance Committees
announced no less than one
major protest a week.

nounced no less than one major protest a week, and that doesn't include the smaller neighborhood protests. They announced the Three No's slogan: "no negotiations, no partnership, and no legitimacy for the military."² The committees' work continues

to disrupt the attempts of the national elite and the international community to force a return to the military-civilian partnership. The elite are faced with a new way of doing politics in Sudan mainly shaped by the RCs. The lessons of this experience are worthy of attention and careful study by those aware of the need for revolutionary change.

The Bourgeoisie Will Not Lead the Revolution

A revolution that delivers to the working people will not take place under the leadership of a class with interests that contradict those of the working people; the bourgeoisie cannot and will not lead the revolution. Although a self-evident statement, its manifestation in reality can come with noise disturbing the obvious fact and is thus worthy of study.

The formation of the FFC faced public questioning from its early days. The new alliance of old forces included the classic bourgeois parties that controlled Sudan's political scene since its independence, among them the old sectarian parties, the newer liberal ones, and the Sudanese Communist Party. Many of them had joined the governments of the previous regime or signed alliances with them at different times. Some renounced the concept of the revolution a short few months before the first protest and were advocating for participating in another rigged election controlled by the regime. Public apprehension was understandable. Yet the position that the majority of the resistance took toward the FFC is better summarized in a phrase that went viral in response to news of one of the sectarian leaders joining a protest in person. The yet-to-be organized resistance front responded, "He is welcome as comrade, not a leader." The leadership titles were bestowed by the public upon the SPA.

The Charter of Freedom and Change, issued by the SPA and published with the

signatures of what became known as the FFC, was received positively. It started with a call to overthrow the existing regime and the appointment of a transitional government with defined priorities. However, a more careful reading of the charter reveals its contradictions. For example, the point related to ending the war closes by stressing the preservation of the existing land tenure system. This minimizes the chance of effective wealth and land redistribution for the benefit of the majority, a redistribution that contradicts the interests of the existing elite. The authors of the charter revealed their alignment with the interests of the elite on this matter and many others in the months that followed. As soon as official spokespersons of the FFC started appearing on mainstream regional media, they dressed the popular anger in the morals of the bourgeoisie and they were often offended by any indication of the Sudanese revolution being ignited by poverty or hunger. They used phrases such as "revolution of consciousness" and insisted the demands of the protestors were democracy and freedom, not affordable food and a decent standard of living. These phrases were also later used by the transitional government as a justification for deprioritizing economic concerns. Democracy is on the line, and the transition must be protected at all costs.

Glorification of Western praises and visits bestowed upon the government, emphasis on decency and an English-speaking prime minister as a great gain of the revolution, and using the "difficult legacy" of the old regime as an excuse were among the many messaging tools used to muddy the reality of continuing divergences from the priorities of the revolution and the government's alignment with the interests of the rich. The success of these messaging tools in taming the public highlights the gap left by the lack of a revolutionary party at present in Sudan. It is among the most important

tasks of a revolutionary party to accumulate revolutionary knowledge and further clarify the contradictions of the interests of the oppressed and those of their oppressors.

One who believes that political party names represent their true values might imagine the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) would take on the role of the revolutionary party. The SCP was a founding member of the FFC, an alliance of sectarian and liberal parties. And for months after this alliance was created in early 2019, FFC statements and positions varied in their level of tolerance to ideas of partnerships with the military. SCP statements often condemned such positions and sometimes exposed details of the negotiation process. This position of the SCP, joining an alliance with the bourgeoisie and condemning their bourgeois positions, is aligned with the philosophy adopted by the SCP advocating for an alliance with the “national” capitalists. Instead of clarifying the contradictions between the interests of the FFC parties and those of the people, the SCP joined the alliance, promoted it, and theorized a path to ending oppression that included alliances with the oppressors. Logical and historical evidence that alliances with the bourgeoisie further only the bourgeoisie’s interests and deepen the suffering of the oppressed were ignored by the SCP. Their position is best explained by a clarification provided a little over a hundred years ago regarding other communists-in-name:

The “mistake” of the leaders I have named lies in their petty-bourgeois position, in the fact that instead of clarifying the minds of the workers, they are befogging them; instead of dispelling petty-bourgeois illusions, they are instilling them; instead of freeing the people from bourgeois influence, they are strengthening that influence. (V.I. Lenin, *Pravda* No. 28, April 9, 1917)

Under the leadership of the bourgeoisie and its allies, the revolution was mostly alive

in name only. The words of the revolution were used by counter-revolutionary governments and parties to justify one divergence from its demands after the other. This situation repressed the potential of structural revolutionary change. The revolution was halted by its bourgeois leadership.

A New Way of Doing Politics Is Emerging

In the months that followed the SPA’s call for creating neighborhood RCs, the framework behind the call manifested itself. The communication taking place between the SPA and the RCs was limited to a top-down approach, with the SPA putting out protest schedules and the RCs expected to implement them on the ground. No clear tools were created for feedback from the RCs, and although a form of inter-RC network was mentioned in the first call, there was no promotion of collaboration between RCs of even adjacent neighborhoods. In hindsight, these actions alone are enough to show that the SPA, and the FFC behind it, only considered the RCs as pawns to be utilized in street confrontations, with no intention of democratically including them in political decision-making. However, this is further confirmed by the repeated answer from FFC leaders to the question of what guarantees they have that the military will uphold their part of the partnership agreements. FFC leaders often answered that the RCs are the guarantee, as they will come out—which can also be read, “they will be called out”—to the streets in the face of any betrayal. Bear in mind that the RCs were in no way included in the negotiations that created this agreement that they are expected to defend with their bodies in the streets.

However, the RCs outgrew the submissive role the elite wished for them. Their evolution was motivated and guided by necessity, starting from the protests they

called a few weeks after the appointment of the transitional government. These were among the first countrywide protests to be called for not by the SPA but by the RCs, demanding justice for the martyrs of the massacre and trials for the military generals

The Charter of Freedom and Change was received positively.

However, a more careful reading of the charter reveals its contradictions.

responsible for the massacre. Such justice never came, a logical result of the criminals being in power.

The committees provided a way for actors outside the elite to impact political reality. Young women and men, many unemployed, some low-wage workers and a few middle-class professionals, not requiring ancestral privilege or technocratic credentials, could join their neighborhood committee and join a meaningful discussion on the RCs' joint stance toward the decisions of those in power—a large step in the revolution.

At the end of 2019, the new transitional government was preparing to issue its first national budget. Upon news of more austerity measures, the RC in the Ministry of Finance sought to inform several political actors of the disastrous impact of such policies as well as of alternative approaches. The RCs being the actor most reflective of the interests of the majority were logically the most responsive. Together with the RC in the Ministry of Finance, the neighborhood RCs organized against the austerity budget and forced the transitional government to place it on hold and hold a national confer-

ence for a more democratic discussion of economic policies. The government eventually passed its intended, disastrous policies. However, the RCs gained unprecedented capacity as a result of engaging in the economic discussion and the education they received from the Finance Ministry's RC for more than seven months in preparation for the conference.

The transitional government tried to absorb and contain the RCs in several ways, the most notable of which was enacting a law that changes their name to Service and Change Committees and including them in the municipal structure. The reaction to this move differed from one RC to the other. Some saw the move as an attempt to depoliticize the RCs and rejected it vigorously, some accepted it, and some compromised by creating another committee for that purpose or creating a service office within the existing RC. Nevertheless, austerity measures and governmental failure to provide basic goods and services forced the RCs into the role of service provision. This greatly educated the committees on matters of local governance and strengthened their bonds to the community, and as a result, the communities' trust and faith in them grew.

All these developed capacities and learned lessons factored into the RCs' response to the coup. The Three No's slogan adopted by the committees against the military coup (no negotiations, no partnership, and no legitimacy for the military) revealed a departure from the elite's ways of negotiations and compromises among themselves with total disregard for the interests of the majority. And while international actors and the national elite spent the following year recreating negotiations under different names, the RCs maintained over a year of peaceful protests in the streets in the face of brutality that killed more than 120 protestors in that year alone. The RCs also announced early on that a new

political alliance is required to lead the new revolutionary wave. However, with the memory of recent betrayals and the capture of their political will by the elite, they announced the issue of alliances would only be discussed after they had issued their own political charter(s)³ detailing their proposed solutions and their road map to defeating the coup and achieving the goals of the revolution. The RCs also clearly announced that they will only join alliances with parties that share their vision. This rational position spiked anger among the elite and the bourgeois parties for whom “unity” had become the new favorite word.

It is important to highlight that the positions of the different RCs varied on the aforementioned issues and many others; they are after all geographically based grass-roots organizations with no pre-defined ideological stance. The different interests of neighborhoods that vary economically and socially will always impact the decisions and evolution of the committees. However, it cannot be denied that they engaged, and continue to engage, a historically larger percentage of the population in political decision-making, including by groups never provided this access in the past.

The new way of the RCs paralyzed a military coup for over a year and disarmed the tools of the international community in forcing elitist settlements and further

exploitation on the population of Sudan.

Prospects of more revolutionary and democratic structures can also be seen in the RCs’ political charters, mainly the call for creating residents and workers councils. These councils are the first step toward democratic selection of delegates to higher levels of governance, leading to appointing the national legislative body and selecting the country’s prime minister. The new challenge currently facing the RCs is the implementation of this vision, with the councils functioning not just as a structure for the selection of delegates and governments, but also as a popular tool of self-governance and direct engagement of the people in making the decisions impacting their resources and needs. That is how “people’s power” can manifest itself. That is revolution.

NOTES

1. Dec. 1, 2021, press.un.org/en/2021/sgsm21054.doc.htm.
2. Muzan Alneel, “The People of Sudan Don’t Want to Share Power with Their Military Oppressors,” *Jacobin* (Nov. 24, 2021), jacobin.com/2021/11/sudan-revolution-coup-strikes-power-sharing-protests.
3. Muzan Alneel, “The Charters of Sudan’s Political Landscape,” The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, Apr. 26, 2022, timep.org/commentary/analysis/the-charters-of-sudans-political-landscape/.

Iran: Secular Revolt Against Clerical Tyranny

SAEED RAHNEMA

THE ISLAMIC REGIME IN IRAN IS occupied with the brutal crackdown of the latest uprising of Iranians, who, fed up with 43 years of repression, are demanding change. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was a mass popular reaction to the Shah's dictatorship, with hopes for democracy, political freedoms, social justice, and national independence. Though both secular and religious forces participated in the 1979 revolution, in the absence of secular leadership, the religious forces, with the support of liberals, gained the upper hand and claimed it as an "Islamic Revolution." Secular leadership was missing particularly among the left, many of whom had been eliminated by the Shah's regime. Much of the left, infatuated with the populist anti-imperialist rhetoric of the new regime, particularly following the hostage-taking at the U.S. embassy, assisted in their own further demise.

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The Islamic regime went through several transformations in the long post-revolutionary period. After eliminating the left and liberal opposition, a clerical oligarchy was established, which during the long Iran-Iraq war developed into a clerical/military oligarchy. Postwar reconstruction policies, especially denationalizations and "privatizations" of major industries, mines, and agrobusinesses—handing them over to the cronies and families of those in power—transformed the regime into a clerical/military/business oligarchy. Differences within the ruling bloc formed "reformist" and "principlists" factions, and for a few decades Iranians participated in highly restricted "elections," choosing the lesser of two evils.

The neoliberal policies adopted by successive governments led to, among other things, a widening gap between the nouveau-riche and the poor majority. Outright corruption, mismanagement, and wrong-headed policies created major economic, environmental, social, and cultural crises. Pursuing the dream of its founding father of "exporting the Islamic revolution," the regime established relations with militant Shia and other Muslims in Lebanon, Gaza, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, and Yemen, putting itself on a collision course with the United States and its allies, in particular Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The regime's controversial nuclear project further strained its relations with

the West and brought it closer and closer to Russia and China. The confluence of all these crises further deteriorated the regime's relations with a growing majority of the Iranian people, leading to sporadic and intensifying uprisings. As it faced more problems and was losing more legitimacy, it resorted to more repression.

Consecutive and Intensifying Revolts

Throughout these years, and particularly in the past two decades, the Islamic regime has faced consecutive movements and revolts by different sections of the population in reaction to a wide variety of socio-economic and cultural problems. Anger with decades of obscurantism, rampant corruption, incompetence, outright discrimination of all sorts, humiliation, and suppression of dissent created a situation where any spark could inspire a revolt.

The first major revolt occurred in 1999, when university students in different cities rose against the closure of a "reformist" newspaper, demanding freedom of the press. Then in 2009, during the swindled re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadi-njad, a "principlist" running against an Islamist "reformist" former prime minister, a massive protest identified as the "Green Movement" (nothing to do with environmentalism) brought millions to the streets and attracted the world's attention. This was mainly a movement of the new middle class, with political demands, but it did not yet dissociate from religion or the Islamic regime in its totality.

The year 2017 saw yet another major movement and marked an important political shift, both in terms of the involvement of the poor as the main participants and in the movement's political slogans. Expressing disgruntlement with the "reformists'" ineffectiveness and opportunism, the major slogan of this period was "Principlists/

Reformists, this is the end of the game." The focus was economic issues, inflation, unemployment, and corruption. In 2018 a series of uprisings in different parts of Iran included one in the Bazaar of Tehran, a traditional ally of the clerics. Unstable fiscal and monetary policies of the regime, uncontrolled fluctuations of the exchange rate, and the continued decline of the Rial, the national currency, had negatively affected the merchants and traditional middle classes. Other notable events in this period were successive industrial actions, most markedly in a large "privatized" agrobusiness and in a steel plant in a southwestern province of Khuzestan, where thousands of workers engaged in major demonstrations and work stoppages. In 2019, the government's decision to sharply increase the price of fuel created a massive uprising that soon engulfed every province and hundreds of cities across Iran. It involved many sections of the population, especially the lower middle class and the working class. The demonstrators openly called for the overthrow of the regime and, for the first time, of the Supreme Leader himself.

In 2020, environmental catastrophes predominantly resulting from mismanagement of water resources in some cities and rural areas, combined with the recurrent economic issues, created another series of protests against the regime. This period again saw industrial actions and work stoppages in several industries and mines, nurses' strikes in several cities, as well as protests by groups of people who had lost their savings in the phony Tehran stock market. The United States' assassination of General Qasem Soleimani of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), while a major blow to the Islamic regime, created an occasion for it to mobilize public support by orchestrating massive funeral processions. Yet, the shooting down of Ukrainian flight 725 by IRGC missiles caused a

major uproar and instigated another wave of demonstrations calling for the downfall of the regime. The revolts were somewhat delayed by the big toll of the Covid 19 virus, which resulted mostly from the Supreme Leader's ban on the import of vaccines from the West.

Throughout 2021, the regime was faced with more protests in different cities, over a variety of problems. These included pro-

The present uprising, with its own unique features, is the most significant, the most widespread, and the most threatening to the Islamists' power.

tests against the drying up of a major river in central Iran, the result of the regime's wrong-headed policies; demonstrations by farmers, supported by city dwellers, in Isfahan; pensioners' regular picketing in objection to the mismanagement of the nearly bankrupt pension funds; and demonstrations by teachers and contract workers of different industrial projects demanding better pay; among many other examples.

The regime's reaction to all these social protests and unrest was brutal suppression and killings, detention and torture of the protesters, and blaming conspiracies by foreign agents, hence ignoring the buildup of anger and frustration of a growing number of people of diverse social classes. Meanwhile, with the full support of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the principlists filled the Islamic parliament and judiciary, various internal factions were silenced, and the hardline principlist Ebrahim Raisi—known as the Ayatollah of Death

for his membership in the committee that massacred thousands of political prisoners in 1988—became president. The regime felt more confident to follow more radical policies both at home and internationally. Dissatisfied with the progress in the JCPOA—the nuclear deal with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany—and angered with the earlier U.S. re-imposition of sanctions and the killing of Khamenei's most favorite IRGC general, the regime intensified its controversial nuclear and missile programs and at the same time moved to further push for “Islamization” of Iranian society. The emphasis was placed on the regime's most representative symbol, the hijab and forced veiling of women. Enchanted with his seemingly absolute power, Khamenei commissioned a propaganda song that came to be known as “Hello Commander,” to be sung in all schools, calling for the return of the Mahdi (Shia Messiah) and praising his representative on earth “Sayyid Ali”!

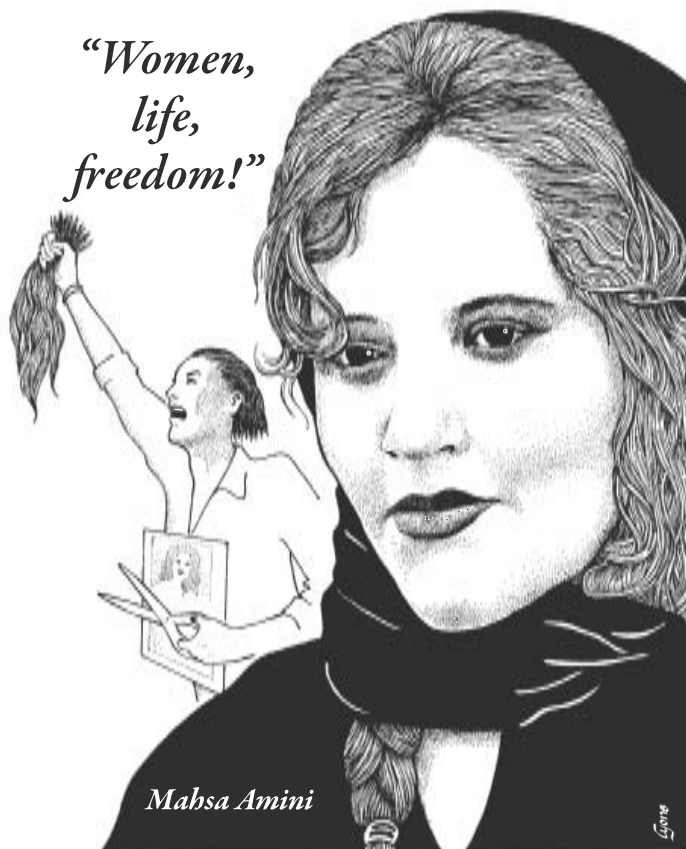
A Different Uprising

The September 2022 death of the young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini in the custody of the infamous Morality Police was the spark that blew up the tinderbox and rapidly engulfed the whole country. Compared to previous revolts, the present uprising, with its own unique features, is the most significant, the most widespread, and the most threatening to the Islamists' power.

As has been rightly noted, it is a feminist uprising. The slogan “*zan, zendegi, azadi*” (“women, life, freedom”), which was originally coined by the Kurds, immediately became the main slogan of the whole movement, beautifully portraying the demands of the protestors. Women have suffered more than any other social group under this regime. Forced veiling—the mandatory hijab—is just one aspect of it, although

symbolically it is the most important. From its inception, the Islamists in power have considered women as creatures in the service of men and procreation and for casting votes for the regime's selected candidates. They changed the Family Law, taking back most of women's rights, for instance reducing girls' minimum age of marriage from 18 to 13, and in many cases in practice, to 9 years old.

The present uprising is also clearly a revolt of the youth. Young Iranian girls and boys have been subjected to all sorts of cultural and behavioral restrictions. The Millennials and Generation Z were all born under the Islamic regime and its propaganda system, yet they so valiantly revolt against it. The authorities announced that the average age of those detained in the recent uprising (and we are talking in the thousands) is 15, and among the hundreds who have been killed so far, close to forty have been children. The same children who were forced to chant "Hello Commander" and hail to "Sayyid Ali" started chanting the song "*Baraye*" ("For ...")—put together by a lesser-known singer, which depicts all the malaise of Iran under the Mullahs based on the many tweets following the killing of Mahsa Amini. It soon turned



Thanks to Against the Current, which first published a version of this drawing by Lisa Lyons

into the anthem of the uprising, added to "death to the dictator" and "down with Sayyid-Ali!" Other than women and girls, university and high school students are the most active elements of the uprisings, with campuses turned into major sites of revolts. Interestingly, aside from important political mottos, like "*azadi*" (freedom), they call for a "*zendegi ma'mouli*" (normal life)! Their bravery in confronting the brutal, armed, uniformed and plain-clothes security agents and thugs, and their innovative guerilla-like tactics of gathering and dispersing in different neighbourhoods, have astonished the whole world.

Another important feature of the present movement is that it has linked the

women's movement to the movements of national minorities, who have also suffered from the very first days of the Islamist regime. The Kurdish region, where Mahsa Amini was from, was the original site of the revolt and continues to be the centre of resistance. The regime, accusing national minorities of separatism, intentionally at-

If a major section of the left
cannot form a leftist front, it
will again be the main loser.

tacked the Kurdish areas, hoping to provoke an armed reaction. It even bombarded parts of neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan where many Iranian Kurdish organizations are located. In another region, in Iran's Baluchistan, the regime gunned down Sunni worshippers coming out of a mosque, killing more than ninety people, following a mass public protest against the sexual assault of a teenager by a security officer. None of these tricks worked, and the slogans of the protesting crowds keep emphasizing the unity of the Kurds, Azari Turks, Baluchis, and others.

The present movement is strictly secular in nature, is independent of political organizations of the opposition, and has no central leadership. The continued spontaneity and lack of leadership have so far kept it going forward, but to bring its calls for change to fruition, it eventually will need organization and strategy.

Another Iranian Revolution?

The protestors and many others identify the present uprising with another Iranian revolution, and indeed it has the aura of the early phases of the 1979 revolution. However, the 2022 revolutionary actions still

lack many of the prerequisites for success in changing the political system. Without a doubt, the vast majority of people do not want the current regime. But the regime is still capable of holding onto power. The Islamist oligarchy can still rely on its powerful repressive apparatuses, a double-decker military in the form of the IRGC and the Basij militia, and the regular armed forces and police. It also has strong influence among militant Islamist organizations in the region and can use them—as it did in 2019 in Khuzestan—for suppressing its own people. While its ideological and economic apparatuses have been severely weakened, it still has influence among millions of believers and beneficiaries of multiple religious foundations and institutions. The oligarchy also has access to the usual rent-a-mob and an army of lumpen-proletariat and can organize intimidating demonstrations—as it did on Friday, October 28, after a most suspicious and concocted “terrorist” attack at a religious shrine in the southern city of Shiraz.

Aside from the lack of preparedness of revolutionary forces and lack of a strong organized opposition at this stage—as discussed below—the present revolutionary actions need external support. The regime no doubt has further and further isolated itself internationally, except for the opportunistic support of Russia, China, and several militant Islamist groups and organizations in the Middle East. Moreover, fearful of another major turmoil in the Middle East which, among other things, can further disrupt global oil and gas supply, none of the major powers, despite their rhetoric, seeks “regime change” in Iran. The war in Ukraine has been very beneficial to the Iranian regime, although the way the Russian government dragged the regime into supporting Moscow in the war has created more problems for it. The progressive opposition, based on past

experience with imperialist interference, is also correctly very much against any direct foreign intervention.

The Needed Quadripartite Connections

Street demonstrations alone cannot terminate a brutal authoritarian regime. The advancement of the present movement to a revolutionary status needs a quadripartite coordination and alliance among different sites of resistance: in the streets (cities and neighborhoods), workplaces (factories, government ministries, and others), places of learning (universities and schools), and places of business (the bazaar, large and small businesses). Presently, elements of these sites, most notably the street and universities/schools, have temporarily coalesced. In several cases, contract workers of several industrial projects, and some store owners too, went on short-term strikes. But so far, except in Kurdish areas, there has been no consistency among these sporadic actions. The creation of an organized and sustained connection among the four spheres at the national level, most notably between the workplaces and streets, faces serious obstacles.

What broke the back of the Shah's regime in the 1979 revolution was the workers' strikes in the oil industry and other major industrial establishments. Aside from the fact that the oil industry is not as significant a source of income for the Islamic regime as it was for the Shah's, organizationally the industry has gone through major transformations. Under the Shah's regime, the gigantic industry was more-or-less a single integrated body. But under the Islamic regime, the upstream and downstream activities have been separated and each further broken down into multiple layers and sub-layers of numerous separate companies, many "privatized," each with a significant number of temporary and

contract employees. Such is the case for gas, petrochemicals, and most other major industries.

During the 1979 revolution, when "strike committees" were formed in the oil and other major industries, they soon came under the influence of the left and turned into *Showras* (councils). These councils played a vital role in paralyzing the whole industry. Now, with hundreds of scattered smaller units, such coordinated action would be much more difficult. Moreover, the security arrangements in these strategic industries are much more extensive. The largest division within the oil company is *herassat* (security), with several thousand employees. When, after weeks of delays following Mahsa Amini's death, some workers and employees of the oil industry announced a symbolic one-day strike to protest brutal suppression of demonstrators, the security officers immediately detained several of the organizers and the strike was called off.

The absence of labor unions in Iranian industries is another major difficulty for workplace actions, notably for strikes. After suppressing the genuine workers/employees councils of the revolutionary period, the regime created yellow "Islamic Councils" run by their cronies, and even these phony organizations were not allowed in large strategic industries. To be sure, despite the highly segmented industrial working class of Iran and much tighter security surveillance, we have witnessed many strikes, road blockages, and many other forms of industrial action in the last four decades. But the lack of unions means there are no strike funds that would assure a strike's sustainability, as workers do not have savings to support their families. During the 1979 revolution, the big merchants of the bazaar who have historically been close allies of the mullahs were providing financial support to some of the oil workers, and to maintain the strikes,

sacks of money were sent to refineries and other units. Such helping hands no longer exist, as most of those merchants are now themselves an integral part of the oligarchy.

The bazaars have also witnessed major transformations in the past four decades. All the big merchants, the traditional commercial bourgeoisie of Iran, have been rewarded for their support of the Ayatollahs by getting big shares in industries, mines, and banks that were confiscated by the new regime. They have formed their own holding companies and trade monopolies and are part of the Iran's industrial and financial bourgeoisie. As a consequence, only the smaller merchants and the traditional petite-bourgeoisie have remained in the bazaar, and while many of them are still supporters of the regime and follow the religious edicts of their Ayatollahs, the majority of them have suffered economically both because of wrong-headed policies of the government and the trade monopolies

Women have suffered more than any other social group under this regime.

controlled by their more powerful counterparts. Constant internet blackouts by the regime to prevent exchanges among the demonstrators have created serious economic losses for tens of thousands of small and medium businesses. Several sporadic strikes in the bazaar, and store closures in several cities that we have been witnessing in the present uprising, relate to these social classes.

Significant sections of workplaces in the Islamic republic also include a wide array of economic institutions under the control of the IRGC and the powerful *bonyads*, the

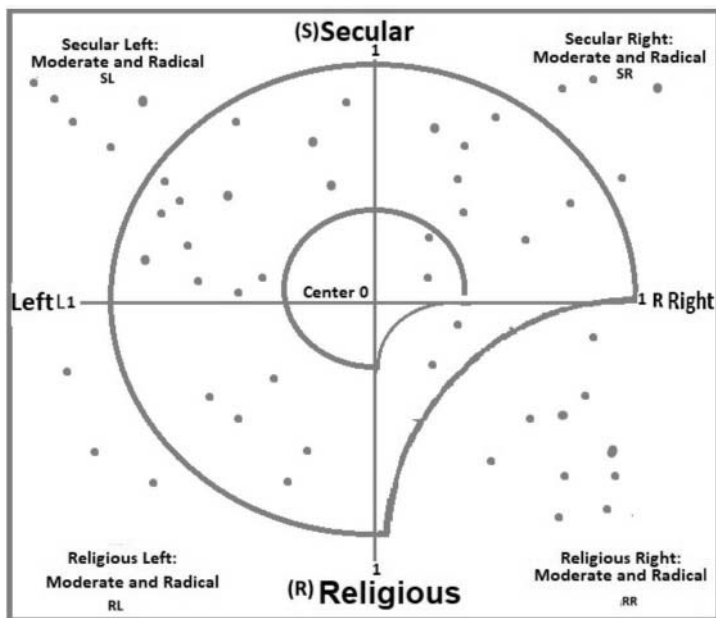
religious foundations that account for over 40 percent the country's GDP. Hundreds of thousands of employees and workers of these corporations, holdings, and agencies are obviously not expected to provide any support for the uprisings, at least for now. Also, the vast government ministries and agencies, with more than 2.3 million employees, have so far remained silent. Nonetheless, if the uprising continues and expands, there is a chance that they would also join the resistance. During the 1979 revolution, all government institutions formed strike committees that later turned into *Showras*.

While the connections between the street and the workplaces have so far been limited to sporadic actions by contract workers, the strongest connection has been between the street, with the nightly gatherings of people in certain neighborhoods and apartment blocks, and the universities and schools. In fact, with the shifting status of street demonstrations, except in Kurdish and Baluchi areas, universities and schools have become the major centers of demonstrations. However, despite their amazingly brave resistance in the face of the brute force of the security forces and the heavy casualties that they are enduring, the schools and university demonstrations and strikes alone will not be sufficient to bring the regime to its knees. Much organizing and strategizing will be essential in order to connect the four spheres of political action.

Debilitated Iranian Opposition

A successful revolution, above all, needs a strong organized opposition, which is currently lacking in Iran. I have portrayed the present Iranian political groups and organizations in a biplot/multi-dimensional matrix: left/right; secular/religious; and radical/moderate, forming four categories of secular right, secular left, religious left, and religious right, depicting scattered

political organizations across all these axes. On the far side of the secular right are the royalists who hope to re-establish a monarchy under the former crown prince with the help of the United States and its western allies. On the far side of secular left are a multitude of small socialist and communist organizations, each desiring to immediately move toward a socialist revolution by the working class. On the far side of the religious left are the Mujahedin Khalgh, who wish to bring their “hidden” leader to power to establish a different religious state with the help of hardline U.S. Republicans. In the far corner of the religious right is the regime itself and the multitude of its organizations. Its so-called “reformists” have been so disgraced that it is hard to make any distinctions within the currents of the ruling bloc. It is obvious that none of these opposition groups at the far corners of the matrix are willing to cooperate with each other, and they are actually more busy fighting amongst themselves. In the middle of the matrix, there are a multitude of moderate left, liberal, and religious organizations that call for a secular democratic state replacing the current regime. Despite much infighting among these groups also, there have been some successful efforts for unification or united actions. The main problem for all these moderate and radical opposition groups and organizations is that they are



all survivors of the 1979 revolution and are outside Iran, with almost no mass base inside the country.

A major difference between the present uprising and the previous ones is that now a significant and growing number of the Iranian diaspora have come together to support the uprisings. More than six million Iranians who live outside the country migrated or took refuge in the West in the years after the revolution. The overwhelming majority belong to the new middle classes, are highly educated, and have found a relatively strong foothold in their respective countries of residence. They have become more and more politically active, but the vast majority do not belong to or support any of the existing opposition groups. The main call to support the uprising in Iran brought hundreds of thousands of Iranians in more than 150 cities in different parts of the world to demonstrate; the call came from the spokesperson for the families of the downed Ukraine flight 725. No organization, singularly or combined

with other opposition groups, could mobilize such gatherings—a hundred thousand in Berlin, fifty thousand in Toronto, among others. The Iranian diaspora has also been very successful in attracting the attention of the world to the atrocities of the Islamic regime in Iran. Yet, despite all the potential capabilities, it needs sustained organization and connection among the diaspora opposition groups and most importantly with the movement inside Iran.

The role of the left is most significant here, because among all existing political organizations it is the only current that defends the rights of the working class and the lower echelons of the new middle class, and its thoughtful and measured presence in the movement can have a positive impact on the mobilizations in workplaces. This is particularly important as the right wing and royalists have gained momentum with the support of influential media outlets outside the country. The problem, however, is that in the wide spectrum of left organizations, we have on one extreme organizations that have openly or tacitly put aside their socialist ideals, and on the other extreme, we have a wide variety of small communist “parties” and radical socialist organizations that repeat the Bolshevik and Maoist perspectives of the past and call for the immediate establishment of the dictatorship of proletariat, without taking into consideration the subjective and objective realities of today’s Iran. There are also left organizations and individuals who adhere to democratic socialism and social democracy. If a major section of the left cannot form a leftist front, it will again be the main loser of the current and the impending political changes in Iran.

The End Game

It is very difficult to anticipate the direction that the present uprising may take. Can it succeed in toppling the brutal Islamist regime in power, or, like previous uprisings, will it be suppressed until an undetermined time in the future. There are many possible scenarios, depending on how long the present uprisings can last and the nature and extent of the regime’s responses. The regime, as in the end phase of other dictatorial/oligarchic regimes, has reached a point of no return and is faced with a catch-22 situation. If it retreats, the forces of change will make more advances. If it does not retreat, it will be faced with a stronger revolutionary upheaval. The leading figures of the regime have openly said that they will not repeat the mistakes of the Shah and will not retreat, and the improbability of the regime reforming itself is a proven fact. What is imaginable is that if it cannot suppress or slow down the uprising, it may resort to all sorts of machinations, ranging from a direct takeover of the government by the IRGC to frighten the forces of change, to instigating an attack on a neighboring country to provoke foreign powers’ involvement and claim a threat to national security. What is most certain is that regardless of what happens, the regime is no longer what it was or could have been prior to the present uprising. Even if the regime succeeds in suppressing the movement, this would only be a Pyrrhic victory, the regime having weakened itself so drastically and discredited itself nationally and internationally. The present movement is definitely the biggest nail in the coffin of the Ayatollahs’ regime.

Abenomics and the Liberal Democratic Party

Bad Politics for Japan

DONALD C. WOOD

THE EYES OF THE WORLD TURNED briefly to Japan on July 8, 2022, following the lethal shooting of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmaker and former prime minister Shinzo Abe while he was campaigning in the ancient city of Nara. Reactions of shock, disbelief, and anger at what at first appeared to be a politically motivated, anti-democratic act of brutality were understandable. Japan is known for low levels of violent crime and firearm ownership, Abe had only stepped down as head of state less than two years earlier after a nearly eight-year tenure as a divisive and powerful prime minister, and an upper-house election was only two days away.

Initial news reports lamented Abe's murder and condemned the apparent attempt to subvert the democratic process through violence—ironic, in that Abe is widely seen as having been an especially undemocratic leader.¹ U.S. news media took this to a higher level, depicting a nation unified in shock and anger over a politically motivated assassination. Domestically, even the left-leaning *Asahi* newspaper ran a front-page article on election day with the

headline, “A vote in defense of democracy.” Opinion pieces praising Abe's political achievements and personal character began to appear. However, a significant proportion of Japan's population was not deeply saddened by Abe's death. This became clear when current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's July 14 announcement that a state funeral would be held for Abe was met by public outcry and when donations of money and goods for the killer began pouring into a detention center where he was being held.²

Of vital importance was the early revelation that the attacker, who was unemployed, was motivated by a personal grudge and not by political ideology. First, the public learned that he blamed the former prime minister for supporting a religious organization to which his mother had been coerced into donating money. Soon it became clear that his mother had apparently handed so much wealth over to the Unification Church (now officially called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) that his family was destroyed and his own future imperiled. It was also revealed that Abe had indeed been involved with the organization, though not as a member, and that he had drawn on it for campaign assistance. This is the main benefit for Japan's politicians who have cozied up to the Unification Church. One LDP lawmaker's secretary is quoted as having

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candidly said, “Followers bring their friends along and help with making telephone calls and handing out leaflets. They work for free and work hard. This is valuable.”³ In Japan’s political system, characterized by brief campaign periods, staffing shortages, and easy access to elected officials, relying on this kind of support—even from cultist groups—has unfortunately become commonplace, and this is especially so for LDP politicians and the Unification Church.⁴ A recent poll found that 440 lawmakers at both the national and regional levels have ties with the organization, 80 percent of whom belong to the dominant, conservative LDP.⁵

The Unification Church’s socially conservative politics and anti-communist stance, inherited from its founder Sun Myung Moon (who was convicted of tax fraud in New York in 1982), have been cited as reasons for the strength of its connections to the LDP and particularly to the *Seiwa Kai*, a rightist faction that was headed by Abe’s father in the 1980s and by Abe himself for a short time before his murder.⁶ But since the 1980s, the Unification Church has attracted attention in Japan for increasingly aggressive donation-collecting tactics backed by appeals to ancestral and collective guilt over Japan’s 1910-1945 domination of the Korean Peninsula. This campaign reportedly aimed to take in at least 30 billion yen annually as of 2017⁷ and brought the organization to a point where 80 percent or more of its annual income may come from Japan.⁸ Reports of families and lives being ruined by massive, coerced donations to the organization abound. If Japan’s center-right and rightist politicians had had more concern for the country’s people, they would have steered clear of the Unification Church. Unfortunately, however, winning elections has taken priority. (It is worth noting that a recent *Asahi* newspaper poll found no Socialist Party or

Communist Party members with ties to the organization in the national Diet.)

Abe’s murder’s cause and aftermath speak clearly of his record as prime minister from December 26, 2012, to September 16, 2020, and his political legacy, not to mention LDP social, economic, and political philosophy. But a forgotten incident that occurred in the northern city of Sendai the day before Abe’s 41-year-old killer attacked him from behind with a homemade double-barreled shotgun says nearly as much about Abe’s domestic achievements. At approximately eight o’clock that morning, an unemployed 43-year-old man armed with a kitchen knife attacked two junior high school girls on their way to school because he wanted to escape society and go to jail, as he reportedly told investigators.⁹ There is no proof that the attack was caused in any way by Abe’s policies, but the action and the reason given are in line with social symptoms of LDP ideologies and priorities and the effects of Abe’s trademark “Abenomics.” It is also telling that the two attackers were both unemployed men in their forties who had “slipped through the cracks” of Japanese society, the reality of which does not mesh with LDP or Abe fantasy. In other words, the men represent people about whom the LDP does not care and whom the successive Abe Administrations chose to ignore.

Unfortunately, due to the late (1947) introduction of universal suffrage, the traditional domination of politics by male elites, and the overwhelming post-World War II U.S. influence, Japan has few viable alternatives to the LDP. During the early years of the MacArthur occupation, when the main U.S. concern was transforming Japan into an egalitarian democracy, rounding up fascists and nearly anyone else who had been associated with wartime administrations was top priority. But the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

on the Korean Peninsula in 1948 and the victory of the People's Liberation Army in China late the following year—by which time the USSR had become a nuclear power—motivated the United States to largely reverse course regarding its treatment of nationalism in Japan. The decision to not try Abe's grandfather Nobusuke Kishi as a war criminal—despite his involvement in the colonial rule of Manchuria in the 1930s, cosigning of Japan's 1941 declaration of war, and service in wartime administrations—and to release him from prison in 1948—reflected this shift.

With the end of the U.S. occupation in 1952, Kishi and other blacklisted individuals became free to re-enter political life. Kishi won a seat in the Diet the following year, helped found the LDP in 1955 to counter the influence of the then-vibrant Socialist Party, and became prime minister in 1957. He was only able to hold the office for three and a half years due to political fallout over the 1960 revision of the security treaty with the United States, but by the time Kishi resigned he had helped establish a political system fully parallel to U.S. interests, with ties to conservative groups such as the Unification Church, that would not waver in its course until 1993. Moreover, the LDP and its members were set to enjoy heavy, covert financial assistance from the CIA to the 1970s.¹⁰

One side effect of the establishment of this “1955 system,” of successive U.S.-Japan security treaty revisions, and of U.S. wars in Southeast Asia, was the emergence of radical Japanese leftism in the form of the Communist League, the Revolutionary Left, and the Red Army. These groups and their members attracted much attention and became objects of derision during the 1970s by pulling off hijackings and taking hostages both inside and outside of Japan and by leaving trails of human remains to show for their violent internal conflicts and

purges. Japan's left-oriented political parties, on the other hand, have largely failed to attract much positive attention and yet became objects of derision for many voters, partly because of negative impressions made by the above-mentioned radicals and due to their general exclusion from the credit given for Japan's LDP-led rise from the ashes of the 1940s. Intertwined as it was with the party's tight U.S. government, military, and business relationships, this ascension led the country to the pinnacle of Asian development and quality of life

Abenomics was doomed from the start because of 3 flawed beliefs: (1) trickle-down economics, (2) growth is good, (3) the state exists a priori of the people.

during Japan's mid-1950s to early 1970s “high economic growth” period. One result was the reinforcement of a belief that only the LDP is capable of successfully running Japan, a tired but surprisingly effective trope that the party's members still use in election campaigns.

The powerful but clunky and subdivided LDP has given birth to adversarial parties. Some have teamed up with the socialist, communist, and other relatively weak left-oriented groups to form short-lived opposition coalitions and alliances, briefly wresting power from the LDP in 1993 and again 16 years later. But the 2009 victory of the centrist/center-left Democratic Party of Japan (the DPJ, which was largely controlled by former LDP members) wound up reinforcing the LDP's claims of exclusive leadership

ability because (in short) the DPJ failed to stop the “revolving door” phenomenon that had plagued the office of prime minister since Shinzo Abe abruptly ended his first occupation of that position in 2007. The third DPJ prime minister in three years capitulated in December of 2012, allowing Abe to reclaim the office and the LDP to roar back to power—bolstered by its alliance with the socially conservative Komeito, a party with close ties to the Soka Gakkai religious organization—leaving the opposition in tatters and setting the stage for the introduction of Abe’s eponymous economic policy package. The DPJ sputtered for a few years but finally imploded in 2016.¹¹ Its remnants have continued to challenge the LDP in subsequent elections from within a messy field of generally weak parties—some of which are right of the LDP—whose poor election performances and lack of unity appear to ensure LDP dominance at least for some years to come.¹²

Abenomics was unveiled to much fanfare at the start of Abe’s second stint as prime minister. It was conceived as consisting of three arrows—an allusion to a famous story about the sixteenth-century warlord Mori Motonari, who supposedly taught his sons a lesson about loyalty by demonstrating that three arrows bundled together could not be broken, whereas an individual arrow could easily be snapped. The three arrows of Abenomics—aggressive monetary policy, fiscal consolidation, and growth strategy centering on restructuring and revitalization—were supposed to be fired in succession to lower the value of the yen and boost exports, spur wage and spending increases, reduce unemployment, increase tax revenues flowing into government coffers, and raise the GDP, thus creating a virtuous cycle of economic reinvigoration and development to counter years of relative stagnation and deflation¹³ (although the former was not as bad as it

was often made out to be and the latter was better for households than its opposite).

The first arrow was fired quickly: Under new leadership, the central bank began buying government bonds to flood the market with cash, and interest rates were lowered to near-zero (and even below zero in 2016) to weaken the yen against the dollar. This helped larger export-oriented corporations, raising the chance that these would make greater donations to LDP campaign war chests and that their employees would vote for LDP candidates. Stockholders of such corporations were also pleased.

The second arrow consisted mainly of boosting government spending but not, predictably, on social programs or infrastructural development that would have benefited the most people. Rather, spending went to construction projects and high-profile develop-

The LDP had ties to conservative groups such as the Unification Church and enjoyed heavy, covert financial assistance from the CIA to the 1970s.

ment initiatives like the maglev bullet train that is now expected to cost more than ten trillion yen, the very expensive 2020 Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, and the military and police. Tax laws also played roles; whereas corporate taxes were cut or kept at relatively low levels to maintain steady revenues close to ten trillion yen per year, a highly regressive consumption tax took annual government revenues in that category from 10.8 trillion yen in 2013 to a whopping 21.7 trillion yen in 2020.¹⁴ In other words, the recipe for the first two-thirds of Abenomics was, “Help the rich, take a little from them, and take a lot more from everyone else.”

The last arrow, which could have been used to help the masses, never quite made it out of the quiver. This represented the final third of the recipe: “Placate the masses with smoke and mirrors and promises you know you won’t keep.” Instead of enacting meaningful social and labor structural reforms to better empower workers, improve their conditions, and raise wages, superficial measures such as setting stronger guidelines for taking paternity leave were established and pretty but empty terms like “womenomics” were tossed about. The crown jewel of Abenomics in this area was the so-called *hataraki-kaikaku* (work system reform) law passed in June 2018. This may have looked good on the surface, but it did little more than create a new layer of paperwork full of falsifications to cover a labor system that continues to suffer from the same old problems as before.

My experience of living in Japan through the long, lean years of Abe’s second (2012–2020) term allowed me to see and feel changes that to me were unprecedented. First, the buying power of the yen plummeted. This made it hard to buy anything from, or to send money, overseas. At the same time, not a few business leaders praised Abenomics. There was a giddiness among many, who loudly and publicly extolled the apparent virtues of the plan, revealing their high expectations for Japan to once again become an economic dynamo—a return to the *Japan as Number One* era. Political, financial, and even educational institutions realigned their long-term plans to dovetail with or run parallel to Abenomics, hoping to ride an expected wave of wealth and prosperity. But higher taxes and inflation hurt the working class, widening the disparity between it and the corporate world and upper socioeconomic echelon.

Indeed, even in 2013 it was clear that Abe’s administration was poised to divert

funding for social programs and welfare benefits to military use to prepare for standing in unison with the United States against unspecified enemies and to promote “self-independence among the poor.”¹⁵ This, despite Japan’s child poverty rate of 16.3 percent and single-parent household poverty rate of 54.6 percent at the time.¹⁶ Next, the Abe administration managed to divert public attention to the issue of freeloaders mooching off the social welfare system, partly by capitalizing on the 2012 revelation that the mother of a prominent comedian had been living off government handouts for over a decade.¹⁷ Harsher punishments for violators were set, and nearly all welfare payments were cut, in 2013.¹⁸ It became common to hear complaints about the “welfare cheat problem” in daily life, and municipal governments cracked down on apparent violators, even though reports indicate that no more than 0.5 percent of payments were going to illegitimate recipients at the time.¹⁹ Municipal ordinances encouraged residents to report suspected cases of misuse of welfare money,²⁰ and one city office got in trouble after its employees dressed up in jackets sporting a message vilifying welfare-cheating “dregs” on their backs.²¹

Those who stood to benefit financially from Abenomics overlooked the disheartening mood of the time and made money, driving wealth disparities up to new levels. Corporate leaders had been given an opportunity to boost profits beyond the benefits of Abenomics, largely by Abe himself: the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. While the masses worried about welfare cheats (and the possibility of distant rocky islands being seized by China), the same corporations that were refusing to raise wages jockeyed for special Olympic Games deals with massive under-the-table payments.²² Meanwhile, wealthy individuals and companies salivated over opportunities to ben-

efit from large-scale casino resorts, which the Abe administration wanted to build at key spots, resulting in more clandestine exchanges. The December 2019 arrest, and 2021 conviction, of an LDP lawmaker for accepting bribes from a Chinese gambling operator eager for a chunk of a new market was probably only the tip of the iceberg.²³ Illicit money-making methods aside, under Abenomics many got rich and many who were already wealthy got richer, driving luxury goods purchases among the new rich high enough to boost the GDP to pre-COVID-19 levels by the summer of 2022.²⁴ But the majority—symbolized perhaps by the two men facing conviction for assault and murder mentioned above—experienced overall wealth loss, increased economic insecurity, or total destitution.

Throughout the dark, jingoistic 2012–2020 era of Abe rule, Japanese society became more divided politically: supporters of Abe and the state pitted against unpatriotic subversives and the generally unwelcome. Emboldened by Abe administration nationalism, far-right hate groups like the infamous Zaitokukai launched online recruiting campaigns that resulted in ugly anti-Korean rallies in major cities. These, in turn, spurred anti-rightist protests. And the next big scapegoats for LDP/Abe administration failures were non- or insufficiently procreating adults, because a shrinking population means fewer laborers and taxpayers in the future, among other complications. During the first half of 2018, when Japan's birthrate stood at 1.42,²⁵ several members of Abe's cabinet and other prominent LDP lawmakers publicly blamed women and "selfish" people for not having children, or more children, despite the fact that 70 percent of parents surveyed at the time reported that they were not doing so due to financial reasons and job demands.²⁶ The mouthy LDP politicians had conveniently overlooked the fact that

improving such conditions was not only their job, but also central to Abenomics. These comments were widely recognized as representative of Abe administration ideology.²⁷ Moreover, blaming women for not providing the country with more children was nothing new for LDP lawmakers. In January 2007, during Abe's first stint as prime minister, the health, labor and welfare ministry chief publicly branded the nation's women "birthing machines" and chastised them for not working harder to serve that function.²⁸ And as if attacking the country's women, and couples with "only" one or two children, was not offensive enough, an LDP lawmaker declared in a July 2018 article that non-heterosexual people were "unproductive" and therefore should be ineligible to receive government support.²⁹

My faith in Japan, though wounded by the nationalistic, pro-Abe giddiness of 2013–2016, was increasingly reaffirmed during the latter half of the decade, as more and more people began to groan when the prime minister publicly touted his eponymous and dubious recipe for economic reconstruction. One by one, institutions that had adopted long-term plans based on anticipation of Abenomics windfalls reconsidered their options and dropped such plans, scaling their expectations back to more realistic levels. Before long, only certain economists, commentators, and shills were publicly seen, heard, and read unequivocally extolling the virtues of Abenomics and confidently pointing toward great benefits on the horizon. This marked the beginning of a curious development: As disappointment in and distrust of Abenomics rose inside Japan during the remainder of the decade of Abe rule, expectations seemed to remain strong overseas, particularly in the United States. This also carried over to Abe himself, who tended to be viewed favorably by the U.S. media

throughout his time as prime minister and even after.

Had Abenomics succeeded, many more people might have tolerated LDP/Abe administration arrogance and offences—not to mention the scandals, bellicosity, and historical revisionism.³⁰ There may even have been less resistance to Abe's campaign to control Japan's free press.³¹ But Abenomics was doomed from the start because it rested on three flawed beliefs: (1) that trickle-down economics works, (2) that growth (measured by GDP) is necessarily good for a country, and (3) that the state and economy exist a priori of the people. First, at its core Abenomics was a dressed-up trickle-down scheme. But trickle-down failed under Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s, under Fed Chair Ben Bernanke in

The recipe for the first two-thirds of Abenomics was, “Help the rich, take a little from them, and take a lot more from everyone else.”

the 2010s, and under Abe—and caused Liz Truss' downfall—because it simply doesn't work. A government that cuts corporate and other taxes at the highest levels aiming for a trickle-down is simply outsourcing its redistributive function to the wealthiest class. Combined with a devalued currency, a regressive sales tax, and inflation with insufficient salary boosts, it sucks wealth from the working class and cruelly punishes those who have slipped below that level. Japan's predicament well illustrates the recent conclusion of King's College London researchers David Hope and Julian Limberg that trickle-down economics

enriches the wealthy but brings no benefits to countries in terms of growth or employment.³² (See also Olinsky and Mayerson's 2013 similar argument.³³) Indeed, new assessments of the effects of Abenomics and Japan's current fiscal situation point to heightened wealth inequality and increased financial misery.³⁴ The OECD now ranks Japan only barely within the top 30 low-Gini-coefficient countries.³⁵

Second, chasing economic growth is a fruitless endeavor in this era of late capitalism. Capitalism itself is sputtering, breaking down and requiring wealth injections and patch-ups every time it hits a bump in the road, as the shadow of the grim reaper of ecological ruin hanging over it grows longer. Furthermore, the realization that GDP is one of the worst possible measurements of the health of a country's economy—the conclusion of a 2010 book by Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi—is spreading.³⁶ Furthermore, “growth” as it is conventionally conceived, and as necessarily a good thing, has increasingly come into question. Cogent arguments have been made that infinite economic growth is not possible.³⁷ Growth has even been labeled “passe” (yet arguments to the contrary have been made, by eminent economist Joseph Stiglitz, for example).³⁸ Noted economist Herman Daly argues for de-emphasizing growth, which he calls “an idol of our present system,” as well as GDP.³⁹ Anthropologist Jason Hickel presents a compelling argument for degrowth, leading to a new type of economy that would be both fair and ecological—one that would not enrich the wealthy and powerful but protect the weakest people on the planet.⁴⁰ Opinions vary, but it has become clear that simply aiming for economic growth measured by GDP is no longer tenable and that politicians who do so are *passe*.

Last, Abe and his cohorts made the mistake of viewing the state as a permanent

entity, for which its citizens are obligated to work, and the state's economy as its lifeblood, to be fed by the people and used mainly to protect the state from those who would harm it. According to this mindset, the state's money belongs to the state and its people should be grateful to receive it, and those who do not pay taxes but rather live on state handouts are problematic at best, generally undesirable, and unpatriotic at worst. But a state only exists because it has people, the economy exists as an outgrowth of society, in which it is embedded and for which it functions, and the wealth of a state belongs to its people. Individuals sometimes need to draw on it for survival and cannot always make payments to support it. To be sure, there will always be opportunistic "freeloaders," but this label is too often misapplied for political gain, and true "freeloaders" are far less harmful than their wealthy and powerful opportunistic counterparts. Japan has too many politicians, especially at the highest levels, who were born privileged and seem to have no concern for those who were not or who do not fit into their status quo fantasy world. Many of these, like Abe, are legacy lawmakers, a term that describes at least one-quarter of the country's politicians.⁴¹ And unfortunately, Japan also has too many growth-focused, conventional economists. Yet it has others, too. University of Tokyo emeritus economics professor Naohiko Jinno has long eschewed neoliberalism and pointed toward Scandinavian models, arguing for Japan to build a kinder, more inclusive, more generous system based on a sharing philosophy akin to Nordic countries.⁴² It is no wonder that LDP prime ministers have long eschewed him.

Japan's current prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has publicly laid the blame for Abe's murder at the feet of the Nara police for not providing adequate protection on that fateful July day.⁴³ It is true that with

better protection Abe would probably still be alive. However, the attack occurred in the first place because of structural problems with Japan's political system, because for far too long and for far too many of Japan's politicians—particularly those of the LDP and others on the right—winning elections has been more important than what is best for society, and because of a general lack of concern on the part of the LDP for unemployed, "non-productive" residents of the country. Many other violent attacks of late—although none condonable—can be attributed at least in part to dereliction of duty on the part of the state; research points to economic inequality and inability to respect others as the most important factors in the prevalence of murder in a society.⁴⁴ Japan's economic revitalization minister publicly admitted in October 2021 that Abenomics caused greater wealth inequality, and encouraging respect for all members of society was never high on Abe's agenda.⁴⁵ Abe is gone, Abenomics is (ostensibly) out, and Kishida now touts "new capitalism." However, right now this looks like old Abenomics in a new suit. Sadly, unless Japan's political status quo changes, and soon, its people are likely to get more of the same. They deserve better.

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Statement of the Ukraine Solidarity Network

The brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine has been a litmus test for the Left. A principled and strategic commitment to the Ukrainian people, in their defense against Russian imperialism offers the answer.

Arising out of the Socialism 2022 Conference—held in Chicago over Labor Day weekend—and inspired by a session led by Ukrainian political economist and activist Yuliya Yurchenko, a group of mainly U.S. leftists came together to form what has become the Ukraine Solidarity Network—U.S. (“USN-US”). Over the last few months, and with active support from both Ukrainian leftists (such as Social Movement/Sotsialnyi Rukh), and the growing international solidarity movement, the USN-US is seeking to grow and gain support.

New Politics is built on a commitment to the politics of socialism from below and the vision of a “third camp,” which looks to the force of the working class and the oppressed, and not to rival capitalist states, as the key to our collective liberation. The work of the USN-US, in seeking to support “Ukraine’s war of resistance, its right to determine the means and objectives of its own struggle,” while “stand[ing] in opposition to all domination by powerful nations and states, including by the United States and its allies, over smaller ones and oppressed peoples” is consonant with our vision. We republish that statement here and encourage readers to add their names to the list of signatories.

Solidarity with Ukraine!

THE UKRAINE SOLIDARITY NETWORK (U.S.) reaches out to unions, communities and individuals from diverse backgrounds to build moral, political and material support for the people of Ukraine in their resistance to Russia’s criminal invasion and their struggle for an independent, egalitarian and democratic country.

The war against Ukraine is a horrible and destructive disaster in the human suffering and economic devastation it has already caused, not only for Ukraine and its people but also in its impact on global hunger and energy supplies, on the world environmental crisis, and on the lives of ordinary Russian people who are sacrificed for Putin’s war. The war also carries the risk of escalation to a direct confrontation among military great powers, with unthinkable

possible consequences.

It is urgent to end this war as soon as possible. This can only be achieved through the success of Ukraine’s resistance to Russia’s invasion. Ukraine is fighting a legitimate war of self-defense, indeed a war for its survival as a nation. Calling for “peace” in the abstract is meaningless in these circumstances.

The Ukraine Solidarity Network (U.S.) supports Ukraine’s war of resistance, its right to determine the means and objectives of its own struggle—and we support its right to obtain the weapons it needs from any available source. We are united in our support for Ukraine’s people, their military and civilian defense against aggression, and for the reconstruction of the country in the interests of the majority of its population.



Picture for Social Movement, Katya Gritseva, 2022, digital art, Lviv

We stand in opposition to all domination by powerful nations and states, including by the United States and its allies, over smaller ones and oppressed peoples.

We uphold the following principles and goals:

1) We strive for a world free of global-power domination at the expense of smaller nations. We oppose war and authoritarianism no matter which state it comes from, and support the right of self-determination and self-defense for any oppressed nation.

2) We support Ukraine's victory against the Russian invasion, and its right to reparations to meet the costs of reconstruction after the colossal destruction it is suffering.

3) The reconstruction of Ukraine also demands the cancellation of its debts to international financial institutions. Aid to Ukraine must come without strings attached, above all without crushing debt burdens.

4) We recognize the suffering that this war imposes on people in Russia, most intensely on the ethnic and religious minority sectors of the Russian Federation which are disproportionately impacted by forced military conscription. We salute the brave Russian antiwar forces speaking out and demonstrating in the face of severe repression, and we are encouraged by the popular resistance to the draft of soldiers to become cannon fodder for Putin's unjust war of aggression.

5) We seek to build connections to progressive organizations and movements in Ukraine and with the labor movement, which represents the biggest part of Ukrainian civil society, and to link Ukrainian civic organizations, marginalized communities and trade unions with counterpart organizations in the United States. We support Ukrainian struggles for ensuring just and fair labor rights for its population, especially during the war, as there are no military reasons to implement laws that threaten the social rights of Ukrainians, including those who are fighting in the front lines.

There are more than 100 initial signatories to this statement, including the individuals listed below. To add your own name, please go to ukraine-solidarity-network@googlegroups.com.

Check the online version of this statement on the *New Politics* website for a link to the full list of names.

Frieda Afary
Iranian American Feminists

Molly Crabapple
Visual Artist, contributing editor *VICE* magazine

Dr. Ron Daniels
Institute for the Black World-21 ACTION, International Activist

Cindy Domingo
Legacy of Equality Leadership and Organizing (LELO), Seattle

Eric Draitser

Author, Podcaster, CounterPunch Radio

John Feffer

Institute for Policy Studies, Foreign Policy in Focus,
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Assoc. Professor Emerita, Wilfred Laurier University, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction*

Bill Fletcher Jr.

The Real News Network

Mindy Thompson Fullilove

The New School, People's Center for Disease Control,
From Enforcers to Guardians: A Public Health Primer on Ending Police Violence

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Dayne Goodwin

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Howie Hawkins

Green Party Presidential Candidate 2020

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Peter McLaren

Distinguished Professor, Chapman University,
Emeritus Professor UCLA, Emeritus Professor
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Naomi Murakowa

Assoc Professor, Princeton Univ, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*

Joshua Pechtalt

California Federation of Teachers, Former President

Haley Pessin

DSA Afrosocialist Caucus

Jamala Rogers

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Don Rojas

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Tanya Vyhovsky

Vermont Legislature State Rep, DSA member,
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Jeffery R. Webber

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Suzi Weismann

KPFK Radio Los Angeles

Matthew Zawisky

Ukrainian American Civic Center, Buffalo NY

Jonathan Zenilman MD

Professor of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University

The name of the organization is listed for identification purposes only. The endorser's position does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the institution.

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Antisemitism in Ukraine

An Interview with Historian Serhiy Hirik

PATRICK LE TRÉHONDAT

"The level of antisemitism in Ukraine is one of the lowest in Europe"

SERIY HIRIK

THE QUESTION OF ANTISEMITISM in Ukraine is one of the issues at the center of debates over Russia's war on Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022. Russian president Vladimir Putin justified the Russian invasion claiming that he was going to "de-Nazify" the country. Some on both the left and right agree with Putin, arguing that Ukrainian Nazis play a leading role in the government, military, and society. Others, in the U.S. and Western European governments and on the left, have dismissed the claim as highly exaggerated. Nazism, of course, is associated with violence and antisemitism. What is the history of Ukrainian antisemitism and violence against Jews?

To look more deeply into this issue Patrick Le Tréhondat of Syllepse, a leftwing publishing house in France, interviewed Seriy Hirik. Hirik, a historian, is a lecturer in the Kyiv-Mohyla National Academy's Jewish Studies Master's Program and a researcher at the State Research Institute Encyclopedia Press (Kyiv). He was Vice-President of the Ukrainian Association for Jewish Studies (2020-2023). The interview was conducted on October 8, 2022, and has been edited for clarity.

Patrick Le Tréhondat: What was the situation of the Jewish community in Ukraine before February 24? Before World War II,

there were more than one and a half million Jews, and today the figure is often given as being 40,000. Where do Ukrainian Jews live today? What kind of organizations do they have, particularly cultural and labor institutions that cultivate Jewish memory?

Seriy Hirik: It's very difficult to count the real number of Jews in Ukraine. The majority of Ukrainian Jews live in mixed families and have a double identity, as both Ukrainian and Jewish, and generally consider themselves to be Ukrainians of Jewish origin. Many of them do not have direct contacts with Jewish community organizations.

In the Soviet era, personal documents, such as internal passports, contained information about ethnic identity, so the authorities collected information about the total number of Jews as well as about representatives of other ethnic groups. Since 1991, the state's mandatory collection of such information is forbidden. People may declare their ethnic identity during the national census, but it has been conducted only once since the collapse of the USSR, and that was in 2001. Some 103,000 Ukrainian citizens called themselves Jews then, but one needs to consider that many members of mixed families have double identities and called themselves Ukrainians.

There were many more than one and a half million Jews living in Ukraine before

World War II. According to the 1939 Census, in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), there were one and a half million. But this number does not include Galician and Volhynian Jews since the census was conducted in January, but these regions were only annexed by the USSR that November. This number also does not include the number of Jews living in the Chernivtsi region and the western part of Odessa, annexed by the USSR in 1940, nor Transcarpathia, annexed in 1945, as well as in Crimea, which became a part of Ukrainian SSR in 1954. The total number of Jews in Ukraine in contemporary borders as of 1939 was about three million.

The total number of Holocaust victims in Ukraine, according to various estimates, ranges from one to one and a half million. Many Jews who were evacuated to Central Asia, in 1941, did not return after World War II. A significant number of Holocaust survivors, from Galicia, Volhynia, Bukovyna, and Bessarabia, left the USSR between 1945 and 1948. These were Jews who had preserved their prewar Polish and Romanian documents, some of whom survived in occupied Ukraine, while others were evacuated in 1941. Some of them were arrested and deported by Soviet authorities as “bourgeois” in the period between 1939 and 1941, which, inadvertently, saved their lives.

According to the first Census after World War II, in 1959, there were about 840,000 Jews. From the 1960s to the 1980s, their number has been steadily declining because of mixed marriages, migration, and natural demographic processes. Jews living in the cities experienced negative natural increase in population, as cities grew due to migration from rural areas. In 1989, the very last Soviet Census found that there were 486,000 Jews in Ukraine. After the late 1980s, when the government abolished restrictions for those who wanted to emi-

grate, the majority of Ukrainian Jews left for Israel. This process was accelerated by economic crises in the 1990s.

According to the data of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (Vaad of Ukraine), in 2019 there were about 300,000 people of

While only five percent of Ukrainian citizens would not accept Jews as fellow citizens, in Russia the figure reached fourteen percent, in Poland, eighteen percent.

Jewish origin. This includes Jews, members of mixed families, and those who were born in mixed families but do not have the right to move to Israel under Israel’s “Law of Return.” Many of them do not consider themselves to be Jewish, but preserve personal connections with Jewish communities, celebrate Jewish holidays, etc. About 50,000 of them consider themselves Jews, others simply as people of Jewish origin. The largest Jewish communities are in Kyiv, Odessa, and Dnipro. Many Jews also live in Kharkiv, though a significant part of the Kharkiv Jewish community was evacuated after February 24 because the city is near the frontlines. Other important Jewish communities can be found in Kryvyi Rih, Chernivtsi, and Lviv.

There are a few umbrella organizations uniting Jewish communities. The largest one is the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (Vaad of Ukraine). The others are the United Jewish Community of Ukraine and the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine. All of them are active in preserving Jewish memory. The

Jewish memorial sites in Kyiv are preserved, first of all, by local Jewish communities, with participation of local authorities, as well as by Jewish all-Ukrainian umbrella organizations and international Jewish organizations. For example, many Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine were

described and preserved thanks to the large-scale international project carried out by the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (ESJF) project. Jewish historical monuments, such as old synagogues, have been restored thanks to private donations as well as contributions from international Jewish organizations. The heritage of Ukrainian Jews and the history of Ukrainian Jews also attract the attention of Ukrainian scholars, many of whom are members of the Ukrainian Association for Jewish Studies.

PLT: *In the 2000s, figures like Stepan Bandera or the Ukrainian Nationalist Party (OUN-UPA) were rehabilitated. The latter, made up of about 200,000 men, joined with the German Army and participated in the mass murder of Jews. It should also be remembered that four million Ukrainians were fighting against the Nazis. How did the Jewish community react to this rehabilitation?*

SH: First of all, there was not a single “OUN-UPA” at all. There was the OUN (since 1929) as a political organization; and in fact, after the 1940 split within this organization, there were two OUNs (the Bandera and Andriy Melnyk factions—the OUN-B and OUN-M). And there was also the UPA, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army,



The sea. Caution!

Katya Gritseva

a military formation created by OUN-B, but not fully controlled by it. The UPA was established in the Spring of 1943, though it pretends to have been created in the Fall of 1942 (though this date is not real: by then the majority of Galician and Volhynian Jews had already been exterminated by the Nazis).

Both the Bandera and Melnyk factions of the OUN cooperated with the Nazis from 1940 to 1941 and planned to achieve their own goals using German help. The OUN-B even tried to proclaim the establishment of a Ukrainian state on June 30, 1941. But their romance with the Germans was very short. There were several waves of arrests of the OUN-B and OUN-M activists after July 1941. In January-February 1942 both groups were finally made illegal and their most popular activists in Ukraine were arrested and executed (members of the OUN-M: Olena Teliha, Orest Chemerynsky, Daria Huzar, and others in Kyiv; members of the OUN-B: Dmytro-Myron Orlyk in Kyiv, Mykhailo Pronchenko in Kryvyi Rih etc.). At the same time, in occupied Poland, especially in Cracow, they operated almost openly.

So, after January-February 1942 both wings of the OUN operated underground.

In 1943, the OUN-B took control of some partisan paramilitary groups spontaneously organized in the Volhynia and Polissia regions and later created its own partisan groups in Galicia. In 1943–1944, they operated against the Germans (on a limited scale) and after 1944—also against the Soviets and also on a limited scale.

Both the Bandera and Melnyk factions of the OUN cooperated with the Nazis from 1940 to 1941 But their romance with the Germans was very short.

The highest level of its activity was in the late 1940s when the UPA confronted the Stalinist terror in rural areas in Volhynia and Galicia.

The total number of Ukrainians who joined the German army was up to 20,000. In 1941, two battalions were created (“Roland” and “Nachtigal”), with participation of the OUN-B, each of them consisting of about 300–400 people. Both were reorganized in the Fall of 1941 into *Schutzmannschaft* units, units made up of collaborators, who became military police. They were finally dissolved in 1942. In 1943, 13,000 Ukrainians joined the 14th *Waffen Grenadier* Division of the SS (Galizien). Several thousand also joined the *Wehrmacht* individually.

There were antisemites as well as philosemites in both OUN factions. OUN propaganda did not condemn the Holocaust and did not even mention it. In general, both OUN factions did not have any clear position on the German policy against Jews. The OUN ideological texts, published during the 1930s, rarely mentioned Jews

and did not consider them to be a political factor. They contained statements against Polish rule in Galicia and Volhynia and against Soviet rule in central and eastern Ukrainian regions. The so-called “Jewish question” was not important for them at all. Some OUN-B members participated in anti-Jewish atrocities personally because they were influenced by Nazi propaganda. At the same time, some OUN-B activists saved Jews. For example, Fedir Vovk (Ivan Vovchuk), who was one of OUN-B’s leaders in the Dnipropetrovsk region in 1941–1943, and one of the OUN-B leaders in the U.S. after the war, saved four Jews in Nikopol; Yad Vashem has recognized both him and his wife, Yelizaveta Shkandel, for its “Righteous Among the Nations” award—given to non-Jews who saved Jews during the Holocaust—in 1998.

Ukrainian Jews do not have any common position on this subject. They also understand that OUN members and UPA combatants are memorialized primarily for their struggle against the Stalinist USSR after the war. Some Ukrainian Jews, mostly older ones, oppose their memorialization. But the majority of Ukrainian Jews and Ukrainians of Jewish origin are neutral regarding this.

PLT: In 2016, you published an article, titled “The ‘decommunization’ of Ukraine: The Jewish Dimension,” where you observe that the new toponymy of street names did not consider, in a satisfactory way, the Jewish dimension of the Ukrainian nation. Have things changed since then?

SH: Yes, things have changed. One of the most impressive examples is in Kyiv, where streets have now been named after Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky, Golda Meir (she was born in Kyiv), and local Jewish philanthropists of the early 20th century (the Brodsky family and Yosyf Marshak). Also, streets were named after the Righteous Among

the Nations in a number of cities.

PLT: What is the level of antisemitism in Ukraine? How does it manifest?

SH: The level of antisemitism in Ukraine is one of the lowest in Europe. It increased for a short time in the 2000s but has been constantly decreasing since. The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities in Ukraine has monitored antisemitic related violence and vandalism for more than twenty years and publishes annual reports. In the 2000s, it documented several cases of antisemitic violence each year. In 2004, there were eight cases, in 2005, thirteen, in 2006 and 2007, eight again, and in 2008, there were five. Later the number of such incidents significantly decreased: with only one reported in 2009 and 2010, none in 2011, and only as many as four in each of the following years of that decade. For comparison, there were 108 cases of antisemitic violence reported in France in 2014, forty in 2016 and twenty-nine in 2017.

More frequent are cases of antisemitic vandalism (antisemitic graffiti and slogans, damage to Jewish memorial sites, etc.). There were only ten such cases reported in 2020, while by comparison there were fifty-three such incidents in Austria in 2020 and 104 in France in 2019.

According to a research report published in 2018 by the Pew Research Center, a non-partisan American think tank, in 2015–2016 the level of social distance toward Jews in Ukraine was the lowest in Central-Eastern Europe. While only five percent of Ukrainian citizens would not accept Jews as fellow citizens, in Russia the figure reached fourteen percent, in Poland, eighteen percent, in Romania, twenty-two percent, and in Armenia, thirty-two percent.

PLT: Since February 24, how has the Jewish community reacted to the war? What has happened to the community since the start of the war?

SH: The attitude of Ukrainian Jews towards the Russian aggression does not differ from the attitude of other parts of the Ukrainian population. More than one thousand Ukrainian Jews participate in the war as soldiers. Many of them are religious, so in July 2022, Hillel Cohen was appointed the chief rabbi of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The famous Rabbi Asher Yosef Cherkassky, and his son David, serve in the voluntary battalions of territorial defense.

The Jewish community organizations aid those who need it, Jews and non-Jews, in the form of providing medical supplies to military hospitals, and other necessities.

Many Jews who lived near the frontline or in the occupied territories were forced to leave. Some of them emigrated to Israel. But most of them found refuge in the European Union countries, or stayed in relatively safe Ukrainian regions, especially in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, and Transcarpathia. So, the fate of Ukrainian Jews during this war is roughly the same as the fate of other Ukrainians. Missiles and shells do not ask their victims about their ethnic origin.

PLT: Do you have any information on the situation of the Jewish communities in the territories occupied by the Russians?

SH: Unfortunately, no. My Jewish friends and those Jews whom I know personally left the occupied territories. It is better to address this question to Jewish community leaders. However, I believe that it is not safe to share such information until these territories are liberated.

A Century Since the March on Rome

Fascism, Past and Present

STEFANIE PREZIOSO

MEANT TO CONSECRATE THE ARRIVAL in power of Benito Mussolini, and the culmination of two years of fascist violence and its gradual penetration into the machinery of the state, the March on Rome began on October 27, 1922. For the next twenty years, it would be celebrated every October, making it the “founding” event of the new regime, a key element of the “national revolution” that Mussolini said he had begun with the founding of the *Fasci di combattimento* in March, 1919. One hundred years later, the “return” of fascism has never seemed so close again in Italy. Ignazio La Russa, a historic member of the Italian Social Movement (MSI) and one of the founders of *Fratelli d'Italia* in 2012, is now president of the Senate, thanks to seventeen votes from the ranks of the opposition, including that of former council president Matteo Renzi.

A proud collector of busts of Mussolini, La Russa said in September, 2022, “we are all heirs of the Duce.”¹ Lorenzo Fontana, “the new standard-bearer of Christian fundamentalism,” both homophobic and racist, and a supporter of the Greek fascist group Golden Dawn, is President of the Chamber of Deputies.² The formation of the government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the first woman to hold the posi-

tion, as the national and international press has repeatedly pointed out, has confirmed the gloomiest of forecasts. The names of the ministries should also get the attention of informed observers: Economic Development and *Made in Italy*; Education and *Merit*; Family, *Birth*, and Equal Opportunities; Agriculture and *Food Sovereignty*. And, in the palette of those chosen to compose the new executive, note the presence of Francesco Lollobrigida, brother-in-law of Giorgia Meloni, who in 2012 inaugurated a mausoleum to Rodolfo Graziani, the ‘Butcher of Fezzan,’ general of the Republic of Salò, the fascist regime established on September 23, 1943 by Mussolini in the part of Italian territory occupied by the Germans.

The idea of Italy that the new executive intends to promote, a government presented by Meloni as “fully representative of the popular will,” was clearly expressed on October 25, 2022 during the inaugural speech of the President of the Council (Meloni chose to use the title in the masculine form). The obligatory reference to the passage of the racial law, defined as “the lowest point in Italian history,” and more generally her remarks on her relationship with fascism (“I have never felt any sympathy or closeness to anti-democratic regimes, to any of these regimes, including fascism”) attempted to relegate fascism to the past. She seems to have forgotten, though, about her refusal to remove the tricolor flame from the logo of her party, and more generally reality of

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her militancy in neo-fascist ranks, which she still proudly claim. Her discourse generally links to the history of post-war neo-fascism (“I come from a history relegated to the margins of the Republic”), and openly targets anti-fascism, in the name of which, she said, “innocent young people were killed with a wrench,” thus making those opposed to fascism as the real and only danger to democracy. And finally, she used a femonationalist,³ right-wing, pseudo-feminist discourse that appeals to the values of “Western civilization” and to her Judeo-Christian roots as the basis of her identity politics.⁴

Post-fascism, understood as the continuity of fascism in its transformation, is today in power in Italy ... as if nothing had happened. An anomaly? No doubt, considering the millions of pages that Italian historiography has dedicated to fascism and the debates that it provokes. And yet, as Francesco Filippi wrote in an effective book entitled, *But Why Are We Still Fascists?*, the “rumors” about fascism and its history persist, not only in the very minority of those who continue to commemorate with a raised arm the October March on Rome, but more generally in Italian society as a whole. Giorgia Meloni referred in her inaugural speech to the “national pacification that the democratic right has always desired.” She continued, “The political community from which I come has always taken steps towards a complete and conscious historicization of the 20th century.” Perhaps it is time to look at how Italian society has dealt with its past in order to better grasp the apparent anomaly of a victory for post-fascism.

A Past that Won't Go Away

The daily *Il Tempo* published a photo of Benito Mussolini on its front page with the headline, “It’s the Eternal Mussolini, the Man of the Year” while the election

campaign for the 2018 national elections was in full swing. The article accompanying the photo was written by Marcello Veneziani, a sharp pen of the Italian right and author of a small book on the culture of the right. “A duce,” he wrote, “who has been dead for more than seventy years is full of more vitality than the president in charge.” Veneziani presented Mussolini as the unifying element of the country in the face of the proclaimed anti-fascism of an Italian political class “without faith or law.”

A few weeks earlier, Maurizio Sguanci, an elected member of the Democratic Party of Florence, wrote in a post on Facebook: “No one in Italy has done more in 20 years than Mussolini.” We could give countless examples. Such as that of Pier Luigi Biondi, member of *Forza Italia* and mayor of the city of L’Aquila, chatting in a Facebook group emblazoned with the colors of the flag of the Republic of Salò; or that of Genoa City Councilor Sergio Antonino Gambino, who, at the end of April, 2018 commemorated the dead of the Republic of Salò with the passive support of Marco Bucci, mayor of the city since June, 2017;

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or that of the city council of the city of Todi, where sat a member of *CasaPound*, a movement defining itself as fascism for the third millennium, decided not to support the celebrations of April 25 (day of the insurrection of Milan in 1945 and ever since the anniversary of the liberation of Italy),

claiming that they would be “too political” or that of the two schools that merged in the town of Noicattoro (Bari) joining their two names, giving birth to the school A. Gramsci-N. Pende; a senseless decision that combined the name of Antonio Gramsci, the Communist activist imprisoned by Mussolini and symbol of anti-fascist struggle, with that of Nicola Pende, eugenicist doctor, early fascist, and theorist of “race” praised by the Fascist regime.

Of course, one could argue that more than seventy years have passed, that there are almost no witnesses left, or that the generational leap has accentuated what the historian Alberto de Bernardi once called the “fragility of the social roots” of anti-fascism and its “growing difficulty” in constituting and nourishing a “shared memory” of the past, after the end of the Cold War.⁵ But isn’t the indifference towards the history of fascism, precisely in the country that saw its birth, the most palpable sign of what the historian Angelo d’Orsi, called, in *Il Manifesto* (June 16, 2018), “ignorance,” attributing to it two different meanings: “A ‘weak’ meaning, elementary: not having knowledge about the past; a basic ignorance with regard to the facts of the near or distant past. And a ‘strong’ meaning, that is to say, to know and not to take into account”?

Memory Fades, Forgers Repaint History

This ignorance, in the strongest sense, tinged with indifference, is an indication of the weight of the political grammar of the Italian right over the last thirty years. How can we fail to appreciate the victory, for a generation, of the great cultural revision carried out by the “plural right”? From the moment it came to power in the early 1990s, it placed the systematic destruction of anti-fascism as a political and cultural reference high on its agenda.

A “motley group of arrogant politicians and intellectuals who have renounced their duty,” as the historian Gabriele Turi wrote, have imposed their reading of the history of contemporary Italy⁶; a reading that sees in a “Communism camouflaged as anti-fascism” the only real danger that would have threatened, and, for some, could still threaten, Italian society; one that has made anti-Communism and its corollary anti-anti-fascism, its historical paradigm. An operation facilitated by distance from facts, which inevitably produced the revision of the canons with which they had been analyzed until then; by the death of its most important actors, some of whom were historians; and by the arrival on the political scene of a generation whose parents had not lived through fascism.

This rereading of the past is not, however, simple revision, “an indispensable moment of historical research,” but rather revisionism. For it is based on a “moral-historical” orientation that most often aims to condemn previous interpretations on the basis of a “political battle.” It is true that since 1989, a symbolic year if ever there was one (with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the bicentenary of the French Revolution), all European societies have been affected to varying degrees by a revisionist wave that placed revolutionary phenomena in the dock. In Italy, however, revisionism was made possible by the decomposition of the post-war political field; by the disappearance of the “Republic born of resistance,” making the indistinctness into which the values and utopias attached to the experience of anti-fascist struggles even more blatant.

Renzo De Felice is undoubtedly the figurehead of Italian revisionist historiography, like the philosopher and historian Ernst Nolte in Germany. This revisionism is based on the idea that “the history of fascism was somehow taken hostage by

the culture of the Italian left, hegemonized by the CP.⁷⁷ His mission is to delegitimize the historiographic production of historians with a Communist background or sympathies and to condemn what De Felice called the “fetish of anti-fascism.” In the preface to his biography of Mussolini, *Mussolini l'alleato, Vol. 1, 1940-1943*, the Italian historian severely criticized this “essentially ideological (and often openly and aggressively political) historiography,” while emphasizing the shortcomings of the anti-fascist parties, which he considered to be a mere reissue of the National Fascist Party: a minority in Italian society, they would have imposed themselves on the country despite their lack of a popular base. The revisionist interpretation attacks the Resistance, criticizing in particular the support given by non-Communist anti-fascists to the Communist Party, which would have given the latter the democratic credentials it needed. Thus, De Felice, in the book interview *Rosso e Nero*, wrote: “Neither the Fascists, nor the anti-Fascists, nor the Communists, nor the anti-Communists are legitimate in explaining to people what happened and how important it is for the history of Italy today. And besides, people don’t trust them anymore, they consider them to be the peddlars of myths they don’t believe in anymore and to which they attribute a good part of the situation that Italy is in today.” In the name of a “de-ideologized,” “dispassionate,” “serene,” and, above all, “disinterested” history, the revisionist reading of the past and, in particular, of fascism, anti-fascism, and the Resistance, has taken hold. This rereading was easy to impose since it was part of a long tradition which, since the autobiographical writings of fascist hierarchs were published at the end of World War II, tended to depict fascism in reassuring terms: a regime “outside the cone of darkness of the Shoah,” at best a “lesser evil,” at worst nothing like German National Socialism.⁸

In this reading the Italian fascists only made the “irreparable mistake” of allying themselves with Hitler and entering the war, but whose “honest and hard-working people, physiologically and unconsciously fascist because it was normal that way,” were all in all “good people” (*Italiani brava gente*). A common opinion spread among the petty and middle bourgeoisie, well rendered by the figure of Gennaro Jovine, a character

This rereading of the past is not, however, simple revision, “an indispensable moment of historical research,” but rather revisionism.

in the play by the Neapolitan Eduardo de Filippo, who only aspires to live in peace and waits for the “night to pass” (*adda passà 'a nuttata*). In this sense, the means of communication (general public press like *Gente* and *Oggi*) and above all television, are the extraordinary vehicles of both “identity” and “memory,” and have played a cardinal role in the process of collective self-absolution. Re-perpetuating the “rehabilitating vulgate” of the “good man” (*buon uomo*) Mussolini, Italian television became a vector of an “indulgent memory” of the regime, offering the reassuring vision of a fascism presented as “necessary” to the “redemption of national identity” and to the subsequent struggle against Communism. This “Italian ideology” spread with all the more ease because it had been made its own, in part, by Christian Democrat governments, and so was received with complacency outside the borders of the Peninsula.

The self-absorbed tendency of the

Italian media, however, became more pronounced in the 1980s, when the image of a fascism “with a human face” and an anti-fascism “blind” to other enemies of democracy, began to spread. In 1987, De Felice, Mussolini’s biographer, insisted in two interviews conducted by Giuliano Ferrara, soon to be a loyal supporter of the right-wing politician Silvio Berlusconi, on the need for historiographic revisionism in a period of “political innovation,” calling for the laying of the foundations of the Second Italian Republic.⁹ The cultural and political baggage and traditions of struggle of the Italian labor movement were seen as obstacles to these projects of “innovative” transformations. The Socialist Bettino Craxi, president of the Council in the mid-1980s, was the “protagonist of this new ‘zeitgeist,’” to which De Felice clearly referred. The delegitimization of anti-fascism was also used to undermine the foundations of the Constitution, which had emerged from the Resistance, with the declared aim of founding a new, presidentialist republic, free of the utopias of the post-war period.

The Italian media not only accommodated this transformation, but in a

In the name of a “disinterested” history, the revisionist reading of the past and, in particular, of fascism, anti-fascism, and the Resistance, has taken hold.

way directed it. When Gianfranco Fini modernized the MSI to make it a more presentable political formation, he never tired of repeating this idea: the program of *Alleanza Nazionale*, the new movement

which came out of the Fiuggi Congress in 1995, was entitled, “Let’s think of Italy, the future is today” (*Pensiamo l’Italia, il domani c’è già*). Fini called for a “national reconciliation” that would go beyond fascism and anti-fascism. The implicit bias of this position, as philosopher Norberto Bobbio has pointed out, was that it *de facto* put fascism and anti-fascism on equal footing—an erasure of differences that takes the form of a “retroactive reconciliation.”

A Murky Pond

Renzo De Felice died in 1996. In the meantime, revisionism reached its “supreme stage,” becoming *inversism* (a radical inversion of values), as it was called by Angelo D’Orsi. This “new historiography” has been particularly successful in the re-reading of the Resistance. One thinks of the extraordinary diffusion of books on the “lies” of the Resistance, its “dirty” war, and its “crimes,” by Giampaolo Pansa, who proudly declared himself a revisionist. Neither better nor worse than the others, fascists and anti-fascists, Resistance fighters and fighters of the Salò Republic, are all represented in this historiography as equally guilty and therefore equally innocent; a topos taken up by Giorgia Meloni in her inaugural speech. Wasn’t the objective that De Felice set for Italian historiography in his last book to establish “a general framework that places the Resistance and the Salò Republic in a unified history of Italy,” thus avoiding the implications of specific involvement in one of the opposing camps in terms of socio-political imaginary, ethics, worldview, and objectives?¹⁰

In addition to this historiographical offensive, the right-wing has mobilized repertoires of political action to erase “the misdeeds and infamy of fascism” from memory and history. Of course, one recalls the statements of Berlusconi, insisting that Mussolini was a “great statesman” who nev-

er killed anyone and sent the anti-fascists on vacation and denounced the “permanent civil war” waged by the Communists in the peninsula; an expression taken up again by Giorgia Meloni (*The Washington Post*, May 27, 1994).

More important were the attacks on school programs. In 2000, the regional government of Lazio, led by Francesco Storace (National Alliance Party), appointed a commission of experts to censor “factious” school textbooks. In 2002, the same political agenda targeted “the ideological vision that has often altered irrefutable historical facts for political purposes” at the national level, in the name of a “non-ideological” reading of history.¹¹ In the same year, *Forza Italia* writer and politician Gianni Baget Bozzo announced his intention to abolish April 25 (the Anniversary of the Liberation, Anniversary of the Resistance) as a national holiday, while National Alliance in the Liguria Regional Council proposed to cancel public funding to the Institutes of Resistance History scattered in the north of the Peninsula, in order to create a single regional Institute of Contemporary History.

In 2008, Marcello dell’Utri announced in a thunderous YouTube spot that “the history books are still too conditioned to the rhetoric of the Resistance, they will be revised, if we were to win the elections. This is a thesis that we will address with particular attention.” A year later, he stated: “Mussolini, an extraordinary man and of great culture, lost the war because he was too good: He was not at all a dictator like Stalin” (*Repubblica*, May 5, 2009 quoted by Mimmo Franzinelli). In March, 2011, five right-wing senators proposed, in the name of “freedom of opinion,” to repeal Article XII of the Italian Constitution, prohibiting the reconstitution in any form of a fascist party.

This *inversism* would not have been able to impose its mark on the common

opinion of the *Ventennio* if it had not also been emulated by the left, which has shown itself to be receptive to a rereading of the past, in particular of the period of resistance and anti-fascism, calling for the creation of a “shared memory,” which was to be the basis for the legitimacy of the alternation

The delegitimization of anti-fascism was also used to undermine the foundations of the Constitution.

of governments of the two political poles that have been fighting for power between 1994 and 2018. A key moment in this rallying was the speech by Luciano Violante, in 1996 in the Chamber of Deputies. Elected from the left after the electoral victory of the so-called Olive Tree (*Ulivo*) led by the former Christian Democrat Romano Prodi, he then became president of the Chamber. An ambiguous speech linking understanding for the “children of Salò” to the need to found a “national” narrative of the history of the Italian Resistance, but a speech in line with the transformation of the Communist Party into the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS - Democratic Party of the Left) at its 20th Congress in 1991. The PCI, which became the PDS, then resolutely broke away from the simple idea, recalled by the Marxist intellectual Rossana Rossanda, of a “left thought in terms of equality” and emancipation, to join the Social-Democratic (PDS) governing party, and then the conservative Democratic Party, whose secretary, Achille Occhetto, said, “We are now something else,” and later in 1991,

[F]rom now on we will only answer for the merits and mistakes of the PDS. I hope that today it is clear to everyone that the emblematic choice of the Berlin Wall was not the result of an improvisation, but the great metaphor of the end of an era in the East, but also in the West.... Without a clear vision of the historical moment, this turning point would have been impossible. With this effective understanding of the new era that was opening up before us, we won the right on the ground to say, now that's enough. Let's move forward (*L'Unità*, October 27, 1991).

A few months before Luciano Violante's speech, Francesco Rutelli, the "left" mayor of the city of Rome, decided to add his stone to the monument of "national reconciliation" by suggesting to name a street after Giuseppe Bottai, the Fascist Minister of Education who had led the persecution of the Jews in schools and universities starting in 1938.

Bertrand Méheust describes our time as a "soft apocalypse," in which the incantatory invocation of the past, and in particular of the "murderous violence" of Nazism and fascism, "exempts our society from the radical examination of conscience which it would be well advised to carry out as soon as possible."¹² He then defended the nostalgia of a time when solidarity, resistance, struggle, and above all, hope were the experience and horizon of all those who fight for a radically different world.¹³ However, the "sea of hope" represented by the war of resistance has gradually—but no less brutally—turned into an indistinct puddle.

Today, revisionism seems to have won the day, if not in historiography, at least in widespread public opinion. Perhaps then, in order to resist the irresistible, it is necessary to get to work and reeducate the Italian population about its own history. The threats against those who play a fundamental role in this work can only be an

incentive to continue tirelessly on this path.

NOTES

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Old Bolshevism, New Bolshevism, and Lenin's *April Theses*

Karl Kautsky as Theorist of Permanent Revolution?

JOHN MAROT*

Bolsheviks proceed from [the] abstract notion "democratic dictatorship, not socialist dictatorship" and arrive at the idea of a proletariat in possession of state power imposing a bourgeois-democratic limitation upon itself. ... The anti-revolution aspects of ... Bolshevism are likely to become a serious threat only in the event of victory.

LEON TROTSKY, 1909¹

THE "SERIOUS THREAT" TROTSKY spoke of materialized in the wake of the victorious February 1917 Revolution. As he had foretold, the "Old Bolshevik" perspective had arrived at the idea of workers holding power—Lenin's "dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry"—but imposing a bourgeois-democratic limitation upon itself. The "anti-revolution aspects" of Old Bolshevism emerged clearly and assumed definite shape in the five-week period preceding Lenin's arrival at the Finland Station on the evening of April 3, 1917. By the end of April, however, the Bolsheviks had reversed course, adopting Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution in everything but name.

A Menshevik eyewitness, N.N. Sukha-

nov, author of a seven-volume work on 1917 and cited by Trotsky in his own *History*, reports Lenin's first meeting with the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks announcing the Bolshevik chief's determination to chart a new direction:

I will never forget that thunder-like speech, startling and amazing not only to me, a heretic accidentally dropped in, but also to the faithful, all of them. I assert that nobody there had expected anything of the kind. It seemed as if all the elements and the spirit of universal destruction had risen from their lairs, knowing neither barriers nor doubts nor personal difficulties nor personal considerations, to hover through the banquet chambers of Kshesinskaya above the heads of the bewitched disciples.²

Lenin would now go beyond the Old Bolshevik program of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, toward socialist revolution at home and abroad. This reversal, or "rearming," of the Bolshevik party, as Trotsky termed it, has long been settled

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**In memory of Mike Davis*

history, accepted by serious historians of all persuasions, along with eyewitnesses and memoirists, until now.³

Lars Lih has challenged this narrative.⁴ Marching in lockstep with Lih is Eric Blanc. Both affirm a continuity and essential unity—not disruption and upheaval—between the pre-1917 politics of “Old Bolshevism” and those of “New Bolshevism” in 1917.⁵ (All unreferenced citations in this essay refer to the two articles by Blanc cited in note 5.) This view is not original to Lih and Blanc.

As early as 1924, the top leadership in Russia, Stalin and Kamenev in particular, minimized the conflict between Lenin and themselves over the party’s orientation in the first weeks of the 1917 Revolution. By 1939 Stalin had gone further and asserted in *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Short Course) that there really had been no conflict worth mentioning.⁶ But even at this late date, Stalin still allowed that the *April Theses* represented a new orientation that flowed “naturally” from Old Bolshevik premises. The new orientation was Stalin’s concession to the truth. But this is still too much for Lih and Blanc: For them, there was not even a new orientation but a straight continuation of the old—a mere tactical articulation of a long-held strategy derived from the work of Karl Kautsky, leading theoretician of Second International Marxism, making Kautsky the “architect” of the October Revolution.⁷

In contrast, I shall reaffirm the long-standing conventional view that Lenin’s 1917 *April Theses* did represent a sea change in strategic perspectives that could not be deduced from the “logic” (as Lih says) of Old Bolshevism but required concrete political analysis. That analysis tended toward the appropriate politics in the new and unforeseen circumstances in which the Bolshevik Party found itself in 1917.

Blanc’s revisionism is of concern because it tends to support his contemporary pronouncements on the feasibility of the parliamentary road to socialism in bourgeois democracies (Kautskyism) while confining the relevance of the soviet road to socialism (Leninist vanguardism) exclusively to autocratic regimes.

The Old Bolshevik Perspective: The Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution and the Democratic Republic

Until Lih and Blanc came along, it was generally understood that Old Bolshevism had only aimed to set up a republic in Russia—the most democratic form of the capitalist state—as the political expression of the coming bourgeois-democratic revolution in that country. And there is broad agreement that Lenin broke with Old Bolshevism on this matter—Lenin himself thought he was doing so—when the Bolshevik leader called on workers to permanently set up a soviet state instead, that being the only form a workers’ state could take because it was democratic through and through. On this conventional account, New Bolshevism, encapsulated in the slogan “All Power to the Soviets,” marked a critical discontinuity with Old Bolshevism, incompatible with the latter, because no capitalist state, in whatever form, could stably exist under soviet power.

Lenin’s call for an epochal transition to socialism in Russia meant transcending the bourgeois limitations of the existing, democratic revolution while retaining all of its democratic features—notably, freedom of speech, press, and assembly. As well, soviet power would inspire workers throughout the advanced capitalist world to emulate their Russian brothers and sisters by bringing a condign end to the capitalist mode of production everywhere. Indeed, in all key respects, Lenin adopted Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, masterfully

translating it (better than Trotsky even, I would assert) into political practice. Blanc tries to overturn, in central respects, what we knew—or thought we knew—about all this.

Building on Lih's work, Blanc rightly shows how Old Bolshevism was "articulated and implemented" in the very first weeks of the February Revolution, weeks that form "a necessary starting point for understanding the ensuing developments" down to October 1917. Hitherto, that has generally meant that since Old Bolshevism was wedded to a limited, bourgeois-democratic conception of the February Revolution, it stood in the way of realizing the proletarian-socialist one in October. In sharp contrast, Blanc affirms just the opposite: Old Bolshevism, remaining true to itself, transcended with nary a hitch the bourgeois limitations of the February Revolution, paving the way for the October Revolution. The anti-socialist revolution aspects of Old Bolshevism never existed. Trotsky had only imagined them for politically interested reasons. There was no "April Crisis" and no "rearming" of the Bolshevik party. "[I]rrefutable primary sources undermine the entire edifice of Trotsky's argument," trumpets Blanc.

Pace Blanc, it is impossible to understand Bolshevik policy at that "particular moment"—February–March 1917—unless a longer, systematic view is taken. Some relevant, theory-sensitive, pre-April 1917 history, stretching back to 1905, and missing in Blanc, is indispensable to set the proper context.

The Question of a Provisional Government in Old Bolshevik Theory⁸

The Bolsheviks had thought hard about what to say and how to act in a revolution long before 1917. In 1905, the Bolsheviks held a series of meetings at their Third

Congress, as a revolution back home was unfolding. On one issue, they resolved in favor of Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP)⁹ participation in a provisional government should one emerge in the wake of the hoped-for overthrow of the monarchy, then savagely battling for its very existence.

The Bolsheviks reasoned that a successful RSDLP-led popular uprising to topple Tsardom would earn them bountiful political capital. They would then cash out that capital by founding a revolutionary provisional government dominated and led by Russian Social Democrats—a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry," Lenin called it. They envisioned the following, two-step scenario.

First step: The hypothetical RSDLP-led provisional government would carry out the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the end, working hard to assure the most favorable political environment for a Constituent Assembly to lay the constitutional basis of a republic. Using its positions of power above, in the provisional governmental apparatus, jointly with those below, in civil society, in the factories, the streets, and the neighborhoods, the RSDLP would "vastly extend" the democratic "boundaries" of the bourgeois revolution to the very limit, right up to the democratic republic—without going beyond it.¹⁰

Second step: The republic would be founded. The party, its work done, would dissolve the provisional government. The RSDLP, now emulating German Social Democracy, would become a party of revolutionary opposition to capitalism and the capitalist state, inside and outside the newly constituted parliamentary institutions.

Thus did the Bolsheviks determine to give the then on-going bourgeois-democratic revolution a distinct "proletarian imprint," the highest degree of "democratism,"¹¹ which the proletariat would use to

advance and defend its class interests, along with the interests of peasants, women, Jews, ethnic and national minorities, and other oppressed groups. At the same time, the successful revolution would clear the way for the broad, smooth, unfettered “American” road to the development of capitalism in Russia.

The 1905 Revolution failed. The autocracy was not overthrown. No provisional government ever materialized. Bolshevik theory about what to do and say about this matter was never put to the test of practice. That test only came in 1917.

That year the unprecedented happened: The February Revolution swiftly won, toppling the autocracy. Finally, a new, never-before-seen institution, only hypothesized by the Bolsheviks in 1905, at last came into existence: the Provisional Government.

The Paradox of the February Revolution

The workers (and soldiers) led the revolution, vindicating Old Bolshevism. Meanwhile, the Kadet-led bourgeois opposition, to whom the Mensheviks had looked to lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution, had in fact led no struggles, fought no battles, and risked no necks, instead conducting behind-the-scenes intrigues to save what could be saved of the old order.¹²

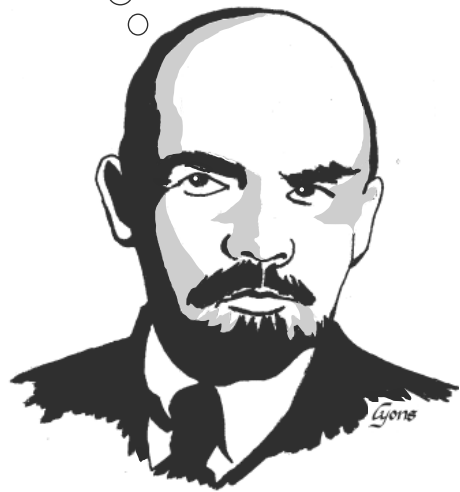
In 1905, the soviets had remained representative of different tendencies in the workers’ movement, fora for workers to discuss how to overthrow Tsarism. In 1917, soviets once again became a multi-tendency platform of political struggle, and much more, *after* the masses had struck down the Romanov dynasty—an entirely novel situation.

With the destruction of the monarchy factory committees became firmly established and authoritative institutions of democratic workers’ power at the point of production,¹³ and the central electoral constituency of the soviets in every urban

“Can Leninists Explain the Russian Revolution?”

— Blanc

Seriously?



center of Russia. Standing at the head of the masses was the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies (the Soviet). Its famous Order No. 1 of March 1, 1917, established soviet power over the armed forces—an attribute indispensable to any state, *qua* state.

Deceived Expectations

Alarmingly, the actually existing Provisional Government bore absolutely no resemblance to the one the Bolsheviks had anticipated 12 years earlier. Defying all Bolshevik expectations, no Bolsheviks had participated in its creation. There were no Bolsheviks in it. Worse, Lenin’s partisans confronted a political nightmare: Wealthy landlords and industrialists dominated it, and the counter-revolutionary Kadet Party, not the RSDLP, led it.

There was a disconnect between those who had made the revolution, on the one hand, and the people who reaped the

harvest—the Kadets, liberals who feared popular power to the marrow of their bones. This was the “paradox” Trotsky spoke of in his *History*.¹⁴

Still, the counter-revolutionary class composition and policies of the Provisional Government—continuing the war, stonewalling land reforms, postponing elections to a Constituent Assembly, re-asserting managerial authority on the factory floor—could be opposed by the Soviet. Indeed, in 1905 Lenin had looked to the Soviet as the “embryo of a provisional revolutionary government” and argued that Social Democrats should broadcast the idea that the Soviet regard itself as such, or that the Soviet assume responsibility for “*setting up*” such a government until a bourgeois-democratic state permanently supplanted it.¹⁵

II. Initial Bolshevik Reaction to the Actually Existing Provisional Government

Fundamentally at issue here, and the focus of Blanc’s essays, are the Bolsheviks’ politics toward the Provisional Government in the first weeks of the February Revolution, and the reasons for them.

On the fifth day of the revolutionary whirlwind, February 27, shortly before the Tsar’s abdication, the Bolsheviks of Vyborg district in the capital reiterated the RSDLP’s call, dating back to the 1905 Revolution, for the formation of a “Provisional Revolutionary Government” to fight for a “democratic republic.” On that day as well, the top Bolshevik leader present in Petrograd, Alexander Shlyapnikov, summoned workers and soldiers to send “their representatives to the Provisional Revolutionary Government.” “Long Live the Democratic Republic!”

In the next few days, however, it became increasingly clear that the just-formed Provisional Government would not be a revolutionary one. The most radical Bol-

sheviks, those of Vyborg, now called for the immediate formation of a revolutionary provisional government to displace the existing, counter-revolutionary one. “The Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies must immediately eliminate the Provisional Government of the liberal bourgeoisie and declare itself to be the Provisional Revolutionary Government.”

Very simply, Vyborg called for a new provisional government with no counter-revolutionaries in it—let alone leading it. It was a call for revolutionaries, for Bolsheviks—not venal, war-mongering Duma parliamentarians—to take ministerial posts and make revolutionary bourgeois democratic policy, in conformity with the Old Bolshevik resolutions of the 1905 Congress.

Blanc explains that the Bolshevik central leadership in Petrograd imposed less-radical “tactics” on the Vyborg radicals. This is true, but Blanc (like Lih) fails to recognize that behind this tactical change there remained a strategic adherence, in practice, to the Old Bolshevik goal of setting up a bourgeois republic, not soviet power.

Shlyapnikov’s view of the political situation dovetailed with Old Bolshevik perspectives. He urged extreme caution and came out against an immediate, direct assault on the Provisional Government. Instead of pushing hard for the formation of a revolutionary provisional government right away, as the Vyborg “extremists” were demanding, the Bolsheviks ought instead to pressure the existing Provisional Government to act in a revolutionary way by putting its Kadet leaders’ feet to the fire and supporting the Provisional Government “insofar as it” acted in a progressive way, and not supporting it when it did not.

Again, Shlyapnikov was recycling the Old Bolshevik project of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, where the Soviet has no other purpose than to apply pressure on the Provisional Government to carry

that revolution through, and, if the provisional regime proved obdurate, to create an alternative, a “Provisional Revolutionary Government that was democratic in nature (the dictatorship of the proletariat and the

Had the Bolsheviks rejected the April Theses and maintained continuity with Old Bolshevism, the October Revolution would never have taken place.

peasantry),” as explained by the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* on March 15, two weeks before Lenin’s return.

This tactical shift, prompted by Old Bolshevik leaders, did not at all anticipate New Bolshevism and socialist revolution, as Blanc declares, muddying the waters. It was, rather, a tactical inflection of Old Bolshevism to achieve the same objectives as before—only more slowly, requiring the Bolsheviks to be more patient. Blanc lists these objectives as “peace, bread, agrarian reform, the eight-hour day, and a democratically elected Constituent Assembly.” These were not specifically socialist demands, they were bourgeois-democratic ones, which Old Bolsheviks thought a bourgeois provisional government could meet—provided it was subject to sufficient revolutionary pressure from without, from the Soviet.

In this scenario, the one they would pursue for the next five weeks, the Bolsheviks would spare themselves the trouble of replacing the Provisional Government with a spanking new, Bolshevik-dominated, “revolutionary” one. It was an indirect way of realizing the Old Bolshevik program of pushing the bourgeois-democratic revolu-

tion to the end. It was not the herald of a strategic break with it, and with capitalism, as was the *April Theses*. Blanc correctly points out that before they endorsed the *April Theses*, the Bolsheviks “did not project the perspective of overthrowing capitalism in Russia *prior* to the Western workers’ revolution.”

In light of the foregoing reflections, official Bolshevik policy, before April, to supplant the Provisional Government with, if necessary, a “revolutionary” one was not a demand for a permanent soviet power and socialism but a demand for a Provisional Government that would remain provisional, eventually yielding to a Constituent Assembly that would set up the legal, constitutional basis of a permanent, capitalist state.

Let’s cross all t’s and dot all i’s: The Old Bolshevik party line did not call for “All Power to the Soviets” as the one and only *living, practical, and permanent* alternative to the existing Provisional Government. Old Bolshevism was never about the Soviet setting up a workers’ state and making a socialist revolution, as Blanc believes.

Lenin was the first Bolshevik leader whose political calculations took into account the actual existence of soviets, of this exceptionally popular and unprecedentedly democratic *state* form, in pushing for a fundamental reorientation of Bolshevik strategy, toward socialism. In the *April Theses*, Lenin *did* “project the perspective of overthrowing capitalism *prior* to the Western workers’ revolution.” Unlike the Old Bolsheviks, he would not put socialist revolution in Russia on the back burner, waiting for workers in the advanced capitalist world to make the first move.

Lenin explicitly recognized what the Vyborg Bolsheviks had only intuited: It was impossible to reconcile the existence of the counter-revolutionary Provisional Government with revolutionary soviet power. In

State and Revolution, he would theorize a new Marxist model of the state that broke decisively with the old one, which he and all Second International Marxists, led by Kautsky, had espoused, namely, that the working class could seize control of the capitalist state and use a suitably transformed version of it to build socialism.

As long as Lenin's partisans in Russia did not recognize in the soviet the "political form at long last found for the economical emancipation of the working class,"¹⁶ assuming the functions of a workers' state, they were bound to fall back on the time-worn Old Bolshevik demand to establish a new "revolutionary provisional government" to fully democratize the bourgeois revolution, terminal point of the 1917 revolution. So long as they did so, the Kadet-led Provisional Government, representing the interests of the propertied classes, would not have to be destroyed, only pressured to push the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the end.

III. Blanc's Argument: The February Revolution Anticipated the October Revolution

In Blanc's account, Lenin's *April Theses* represented but a theoretical specification of already existing Old Bolshevik practice, really adding nothing new. The Bolshevik call for a revolutionary alternative to take the place of the existing, anti-revolutionary, Provisional Government, he believes, was simply an unarticulated call for soviet power. Specifically, in Blanc's view, the radical Vyborg Bolsheviks' demand for a revolutionary provisional government was tantamount to the demand for "All Power to the Soviets," anticipating Lenin's theses in every essential respect. This demand was implicit in Old Bolshevik politics, Blanc says, following Lih; it became explicit in April 1917.

At the same time, Blanc rightly says that the Bolsheviks "did not project the per-

spective of overthrowing capitalism *prior*" to their adopting the *April Theses*. Blanc recognizes that the Bolsheviks changed course *after* voting in favor of Lenin's position, taking the initiative to immediately fight for socialism. This sets up a huge problem for Blanc.

Before the *April Theses*, could the Bolsheviks call for a "proletarian peasant government to end the war, meet the people's social demands, and spark the international overthrow of capitalism" without *also* calling for the *immediate* overthrow of capitalism at home, not waiting for workers in the West to take the lead? Could capitalists confidently expect a return on their investments under a "workers' and peasants' government" or a "proletarian peasant government" or a "regime of workers and soldiers" or a "revolutionary regime" or a "working people's regime" or a "revolutionary government" or a "revolutionary government based on the soviet"? Blanc invented all these terms—they are not found in the primary sources he cites for the period—and uses them indifferently to characterize the future New Order before and after the *April Theses*. But isn't the intrinsic political meaning of these categories fundamentally different if the Bolsheviks were, *on Blanc's own account*, not calling for the immediate overthrow of capitalism *before* the *April Theses*, but were calling for it *after* the Bolsheviks made the *April Theses* their own? Blanc's novel, kaleidoscopic political nomenclature signifies nothing unless he specifies the socio-property relations underlying it and the corresponding state form.

The Old Bolsheviks—as long as they remained Old Bolsheviks—could never call for the *permanent* transfer of power to the Soviet because that would mean socialist revolution and the end of capitalism, the end of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

In other words, the Bolsheviks demanding a revolutionary provisional government before the *April Theses*, under whatever name Blanc chooses, still weren't demanding socialist revolution and a lasting workers' state. This is how the Old Bolsheviks arrived "at the idea of a proletariat in possession of state power imposing a bourgeois-democratic limitation upon itself" predicted by Trotsky. And because they had this idea, their outlook was fully in harmony with Old Bolshevism, with the decisions of the Third Congress to place revolutionary social democrats—Bolsheviks—in charge of running a provisional government, whatever the name, earning the honorific "Revolutionary."

In dramatic contrast, the *April Theses* spoke of a *permanent* state power—a workers' state, *immediately*. Its foundation was the first step toward socialism. Here, Lenin broke decisively and irrevocably with the 1905 Old Bolshevik strategy of joining the Provisional Government, then putting the nefarious liberals in their place and carrying out the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the end. And he did not advocate the 1917 Shlyapnikov variation of that strategy (later adopted by Kamenev and Stalin) of having the Soviet pressure the Provisional Government from without to achieve the same goal. Nor did he follow the Vyborg Bolshevik demand for something like "All Power to a Revolutionary Provisional Government" to become the official party line—a government that would also eventually go the way of all flesh.

Instead, Lenin, the New Bolshevik, came up with a new goal summed up in a new slogan, "All Power to the Soviets!" *for keeps*. The Vyborg Bolsheviks especially, and the Bolshevik rank and file generally, would greet this slogan with the greatest enthusiasm since it was the closest approximation to their outlook, shaped by trenchant, years-long Bolshevik polemics

against treacherous Kadet liberalism and milquetoast Menshevik reformism. Above all, Lenin's perspective gave the Bolsheviks a leading role in the revolution because it gave a leading role to the proletariat, organized in soviets and factory committees.

The Old Bolsheviks—Stalin, Kamenev, Shlyapnikov—had not measured up. It wasn't the first time. Lenin remarked acidly that other Bolsheviks similarly had played "regrettable" roles in the history of the party by "reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality."¹⁷

And so, upon his return, Lenin had no choice but to premise all future discussions about what the Bolsheviks should do in the coming months around the New Bolshevik idea of "All Power to the Soviets" and socialist revolution. This was the practical, living alternative to the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the Provisional Government, a clear break from Old Bolshevism. The objective was new—socialist revolution—and so was the institution that would realize it—soviet power.

There is virtually no direct evidence to support Blanc's view that the Bolsheviks, even the most radical ones, were talking about *permanently* transferring all power from the actually existing Provisional Government to the actually existing Soviet, while indirect evidence does point to the failure of the Bolshevik leadership to clearly distinguish itself strategically from its Menshevik counterparts before Lenin's arrival.

IV. The Failure of Old Bolshevism to Distinguish Itself from Menshevism

Blanc insists that the Bolsheviks "indisputably" advocated a policy very different from Menshevism. But his own narrative very much disputes the view that the Bolsheviks were sharply distinguishing themselves politically at this time.¹⁸

Upon Kamenev's return from exile, Blanc writes, the leading Bolshevik in Russia won the "majority" of the Bolsheviks to vote approval of a "text that was basically not critical of the Provisional Government and that said nothing explicit about the need to establish a government of workers and peasants." "Kamenev and his allies particularly stressed the strategic possibility and desirability of compromising with the SRs and Mensheviks on this crucial matter," Blanc continues. In "most towns outside of Petrograd and Moscow, a sharp political delineation from the conciliatory socialists [the Mensheviks] was the exception rather than the norm." Finally, Blanc concludes, "pressures towards unity" with the Mensheviks on Menshevik terms "frequently led local Bolsheviks to act on a vague, lowest-common-denominator orientation that did not go beyond calling for pressure on the government to meet the peoples' demands."

Blanc could not be clearer here. The bottom line is that the Bolsheviks had *no* line independent of the Mensheviks at this juncture, contrary to Blanc's idea that the Bolsheviks had consistently marked themselves off from the "moderate socialists"—the new, deceptive descriptor he gives, suddenly and without explanation, to Russia's "revolutionary social democrats" and followers of Kautsky, the Mensheviks.

Blanc references "objective" factors, notably the threat of counter-revolution, to explain the emerging Bolshevik-Menshevik alliance. That is neither here nor there. The point is that, for whatever reason, Bolsheviks had a hard time distinguishing themselves from the Mensheviks. Blanc merely invokes the political pusillanimity of Old Bolshevism at this juncture and makes it his own. Lenin did not see matters this way at all.

Lenin could not see how any unarmed counter-revolutionary *coup* to overthrow

the Soviet could have prevailed, given that the armed forces could not and would not make a move unless the Soviet agreed to it. That was the essence of the Petrograd Soviet's Order Number 1. Surprisingly, and dispensing with logical argument, Blanc, elsewhere, agrees. "Since the insurgent workers and soldiers looked to the new Petrograd Soviet as the legitimate authority, it easily could have taken full power had it been so inclined." Indeed it could have! But what happened to the objective correlation of class forces, invoked by Blanc earlier, that ostensibly made this impossible and the demand for it utopian? Blanc ends up arguing at cross purposes: He strikes out with his right hand the truth he seizes with his left. In any event, the point is that the Old Bolsheviks camouflaged, by appealing to objective political limitations, what were in fact the self-imposed political limitations of Old Bolshevism.

The most straightforward explanation for the failure of Old Bolshevism to unambiguously differentiate itself from Menshevism was that there was no longer any rationale for such a break after the fall of the Romanovs. After all, bringing down Tsarism had long been *the* goal of the RSDLP, naturally fostering a sentiment of unity for a job well-done, especially in the upper echelons of both wings—even if the RSDLP had not organized and led the February Revolution. In the euphoria of the moment, the Bolsheviks adapted "to the mood of the majority of workers" and their Menshevik representatives. Common sense dictates, at least to outside observers unable to read the Bolsheviks' minds, that the Bolsheviks were acting as Mensheviks. And the Mensheviks, Blanc explains, held

that steady pressure by an independent labor movement was necessary to push from below to overcome the hesitations of the bourgeoisie. Mensheviks held firm to this relatively oppositional stance for most of March and they sought to use

their strength to steer the government in a progressive direction.

How is this “indisputably distinct” from Old Bolshevism? It is not.

Blanc cites N.N. Sukhanov, who wrote that “when it came to voting” the Bolsheviks “constituted a single majority with the representatives of the third tendency [in favor of ‘dual power’ and the recognition of the Provisional Government].”

Sukhanov’s testimony is invaluable—and should give pause—because it undermines Blanc’s idea that the Bolsheviks were forging their own path. Yet, Blanc is undeterred and unfazed. Riding roughshod over his own account, he brazenly concludes that his “article has shown that Bolsheviks—in sharp contrast with conciliatory socialists—were homogeneously committed in March 1917 to class independence and the fight for proletarian hegemony over the revolutionary process.” Or, in less cryptically Gramscian terms, the fight was on for permanent revolution, for soviet power and socialism, even before Lenin had set foot in Russia.

To recapitulate: Old Bolshevism remained true to itself when it pressured the Provisional Government to carry out the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the end. It was incompatible with the New Bolshevism, which, in its drive to push the revolution beyond its bourgeois limits using soviet power, refused the Provisional Government *any* support.

Without the appearance of the Soviet, any idea of destroying the Provisional Government and thwarting the creation of a capitalist state, going beyond the bourgeois-democratic revolution, was unthinkable. For, without the Soviet, what would have been the alternative to the Provisional Government and the bourgeois-democratic revolution that had brought it into existence? Lenin explained,

The Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies are a form of state which does not exist and never did exist in any country. This form represents the first steps towards socialism and is inevitable at the beginning of a socialist society. This is a fact of decisive importance. The Russian Revolution has created the Soviets. No bourgeois country in the world has or can have such state institutions. No socialist revolution can be operative with any other state power than this.¹⁹

As Lenin saw it, it was the Bolsheviks’ business to make “All Power to the Soviets” a reality by “patiently explaining” to the masses the need for soviet power, which, alone, would bring peace, land, bread, and socialism. Once a socialist workers’ revolution put an end to the Provisional Government, so too would it put an end to the bourgeois-democratic revolution, by completing it and going beyond it. Old Bolshevism did not have this theory, New Bolshevism did.

That theory was essential to putting forward the specific program incarnated in the *April Theses*. Had this revolutionary alternative to Menshevism not been presented to the working class, the majority of workers would have been strung along by the Mensheviks, politically disarmed before the covert support given by the Provisional Government to counter-revolutionary forces, led by Tsarist General Lavr Kornilov, to destroy Soviet power in August 1917. Indeed, had Kornilov won, the Menshevik objective of establishing a bourgeois-democratic state would not have been realized either, for the February Revolution would have been reversed.

Had the Bolsheviks not adopted a radically new conception of the Russian Revolution, they could not have fought for it. Had the Bolsheviks rejected the *April Theses* and maintained continuity with Old Bolshevism, the October Revolution would never have taken place.

Blanc's Dysfunctional History of 1917

Blanc's account shows little analytical and empirical mastery of the Russian Revolution. It is marred by self-contradiction and riddled with non-sequiturs.

"There have been plenty of attempts ... to prove that the April party crisis was a passing and almost accidental confusion,"²⁰ Trotsky wrote in his *History*. With only minor modifications, Lih and Blanc are trying to do the same thing a century later. They are convinced that long-held accounts of the "April Crisis" in the history of Bolshevism are entirely false, illusory. Yet what explains the staying power of this "illusion"? Is there a materialist explanation for it, just as there are for mirages in the desert? Could it be that these accounts are *true*, that is, internally coherent and properly reflective of the actual history, whereas Blanc's crypto-Stalinist account is not? Here we come to Blanc's striking failure to think through matters.

Blanc declares, "The Bolsheviks in 1917 led a soviet revolution in a context defined by decades of autocratic rule, in which there was no existing government democratically elected through universal suffrage."²¹ But the February Revolution destroyed autocratic rule virtually overnight, and thus destroyed the old "context." And, of course, there was no elected parliament of citizens, shorn of all political or economic attributes, to appear to run things as in a bourgeois democracy. So what *was* new in the context of 1917? The "soviet revolution."

What was new was workers organizing soviets and multiparty elections to them; it was workers organizing elected factory committees, destroying autocratic rule at the point of production; it was peasant self-rule, organized in the land commune, to flush out the gentry and gain full control of the land; it was the self-assertion of women, of minorities, of Jews, of nationalities; it was soldiers organizing soldiers' committees to

question orders. It was a democratic revolution through and through, a "festival of the oppressed" as Lenin memorably put it, the masses straining, through "revolutionary practice," to rid themselves of "the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."²² In sum, it was a movement of the vast majority in the interests of the vast majority, as forecast by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848.

The Bolsheviks led the socialist revolution to victory—however fleeting that victory turned out to be. Is this the Kautskyism and Second International Marxism in action that Blanc assures us is the path to power for socialists today in the advanced capitalist world? Or is it Leninist "vanguardism" in action that revolutionaries should forswear because it is destined to fail in bourgeois-democracies? Blanc arrives at a historical and political dead-end either way.

NOTES

1. Leon Trotsky, "Our Differences," in *1905* (Vintage, 1972), 316-317. Published in Rosa Luxemburg's Polish Marxist journal, *Pzegląd social-demokratyczny*.
2. Cited by Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol. 1, Max Eastman, trans. (Monad Press), 298.
3. E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 1 of *A History of Soviet Russia* (Norton, 1986 [1950]); Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967); Hasegawa Tsuyoshi, *The February Revolution, Petrograd, 1917*; S.A. Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Leon Trotsky, *History*; Marcel Liebman, *The Russian Revolution* (Random House, 1970).
4. Lars Lih, "The Ironic Triumph of 'Old Bolshevism,'" johnriddell.com/2015/06/01/lars-lih-the-ironic-triumph-of-old-bolshevism/.
5. Eric Blanc, *Before Lenin: Bolshevik Theory and Practice in February 1917 Revisited*; www.historicalmaterialism.org/index.php/blog/before-lenin-bolshevik-theory-and-practice-february-1917-revisited; *A Revolutionary*

Line of March: 'Old Bolshevism' in Early 1917 Re-Examined, www.historicalmaterialism.org/index.php/blog/revolutionary-line-march-old-bolshevism-early-1917-re-examined.

6. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01/ch07.htm. Stalin did concede that one Old Bolshevik leader, Kamenev (among others), opposed Lenin. Kamenev could not respond to Stalin by incriminating him—Stalin had joined his Old Bolshevik comrade in those fateful weeks—because Stalin had ordered Kamenev's execution three years earlier, in 1936.

7. Lars Lih, "Karl Kautsky as Architect of the October Revolution," jacobin.com/2019/06/karl-kautsky-vladimir-lenin-russian-revolution.

8. This section draws on my "Lenin, Bolshevism, and Social-Democratic Political Theory: The 1905 and 1917 Soviets," *Historical Materialism* (22.3–4, 2014), 129–171. My essay is, *inter alia*, a thoroughgoing critique of Lars Lih's interpretation of Lenin's *April Theses*—an interpretation Blanc accepts, builds on, and only modifies in inessential respects.

9. At their Second Congress, held in London in 1903, Russian Social Democrats split into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks over questions of organization. In 1904, there emerged a clearly political division between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks toward the newly emerging liberal-bourgeois opposition to Tsarism, supplementing the organizational one.

10. Vladimir Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution," *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, 76, 52.

11. "There are bourgeois-democratic regimes like the one in Germany and also like the one in England; like the one in Austria and also like those in America and Switzerland. He would be a fine Marxist indeed, who in a period of democratic revolution failed to see this difference between the degrees of democratism and

the difference between its forms." Lenin, 52.

12. William G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917–1921* (Princeton University Press, 1974). The Constitutional Democratic Party (known in Russian as the Konstitutsionno-Demokraticeskaya Partiya, or K.D. for short) represented the liberal bourgeoisie in the eyes of Russian social democrats.

13. S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

14. Trotsky, *History*, Vol. 1. Chapter 9, "The Paradox of the February Revolution."

15. Lenin, "Our Tasks and the Soviet of Workers' Deputies," *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, 20.

16. Karl Marx, "The First International and After," in David Fernbach, ed., *Political Writings*, Vol. 3, (Vintage Books, 1974), 212.

17. Lenin, "Letters on Tactics," in *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, 44.

18. For an admirably detailed and clear account of this critical episode, see Rabinowitch, 34–43. Blanc does not attract attention to Rabinowitch—a name known to everyone on the left who knows anything at all about the Russian Revolution; Rabinowitch's account does not support Blanc's (or Lih's) thesis.

19. Lenin, "The April All Russia Conference," *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, 271.

20. Trotsky, *History*, Vol. 1, 301.

21. Eric Blanc, "Can Leninists Explain the Russian Revolution?" www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/can-leninists-explain-rr. Originally titled, "Leninists Can't Explain the Russian Revolution."

22. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965), 86.

Revisiting *Their Morals and Ours*

SAMUEL FARBER

IN THE MORE THAN SIXTY YEARS THAT I have been a socialist, I have heard fellow socialists say on innumerable occasions that an issue under discussion did not “involve a moral question.” They were usually right, mostly because the hegemonic individualistic American political culture approaches all sorts of social questions with a strong bias against structural, and particularly social class, explanations of behavior, relying instead on notions of individual responsibility that tend to slide easily into issues of morality and immorality. For example, take the notion of the “deserving poor.” It was originally developed in the first half of the nineteenth century to limit private and public aid to those whose conduct stayed within the limits of “moral” individual behavior rather than provide such aid simply based on the recipients’ income or class situations. Today in the United States, several states require recipients to work a certain number of hours to “deserve and earn” such benefits as Medicaid.

At the same time, I cannot recall even a single instance of a fellow socialist stating that the issue at hand was or involved “a moral question.” Is it because there are no “moral questions” that radical and socialist

activists deal with in their political lives? That is hardly the case. For example, I have been present at innumerable strike picket lines and been impressed by the moral indignation of the strikers’ (and their supporters’) reaction to strike breakers crossing or attempting to cross the picket lines. No radical or socialist worthy of her

Why are many leftists so reluctant to call moral issues by their name when morality is pertinent and may even be the most important aspect of the situation?

name would consider such actions, or the expression of moral sentiments that usually accompany strike actions, to be misguided even though they primarily express a moral outrage. Of course, scabbing should also be analyzed in other than ethical terms, as for example, when an increase in the number of scabs coming from the strikers’ ranks suggests a weakening of the strike. Nevertheless, in the context of combat, there is a powerful ethical component to the old question of “which side are you on?” What is true of strikes is also true of many other situations, as when formerly radical and left-wing people switch sides, an act that is commonly referred to as selling out, as pure an ethical accusation as one can get.

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Why then are many leftists, especially those who, ironically, have been primarily politicized by ethical concerns, so reluctant to call moral issues by their name when morality is pertinent and may even be the most important aspect of the situation at hand? Perhaps many radicals and socialists fear that invoking ethics in any form may taint them with an association with liberal politics, even though the liberal approach to politics is quite different from those of revolutionaries and Marxists. Most important, many socialists and radicals may be reluctant to utilize ethical categories like justice because there is a widespread perception that Marx and Engels repudiated the utilization of ethical and moral categories. There were several reasons for Marx and Engels' approach, but most of all, they saw ethical categories as undermining the materialistic basis of their critique of capitalism on its own systemic terms as opposed to empty appeals to eternal, ahistorical themes such as justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

These issues have been discussed in depth and at length by Marxist philosophers for many years, and they are far more complicated than the simple-minded "Marxist" repudiations *in toto* of moral and ethical thinking may suggest. The British philosopher Norman Geras, when he was still a Marxist, painstakingly and rigorously analyzed this issue while considering the different views of other Marxist philosophers. Geras concludes that Marx, while "disowning, when he is not actively ridiculing any attachment to ideas and values, ... is nevertheless quite free in making critical normative judgments, [and is] author of a discourse that is replete with the signs of an intense moral commitment." For example, Marx repeatedly talked about the capitalist appropriation of surplus value with such morally laden terms as "robbery" and "theft." Similarly, when discussing primitive

capitalist accumulation, Marx asserted that the greatest part is not played by right and labor, as in the idyll of political economy, but "in actual history [by] conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short force." (Norman Geras, "The Controversy About Marx and Justice" in Alex Callinicos, ed., *Marxist Theory* [Oxford University Press, 1989], 265, 225-6.)

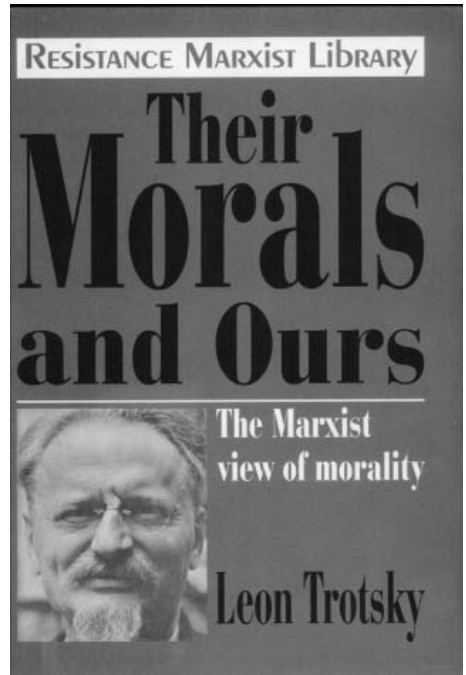
Leon Trotsky and Political Morality

While Marx and Engels' theories and views on a wide variety of subjects, including morality and ethics, had world wide influence, it could be argued that Leon Trotsky's views and practices related to those issues had more immediate practical relevance than those of Marx and Engels, although Trotsky shared, in general terms, the common interpretation that ethics and morality had no place in Marxist analyses. Trotsky was one of the main leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution as chief organizer of the Red Army and foreign minister of a revolutionary regime that tried to put into practice the teachings of the founders of Marxism, the most important school of socialism. As a major revolutionary government leader, Trotsky was politically responsible for several highly controverted actions on the part of the Soviet government that had very important moral consequences, such as the uncontrolled and illegal actions of the secret police (Cheka) and the suppression of the revolt of the Kronstadt sailors in March 1921. He promptly assumed political responsibility for those events and continued to do so until the end of his life. In addition, he never rectified his early false claim that the Kronstadt rebels agitated for "Soviets without Communists." In fact, a majority of Communist Party members in the garrison actively supported the rebel program.

One effect of the suppression of this revolt was that it elicited strong objec-

tions, then and years later, not only from the usual opponents of the soviet regime on the right but also from various quarters on the left. As Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky's most important biographer, relates, during the winter of 1937-1938, a number of writers who had at one or another time been associated with the anti-Stalinist Marxist left, such as Victor Serge, Boris Souvarine, Anton Ciliga, and Max Eastman, raised, in a critical manner, the issue of Trotsky's political responsibility for the repression of the sailors' revolt at the Kronstadt Naval base, and also pondered the significance of that event in explaining the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinism. (Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast, Trotsky 1929-1940*, Vol. III, 436.) A few months later, in 1938, Trotsky responded to these critics in *Their Morals and Ours*, a forty-page pamphlet. Compared with Trotsky's major historical and political works, this was a minor one in terms of length and quality but very important in terms of its subject matter.

Some of the objections raised by critics of the pamphlet are, in my view, unconvincing, such as the claim that the pamphlet approves the notion that "the end justifies the means." It is worth noting that the well-known American philosopher John Dewey's main objection to Trotsky's approach was not at all about the issue of means and ends, as such, but was about what he saw as Trotsky's a priori and unjustified choice of the class struggle as the principal means to bring about the socialist revolution's desired ends. Trotsky maintained that there is a "dialectic interdependence of ends and means," and postulated that the ends are justified if it leads to increasing the power of humans over nature and to the abolition of the power of some humans over others. In terms of the means leading to the desired revolutionary ends, Trotsky further contended that those means are permissible



that *really* (Trotsky's emphasis) lead to the liberation of humankind, and he declared that "permissible and obligatory are those and only those means ... which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle." Trotsky concludes with the assertion that

the great revolutionary end spurn those base means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts [of the working class] or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation; or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organizations, replacing it by worship for the 'leaders.' Primarily and irreconcilably, revolutionary morality rejects servility in relation to the bourgeoisie and haughtiness in relation to the toilers. (41)

Trotsky's pamphlet did not specifically

discuss the Kronstadt events or the criticisms he'd received a few months earlier. In light of Trotsky's arguments above, the question arises as to what Trotsky's mostly valid but often abstract notions about which means are permissible in a revolutionary struggle relate to the very concrete criticisms of specific acts and atrocities committed by the revolutionary government in Kronstadt or, I may add, in a large number of other situations. (I discussed some of these at length in *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy*, such as the continuing, openly illegal behavior of the Cheka.) Thus, to seriously take on his critics, Trotsky should have outlined his position on the specific Bolshevik practices of which his government was accused, just as he answered in detail the Stalinist slanders and calumnies against him to the 1937 Commission of Inquiry headed by John Dewey, rather than evading these issues as he did in *Their Morals and Ours*. However, Trotsky later did address two of these concrete questions (the absence of public trials and the taking of hostages), at least rhetorically, in a subsequent pamphlet, "Moralists and Sycophants Against Marxism," published in June 1939.

Some of the practices of the Bolshevik

Do leaders and activists
consciously combat these old
vestiges or try to take advantage
of the old society's vices to
build and consolidate their
power?

leadership were more defensible than others. Thus, as Trotsky argued in the June 1939 pamphlet, the capture of hostages to be exchanged for prisoners taken by the

enemy, or for other concessions from them, was, or could be, based on the principle of selectivity rather than an indiscriminate seizure of real or suspected opponents. Even the killing of the tsar and his family had at least a rational basis, given the importance of even the tsar's youngest descendants as bearers of monarchical legitimacy and rallying symbols for the White opposition during the Civil War. There were, of course, other considerations relevant to whether the tsar's family should have been executed, particularly because children were involved. But what possible justification could Trotsky have given for the widespread government practice of collective punishment based on people's membership in certain social classes and ethnic groups rather than on their actual conduct? (This punishment was very different from the nationalization of some of these people's capitalist property.) An example was the Red Terror, instituted by Lenin in Petrograd in 1918 in response to the assassination of major Bolshevik leaders. People were targeted, at least in part, based on who they were rather than what they had done or were preparing to do; many people of bourgeois background were punished although they were in fact collaborating with the Bolshevik government. As historian Alexander Rabinowitch reports in *The Bolsheviks in Power* (Indiana University Press, 2007), the Red Terror's indiscriminate policies were opposed even by a substantial part of the local Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd. Thus, in this instance, Trotsky's vaunted criterion of selectivity was not only violated in practice but also in principle.

It is usually claimed, and rightly so, that authentically popular uprisings and revolutions will unavoidably engage in excesses, in the sense that mass anger and indignation against the ruling and oppressing groups blinds people, usually momentarily, to the best interests and goals of the revolutionary

movement, let alone to considerations of mere humanity. But expressions of “normal” institutional revolutionary government policy are not such “excesses.”

Perhaps anticipating such criticisms, Trotsky maintains in *Their Morals and Ours* that he “cannot give a ready answer to the question as to what is permissible and what is not permissible in each separate case. There can be no such automatic answers. Problems of revolutionary morality are fused with the problems of revolutionary strategy and tactics.” (41) Here Trotsky is engaging in both evasion and sophistry. No revolutionary partisan with her feet on the ground would suggest that leaders such as Trotsky should or could have produced a list of every conceivable transgression in every conceivable situation, especially when we know that the character of an action is unavoidably affected by its context. But it is striking that Trotsky could not even come up with one or two examples of actions that were not permissible *under any conceivable circumstances*. Are there, for example, any conceivable “problems of revolutionary strategy and tactics” that would make rape by soldiers (a horrible but frequent accompaniment of wars) or deliberate physical torture permissible? If not, why not say so openly and explicitly in the context of discussing “their morals *and ours*”?

Trotsky’s untenable positions in these two pamphlets forces him into false equivalences to justify an attitude that could perhaps be described as “moral nihilism.” Thus, in *Moralists and Sycophants Against Marxism*, when discussing the seizure of non combatants in a struggle, Trotsky raises the issue of the “tens of thousands who were duped and conscripted by force” into Franco’s army in Spain. Here, Trotsky ignores a very major issue: Those who were forced to fight for Franco were, after all, *fighting* against the Republican armies, who could not ignore that reality and had to

fight back. That situation in Spain was very different from the situation of non combatants elsewhere, who do not, by virtue of their conduct, force anybody to fight back.

A similar attitude was evident in Trotsky’s claim, in the same pamphlet, that “public trials are possible only in a condition of a stable regime. Civil war is a condition of the extreme instability of society and the state ... so it is impossible to reveal in public trials the conditions and circumstances of conspiracies, for the latter are intimately linked with the course of the civil war.” Trotsky could have made a better case had he argued that prison sentences can become meaningless in situations of a “moving front” and that the death penalty may unfortunately be the only meaningful sentence that a revolutionary tribunal can give in those highly unstable circumstances. But as Victor Serge argued in 1940 (*Unpublished manuscript on Their Morals and Ours*, www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1940/trotsky-morals.htm), “During the [Russian] civil war there was perfect order behind the front itself, in the interior of Soviet territory. ... There was nothing to prevent the functioning of regular courts, which might in certain cases have sat in camera, before which the accused could have been able to defend themselves, have their own counsel present, and show themselves in the light of day.”

Trotsky’s (and Lenin’s) Quasi-Jacobinism

Trotsky’s evasions and sophistries in discussing revolutionary morality should not be characterized as an oversight or defect but rather as an expression of what I call his (and Lenin’s) “quasi-Jacobin” politics. By this I do not necessarily mean the actual politics of the Jacobins in the French Revolution, but rather a political tradition based on what some leftists *perceived* as the essence of Jacobinism, primarily the



Leon Trotsky

notion that there should not be any limits to the actions that revolutionaries consider necessary to the success of the revolution. Revolutionary success was usually defined by some Marxists as the seizure and holding of power by the revolutionary working-class movement (the reference to the working class here is why I call this kind of thinking “quasi-Jacobinism”). This would explain why Trotsky resisted making any commitment to avoid certain actions, even if these were quite minimal in terms of their military significance and consequences. This outlook paid no attention to the fact that success in taking and/or holding power is by itself no clear indication of who is holding power. Militarily successful actions can help to transform a movement away from its original politics and into something entirely different. However, Trotsky’s “quasi-Jacobin” approach was not universally adopted by revolutionary Marxists. It was certainly not the approach of Marx, Engels, or Luxemburg, and even Trotsky himself

rejected such politics when he published the pamphlet *Our Political Tasks* in 1904 (as a response to Lenin’s book “*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*”), where Trotsky criticizes Lenin precisely for Jacobinism.

The refusal to accept any limitations on what revolutionaries do to achieve victory is closely tied to Lenin’s and Trotsky’s rejection of any kind of rules, even those that stipulate conditions for waiving them in certain situations. As the Marxist scholar Hal Draper noted, Lenin argued as early as April 1906, in the pamphlet *The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers’ Party*, that the *soviets* or workers councils that arose in 1905 “represented a dictatorship in embryo, for they recognized *no* other authority, *no* law and *no* standards, no matter by whom established. Authority—unlimited, outside the law, and based on force in the most direct sense of the word—is *dictatorship*.” Reviewing another formulation utilized by Lenin in this pamphlet, Draper wondered whether a lynch mob could not also be considered an example of what Lenin had termed “dictatorship of the people.” (Hal Draper, “*The ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ from Marx to Lenin*” [Monthly Review Press, 1987], 92, Lenin’s italics.) More than 12 years later, Lenin, now the head of the revolutionary government, was still defining the dictatorship of the proletariat as a rule “won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws.” (V. I. Lenin, “The Proletarian Revolution and Kautsky the Renegade,” in *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, July 1918–March 1919 [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965], 236.) It is important to note that Lenin was writing here not only about the civil war that he thought likely to develop after the victory of the revolution, but also about the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” For a revolutionary Marxist like Lenin,

this term referred to a transitional epoch possibly lasting many years, a lengthier period than that of the civil war and social upheaval that is likely to immediately follow the violent overthrow of the old ruling classes. Of course, as I explained at length in *Before Stalinism* (149-151), Lenin would sometimes defend formal rules as, for example, asserting that “the Party tie ... must be founded on *formal*, bureaucratically worded rules (bureaucratic from the standpoint of the undisciplined intellectual), strict adherence to which can alone safeguard us from the willfulness and caprices characteristic of the [informal] circles.” (V. I. Lenin, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 7, September 1903-December 1904 [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1961], 390-1, Lenin’s emphasis.)

It should not be surprising that a political ideology opposing rules would encourage arbitrariness as a political tool. As we know, the struggle against arbitrariness has been a central feature of working-class struggles in the United States and abroad. One of the main tasks of militant shop stewards is to enforce the rules laid out in the contract, which employers and supervisors are prone to ignore. What is, after all, the treasured principle of seniority about, if not to prevent favoritism based on management’s interests, convenience, and whims? Moreover, under the hierarchical division of labor, which would continue to exist at least in the early stages of socialism, rules would continue to be necessary to protect the democratic rights of those people doing the most routine and least challenging jobs. History has taught us that people making decisions and doing the most interesting work will do everything they can to remain in those advantageous positions even if they are not the capitalist owners or the managers of their workplaces.

Revolutionary Socialist Warfare and Warfare ‘as Usual’

It is not surprising that in *Their Morals and Ours*, Trotsky, an experienced military leader, argues that “different classes in the name of different aims may in certain instances utilize similar means. Essentially it cannot be otherwise. Armies in combat are always more or less symmetrical; were there nothing in common in their methods of struggle they could not inflict blows upon each other.” (14) There was truth in what Trotsky was arguing here, but only a partial truth. Moreover, this argument could be used to naturalize the worst kinds of abuses by the leaders of revolutionary armies. While emphasizing the similarity of methods between revolutionaries and the reactionary defenders of the existing systems, Trotsky says nothing about the crucial differences in the methods of struggle that can be expected to prevail on both sides. After all, this was the same Trotsky who, at the peace negotiations with Germany at Brest Litovsk in the spring of 1918, called on the German soldiers to rise against their warmonger generals and bring the war to an end through revolutionary means, hardly a slogan of “regular” warfare.

Aside from the critical issue of how “regular” armies differ from revolutionary armies when it comes to the nature of internal military discipline, the conduct of warfare is not merely the use of a collection of “neutral” tools that can be used by either side regardless of the political ends that each is defending. The military strategy and tactics promoted by Joseph Stalin and by U.S. Pentagon generals cannot be used for good as well as for bad ends. The deliberate famine provoked by Stalin in the Ukraine in 1932 may have been effective in promoting his political and economic ends. Similarly the “strategic hamlets” and widespread use of Napalm against civilians may have promoted U.S. military goals in

Vietnam. But such tactics cannot be used to promote socialist ends; instead, they were horrendous practices that socialists and democrats should have opposed as such. The list of these deliberate (or at least consciously tolerated) recent atrocities, especially those made possible and facilitated by modern technology, is very long, and I will just provide a few examples: The Nazi Holocaust principally directed against Jews but also against gays, the Roma people, and others; the millions of victims of Stalin's totalitarian reign in the USSR; Winston Churchill's support for famine in Bengal in 1943; the rape of an estimated half a million German civilian women by Russian soldiers in 1945; the extensive use of torture in the ruthless British suppression of the "Mau-Mau" revolt in Kenya in the fifties; the torture carried out in the equally ruthless French repression of the Algerian revolution in the fifties and early sixties; and Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward, which caused the deaths of tens of millions of Chinese people by famine and massive repression from 1960 to 1962. The Cambodian genocide of the late seventies was, in proportional terms, even worse than Mao's atrocities.

The carpet bombing of the German city of Dresden in February 1945 by the British and U.S. air forces starkly presents the difficulties involved in taking a stand against deliberate atrocities. While the Nazi regime was in its last throes, it was still in power in Germany. Yet civilians in Dresden were not unavoidable victims of warfare but were deliberately targeted by the British and American air forces, with the result that 25 thousand primarily civilian Germans were killed. As described by Robert S. McNamara in the film "The Fog of War," civilians in Japanese cities were systematically fire-bombed besides the cataclysmic nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki toward the end of the war.

Would it have played into the hands of the German and Japanese rulers for Americans to object to these Allied criminal actions? Would it have been "petty bourgeois moralism" to oppose all these atrocities regardless of which side was carrying them on?

The threat of nuclear warfare that became reality with the obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U.S. Air Force in 1945 placed these issues at center stage. For one thing, a most important aspect of the over forty- years- long Cold War between the Soviet bloc and the U.S.-led Western bloc was precisely the issue of the "balance of terror" between the two contending sides. While this "balance" does not currently play the role it did during the Cold War, we should not forget that Russia, the United States, and several other powers have ready access to nuclear weapons.

When I participated in the British peace movement while I was a graduate student in London in the early sixties, there was a debate between some leftist groups who supported the "workers' bomb," that is, the Soviet bloc possession of nuclear weapons, and other groups who opposed nuclear weapons by both East and West; I worked with the latter. We argued that the USSR and its satellites were not workers' states and also that nuclear bombs could not be used by our side, since by their very nature these weapons could not distinguish between oppressors and the oppressed. Of course, Trotsky could not have known about the destructive power of these weapons, and in this sense, we know more on this than he did because the history that has transpired since his time has taught us lessons that we have an obligation to incorporate into our socialist outlook.

One who took these lessons seriously was the late Daniel Bensaid, an important leader of the 1968 uprising in France and one of the principal figures of French Trotskyism. Taking off from Trotsky's

Their Morals and Ours, Bensaid amplified, in a far more concrete and specific manner, Trotsky's discussion of the means that were not acceptable in the revolutionary struggle. In this context, Bensaid argued for a categorical rejection of weapons of mass destruction that make no distinction between civilians and combatants, a principled opposition to wars of race or religion, and opposition, for both political and moral reasons, to attacks such as those of September 11, 2001. Anticipating the usual objections, Bensaid admitted that "no rule can respond to all concrete situations. But at least it makes it possible to designate and circumscribe the exception, instead of banalizing it." Bensaid went on to argue that while violence cannot be eradicated in the foreseeable future, we must work at least to discipline and restrain it, "which presupposes the development of a new legal culture, and a [new?] culture of violence itself. ... Why should it be impossible to develop a culture of dominated violence? Certain military codes and certain martial arts have sketched a few pointers in this direction. Under the threat of collective self-destruction, our era has a responsibility to invent in its turn new regulations and new customs." (Daniel Bensaid, *An Impatient Life. A Memoir*, David Fernbach, tr. [London: Verso Books, 2013], 165-66.)

Is Bensaid's a utopian program? Not in terms of changing the sometimes-caloused political culture of the left. In society at large, his goals would require very radical and revolutionary changes. In addition, the program would be particularly utopian if it ignored that all revolutions and radical social changes carry, to one degree or another, political and cultural vestiges of the old society. The issue is whether the leaders and activists of the new revolutionary movement consciously combat these old vestiges or do the opposite and try to take advantage of the

old society's vices to build and consolidate their power.

Trotsky in Transition— His Politics in the 1930s

Trotsky's stance in *Their Morals and Ours*, and more generally his polemic against Victor Serge and other left-wing critics of the practices of Leninism in power, is that of a defeated but tough-minded revolutionary leader retrospectively identifying with the responsibilities and tough choices he faced as a man of power less than two decades earlier. The tough stands he took during the thirties reflected in part the politics of Leninism in power, an openly dictatorial regime, although different from the totalitarian Stalinism that followed. At the same time, however, the extreme suppression of democratic rights by the Stalinism that preceded Hitler's rise in Germany (for example, the violent collectivization of agriculture in the USSR and the accompanying Ukrainian famine) forced Trotsky to move in a more democratic direction. I would argue that even *Their Morals and Ours* shows some signs of that tendency, at least in the seriousness with which Trotsky addressed the issue of means and ends.

By the late twenties, Trotsky had been expelled from the CPSU and exiled from the USSR. By that time, he no longer called on his followers in the USSR and throughout the world to work within the various Communist parties but asked them to organize independently and in opposition to the parties. Moreover, in 1936, Trotsky took a major step away from the political foundations of Leninism in power in his major work *The Revolution Betrayed*. He not only agreed that a multiplicity of political parties was legitimate under socialism but also argued strongly against "Marxist" defenders of the one-party state, particularly when they argued that the Communist parties were the only true representatives

of the working classes. As Trotsky put it,

In reality classes are heterogeneous; they are torn by inner antagonisms and arrive at the solution of common problems not otherwise than through an inner struggle of tendencies, groups and parties. It is possible, with certain qualifications, to concede that "a party is part of a class." But since a class has many "parts"—some look forward and some back—one and the same class may create several parties. For the same reason one party may rest upon parts of different classes. An example of only one party corresponding to one class is not to be found on the whole course of political history—provided, of course, you do not take the police appearance for the reality. (Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* [Merit Publishers, 1965], 267.)

Unfortunately, Trotsky's defense of democracy was uneven, especially when it came to his views on internal democracy in a revolutionary party. As he argued in "Moralists and Sycophants Against Marxism" in June 1939, "The internal democracy of a revolutionary party is not a goal in itself. It must be supplemented and bounded by centralism. For a Marxist the question has always been: democracy for what? For which program? The framework of the program is at the same time the framework of democracy."

Thus, in Trotsky's 1939 view, internal democracy in a revolutionary party is only a means and not an end, instead of being both a means and an end, or, in broader terms, the revolutionary's customary way of engaging in political activity. Viewed in this alternative way, the internal democracy of a revolutionary party is not dependent on the program it adopts to face a certain political situation, and of course any specific party program is supposed to be, in any case, the one chosen by the majority at a party conference or convention. As far as centralism is concerned, the devil is in the details. It is perfectly democratic to insist that the party carries

out majority decisions and that the minority cannot publicly oppose such decisions, although it might be allowed to abstain if the minority thinks that questions of principle, and not merely of strategy and tactics, are at stake.. The problem is that "democratic centralism" is quite often accompanied by blatantly undemocratic practices, such as the paid party organizers acting as a body consciously separated from the membership

Unfortunately, Trotsky's 1930s defense of democracy was uneven, especially when it came to his views on internal democracy in a revolutionary party.

and as political representatives of the leadership, necessarily supporting the leadership's political line (as for example, at a conference or convention) rather than following their own political judgment. In other words, under this version of "democratic centralism," the leadership uses employees of the organization as political patronage. An even more important issue is the leadership developing into a virtual faction that hides from the membership its internal differences. This raises fundamental questions like the fact that the members don't know and can't learn what the real politics of different leaders are when they come up for reelection.

Trotsky's views became gradually more democratic in the 1930s, although as we have shown above, in an uneven manner. At the same time, he continued to think, at least until the beginning of World War II, within the limits of an iron-cage view of historical development that saw private capitalism as being only possibly succeeded by socialism. Even when faced

with the monstrous realities of Stalinism in the USSR, he could not allow for the possibility that a new mode of production and class system was being created in that country. Instead, he developed the concept of a degenerated workers' state to explain the social nature of the USSR, as if nationalized property by itself constituted the basis for any kind of workers' state. This was the same underlying outlook that led Trotsky, in the second half of the twenties, to see Stalin as a lesser evil than Bukharin, because of the latter's proposals to provide economic concessions to the Soviet peasantry. For Trotsky, Bukharin represented the potential threat of capitalist restoration, while Stalin did not. He did not contemplate even the possibility that Stalin may have represented a totalitarian alternative to both private capitalism and socialism. On the other hand, in his analysis of the likely effects of World War II, in September 1939, Trotsky opened the door for a possible future change of mind when he argued that "war accelerates the various political processes. It may accelerate the process of the revolutionary regeneration of the USSR. But it may also accelerate the process of its final degeneration." In the same article, Trotsky indicated that "[t] he historic alternative, carried to the end, is as follows: either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society. If the second prognosis proves to be correct, then, of course, the bureaucracy will become a new exploiting class." (Leon Trotsky, "The USSR in War," *The New International*, Vol. 5, No. 11, November 1939, 325-332.)

Trotsky's opposition to Stalinism was not that of a "sore loser" but a principled stand in defense of working-class internationalism against Stalin's great-Russian chauvinism and totalitarianism. In his

opposition to the submission of the international Communist movement to Russian domestic and foreign policies, Trotsky at the same time developed a brilliant analysis of fascism and how to fight it, and he attacked the lunacy of Communist policy, particularly in Germany, where the Communist Party claimed that Social Democracy was a form of fascism and therefore refused to call for a united working-class front against fascism that would prominently include the Social Democrats.

Whatever Trotsky's limitations and errors, he proposed a better politics to face the twin evils of fascism and Stalinism than most of the international left. In the United States (and elsewhere), magazines like *The Nation* and *The New Republic* as well as most left opinion outlets became shameful apologists for Stalinism. At the same time, Trotsky was under the ruthless persecution of Stalin's agents, which led to the assassination of almost his entire family and loss of his own life in Mexico City in 1940. No wonder that Trotsky felt increasingly isolated, and this political isolation in turn encouraged a certain kind of political desperation and sectarianism. His vitriolic attacks on Victor Serge and other left critics were entirely disproportionate to the content and tone of these critics. It was perhaps this increasing isolation and political desperation that also led Trotsky to call for the formation of a Fourth International in 1938. It included 21 delegates representing organizations in eleven countries, the largest being the American Socialist Workers Party, which claimed a formal membership of only 2,500. Unlike the previous internationals, Trotsky's Fourth International was created with a small working-class membership and little support beyond a few localities like Minneapolis.

Leon Trotsky was not only a brilliant historian, literary critic, and military leader. He also made significant contributions

to Marxist understanding with his development of the theories of uneven and combined development and permanent revolution. However, I don't believe those important contributions warrant the existence of separate *Trotskyist* organizations today in the context of the politics of the twenty-first century. Stalinism is still very much alive in many of the conceptions favored by a majority of the international left, but there is no doubt that it has become only a shadow of what it was until late in the twentieth century. Instead, a democratic revolutionary socialism for our time needs to draw on a variety of sources for its theoretical development and practical political work. Of course, Trotsky must be part of it, but also Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, and the V.I. Lenin that led the October Revolution with his brilliant application of Marxism to the understanding of the existing relation of forces and political conjunctures rather than holding on to

the rigid schematic categories of historical development favored by classical social democracy. In 1925, Trotsky himself provided a very apt analogy when discussing what cultural contributions of the bourgeoisie and other previous ruling classes should be preserved and rescued for the construction of the new working-class order. Trotsky cited post-Justinian Roman jurisprudence, which gave inheritors a certain degree of choice through the establishment of "inventorial inheritance," and claimed that "the revolutionary state, representing a new class, is a kind of inventorial inheritor in relation to the accumulated store of culture." I suggest that the same approach with respect to the broad socialist and Marxist tradition can be applied to the gigantic task of constructing a political movement dedicated to the defeat of the increasing threat of barbarism and to bringing about the victory of a democratic revolutionary socialism.

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Conceptions of Dual Power and Prefigurative Politics

WAYNE PRICE

LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISTS (INCLUDING anarchists and autonomous Marxists) reject the state as a means toward a stateless and classless society, one without other forms of oppression (of gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, and others). The use of statist and capitalist means has consistently produced statist and capitalist ends. If we concentrate all our efforts on building a state, thinking that it will eventually “wither away” by itself, then what we will get will be ... a state. Instead, anarchists believe that libertarian ends can only be achieved—if they can be achieved at all—by congruent libertarian means: dual power and prefiguration.

What are those means? Anarchists divide mainly into two broad schools of thought about prefiguration. One tendency (sometimes called, misleadingly, “life-stylist”) advocates building alternate institutions, often referred to as a “dual power” strategy. These might include various types of co-ops, small workshops using advanced technology, associations with farmers, bicycle clubs, progressive schools, and so on. These would grow peacefully and gradually, overtaking and crowding out the

state and capitalist businesses. (I think of this as the “kudzu strategy.”) There would be little if any direct conflict with the state.

The other proposes to build mass movements and popular struggles, democratically organized from the bottom up. These include labor unions, anti-racist community associations, anti-war coalitions, tenant unions, and environmental struggles, among others. These would create alternate sites of power, which might also be called “dual power.” At some point, it is expected that there would be a confrontation with the state and the capitalist class—that is, a revolution. If successful, the revolution would be followed by a period of popular rebuilding of society.

Alternate-institution Approach

The gradualist, alternate-institution, approach is sometimes held up as a new form of anarchism. It is not. It goes back at least to Pierre Joseph Proudhon, the first person to identify as an “anarchist.” In France, he proposed a nonprofit “mutual” bank to link up peasants, small businesses, artisan shops, and workers’ self-governing industrial associations. He called this “mutualism.” Others at the same time in Europe proposed communist communes, consumer co-ops, and producer co-ops, to be associated in federations and growing within the marketplace. As the Marxists advocated using the state to establish socialism, this school of anarchism advocates using the market—which

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is at least as capitalist an institution as the state. Again, capitalist means are to be used to establish socialist ends.

Yet this approach has had successes. The consumer co-op movement has maintained itself. Producer co-ops have worked well, if at the margins of the national economy. The large Spanish co-op Mondragon has been quite successful. Millions of people live in housing co-ops (or condominiums). Farmers use marketing co-ops. Credit unions (nonprofit co-op banks, often affiliated with unions) work well. In fact, this approach may be said to have “failed by success,” as worker-run co-ops and co-op supermarkets flourish and are integrated into the overall economy. They do not threaten the semi-monopoly corporations that dominate the national

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(and world) market.

It has been argued that this alternate-institutional approach can end capitalism and the state in a way similar to how capitalism originally ended feudalism. Gradually, bourgeois businesses grew in the interstices of medieval Europe. Eventually banks and businesses grew ubiquitous. They became strong enough to replace the feudal aristocracy with the capitalist market. Therefore consumer and producer cooperatives and other democratic and alternate businesses can do the same to capitalism today.

As history, this account of the rise of capitalism leaves out some things. It leaves out the role of the state and other coercive, non-market forces in promoting early capitalism. Karl Marx discussed this under the heading of “primitive accumulation.” Peter Kropotkin, the anarchist theoretician, also wrote on the role of the state in initiating and sustaining capitalism. It also leaves out the great revolutions that shook up the aristocracy and opened the way for the development of industrial capitalism: the English Revolution of the 1640s, the U.S. Revolution of 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, the revolutions of Latin America and the Caribbean, the failed German Revolution of 1848, the U.S. Civil War, and so on. Without these world-shattering popular upheavals, capitalism would not have grown as “gradually” and “peacefully” as it seemed.

It has been argued that the state is a relationship. If enough people stop relating to each other in a statist way, then the state and its repression would vanish. It is true that institutions are relationships. Institutions are patterns of mass behavior, of many people relating to each other and behaving toward each other in a patterned, repetitious way. (By “behaving” I am including communicating and thinking.) A changed society will require a lot of changed behavior. This much is true. However, what if most people come to relate in a different way, but a sizable minority continues to act in a statist fashion? What if the minority—and its armed minions—want to keep its privileges, its comforts, its wealth, its power, and its status? Wouldn’t they recognize that all those expanding co-ops threaten their way of life and do something about it, through laws or market mechanisms? Won’t a changed society require a conflict, even possibly a violent one?

Yet the term “dual power” originally came from the Russian Revolution of 1917.

There was a “Provisional Government” (unelected) and the popular soviets (“councils” rooted in factory committees, peasant village assemblies, and army unit councils). Both the Provisional Government and the soviets had power (it was also translated as “double sovereignty”), one representing the capitalist class and one representing the workers and peasants. Sooner or later, one or the other would win out. Eventually the soviets overthrew the capitalist state—only to face another form of dual power as the Bolshevik bureaucracy overran the soviets and other popular councils.

A revolutionary approach to anti-authoritarian socialism does not necessarily mean opposition to workers’ co-ops, credit unions, co-op supermarkets, artisan workshops, and such. These things are good in their own right. They do not need to be justified as contributing to a strategy for changing the world. Further, they can serve as models of how a free and cooperative society might work. Revolutionary anarchists may still learn a great deal about how anarchism might function in a decentralized but modern technological society from Paul Goodman, Colin Ward, and Kevin Carson, among other gradualists.

Criticisms of Revolutionary Dualism

The alternate-institutionalists point out that a single upheaval, a one-time “seizure of power,” cannot be relied on to change society in a stable, thorough, way. No one disputes this, certainly not any type of revolutionary socialist. To pick an historical example, the U.S. Revolution began with years of increasing tensions between the colonies and Great Britain. This included building local radical clubs, inter-colony “committees of correspondence,” and other organizations to prepare for a revolution. Then there was a flare-up of violence at Lexington and Concord, followed by the

siege of Boston. After this came eight years of war with Britain (including an internal civil war with the Loyalists). Even after independence was won, it took years until the Constitution was established. Even then there had to be one final war with

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consciousness.

Britain, in 1812.

Anyone who studies the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, or the Chinese Revolution (and revolutionaries study revolutions) knows that they went through lengthy developments, of which an actual insurrection was only one stage. But an insurrection, or some such direct clash with the state, has always been necessary at some point. However, for anarchists, unlike revolutionary statist, it would be necessary for the people to “seize power” but not to “seize state power.” This means that the workers and all oppressed people would need to overturn the state and other institutions of oppression. They would begin to replace them with new, radically democratic institutions of their own: federations of workplace councils, community assemblies, a popular militia (an armed people), and more. However, they would not create a new, elite, bureaucratic-military-police body standing over the rest of society—a state.

Gradualist anarchists are among the many anti-revolutionists who express concern that a revolution, anarchist or otherwise, would be “bloody” and destructive of human lives. The aim of anarchism is a peaceful world, with differences being

settled through the creative use of intelligence and nonviolence. Would a violent revolution, with armed people on both sides, contradict the principle of prefiguration? Would it not be trying to use bad means to create good ends?

Revolutionary anarchists are not absolute pacifists. In general, their principle is to be for only as little violence as absolutely necessary. Violence must be appropriate; there are limits (anti-authoritarians would not support the use of nuclear bombs even by a federation of free communes). However, they do not equate the violence of the oppressed with that of the oppressor. There is no equation between a colonial imperialist seizing land from Indigenous people with arms and a violent Indigenous resistance. They do not equate violence used by slaves to escape bondage and the violence used by slave masters to recapture their slaves. They are not embarrassed to physically fight against fascist bands in order to protect workers, African Americans, Muslims, or LGBTQ people.

Neither are they fooled by the “peaceful” appearance of the existing society. It may seem “nonviolent” to get laws passed through the legislative process—but the laws depend for their enforcement on the police and the other governmental agencies. The U.S. Civil Rights laws passed in the sixties were won through massive nonviolent civil disobedience. Once won, they only became meaningful when enforced by the armed power of the state.

The main reason for rejecting revolution as a goal is really the level of popular consciousness. Nowhere in the world is there a mass revolutionary-anarchist

consciousness. The U.S. population is particularly conservative; it is the only imperialist country which has never had a large socialist, communist, or labor party. Probably this is due in part to its history as a colonial-settler state, one rooted in stealing land from the Indigenous peoples and in African slavery. Yet it has had great upheavals, such as the Revolution, the Civil War, the great union efforts of the thirties, and the Black liberation struggles, anti-war movement, and other movements of the sixties and thereafter. In any case, history is not over.

Conclusion

There are two main streams in libertarian socialism today: one proposing alternate institution building and one building oppositional movements with the strategic aim of a revolution. These are not absolutely antagonistic. Revolutionary anarchists have a history of community organizing, tenant-union building, and so on, while alternate-institutionalists are likely to join in any popular struggle. The issue is their long-range strategic orientation.

How does a class or a people learn self-government? The existing capitalist society, for all its vaunted “democracy” and “freedom,” mainly teaches political passivity and reliance on “leaders” and bosses. It is through popular struggle, fighting for demands, and opposing the people’s will to that of the ruling minority that people learn to collectively stand up for themselves and to make their own decisions. They oppose their power to that of the capitalist class and its state in the process of revolution.

When Sri Lanka Operated Workers' Councils

UDITHA DEVAPRIYA

THE ORIGINS OF SRI LANKA'S workers' councils can be traced back to developments in Yugoslavia under Joseph Broz Tito.

On June 28, 1948, the Stalinist League of European Marxist-Leninist parties, the Cominform, expelled Yugoslavia from its ranks. Having deviated from the Stalinist line, Tito could have expected little else. Facing a blockade from his former allies, he had to rechart his country's course.

Tito did this by institutionalizing what would later be called "market socialism." Initially criticized as a deviation from the Communist line, it was later embraced not just by anti-Stalinist reformists, but also by those advocating a path between capitalism and Communism, particularly in what was once called the Third World. Tito's involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement in later years helped bolster his credentials as a proponent of this line.

One significant innovation of Yugoslav market socialist reforms was the formation of workers' councils. The logic behind these councils was not immediately clear, and it was, for obvious reasons, viewed as an aberration by Stalinists. Nevertheless,

it was based on an unmistakable Marxist body of theory, dating back to Engels' *Anti-Dühring*:

State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not "abolished. It dies out. This gives the measure of the value of the phrase "a free people's state," both as to its justifiable use at times by agitators, and as to its ultimate scientific insufficiency; and also of the demands of the so-called anarchists for the abolition of the state out of hand. (*Anti-Dühring*, Part III, Chapter II)

Engels contended that the post-revolutionary state would cease intervening in and mediating social relations between people. With the "dying out" or "withering away" of the state, the means of production would be managed and controlled by the proletariat itself, leading to a true "dictatorship of the proletariat."

Similar views were sometimes pronounced by the Bolsheviks as well. "The implementation of all these measures," Lenin once contended, "is possible only if all the power in the State passes to the proletarians and semi-proletarians." Upon coming to power, of course, Stalin abandoned any pretenses: instead of greater power for the workers, he resorted to bureaucratic repression and administrative commands, dissolving such projects as the

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Kuzbass Autonomous Industrial Colony.

Tito institutionalized workers' councils as a counter to Stalin's policies. For that, certain reforms had to be in place.

In Sri Lanka workers' councils
were hemmed in by the
contradictions of an alliance
between working class and
small capitalist parties.

In response to the Stalinist advocacy of a centralized bureaucracy, for instance, Tito embraced devolution. In May 1949 his government granted autonomy to local governments. Political decentralization led to increased worker participation: in 1950, a year after devolution was implemented, the Yugoslav National Assembly legalized worker self-management schemes. The Yugoslav state moved away from direct management of productive enterprises.

This was bound to have an impact on left movements elsewhere, especially in the Third World, including Algeria, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Mexico. Arguably the most striking use of workers' councils as part of a wider strategy of fomenting revolution through working-class mobilization, however, was to be found in Sri Lanka.

A Brief History of the Sri Lankan Left

Sri Lanka—Ceylon under British rule (1796-1948)—had been a plantation colony for over 150 years. The imperialist experiment of breeding a class of people born there, but imbued with proper British manners and culture, had succeeded in the tiny island colony more than it had in India.

After British forces annexed the Kandyan kingdom in 1815, they faced, and brutally crushed, a series of peasant uprisings, the most serious of which took place in 1848, also a time of revolution in continental Europe. In the aftermath of the 1848 uprising in Ceylon, the colonial government shifted its strategy from bureaucratic rule to co-opting the country's elites, especially the newly emerging middle-classes.

The result was the formation of a bourgeoisie that, in effect, identified their interests with the interests of the colonial state, and worked on behalf of the latter. The nature of this colonial bourgeoisie not surprisingly determined the course of anti-colonial agitation in the island in the years to come. The conventional Communist line held that in colonial and semi-colonial countries, the national bourgeoisie would lead a democratic revolution, and then overthrow imperialism. In contrast to this view, Leon Trotsky contended that the "national bourgeoisie" was too weak to combat imperialism. It was the working class, he argued, and not the bourgeoisie, that had to face and dismantle imperialism.

The Trotskyist perspective fit the situation of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie rather aptly. As former Sri Lankan Marxist writer and commentator, Regi Siriwardena, noted, "Trotsky could even have taken the Ceylon bourgeoisie and its political leadership as a demonstration of the incapacity of that class to play a militantly anti-imperialist role."

In the early years of the 20th century there had been a series of struggles, strikes, and movements led by workers in Ceylon. But devoid of leadership, they petered out. The Sri Lankan Labour Party was founded in 1928; however, the depression of the 1930s caused the movement to rupture, during which a new generation of radicals began to question Labour Party leadership.

These radicals, recently returned from Europe, formed the *Lanka Sama Samaja* (Equal Society) Party (LSSP) in 1935. They declared as their aim the achievement of complete national independence (as opposed to the bourgeoisie's call for constitutional reform), the socialization of the means of production, and the abolition of all forms of inequality "arising from differences of race, caste, creed, or sex." Other partial demands included the enactment of the eight-hour day, the passing of a minimum wage, and the abolition of child labor.

From its beginning, the LSSP identified the weak and embryonic nature of the bourgeoisie. Concentrated within the Ceylon National Congress, the bourgeoisie found itself incapable of playing the militantly anti-imperialist role that its Indian counterparts were playing through the National Congress. The LSSP did not articulate its view of the elite along Trotskyist lines, especially since a section agreed with the Stalinist view. Nevertheless, a section in the party began to question the orthodox Communist view of colonial society.

In 1940, a mere five years after its establishment, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party split over the Third International. This was compelled by developments in Europe, in particular the Moscow Trials, the Popular Front, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, that had put in doubt the correctness of Stalin's leadership.

The group that sided with the Fourth International, the Trotskyist faction, rejected any alliance with the bourgeoisie. It pinned its hopes for a revolution on the workers rather than on the Ceylon National Congress. The Communist faction, by contrast, opted to side with the latter during the Second World War. It was against that backdrop that, in the post-war period, the LSSP began looking at countries charting alternative paths. This included the Yugoslav reforms, especially Tito's labor reforms.

The Establishment of Workers' Control

In its manifesto for the general election of 1951, the LSSP called for "the establishment of workers' control in all industrial establishments and workplaces."

One of the most fervent advocates of this line was the LSSP's General Secretary, Leslie Goonewardena. Goonewardena contended that Tito's reforms constituted "an original contribution to socialist thought and practice." Regardless of differences between the two societies, he found it suitable for "an underdeveloped country embarking on socialist construction." That was no doubt informed by the Party's attitude to the Soviet Union, which it saw, and denounced, as a "degenerated workers' state."

Goonewardena also advocated workers'



Anil Moonesinghe addressing a meeting at the Ceylon Transport Board. Leslie Goonewardena is sitting on his left. Image courtesy of Vinod Moonesinghe.

councils as a way of reforming the colonial bureaucracy. To this end, the LSSP changed its strategies. In the early 1960s it decided, controversially, to enter into electoral arrangements with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, a nationalist formation based on the backing of small capitalists that had come to power in 1956, in a bid to upend the bourgeoisie, which had by now shifted its support from the National Congress to the United National Party (UNP), under the leadership of D. S. Senanayake and his son, Dudley.

In 1964 the LSSP adopted a program for workers' councils as part of its agreement with the SLFP, so as to bring people into "participation in the process of government." The decision to enter into an electoral agreement with the SLFP proved to be controversial in the long term, though advocates of the agreement argued that the left could foment revolution in the country only through electoral strategies.

What these initial reforms
would have led to, we may
never really know. But
their achievements were
considerable.

This led to a split in the LSSP, and the latter's expulsion from the Fourth International, but it also led to discussions about the reforms it had recommended, so much so that five years later, even the UNP could propose "worker participation in managerial functions." The Communist Party, which had rejected the LSSP, joined the latter in a common front against the UNP.

On the basis of a common program adopted in 1968, the SLFP-LSSP-Communist Party coalition that came to power in 1970, under the United Front label, adopted a series

of reforms that paved the way for workers' councils and advisory bodies at state enterprises. This was necessitated, in part, by the growth of public corporations and a rise in the number of employees at these corporations.

Weaknesses and Strengths

The councils and advisory bodies had very clear aims. Both were entrusted with powers to "check waste, indifference, and sabotage." The leftist political academic Wiswa Warnapala has noted that they were also "expected to bring down the cost of living and narrow the gap between the upper and lower rungs of the administration."

Among the institutions that took the lead in forming workers' councils was the Ceylon Transport Board. Under its Chairman, Anil Moonesinghe, who had served as Transport Minister in 1965, issues like the utilization of capital equipment and reduction of overtime came within the purview of the councils.

In 1970, two French Marxists, L. Schmidt and D. Maurin, spent several months in Ceylon examining these councils. Observing their formation and mobilization in the Transport Board, they commented that under Moonesinghe's leadership, the councils had helped in "cutting down costs, improving services and timetables and better upkeep of the buses, cutting out corruption, and better use of new buses," leading to a jump in revenue "from 600,000 rupees a day in April to 800,000 a day in August."

On a more sober note, they also wrote that the SLFP's right-wing, headed by the leader's own nephew, "proposed a White paper that the presidents of the workers' councils and people's committees be appointed by the Minister concerned," a move antithetical to the spirit of such reforms.

To be sure, these organs did suffer from several weaknesses. Apart from being subject to Ministerial oversight, they also led

to tensions between the councils and trade unions, the latter which may have felt their powers usurped through the granting of autonomy to employees. The government did not ignore their concerns; consultations were frequently held to prevent tensions from flaring up and defeating the aims for which these organs had been set up. Such tensions, however, did not disappear, in part because trade unions were led by political parties that prioritized their own interests.

An Ultimatum

Owing to a loss in popularity due to food shortages and scarcities, the SLFP was defeated by the UNP in 1977. The new regime enacted neoliberal reforms that had their antecedents in Chile under Pinochet and Egypt under Sadat. Perhaps needless to say, the councils were abandoned. The passing of an Employees' Councils Act No. 32, in 1979, may have bolstered hopes about their continuation, but this did not happen.

In 1997, a newly returned SLFP alliance, albeit one that modelled itself along Third Way Centrist rather than socialist lines, issued a call to re-establish workers' councils. This, too, fell into neglect and has not been revived since.

What these initial reforms would have led to, we may never really know. But their achievements were considerable. By 1974, 212 councils had been formed, involving a workforce of 135,000 in the public sector. The labor studies scholar Gerard Kester called them "an important innovation in social political development." They were also praised by the International Labor Organization. Whether or not these pointed to an alternative road to socialism, they became a prototype for worker empowerment.

In the country of their birth, Yugoslavia, on the other hand, workers' councils achieved a mixed record: as James Robertson, of the University of California Irvine, puts it in an essay in *Jacobin* (July 17, 2017),

the contradictions that the Yugoslav model generated, including uneven rates of growth between the country's regions, eventually led to their collapse.

Yugoslavia's shift to market socialism, even under the guise of self-management for employees, could not stop its free-fall after 1989. By then, Robertson notes, "[c]rippling foreign debt, structural adjustment measures enforced by the International Monetary Fund, and economic collapse amplified the centrifugal pulls of foreign markets." The result, which came to fruition in the new millennium, was the disintegration of an entire country.

In Yugoslavia, workers' councils floundered under the contradictions of Tito's alternative to Stalinism; in Sri Lanka they were hemmed in by the contradictions of an alliance between working class and small capitalist parties. Put simply, as in Chile under Allende, and Egypt under Nasser, the bourgeois state in Sri Lanka could not withstand small capitalist elements coexisting with a radical left.

What happened next was tragic. The socialist alliance that won elections in 1970 turned to the right five years later, when, over a number of issues, the two main left parties in the alliance, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party, were expelled by an increasingly authoritarian and nepotistic Sri Lanka Freedom Party. This detour to the right served as a prelude to the SLFP's defeat in 1977, in an election that was won by the even more rightwing neoliberal United National Party.

However, whatever criticism one can make of the LSSP and the Communist Party for their decision to form an alliance with the SLFP, it was through this alliance that several important reforms came to pass. The workers' councils held the promise of such a reform, as did the advisory bodies. Yet as with every radical piece of legislation after 1970, including land reforms, these would eventually, and tragically, not come to pass.

Presentism: African American Epilogue

Book Excerpt

ENZO TRAVERSO

WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS, the historical and literary sources of these chapters come from continental Europe (they are mostly French, with several German, Italian, and Spanish incursions). I had already finished the original version when I discovered the powerful work of Saidiya Hartman. At first glance, *Lose Your Mother* (2007) perfectly conforms to the tropes of subjectivist history: she writes in first person; her book is based on extensive historical documentation without inventing or fictionalizing anything; she describes the steps of her investigation, giving her work a significant autobiographical dimension; she does not hide the emotions related to her discoveries and thoughts; she puts forward the subjective part of her inquiry, admitting how much it is fueled by an identity quest, well expressed by genealogical references

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We thank Columbia University Press for giving us permission to publish this excerpt from Chapter 8 of Enzo Traverso's forthcoming book *The Singular Past: The "I" in Historiography*. Translated by Adam Schoene. Translation copyright ©2023 Columbia University Press. *Passés singuliers: Le "je" dans l'écriture de l'histoire*, copyright ©Lux Éditeur 2020. Pages 158–163, 192.

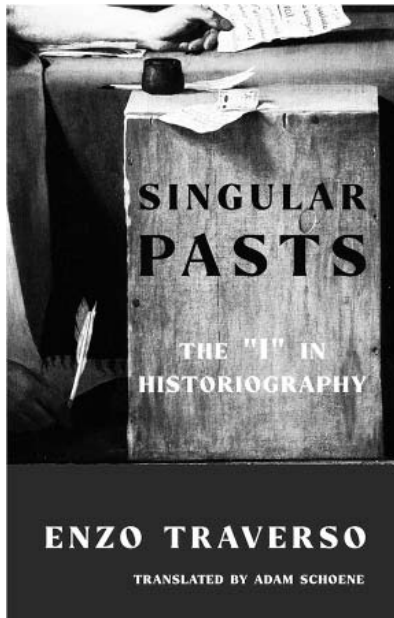
and family recollections; finally, her book is built on a twofold historical temporality that merges the reconstitution of the past with an account from the perspective of the present. The history of slavery and the slave trade intermingles with the description of a one-year investigation conducted in Ghana, and this continuous switch between past and present is supported by a remarkable narrative rhythm. Readers do not face a grandiose historical fresco à la Braudel, but rather a literary, historical, and political work in the style of Susan Sontag, even if Hartman combines many skills of both. Undoubtedly, all these elements give Hartman a distinguished place in the constellation of subjectivist authors analyzed in this book, beside someone like Jablonka. Nonetheless, there is something in her writing that overcomes the limits—or avoids the traps—of most subjectivist history.

The main difference is as simple as it is essential. Differently from those of many European historians analyzed in these pages, Hartman's investigation is not confined to a subjective sphere: it transcends the author's self and results in a collective view of the past (as well as inspiring a collective agency in the present). Her latest book—*Wayward Lives* (2019), a reconstitution of the trajectory of rebellious black women in Philadelphia and New York at the beginning of the twentieth century—persuasively explains this posture. She does not fill the

blanks of history with her imagination or literary artifacts; nothing is invented, since all characters and events described in her book truly existed. They are gathered from a multitude of sources that usually encumber the historian's workshop and fuel archival investigation: "journals of rent collectors; surveys and monographs of sociologists; trial transcripts, slum photographs; reports of vice investigators, social workers, and parole officers; interviews with psychiatrists and psychologists; and prison case files."¹ Her voice intermingles with those of historical actors by creating a polyphony that, although nonfictional, possesses a powerful lyrical strength. As she elucidates in the "note on method" that opens *Wayward Lives*,

I recreate the voices and use the words of these young women when possible and inhabit the intimate dimensions of their lives. The aim is to convey the sensory experience of the city and to capture the rich landscape of black social life. To this end, I employ a mode of close narration, a style which places the voice of narrator and character in inseparable relation, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the wayward shape and arrange the text. The italicized phrases and lines are utterances from the chorus. The story is told from inside the circle.²

A similar hermeneutic "I" is at work in *Lose Your Mother*. Retracing the Atlantic slave route, she tries to capture some life fragments of the enslaved people deported to the New World by exploring the realms of their departure. Saidiya—she chose this Swahili first name in her sophomore



year of college—claims her African American identity, but in Accra she quickly realizes the precariousness and elusiveness of the concept of "roots" itself. In Ghana, she was an *Ob-runni* (a stranger) and a "slave baby." Any dream of finding "roots" and feeling "at home" had to be abandoned as romantic illusion. Slavery was an experience of complete dispossession; there is no "homeland" to recover. Frederick Douglass was right to emphasize that "genealogical trees don't flourish among slaves,"³ and Saidiya's experience proves this assessment. The African roots of African Americans are fabricated and exhibited by cultural industry. More than a legacy of the past, they are an "invented tradition" forged by the Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism with museums, U.S. universities, and some multinational companies like McDonald's (which organizes "McRoots" tours). Slave memory is finally illustrated by brochures in which Ghana's black kids appear disguised as slaves: "Every town or village had an atrocity to promote."⁴ There is nothing to be done: in Accra, Saidiya is a stranger even among her university colleagues. For them, she observes, "my self-proclaimed African identity, albeit hyphenated, was fanciful and my Swahili name an amusement. They could hardly manage to say it without snickering."⁵

In fact, the slaves' past is a mystery. Through genealogical research, Saidiya finds traces of her family at the archives of Willemstad, the capital of Curaçao, thus discovering that her known ancestors were all

named Virgilio. However, she does not know the origins of her family name, Hartman. "Return" is an illusion. "The sense of not belonging and of being an extraneous element," she concludes, "is at the heart of slavery."⁶ Yet she persists in defining herself as African American. This identity is grounded on a memory of suffering, not on ungraspable "roots" or a mythical imaginary home. It is an identity made of a memory of struggles. African Americans did not inherit a past of rootedness or the promise of a recovered homeland. They receive a legacy of struggle and rebellion, and this is their link with the past. Far from being a retreat into the self, this link is a living continuity of collective agency. Saidiya does not try to imagine her ancestors basking in the beautiful glow of an African landscape at sunset, the evening of a ritual celebration. Her visit to the dungeon of Elmina Castle, the Gold Coast fortification that provided the headquarters of the Royal Africa Company, which the British transformed into one of the main slave "warehouses" on the continent at the end of the seventeenth century, and from which five hundred thousand of slaves were deported, is a meaningful experience. Saidiya does not pretend to know what exactly happened there; she is more interested in understanding "what lived on from this history."⁷ Dispossession and oppression are not over. As she writes, the inequalities that affect Blacks in terms of lifespan, poverty, and homicide rate rival those of a third-world country. Her purpose, therefore, is not searching for an idealized past, but rather for the "roots" of a still living despair. In some passages worthy of Fanon, she emphasizes that freedom is not a gift—it has to be taken—and that liberation is usually conquered by violence. Without any embellishment, she quotes the "inaugural gesture of revolt" as transcribed by a French planter:

That unhappy day was the 23rd of November 1733, at three in the morning. Mr

Soetman's Negroes, assisted by others, broke down their master's door, while he was sleeping, ordered him to get up, and, after having stripped him naked, forced him to sing and dance. Then, after having run a sword through his body, they cut his head off, cut open his body, and washed themselves in his blood. To this execution, they added that of his daughter Hissing, thirteen years old, by slaughtering her on top of her stepfather's body.⁸

Violence is horrible and ugly, and nonetheless, Fanon stressed, it can both "humanize" and "detoxify."⁹ Of course, a romanticized family saga would avoid these kinds of unpleasant descriptions. Javier Cercas, for example, does not depict the atrocities perpetrated by the Falangists during the Spanish Civil War when he sketches the portrait of his great-uncle as an authentic Homeric hero. Saidiya Hartman's book certainly cannot be read as an apology for violence, but it is at the same time far from the current standards of memory catechism and human rights' rhetorical prescriptions. She proves that it is possible to write in the first person avoiding solipsism and connecting one's manifold "I" with the "we" that makes history.

NOTES

1. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton, 2019), xiv.
2. Hartman, xiii–iv.
3. Quoted by Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 90–91.
4. Hartman, 163.
5. Hartman, 218.
6. Hartman, 88.
7. Hartman, 130.
8. Hartman, 91–92.
9. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), 44.

Staughton Lynd and the Labor Movement

INTRODUCTION BY DAN LA BOTZ

STAUGHTON LYND, WHO DIED ON November 17 at the age of 92, was a remarkable American radical who played important roles in the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and in the labor movement, always in collaboration with his wife Alice. We reprint here an essay that Staughton Lynd wrote for the Winter 2005 edition of *New Politics* in which he discusses the views of his friend and collaborator Stan Weir. We have chosen this piece because we believe it provides an excellent view of Lynd's ideas, as well as Weir's. We introduce it with a brief overview of this life and conclude with some thoughts about his politics.

Staughton Lynd was born and raised in a Quaker family. His parents Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd were both sociologists who together wrote an academic best seller, *Middletown*, a study of a small city later revealed to be Muncie, Indiana. The book was published in 1929, the same year Staughton was born. While they were Quakers, Lynd's father said that his study of sociology had led him to see the value of Marx's notion of "class struggle."

Young Staughton grew up in New York City in the 1930s and 40s, studying at the Ethical Culture Society's Fieldston High School, whose curriculum centered on ethics and whose slogan was: "*The place where men meet to seek the highest is*

holy ground." After graduating, Staughton went off to study at Harvard College where he was briefly involved with Communist Party organizations. When faced with the draft board, he declared himself to be a conscientious objector and was assigned to a non-combatant unit, but when it was learned he had been associated with the Communists, he was given a dishonorable discharge.

He met his wife Alice in the summer of

"I find myself in an odd position about Marxism, and I've been in it a long time," said Lynd.

1950 and they were married in the Stony Run Friends Meetinghouse in Baltimore, the Quaker congregation to which his parents belonged. A few years later when they moved to Georgia, they joined the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) there. Clearly the Quaker community was very important to his life.

After graduating from Harvard, Staughton earned his doctorate in American history at Columbia University and then took a teaching position in Georgia at Spellman College, one of the historically Black colleges. One of his students there was Alice Walker, author of *The*

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Color Purple. Lynd was an advocate of the “history from below” school that wanted to turn from writing about the political and economic elites who had ruled the country to describing the role of the working people who had made it.

At that time, he began to work with another historian, Howard Zinn, in the civil rights movement. In 1964 Lynd became the director of the SNCC Freedom Schools in Mississippi and with Bob Moses and others helped to organize Freedom Summer, organizing white students to come to the South to join the civil rights movement. His work, like that of all civil rights activists Black and white, put him in jeopardy.

When Black people, wanting to take leadership for themselves began to exclude whites from the civil rights movement, Staughton accepted a position in 1964 in the prestigious history department at Yale University and he and Alice moved to New Haven, Connecticut. At the same time, he began to become active in the anti-Vietnam War movement. He chaired the first march against the war in Vietnam in Washington, D.C. on April 17, 1965. Four months later he was arrested together with Bob Moses and David Dellinger at the Assembly of Unrepresented People. Standing at the steps of the Capitol in a utopian gesture they had declared peace with the people of Vietnam.

Then in December 1965, Lynd joined Tom Hayden of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Herbert Aptheker, a historian and leading Communist Party intellectual, on a controversial trip to Hanoi to see what sort of peace terms might be acceptable to the North Vietnamese government and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Some called them traitors for meeting with the enemy. With the Yale administration and alumni turning against him because of his activism, Lynd took a leave of absence from Yale and moved to

Chicago. In 1968 Yale denied him tenure.

Blacklisted from the leading universities because of his militant activism against the war, Lynd taught courses for a couple of years at Roosevelt University and Columbia College in Chicago and he worked for a while for Saul Alinsky’s Industrial Areas Foundation that organized community groups. He also studied for his law degree at the University of Chicago. While teaching and studying, Staughton and Alice conducted interviews with working class people who had been activists from the 1930s to the 1970s and wrote the book *Rank and File: Personal Histories of Working Class Organizers* (1973). It was a book that many of us young radicals of the 1970s read and discussed. In those years Staughton also became involved in offering support to a group of truck drivers in the Fraternal Association of Steel Haulers or FASH in Gary, Indiana. They were then engaged in a struggle for autonomy with the Teamsters union leadership, which violently attacked the group, blowing up the house of one of its leaders.

With his law degree in hand, Lynd took a job at a law firm in Youngtown, Ohio, and also worked for the National Legal Services Corporation handling cases for the very poor. Alice also got a law degree and joined him in the legal work. Staughton soon fell in with Ed Mann and John Barbero, both United Steel Workers Union (USW) local officers and activists in the United Labor Party of Ohio, a small political organization of Trotskyist origins. Mann, Barbero, and others carried out a national union campaign and sued in court to get rid of the USW’s no-strike clause and also backed William Litch for international union president against I.W. Abel.

Shortly after Lynd arrived in Youngstown, the steel companies began to close the mills in what was then called deindustrialization. Working with his friends

in the USW, he developed a plan to create a community-owned and -managed steel company to take over the closing mill. He became the chief lawyer for an ecumenical council of churches allied with rank-and-file steelworkers attempting to save the mill. Getting political support proved a futile task, and one after another the plants closed. He described the experience in *The Fight Against Shutdowns—the Youngstown Steel Mill Closings*. That experience, he said, seeing the power of capital and its domination of the political system, made him more of a Marxist than ever.

Back in 1994, journalist Jane Slaughter did an interview with Staughton Lynd for *The Progressive* magazine in which they talked largely about President Bill Clinton's economic policies, and what Lynd called the president's hypocrisy. Toward the end of the interview, Slaughter asked him, "Are you a Marxist?" to which he replied, "I find myself in an odd position about Marxism, and I've been in it a long time. Namely, to the Marxists, I seem like some sort of middle-class sentimentalist. To everyone else I seem like a hardcore Marxist."

While many of us on the left shared a common critique of both capitalism and the labor bureaucracy, Lynd's views set him apart. He was right that others in the left sometimes viewed him critically, but not for the reason that he suggested. We had long admired him. He had played an outstanding role in both the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements, and, though he wanted to see workers reform the unions, and see the creation of a labor party and a socialist movement, he held views that placed him outside the strategic perspective of most other left labor activists. It was not, as he suggested, that "middleclass sentimentalism" that led others on the left to criticize him, but rather what seemed to many of us his utopian rather than strategic approach to the labor organizing.

Consider his approach to the unions and collective bargaining. Lynd argued that unions should reject use the National Labor Relations Act by means of which workers obtain legal recognition for their unions. He criticized and (in theory) opposed the signing of union contracts because of no-strike clauses, even though those contracts often codified workers achievement in improving wages and benefits and provided a point from which to advance fights for new demands. He rejected the notion that workers organizations such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) should run for the highest offices in the international union. He believed that would lead to their inevitable bureaucratization.

Lynd wanted workers instead to concentrate on organizing primarily at the local level and establishing horizontal ties with other rank-and-file workers to create an alternative central labor council (as a substitute to the AFL-CIO's official local central labor bodies). He worked to create such a group in Youngstown of longtime, local leftist leaders in the United Steelworkers. Local groups like these, he believed, would be the authentic vehicle of a genuine workers' movement. At the same time, he thought that labor activists should also strive to create local labor parties offering a political alternative.

In advancing these views, Lynd often tended to be moralistic, condemning those who did not share his approach and vision for being vanguardist, bureaucratic, or social democratic. Yet when it came to trying to save the Youngstown steel mills, he allied with the local churches (whose politics were social democratic at best), supported a project that would have had a local advisory board that included local business, and called upon the Democratic Party politicians to get the government to finance it. Those he criticized were doing much the same in those desperate times,

trying almost anything to try to save the workplace, the jobs, and the union, to save the community with its churches and schools, with its Little League teams and Brownie groups. In practice, Lynd and the rest of us on the left at that time ended up doing similar things.

Whatever differences one might have had with him, Lynd spent virtually his entire adult life in the movements for peace, for racial justice, and for workers' power

and for the ultimate goal of democratic socialism. His belief in racial equality led him to put his life in danger in the Deep South, and his commitment to peace cost him his prestigious appointment at Yale. Moving to Ohio and rubbing elbows with steelworkers, he and his wife Alice strove to build a militant labor movement. The two continued for fifty years to analyze, to criticize, and to organize for the better world in which they both believed.

[From *New Politics*, No. 38, Winter 2005 (typos corrected)]

Alternative Unionism

A New Politics Classic

STAUGHTON LYND

THIS RICH COLLECTION OF WRITINGS by the late Stan Weir invites friends, rank-and-file workers, and radical intellectuals to reconsider their assumptions and to recommit themselves to the struggle.

I met Stan Weir about 1970. He was turning fifty and teaching in a workers' education program at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. He lived at the time in Danville, Illinois, where a group of eager young people

surrounded him.

A first product of our friendship appears in this collection, the edited transcript of an interview conducted by my wife, Alice Lynd, and myself for our book *Rank and File*. It is entitled "The Informal

Work Group" but is actually a mini autobiography. Therein Stan Weir describes how as a young merchant seaman during World War II he was educated by ex-Wobblies and other veterans of the 1934 general strike. "On that ship," Stan told us, "I finally found a cause and a vehicle for pursuing it."

Later, when Stan and fellow longshoreman Robert Miles founded Singlejack Books, I wrote two books for them. The first was a "little book" that could be slipped

Singlejack Solidarity

STAN WEIR

Edited and with an afterword by George Lipsitz, foreword by Norm Diamond
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004 384 pp. \$19.95

STAUGHTON LYND is a historian, peace activist, and labor lawyer, and a longtime contributor to NP. He is the author of numerous books, including *Living Inside Our Hope* (1997), *The Fight Against Shutdowns* (1992), and *Lucasville: The Untold Story of a Prison Uprising* (2004).

into a hip pocket or a blouse, *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer*. The book was organized around an idea suggested by Stan and mentioned several times in this collection, namely, that when a worker punches in, he or she leaves in the glove compartment of the car the constitutional rights that a citizen takes for granted. *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer* is then the effort to recreate these same rights in the workplace by other means. Thus, in a particularly bold and imaginative flight, Stan suggested that in a unionized workplace a discharged worker has a right to see his or her union representative before leaving the plant, and this is the workplace equivalent to the right of *habeas corpus* on the street.

In 1982, Singlejack published my account of the closing of Youngstown's steel mills, *The Fight Against Shutdowns*. This was a case study of a problem that necessarily preoccupied Stan Weir, because it underlay his unjust exclusion from his craft as a longshoreman: the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy. As a "B man" in West Coast longshore, Stan and other B men were given the work that was left over after the regular "A men" took their pick of jobs, and were unable to protest because they were not allowed to join the union. In effect, they were temporary workers allowed to make a living only during the time it took the industry to implement "containerization" and, thereby, cut in half the number of longshore workers permanently needed.

My last sustained contact with Stan was in the mid-1990s. I had set out to edit a book of essays on the "alternative unionism" of the early 1930s: the local industrial unions, and horizontal networks thereof, organized from below at a time when there was as yet no National Labor Relations Act and no Congress of Industrial Organization. Stan called me up. Why had he been left out? he asked. I haltingly explained that the authors were all young academics, pub-

lishing their research for the first time. That didn't satisfy him. I felt ashamed, and the result was his essay, "Unions with Leaders Who Stay on the Job," which became the final essay of my book and is also included in this collection. Stan wrote it, so he told me, with tears running down his face.

II

So what are the big things to remember about this extraordinary man?

First is his sense of humor. An essay in this volume, "Whatever Happened to Frisco Jeans?", offers several examples. Stan (in California) would telephone me (in Ohio) for no other purpose than to share a new joke. Nor was this a superficial mannerism. Stan viewed humor as an essential element of any subculture of ordinary people who felt confident in confronting the world and in improvising solutions to the world's problems. When he heard in 1956 that Hungarian workers in a bicycle factory were making bicycles for themselves, he decided that this revolution must be for real and began to imagine something similar happening at his Chevrolet plant (199-200). He would often begin a workers' education class by asking, "What is the funniest thing that ever happened where you work?"

Second, Stan broke with both the concept of a Leninist vanguard party *and* with bureaucratic business unionism. This was unusual. Only a few others, such as the late Marty Glaberman, chose the same lonely path. Far more common was the transformation Stan reported in 1956: "The capable people who had built the Workers Party's auto fraction in the industrial Midwest had become UAW staffers. They had lost their identity as radicals." One sees the same thing today even among members of the IWW.

Stan long wanted to write a comprehensive critique of the vanguard party, and did not live to do so. The fragments lovingly

collected here convey the gist of what he wished to say. It comes down to certain relatively simple insights: Radical intellectuals who consider that their task is to bring theory to the workers (as Lenin advocated in *What Is To Be Done?*) will never attract workers to a radical movement. Rather, the intellectual needs to listen to workers and learn from them at the same time that the intellectual shares his or her own insights. Further, what needs to be created is not a single, vertical structure, but horizontal networks of informal work groups and local unions “that cross traditional union lines.”

As to bureaucratic business unionism, it is hard for me to untangle the ideas I took from Stan Weir and those I developed for

It is hard for me to untangle the ideas I took from Stan Weir and those I developed for myself.

myself in abrasive encounters with Steelworkers, Auto Workers, and Teamsters. Here are sample statements by Stan:

“The failure of the union officialdom cannot be solved by voting ‘the old guys’ out.” With these words Stan set himself at odds both with the Communists who worked so hard in the 1930s to capture offices of influence in the CIO and its affiliated national unions, and with the Trotskyists and ex-Trotskyists who labored in efforts such as Miners for Democracy, the Sadlowski campaign, and Teamsters for a Democratic Union half a century later.

“When working people mobilize to control their working conditions, they rid themselves of the old vertical structures and turn to horizontal forms of organization . . . anticipating the need for an alternative unionism that draws its strength from soli-

arity agreements rather than cooperation with employers.”

About what happened to the labor movement in the United States after World War II: “The goal of the peacetime [labor] policy was to eliminate strikes in support of grievances during the life of contracts.” Real change in the labor movement must begin by reclaiming the right to direct action whenever workers perceive it to be needed.

Thus, Stan Weir stood four-square for at least the last thirty years of his life in advocating a qualitatively different kind of labor movement. In place of the mainstream unions of Germany before World War I, criticized by Rosa Luxemburg, or the “new men of power” like Walter Reuther who appeared so quickly at the head of CIO unions, Stan visualized a unionism closer to the ground and to the workplace, accountable to the shop stewards and informal spokespersons who rose from the ranks, and committed to archaic notions like “an injury to one is an injury to all.”

And he found this new labor movement. Many commentators of like mind, such as myself, have pointed to agreements to share and share alike when workers confront layoffs. The seniority system so often lauded by labor historians does not express the idea that an injury to one is an injury to all. New hires, often women and minorities, are put on the street with nothing, while white males in their fifties continue to work overtime. However, there are old and new instances of workers disregarding seniority to share what work is available equally, at least until the work available does not decrease below, say, four days a week.

Stan saw in the longshore hiring arrangements won by the 1934 general strike a similar egalitarianism in apportioning daily work assignments. These arrangements were based on “longshoremen’s control over daily hiring in the dispatch hall” and a “commitment to work opportunity equalization.”

Of course, the degree to which West Coast longshore from the 1930s to the 1960s approximated an egalitarian vision made it doubly painful to be thrust out of that work at the same time that these hard-won institutional arrangements were scrapped. Indomitably, brother Stan found an even fuller expression of his beliefs in the practice of a Spanish longshore union, “La Coordinadora.” Attending a meeting of the International Harbor Workers in Denmark in 1982, Stan met delegates from La Coordinadora and thereupon went to Spain to have a look. Like Lincoln Steffens, he could thereafter say that he had seen the future—a union larger than the West Coast longshoremen with no more than a single paid staff person—and it worked. La Coordinadora remained, for the next twenty years, the closest approximation he knew of to the hoped-for shape of the future.

III

“Death doesn’t end relationships,” Stan writes in the first essay in this book about his friend James Baldwin. Maybe. But I think to keep the relationships alive, when the other person can no longer speak up, we have an obligation to be ruthlessly self-critical.

Stan once made a special trip to Youngstown to urge me not to submit to publication an essay by John Lippert. At the time Lippert was working in a Detroit automobile factory, and had written a riveting account of a wildcat strike. Stan’s point was that the account might give management some indication of who had been the movers and shakers in the wildcat, and subject them to discipline. One doesn’t snitch. However exciting the article, he argued, it should not appear.

At a memorial for Stan at the Socialist Scholars Conference, I met persons who had known him as a member of the International Socialist group in, I believe, the early 1970s. This was at a time when IS was trying to be a Leninist vanguard party, all the way to telling people—no matter what the hardship—how they should spend their time and plan their days. Stan, I was told, protested. This was the origin of his break with the last radical group to which he belonged and the basis of the isolation expressed in the essay “I Am Lonely.”

Finally, I think I should testify that the loneliness Stan Weir experienced was to some extent—perhaps only a small extent—expressive of the fact that people who leave vanguard parties sometimes carry with them certain vanguard attitudes that are hard to shake. I recall Stan once saying, “We believe, don’t we . . .” It was as if there was an organized “we” that had certain ideas and Stan was checking to make sure that he and I both shared them. To say the same thing in another way, Stan had certain ideas in which he believed strongly and he tried very hard to cause other persons to accept these ideas.

In conclusion: If there is such a thing as a worker-intellectual, Stan Weir was it. He read Hobsbawm (I recall his excitement in discovering Hobsbawm’s concept of “organic intellectuals”). He read George Rude. He read all sorts of writers of whom I have never even heard (see page 32). He was a warm, humorous, decent human being, who never cut himself off from whence he came. As Mark Anthony said of Brutus: The elements in him were so co-mixed “that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, This was a man.”

Action for Disability Justice

TESS SHELDON

I HAVEN'T MET NADINA LASPINA, but I can easily imagine it. She radiates through her memoir, *Such a Pretty Girl: A Story of Struggle, Empowerment, and Disability Pride*. Shiny! Illuminating! Bright! Readers will hear riotous laughter, the cooking-up of plans, and good listening. Her memoir is one-part unapologetic exuberance and one part clear-headed persistence.

Nadina is also apparently propelled by a cosmic energy towards disability justice and profoundly effective. Throughout the decades, she has organized with Disabled In Action, ADAPT, the Disability Caucus of Occupy Wall Street, and Not Dead Yet.¹ Her memoir sketches the disability movement's historic contexts by introducing us to its characters, including her friends, lovers, and comrades. She is, no doubt, a person you want to know to have in your corner at your kitchen table and shoulder-to-shoulder on the streets.

Her memoir, however, doesn't cast her as an inspirational leader. It doesn't read as

an account of her exceptional triumphs or a long list of her many accomplishments. This is important since, too often, disabled

people are characterized as inspiring for succeeding "despite" their disability. Instead, the memoir recounts her struggle to build a life in a world that wants to erase bodies like hers.

In her words, it took

years to "learn how to fight against the violence done to us and many more years for the wounds to begin to heal." (at 312)

The first chapters in Part I ('Che Peccato: What a Shame') recount Nadina's early years in Sicily. Her father's desperation to find a "cure" led to innumerable surgeries and, eventually, a double amputation. She also describes innumerable encounters with classmates, neighbours, and friends characterized by pity and mourning. This aligns with dominant conceptions of disability that prize independence and disparage the need for support. These pervasive stereotypes pressure disabled people to alter themselves to conform and function "normally" through cure, rehabilitation, and prosthetics. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, disability became associated with abnormality, and our social and economic worlds were organized around the search for the "normal." Disability is considered a private burden, rather than seeing its costs as the subject of state or col-

Such a Pretty Girl:
A Story of Struggle,
Empowerment, and Disability
Pride

NADIA LASPINA
San Francisco: New Village Press, 2019

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lective support. The subjugation of disabled persons is not historical, and these stereotypes continue to be so pervasive that they often remain unrecognized as oppressive. Critical Disability Theory (CDT), however, characterizes disability as a universal human variation rather than an aberration. CDT explores the ableist assumptions of the bio-medical and charity models of disability and exposes their distinct historical and institutional underpinnings.

In Part II ('Fighting Back'), Nadina recounts her experiences as a disabled student and the barriers she faced on campus as a graduate student and faculty member. On one occasion, a classmate proclaimed: "I don't think of you as disabled," as though it were a compliment. Indeed, disability's place on campus remains contested, and students with disabilities remain governed by bio-medical and charity models of disability. This section reminded me of Jay Dolmage's *Academic Ableism* (2017) and his exploration of ableist attitudes, policies, and practices that are baked into Canadian post-secondary accommodation processes. Biological reductionism has long infiltrated Canadian campuses to identify "normal" learners and exclude those outside the bell curve (a eugenical term used to categorize the qualities and characteristics of a "cognitive elite").²

Universities are neoliberal institutions, relying on various strategies to increase the role of the free market, marked by individualistic understandings of social problems. Pre-pandemic, Canadian universities faced brutal cuts from their conservative provincial governments in the name of modernization. For example, Ontario's Progressive Conservative party has a long and violent history of deep cuts to social assistance. These cuts were never neutral and are, instead, intended to create a future without disability. In 2019, the Premier slashed tuition by 10 percent.³ Campuses had no way

to make up for the lost revenue. Students with disabilities bore the brunt of cuts to services. Ontario's provincial government took credit for improving access, even though tuition cuts help higher-income students as opposed to debt cancellation.⁴ The pandemic compounded the hostile environment for students with disabilities.⁵

In Part III ('Love and Activism'), Nadina tracks the evolution of the American disability rights movement(s) of the second part of the twentieth century. This Part smells haunting and verdant, a combination of heartache and celebration. Across the world, Disability Pride Marches are organized to resist ableism, disability violence, and disability oppression. Organizers often raise demands that go beyond traditional civil rights reforms, like enacting legislation or policy reform. They aim, instead, to dismantle structures and root causes of disability subjugation. They challenge presumptions that the best way to address disability exclusion is to gain inclusion in state institutions. Organizers adopt transformative resistance strategies, including mutual aid and the abolition of the institutions that warehouse persons with disability (prison, long-term care, child protection, group homes). In Toronto, disability movements have lost several key leaders recently, including Graeme Bacque and Don Weitz, whose work supported a "Mad turn" to Disability Pride.

Nadina's memoir is also about connection, loss, and love, especially Part IV ('Come Sono Contenta: How Happy I Am'). She describes falling in love with Danny Robert, a fellow disability activist. Their love story is electric, but I found myself preoccupied with her relationship with her "blood sister," Audrey, whom Nadina met in a New York hospital as a teenager. About Audrey and Nadina, Sister Angelica, at the convent where they went to school, pronounced: "This is your destiny; you

can never be happy.” (at 91) Audrey died by suicide. At her funeral, the rabbi said Audrey had “stopped suffering” and that “she had suffered bravely all her life.” (at 92) Nadina writes: “No, no. I wanted to scream. Audrey was a lot of fun. Audrey and I had been so happy so many times... I was angry at Audrey for dying and at myself for being unable to stop her... Angry at everyone who had made Audrey believe she was better off dead.” (at 92)

These same presumptions about the inevitability of the suffering of disabled people have been used to justify the expansion of the criteria to access Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) in Canada. The restrictions on access to MAiD for persons whose sole source of suffering is related to their mental health are set to be removed this coming March.⁶ There are, however, terrifying barriers to mental health services and support in Canada (particularly non-coercive ones). Persons with mental health issues, like Audrey, might certainly have been and are without adequate support. There is also no protocol to confirm that persons with disabilities have been provided with viable alternatives before becoming eligible for MAiD. In April 2019, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of People with Disabilities criticized the unavailability of “adequate safeguards to ensure that persons with disabilities do not request assistive dying simply because of the absence of community-based alternatives and palliative care.” Consider the impact of the availability of MAiD to vulnerable persons with disabilities, like Audrey might have been. MAiD becomes an additional means of death and a substitute for assistance in living.⁷

MAiD is a deeply feminist issue. Women with disabilities, often denied adequate support, are pressured to seek MAiD. The Disability Filibuster launched in March 2021 on International Women’s

Day. It came together as a “last-ditch effort to stop the expansion of MAiD.” Organizers broadcast an ongoing live stream that featured disabled people and allies. Speakers testified about the impact of the changes to MAiD’s availability on Black, Indigenous, queer and poor communities, characterizing it as another form of cultural genocide.⁸ Indigenous communities advocate for services that support life, such as suicide prevention services. The expansion of MAiD contradicts this work, becoming a kind of “suicide assistance.”

In all, Nadina shines through this compelling book. It chronicles the struggles of people with disabilities to confront ableism, disability violence, and other forms of oppression. She illuminates a future course for disability justice movement(s). *Such a Pretty Girl* is an important and necessary contribution—a ‘must-read’ for anyone interested in modern reverberations of struggles for disability justice, including the eviction of encampments and a disability-centered response to COVID-19. At the same time, though, the book feels intimate rather than tactical or strategic. Nadina figured out a way to live well in a world that intended to exclude her. Her struggles feel familiar, so deeply relevant to our collective aspiration for a blueprint toward a good life.

NOTES

1. Disabled In Action, ADAPT can be found at: diabledinaction.org, adapt.org, and notdeadyet.org.

2. “Normalcy and Subnormalcy,” Eugenics Archive, eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/encyclopedia/5233c40d5c2ec50000000089

3. Elizabeth Redden, “A 10% Tuition Cut, but Who Benefits?” *Inside Higher Ed*, January 18, 2019, www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/01/18/ontario-cuts-tuition-10-percent-while-reducing-aid-spending-raising-concerns-about

4. “Cancel Student Debt,” Debt Collective, debtcollective.org/what-we-do/campaigns/student-debt/

5. Written by Sarah Trick, "Why these disabled Carleton U students can't go back on campus," *tvo Today*, Oct. 21, 2021, www.tvo.org/article/why-these-disabled-carleton-u-students-cant-go-back-to-campus

6. Canada's new medical assistance in dying (MAiD) Law, Government of Canada, www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/ad-am/bk-di.html

7. Ravi Malhotra and Caroline Leiffers, "As-

sisted dying? Let's talk about accessible living first," *Ottawa Citizen*, May 5, 2016.

8. "A panel on the impacts of changes to MAiD, Bill C-7, on Black Indigenous Queer and Poor Communities," Disability Justice Network, www.djno.ca/post/a-panel-on-the-impacts-of-changes-to-maid-bill-c-7-on-black-indigenous-queer-and-poor-communities

Life-making Through Socialist Feminism

ROSEMARY HENNESSY

IN HER RECENT BOOK, FREIDA AFARY makes a compelling case for socialist feminism as an urgent response to twenty-first century crises. Her "new approach" attends to recent historical and theoretical developments (authoritarian capitalism for one), key concepts (among them social reproduction, alienation, intersectionality, and queer), as well as political

Socialist Feminism: A New Approach

FRIEDA AFARY
Las Vegas: Pluto Press, 2022

and theoretical practices that share affinities with socialist feminism (notably, #Me Too, Black Lives Matter, and Queer Theory). This timeliness and scope make *Socialist Feminism* a striking intervention. Another noteworthy feature is Afary's strong case for Marxist humanism

as an under-examined archive of socialist feminist history. She presents it as a theoretical approach that can amplify socialist feminism's philosophical, political, and Marxian foundations and contemporary effectiveness. I do not know of any other book that does all of this.

Attention to socialism in public discourse, even among those most involved in Left social movements, often lacks informed knowledge of its history and feminist contributions. When this history does surface, it is often fragmented into single-issue lines of thought and action. Afary's book interrupts this fragmentation and

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understands it as one of the consequences of capitalism.

Although anchored somewhat in the United States, the book offers an expansive account of international feminist scholarship and activism. The bibliographies for each chapter alone capture this breadth and are an impressive and invaluable resource in their own right. In addition, the book demonstrates socialist feminism's pertinence to broad-reaching twenty-first century events. Afary's argument for socialist feminism attends to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the relentless and lethal devaluation of Black lives, and recent global developments in reproductive technology. In each case, her analysis is keenly attuned to the critical resistance accompanying these developments and the possibility of a better future.

Afary begins her book with a brief turn to autobiography. Her narrative of the contradictions she lived as a young immigrant to the United States arriving in the wake of the Iranian Revolution discloses her political formation from ground zero of global capitalism. She encountered in Chicago the writings of Raya Dunayevskaya on the Iranian Revolution and women's involvement in it, on the relation of Middle Eastern struggles to American Black liberation movements, and their contributions to emancipatory philosophy. Introduced to Marxist humanism, she converted that experience into a deep understanding of exploitation and domination. From her account of this history, we learn about the formation of a socialist feminist standpoint.

The book's contributions are so many that I will only list some of them here before addressing a few in detail. Afary's case for returning to alienation and needs by way of Marxist humanism is surely one. She pursues that path through the work of Dunayevskaya and Audre Lorde, a pairing in itself exceptional. Like Lorde (and I would

add Alexandra Kollontai), Dunayevskaya has been much overlooked by feminists. Afary reads her Marxist humanist attention to human potential and needs as in tune with Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic, both of which capitalist relations foreclose. In this respect, she situates both Lorde and Dunayevskaya as contributing *philosophically* to socialist feminism. Among the book's other unusual contributions is Afary's dialectical and global approach to reading that underlies the book's structure, the extensive empirical data she offers on every topic, and the instructions for movement building that she takes from the Arab Spring and Occupy.

Finally yet importantly, there is the book's accompanying study guide. Available online for free, the *Workbook* provides readers with Key Terms and Concepts for each chapter as well as Discussion Questions and Ideas for Activities. These materials enable readers to grasp the intimate connections between theory and action. As such, they are a valuable pedagogic resource for readers from multiple sectors. I certainly plan to use the *Workbook* in my university classroom, and I can imagine it being an excellent resource for community-based reading groups.

Among the book's seven chapters, the one on Social Reproduction is one of the strongest. It speaks to a longstanding contribution of socialist feminism: the recognition that the basis of women's oppression under capitalism is the devaluation of our reproductive labor. Afary offers a genealogy of that feminist analysis, beginning with the early contribution to the domestic labor debates from the Canadian feminist, chemist, and computer science professor, Margaret Benston. She sorts out distinctions among ensuing feminist approaches that understand domestic labor as contributing directly, indirectly, or not at all to the accumulation of surplus value.

She skilfully walks the reader through some of these foundational conceptions of social reproduction and their bearing on the key Marxian terms “value,” “surplus value,” and “alienated labor.” Her clear explanations elegantly parse out varied inflections in these debates and why it matters that we understand the relation of domestic labor to the accumulation of profit. Her attention to some of the developments in reproductive technology and their implications regarding the relation between the family and capital accumulation are especially noteworthy.

Increasingly in the twenty-first century, feminist attention to reproduction arises from awareness of the Earth’s growing inability to reproduce the conditions that support life. The signs are everywhere. While nature appears occasionally in Afary’s book, however, this imperilled reproduction of life does not receive much treatment. Yet I wonder whether socialist feminism can be restricted to *social* life. Shouldn’t socialist feminist attention to reproduction also take into account the destruction of nature, of which humans are a part? Susan Ferguson gives us vocabulary to make this conceptual shift, I think, when she attends to capitalism’s devaluation of “life-making.”¹ I find that term—“life-making”—to be apt. It supersedes the severing of the human from the “natural” world, a form of alienation that is another of the casualties of capitalism. Attention to “life-making” also can amplify how we understand the process and scope of capital accumulation. It is indeed hostility to life that devalues reproductive domestic labor and the reproductive capacities of human and non-human bodies. Theresa Brennan addressed this dialectic in *Globalization and its Terrors* where her concept of “deregulation” captures the effects of the extraction of value across life forms and its prerequisite alienation.² A growing number of Marxist theorists who attend to the current planetary crisis of global warm-

ing have underscored these transcorporeal metabolic relations, but they often do not connect them to social reproduction in the form of domestic labor. Jason W. Moore may be one exception. In short, we need more ample terms for the requirements of the *reproduction of life*, terms that do not reiterate the social-nature split. Afary’s book suggests that the humanist Marxist theoretical frame—despite its focus on the human—may be a useful analytic bridge to such a less-partial understanding. It might direct the concept of value to capitalism’s reliance on unmet needs, to a conception of reproduction that spans human and non-human life, and a continual history and possibility of resisting the alienating, deregulating tendencies of capitalism.

Although the book gives little attention to ideology in the discussion of the relations of life-making, there is room to develop that feature of social reproduction as well. Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” essay was fundamentally concerned with the question of capitalist reproduction and pointed to the family, school, church, and media as institutions through which dominant ways of knowing are reproduced.³ He addressed the formation of social subjects as central to that task. As we develop clarity on the dialectical relation between social and natural reproduction, there is more to think through here. As Afary recognizes, the process of reproducing life under capitalism takes place through the institutions and cultural discourses that reproduce naturalized racial and gendered subjects whose devaluation becomes valuable to capital. Consideration of the formation of social subjects as a component of social reproduction can enable a better understanding of the intersectional relations of race and gender, white supremacy, and patriarchy as institutionally reproduced cultural discourses. They are weapons of domination

that condition and enable the capitalist class relation of exploitation and thus indirectly contribute to the accumulation of profit. Practices that legitimize patriarchal domination and white supremacy are also questioned and resisted. Here Afary's new socialist feminist approach is especially strong as she references multiple social movements in which that resistance and the aspirations of socialist feminism are alive and advancing.

Scholars and students will find this timely book extremely useful. As Afary well knows from her own experience as a public librarian who has run community-based study groups, readers outside academia

also will turn to this book for an updated perspective on socialist feminism. It is especially invaluable now when the terms "socialism" and "feminism" circulate across the English-speaking world as both threat and promise.

NOTES

1. Susan Ferguson, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction* (Pluto Press, 2019).
2. Teresa Brennan. *Globalization and its Terrors* (Routledge, 2002).
3. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (Monthly Review, 1971), 85-126.

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Socialism or Barbarism! Truer than Ever?

MICHAEL BROZ

“WE ARE EXPERIENCING AN ecological and social crisis, driven by exponential capital accumulation, whose end result will be the extinction of human civilisation” (p. 18). While it is easy to shrug off such a dramatic claim, in *Alienation, Spectacle, & Revolution: A Critical Marxist Essay*, Neil Faulkner takes this relatively strong claim and endeavors to demonstrate its truth. Thus begins his project of updating our understanding of alienation—not an easy task, but one that Faulkner does well. In a time of a simultaneous dearth and deluge of information, Faulkner attempts to pull apart the dialectical and economic structures of the third industrial revolution and follows the breadcrumbs until he comes to a different “end of history.” Faulkner, who died in February 2022, was an archeologist and a political activist. He was a member of the Socialist Workers Party in the U.K. for many years and later a founding member of Anti-Capitalist Resistance. He wrote on topics ranging from the Arab-Anglo conflict to the history of the Olympics. While his corpus spanned several subjects, his books and articles all have a bitingly

Alienation, Spectacle, & Revolution: A Critical Marxist Essay

NEIL FAULKNER
London: Resistance Books, 2021

Marxist take that brought Faulkner much acclaim.

This book will interest readers who want to understand the social roots and intersection of our current ecological and humanitarian crises, especially those looking for an up-to-date Marxist approach to climate change. The few digressions into the

stark landscape of the third industrial revolution*, where industry is primarily replaced by technology, argue that the same dialectical and social rules that characterized the first industrial revolution still apply. It also indicates that this trajectory of capitalism is quiet and often undetectable to the average person until it has normalized itself. The essay also sheds light on the nature of alienation and how new technology continues to shape capitalism and the wider society. Overall, Faulkner offers a Marxist analysis of contemporary capitalism.

“The Wall, the most powerful communication system in history, is a superlative

*The first industrial revolution, according to Faulkner, was the revolution that established mass production. The second industrial revolution was precipitated by the railroads, mass communication, and international trade. Finally, the third industrial revolution is characterized by technology-focused employment and institutions like the internet.

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mechanism for transmitting the hegemonic ideas of the ruling class, sedating social discontent, suffocating dissent, achieving *consent*" (p. 8). The wall that Faulkner speaks of in his prologue is a wall of screens

Like Marx, Faulkner
believes that capitalism's
perverse incentives drive the
environmental crisis.

(computers, phones, etc.) that has settled into the daily life of the western society. Faulkner sees this wall as the seductive nature of capitalism to pacify those who are economically and technologically oppressed. Faulkner argues for this because, to him, it takes the basic ideas of the ruling class and transmits them on a large scale, allowing capitalism to promote a misinformation campaign consumed by all to whom it can reach (by "The Wall," advertising, etc.) This misinformation shapes Marx's Industrial Reserve Army—a body of workers who desire the luxury of wealth but only have their labor power to sell. As a result, these (potential) laborers accept low wages with an illusory promise of upward mobility.

In his introduction, Faulkner begins by describing a hospital waiting room and how it is dominated by television screens and other visual technology. These screens, for Faulkner, indicate that the world of technology has a hegemonic hold on capitalism. So, Faulkner criticizes capitalism not merely in terms of class, but also in terms of the unique climate it has created in the era of the third industrial revolution.

Faulkner explains further: "One aspect of the eternal dialectical motion that con-

stitutes social reality is that nothing that came before is ever entirely erased" (p. 26). Faulkner does not discuss dialectic in great detail, but he ties Marx's dialectical analysis to the contemporary world. In doing this, he shows that the Marxist dialectical principal of "negation of negation" means that these revolutions in modes of production continue to contain some aspect of the past within itself, subsuming itself but never losing its grounding in nature.

A significant component of the text is the threat posed by anthropogenic climate change. As Faulkner writes in chapter three:

The climate crisis can be understood as a *metabolic rupture* between Nature and Society—Nature in the sense of a finite but renewable resources of organic and inorganic matter capable of sustaining human life; Society in the sense of a global system of production, destruction, and waste propelled by capital accumulation (pp. 31-2).

Like Marx, Faulkner believes that capitalism's perverse incentives drive the environmental crisis, and the inability to discard these incentives without what Faulkner will describe as revolution is not only a threat of pollution or temperature change but an existential threat that has yet to be fully appreciated. This explains his larger argument that capitalism, especially in the age of mass communication, generates vicious misinformation that drives the average person to believe that there is no other option than capitalism. This misinformation precludes understanding the genuine risk of the current climate crisis. It can only be seen as what Faulkner calls a "spectacle" that will lead to extinction unless the system that produces it is overturned by revolution. As Faulkner writes:

Because the crisis only continues and intensifies, because the proclamations of bourgeois politics have no practical meaning, and because the revolutionary alternative has not yet emerged, the

crisis can take only the form of *spectacle* (pp. 42-3).

Having provided this framework, Faulkner then addresses other significant crises that he believes to be the direct result of the contradictions of capitalism. While we will not go in-depth here, he is most interested in the new forms of fascism that are arising, noting that they differ from the fascism that was known in the era between World War I and World War II. This, together with the rise of militarized police and international geopolitical conflicts, supports Faulkner's thesis that capitalism provides perverse incentives that, in the short run, have benefits but which create impending disasters in the long run. Towards the end of the essay, Faulkner provides his most contentious argument: trade unions in the western world are declining. They are permanently de-teethed and will no longer be a beneficial force for the proletariat. The era of labor power has been demolished by capitalist union busting, and therefore the working class has no choice but to seek salvation in a violent revolution.

Faulkner finishes the text with pessimism regarding the ability of the proletariat to successfully achieve emancipation without revolution:

Revolution is an existential imperative, but despite hundreds of millions engaged in militant street protests across the world, the masses have not yet constituted themselves as a revolutionary agent, that is, organised themselves in organs of participatory democracy in the context of class struggle from below (p. 106).

This concern for the necessity of revolution and the proletariat's inability to

overcome bourgeois power drives Faulkner to leave us with a Marxist cliffhanger—an unresolved crisis with underdeveloped responses. Faulkner ends the essay, by warning, “Those who half make a revolution merely dig their own graves” (p. 115). Faulkner seems to see this as both a warning and a call to arms.

The essay makes several very significant claims. Faulkner describes current conditions and class struggles, grounding his claims in the material reality as it appears now. His understanding of history and his ability to see into the needs of society at large allows him to make broader claims and back them up. However, these same claims are also the difficult part of this text. As the passage at the beginning of the review shows, Faulkner makes grand claims about issues such as extinction. While he has some science to back up his fears, these claims are underdeveloped and seem more dramatic than genuinely urgent. This tendency towards shock value makes some text inaccessible, especially for those who may not have read much Marxist literature.

Faulkner has a firm grasp of Marxism and contemporary issues and the ability to trace trajectories beginning as far back as the start of the industrial revolution. The uncertainty of the text and its momentary dramatics is an apparent response to a confused and unjust system that he feels requires more direct language. Faulkner may be wrong that we are on the verge of extinction, but not heeding his warning and ignoring the historical analysis may be a mistake. Whether it means extinction or just reified oppression, Faulkner sounds alarms, and we should listen.

The Rise and Fall of the Corbyn Left

DAN DAVISON

WRITING POST-MORTEMS OF Corbynism is something of a cottage industry. In 2022 alone, Oliver Eagleton, James Schneider, and Andrew Murray have all published books offering an “insider perspective” on the left-wing resurgence in and around the U.K. Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn from 2015 to 2020.

In *This is Only the Beginning*, Michael Chessum, a left-wing activist and journalist in the U.K., puts forward his own account of the “new British left” that emerged in the early 2010s and, from 2015, found much of its mainstream political expression in Corbynism before falling apart at the end of the decade. In brief, Chessum’s argument is that “[w]hat the left lacks...is neither a governmental program nor the people to support it, but a means of cohering a genuinely thriving, democratic movement” (p. 7). In Chessum’s view, “[t]he lack of a truly empowered grassroots in the new Labour Left was not an accident or an inevitable fact but the result of a series of conscious decisions on the part of its leadership and an unspoken battle of ideas and methods in which the politics of the social movements was, quietly, snuffed out” (p. 4).

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This is Only the Beginning:
The Making of a New Left, from
Anti-Austerity to the Fall of Corbyn

MICHAEL CHESSUM
New York: Bloomsbury, 2022

Chessum and I work together on the British left in such organizations as the Labour Campaign for Free Movement (LCFM). In 2015–18, I was involved in the

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), the student activist group that Chessum co-founded in 2010. Therefore, my perspective

will almost certainly differ from that of U.K.-based leftists who crossed swords with Chessum in the same time frame.

Chessum’s book enjoys several strengths over other post-mortems of Corbynism. Firstly, the prose is very readable. Although the book is published under the Bloomsbury Academic imprint and features numerous interview quotes, it is not an academic work. While I would have liked a more in-depth treatment of the subject matter, the part-memoir, part-political analysis format gives Chessum’s account a vibrancy and clarity that a social-scientific study would probably lack.

Secondly, the book avoids a “chess moves” telling of the events. That is, rather than focusing on the “court intrigue” of how different Labour and trade union higher-ups maneuvered against each other, Chessum connects the dynamics within the Labour leadership with those of the broader social movements and political currents from which the new British left emerged.

Thirdly, and relatedly, the book links the Corbyn moment with the ideological space opened by earlier challenges to neoliberal hegemony, especially in the wake of the 2007–08 financial crash, the imposition of austerity measures, and the pushback against those measures.

While undoubtedly colored by my own fond memories of NCAFC, the chapters I enjoyed most were those on the U.K. student movement, sparked by the announced trebling of university tuition fees to 9,000 GBP per year in 2010, and the broader anti-austerity protests of that period. Chessum narrates events like the student protesters' storming of the Conservative Party's campaign headquarters in Millbank Tower, London, on November 10, 2010, with a verve that only a closely involved participant could capture.

Chessum praises the creativity and fresh aesthetic that this young movement brought to organizing and protesting and how this period of intense struggle helped many people realize their agency. Nonetheless, he is frank about the movement's weaknesses and failures. Here Chessum underscores how the anti-austerity movement lacked a sense of its place within a longer history and political tradition – a problem he links with the declining strength of the organized left. Large sections of the movement drew on anarchist politics and “horizontalist” models of organizing to make a virtue of its lack of centralized leadership and strategy, but this created its own serious pitfalls.

As those familiar with Jo Freeman's 1970 classic “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” might surmise, without formal organization and democratically accountable authority, the movement developed informal, unacknowledged hierarchies. Accordingly, “[t]he vast majority of those who took part in the protests had no voice in organizing them or deciding what would

happen next” (p. 54). Likewise, the movement produced hardly any organizational or ideological legacy of its own. As Chessum observes, “[I]acking a properly hammered-out strategy and organizational center, the movement was limited to calling days of action and being blown along with events and had no time or mechanism by which to prepare its rank and file for the inevitable setbacks that came in the form of parliamentary votes and police repression” (p. 54).

Despite its defeat, the movement had positive repercussions for the left: “The hegemony of the neoliberal consensus was broken at a deep, sociological level, even if it persisted in the political mainstream for some years” (p. 104). In Chessum's view, this laid the groundwork for Corbynism. In 2015, Corbyn reluctantly stood for Labour leader following the Conservatives' victory in the 2015 general election and appealed to people frustrated with and seeking an alternative to the neoliberal status quo,

“As far as many were
concerned, you could either
defend Jeremy or betray him” —
Chessum

unexpectedly catapulting the long-serving backbencher to the top of the party.

The shattering of the neoliberal, austerity-supporting consensus posed “a mortal threat to the existing Labour Party establishment which resided at Westminster and at the party's headquarters at Southside” (p. 152). As such, Labour's central office, most Labour MPs, and most of the mass media were venomously hostile to Corbyn, with multiple attempts within the party to oust or undermine him. One can

therefore understand the felt need for an extra-parliamentary movement that could fight for a socialist program in the face of such unrelenting opposition.

Unfortunately, Momentum, the Labour left faction that emerged from Corbyn's 2015 leadership campaign, responded in a way that was disastrous for the movement in the long run. Anxious over accusations of far-left "infiltration" and of being a "party within a party," Momentum's leadership, grouped around veteran Labour leftist Jon Lansman, wanted to focus on simply supporting the Labour leadership and mobilizing Momentum members in elections within and beyond the party. It moved to replace Momentum's deliberative, delegate-based system of internal democracy with an online plebiscitary model that would let the national office retain central control. This culminated in the "Momentum coup" of January 10, 2017, when a majority on Momentum's ten-person Steering Committee abolished the organization's democratic structures and imposed a new constitution via an unscheduled email vote.

In 2016, there were over a hundred local Momentum groups, the vast majority of which had opposed the organization's restructuring. As Chessum observes, "[b]y the end of the decade, almost all of them had evaporated, cut off from any democratic representation", and, for the rest of the Corbyn era, Momentum had only token democracy (p. 170). In Chessum's view, the left failed to keep control of Labour after its 2019 general election defeat "in large part because it lacked the kind of cohesion and resilience that could only be built up at a grassroots level" (p. 170). While projects like the annual left-wing festival *The World Transformed* opened some space for a pluralistic discussion of ideas, these "could not substitute for a lack of a truly democratic organization and of a healthy democratic culture on the new Labour left" (p. 175).

The 2016 Brexit referendum and its aftermath were awkward for Labour because most of the party's members and supporters opposed Brexit, but many Labour-held areas voted Leave. The Labour leadership attempted to paper over this by adopting "constructive ambiguity" on Brexit and trying to "change the subject" to other policy matters. While this seemed to work for the 2017 general election, where Labour achieved its highest increase in vote share since 1945, trying to skirt such a major political issue was ultimately unsustainable. Instead of adopting a position early on and "putting forward a new class politics as the explicit and counterposed alternative to right-wing nationalism and border-building," Labour "shifted from policy to policy in the hope it might draw voters towards it" (p. 181).

Parts of the British left argue that, by pushing Labour towards supporting a second referendum, Chessum was responsible for Labour's crushing defeat in the 2019 general election. This betrayal narrative is both factually and politically suspect. It makes it sound as if Chessum, former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, and other individuals pushed Labour closer to an anti-Brexit stance through backroom maneuvering. This erases the political agency of rank-and-file Labour members acting to shift their party's position from the bottom up through political campaigning and democratic procedure. It also ignores that the Brexit policy that the Labour Conference 2019 adopted and that Labour carried into the 2019 general election was not that of *Another Europe is Possible* (AEIP), the left-Remain campaign group that Chessum founded, but rather the policy that the Labour leadership put to the conference delegates and framed as a loyalty test.

Instead of building a movement that could broadly support Corbyn's program

while leaving space for open, political criticism and debate, much of the Labour left responded to the Labour right's sustained attacks by adopting a toxic culture of Corbyn loyalism: "as far as many were concerned, you could either defend Jeremy or betray him" (p. 191).

In the end, for all its inspiring moments and for all the people it energized into political activity, Corbynism ran aground. During the Corbyn years, the Labour leadership refused to push for mandatory reselection of MPs, made little effort to connect the party with broader social movements, and made no serious efforts to mobilize support for high-profile strikes. As Chessum remarks, "despite its much more radical policy program, Corbynism displayed all the internal management practices of a conventional Labour Party leadership" (p. 172).

While *This is Only the Beginning* focuses on contexts and events in the U.K., the book raises vital issues for the international left. Firstly, there is the importance of internal democracy. Reading Chessum's book so soon after the comparative article on abortion rights movements that Ewa Pospieszńska and I wrote for the Summer 2022 issue of *New Politics* ("Beyond Roe: Strategic Lessons in the Fight for Abortion Rights"), I found the parallels between the 2010-11 anti-austerity protests in Britain and the 2020-21 Women's Strike protests in Poland very striking. Both were eruptive movements that inspired masses of people to take to the streets, unsettled the ideological status quo, and politically activated thousands of previously unengaged individuals, but fizzled out and failed to achieve their objectives, in large part because the rank-and-file participants had no democratic structures to decide the movement's direction and next steps and to prepare the

movement for the inevitable setbacks.

Secondly, and relatedly, there is the question of a socialist organization's purpose. While many leftists see such notions as inherently and problematically elitist, the important truth within the Leninist idea of the "vanguard" and the anarcho-syndicalist idea of the "militant minority" is that people develop politically at different rates, so those with a more worked-out perspective must learn how to hone other people's thinking and draw them into the fight. Accordingly, the task of socialists is to build an active, organized, and politically-developed layer of worker-activists that can intervene in the struggle, sharpen ideas, enlarge itself through political persuasion, and seize opportunities.

Since Chessum approvingly quotes the socialist-feminist writer Hilary Wainwright that we need a way of doing politics in which "we're neither vanguards nor the supporting spectators," I suspect he would not frame the issue in the same terms I do (p. 216). Nevertheless, I believe this substantiates (a) what Chessum critically notes about horizontalism and consensus decision-making and (b) the connection he draws between strategic effectiveness and democratic empowerment. Without democratic structures in which the rank-and-file membership can propose, discuss, and decide upon positions, a socialist organization will struggle to improve its own ideas over time, making it less able to stage effective political interventions when an opening presents itself.

In short, *This is Only the Beginning* is an enjoyable read for anyone interested in the recent history of the British left and raises crucial questions for socialist organizing far beyond the U.K. context. I therefore recommend it strongly.

Russia's Anti-capitalist Intelligentsia

PETER RANIS

AS A CULTURAL, LITERARY, AND ART historian, Ilya Budraitskis' book is a welcome assessment of the role of Russian dissident intellectuals from the Soviet days through the ascendancy of Vladimir Putin. A short preface by Tony Wood, a member of the editorial board of *New Left*

Review, introduces the book. Its value for the reader is that in this English translation it combines new and engaging explorations of the varieties of Russian dissent from Marxist to liberal critiques. It opens a historic space that deepens our understanding of the varieties of Russian opposition long before the imprisonment of Alexei Navalny. Budraitskis brings under one cover his stand-alone writings since 2014, which accounts for some overlap in these essays. The book is a wide-ranging series of chapters that deepen our historical lens of the Putin era that is built upon the still living manifestations of the Soviet past. He portrays the history of socialist dissent that rejected both existing Soviet socialism in practice as well as liberal Western capitalism. In this he has succeeded but this focus is set forth most clearly in one extended chapter with

Dissidents Among Dissidents:
Ideology, Politics and the Left
in Post-Soviet Russia

ILYA BUDRAITSKIS
New York: Verso, 2022), 204 pp.

the same name as the book itself, *Dissidents Among Dissidents*. (103ff) This is the heart of the book encompassing fully one-third of the text.

Budraitskis sees his book as a cultural analysis and critique of Russia's conservative ideological hegemony in the realm of the state

and economy. Yet, the book's orientation makes clear that an authentic critique of contemporary Russia can only come from an anti-capitalist stance. Budraitskis' thesis is encapsulated by..." the underground socialists of the 1960s and 1970s, [were] dissidents among dissidents who, while criticizing both their government and Western capitalism from the left, refused to repeat the binary oppositions of the Cold War." (2) He argues instead that the collapse of the Soviet state has been succeeded by post-ideological strife. These differences are based more on national identities than class conflicts between East and West. This explains how effortlessly Russian anti-Americanism shifted from socialist ideology to cultural nationalism. (31ff) Butraitskis sees the key antagonism as highlighted by the Russian reaction to the Ukrainian conflict in 2013-2014 and the subsequent legislation of repressive laws that deemed many Russian critics (including the author) as "foreign agents."

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(37, fn. 2)

This nationalist turn was already seen in 2012 by the establishment of the Russian Historico-Military Society (RVIO) founded by the Ministries of Defense and of Culture. (49) As Sergei Chernyakhovsky argued in 2014, that struggle is one of Russian mass culture of a high standard against a primitive Western mass culture. (52) This does not convince the author as a cultural and art historian. He cites an art exhibition "*Na Dne*" (The Lower Depths), organized by the Art Without Borders Foundation, which is close to the ruling United Russia party. The show consisted of a series of photographs taken at a number of state theaters that challenged traditional values in a variety of ways (such as nudity, acts of violence or profanation of Christian symbols). (53) This can only remind one of Hitler's 1937 "*Degenerate Art Exhibition*" confiscated from German museums. Rather, in this vein, Budraitskis argues that the whole Putin perspective is found in the belief that there is an "organic unity of nation and government." (58) He writes, "The cultural institution of art itself is transformed into a powerful means for the division of society into a 'moral majority' (organically connected with the authorities through shared values and traditions) and a 'minority' (which asserts its cultural superiority over the majority). This situation is entirely in the interests of the ruling elite." (60)

Budraitskis devotes one chapter to Ivan Ilyin who has made an imprint on Putin as a key anti-Bolshevik ideologue among the former liberal Cadets (Constitutional Democratic Party) and who was a fervent supporter of the Russian whites. His principal beliefs centered on Russian orthodoxy both in the state and religion. In his book, *On Resistance to Evil by Force*, Ilyin writes, "There is no need here to restrain oneself, for any reverent trepidation before the body

of the evildoer, who is not in awe of the face of God...is mere moral prejudice, spiritual faint-heartedness, feeble-mindedness, sentimental superstition...fettering a healthy and faithful spiritual impulse by some psychosis." (69) Thus, for Putin, the ideological vacuum of the collapse of existing socialism is filled by this combination of Ilyin's "warrior and the monk." (77)

In a subsequent chapter, with the infelicitous title of "The Eternal Hunt for the Red Man," meaning *Homo Sovieticus*, Budraitskis makes the case that Russia has not cleansed itself of Soviet repression and that historical continuity remains. Here he extensively quotes Russian writer Vladimir Sorokin on Russian nationalism reflecting the past Soviet spirit. (82) Budraitskis writes that "the proposed methods for exorcising this spirit-decommunization (exorcism in relation to state and society) and lustration (the expulsion of the spirit from inanimate objects) solve only part of the problem." (86) Budraitskis accentuates this in the next chapter entitled "Order in Disorder," which is taken from Georg Lukács' description of the Bolshevik Revolution as a "path from the 'great disorder' of capitalism, alienation and the splintered condition of human life, to the universal good." (97) He recognizes the slow unraveling to the point where it has become difficult to bury this common history and accept that it has become a destructive revolutionary religion.

Budraitskis clearly believes that his book is the first scholarly monograph devoted to dissident socialists as a separate body of thought. Much of the dissent summarized in this book's central chapter "Dissidents Among Dissidents" distills the compilation of samizdat writings of the de-Stalinization period under the Nikita Khrushchev "thaw", the crucial reaction to the invasion of Czechoslovakia during the Leonid Brezhnev period and the 1980s when "most of the intelligentsia shifted to

the right and harbored a deep distrust of any attempts at a renewal of “really existing socialism.” (107) During the thaw period the intelligentsia questioned whether the Soviet Union was a workers’ state, whose interests it defended, what the real structure of the Soviet society was and whether there was a socialist alternative to the power of the bureaucracy? (110-111) This dissent resulted in the various arrests and imprisonment of many in the Anti-Party Group, public poetry readings by the statue of Vladimir Mayakovsky, famed cultural poet during the Leninist period, and, finally, the Leningrad underground adherents.

After the Khrushchev thaw, during the Brezhnev period, critics focused on socialism from the left. A major spokesman during this time was Roy Medvedev who encapsulated the dissenters as “...scholarly community-philosophers, sociologists, historians, etc.—as well as from a section of the scientific and technical intelligentsia and some writers and other people engaged in cultural activities...” (137) Later the “right turn,” exemplified by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, focused on the undemocratic nature of the Soviet system and the bellwether of the turn to the West and the campaigns for human rights. On the left, there was Boris Kagarlitsky, a central promoter of Western Marxist writings of Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, Leszek Kolakowski and others.

Lastly, Budraitskis analyzes the post-Soviet left. This he encapsulates in two major arenas: The opposition to the second Chechen War and its implied chauvinism and anti-Chechen Muslim racism and the anti-Putin dissent that opposed the

new Russian hegemony of the state with capitalist big business embarking on mass deindustrialization and its impact on Russian working-class salaries and benefits. In Putin’s second period as president in 2012 and his reelection in 2018, the major opposition was expressed by Alexei Navalny, representing the liberal left that focused on electoral fraud and Putin’s ties to wealthy capitalists. Budraitskis sees Putin’s “managed democracy” and his response to this opposition: What makes Russia a democracy is its autonomy and its sovereignty in the global arena and its stance against the West.

Throughout Budraitskis’ book his major theme continues to reappear: Soviet and Russian dissidents qualify as an intelligentsia that acquired the characteristics of a class in itself throughout all the years of opposition and as Gramsci wrote a hundred years earlier—“organic intellectuals” aware of their role as confronting the dominant hegemony’s rule with the consent of its subordinated people.

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CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE



Alaa Abd El-Fattah, Egyptian-British political activist, a leader of the Arab Spring revolution, a prisoner of conscience for most of the last seven years, and author of **You Have Not Yet Been Defeated**, writings smuggled out of his prison cell. Alaa began a hunger strike in April, 2022, and a water strike in November, 2022 to coincide with COP27. An activist against three successive authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Alaa is one of the most high profile of the 60,000 political activists currently unjustly imprisoned in Egypt.

“We were, then we were defeated, and meaning was defeated with us. But we have not perished yet... the current chaos that is sweeping the world will sooner or later give birth to a new world...”

“All what’s asked of us is that we fight for what’s right. We don’t have to be winning while we fight for what’s right, we don’t have to be strong while we fight for what’s right, we don’t have to be prepared while we fight for what’s right, or to have a good plan, or be well organized. All that’s asked of us is that we don’t stop fighting for what’s right.”

— *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated*

As We Go to Press: The House select committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol referred criminal charges to the Justice Department against former president Donald Trump for inciting or assisting an insurrection. This insurrection was part of a broader plan to carry out a coup d’état that would have overturned the results of the election and kept Trump in power. The House investigation and the trials of the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys make clear that the far right and neo-Nazis are real dangers to democracy, but such judicial steps cannot by themselves stop this authoritarian movement. For that, we need a countervailing mass movement on the left.

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Katya Gritseva, 2022, digital art, Kharkiv

Picture about the importance of mutual assistance and cooperation during the Ukraine war.