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From the Editors

CONTEMPORARY CAPITALIST SOCIETY faces multiple crises: environmental catastrophe, proliferating wars, multiplying authoritarian governments, inequality, poverty, and failing health and education systems. Everywhere new democratic and progressive social movements continue to arise, from Ferguson, Missouri, to the Climate March in New York City, to the movement for democracy in Hong Kong. And yet, in most countries the democratic socialist left is small, weak, and divided. This is especially true of the United States, where the generation of 1968, now in their sixties, begins to fade from the scene while we have yet to see the emergence of strong new left organizations or a new layer of influential labor and social movement activists.

In this issue we offer a special section on “The Left We Need” that draws together three kinds of essays. From the United States we publish perspectives from three socialist organizations and from one group seeking to assist the building of a new American left. From Europe, we present statements from two mass left parties and one organization attempting to bring together left forces. And from Latin America, we present analyses of two elections where the left has been a key participant.

In the United States, as we wrote in our last issue, working class and socialist politics have reappeared as small blips on the radar screen. We are far from having either mass left political parties or even mass social movements. We face the challenge of reconstructing a left while at the same time building those movements. Three American groups—LeftRoots, the International Socialist Organization (ISO),

and Solidarity—publish here their perspectives for addressing that dual challenge. Two of these groups, ISO and Solidarity, are offshoots of the International Socialists, which advanced the “third camp” perspective that has also been part of the orientation of *New Politics*. LeftRoots is a new left organization that has brought together activists, especially young activists of color, to promote socialism and internationalism. From the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, the “think tank” of the German party Die Linke, we provide an explanation of its work and how it views prospects for building the American left. We also thank the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung’s New York office for advice and help in acquiring the article on Syriza, as well as the one on Die Linke.

New Politics has always been independent of any political group and we remain that way. Our hope in publishing these articles is to generate a conversation that can help the left move forward. We note that some groups we contacted were unfortunately unable to provide an article at this time. We look forward to hearing from them in the future and to responses to the statements published here, which we will make available on our web site.

Since the economic crisis of 2008, Greece has been at the center of the struggle between capital and labor, the conflict among European national governments, and the fight between left and right. There Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left, has emerged as a mass party of the left which appears to stand on the verge of being elected to government. In Germany, Die Linke (the Left Party) is poised to take power in the state of Thuringia. There is perhaps no

greater test of radical left parties than how they meet the challenge of using the political power they achieved through elections to weaken capital, to strengthen working people, and to raise the struggle for democratic socialism to a new level. We read here how these parties see themselves in relationship to these tasks. In the United Kingdom, while there is not a major radical left electoral party, we have seen the recent emergence of the Left Unity Project, which seeks to become a pole for forces to the left of the Labour Party.

Finally, we have three articles on South America. Since the 1980s, South America has often been seen as one of the most hopeful regions of the world in terms of left political developments, with many leftists at different times sympathizing with and expressing solidarity with movements, political parties, and governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Venezuela, in particular. In this issue, we look at the recent elections in Brazil and Chile to see how that process is playing out today.

In this issue of *New Politics* readers will find two other special sections. One deals with the ongoing and escalating crisis in Syria and Iraq. Assad maintains his ruthless grip on power in Syria, while the rise of the Islamic State group and air strikes by the United States pose new challenges. We offer interviews with two leading Syrian activists—Joseph Daher and Yassin Al Haj Saleh—who present differing assessments of the prospects for the uprising, while sharing a critical view of U.S. intervention—along with a statement from the Campaign for Peace and Democracy on ISIS and Kobanê.

The second special section deals with crime and the left. What does the left have to contribute to a discussion of crime? We offer three articles that grew out of a panel at the Left Forum conference this past spring. Lynn Chancer discusses the neglect by the left of crime's causes. Brenden Beck takes a fresh look at incarceration, and how the left ought to

respond to it. And Colleen Eren explains why we need radical, not conservative, arguments against capital punishment.

This issue also features a remembrance of our long-time board member and former co-editor Betty Reid Mandell, whose death we mourn and whose life we celebrate. We also present an interview with radical cartoonist Eli Valley, and reviews on Palestine, the environment, and other topics.

We at *New Politics* believe that the left we need will only emerge through discussion and debate, as well as through joint work in common causes. We are pleased to host several socialist parties and other left organizations from various traditions in this issue of our journal, and hope that the left will come to see our journal and our website (newpol.org) as a locus for conversations, debates, and respectful polemics about the labor and social movements, the left, and our common project of the struggle for socialism. We look forward to being part of that process with you.

AS WE WERE PUTTING TOGETHER this issue of *New Politics*, grand juries failed to indict police officers who killed African-American men in Ferguson and Staten Island, leading to mass protests. It was too late for us to organize a symposium on the subject, so we decided to write a brief statement that you will find immediately following, and as well to put the symbol of the movement against such injustices—the “Hands Up, Don’t Shot” profile—on our cover. The killing of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and every other young black or Latino man who dies at the hands of police makes clear why we need a strong left in America to respond to the deep systemic problems that lead repeatedly to such outrages. The building of that left is a major theme of this issue.

DAN LA BOTZ
STEPHEN R. SHALOM
JULIA WRIGLEY

Ferguson and Staten Island

Exemplars of America's Racialized Capitalism

THE KILLINGS OF MICHAEL BROWN and Eric Garner, by police who were not indicted by grand juries in Missouri and New York, represent only the latest in a string of such police or vigilante killings—sometimes clearly murders—of African-American or Latino men.

The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, an activist anti-racist organization, reports that police kill an African-American man every 28 hours, almost one for every day of the year. Police killings of people of color—often unarmed, some while being held in custody, some mentally ill—represent the predictable outcome of a system of racial profiling, police harassment, manhandling, unjustified arrests, trumped-up charges, lack of adequate counsel, disproportionate conviction, and excessive imprisonment.

The U.S. prison population has grown from 500,000 in 1980 to 2.3 million today. The United States has a larger proportion of its population in prison (743 per 100,000) than any other nation in the world. U.S. federal and state governments spend more than \$60 billion a year on incarceration. The growth of the prison population has been largely driven by the blatant racism of the system.

One of every three black men and one of every six Latino men in the United States will be imprisoned during their lifetime, compared to one of every 17 white men. African Americans make up just 13 percent of the U.S. population, but are 40 percent of the prison population; Latinos are 16 percent of the population, but 21 percent of the nation's prisoners. African Americans and Latinos make up more than half of the death row inmates, and though

about half of all U.S. murder victims have been black, almost 80 percent of those executed were convicted of killing whites.

America's so-called "justice system" is rigged against African Americans, Latinos, and poor people. The entire system—from the cop on the beat and the prosecutor, to the judge and the prison guard—fails to provide justice to virtually anyone caught up in it. The system that evolved over more than two centuries out of class interest, political opportunism, and racial prejudice is a horror and a scandal. We need not only to stop police and vigilante killings, but we must transform justice as it is now—one based



on retribution and emphasizing fear, violence, torture, and killing—into another approach entirely, based instead on rehabilitation and restorative justice.

Behind the criminal justice system, however, stands the capitalist system that continually engenders and accentuates social inequality, leaving many unemployed and often in poverty. As long as inequality and discrimination persist, the police will be an occupation force in our poor communities. Where there is a lack of education, health care, housing, employment, and living-wage jobs, there will be no justice in the criminal justice system.

We have seen Ferguson and New York City's cries of pain turn into enormous protests

against these specific police, prosecutors, and grand juries, but also into demands for an end to police killings across the nation, as well as for replacing the whole unjust criminal justice system. New organizations are appearing and new networks developing. These represent the beginnings of the mass social movements we will need to stop the police killings of people of color and transform our criminal justice system. They are the prototypes of what we need in order to junk the intertwined nightmares of capitalism and white supremacy in America.

DAN LA BOTZ
STEPHEN R. SHALOM
JULIA WRIGLEY

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THE LEFT WE NEED

Towards a Transformational Strategy

N'Tanya Lee, Maria Poblet, Josh Warren-White,
and Steve Williams on behalf of the LeftRoots
Coordinating Committee

WE ARE LIVING IN TIMES of great instability and crisis. Everywhere there are troubling signs of collapse: mass shootings, widespread unemployment, potentially irreversible ecological devastation, and the consolidation of wealth into fewer and fewer hands. The interpenetrating crises within the economic system, the ecological system, and the system of empire are pushing the 1% to implement massive austerity programs, militarization, and further disenfranchisement of oppressed communities. But not everything is gloom and doom. In the face of the ruling class's savage attacks, heroic struggles are breaking out around the world against the manifestations of imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy.

While these crises have called the legitimacy of ruling class hegemony into question, it is by no means guaranteed that popular forces will succeed in rescuing the world from the tyranny of the 1%. We are living in a period in which, as Antonio Gramsci once observed, the old order is dying while the new phase is still struggling to be born.

Even though the ruling class faces instability and internal strife, they are armed to the

teeth and are committed to holding onto power at any cost. What happens in the next period of history will determine the future of the planet and humankind.

From Resistance to Strategy Development

In response to the worsening conditions in our communities, and driven by a deep desire to change the systems that have made conditions so bad for our people, many social movement activists have taken up the work of organizing resistance. This work is critical. But it's not enough. We need our fights to add up to something beyond resistance.

So often activists in reform fights say, "I don't think that we'll ever achieve liberation, but I want to do what I can." The problem with this attitude is that it closes us off to seeing and seizing opportunities to take unimagined leaps forward. After all, who would have dreamed in the beginning of 2011 that by the end of the year people across the country would be occupying public space to denounce the tyranny of the 1%? Or that fast-food workers across the country would be walking off their jobs to demand a living wage? Or that undocumented youth would

be intentionally getting detained so they could organize resistance inside detention centers?

Holding onto the hope that we could win, that we could radically transform society, is difficult, but vital. That hope and audacity can change the way that we organize, fight, and build movements. The problem is that it is almost impossible to keep hope alive if we don't have a plan to win.

Strategy is one of the fundamental building blocks for all successful revolutionary movements. In revolutionary periods throughout history well-developed strategy has enabled organizers to cohere different sectors of society into a unified movement of movements that was able to defy the odds and transform society. Each of these strategies was as unique as the conditions from which it emerged, and the most successful evolved over time as those conditions changed.

There are no successful cookie-cutter strategies. What worked in one place, at one time, will not necessarily work in another. That said, while every strategy must grow out of its own particular time, place, and conditions, there are some common features of successful revolutionary strategies. Broadly speaking, they:

1. Articulate a vision of a transformed society;
2. Examine the characteristics and conditions of society's social and economic groupings;
3. Project a revolutionary historic bloc by assessing which social sectors have the most vested interest in transforming society, which might support that vision, and which have the power to carry out that transformation;
4. Evaluate the balance of power between organizations and the interests those organizations represent;
5. Assess the cultural, social, economic, and political hegemony;
6. Name collective goals to be achieved by advancing the larger strategy; and
7. Identify key fights in which to concentrate forces.

The Need for the Left

Historically, it has been leftists from different resistance struggles that have come together to forge a broader strategy for liberation. Although left forces in many parts of the world are taking bold steps to navigate the twists and turns of the current period with effective strategy, such a left does not exist in the United States today. There are important left organizations and formations in this country, but a coherent and audacious left in the United States will have to be reconstituted if this role is to be fulfilled.

The task of reconstituting a radical and relevant left in the United States faces many serious challenges. Despite these challenges, there are reasons to be hopeful. Along with mass organizations rooted amongst exploited and oppressed sectors, a successful revolutionary movement today will require one or many left formations that learn from the errors of twentieth-century left organizations. In order to be successful this next left will need to be:

1. Strongly rooted amongst key social sectors and geographical regions in order to accurately ground its analysis of the objective and subjective conditions;
2. Capable of strengthening existing social movements. It will need to be respectful of popular organizations and movements, relat-

"Protagonism" is a term that we first came across in the work of Marta Harnecker who noted its usage among social movement activists throughout Latin America. We have adopted the use of the term within LeftRoots even though there is no direct translation in English because, like no other term we've come across, "protagonism" names an approach that has the potential to strengthen social movements inside the United States. The concept builds from the literary term "protagonist" which refers to a character who takes ownership over her destiny and drives the narrative forward by taking action. In a similar vein, we understand protagonism to be the democratic engagement that builds our individual and collective capacities for transformative change and, in doing so, combats our fundamental alienation from the means of production, from the products of our labor, from each other, and from ourselves.

ing to them not merely as conveyor belts or competitors, but as partners that have unique and valuable contributions that are needed to advance the struggle and pave the way for the emergence of a free society;

3. Able to bring the distinct demands of various social movements together into a single political project in ways that those movements see themselves authentically represented. This requires the ability and desire to listen to the wisdom that exists amongst comrades, other activists, and unorganized people;

4. Capable of identifying key fronts of struggle where collective action can shift the balance of power and create new openings; and

5. Constantly searching for opportunities to expand popular protagonism* and democratic participation—both inside left organizations and in society in general.

This is a different kind of left than the self-proclaimed vanguard model that was so prevalent in the twentieth century. New types of left formations are beginning to prosper in countries like Greece, South Africa, Venezuela, and Bolivia. These political instruments are helping to establish new models and new practices that we have a lot to learn from, despite our different context in the United States.

Developing grounded strategy for liberation, and developing cadre capable of carrying out that strategy, are two central tasks of building a liberatory movement of movements in the United States today.

Leaning Forward

History is not flat. It ebbs and flows like the tide. Recent events in Egypt are a prime example of this. After decades of isolated workers' strikes and organizing against police brutality, a movement erupted that mobilized millions of people. In a matter of weeks, the people of Egypt deposed a U.S.-backed dictator who had been in power for decades. The tasks for revolutionaries change depending on the nature of the period in which they're working. During ebbs, we

engage in fights, build our forces, and prepare to advance. Most struggles during these periods take place within a political context that is not

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to our advantage. During flows, we advance. We surge forward. These periods of flow often correspond to structural crises and offer revolutionary opportunities to gain ground and shift the terrain for future struggle.

We believe we are in a period of flow in which crisis is likely to expand. Instability will become the norm. In response, the ruling class will likely exert their power through violence and intimidation more than through concessions and persuasion. This will lead to more action from the right-wing as well as from popular forces. Global instability will allow many nations outside of the first world to explore building alternatives outside of U.S. imperialism. This will be especially true in the Global South.

In these moments revolutionaries can begin to make possible what until recently seemed impossible. These moments hold untold challenges and opportunities. In order to advance, revolutionaries must be prepared. History suggests that progressive advance will require a strong and skilled left. In order to help meet that need we have begun building LeftRoots, a national formation of left social-movement organizers and activists who want to connect grassroots struggles to a strategy to win liberation for all people and the planet.

We do not yet have a fully developed strategy, but based on a cursory assessment of the current conditions and the imbalance of political forces in the United States, LeftRoots has

developed an outline of some of the tasks needed to strengthen the position of the left, weaken the position of the right, and win the trust and loyalty of important sectors of U.S. society:

Build popular organizations. Mass organizations are the basic building block of all revolutionary movements. These organizational forms allow people to rebuild community; to make connections between their own struggles, the struggles of their neighbors, and their connections to the system; and they allow people to take collective action. Too often,

A renewed left must support efforts to build alternative institutions that could help serve as building blocks of a post-capitalist society.

these organizations have been seen as conveyor belts feeding information and resources to more strategic parts of the movement. We believe that these organizations must be vital participants in any liberation movement. Popular organizations generate energy, innovation, and wisdom that must be respected and supported.

Wage counter-hegemonic fights. As the crisis continues to deepen, people will rise up and take action, calling for change. In different places these actions will have different demands. It is the responsibility of a renewed left to support and strengthen those fights, but leftists need to be mindful of not falling into the pitfalls of populism. The next left must seek to make what seems impossible now, possible in the future. This left must offer analysis, suggestions, and material support with the aim of deepening those fights where possible to undermine ruling class hegemony and to nurture a liberatory hegemony.

Build alternatives. In addition to participating in and supporting popular struggles, a re-

newed left must engage in and support efforts to build alternative institutions and practices that could help serve as some of the building blocks of a post-capitalist society. In all of these activities we must work democratically, showing respect, accountability, tolerance, and love for the people and the planet.

Engage in the battle of ideas. A renewed left must ground itself in a vision of a free society. We call this vision “twenty-first-century socialism” in an effort to signal the need to break from capitalism and to avoid repeating the errors of the twentieth-century socialist experiments. This vision will inform the development of a clear strategy of how to get there. The left must also engage in the battle of ideas. We must present our vision of a free society in ways that connect with people’s very real frustrations with capitalist society and their ambitions for a better future. Along with the frontline struggles and alternative institutions, this work will lay the basis for a new common sense.

Forge a revolutionary social bloc. Any successful effort to challenge and build alternatives to the capitalist, racist, and sexist world order will involve millions of people around the world. The strategic alliance between the working class and communities of color form the two wings of the bloc that can lead a successful challenge to the ruling class in the United States. Building democratic organizations rooted in working-class communities of color provides the greatest guarantee that the interests of these sectors is at the center of the perspectives, programs, and demands of the movement. Because their interests demand an end to the tyranny of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and imperialism, building organizations rooted in these sectors is of strategic importance. However, the left’s attention cannot focus on these sectors exclusively. The left must cultivate a vision, organizational fronts, and demands that forge a new identity, a new social bloc that sees its interests as being served best by an alternative to the existing tyranny of the 1%. Winning over and engaging other sectors of society—without betraying the interests of the most exploited and oppressed sectors both here in the United States

and around the world—is one of the central strategic tasks of a renewed left.

Connect with struggles around the globe.

Any liberatory movement based in the United States must recognize the imperial privilege that this country has and continues to profit from. Justice and liberation cannot be achieved at the expense of the global community. International solidarity and global equity must be a driving principle of any liberation movement. The next left will look to build connections to social movements around the world and to link our local struggles to the efforts of other activists struggling on different terrain towards our common objectives.

Renew our movement culture. To make such a revolutionary project possible, we need a renewed left culture based on respect for political and ideological pluralism. This is deeply connected to the dialectical process of breaking from the alienation so pervasive in the capitalist system. As we struggle to transform society, we must also struggle to transform ourselves. This will happen through conscious work at individual and collective levels, just as it will happen through collective struggles for human solidarity as we recover parts of ourselves that have been long atrophied in an environment of consumerism and individualism.

Build democratic participation and revolutionary protagonism.

The capitalist democracy promoted by the U.S. empire is a hollow perversion. Democratic protagonism rejects the idea that democracy is simply about one magical moment of decision-making. Through our exposure to systems, we all learn and develop particular skills and attitudes. Social relations under capitalism undermine and diminish our capacities. On the other hand, participatory democracy takes into account all of the steps leading up to the making of the decision, thereby promoting people to be protagonists, the makers of history. As Karl Marx noted, the key to revolutionary practice is not simply being in a different circumstance, but also in helping to make that changed situation. The next left must take up different practices and procedures to develop everyone's capacities so that we can all play leading roles in shaping

the decisions, workplaces, communities, and world in which we live.

Deepen our capacity to respond to ruptures.

The first years of this decade have witnessed an unprecedented level of ecological catastrophe, social upheaval, and popular mobilization. Much of this action is a direct response to social, economic, and political contradictions and the ruling class's self-serving attempts to manage those contradictions—since it is not in their interest to fully resolve the contradictions. As long as these social, economic, and ecological contradictions continue to grow, more upsurges and mobilizations are likely to occur. The task for a renewed and reinvigorated left will be to support and offer facilitative leadership in the midst those reactions. Individual leftists acting independently cannot accomplish this task. Nimble and coherent, collective action of leftists multiplies and amplifies the impact of social movements and of the left so that crisis can be transformed into opportunity—the opportunity to begin making real our vision of a more just, equal, sustainable, and protagonistic world.

While this outline marks a particular approach to building a liberatory movement, we recognize that it is just an outline. It is not a strategy. Within this outline, there are a lot of unanswered questions: what is the class structure of U.S. society? Which classes and social groups have the power and potential to lead and participate in a historic bloc for liberatory transformation? What regions have the most potential to advance the struggle? What might be the role of rural-urban alliances in a liberation movement? How do the re-emergence of the racist right, the expanding role of state-sponsored infiltration, and criminalization impact movement building efforts? Given the financial crises impacting state and local governments, what campaigns and targets give us the best possibility to advance? The list goes on.

Ultimately, more research and analysis will be necessary in order to ground our analysis in the real conditions and class structure of the U.S. empire, and we believe that by doing this work,

we will be able to make this outline a strategic tool with goals, objectives, and criteria that can help strengthen the struggle for a free society.

LeftRoots is not acting alone to achieve these objectives. We are both a project and an organization. As a project, LeftRoots aims to work with others to help nurture the re-emergence of an ideologically sharp, tactically adept, and strategically clear left that can help spark and be of service to massive social movements confronting and building alternatives to imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. As an organization, LeftRoots is a political home for a grouping of social-movement leftists that we consider to be key to the emergence of the next left in the United States.

Building Beyond the Social Movement Left

As we've discussed, any successful revolutionary movement will involve conscious and organized left forces. It is equally important that the left include the participation and leadership of those from the very social sectors that make up the leading forces in the liberation struggle: working-class people, people of color, women, queer, genderqueer, and young people.

Clearly, this is not what the self-identified left looks like right now. For the left to be successful will require a radical shift in who sees themselves as a part of it. Though we are far from this reimagined left, there are hundreds of leftists out there, many of us playing key roles in social movements rooted in the popular sectors, that will play a central role if the U.S. left is to expand its power and influence.

These leftists who are deeply engaged in social movements must play a leading role in renewing and reshaping the left in the United States. This will not be easy since social movement and base organizing work are relentless and can be all-consuming, but it's necessary. Leftists in social movements are uniquely positioned to bring together the lessons and experiences from various frontline struggles to

expand on old ideas and practices and innovate new ones.

Many do not see the revolutionary potential of the social-movement left. We are like the bees of the movement world. Many flight experts don't understand how bees actually fly. According to their calculations, their wings are too small to be able to carry their relatively large bodies. Undeterred by the naysayers, bees fly around and play a critical role in supporting the ecosystem. Bees cross-pollinate. They carry pollen in the same way that social-movement leftists so often cross through the silos that constrain our movement work, bringing information and lessons from one movement to another.

Bees are social creatures. They draw their strength from acting in cooperation with the other bees in their colony. One of the most dangerous impacts of the increased use of pesticides is that many of those chemicals are drugging bees to such an extent that they are not able to find their way back to their hives. Isolated and separated from their homes, bees are dying off in alarming numbers.

Due to many different reasons including the impacts of Cointelpro, the neoliberal assault, and the weakening of the global left, social-movement leftists in the United States have been trying to figure out answers on our own, hoping our efforts would add up to something more. But isolated and unable to collectivize our power and impact, we have come up against the limitations of nonprofits and the trade union movement.

LeftRoots is building a political home for social-movement leftists in the United States to come together to build a collective identity and to develop transformational strategy that can help unleash the power of the people. This, we hope, will contribute to sharpening the left edge of social movements and reinvigorating the left in general.

An ISO View of the Future of the Left

JENNIFER ROESCH AND SHARON SMITH

THE FATE OF THE SOCIALIST LEFT is tied to that of the working class movement—and the last four decades of one-sided class war have had dire consequences for both. The thread linking today's generation of young workers to U.S. labor's proud history of class struggle has been effectively broken and must be developed anew. This is a daunting but necessary task for rebuilding the working-class movement.

The 2007 global financial meltdown was caused by neoliberal policies, yet these remain firmly in place and will continue to remain so until they are pushed back through struggle from below. The role of radicals in this process is no less important today than it was a century ago.

Perhaps most important, seven years after the start of the Great Recession the class struggle remains largely subdued. The conditions facing the U.S. working class and the left are therefore quite different than at the parallel stage in the Great Depression of the 1930s, when a strike wave was sweeping the nation.

Building revolutionary movements in non-revolutionary periods always carries the twin dangers of sectarian isolation and/or political adaptation. The problem is that very often the left historically has posed the question as if the choice was between these two poles—*either* adapting to the existing state of mass consciousness *or* building a revolutionary sect. At present, many on the left have adapted to the so-called “politics of realism” (that is, the Democratic Party as “the lesser of two evils”), accompanied

by a knee-jerk hostility toward the organized revolutionary left. But after six years of Obama, the need for political independence from the Democratic Party is even clearer today than it was during Clinton's presidency.

The legacy of the unsuccessful attempts by virtually every tendency on the 1960s left to build revolutionary parties after 1968 weighs heavily on the present. Many on the left have concluded that such efforts at “party building” are necessarily sectarian and fruitless. Thus, the antagonism toward political parties of all types on the part of a whole layer of newly radicalizing people is not solely driven by hatred of the existing bourgeois and reformist parties but also is a result of these past failures.

Yet the experience of the struggles that have emerged in this period of social and economic crisis is that the critical *missing* element in each case was a socialist organization of sufficient size and social weight to influence the outcome. While the mistakes of the 1960s generation should not be repeated, revolutionary organization is exactly what is needed today.

It should be noted that the class struggle in Greece, with numerous general strikes and the sustained electoral success of Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) has been the notable exception to this pattern since the start of the global economic crisis.¹ While this advance is certainly partly due to the severe deprivation suffered by large swathes of the Greek population under the policies of austerity, there are undoubtedly lessons to be learned by the strategy adopted by the far left. As Antonis Davanellos, a co-founder of Syriza and a leading member

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of the International Workers Left (DEA) in Greece, described in 2008,

SYRIZA is a type of united front in the political and electoral field. The SYRIZA coalition includes a reformist party (Synaspismos), revolutionary organizations of the far Left (DEA and KOE—a “Maoist” organization), three more organizations coming from the fracture of the communist wing (AKOA, KEDA, EP), and a group that broke with a small social-democrat party (DIKKI). But, most importantly, SYRIZA has recruited thousands of independents—left-wingers not affiliated to any party.²

SINCE THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF 2007, U.S. socialists have been in a political period marked by a high level of volatility that is shaped most importantly by high levels of class inequality and social polarization.

The ruling class faces significant economic and political weaknesses and frictions—including the contradictions resulting from the resumption of the United States’ permanent war in the Middle East and deep-seated economic problems that have fueled talk about another recession on the horizon. Nonetheless, the ruling class continues to be on the offensive around a shared agenda of restoring profitability following the 2007-08 recession. The resulting deep and permanent cut in working-class living standards and organization continues to fuel bitterness and anger—and is the main driving factor of the political radicalization of the period.

Indeed, seven years after the financial crisis started, the outlook for workers is grimmer than when it began. Union membership stood at a 98-year low in 2013, with just 11.3 percent of workers—and only 6.7 percent of private sector workers—belonging to unions.

For most workers in the United States, it still feels like a recession, even though the economy has been in recovery for more than five years according to official measures—while corporate profits long ago recovered their lost ground and began setting new records. Opinion polls show that 71 percent of people say the

recession personally impacted them “a lot” or “just some,” and 64 percent say it is still having an impact on them. Some 40 percent of people say someone in their household lost a job in the last five years. Student loans, credit card debt, and the skyrocketing cost of health care—completely left out of the government statistics showing a low rate of inflation—are a burden on working-class families that never seems to relent.

Meanwhile, almost all of the increase in national income during the “recovery” has gone to those at the top. Only 22 percent of people say they are satisfied with the state of things in the United States, and more than 70 percent say that the country is headed in the wrong direction. Today, the percentage of people who call themselves part of the lower class stands at 40 percent, up from 25 percent at the start of the economic crisis—a profound indicator of fundamental radicalization in consciousness compared to the era before the recession.

But this class anger and radicalization hasn’t automatically translated into a sustained rise in struggle, much less victories for our side. The



ruling class has escalated its offensive since the Great Recession began, pushing the working class yet further on the defensive. This is particularly true in regard to union and workplace struggles. With some very important exceptions—including some teachers and groups of low-wage workers who have threatened or used the strike weapon—the level of struggle is especially low at the point of production, where the ruling class offensive has been most aggressive.

The Chicago Teachers Union strike of 2012—in which a strike of 26,000 teachers catapulted issues of class inequality, racism, and poverty to the center of politics—was one crucial example of how working-class struggle can begin to redefine the political landscape, but it was also short-lived and has not been not replicated so far.

A further factor impacting the level of sustained struggle is the weakness of the left—both the broad left that includes mass liberal, labor, and progressive organizations and movements, as well as the radical and revolutionary left. As a result, some of the basic organizational structures and political practices that even modest struggles require need to be revived and rebuilt.

At the same time, though, the social and economic crisis has given rise to struggles on a higher level than before 2008. In the United States, this has included the occupation of the Wisconsin state capitol at the beginning of 2011 and the Occupy Wall Street movement that spread across the country in a matter of weeks in the last few months of 2011—with the Chicago teachers' strike taking place the fall of 2012. Internationally, the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions that set off the Arab Spring represented the high points of a revolt against neoliberalism that found expression in a number of countries throughout the Middle East.

It is possible at this stage to draw some conclusions about the struggles that have broken out in the United States since the start of the Great Recession. They are significant due to their mass character, but they have also taken

place in fits and starts, involving mass outpourings of anger followed by retreat. This makes sense for a working class attempting to rebuild its own organizations after four decades of one-sided class war.

In general, the level of struggle has remained low compared to the scale of radicalization in working-class consciousness. But the social pressures of the present era will continue to find their way to the surface. There will be ideological fissures, sudden political eruptions, spontaneous and short-lived rebellions, and longer campaigns and movements that go through ups and downs.

IT IS TEMPTING TO VIEW recent struggles as shooting stars across the political landscape that rise and fall quickly with little lasting impact. For those of us on the left, it can be frustrating to see thousands of people brought into political activity only to seemingly disappear after a short spell of intense activity. This can lead to a tendency to dismiss the struggles that do emerge. But to do so is to miss the ways in which these struggles have begun to forge new networks of activists, have transformed the individuals involved, and have left a lasting ideological residue.

The emergence of a new consciousness and experience of struggle around racism—which reached its highest level thus far in Ferguson—illustrates this dynamic. With police murders of unarmed Black men a regular occurrence in this country, it was impossible to know where and when a rebellion like Ferguson would erupt; yet it was inevitable that it would. No one would have predicted that an unknown blue-collar suburb of St. Louis would be the site of the most sustained and dramatic protests against police misconduct since the LA Rebellion of 1992.

But knowing the specific political and social environment of Ferguson, Missouri, and the backdrop of the national epidemic of police violence, makes it easy to see in retrospect why the anger there was ready to boil over. Just weeks

before the shooting of Michael Brown, Eric Garner was murdered by the police in the streets of Staten Island, New York. The response in New York was restrained and timid compared to Ferguson. An institutionalized liberal civil rights leadership, which includes Al Sharpton, serves to *contain* as well as to channel anger against racism in New York City. But Ferguson lacks any such liberal institution, while its majority Black population experiences near complete disenfranchisement. These are the conditions that created the explosive eruption of struggle in Ferguson.

Ferguson shows the volatility of the political period. But it also illustrates other dynamics: the development of new political forces brought to life through the ups and downs of the movements, the way outbursts of struggle can quickly become a lightning rod for multiple issues, and the political questions and developments that outlast those struggles themselves.

Ferguson did not emerge out of thin air. We can point to a number of developments over the last several years that have politicized many thousands directly and millions indirectly around questions of racism. First, there was the struggle to stop the execution of Troy Davis in 2011. While this was not a mass movement, it did manage to break through into national consciousness. In New York City, the protests for Troy Davis joined together with the fledgling Occupy movement, helping to radicalize a layer of young activists. Then 2012 saw an increasing number of struggles of family members of victims of police violence fighting for justice for their loved ones. Most of these struggles have remained small and largely isolated, but nonetheless expressed a new determination to fight, while bringing activists and family members together who were able to make initial connections with one another across cities.

It is in this context that the movement around Trayvon Martin emerged and took on a national character. There were demonstrations of thousands in cities across the country, and activists in Florida launched civil disobedience

actions, while forming new organizations like the Dream Defenders. Thus, well before the rebellion in Ferguson, a general awakening around issues of racism has expressed itself in a higher level of struggle and greater radicalization, bringing new people into political activity and organization. And over the course of these different fights, there has been a rise in their scale, politics, and impact on mass consciousness. Most of these struggles were short-lived and difficult to translate into sustained and generalizable activity. But it is impossible to trace the history of the struggle against racism in the last three years, and the fact that we have seen new rounds of protests in each of them, and not conclude that something new is developing.

In an article for the *Nation* written during the Ferguson protests, Mychal Denzl Smith developed a similar analysis in an article headlined “Trayvon Martin’s Death Launched a New Generation of Activism.”³ Smith focused on the rise of new political formations to confront the issue of police violence and racism, and showed how they have a life that continues beyond the specific struggles. While the Dream Defenders receded from ongoing activity, they helped to launch the Black Youth Project and both were part of the mix of formations coming together and interacting with the wave of activity launched by Ferguson. He also described how many of today’s young Black organizers first radicalized around earlier issues of racial injustice such as the Jena 6 and Hurricane Katrina.

WHILE WE CAN’T PREDICT the exact trajectory of particular formations, or what new organizations might come together in the coming years, this development is common to the history of many movements. For example, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was founded in 1957, and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee in 1960—when existing organizations proved not up to the challenges thrown up by the rising civil rights movement. When we talk about the weakness of the left and its orga-

nizations being a factor holding back the level of struggle, we also understand that the struggles themselves will launch new organizations that can fill the vacuum.

The uprising in Ferguson has also highlighted the centrality of racism to other social struggles and movements—particularly to the question of class and class struggle. In both the initial protests and the Ferguson October mobilizations, workers involved in the Fight for 15 were regulars, with their own contingents organized to show solidarity with the struggle against racism.

Ferguson has been a galvanizing event for a significant minority of people, particularly African Americans but also more broadly. The tenacity and persistence of the struggle there has made it a focal point and helped give confidence to other struggles—most immediately and directly, the fight in Ohio for justice for John Crawford, who was killed in a Walmart while holding a toy gun in his hand. Just as importantly, if and when these concrete expressions of struggle recede, Ferguson will be a milestone in political consciousness for a significant minority of people—just as we can now see in hindsight that the movement around Trayvon Martin’s murder became. The ideological questions it has raised—about the relationship between racism and capitalism, the failure of the liberal Black political leadership, the reason high levels of racist violence continue under a Black president, the relationship between race and class, and many more—still remain to be answered.

All of these developments represent a new fertile ground for the rebuilding of a revolutionary left in the United States—not yet rooted in struggle at the point of production, but nevertheless with the potential to be built within emerging struggles of the oppressed and struggles against inequality inside the working class. But there is nothing easy or automatic about this process.

As labor scholar Kim Moody argued in early 2012:

While there is no automatic mechanism that creates such an upturn in worker self-activity, the worker-led resistance that has commenced on a fairly large scale in Europe, Latin America, and more recently in China suggests the possibility of a new upsurge. ... Whether America’s weakened labor movement can rise to the occasion, as it did in the early 1930s when it had hit low levels of organization comparable to those of today, is as much a matter of practice and politics as of economics.⁴

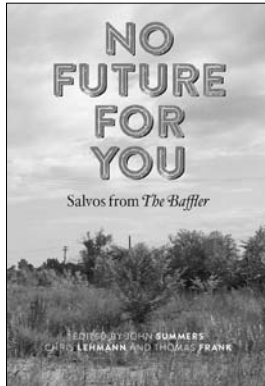
The next major struggle could appear seemingly out of nowhere, like the Wisconsin uprising or Occupy Wall Street, or it might involve the steady building of a strike, as did the Chicago Teachers Union strike of 2012. The question is not whether but when the struggle will resume. This will bring about the possibility for rebuilding the left on a larger scale, but only if the socialist left rises to the occasion.

The issue of organization urgently needs to be addressed. This requires training and developing a new generation of young people to the politics and practices of Marxism while constructing the rudiments of organization that fit the present situation. The failure of the party-building efforts of the 1960s and 1970s have little bearing on this process today, and those who participated in those failures should no longer use their own unsuccessful projects to dissuade the organizational efforts of today’s generation of revolutionaries.

NOTES

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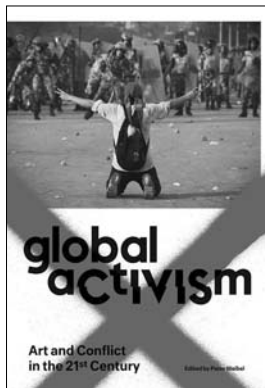
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Solidarity Statement Rebuilding the Left

GREG CHERN, SUSAN SCHMITT, AND DAVID FINKEL

REBUILDING A U.S. SOCIALIST LEFT requires, first of all, coming to grips with the full magnitude of the social crisis and decline in this society.

Income and wealth inequality, widening since the 1970s, have reached levels not seen since the Great Depression. Real wages remain stagnant or declining while massive debts are crushing “underwater” homeowners and college students. Job creation since the 2008 crisis has been disproportionately concentrated in low wage positions with unpredictable schedules that cause stress and anxiety, especially for workers attempting to care for their families. On top of the unstable employment situation, around 20 percent of us are providing unpaid care to an aging adult, and many of us are struggling with physical or mental health issues without adequate health insurance.

As we face daunting economic and personal challenges, we also find our support network shrinking and our communities fractured. Mass incarceration and deportation have destabilized many poor and working-class communities. The approximately 2.4 million people currently behind bars represents a massive disruption of families and communities, especially African-American communities which are dispropor-

tionately impacted by mass incarceration. Similarly, the more than two million deportations carried out under the Obama administration has devastated immigrant communities. Tens of thousands of children of those deported now face an uncertain future and the possibility of long-term separation from their parent(s). At the same time, the churn of neoliberal “development” in the form of privatization and gentrification deprives communities of public neighborhood schools and safe affordable housing.

Bourgeois politics have taken increasingly ugly forms, fuelled by a toxic ideological brew of greed, racism, bad religion—and mountains of unregulated political cash—manifested in state voter-suppression laws and the drives to close abortion clinics; the spread of “right to work” laws to northern states (Michigan and Indiana); and the rest of the poison spread by the Koch brothers and the *American Legislative Exchange Council*. The municipal bankruptcy of the city of Detroit with all its vicious consequences may be the largest so far, but certainly not the last.

All this takes place against the backdrop of a growing cascade of environmental disasters, local, national, and global. The logic and necessity of capital accumulation, and what’s considered “growth” under the regime of capitalist production, mean that this system cannot and will not halt the destruction of the environment. If this system itself isn’t challenged and overthrown in time, the environmental crisis (actually, multiple crises) will accelerate until it becomes an actual obstacle to “growth”—at which point the measures likely to be imposed on the population, the means of enforcing them,

GREG CHERN, SUSAN SCHMITT, and DAVID FINKEL are members of Solidarity. Solidarity publishes statements and sponsors the magazine *Against the Current*, all of which can be accessed on our website www.solidarity-us.org. A variety of our recent and historic publications can be found at www.solidarity-us.org/site/publications. Contact us at info@solidarity-us.org.

and the prospects for human civilization are not pleasant to contemplate.

The left has the analytical tools to understand the deep roots of the capitalist crisis, and on the whole uses them reasonably well. In principle, furthermore, the conditions of social decline should provide openings for the left and for the growth of socialist politics—indeed, in the wake of the 2008-09 financial meltdown, “socialism” famously received favorable polling results among young people. It’s fair to say that millions of people in the United States perceive that there’s a general crisis—more than just separate and discrete issues—and feel it sharply impacting their own lives, their families, and their futures.

The Occupy movement, mass protests and actions against the Keystone XL pipeline and fracking, the outpouring of hundreds of thousands for the September 21 Peoples Climate March, the October 10-13 weekend mobilization in St. Louis demanding justice for Michael Brown, and numerous local struggles large and small, show that people are not silent or passive in the face of the system’s serial atrocities. And the deep hostility in the U.S. population toward another military adventure, thankfully, limits the options of the current president and the next one to put “boots on the ground” back into Iraq or elsewhere.

This potential must be viewed, however, against the stark reality that the left itself has nothing like the capacity to beat back the continual assault on working people, on African Americans, on immigrant communities, on public education, and on essential social services. Our existing organizations, taken individually or even all combined, have nothing like the social or political weight or leadership capacity to act as an authentic “vanguard”—not to be confused with the posturing of ideological currents aspiring to play that role. And this problem, of course, is self-reinforcing as the vast layers of working-class and oppressed peoples are less likely to be attracted to a left that can’t win big

gains for their communities and themselves.

How can the left rebuild itself to become the force it needs to be? In Solidarity, we are engaged in two mutually supportive tasks: building movements and bringing them together, along with uniting the remnants of the left.

Solidarity from our inception has emphasized the importance of left unity in action wherever that’s feasible, and of socialist regroupment when agreement on basic principles make it possible, without demanding unanimity of opinion or artificially enforced “discipline” on every political question. We have attempted to act accordingly both in left unity initiatives and inside our own organization. But breaking down sectarian intra-left barriers, however important and necessary, is in no way sufficient for reconstructing a socialist left that matters.

That’s why we need to build social movements, taking them seriously and on their own terms. As mass movements progress, the leadership and consciousness that develop can form a firm foundation for a relevant left.

It may sound old-fashioned, but we believe that *the labor movement especially remains key*. If the general state of unions in the United States is shockingly weak by historic standards, that only reinforces a hard fact: *the weakness of working class politics and organization imposes a low ceiling on the possibilities of significant reforms, to say nothing of fundamental change*.

That does not mean now, nor has it ever meant at any time, that struggles like Black liberation, the women’s movement, indigenous people’s struggles, or any other democratic fight, should “wait for the working class” or hold back on their demands for fear of disrupting a mythical “class unity.” Quite the contrary, those struggles are inevitable, progressive, and democratic in their own right, and may also have a catalytic impact on sectors of the working class. And no one ever won their rights by waiting for someone else to do it for them.

There’s one example at least of a movement that’s made significant gains in a politically re-

actionary period: the LGBTQ struggle, particularly in the arena of equality within mainstream institutions, notably the right to marry; to some degree in housing and job discrimination; and in winning the evolution of a much less hostile culture toward queer people and issues, although much more remains to be fought for and won.

Nonetheless, reviving the nearly moribund labor movement is essential to any overall strategy for serious reform let alone socialist left reconstruction. Our views on “A renewed strategic perspective on socialist work in the labor movement” are outlined in a document posted at www.solidarity-us.org/site/renewed_strategic_labor_perspective.

Without going into details here, it’s important to say that the union movement must be rebuilt, but cannot be expected (nor would we want it) to look like the organized labor movement and apparatus of the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s. The enormous changes in the structure of the U.S. working class and of work itself, and the demands imposed by the social crisis itself, demand that a reconstructed labor movement be radically more democratic, inclusive, and armed with a far more inclusive social justice agenda than that of decades past. That agenda will need to cover the gamut from universal single-payer health care, to defending immigrant rights, to a conversion to renewable energy and environmentally sustainable economy—taking on the system that forces millions of workers to choose between having a job or a habitable planet.

The socialist left needs to project that kind of labor movement vision, and engage in the hard work of helping make it happen. A picture of what kind of movement is possible—and how those movements relate to left refoundation—can be seen in the Chicago Teachers Union strike two years ago, spearheaded by an energetic rank-and-file union leadership in which socialist activists play a meaningful role.

To achieve the strike’s limited victory, CTU built a powerful alliance with parents and especially with Black and Latino communities

far in advance of what most union leaderships have even contemplated. This entailed not just a positive program for quality education, but more—it demanded and achieved a level of sustained teacher membership involvement on a scale that most traditional union leaderships have considered to be impossible, unnecessary, inconvenient, and indeed threatening.

Even in the case of this magnificent struggle, “all proportions guarded” is a necessary caution. This was a defensive strike, which succeeded only partially in the struggle to stop the plague of school closings and “turnarounds” in the destructive drive of “Mayor One Percent” Rahm Emanuel and President Obama’s education czar Arne Duncan. CTU’s Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE) had raised the union above that ceiling imposed by the general weakness of working-class organization in the United States, only to encounter another ceiling: the undemocratic Chicago political system. Among other things, this meant that CTU found itself isolated from other public sector unions or the rest of the Chicago labor leadership that’s tied itself to the Emanuel machine. Nevertheless, the alliances built in Black and Latino communities and the local left catalyzed by the strike continued to gather momentum, sweeping CTU President Karen Lewis into position as a strong challenger to Rahm. A left was building around her campaign, which hoped to turn that ceiling into the floor for further political organization.

But as the situation unfolded, it presented new barriers and challenges resulting from fragmentation within the labor movement, social movements, and the left generally. How does a union, isolated and defensive in the wake of the mayor’s post-strike counter-offensive, prepare itself to expand offensively into political activity? How does it maintain the democracy, inclusivity, and social justice agenda CORE built within the union as it enters the undemocratic, exclusive arena of bourgeois politics? How does it avoid splitting the left side of the ticket, coordinat-

ing with other movements entering that same bottleneck at the ballot box? Movements we work with can often end up in competition with each other for resources, media attention, or capacity, especially in times like the current crisis where working class people are asked to “make more with less.” And any victories riding on the efforts of one organization or social movement working in isolation cannot last in the long run. This indicates the necessity of a left refoundation perspective that seeks to break down barriers—both material and ideological—between movements and socialist organizations. The continued future success of any one movement requires it.

Even as Karen Lewis has withdrawn from the race due to a serious illness, the questions brought up by her campaign and the continued pull into local political action by CTU’s post-strike setbacks commit us to this perspective. We can safely estimate that, in times of state-administered austerity, future successes from rank-and-file-led unions will come up against the same ceiling of political action against that state.

There are other examples that give us glimpses of possibilities still to be realized: the potential for alliances between Occupy forces and West Coast longshore workers, the unions that came out in support of the Peoples Climate March (a revival, perhaps, of the “Teamsters and Turtles Together” of Seattle in 1999?), the continual growth in turnout for the biennial conference and “Troublemakers Schools” held by *Labor Notes* for activist layers in labor and allied movements, and the two straight months of mobilization-turned-organization in Ferguson, Missouri, that have pulled in unions and gar-

nered recognition of a new generation of black activists in public attention.

Solidarity looks for ways to engage with comrades, whether from other socialist organizations or independents, in projects to help move such possibilities forward. For example, our Ecosocialism Working Group participates in the exciting, relatively new System Change Not Climate Change (SCNCC) initiative that’s building a left presence in the environmental movement.

We’re exploring how the left that’s engaged in independent political action can build on the successes of Kshama Sawant/Socialist Alternative campaign in Seattle, the Howie Hawkins campaign for New York governor and other Green Party campaigns around the country, and the powerful example in Jackson, Mississippi, that was so tragically cut short by the untimely death of Chokwe Lumumba. We’re certainly hopeful that a national progressive campaign might emerge in 2016 posing an alternative to the dreadful reactionary candidates sure to be the Republican and Democratic nominees, but it’s far too early to assess those prospects.

Our own efforts and those of others, to be sure, are barely a start of what will be required to take on the ruling class offensive in both its neoliberal and far-right forms. The crisis is way bigger than we are, and in one way or another it is leading toward some form of social explosion. Whether that may ultimately take the positive form of mass strikes and new movements, or any number of destructive and reactionary forms resulting from hopelessness, cannot be predicted, but may in some measure depend on what we do now.

Connecting the Dots

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—New York Office

ALBERT SCHARENBERG AND ETHAN EARLE

IN THE FIRST DAYS OF AUGUST 2014, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—New York Office brought together one hundred influential leftists from across the United States, Canada, and Europe for an “un-conference” on socialist strategies. The retreat was held at the Edith Macy Center, located in Westchester County about an hour north of New York City. Shortly before we arrived on Friday afternoon, a powerful storm swept across the Lower Hudson Valley and knocked out power lines throughout the region. Off the Harlem Line train and through the post-storm drizzle, guests trickled into a conference space that was nearly dark and eerily quiet, lacking the usual whirring of electricity and air conditioning. We took it as a sign: the calm before the storm of socialist strategizing to come.

Over three nights and four days, heads of European socialist parties met with U.S. social movement leaders; Canadian environmental activists exchanged ideas with some of the brightest minds in progressive journalism; labor leaders from across North America touched base with European political strategists. People with fifty years’ experience in the struggle handed down knowledge—and received inspiration from—the next generation of fighters for the left. The result? New friends, comrades, and allies. New collaborative initiatives already in

the pipeline. New strategies for twenty-first-century socialism? We can’t promise that, but we’re working on it, doing our part by helping to rebuild the left.¹

Based Out of Europe

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, or RLS, is an unusual organization. The German *Stiftung* translates roughly to “foundation,” but we don’t give grants and we’re certainly not a foundation in the traditional U.S. sense. Rather we’re something of a hybrid: one part civic education and policy institute, one part international operating foundation. Based out of Germany and funded with public money, we have regional offices in 17 countries and a mission to support international dialogue and the strengthening of the pluralist, socialist left. Our New York office has a special focus on the U.S. and Canadian left and also engages the United Nations, particularly in relation to the Global South.

Despite this international scope, our deepest body of experience is drawn from Europe. Our work is possible because of a German law enabling parties represented in the German federal parliament, the *Bundestag*, to direct long-term funding to the development of a foundation with political values close to their own. Our relationship is with Die Linke (The Left), a multi-tendency democratic socialist party founded in 2007 as a merger of the East German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the mostly West German Electoral Alternative Work and Social Justice (WASG).² Die Linke currently stands as Germany’s third-largest party, behind the center-left Social Democratic

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Party (SPD) and center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Its rise has been mirrored across Europe, where a plethora of multi-tendency parties have been winning anywhere from 5 percent to 15 percent in recent elections. Examples include more established parties (such as Sweden's Left Party, Spain's United Left, the Dutch Socialist Party, and the Danish Socialist People's Party); multiparty coalitions (Left Front in France, Left Bloc in Portugal); new formations (most recently the United Left in Slovenia, as well as Podemos in Spain); and at least one party that is challenging for power, the Coalition of the Radical Left in Greece, known by its acronym Syriza.

Syriza is the second-largest party in the Greek Parliament, winner of the recent European elections, and currently running first in all popular-opinion polls. Standing in clear opposition to what they call "austeritarian" rule by the neoliberal "center," Syriza has developed an unabashedly socialist policy platform that appeals to a broad base of Greeks who have shouldered the worst of the most recent crisis and austerity response at the European level.³ It is worth mentioning that this disaffection with the neoliberal center has also driven voters to the right, in the form of the neofascist criminal organization Golden Dawn in Greece, and also to a motley crew of radical-right formations that are making waves in parliaments throughout Europe. In the same vein as the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) aligns itself with the rise of a multi-tendency socialist left, we also see it as integral to our mission to oppose any resurgence of the radical right, with its dark history on the European continent.

RLS Goes NYC

In the United States as well as Canada, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—New York Office has found the political terrain to be quite different from Europe's. At the same time, we see plenty of opportunities to build bridges that can strengthen both sides. Here it is common

enough to lament the structural impediments to left electoral participation, the dual dysfunctions of Washington and Ottawa, and the relative disarray of the left. However, in recent times there have appeared a few modest openings for the possibility of a renewed leftist participation in politics. In Canada, Québec solidaire (QS) has established a small but vibrant and increasingly durable socialist pole (7.6 percent and three elected candidates in the 2014 Quebec elections). Leaders from QS exchanged ideas with European party leaders at our August socialist strategies retreat, and talks between the party, RLS, and Die Linke have continued since that time. In the United States, the last years have seen a wave of left victories in cities across the country, from radicals like Jackson, Mississippi, Mayor Chokwe Lumumba to genuine progressives like New York Mayor Bill de Blasio. In the last year our office has organized talks between new Seattle City Council member and avowed socialist Kshama Sawant and Die Linke Co-Chair Bernd Riexinger (Left Forum, 2014), has brought a contingent of radical Mexican trade unionists to meet with New York City Council members, and has hosted a series of public discussions with European socialists to strengthen dialogue and continue to expand the framework of reference for what is possible on this side of the Atlantic.

As with the electoral system, critics have been quick to deride the labor movement in North America. From the right, sustained attacks tracing back at least to postwar McCarthyism have taken a clear toll on the popularity of unions. In addition, structural economic changes as well as homemade mistakes have diminished union membership as well as labor's ability to defend its own narrative or take offensive positions in new struggles, often resulting in left lamentations. But while attacks remain ongoing and membership continues to fall, there has been a clear progressive shift in a number of union policies that RLS-NYC is working to support. As a case in point, an increasing

number of unions are recognizing the imminent need to address climate change. Through our Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) initiative, we bring together unions and labor federations from the United States, Canada, and around the globe to build a community of trade unionists dedicated to fighting for a just, democratic, and truly sustainable energy system. At the People's Climate March on September 21, 2014, TUED participants from around the globe joined hundreds of thousands of people and an unprecedented labor contingent to demand climate action and show which side of history they're on. And it hasn't been just the environment. Labor unions in the United States and Canada have also shown increasing willingness to adopt more progressive positions in such areas as immigration and new labor formations, particularly in the low-wage sector. This has led to new alliances with what we might broadly call the social movement left.

Ranging from Occupy Wall Street to the Ferguson protests; from Quebec's student movement to Idle No More and anti-pipeline campaigns along the U.S.-Canada border; from the Florida Dream Defenders to the National Domestic Workers to the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network: The admittedly diverse and sometimes even contradictory movement of movements around us is breathing important energy into the North American left. Some of these formations have been spontaneous while others are the result of years of meticulous organizing; some fight for concrete reforms while others enact transformative visions for what a radically different world could look like. Nearly all suffer from issues of sustainability, whether due to the difficulties of building institutions that last, or alternatively to the nonprofit complex that requires radical groups to walk tightropes for corporate grant money. But taken together we see a clear trend that is very much worth supporting.

As an example of our work in this broad area, over the past two years we have hosted a

series of transatlantic housing initiative workshops around the "Right to the City" framework. Member organizations from the United States' Right to the City Alliance have shared strategies with similarly minded groups working on

In the United States, the last years have seen a wave of left victories in cities across the country.

homelessness in Hungary, gentrification in Germany, evictions in Spain, and crisis-induced displacement in Athens, to name a few. Radical activists have met with leftist government officials and policy experts from across India, Brazil, and South Africa to discuss slum clearance, the impacts of mega-events and "celebration capitalism," and how best to cope with displacement when there is no other option. Participants have strengthened their own domestic as well as international relationships while at the same time contributing to a necessary and growing movement around how we conceive of the relationship between the city, the commons, big capital, and human well-being.

Speaking broadly, our work in North America is based on these and similar analyses of the concrete situation on the ground, including a balance of the left's strengths and weaknesses, and emerges from our assessment of where we must—and particularly where we actually *can*—make a difference. The socialist strategies "un-conference" exhibited our dedication to the construction of a big tent for any emerging socialist left—bringing together leaders from diverse backgrounds, ideologies and geographies to connect as people, even if there isn't a clear and immediate "deliverable."⁴ At the same time our work on housing and climate change, as well as our focus on labor, demonstrate that we aim to directly impact the

critical political issues of our time. Together it makes for a big tent, but this is our ambition: the sects and silos of the twentieth-century left have proven insufficient for the massive task of restructuring our political system and overcoming neoliberal capitalism. We must break down the walls that separate our different struggles so that we may better see our commonalities and find common ground for collaboration. Only then will we be able to move toward strategic intentionality at any sort of mass level. When we at the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—New York Office say that we are working toward rebuilding the left, and more broadly toward strategies for twenty-first-century socialism, this is what we

mean. Another left is possible!

NOTES

1. For a more detailed account, see our report (“Reporting Back and Moving Forward”) and the videos about the event, www.rosalux-nyc.org.
2. For more on the development of the Left Party leading up to the 2013 elections, see Cornelia Hildebrandt, *An Inside Look at “DIE LINKE”*, October 2012, www.rosalux-nyc.org/germanys-left-party-where-to-go-from-here.
3. For more on SYRIZA, see the article co-written by Yiannis Bournous and Giorgos Karatsioubanis for this issue of *New Politics*.
4. To get a better look at what we mean, check out our video from the Socialist Strategies retreat, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUQpBFKnjM.

CRUSADERS FOR JUSTICE



“Since the beginning of society, there has been no end of theories ‘proving’ that tyranny is inevitable and that freedom-in-democracy is impossible; there is no more convenient ideology for a ruling class and its intellectual flunkies. These are self-fulfilling predictions, since they remain true only as long as they are taken to be true. In the last analysis, the only way of proving them false is in the struggle itself. That struggle from below has never been stopped by the theories from above, and it has changed the world time and again. To choose any of the forms of Socialism-from-Above is to look back to the old world, to the ‘old crap.’ To choose the road of Socialism-from-Below is to affirm the beginning of a new world.”

—*The Two Souls of Socialism*

— **Hal Draper**, *Socialist scholar and activist, author of Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution, and founder of the Center for Socialist History*

Austerity, Collapse, and the Rise of the Radical Left in Greece

YIANNIS BOURNOUS AND GIORGOS KARATSIIOUBANIS

THIS ARTICLE AND ITS TITLE ARE BASED on a presentation made at the Mapping Socialist Strategies Conference, hosted by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung–New York Office at the Edith Macy Conference Center, New York, August 1–4, 2014.

2010–2014: The Establishment of Austeritarianism as the “New Normality” and Its Lethal Consequences

Although signs of financial and fiscal instability became more than evident in the last decade, the global crisis officially struck Greece in 2010 under a government of the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK), the forty-year-old social democratic party led by George Papandreu. Papandreu’s was the first eurozone government to invite the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to interfere in Greece’s internal European Monetary Union affairs through the formation of the troika (the IMF, the European Union, and the European Central Bank).

During the period of the implementation of the first “Memorandum of Understanding” with the troika (May 2010), the government quickly understood that it would be almost impossible to maintain social peace and consensus while applying the barbaric austerity provisions

of this framework. That’s why it decided to unleash an unprecedented smear and terror campaign against its own citizens. As always, major corporate media immediately became the pioneers of this new neoliberal crusade. Their main argument was that the application of the memorandum was the only solution to avoid an imminent Greek exit from the eurozone. They embellished this narrative by building up a sense of collective guilt: The crisis was presented as a “Greek particularity,” because a) Greeks had been living beyond their means; and b) public spending had grown excessive due to an “over-sized,” “non-efficient,” and corrupt public sector. The same arguments against the Greek people were used—mainly by German populist media (*Bild*, *Focus*), but also by the rest of the governments and media—against the so-called PIIGS states (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain), even as the other governments were trying to convince their own citizens that their countries would never face similar problems under their rule.

Very soon it became more than evident that the crisis was neither a “Greek particularity” nor a consequence of excessive public spending because of an over-sized public sector (an official re-registration of civil servants demonstrated that the Greek public sector was below the European average).

What really happened was that Greece was used as the first guinea pig for an unprecedented biopolitical experiment on the new, universal model of “EU advanced competitiveness” (that is, the violent redistribution of wealth and power from bottom to top, the transfer of the com-

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mons and public services to the private sphere, and the abolition of fundamental social rights and services).

This is the new status quo of “austeritarianism,” encompassing the extensive violation of national constitutional rule and parliamentary procedures, the decisive role of unelected and uncontrolled bodies, and widespread violation of popular and national sovereignty. The neoliberal strategy has shifted from consensus to authoritarian enforcement and blackmail.

As official figures demonstrate, the real aim of the austerity strategy has never been the improvement of public finances and the control of sovereign debts. Rather, the aim of the memorandum strategy is to introduce this new state of normality in the European Monetary Union and EU states: Greek wage earners and pensioners have lost 40 percent of their annual income in the four years of the memorandum regime. At the same time, the right to collective contracts has been abolished; direct and indirect taxes (VAT, property taxes, and so on) have increased dramatically, especially for the lower and the middle classes; while common goods, strategic public services, and public assets and natural resources are under an extensive program of scandalous privatization.

The results of this policy are:

a) The transformation of a financial crisis into a crisis of public finances: 230 billion euros have been offered in cash and guarantees to rescue and re-capitalize the Greek private banking sector since 2009.

b) The dramatic deterioration of the economy, since super-austerity forced the country deeply into recession for six consecutive years (a phenomenon seen previously only in states engaged in warfare), while the Greek public debt as a percentage of GDP rose from 129 percent in 2009 to 175 percent in 2013 (compared to about 90 percent for the EU as a whole), and, according to the annual report by the Levy Institute, it will reach 200 percent by the end of 2015 if the same policy is maintained.

The Rise of the Radical Left: Sociopolitical Alliances, Popular Resistance, and the Phenomenon of Syriza

After four years of austeritarian rule, the violent “proletarianization” of the lower and middle classes has created a social environment of humanitarian crisis in Greece. The general unemployment rate is approaching 30 percent, while the youth unemployment rate is approximately 60 percent, with 1.6 million total Greeks currently without employment. At the same time, Greece is recording an explosion of homelessness and suicide, while a third of the general population has lost access to social security and free health care, including children’s access to free vaccinations, and so on.

This humanitarian crisis has led to an unprecedented rupture in the formerly hegemonic sociopolitical bloc and the dominant relations of sociopolitical representation, and consequently to the unprecedented increase in the social, political, and electoral appeal of Syriza.

In the two historical electoral battles in May and June 2012, the radical left coalition of Syriza was chosen by the vast majority of anti-memorandum and anti-austerity voters, in spite of many other heterogeneous political forces that expressed anti-memorandum, anti-austerity, or even anti-capitalist positions, including the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), the newcomer right-wing populist party of the Independent Greeks, the neofascist gang of the Golden Dawn, and even some electorally insignificant extreme-left parties and coalitions.

In the first electoral battle, on May 17, 2012, Syriza obtained 16.8 percent of the vote and became the second largest political force in the national Parliament. During the following weeks Syriza rejected any negotiation involving joining a government coalition with the right-wing party of New Democracy or the social democrats of PASOK, whose tactic was to entrap our coalition into an austeritar-

ian government of so-called “national unity” or “national salvation.” Syriza’s stance led to the collapse of negotiations and to new elections on June 7, 2012, with Syriza increasing its share of the vote to 26.7 percent with 71 members of parliament elected, thus becoming the first party in all traditionally blue-collar and lower-middle-class districts and amongst the youth, but unfortunately failing to achieve a plurality by a very small margin of 2 percent. It was the first time since 1958 that a party of the alternative left (that is, to the left of social democracy) became the major opposition force in the Greek Parliament.

But if June 7, 2012, was a day of a great political and electoral rupture in the contemporary political history of Greece, May 25, 2014, was a day to remember for all generations of Greek left militants: for the survivors of the anti-Nazi resistance (1940-45) and the civil war (1946-49), for our parents’ generation of the student movement against the military dictatorship (1967-74), but also for our generation, which has built its own ideological and political identity through the anti-global, civil-disobedience movement and the social forum process. It was a day to remember because the left actually won. Syriza won in the European elections. In so doing, it became the leading political power in Greece and forced even some of the corporate media’s most fanatically neoliberal, hardliner talking heads to start speaking of “the next government in waiting.”

The electoral victory of Syriza in the European elections confirmed a massive overthrow of the political balance of forces in Greek society through a process of social and political battles that began with the submission of the country to the supervision of the troika; but it was not per se a natural or deterministic development.

The consequences of the simmering capitalist crisis of accumulation have produced completely different political outcomes across Europe, with only a single common point, which is the explosion of popular discontent. The cru-



cial issue is that while in France or Great Britain popular discontent has been expressed and represented by political formations of the populist extreme right, in Greece, but also in Spain and Ireland, alternative left and progressive forces have won crucial battles for the representation of the popular classes.

Let us try to describe the main reasons and distinguishing characteristics that allowed Syriza to become the new counter-hegemonic political project in Greece and the first post-communist, radical-left party to compete for power in a European Union member state.

Syriza is a child of the social movements. It was initially created as a coalition in 2004, following five years of common struggles and dialogue of various radical-left forces within the framework of the emerging local, national, and international resistance movements. Our coalition was created as a political experiment of unity through diversity; as a common attempt

to overcome the historical, ideological, cultural, and political fragmentation of the postwar era; and also to express and integrate the demands and aspirations of the various social resistances in the arena of central political and electoral battles.

During the last decade, Syriza has been ever present in social struggles, from traditional workers' and students' movements to questions of identities, without faltering when facing possible political costs. Recent highlights and turning points have been the organization of the Fourth European Social Forum in Athens (May 2006), which brought 100,000 citizens into the streets of Athens; the victorious educational movement against the creation of private universities (2006-07); the nationwide youth revolt in December 2008, following the murder of teenager Alexandros Grigoropoulos by a police officer; and even a series of local environmental movements, since Syriza, and to be more accurate its main predecessor party "Synaspismos," was the first force of the Greek left that incorporated the "red-green" agenda in

its identity as early as the 1990s.

During the last years of the crisis, Syriza has also upgraded its social-mobilizing capacity and outreach. In May 2011, after an already long series of general strikes by trade unions, we experienced the emergence of the Greek version of the Occupy movement, the Movement of the Squares, which started and was mainly centralized in Syntagma (Constitution) Square in Athens.

The development of the Movement of the Squares in Greece was a turning point that triggered rapid political developments. The outburst of social protests forced George Papandreou to resign and to deliver power to a government coalition of social democrats, conservatives, and right-wing populists, led by an unelected technocrat, the former general manager of the Bank of Greece, Lucas Papademos. The unprecedented endurance of the movement against police repression maximized social pressure against the memorandum strategy and politicized thousands of lower- and middle-class citizens, who realized that there cannot be per-



WILL THE GREEK PEOPLE BE ABLE TO SEND AUSTERITARIANISM TO HADES?

sonal solutions to collective problems.

Syriza—not accidentally, but because of our prior collective experiences from the new social movements—demonstrated efficient political reflexes. At a time when the leadership of the Greek Communist Party denounced the Movement of the Squares as a “pseudo-movement manipulated by the system and oriented to petit-bourgeois demands,” Syriza joined all committees and workshops in the squares, helped in organizing the resistance against police repression, and tried to politicize the debates in the popular assemblies, not in a vanguardist way, and not with Syriza flags and banners dominating the squares, but with an open mentality of listening and becoming “contaminated” with people’s aspirations.

From Social Explosion to Political Change: The Battle for Hegemony and Power

In April 2012, when the opinion polls gave Syriza less than 8 percent, we made the decisive step: we called for the unity of all Greek left and progressive anti-memorandum forces and in so doing became the first left force to put the question of gaining power on the table. Already at that time, Syriza’s position of seeking the establishment of a new coalition of power and an original narrative for a government of the left, although still not possible according to the polls, had the characteristics of a necessary and realistic utopia.

A *radical act*, as Slavoj Žižek would say, is an act that poses by itself the conditions for its completion. It was this stance that turned the social explosion of 2011 into a will for radical political overthrow that today advances to completion.

In July 2013 Syriza organized its first Congress and transformed itself from a coalition of 18 parties and organizations into a unified, multi-tendency, radical and democratic left party.

Nevertheless, the question of building a

new historical bloc of sociopolitical forces that will confront, as the next government of Greece, rival powers at a national and international level, remains of utmost and central importance for us, as we today escalate our united initiatives against the never-ending austerity and privatization programs, in the direction of forcing our current disastrous government coalition to leave office and allow the people’s verdict to be expressed in favor of the first popular unity government in the political history of Greece.

Because, as Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras wrote in an article in August, we very well comprehend that

The process of the conquest of state power will be a long process of struggle and conflict, the outcome of which will depend on the ability of Syriza to achieve the broadest possible consensus and create the broadest possible social and political alliances around specific dilemmas that will arise.

Our first priorities in this process, to which we have already publicly committed ourselves, are the cancellation of the memorandum and the overthrow of austerity, in favor of a program for the restoration of fundamental social services, the re-establishment of fundamental social and workers’ rights, public intervention in the banking sector, and the productive reconstruction of our country. A successful confrontation of the humanitarian crisis will restore faith and hope among popular social strata even outside of Greece, and thus will reinforce social support and international solidarity for our fight for a European agreement on the abolition of a large portion of public debt and the full renegotiation of loan agreements between Greece and its lenders.

We are aware that the dominant political and economic system will not leave Syriza undisturbed in this enormous struggle of subversion. For some time, many different centers of power have been plotting to prevent this historic political development. They orchestrate the bullying of lower- and middle-class

citizens through the mainstream media. They pose false dilemmas and even plan, in advance, a slippery terrain that restricts the space for maneuvers for a future government of the left; and of course they offer everything they've got to the reconstruction of the political space of the pro-austerity center and center-left, in order to function as a buffer and a bulwark to the rise of Syriza and the change of the sociopolitical balance of forces.

Their objective is either to re-create a large political "central" pole that will popularize the memorandum policy behind a progressive facade, or the establishment of a faction that will play the role of a bilateral interlocutor in order to push Syriza to reduce its programmatic commitments and integrate itself into the dominant political power bloc.

This strategy of our opponents for the revitalization of the center and the center-left space cannot leave us indifferent in the name of a supposed ideological purity or a distorted class prioritization of interests, because a necessary condition for the left to serve the interests of those "from below" is to prevent the plan of the opposing power bloc from degrading or forcing choices of incorporation.

The only way to prevent this reconstruction process is an open policy of alliances—the pursuit of the widest possible convergence of the subordinated classes and political forces that recognize the impasse of the applied austerity policy, a convergence based on a program for the overthrow of the neoliberal memorandum policy and aimed at leading Syriza and its allies to the winning of an absolute majority in the

next national elections.

Of course, the assumption of governmental power even with an absolute majority does not automatically mean the conquest of state power. This process will be a long one of struggle and conflict, the outcome of which will depend on the ability of Syriza to extract the broadest possible consensus and create the broadest social and political groupings around specific dilemmas that will arise from the same programmatic commitments, but also from the outcome of previous conflicts.

By the term "overthrow of austerity" we do not simply mean an increase in salaries through governmental mandates, but ultimately the increase of the bargaining power of the working classes and eventually the conquest of power by them, since power is nothing more than the ability of a class to meet its specific interests.

This is the main guideline of the policy of Syriza, which at the same time refuses to pursue the fantasy of social harmony of social-democratic inspiration, which has only led to defeats.

One could argue, of course, that this path is full of dangers. Allow us to end by recalling one of the brightest minds of the Greek and the European left, our very own Nikos Poulantzas, who wrote that the only way to avoid the possible "dangers of democratic socialism" is "to stay put and be subordinated to the supervision of advanced liberal democracy."

Sorry, but we'll pass, because we're not a religious sect isolated on a ranch in the desert; we're militants of the left of the twenty-first century, dedicated to our historical mission of social change.

The Left Party in Germany

CORNELIA HILDEBRANDT

THE LEFT PARTY IS FIGHTING for “a society in which no child has to grow up poor, in which all men and women can live a self-determined life in peace, dignity, and social security and can democratically shape social relations.” In order to achieve this, it demands “a different economic and social system: democratic socialism.”¹ That is how the Left Party formulated its programmatic approach in its new Erfurt Party Programme of 2011.

This involves the linkage of three basic ideas: First, the idea of individual freedom and the ability of all to develop their personalities through socially equal participation, under conditions of a self-determined life and of solidarity; second, the idea of subordination of the economy to development in solidarity, and to the preservation of nature; and third, the idea of the realization of both of these goals by means of an emancipatory and transformational process, “in which the dominance of capital will be overcome by democratic, social, and ecological forces and the society of democratic socialism will emerge.”² In this paper, I would like to show which potentials the Left Party has for such a challenging perspective.

The Left Party's Position in the German Party System

The political landscape in Germany has changed greatly since the federal parliamentary

elections of 2005. First, with the Left Party, a nationwide party considerably to the left of the Social Democrats (SPD) has established itself. Second, other new political actors have emerged as well. First, the Pirate Party achieved success at the state level in 2011 and 2012, although it may now be headed for oblivion. Then, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) only barely missed achieving the 5 percent threshold for representation in the Bundestag in the 2013 election, but then easily won seats in the June 2014 election for the European Parliament and, later that year, in the state parliaments of Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia. At the same time, the Liberal Party, the FDP, appears to be making its final bow on the political stage, although that is not yet certain. The party system in the Federal Republic is thus in motion as it has not been since the early 1950s, a fact that points to fundamental changes in the societal lines of conflict in the country. The FDP, a party with an economic (neo)liberal program that is both pro-European and culturally liberal, has collapsed into virtual irrelevance both at the federal level and, since the 2013 election, at the state level wherever elections have been held. At the same time, we are witnessing the almost unchecked rise of a national-conservative, Euro-sceptical and value-conservative party with ultra-right-wing tendencies: the AfD. Since 2013 it has gained ground in all elections, obtaining double-digit results in the last three state-level parliamentary elections. The entry of the AfD into the parliamentary system is a challenge not only to the “bourgeois camp”—the term that has traditionally encompassed Angela Merkel’s

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conservative CDU/CSU plus the FDP—but also to the entire political system. In the federal election of 2013, this party was able to attract two million voters from all other parties, including more than 340,000 Left Party voters. This phenomenon was repeated in the state-level parliamentary elections in 2014: between 15,000 and 20,000 voters who had previously supported the Left Party switched to the AfD. That means that the Left Party has lost a measure of its effectiveness as a protest party to a right-wing populist competitor, which even boasts that the Left Party holds similarly Euro-sceptical positions to its own. One might say that a new party first established itself to the left of the SPD, and now the same process is occurring to the right of the conservatives.

Voters who switched from the Left Party to the AfD mostly consist of two groups: those who want to “protest” at the polls by voting for the new “protest party,” and ideological conservatives who feel that their views are best articulated by the populist right. Their rejection of modern life-styles oftentimes includes hostility towards immigrants and asylum seekers. Parts of the middle class who are threatened by downward mobility actually reject redistributive policies demanded by the Left Party. In the European elections of May 2014, opposition to the European Union—and the demand to get rid of the euro and reintroduce the D-Mark—was also popular among these conservative voters.

Particularly in the federal parliamentary elections of 2013, and even more so in the European elections of 2014, it has been shown that the European dimension has long since made its mark on national political debates and the existing political system. The reasons for this are to be found in the crisis of European integration, the social crises in Europe, and the solutions being prescribed for these crises, which are meeting with widespread dissatisfaction. The majority of people in Germany would like to see the country—and hence themselves—do well once again, which is one of the reasons

why, with the crisis in the southern countries of Europe raging, they voted for sitting Chancellor Angela Merkel. However, this view is not uncontroversial. The AfD has also formulated a fundamental critique of the European course of the CDU, also raised by parts of the population. The Left Party, by contrast, has attempted to link its critique of the EU's institutions and its crisis management with social and democratic perspectives, and with issues related to asylum-seekers and refugees—for a peaceful, social, and democratic Europe for all. However, in European elections, it has evidently been less successful than in federal parliamentary elections in mobilizing its voters: In 2014 the Left Party won 7.5 percent, and could thus do no more than confirm its results of the previous European elections in 2009, which had yielded 7.4 percent. In view of the threat of low voter turnout, the Left Party primarily campaigned as a national party, with the same demands it had raised during the federal election the previous year. It thus eschewed any conceptual linkage between the national and European dimensions of the crisis, which in Germany, the purported land of the crisis profiteers—and for at least part of society, this is true—needs to be carried out in equal measure with respect both to German EU policy and domestic policy. This debate was at least to some extent abandoned to the AfD in the European election campaign.

However, in the federal parliamentary election of 2013, the Left Party won 8.6 percent, less than its very good results achieved in 2009.³ Nonetheless the Party managed to finish just ahead of the Greens (8.4 percent) and thus took third place, becoming the strongest opposition party with 64 members of Parliament, compared with 76 in 2009. Its seven members of the European Parliament sit with the GUE/NGL Parliamentary Group, and the Left Party is represented in ten of the sixteen state parliaments in Germany, with a total of 160 MPs. In the recent election in the state of Thuringia, it won its best result to date with 28.6 percent,

which, thanks to the weakness of the SPD in that state (12.4 percent), has opened the way to a “red-red-green” (Left Party-SPD-Greens) state government under the leadership of a Left Party premier. However, such a government in Thuringia would have only a very narrow majority of a single seat; whether this will work out remains to be seen during the coming days, weeks, and months. In Brandenburg, the Party’s situation is different; there, in spite of massive losses (over 100,000 Left Party voters stayed home), they will now be able to once again form a coalition under SPD leadership.

I might add that over 400 Left Party members hold full-time positions as elected representatives at the local level in districts, municipalities, and communities, and another 6,500 have been elected as representatives of the Left Party or of local left-wing lists to unpaid positions in the local councils of smaller communities.

According to its own claim, the Left Party is the party of social justice, and the representative of the interests of all socially disadvantaged people in society, and of all those who seek a different, more socio-ecological and democratic societal model—including those who want to overcome capitalism. It receives an above-average share of the votes of workers (13 percent in the federal election of 2013) and the unemployed (23 percent), and an average share of white-collar employees (8 percent) and pen-

sioners (8 percent). It has less support among the self-employed, only 6 percent of whom voted for the Left Party. It still attracts a higher proportion of male than of female voters, and it is still true, 25 years after the overthrow of the East German regime, that it is possible to describe two different Left Party electorates: one eastern, one western. Although a bare majority of Left Party voters now lives in the western states, its average percentage share there in the 2013 federal election was only 6.5 percent, as opposed to 8.6 percent in 2009. With the exception of Bremen, Hamburg, and the Saarland, the three smallest western states, the Left Party came in behind the Greens and even the FDP, and just ahead of the Pirate Party. In the East German states the situation is very different. There the Left Party came in second overall, averaging 21.6 percent, down from 26.4 percent in 2009, and still retains its character as a “mass party” (*Volkspartei*), which in German political parlance means a party capable of attracting and holding voters from a broad range of societal segments. The results of the 2014 European elections were similar: in eastern Germany 19.6 percent of participating voters cast their ballots for the Left Party, while in western Germany it was only 5.3 percent. However, the difference is that the Left Party was surpassed by the newly established AfD in all the western territorial (as opposed to city-) states.

The greatest difference between Left Party

East-West distribution of the electorates in Bundestag elections

Year	Voters, total	Voters, West	Percent Share of Total, West	Voters, East	Percent Share of Total, East
1990	1,129,578	125,947	11	1,003,631	89
1994	2,066,176	368,952	18	1,697,224	82
1998	2,515,454	460,681	18	2,054,773	82
2002	1,916,702	442,136	23	1,474,566	77
2005	4,118,194	1,874,397	46	2,243,797	54
2009	5,155,933	2,974,801	58	2,181,132	42
2013	3,755,699	2,002,914	53	1,752,785	47

voters in the eastern and western German states was their age structure, which points to a serious problem for the Left Party. In the eastern states, the Left Party in 2013 won 27.5 percent of voters in the sixty-to-seventy age cohort, and 25 percent of voters over seventy. That means that almost 50 percent of eastern German voters are aged sixty or above, while only one in four is between forty-five and fifty-nine, and only 23 percent are less than forty-five years old. By contrast, in the West the Left Party achieved its best results in the twenty-five-to-thirty-four age cohort, with 6.8 percent, while it had its lowest level of support in the over-seventy group—only 2.8 percent. Clearly the Left Party is threatened by demographic shrinking processes in the eastern states, as the generations of the post-upheaval (1990) era, who saw “their” party as the representative of social justice and especially of East German interests, diminish. Many of these voters were also members of the state-supporting strata in East Germany which, with German unification, were threatened by both real and symbolic devaluation.

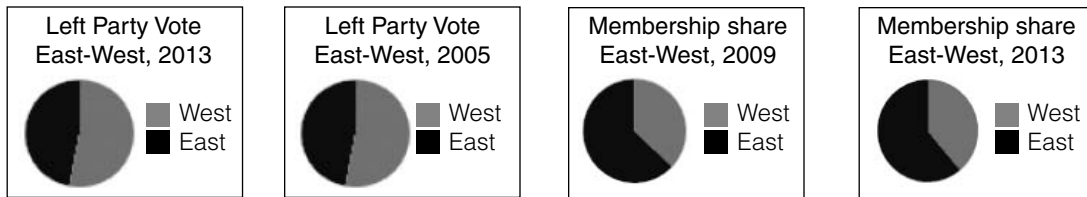
The same developments can be seen in the membership of the Left Party. The Party has over 63,700 members, of which 37 percent are women, although the eastern state branches have female shares of between 43 and 45 percent, compared with an average of only 27 percent in the West. With the growing share of young, active western German members, both the language and the image of the former “eastern” party have changed. In 2005, shortly after the present party was formed by a merger between the old East German party and a West German initiative (WASG), 90 percent of the 61,000 party members were from the eastern states; by 2013 that figure had dropped to 60 percent. This means that almost 40 percent of the membership now comes from the old West German states, or else they consider themselves to be neither East Germans nor West Germans.

The age structure of the Left Party membership, too, is a problem. The average age in

the eastern state branches is above sixty-five; in West Germany, it is approximately fifty. Only 10 percent of party members are aged thirty or less, while only 20 percent are between thirty and fifty, and some 40 percent are over sixty-five. That means that the Party faces the urgent overall task of party development and the recruitment of new members. Between 2009 and 2012 organizational development was almost entirely neglected. Power struggles and disputes over the perspective of the party, and its role as an opposition party, a party of struggle, or a mass party, characterized its image as an internally contentious group that was moreover facing a leadership crisis. Only the adoption of the new Erfurt Party Programme in 2011 and the overcoming of the leadership crisis were able to end this process and restabilize the party. As a result, the consequences of the neglected organizational structure and process are unmistakable. Since 2009 the Left Party has been unable, especially at the local level, to nominate enough party members to fill all the seats that it will win, so that regardless of any debate over whether it is a membership, cadre, or functionaries’ party, there is and inevitably will continue to be a multiple occupation of offices at the local and regional level by elected and party officials. Moreover, local cross-party alliances have been formed in various places. Considering the general societal trend toward classical political involvement at the regional and local levels, and the obvious fact that the Left Party cannot realize its claim to being a societally rooted party with universal presence in either the eastern or western German states, this is of particular significance.

In view of the renewed political activity of the so-called “68 generation,” these people, too, along with future generations, must be seen as an important potential for active citizens’ involvement, and must also be addressed by the Left Party. For this purpose, however, the Party will have to further work on the programmatic approaches initiated in 2011, that is, reformulating

Distribution of Left Party Voters and Membership between Eastern and Western Germany



Source: Federal Election Commissioner; Party Executive Committee information; author's graphic

the issues of justice, democracy, socio-ecological reconstruction, and the struggle for freedom under the conditions of the twenty-first century.

What does that mean concretely? Until 2009 the concept of social justice was strongly linked to the struggle against the neoliberal labor market measures of the early 2000s. However, in the context of the European crisis, especially in the southern countries of the EU, these laws have been successfully reinterpreted by the parties of the grand coalition as part of Germany's success story. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to mobilize people to demand their abolition. Moreover, there have also been successes. The minimum wage demanded by the Left Party has been legally adopted by the grand coalition, albeit in a somewhat perforated form. The discussion on the introduction of flexible entry into pension status has taken up some of the points of criticism raised by the Left Party under the slogan, "No extension of working life!"

Moreover, the bulk of the younger generation, in Germany as elsewhere, is growing up in the context of almost taken-for-granted conditions of precarious work and lifestyles. That means that the demand to defend the welfare state is increasingly coming up against generations who see it as ever less worthy of being defended. Rather they see a state that promotes the polarization of society, and the equivalency of conditions of life prescribed by the Constitution to an ever lesser degree. Concretely facing these issues and linking them to the social and democratic issue of the struggle around public goods

is one of the fundamental challenges facing the Left Party. Thus, in its position paper of August 2014, the Party formulated seven key points of its strategic orientation: *First*, a redistribution of societal wealth; *second*, the expansion of public utilities services and the public infrastructure; *third*, no exclusion of people through precarious working and living conditions, and support for social security and self-determination; *fourth*, the development of democracy and the dismantling of the secret services (integration of the struggle against terror into the police); *fifth*, a new model of economic development for justice and socio-ecological reconstruction; *sixth*, a solidarity-based system of European integration; and *seventh*, a new multilateral conflict-resolution mechanism and an end to arms exports.⁴ The problematic potential, especially of the last demand, has been shown by the debates within the Left Party around the use of weapons in the struggle against the Islamic State group. The Party nonetheless stands by its core demand: no foreign missions of the German army! Against the background of the end of the "politics of (military) restraint" of the German government, the task of the Left Party is to develop and renew its strategies for peace.

For the implementation of these programmatic goals, learning from and using experiences from the state level is particularly important. Thus in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia in 2014, the Left Party was concerned not only with the concrete particular demands and their financial underpinnings, but also with the

regional and *transgenerational* design of democratically *inclusive societies*, which are to avoid excluding anyone from social, democratic, or political participation. These goals are to be fleshed out for particular regions and concrete policy areas, taking into account the accelerating demographic changes of an aging society. At issue is the right to equivalent conditions of life for all in each region of these states, with the goal to secure an infrastructure that permits transport, hospitals, and physicians' offices

close to the citizens, as well as mobile facilities, schools in all localities, free child care centers, and free lunches regardless of income. Some of these demands can be seen in the exploratory talks in Thuringia around the formation of a "red-red-green" government in that state. In light of these results, it would be desirable if the Left Party could, 25 years after the fall of the Wall, make Bodo Ramelow the first Left Party premiere of a state.

But we will have to see whether this can really bring about a policy shift that will make a recognizable difference in Thuringia, compared with other state governments.⁵

GIFT PLANNING

Many of our readers contribute to the annual NP fund drive. Another way to help the magazine is to leave a bequest. A gift of this type can help ensure that New Politics continues to publish for many years to come. We ask that you consider one of the following options:

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NOTES

- 1 Left Party, "Programme of the DIE LINKE Party," en.die-linke.de/die-linke/documents/party-programme/
2. Left Party.
3. For more on the position and development of the Left Party between the 2009 and 2013 elections, see the author's "An Inside Look at 'DIE LINKE'" (October 2012), www.rosalux-nyc.org/germanys-left-party-where-to-go-from-here/
4. "DIE LINKE: Motor für eine soziale und ökologische Gerechtigkeitswende [The Left Party: The Engine of the Turn toward Social and Ecological Justice]," Position paper of August 25, 2014 (German only). www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=1C1TSNP_enUS486US486&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=societally (accessed 8/26/14).
5. For electoral political analysis of the left at the European level, see Hildebrandt and Daiber, eds., "The Left in Europe: Political Parties and Party Alliances between Norway and Turkey" (2009), www.rosalux-nyc.org/the-left-in-europe/; and Daiber, Hildebrandt, and Striethorst, eds., "From Revolution to Coalition: Radical Left Parties in Europe" (2011), www.rosalux-nyc.org/from-revolution-to-coalition/.

The Left Unity Project of Britain

KATE HUDSON

THE ORIGINS OF THE LEFT UNITY project came out of the common struggle across Europe against austerity. The specific moment was the first coordinated general strike across Europe on November 14, 2012. Many of us active on the left, already working with the anti-austerity movement across Europe, saw the need for British engagement too, and from that day onwards, Left Unity has been in development.

The impact of the European economic crisis, and particularly the extreme manifestation of the neoliberal response to this in Greece, created the context for the early development of the project. 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay—solidarity with the people of Greece' was one of the first campaigning expressions of this in May 2010, with the project's first rally addressed by Tony Benn and attended by hundreds of people. The Coalition of Resistance, one wing of Britain's anti-austerity movement, was founded in the autumn of 2010, and unlike its counterparts, was particularly strongly orientated towards Europe-wide solidarity and campaigning, recognizing that austerity was not a national problem but an international one.

A turning point in the European orientation of significant parts of the anti-austerity movement was the 'Europe Against Austerity' conference held in London in October

2011. Attended by around 700 people, with around a third of them coming from Europe, this was the first major exposure in Britain of the parties of the European left, to both the movement and trade unions. The conference was addressed by Pierre Laurent, chair of the European Left Party, as well as representatives from Die Linke (the Left Party) in Germany; Bloco de Esquerda (the Left Bloc) in Portugal; the French Communist Party (PCF), Parti de Gauche (the Left Party of France), and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in France; Syriza in Greece; and many others. Following this event, links with the left and related movements in Greece increased, and in early 2012, the Greece Solidarity Campaign was founded and the first of many successful solidarity delegations took place, strengthening relations between Syriza and the anti-austerity movement in Britain. The message that the Greeks were the lab rats of Europe and that the same policies would in time be inflicted elsewhere if not defeated in Greece had a powerful impact on anti-austerity campaigners.

Debates about unity on the left intensified throughout 2012 as Greeks went to the polls twice. Support for Syriza increased as it opposed the imposition of European troika policies on Greece. But at the same time the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn began to appear as a political force, and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) refused to work with Syriza against the right and far-right parties. The seeming impossibility of achieving unity on the left in the face of the rise of fascism led

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to discussions drawing parallels with Weimar Germany, but it was understood as a problem that afflicts the left far more widely than Greece. So the call for unity of the left in Greece impacted on the movement here in Britain, and many of us began drawing together people on the left, directly inspired both by the successes of Syriza and other left parties in Europe, and by the need to unite in the face of extreme neoliberalism and the

With a big space vacated on the left by the rightwards movement of the Labour Party, we wanted a left party in Britain too.

rise of fascism across Europe. The first public expression of the Left Unity project was an appeal for left unity launched on November 14, 2012, via social media, on the day of the first Europe-wide coordinated general strike. Our goal was to work to create a party in Britain that operates on the same basis as the various left parties throughout Europe that were taking the lead on the common work against austerity.

Of course the European developments were not the only factor leading to the demand for a new party. But it was clear that while we had the same political problems as other European countries—in particular that social democracy was no longer a left force and had become the vehicle for neoliberal economic policies—we did not have a viable mainstream party to the left of social democracy as did virtually every other country in western Europe. We had now seen the new left parties from across Europe, and were working in solidarity with many of them in our anti-austerity campaigning. With a big space vacated on the left by the rightwards

movement of the Labour Party, we wanted a left party in Britain too.

We began this as a new and open project, holding meetings across the country. We were also very fortunate because Ken Loach was just in the process of bringing out his powerful new film *The Spirit of '45* in March 2013 about the origins of the National Health Service (NHS). This was a game changer for the project particularly because Loach was featured on *BBC Question Time*, the most prestigious current affairs discussion program, in February 2013, calling for a new party of the left.

The film had a fantastic reception and Loach took the opportunity to promote Left Unity as a vehicle for having a debate on “Do we need a new party of the left?” Two days after the film was launched, there was a live satellite screening of the film, shown at cinemas across the country, with a live panel discussion in which Loach called for people to sign up on the Left Unity website for a discussion about a new party. This became known as the “Ken Loach Appeal,” and within days thousands of people had signed up and Left Unity began to attract national media coverage.

From then on, we started working closely with Ken and a wide range of left-wing intellectuals, academics, and activists to engage in a debate about forming a new party. This debate was essentially the first phase of moving towards a party. Almost everyone who signed up favored the founding of a new party—although a small number felt that it would be preferable to develop as a movement instead. Critics of the project from the left tended to fall into three categories: those who thought that the project was basically correct but premature, and that nothing serious could be built without trade unions breaking from the Labour Party and helping to build a new force; those who still thought that Labour could be “reclaimed”; and related to

this, those who thought that Left Unity was counterposed to the building of an effective anti-cuts movement, which could form the basis of a new party at some future point if Labour continued on its current trajectory.

Those who opted to found Left Unity were no longer willing to sit back and wait for a trade union rupture or Labour reclamation when economic and social catastrophe was confronting millions of ordinary people through Conservative policies that Labour was not willing to reverse when back in power. We also took the view that a new party was complementary to the development of the anti-austerity movement rather than competitive with it—after all, Left Unity had effectively emerged from this movement, and was amongst its strongest supporters. However, we were aware of specific factors in Britain that presented obstacles not generally present elsewhere in Europe. First, the fact that the Labour Party was founded by the trade unions and therefore retains residual loyalty from many working-class voters as it is still seen by many as the party that people need to vote for to get rid of the Conservatives. Second, the first-past-the-post electoral system, which has made it extremely difficult for smaller parties to win votes as they are seen as wasted. The crisis of the political system is such, however, that even with this system, the two-party framework has broken down, giving rise to the current coalition government, the growth of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the breaking into Westminster and recent surge in support for the Green Party, and the occasional exceptional support for the Respect Party.

In the run-up to our founding conference, we had an open, democratic process, whereby individuals and groups could organize platforms and put forward platform statements regarding the type of party we, as a collective, would like to be founded.

There were two main political platforms

put forward. The first one was the Left Party Platform, which expressed the type of policies and politics of parties like Syriza. These are socialist, feminist, and environmentalist, and develop a new and openly democratic way of working.

The second platform was the Socialist Platform, which had a more traditional approach to socialism, seeing the ideology as something to emphasize on its own. In this way, other principles would logically follow as part of it.

These two platforms represented a debate between the traditional forms of socialism, and the more contemporary European new left party politics—the concept of a broad left party that was socialist, feminist, and environmentalist, and where, because of past inadequate practice on the left, it was felt necessary to specify these additional principles and not just make the assumption that they would flow naturally from socialism. The Left Party platform eventually won overwhelmingly at the Left Unity party conference and became the founding basis for the organization in November 2013.

The layer of activists who formed Left Unity came from diverse political backgrounds. There were many who have been active all their lives in far-left groups. For instance, I come from the communist tradition, while there were a large number of individuals from the Trotskyist traditions and many former Labour Party activists, including councillors. The former Labour Party activists, in particular, come from the layer of members who feel disenfranchised by how far to the right the party has moved, as well as its lack of organizational democracy.

At the same time, a lot of our new joiners were people who have never been in a political party, nor been political activists before. But they were inspired by the anti-austerity-cuts movement. They have wanted to fight back against policies such as the bedroom tax.

Generally, the vast majority of them simply want justice, fairness, and decent lives for ordinary people.

Both main platforms dissolved once the party had been founded and the major lines of policy and direction decided upon. Still, some smaller ones continue—renamed tendencies—and new ones occasionally come into being over specific issues, for example one that was founded to support a “Yes” vote in the Scottish independence campaign when Left Unity opted not to take a position. The founding conference overwhelmingly voted that we should be an individual-membership party, rather than a coalition of different parties and groups, although some of our members are also members of other parties and groups. The Left Unity conference clearly defines us as a broad, left, anti-austerity party, rather than a revolutionary one. We include people with revolutionary politics, but we also include those who consider themselves left of Labour. Everyone who shares our politics is welcome, and if we are going to make an

The Left Party platform, the concept of a broad left party that was socialist, feminist, and environmentalist, eventually won overwhelmingly.

impact politically we need to work together on the basis of conference policy.

We see social, economic, and environmental issues as equally important. Take environment for example—the vast majority of the British left, as well as our party, recognizes that if we do not resolve the problem of climate change and sustainability, we won’t have

a planet left where the fight for socialism and feminism matters. Given this, we believe that it would be impossible to separate the idea of a “red-green” economy from pursuing social equality and justice in areas like women’s rights and LGBTQ rights.

Also there is the issue of war. In September, Left Unity was active around the anti-NATO protests in Cardiff and Newport. In our founding party principles, we have a commitment to being anti-imperialist and anti-war, as well as anti-nuclear power and anti-nuclear weapons.

We also have a strong commitment to feminism within our principles. Our constitution maintains the need for an organized Women’s Caucus, as well as a number of other caucuses for oppressed groups or members of society.

We also have a disabled members’ caucus, black members’ caucus, and an LGBTQ caucus, which have voting rights and are entitled to automatic representation within the party.

We are also in the process of developing an online branch, particularly for those members who are geographically unable to participate in the regional branches.

We are still in the process of developing our branch structures. We are currently prioritizing development of various branches, as well as organizing members within those branches. There are now more than 50 Left Unity branches across the country, and this number is growing. We provide them with all the required organizational materials, such as leaflets, pamphlets, policy papers, and information about Left Unity, as well as regular party broadsheets for various caucuses for external uses, and we are planning an organizing day school to help branches grow.

We do not currently have an internal education program. The nearest we have to regular education are our policy conferences and the policy commissions. That means we have a process for internal dialogue and

debate about policy, but we do not have centrally organized education classes. The current emphasis is on practical organization, local political activity, and ideas for involving new people in the party.

From the beginning, Left Unity has campaigned on both national and local issues. Our members have been very active in actions against the EDL, a far-right street group, as well as working against racism and in support of immigration. We also played a major part in organizing against the anti-homeless spikes in London. With the London Black Revolutionaries group and others, we succeeded in having the spikes removed. We have also been active in the campaign in defense of the National Health Service throughout the country, as well as in defense of social housing and against the bedroom tax. Anti-war work has also been prominent, as well as the recent demonstrations in support of Palestine. The range of our issues is defined mainly by our broad anti-austerity and anti-war focus.

We have sought to establish relationships with other groups on the left. We entered into dialogue with the Green Party at the time of the European Parliamentary elections. In particular, we supported the Green candidate for the North-West, Peter Cranie, to assist him in a local contest against a far-right candidate. Rather than standing our own candidate in the area, we pledged our support to Cranie in exchange for his agreement to stand as an anti-austerity candidate for the European Parliament and to support trade unions in struggle.

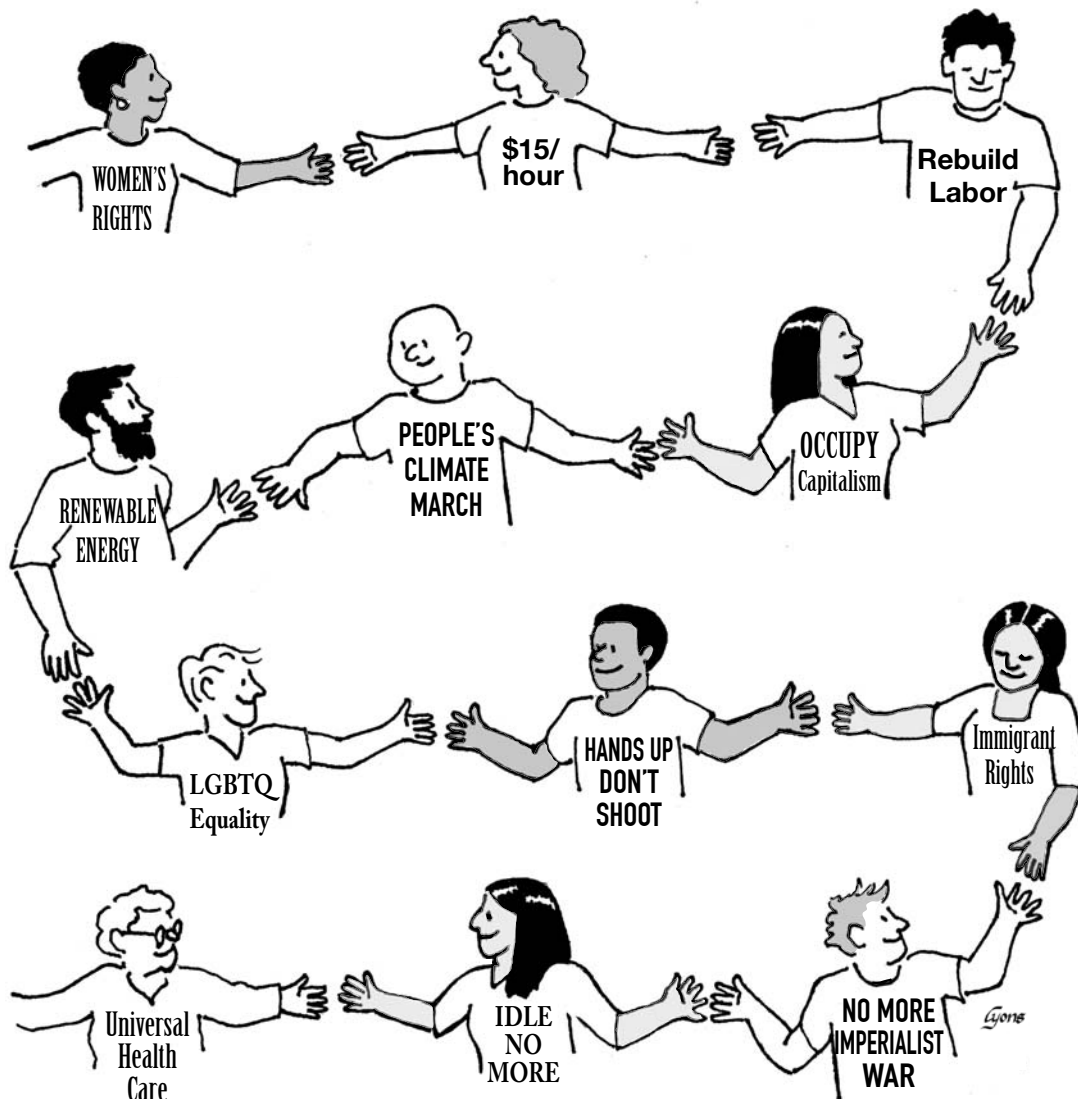
In the context of the current general election campaigning—towards elections in May 2015—we are engaged in discussions with a range of other parties and organizations too, including Respect, TUSC, and the National Health Action Party. Our main intention is to avoid standing against other anti-austerity candidates and to have a good range of left candidates across the country.

We have also been taking quite a few steps towards establishing a working relationship with the European Left Party, including attending a number of their meetings and conferences. At our recent national conference

We see social, economic, and
environmental issues as equally
important.

we agreed to apply for observer status. One of the first actions of our Women's Caucus was to organize a meeting in solidarity with the women in Spain struggling to defend abortion rights, and we made these links through the ELP's campaign on this issue. Recently we have been in dialogue over shared opposition to anti-migrant policies.

Syriza has been a great inspiration to us on the international level and has had an impact on the development of many aspects of our processes—for example, the Syriza policy commission process. We have recently hosted a national tour with Podemos, the new party in Spain, together with speakers from Syriza. The tour, which we entitled “Doing Politics Differently,” was an enormous success, with packed meetings around the country. The messages from the speakers were very well received, and although there are some differences between the development and approach of Podemos and Syriza, the combination was inspirational. We were proud to welcome our two sister parties, both of whom are on the verge of power, and to have the opportunity to locate ourselves in the same political space. Our current position is very different, in terms of British politics, but we are determined to build a party to fight for our common goals.



JOIN TOGETHER FOR

SYSTEM CHANGE

Elections in Chile

Historic Defeat of the Right or a Win for Post-Pinochet Neoliberalism?

RENÉ ROJAS

“¿Qué Nueva, Qué Nueva, Qué Nueva Mayoría? ¡Si van a gobernar pa’ la misma minoría!” (“What New Majority? They’ll rule for the same old minority!”)

FEL STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS

LAST YEAR SOCIALIST Michelle Bachelet reclaimed the presidency after four years of center-right rule and restored power to the *Concertación* coalition that had governed Chile since redemocratization. For progressives, and even some radicals, this election opens a period of heretofore elusive popular reforms. They claim that a recent movement upsurge has supplied the necessary steam to complete the transition to democracy that Chile’s center-left has thus far been unable to accomplish. Spurred by rising mobilization under the outgoing government, and by student activists now in Congress, Bachelet’s landslide victory is said to offer the momentum to carry out the widely demanded tax, constitutional, and education reforms on which she campaigned. With the Pinochetist *Alianza*’s backing at historic lows and an expanded reform bloc, now christened *Nueva Mayoría* (NM, New Majority), and bolstered by the rise of a new generation of young Communists who headed

massive 2011-2012 student mobilizations, the prospects for pushing through changes benefiting workers, students, and the rural and urban poor appear well founded.

There is no question that Chile’s workers and poor are better positioned today than they were just ten, to say nothing of twenty, years ago. Indeed, popular forces for change enjoy the most auspicious balance of forces since the 1973 coup that stamped out Chile’s democratic road to socialism. To obtain, however, a firmer grasp on what these elections mean for neoliberalism’s continuity and prospects for emancipatory politics in Chile, it is worth closely examining their results in relation to elite interests and movement strategies.

Historical Context

The elections and new movements must be placed within a longer view of Chilean history. Developments going back a century have shaped the current conjuncture. First, the country’s economic conditions generated a process of class formation that produced a socialist workers movement and Marxist-led, independent radical unions in the early twentieth century. Workers looked to the Communist (PCCh) and Socialist (PS) parties to guide their struggles against employers and the state. Rising class conflict converged with the failure of postwar developmentalist governments and the activation of students, peasants, and the urban poor, culminating in the election of Socialist Salvador Allende in 1970. Taking advantage of elite divisions, Allende’s *Unidad Popular* (UP, Popular Unity) coalition, led by the PCCh and the PS,

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pursued an improbable socialist transformation without institutional rupture. Meanwhile, new left forces engendered by erupting movements, notably the insurrectionist *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR, Revolutionary Left Movement), challenged the UP from the left, widening a revolution-from-above versus revolution-from-below rift in Chile's road to

Progressives in Chile are savoring a
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go back” moment.

socialism.

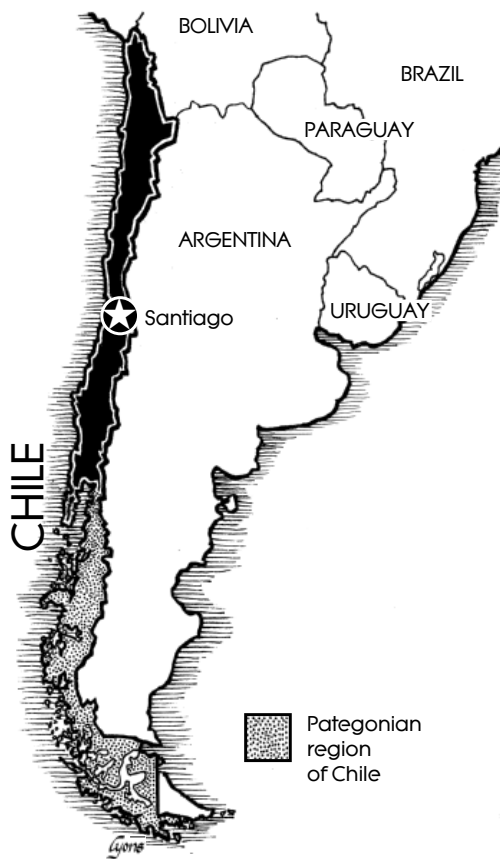
By contrast, elites reunited, instigating the 1973 coup that wiped out a generation of militants and their organizations. Reaction to the Popular Unity experience has also severely shaped the present. The junta under General Pinochet ushered in a radical neoliberal *capitalist* transformation of Chilean society through the barrel of the gun. With the MIR physically eliminated, the PS in exile, and the PCCh tortured, disappeared, and scattered, Pinochet's military regime installed neoliberal orthodoxy enshrined in the 1980 authoritarian constitution. It outlawed the left and rigged future electoral rules in favor of minority right-wing elites. The junta's laws disempowered unions, deregulated markets, and re Commodified social goods like land, health care, pensions, and education. Indeed, one of Pinochet's final decrees formalized the prevailing privatization of education by decentralizing schools' administration and funding, and establishing a voucher system that transferred public money to low-quality venture schools.

Despite pro-market mythologies, the crises and hardships caused by savage market reform triggered mass mobilizations during the early to

mid-1980s. Under popular pressure, the regime was forced to consider a return to democracy. To secure a managed transition, elites, supported by the United States, brokered a deal in which free elections would be granted in return for the domesticated opposition accepting free-market reign and deactivating movements. With the MIR all but extinct and the PCCh marginalized, the renovated market-socialists of the PS joined their former foes, the Christian Democrats (DC, *Democracia Cristiana*) to lead the center-left coalition that governed from 1990 to 2010. Two decades of *Concertación* rule amounted to a neoliberal democratic regime that undermined popular participation, left Pinochet's charter unchallenged, and harshly repressed any sign of protest. Able to secure majorities while promoting elite interests, the center-left consistently beat out the hard-right neoliberal *Alianza* coalition. Four successive DC-PS governments deepened Pinochet's privatization project, maintained labor's disenfranchisement, and preserved the highest level of inequality among OECD countries. Unsurprisingly, growing inequality and oligarchic rule fostered new mass movements with expanding and deepening grievances. The 2005-2006 high school rebellion against Bachelet's first government was a watershed signaling a qualitative leap in popular mobilization. Frustration with the *Concertación* set the scene for the right's presidential victory in 2010.

Progressive Optimism

The optimistic scenario anticipated by left analysts celebrating Bachelet's second election presents another near epochal shift in Chile's polity. This perceived realignment is said to be driven by the irreversible decline of the hard right. After competing steadily with the *Concertación* since redemocratization and finally surpassing its historic 40-45 percent threshold to win the presidency in 2010 second-round elections, the *Alianza's* ability to rule seems buried for the time being. Progressives in Chile are savoring a “once



you go right, you'll ALWAYS go back" moment. This unprecedented rejection allegedly clears the way for a revival of Allende's dream of true political and economic democracy.

This sanguine scenario is reinforced by the undeniable influence of emerging mass movements credited with pushing the dominant electoral bloc as well as the national policy agenda unequivocally to the left. As wider swaths of non-elites reject market orthodoxy and increasingly identify with mounting protest, a period-defining shift in public opinion appears to be taking hold before our eyes. The young Communists, including iconic Camila Vallejo, former spokesperson for the university student union confederation (CONFECH), and their allies who led 2011-2012 protests that shook the foundations of Chile's neoliberal model

after years of quiescence, have been elected to Congress. Their parent party has finally realized a long-sought gambit to enter the center-left coalition and "pressure from within." As Vallejo, who once vowed never to campaign for Bachelet, put it in December, "The elections give us a majority that allows us to make structural changes. Social movements are pressuring many sectors that were not in favor of change before and that have now changed their mind."

With favorable street sentiment and parliamentarians agitating in Congress, the general feeling is that the core features of NM's platform—tax, education, and constitutional reforms (including changes to the restrictive binomial electoral scheme)—are nearly certain. Further, progressives in this culturally conservative society feel well-positioned to expand "social" rights including gay marriage, gender identity protections, and even "therapeutic" abortion.

Even some radical autonomists advance the notion that Bachelet's inauguration is the culmination of decades of democratic struggle from below. A piece appearing in Upsidedownworld.org holds, "Bachelet's return to the presidency, and her promise for structural changes to Chile's educational and political system, is the result of a decades-long struggle to move out of the shadow of the Pinochet dictatorship, and is one of the fruits of the more recent student movement for a better society. ... The student movement's pressure for change helped pave the way to Bachelet's re-election and formed the backbone of what became key promises on her campaign trail."

Describing the new radical impulse overtaking Chile's polity, the *Guardian* summed it up thus: "The [student] rebellion that exploded in Santiago in 2011 is not simply against this or that policy. ... A more profound [wave of leftism] is beginning [and] spells the end of the dogma that the economy determines people's consent rather than the other way around. It is the time of the people once again."

Sensible Sanguinity?

On election night, as the progressive left was celebrating early results, Bachelet's campaign was far from euphoric. Fewer than 100 supporters showed up to the rented space to cheer her December victory speech as they cagily bobbed to generously amplified *cumbias*. Meanwhile, a new "wave of leftism" had occupied her campaign headquarters as high school students who had called for annulling votes took direct action to repudiate the bipartisan consensus on profit-driven education.¹ Newly elected National University Federation (FECh) president, Melissa Sepúlveda, showed up to lend her support, warning against "taking up the movement's slogans yet filling your mouths with empty promises!" In response to Young Communist reversal and subsequent stumping for Bachelet, the campus militants who succeeded Vallejo in the 2012 FECh elections put what they view as the *Concertación's* dead-end elite politics more colorfully: "The Concertación is the Titanic, and we will not buy tickets on the Titanic, and we feel nobody should buy tickets there."²

What was happening? How could the very movements deemed to be supporting the democratic aspirations of Chile's center-left be using their tested disruptive tactics to frontally clash with the *Concertación* and its new Communist Youth allies, themselves spawned by the movements? How could the very forces that finally put reform on the national agenda after 20 years of stringent neoliberal democracy offer such a radically different read of the moment?

In fact, the analysis of the disparagingly nicknamed *ultras* is not so different from the strategic understanding of *Concertación* oligarchs. The brokers of Chilean neoliberalism that emerged from the transition candidly view the moment as a chance to restrict changes to post-Pinochet rules of the game. As Sergio Bitar, a top-level coalition operative put it, "We need to negotiate with the right like we did when we negotiated an end to [minor features

of Pinochet-imposed restricted democracy]. That negotiation lasted fifteen years; [the right] is very closed-minded and if they want to prolong things this time, *they will make the country explode*. We therefore have to understand that change within our institutionality is better than change from outside our institutions"³ (emphasis added).

Like the regime managers they are confronting, the new radical forces understood a basic fact of these elections. Chile was deciding on far more than its next political authorities: the country's convulsed political and social forces are assessing the magnitude of the reforms needed to change the post-authoritarian regime and the role that growing movements should play in achieving them. Besides the massive student protests that mobilized throughout 2011 and 2012,⁴ so-called regionalist movements have erupted, including a Patagonian mini-commune confronting special forces of Chile's militarized police for days;⁵ environmentalists who led street rebellions to challenge mining and hydroelectric projects enjoying the green light of both electoral blocs;⁶ shanty mortgage debtors organizing and making class demands; and Mapuche indigenous communities' struggling against national oppression in what can only be called a low-intensity counterinsurgency war by the state.⁷

The new radicals reject narratives of democratic culmination and shared goals. The elections, in their view, concealed the true contest between those seeking to expand independent class capacities and those who aim to dissolve them under prolonged democratic neoliberalism. The two groups base their strategies on clashing premises: in broad terms, the latter argue that Chile's fragile democracy needs to overcome fetters imposed by the dictatorship to address inequality; the former, by contrast, are focused on toppling the regime itself. Hence, whereas the latter pitch inescapable policy changes as the culmination of a coherent and linear drive to address institutional vestiges of

military rule, for the former the existing form of democracy is itself the central problem. Moreover, they warn that the ballot outcome shows the regime has dangerously retaken the initiative after mass mobilizations had it on the ropes. In this sense, partisan elites are correct to view the recent movement upsurge as a threatening tsunami rather than a friendly tide. The emerging battle then is over whether reform should stabilize the democratic neoliberal regime or whether movements can supersede it. It will determine who sets the terms and who emerges bolstered for a deeper and longer fight.

Behind the Numbers

Prior to any sensible adjudication between these rival perspectives, a review of the results is in order. An analysis of the vote reveals that while there are reasons for optimism in both camps, pitfalls abound.

Any breakdown necessarily begins with a look at turnout. Despite the momentum of the recent upsurge, 50 percent first-round abstention should give pause to all left forces. As I argued in a recent piece,⁸ U.S.-level turnout is less the result of newfound disappointment or apathy than the recently acquired ability to lawfully sit out elections. Cutting both ways, such middling participation levels reflect the large chunks of Chilean society defeated by neoliberal exclusion as well as newly activated layers looking for options beyond current partisan offerings.

The next observation, which has eluded many, involves the fortunes of the major blocs: together, the *Alianza* and former *Concertación* received over five-sixths of all votes. Given the “top-two-winners-take-all” binomial system, together they grabbed 96 percent of House seats and 100 percent of Senate posts. As is widely understood, electoral rules guarantee the two dominant blocs roughly equal shares of seats. In fact, since coalitions are all but ensured to win district representation, often candidates don’t compete against “opposing” parties, instead

fighting their partners for each bloc’s reserved spot.⁹ Further, despite the *Alianza*’s poor showing in the presidential race, legislative results

“The Concertación is the Titanic, and we will not buy tickets on the Titanic.”

are perfectly consistent with their tallies since redemocratization—40 percent in the lower house ballot compared to 43 percent in 2009 and 39 percent in 2005. So even while a leading consultant for the hard-Pinochetist wing of the *Alianza* lamented that “in the last few years the right has suffered a powerful cultural defeat,”¹⁰ the right coalition remains a solid pillar of the regime.

Concretely, this translates into a 21 to 17 advantage in the Senate and a 67 to 49 edge for the center-left in the lower house. In effect, although the Communist votes shifted the center of partisan gravity slightly to the left, the duopoly that has shared power since 1990 remains intact. Not only do results suggest that the pro-Pinochet right is far from buried, more specifically they cast doubt on *Nueva Mayoría*’s ability to deliver on its promises. If the powerful right-wing of the bloc cooperates, Bachelet may muster the simple majority needed to pass tax reform. Her coalition, however, missed the mark for educational reform and constitutional amendments.¹¹

Still, the inclusion of the PCCh in *Nueva Mayoría* should not be derided outright. After all, there is a reason the *Concertación* resisted Communist advances for twenty years. Though PCCh president Guillermo Teillier raced to the front of the class to diligently announce that Communists will not “make waves” against Bachelet’s second tenure, the party’s ability to

discipline its new blood is no foregone conclusion.

Besides Vallejo who led her district balloting with 44 percent, her co-thinker Karol Cariola, a former leader of the historically radical University of Concepción students—who was less hyped—also won handily with 38 percent of votes. Further, the head of new and theoretically independent *Revolución Democrática*, a former CONFECH co-spokesperson and president of traditionally conservative Catholic University students, Giorgio Jackson, won his district with a resounding 48 percent of votes cast.¹² Though Vallejo and Cariola—as well as rookie Daniel Nuñez—have never displayed the independence of other members of PCCh's new generation (such as copper federation leader Cristián Cuevas), their party loyalty doesn't make them outright fools. They know why people voted for them, their instincts having been sensitized during their time at the head of the student insurgency. And while it's true Vallejo has broken her vow to never support Bachelet, it remains to be seen whether she drops her pledge to use the legislative tribune to stimulate pressure from below.

A third student leader facing no such dilemmas is Gabriel Boric of the recently formed *Izquierda Autónoma* (IA) or Autonomous Left. Though independent left forces garnered roughly 7 percent of the vote, Boric will be their only legislator. IA rose to prominence on campuses after students rebuked FECh leadership for supporting a *Concertación*—mediated truce to the educational conflict.¹³ Right when the international press was trumpeting Vallejo, Boric was defeating her in the election for FECh president on a platform that emphasized strengthening militant *and* autonomous grass-roots movements. Over a year later, demonstrating that independence from *Nueva Mayoría* might be an asset rather than a liability, Boric came in first in his Patagonian district, ahead of establishment parties.

Reforms ... and Reforms

With the electoral balance of forces thus arrayed, the ineludible reform agenda will be taken up in a tightly scripted yet contested way. Bachelet and *Nueva Mayoría* will aim to satisfy its business patrons as well as non-elite supporters by “responsibly” delivering the highest attainable results.¹⁴ Business, meanwhile, will look to approve the mildest possible reforms functional to the regime's recovery and stable reproduction. Without question, there will be real tactical disputes over this range. The PCCh will use its minor influence to push in one direction, all the while struggling to define its position in relation to reforms that will undoubtedly disappoint its constituents. Finally, the new radical forces will push to deepen proposed policies, trying to defeat restrictive reforms but doing so in ways that strengthen rather than demoralize new movement actors.

Nueva Mayoría's anchor policy is tax reform. Not only is this the most achievable measure, it is the means to addressing the most decisive issue of the moment: education reform. In truth, there will be few serious challenges to raising corporate taxes to somewhere around the 25 percent on which Bachelet ran. Under her right predecessor, billionaire Sebastián Piñera, corporate taxes were raised with elite sanction in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake to cover unexpected infrastructure and welfare expenditures. Today, business understands that political tremors also require a slight tightening of the profit spigot. Indeed, as banking's serene response to the unveiling of Bachelet's program revealed, of all the proposed reforms, this is the one that rankles least. Encouraged there were no “surprises,” JP Morgan gave its thumbs-up.¹⁵ Adding its seal of approval Morgan Stanley expressed “certainty that Chile's basic political framework is not at risk, including fiscal discipline.”¹⁶ Three years ago, increased corporate taxes were followed by the upsurge in struggle. This time around, business, frustrated by its

lose-lose situation under the *Alianza*, is hoping a broader center-left offers more compelling reforms that contain rising popular demands.¹⁷

Bachelet intends to crown her accomplishments by finally delivering a new, grandiose educational model. Contrasting her success with Piñera's dysfunction on this front, she will present *Nueva Mayoría* as the only political force capable of overhauling the system inherited from the dictatorship. Yet, beyond promising expanded free options, Bachelet has offered vagueries around increasing accessibility and gradual reduction of the primary and secondary school voucher system. Once more, no elite feathers have been ruffled. New student leaders, on the other hand, have chastised the *Concertación* for not breaking altogether with the logic of neoliberal education. The core demand of the student movement is renationalization of education, top to bottom—scrapping inequitable decentralization, vouchers, private management and ownership of schools and universities whether non-profit or not, and tuition and fees altogether. Recently, FECh's Sepulveda harshly rejected Bachelet's reform preview, which, taking a page from Piñera's World Bank-inspired discourse, contemplates individual repayment of tuition costs following gainful employment.

A better test of *Nueva Mayoría's* willingness to push the envelope involves shelved proposals for labor market reform. Though the PCCh-led national labor confederation (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* or CUT) demanded concrete measures that would reverse Pinochet's obliteration of labor rights, including restoration of industry-wide bargaining, it is apparent that Bachelet will do little of substance to enhance unions' fragmented negotiating power. Paying lip service to CUT's other top demand for renationalized pensions, NM dangled the consolation prize of an Obama-like public option aimed at "stimulating competition" with funds privatized under dictatorship. Despite disparagement of labor grievances, CUT dutifully applauded Bachelet's celebration of union "sup-

port for *our* program which represents Chile's workers."¹⁸ Undeterred by Bachelet's nixing of labor's central demand, CUT president Bárbara Figueroa formalized PCCh endorsement of this unequal exchange by proclaiming a partnership with the future administration. She averred that pro-labor "reforms will only be possible if *we* win the December 15 [runoff]." This raw deal for workers can only be explained by Bachelet's other key trade-off: business would sagaciously approve tax and education reforms as long as NM refrained from tampering with Chile's flexible labor markets, the cornerstone of its neoliberal orthodoxy.¹⁹

Our Mobilizations and Their Moves

The surest way for NM to deliver, of course, would be through a constitutional makeover that would guarantee the legislative majorities required for reforms. The first step would be dumping the binomial system. Yet, surprisingly, in a recent lower house vote to eliminate its constitutional basis, the ignominious *amarra* or "mooring" imposed by Pinochet's 1980 charter, dozens of *Concertación* no-shows guaranteed that the quorum went unmet.²⁰

While NM would numerically benefit from dispensing with the binomial system, the measure's net gains are less certain for the coalition. Left forces would be the biggest beneficiaries, to the detriment of the exclusionary regime from which the *Concertación* has profited most. As a recent leak by *Alianza* president Patricio Melero revealed, Socialist and DC chiefs have confided concern that a poor electoral showing by the right would weaken valued counterweights to demands from the left both within and outside the bloc.²¹ *Concertación* oligarchs are foremost committed to the restrictive bipartisanship that undergirds their political reproduction. Accordingly NM roundly and publicly rejects the PCCh-promoted Constituent Assembly preferring to stick to existing procedural rules allowing only the faintest modifications to current schemes of representation.²²

Still, to ensure political success, *Nueva Mayoría* has real interest in achieving reforms. To that end, Communists, and even progressive *Concertacionistas*, not only appreciate the value of grass-roots pressure, but may even promote mobilizations to win elite-approved

Not only do results suggest that the pro-Pinochet right is far from buried, more specifically they cast doubt on Nueva Mayoría's ability to deliver on its promises.

policies and safely channel the upsurge. But with independent forces on the move, calling people onto the streets for narrow political gain carries daunting risks, especially with the right appearing to be in disarray. Put simply, it may give insurgents opportunities to protest without the ability to contain them. If NM fails to act and appears ineffectual, however, the coalition will pay an incalculable price and the regime's legitimacy will continue to dissolve. Its aim then is to get ahead of any mobilizations and push through uncontentious reforms, taking advantage of the elections' momentum to display quick results.

The PCCh finds itself in a particularly tough spot. If, as expected, NM policies disregard movement demands, Vallejo and her ilk just may follow the party script. The real uncertainty revolves around the more dynamic interplay between less disciplined activists and the mobilized bases who refuse to accept parliamentary success as an end in itself. Just as new student cohorts abandoned the Communist Youth, groups under PCCh influence, particularly in the labor movement, could turn to more independent and radical tactics and goals. Actions

by cadre like Cristián Cuevas, who emerged as an activist leader of outsourced service workers to head the entire copper workers confederation, will have to be followed closely in this scenario. While still formally committed to the PCCh strategy, Cuevas, who was edged out by comrade Figueroa in questioned CUT elections, best exemplifies the disruptive new movements of class segments excluded by regime institutions. He has consistently opposed flexibilization and championed sectoral bargaining, the very policy that Bachelet removed from the agenda. Party activists like him will now find it hard to act as firemen extinguishing the conflagrations they helped light against *Concertación* orthodoxy. The coming months and years will witness a dispute within NM, and more precisely within the PCCh, which will centrally impact the broader struggle between regime maneuvers and counter-regime movements.

Perhaps most decisive will be how radicals respond to NM's opening salvo. Their tactics, for one, will condition the decisions of disgruntled Communists. More generally, this new, new left will concentrate its energies on reactivating the student movement and expanding mass popular defiance to pressure for more transformative reforms. Grasping the inherent limitations in student capacities, this diverse array of independent revolutionaries shares a commitment to building a broader insurgent force that centrally involves workers, their communities, and their organizations. They seek to strengthen the preliminary alliances woven at the height of the 2011 mobilizations and expand the organized forces pressing for change outside of the institutionalized rules of the game. In so doing, they look to expose the regime's duopolistic character as the main barrier to political and economic democratization. In short, they hope that the steam mustered for more egalitarian and emancipatory policies overwhelms the regime altogether.

A major obstacle, perhaps unsurprisingly, is disagreement among new autonomous left

forces. The very reason that the Autonomous Left (IA) and Boric, after ushering out the Young Communists, were displaced from FECh leadership by Sepulveda is an ostensible “strategic difference” that threatens coherent radical action. IA favors consolidating the student movement as the period’s most advanced anti-regime contingent, while simultaneously building a genuine dissident presence within state institutions.²³ Boric’s first-place finish demonstrates that in the context of rising struggle, anti-regime forces can position themselves independently within the state (a proposition frustratingly corroborated by Vallejo and Jackson’s electoral successes). Sepulveda and leadership of the new *Frente de Estudiantes Libertarios* (FEL, or Libertarian Students Front. Editors note: in Latin America *Libertarios* are anarchists not Libertarians in the U.S. sense), in contrast, look to orient extant student forces toward galvanizing a non-CUT working class pole eschewing all contention for spaces within the dictatorship-bequeathed state.²⁴ Their insistence that the broadly influential campus rebellions must branch out “transversally” is equally well-taken.

The regime’s difficulties will no doubt facilitate a growing militant challenge, but radicals’ ability to exploit the opportunity remains unclear. After deploying both traditional and innovative organizational resources and devising methods linking secondary and university grievances, the student movement is at a crossroads. After taking advantage of deepening elite divisions and developing strategies to agitate and pull public opinion behind a broad anti-neoliberal program, key decisions await. Activists built the movement in accordance with rising demands and real conditions on the ground, avoiding getting bogged down in cart-before-the-horse debates around regroupment or formal party blueprints. These qualitative advances have raised a new set of challenges. Now that popular insurgency is back, deciding on the most efficacious strategies is crucial.

After so much heavy lifting, what is at stake can be measured in historic terms. IA has correctly identified “the great risk that elites will regroup and generate a new *governability* pact, threatening ... to push back much of what we have gained.”²⁵ But if the seemingly bridgeable gap within the independent left is not addressed, radicals may miss the best chance since 1973 to constrain elite power and assert a popular alternative to neoliberal democracy.

NOTES

1. noticias.terra.cl/elecciones/estudiantes-de-aces-se-toman-comando-de-michelle-bachelet,a8883ea6c2762410VgnVCM10000098cceb0aRCRD.html
2. noticias.terra.cl/elecciones/videos/presidenta-anarquista-de-la-fech-expresa-apoyo-a-toma-de-comando-bacheletista,511222.html
3. www.eldinamo.cl/2013/11/18/no-alcanzan-los-quotums-para-las-reformas-de-bachelet-nueva-mayoria-obligada-a-negociar-con-la-derecha/
4. www.solidarity-us.org/node/3535
5. www.quepasa.cl/articulo/actualidad/2012/12/1-10809-9-aysen-despues-de-la-batalla.shtml
6. www.nytimes.com/2011/06/17/world/americas/17chile.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&_r=1&_r=1
7. viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/human-rights-mainmenu-40/1356-chile-cloc-via-campesina-expresses-solidarity-with-mapuche-people. It is worth noting that persecution of activists and militarization of southern Mapuche territories first intensified under *Concertación* governments’ application of Pinochet-era anti-terrorism legislation. This approach has led to at least four activists murdered by center-left governments. For a report on the *Concertación*’s prosecution of the war on indigenous activists see Human Rights Watch, *Undue Process: Terrorism Trials, Military Courts, and the Mapuche in Southern Chile* (www.hrw.org/reports/2004/chile1004/chile1004text.pdf). The best source for ongoing coverage of incursions into communities is paismapuche.org/. For reports of the conflict’s escalation over the past year see www.ipsnews.net/2013/01/historic-mapuche-land-conflict-flares-up/ and therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=748&jumival=9614.
8. www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/3770
9. A typical example was on display in coverage, with no irony intended, of two key Santiago races by one of Chile’s leading mainstream papers: “By just over two points, former RN minister Andrés Allamand beat out his list partner, former Santiago mayor, UDI’s

Pablo Zalaquett, in the Westen Santiago contest. ... In *Nueva Mayoría*, PPD senator Guido Girardi gained a 12 point advantage over former Maipú mayor, Christian Democrat Alberto Undurraga." (diario.latercera.com/2013/11/18/01/contenido/pais/31-151085-9-alamand-rompe-hegemonia-udi-en-santiago-poniente-y-girardi-logra-facil.shtml)

10. www.elciudadano.cl/2013/11/23/99848/la-otra-guerra-de-la-derecha/

11. Educational reform requires four-sevenths of Congress for approval (69 deputies and 22 senators), while constitutional changes require an even higher two-thirds vote (80 deputies and 26 senators). Even if the entrenched Christian Democrat and Socialist oligarchs cooperated, a highly unlikely prospect, *Nueva Mayoría's* platform would not prosper.

12. Both Jackson and Vallejo obtained more votes than Bachelet in their districts.

13. www.elmostrador.cl/pais/2011/12/12/gabriel-borica-actual-institucionalidad-no-es-capaz-de-contener-las-demandas-estudiantiles/ An excellent report from Centro de Investigación Periodista (ciperchile.cl/2013/11/22/el-arranque-de-la-segunda-vuelta-desnuda-el-precario-equilibrio-de-la-nueva-mayoria/) described the unfolding of the deal between the PCCh and *Concertación* this way: "The massive 2011 marches ... not only damned Piñera's government. They also rocked the *Concertación* whose leaders and parliamentarians were unable to jump on the protest wagon since its governments were primarily responsible for the crisis. ... The offer then made by the three PCCh legislators was like a glass of water in the desert. The proposal was to jointly explore, as a "broad opposition," university reform. The PCCh was well positioned in public opinion thanks to the leadership of its student leaders, particularly Camila Vallejo, and it reached out to the *Concertación* to *devolverle el habla* [help it find its voice]."

14. Perhaps the most glaring example of the orthogonal interests of NM's business and popular constituents is embodied in the successful run by Iván Fuentes. Fuentes will be the Christian Democratic deputy representing Aysén, location of the 2012 rebellion that he helped lead (www.quepasa.cl/articulo/politica/2013/12/19-13320-9-ivan-vs-fuentes.shtml). Yet as he tries to advance the region's anti-corporate demands, he will run up against the multi-million dollar donations that energy giants Enesa and Colbún pumped into the Bachelet campaign to secure her approval of the massively unpopular HidroAysén mega-dam project (www.quepasa.cl/articulo/politica/2013/12/19-13320-9-ivan-vs-fuentes.shtml).

15. www.latercera.com/noticia/negocios/2013/11/655-551894-9-elecciones-mercado-local-se-muestra-dividido-por-alcance-de-reformas-que-propone.shtml

16. JP Morgan graciously added, "We believe that the

majority of these initiatives, *particularly those most likely to be approved and implemented*, are already known by the market and have been factored into current price valuations!"

17. Chile, with one of the lowest corporate tax rates among OECD members, raises 7.5 percent of its gross domestic product through corporate and income taxes, compared with the 11.3 percent average for the OECD. Business, while acceding to raising the corporate tax rate, will take a more recalcitrant position against Bachelet's proposal to gradually eliminate the *Fondo de Utilidades Tributables* (FUT), a sort of tax-exempt pool of "development" funds. It is estimated that companies currently hold US\$270 billion in these funds, or the value of the whole of Chile's economy!

18. www.theclinic.cl/2013/12/02/bachelet-y-apoyo-de-la-cut-es-un-respaldo-al-programa-que-representa-a-los-trabajadores-en-chile/

19. As reported online by *El Mostrador* (see link, above), changes to labor rules, which CUT had been actively pursuing, were subordinated from jump to tax reform negotiations. One NM source who participated in talks with business leaders explained that employers were willing "to accept any of Bachelet's reforms, save labor reform." They were "willing to give up money [i.e. higher taxes], but not *power*." When the deal was settled, Andrés Santa Cruz, head of Chile's peak employers association, declared with satisfaction that "as it stands, the labor issue does not make us nervous."

20. www.latercera.com/noticia/politica/2013/11/674-552638-9-camara-baja-rechaza-proyecto-que-elimina-el-guarismo-120-por-falta-de-quorum-y.shtml

21. www.theclinic.cl/2013/10/06/patricio-melero-la-concertacion-esta-preocupada-de-que-haya-un-mal-resultado-para-la-derecha-porque-se-quedarían-sin-contrapesos-al-interior-del-gobierno/

22. The Communist Youth have interpreted NM's constitutional reform pledge as a call for an "institutional refoundation" via a constituent assembly. Yet following in the footsteps of Venezuelan and Bolivian state refoundation, which could enable forms of political participation not dominated by partisan elites, and, more worrisome still, mandate state-guaranteed social rights which post-authoritarian orthodoxy has made the exclusive domain of the market, is clearly out of the question. While Vallejo and Jackson continue clamoring for a Constituent Assembly, Bachelet and her handlers talk only of achieving a "new" constitution through a restrictive parliamentary amendment process.

23. www.anarkismo.net/article/26344

24. www.anarkismo.net/article/26344

25. www.izquierdaautonoma.cl/este-ano-a-tomar-en-nuestras-manos-la-educacion-que-queremos/

Brazil: Lula, Rousseff, and the Workers Party Establishment in Power

DAN LA BOTZ

DILMA ROUSSEFF OF THE Workers Party (PT) won Brazil's presidential election on October 26, meaning that when her term ends her party will have held the nation's top office for a remarkable 16 years, longer than any party in Brazilian history. Rousseff began as part of an armed revolutionary guerrilla organization during the dictatorship from 1964-85, then helped found the Democratic Workers Party (PDT), and only joined the PT in 2001. The PT of the 1980s and 1990s represented the political expression of militant labor and social movements tending toward socialism, yet today the PT is the establishment. Now others are attempting to build a new revolutionary movement to its left.

Tremendous opposition to Brazil's PT establishment has come from both left and right, as seen in the June 2013 demonstrations that swept the country. And in the October 2014 elections, both the left and especially the right grew as a result. The more conservative Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) succeeded in harvesting much of the discontent that expressed itself in the tremendous demonstrations of June 2013, other right-wing parties have also grown, and a number of far-right candidates have been elected. Thus we see a polarization of Brazilian society with gains for both the far right and the far left.

On the left, the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL) proved most successful, especially in Rio de Janeiro where it emerged as a real electoral force to the left of the PT. There are

also at least two other important far-left parties, the United Socialist Workers Party (PSTU) and the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), though they are both less-significant electoral forces, the former having received 188,473 votes and the latter 66,615 votes in the recent national election. The PSTU is a more important force in the labor unions, while PSOL has deeper roots in other social movements. There have been proposals for electoral fronts of all three parties in the past, but in 2010 and 2014 PSOL was not an attractive electoral ally because it was too weak, so PSTU ran its own candidates. With PSOL's strength in this election, a left electoral front is more likely, as has already happened in some states.

We look here at the PT's almost 12 years in power and at the way in which what began as an inspiring workers' movement tending toward socialism became transformed into part of a new political capitalist establishment.

Brazil's Workers Party: Once the Hope of the Left

After Cuba and before Venezuela, there was Brazil. Brazil was, we recall, the hope of the left.

From the late 1970s until the early 2000s, Brazil represented for the left, especially for the Marxist left, the great possibility for social revolution in the twentieth century. Unlike Fidel Castro's guerrillas who had seized power in Cuba and eventually established a Communist regime, and different than the charismatic colonel Hugo Chávez who led a populist movement in Venezuela, Brazil's left political movement originated in working-class struggles for a better

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life and for democracy. The Brazilian labor and socialist movement seemed in the late twentieth century to be moving forward almost as if they were following a classical Marxist script. First, during the late 1970s the metal workers of the ABC district around São Paulo carried out strikes that played a crucial role in bringing an end to the military dictatorship. Then in 1983 those workers organized a new United Federation of Labor (CUT) that became the leading center of labor organizations in the country at the head of a rambunctious proletariat. The industrial, service, and government workers who affiliated with the CUT, and the Christian left, also used their resources in 1984 to help organize the Landless Workers Movement (MST) which fought aggressively for the redistribution of land to those who had nothing.

Already in 1980 the new labor movement, radical intellectuals, small far-left political parties, and the Christian base communities inspired by the Theology of Liberation had created the Workers Party (PT). The Workers Party called for socialism, even if there were widely differing views about whether that meant social reform and regulation, redistributive programs to help the poor, or a political and social revolution to overthrow capitalism and create a socialist society. As it grew, the PT

bubbled with internal discussion and debate while in a constant process of interaction with labor unions and community groups. Here it seemed was the radical, democratic workers' movement that we had been waiting for as an alternative to populist *caudillos*, the authoritarian bureaucracy of Communism, and the ostensible reformism but more typically austerity policies of contemporary social democracy.

In 1989 the PT put forward as its presidential candidate Luiz Inácio da Silva, better known by his nickname Lula, the foremost leader of the metal workers. Lula seemed to those of us in the United States like a Brazilian Eugene V. Debs, a workers' leader who had built a radical labor movement and then a workers party, and who was putting socialism on the agenda in the biggest country in Latin America.¹ During the 1990s the PT developed models of democratic and participatory government, the most celebrated element of which was Porto Alegre's and other cities' participatory budgeting. Within the PT a variety of revolutionary socialist organizations were active, among them the Socialist Democracy of the Fourth International which believed that the PT had the potential to develop into a revolutionary socialist party.² Brazil was a Marxist dream. It seemed too good to be true. And, as it turned out, it was.

Lula, campaigning for the presidency in 1989, 1994, and 1998, was finally elected in 2002 and became president with 61.3 percent of the vote, carrying all but one state, a stunning achievement. But during that first term, rather than leading the working class forward in struggle against the country's capitalists and politicians as many expected, he made peace with them.

Surprising many of his supporters and shocking members of the Workers Party, Lula continued many of the neoliberal policies of his predecessor Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003), continuing privatization and deregulation. Lula turned his back on agrarian reform, instead promoting large scale agricul-

ture. At the same time, however, he maintained Cardoso's targeted social benefits such as *Bolsa Escola*, an education subsidy that provided monthly cash payments to poor families whose children are enrolled in school. Lula's administration changed the program's name to *Bolsa Família* and expanded and extended it rapidly beginning in 2003 until it covered virtually the entire poor population. As a result, the country's poverty rate fell between 2003 and 2009 from 22 to 7 percent, lifting millions out of poverty and bringing some of them into the working class. Yet, even as he began to institute social programs that lowered the poverty rate, it was during his first term that Lula began to turn the party toward the right. How and why did Lula and the PT turn right?

The Political Decline of the PT and the Emergence of a New Left

Let's go back to the beginning. The PT as a young party won a following, especially among the better educated and better paid sectors of society in the southeast of Brazil, that is, in the states of Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and in the south, especially in Porto Alegre in Rio Grande do Sul, and soon succeeded in electing mayors in several towns and cities. Lula who ran as the party's candidate for president in 1989 did exceptionally well in the run-off, winning 47 percent of the vote, but then in 1994 Lula was trounced by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, while at the same time PT governors, senators, and mayors failed to win reelection in 1992 and 1996. Lula and his supporters drew the conclusion—one they had been coming to since 1989—that they had to move to the right. Their view was reinforced by Cardoso's success in establishing neoliberal policies which, at least in the short term, had proven successful and had received broad acceptance from a majority of the Brazilian population.

Though the PT's radical left wing held a majority at the party's 1993 Congress (the eighth *Encontro*) and adopted a left program

calling for a *luta revolucionaria* (the revolutionary struggle), Lula exerted his personal influence to win greater autonomy for his campaign in 1994—as he would do again in 1998, 2002, and 2006. Under Lula's influence the party moderated its political language, sought closer relations with business groups, and began to make alliance with centrist and even conservative parties.

Lula's government's poverty programs were aimed particularly at the Northeast's large poor population. By 2002 Lula chose José Alencar, an industrial billionaire, as his running mate, while at the same time the party dropped the word "socialism" and adopted the slogan of "*Lula, Paz e Amor*" (Lula, Peace and Love) and "*O PT para um Brasil Decente*" (The PT for a Decent Brazil). As president, Lula headed one of the largest parties in the Brazilian Congress, but it was still a minority, so he formed alliances with centrist and even rightist parties and in order to cement his political coalition, he began to buy the representatives of other parties, paying them a monthly allowance called the *mensalão*

Brazil was a Marxist dream. It seemed too good to be true. And, as it turned out, it was.

as revealed in the 2005 scandal.³

Lula and the PT leadership began to become more autonomous, more loosely connected to their social base. Though created by the unions, the PT had never been a labor party with any official ties to organized labor, but now Lula subordinated the labor unions to the party. The CUT and the metal workers that had lifted Lula to power, having become more bureaucratic and less connected to their social bases, became political captives of the PT, while many of their leaders formed the party's leadership and staff.

At the same time, union leaders

appointed as “workers’ representatives” to the boards of pension funds had, by dint of their positions, become major players in Brazilian finance; their task now being to press for redundancies, sell-offs, and shut-downs, in pursuit of high returns on their investments. Today the principal institutional investors are the Previ, Eletros, Sistel, Petros, Portus, and Funcef funds, and others whose names indicate the firm or sector from which they originated; they carry great weight on the stock exchange, and have played a decisive role in defining the parameters of state privatizations. Well before 2002, this fund-management stratum had crystallized within the core leadership of the Workers Party.⁴

The PT bureaucratically collectivized worker benefit funds and entered into the capitalist financial markets.

Lula’s poverty programs, combined with affirmative action policies first adopted in 2001 that opened Brazil’s universities to graduates of public schools, many of whom were Afro-Brazilians, promised to have a significant impact

Lula and his supporters drew the conclusion that they had to move to the right.

on poverty in Brazil over the long term. The result was that in 2006, the poor people of Brazil’s Northeast, who had long formed the base for more conservative parties, began to vote for Lula, and later for Dilma Rousseff, a political shift of enormous significance. Lula’s programs shifted the party’s base from the historically more politically active, better educated, and better paid social groups of the Southeast to the more politically passive and much poorer people of the Northeast who had historically voted for conservative parties.⁵

With his political power based on a partnership with high finance and big business on the one hand and with the poor on the other, Lula developed a political strategy that has been called “social liberalism”—neoliberalism with a social, human face, one might say—forming an alliance with the bankers, realtors, and construction companies, while at the same time establishing the *Bolsa Família* welfare system for the poor that made it possible not only for some of them to better feed and clothe their families, but also permitted more of their children to go to school. The PT government also put development—that is capitalist expansion—ahead of the country’s environmental and social objectives, offering incentives to the auto companies—thus keeping both them and the metal workers union happy, but leading to terrible traffic and pollution problems in the big cities like São Paulo with its twenty million inhabitants. Lula dropped agrarian reform and neglected indigenous and traditional communities in the countryside. At the same time, though, there was a gradual decline in industrial production, as Brazil shifted to extractive industries like mining, lumber, and agriculture, particularly soya.

As Lula moved to the right, he was criticized and publicly challenged by the PT’s left-wingers, particularly the Trotskyists of the Fourth International, but also former Communists and independent leftists. These struggles led in December 2003 to the expulsion of four legislators. Congressional representatives João Batista Oliveira de Araujo (known as Babá) and Luciana Genro, together with Senator Heloísa Helena, went on to form the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL) in June of 2004. Helena ran for president in 2006, winning 6 percent of the votes cast (6.6 million votes) the highest number of votes cast for a woman for political office in Brazilian history at the time. To understand the possible future for this new left party, we have to know something about the history of the old left. Heloísa became the head of the

party, but when PSOL endorsed Dilma in the second round, she resigned in protest.

Brazil's Old Left: Anarchists, Communists, and the Others

To understand how the PSOL differs from other parties of the left, one has to look at the old left. At the turn of the last century, the Brazilian labor movement, made up of European immigrants, was led by anarchists who carried out strikes, formed unions, and created the country's first labor federation. The Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) was founded in 1922 by former anarchists under the impact of the Russian Revolution; it was headed for years by the charismatic Luis Carlos Prestes who had commanded a revolutionary uprising in the 1920s and then led the famous 14,000-mile "long march," after which he joined the PCB. By the 1930s, the Communists—though still headed by Prestes—had become a typical, pro-Soviet party, following all the gyrations of the Communist International and the Soviet Union.⁶ More fissiparous than Communist parties in other countries, the PCB splintered every few years, flaking off Trotskyists in the late 1920s as well as other revolutionary socialist tendencies every decade thereafter. Still it remained Brazil's most important left party until 1964.

With the coming to power of the authoritarian populist government of Getulio Vargas in the coup of 1930, the Communists were driven underground. Yet, ironically, following the Communist Party's Popular-Front-period line, the PCB supported Vargas when Brazil entered World War II and sent troops to fight in Europe. While the Communists grew in Brazil, and had some influence in the unions during the 1940s, unlike, say, the French Party, they never became the dominant force in labor, the unions being controlled by the state. Then the Communists went into crisis in the 1950s after Nikita Khrushchev delivered his revelations of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Soviet



Communist Party Congress.⁷ For all of these reasons the Communist Party never became a major force in Brazilian politics, and neither did the Trotskyists or any of the other fragments of that left.

The combination of the decline of Communism, together with the thrill of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the rise of Maoism as an international tendency in the early 1960s, just as the military coup occurred in 1964, led to the proliferation of small far-left sects, neo-Communist, Castro-Guevarist, Trotskyist, and Maoist, some of them involved in the armed clandestine movement. Dilma Rousseff herself was a member of one of these underground groups, the Marxist Revolutionary Organization – Workers Politics (ORM-POLOP), for which she was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured during the years of the military dictatorship. Dilma then joined the PT and rose to the top as a close advisor of Lula and ultimately his handpicked successor for president. When she took office in 2011, Dilma continued Lula's strategic approach of collaborating with the financiers, industrialists, and agribusiness, while at the same time expanding even further the social programs, which by improving the lot of the poor had created a new social base for the party.

Still, by the 2010s it was clear that the PT's economic model was running into difficulties.

The Crisis of the Brazilian Economic Model

Under Lula and Dilma, Brazil's economic model depended on the expanding export of agricultural products, including biofuels; on the sale of minerals, most important of all iron ore to China; and on the growth of the internal consumer market, made possible by the poverty programs. The model worked well from 2004–2010 when growth averaged 4.5 percent, making possible the expansion of government infrastructure and social welfare programs that stimulated the consumer market. Brazil rapidly overcame the

Many economic analysts believe that the PT's economic model has now been exhausted.

2008 economic crisis. After a brief downturn in 2009, it achieved an outstanding 7.5 percent growth rate in 2010. After that, however, the economy began declining, growing by only 2.7 percent in 2011, by a mere 0.9 percent in 2012, and by just 2.5 percent in 2013. Many economic analysts believe that the PT's economic model has now been exhausted. Because Brazil's consumer market has expanded rapidly as consumers purchased goods made in other countries, Brazil has a balance-of-payments problem, with its account balance deteriorating steadily since 2004. Brazil is heavily dependent upon Chinese economic expansion, but China, which has until now invested heavily in infrastructure such as railroads and in building construction, may be leaving its iron age, meaning that its purchases of Brazilian iron ore may fall.⁸ The development model promoted by Lula and Dilma has led to an economy based on cheap labor, rather than

good jobs. Some 94 percent of the jobs created pay only US\$400 per month. Even so Brazil's wages may be too high to compete in the global markets with China and other even lower-wage economies. In fact, some critics argue that deindustrialization is already a serious problem.⁹

One of Brazil's historic problems, a legacy of more than 300 years of slavery, was that an enormous number of poor people had never entered the formal labor market.¹⁰ The expansion of the Brazilian economy under Lula made possible increases in the minimum wage, which had a ripple effect throughout the labor market, while the expansion of social programs for the poor, including especially the *Bolsa Família*, also lifted millions out of poverty and carried some into the working class. At the same time, economic expansion helped other millions of people already in the working class adopt a more middle-class lifestyle based on the purchase of consumer durable goods such as automobiles and washing machines. The rise of the poor and of working people created anxiety and resentment among the better-off middle classes and the wealthy who felt their privileges, such as the ready availability of low-paid maids, were being threatened by the rise of those below.

The astonishing, massive demonstrations that swept the country in June 2013 represented a social eruption such as had not been seen in forty years and constituted an explicit rejection of the Workers Party government, but even more important, of political parties and government at all levels. The protests reflected both the rising expectations among the working class and a smaller right-wing backlash from the middle and upper classes. According to the highly regarded polling agency IBOPE, some 8.5 million people (out of a total population of 200 million) joined demonstrations in 400 cities and 22 state capitals, first against high transportation costs and then against just about everything else that had to do with government policies. Largely made up of young people, many with good educations but without good jobs,

the demonstrations gave expression to both their own personal aspirations revolving around public transportation, health care, housing, and employment and also the collective sentiment that the society could do better. Dilma's government's enormous investment in building stadiums for the World Cup exacerbated the sense of frustration of those who felt more schools and health clinics were needed.

The protesters were first violently repressed by the government, but then when it became apparent that they had the public's sympathy, the government quickly made minor concessions, offered promises of reform, and then studiously turned its back on the discontented and ignored the issues they raised.¹¹ IBOPE found that 72 percent of the population approved of the demonstrations and that 89 percent had no faith in the political parties.¹² The protests were followed by a wave of strikes—by transit workers, teachers, and street cleaners—involving 3.5 million workers, a labor upheaval such as had not been seen in the country for decades.

At the same time, many people joined the demonstrations to protest corruption, the corruption of the PT government. The media, conservative parties, and right-wing groups seized upon corruption as their slogan in a very general way and linked it to the problem of what they called the “leftist” PT government. They began to put forward conservative programs and parties as the solution to the corruption crisis. While the left attempted to counter the right-wing interpretation of events, it was not generally successful. The demonstrations' lack of a clear direction was accompanied by increasingly violent clashes between the police and anarchist groups identified as the “Black Bloc,” making many fearful of participating, and leading to the movement's decline. Clearly the June days were a complex process with very different agendas and political groups attempting to take leadership.

As the October 2014 election approached, the question was, where would those who

participated in and sympathized with these movements go? The unexpected death of Eduardo Campos of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) thrust the nomination on Marina Silva, a colleague of Chico Mendes, the famous environmentalist who was assassinated because of his defense of the Amazon and its jungle environment. Silva, a member of the Workers Party, served as Senator and then Minister of the Environment from 2003 to 2008 when she resigned in opposition to the developmental policies of Lula and Dilma. She ran for president in 2011, making an impressive showing by coming in third with 19 percent of the vote (19 million votes). But Silva failed to put forward a clear political message, for example attempting to win LGBT support without confronting the evangelicals, and lost the election to Dilma and the more conservative Aécio Neves. Dilma, supported by the PT's organization, using attack ads on Neves, and with the vote of those in the Northeast whose lives had improved thanks to the government's poverty program, went on to defeat Neves by a vote of 51.4 percent to 48.5 percent—a slim victory. The PT will still be the largest party with 14 percent of the members

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of Congress. PSOL urged its members to vote against Aécio, which meant a vote for Dilma, though other parties suggested casting a blank ballot. Most striking was the larger number of conservatives elected and particularly the number of extreme right-wing candidates. The trend might suggest that this will be the last

presidential election won by the PT—though there is also talk of Lula returning to run in 2018. In any case, the stage is set for further struggles between Brazil's working classes and the government and for greater polarization between left and right.

NOTES

1. Margaret Keck, *The Workers Party and Democratization in Brazil* (Yale University Press, 1992). Keck's account captured some of the excitement of the early days of the PT.
2. João Machado, "The Experience of building DS and the PT, from 1979 to the first Lula government," *International Viewpoint*, www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2630.
3. Perry Anderson, "Lula's Brazil," *London Review of Books* (March 31, 2011), www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n07/perry-anderson/lulas-brazil. Wendy Hunter, *The Transformation of the Workers' Party in Brazil, 1989–2009* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), passim. Hunter's excellent account of the taming of the Workers Party might be favorably compared to Carl Schorske's classic *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917: The Development of the Great Schism*.
4. Francisco de Oliveira, "Lula in the Labyrinth," *New Left Review* (42, November–December 2006), newleftreview.org/II/42/francisco-de-oliveira-lula-in-the-labyrinth.
- 5 André Singer, *Os Sentidos do Lulismo: Reforma gradual e pacto conservador* (São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 2012), passim. Lula's shifting of the foundation of his support from the Southeast's working and middle classes to the Northeast's peasants forms a central axis of his argument that under Lula the PT had become a fundamentally establishment party.
6. Though some of its leading intellectuals, such as Caio Prado Júnior, *A Revolução Brasileira* (São Paulo: Editor Brasiense, 1966), criticized the PCB's popular front politics.
7. Ronald H. Chilcote, *The Brazilian Communist Party: Conflict and Integration 1922–1972* (Oxford University Press, 1974), 3–97; Robert J. Alexander, *Trotskyism in Latin America* (Stanford University, 1973), 69–87.
8. Herwin Loman, "Brazil's economic model: In need of a revamp," Rabobank Economic Research Department, economics.rabobank.com/publications/2014/january/brazils-economic-model-in-need-of-a-revamp/.
9. James Petras, "Brazil: Extractive Capitalism and the Great Leap Backward," petras.lahaine.org/?p=1945
10. The legacy of slavery is one of the great issues of Brazilian history—as it is of American history. Communists were some of the pioneers of the study of the colonial economy and of slavery. Caio Prado Jr.'s *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo* [1942] (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2011) is the classic foundation for the Marxist analysis of the Brazilian economy.
11. Plinio de Arruda Sampaio Jr., ed., *Jornadas de Junho: A revolta popular em debate* (São Paulo: ICP-Instituto Caio Prado Jr., 2014). The several essays provide an excellent account of various aspects of the June Days.
12. www.ibope.com.br/pt-br/noticias/Documents/JOB_0948_BRASIL%20-%20Relatorio%20de%20tabelas.pdf. (accessed 9/11/14).

The Workers Party's Contradictions and the Contours of Crisis in Brazil

A View of National Electoral Politics from Brazil's North and Northeast

MELEIZA FIGUEROA

ELECTION DAY CAME LAZILY in Santarém, a mid-sized city and trading entrepôt at the junction of the Amazon and Tapajós rivers, the halfway point between Amazônia's primary metropolises of Manaus and Belém. The internet was out of service in this sleepy Amazonian town, as were two out of the four major cellphone carriers, and the streets were nearly empty. I encountered a group of men singing songs on the waterfront, reclining under one of the few shaded *barracas* that gave them respite from the relentless sun. I asked one of the men—who, like many who work in the precarious river trades, walked on crutches and nursed an amputated leg—where people were going to vote. After he told me about a few locations, which all seemed too far for me to walk to in the suffocating heat, I asked him when he was going to go vote. “Not until the late afternoon—I don’t like the long lines,” he said. “Not like it’s that important anyway; I’m going to vote *branco*” (leave the ballot blank).

The results for the first-round vote were not to be released until 7:00 that evening, but many people, per the opinion polls, were expecting a second-round runoff between incumbent Dilma Rousseff of the Workers Party (PT) and dark-horse candidate Marina Silva, an ex-PT

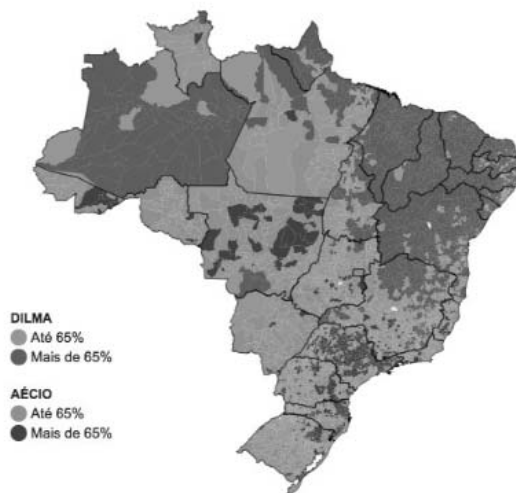
maverick whose humble origins, evangelical ties, and environmentalist credentials earned her a Cinderella-esque ascendancy after the sudden death of running mate Eduardo Campos, the original presidential candidate for the Socialist Party of Brazil (PSB)¹. So it came as a bit of a surprise when Marina ended up in third place with 21 percent of the vote, and the runoff was set between Dilma, who finished first place with 41 percent, and the conservative pro-business candidate Aécio Neves, who took 33 percent.

This unexpected result opened up the potential for a return, after 12 years of PT rule, to the blatantly pro-market, oligarchic *café-com-leite* politics of old. The traditional elites smelled the proverbial blood in the water, and in the intervening weeks before the second-round vote, the gloves came off of the conservative offensive. The PT’s strong constituency in the Northeast, in particular, became the target of vicious and racist attacks from Aécio’s party, the PSDB, and its elite allies. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former president of Brazil and current head of the PSDB, claimed in an interview that Northeasterners were too ignorant to vote, sparking a wave of racist attacks against *nordestinos*.² In one of the worst incidents, a group representing over 100,000 health professionals promoted the chemical sterilization of Northeasterners, calling for a “holocaust” amongst PT voters.³ In the last days before the second round, the elite offensive against the PT even assumed a perverse affinity with global protest movements, as the *Economist* claimed a “cashmere revolution”

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was on the rise.⁴

In the runoff vote, which took place on October 26, Dilma squeaked out a three-and-a-half point victory over Aécio Neves, winning 51.6 percent of the vote and a historic fourth term for the PT. This narrow win, secured in part through a dramatic last-minute mobilization of artists, social movements, academics, and other prominent citizens in support of Dilma, was celebrated as a victory for left progressive forces in Brazil. This mobilization certainly held the line against the shamelessly neoliberal “*tucanos*,” as well as the entrenched oligarchies and financial elites who barely concealed their salivating at the first hint of a return to power. But for many of the informal workers, *favelados*, and others I spoke to on the streets of Brazilian cities who voted *branco* and/or opted out altogether in the first round, holding the line against a right-wing revolt is not enough to



Map of second-round vote, by municipality. Source: infograficos.oglobo.globo.com/brasil/resultado-municipio-eleicoes-segundo-turno.html

counteract a pervasive sense of disillusionment with a stagnant economy and an ineffective government.

In the context of the multiple potential crises currently confronting Brazil, the narrow second-round result perhaps signals less of a

victory for the left than a serious wake-up call for a Workers Party that has grown complacent in its relative hegemony. Brazil's current social and political trajectory—from the explosive yet ambiguous political character of the 2013 protests, to a victory for Dilma that was far too close for comfort—perhaps reflects the fact that the PT's politics of triangulation between the needs of the people and the demands of global capital has reached a critical limit. In the face of a renewed offensive from national right-wing elites and international “market forces,” the PT must do more than simply hold the line in these next few years if a “left” government is to survive in Brazil.

The Geography of Power

Brazil's electoral, economic, and historical geography is of central importance in understanding the nation's political conflicts, dilemmas, and prospects for social change. Since the late nineteenth century and the collapse of the slave-based sugar economy, the contours of oligarchic rule in Brazil have historically been shaped by the politics of “*café-com-leite*” (“coffee with milk”)—a term originally referring to the political dominance of coffee and dairy interests from Brazil's Southeastern states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais in the early twentieth century, and whose legacy has continued to characterize the disproportionate influence of the rich and powerful Southeast in national politics. In fact, some commentators in the Brazilian press noted that Aécio Neves, who was governor of Minas Gerais until his presidential run, suggested a literal return to the “*café-com-leite*” politics of old by choosing a Paulista, Aloysio Nunes, as his running mate.

With the 2003 election of President Lula, a native Northeasterner, the PT government's domestic policies reflected a shift in priorities not only towards the working class and poor, but particularly the rural poor in the semi-arid Northeast, which was at the time the largest contiguous concentration of poverty in the

Americas. For the first time, the poor of the North and Northeast not only gained material support, but a degree of visibility and influence on the national scene. Little wonder, then, that this population—ignored for centuries by Southeastern elites—has continued to vote overwhelmingly for the PT.

The PSDB's fear of the poor and dark-skinned voter rests not on their ignorance, but on the fact that the poor actually do understand their interests, and have experienced the material benefits of their votes. Voting is mandatory in Brazil. This fact is often acknowledged almost as an afterthought in U.S. media reports, but its significance for electoral politics is just as often overlooked. In Brazil, a citizen must show an active voter registration card, or *título*, in order to obtain formal employment, open a bank account, qualify for loans, or receive government services or benefits.

On one level, this system of compulsory voting encourages democratic participation from citizens, and draws a much tighter relationship of accountability between politicians and their constituencies, particularly at the local level. Thus, even (and perhaps especially) in a multi-party system such as Brazil's, communities have real ability to wrest material concessions, such as much-needed infrastructure or social services, from their political representatives through the power of the vote. For example, I recently visited a friend who lives in a *favela* in Salvador, Bahia, and noted that the streets had recently been paved; a banner announced that this was the work of the local PT deputy, who I'm sure received a good share of the vote from this community in return for completing this public service.

It is within this system that the PT has retained power on the demonstrative merit of its social programs. Initiatives such as Bolsa Família, a conditional cash transfer program for poor families, and Fome Zero, an anti-hunger campaign, have indeed significantly reduced absolute poverty in Brazil, especially in the very

poor North and Northeast regions. Especially in the *sertão*—the semi-arid rural interior of

Holding the line against a right-wing revolt is not enough to counteract a pervasive sense of disillusionment with a stagnant economy and an ineffective government.

Northeast Brazil, currently in its third year of severe drought—Bolsa Família payments can mean the difference between life and death for the millions of small farmers, *quilombolas* (communities of descendants of escaped slaves), and itinerant agrarian workers that live in the region. As I traveled through the Northeast by bus this past month, I heard many residents passionately defend the PT's social policies as a vital lifeline for a population otherwise abused and abandoned by successive governments throughout Brazil's history.

The PT's Contradictions and Challenges for Brazil

The material concessions granted—and won by communities—through the mandatory voting system are important and real; but as a political strategy, these local victories fail to amount to any kind of systemic process of democratically driven social transformation. In fact, it easily can, and in many cases has, simply become a game of capturing votes. Looking at Brazil from the outside, the PT's importance as a “left” government in Latin America is quite apparent on an global and regional level; but on the state and local levels, PT representatives and functionaries often blend in far too easily with the oligarchic old boys' networks that have always prioritized private profit over public good.

As Amazonian journalist Lúcio Flávio Pinto recently wrote, “The people are grateful to those who have discovered them, who remembered them, and who have done far more for them than ever before. This is the merit of the PT government. Yet it is a relative merit, conditioned by historical circumstances and individual conditions.”⁵ The historical conditions under which the PT government has lifted nearly 40 million citizens out of poverty also underlie the contours of the current crises facing Brazil. In the last few years, the PT’s “neo-developmental” strategy of triangulating between neoliberal macroeconomic policies that favor agribusiness and financial markets on the one hand, and nominal wealth redistribution through social programs on the other, has reached a number of “structural limits,” in the words of Movement of the Landless leader João Pedro Stedile.⁶

The PT’s internal contradictions are playing out in several dramatic ways, with consequences that reach far beyond the local contexts in which they occur. The revolts of 2013 were just one manifestation of the economic dilemmas that Dilma faces in her second term. Brazil’s spectacular economic growth in the first decade of the 2000s slowed throughout Dilma’s first term in office, technically entering recession in 2014. While Dilma has taken a stand against the standard neoliberal policy prescriptions for austerity that have devastated economies elsewhere, she had made some modest attempts at austerity in the first year of her presidency that, along with the ludicrous levels of spending for the World Cup and Olympics, created the conditions for the 2013 protests.

At the same time, her refusal to fully embrace free-market policies—and Aécio’s willingness to do just that—have made the PT a target for international “economic terrorism.”⁷ Dilma’s re-election in the second round provoked a harsh rebuke from global capital; the national stock market tanked and Brazil’s currency fell close to its lowest point in nearly ten years,

leading to the Wall Street Journal’s brazen claim that “the world voted on Brazil, and . . . the result was a resounding no confidence.” While about 2,500 far-right demonstrators marched in São Paulo for Dilma’s impeachment—a relatively small protest but widely covered in global corporate business publications—a petition at the White House website asking for U.S. intervention to force Dilma out of office reached over 100,000 signatures.⁸ This election also saw a sharp rightward shift in Congress, to the most conservative legislature since the military coup of 1964—with the PT losing 18 congressional seats to the PSDB, PSB, and smaller parties to its right, and extreme right-wing representatives such as Jair Bolsonaro and Luiz Carlos Heinze receiving a greater share of the vote in their respective states.⁹ With a potential resurgence of right-wing political elites waiting in the wings, it is possible that the stage is being set for an all-too-familiar replay of Latin American regime change through the Washington consensus’ economic hit men.¹⁰

Another set of challenges for the PT on a national level are the ecological consequences of its agriculture and conservation policies in the Amazon, as well as the dry-forest areas of the Cerrado, where international scrutiny and Amazon-style environmental protections are practically nonexistent. In these areas, the PT has overwhelmingly favored large-scale agribusiness interests, including the explosively expanding soy industry on which much of Brazil’s export economy has come to depend.¹¹ The “*ruralista*” bloc of big agribusiness interests and their representatives in Congress have facilitated the rapid and incredibly violent expansion of sugarcane, soybean, and cattle production into indigenous lands, extractive reserves, and other protected areas of the rainforest.¹² Dilma herself, in 2012, signed into law crucial changes to the vital Forest Code, which effectively reduced the percentage of agricultural land that must remain under conservation by law¹³; and in 2014 openly declared her support for re-election of the leader

of the most important agribusiness lobby within Congress, Senator Katia Abreu.¹⁴

These and other collusions with agribusiness have resulted in a whopping *190-percent increase* in deforestation since the easing of the Forest Code, compared with a steep decline in deforestation over the previous decade.¹⁵ Evidence now points to a connection between deforestation in the Amazon and an unprecedented drought in—of all places—São Paulo, where millions of residents in one of the world's largest megacities could run out of water in the next few weeks.¹⁶ Sadly, here too, the politics game has undermined the everyday lives of poor and working-class Brazilian citizens, as PSDB governor Geraldo Alckmin faces criticism and protests over having withheld critical action on emergency drought measures until after the October elections.¹⁷

In these contexts (and others), Marina

Silva's sudden rise in the polls made a certain amount of sense. While her politics were relatively vague and inconsistent in some ways—and quite clearly neoliberal in others—her campaign rode a wave of popular anti-PT sentiment and disillusionment with politics-as-usual that appears to stem not simply from right-wing media manipulations and accusations of corruption, but also from the material contradictions of a left in power that has not, and perhaps cannot, go far enough in its current configuration and “neo-developmental” orientation.

Fortunately, for now, Brazilians have kept the reactionaries at bay, and vital space still exists for crucial debates about the nation's future. Social movements, unions, peasants and poor, working class, Afro-descendent, and indigenous communities throughout Brazil can still come together—as they had once before, in the creation of the PT—and demand a real program

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for progressive social change. Whether or not such a program is still possible within the PT apparatus is a contested issue, with many on the Brazilian left advocating for and creating alter-

This election also saw a sharp rightward shift in Congress, to the most conservative legislature since the military coup of 1964.

native forms of left politics and representation. What is clear is that in the current conjuncture, further capitulation to the neoliberal status quo is unsustainable in either the social or electoral arenas. Agrarian reform, equitable urban development, protection of indigenous lands, and socio-environmental policies and protections should lay at the heart of a renewed strategy that can inspire a revitalized left to survive and thrive, in power, in the face of the great challenges that loom on the horizon.

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SPECIAL SECTION: SYRIA, IRAQ, ISIS, AND THE WEST

Interview with Joseph Daher **Revolution, Reaction, and Intervention in Syria**

JOSEPH DAHER is a member of the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria. He is the writer and editor of *Syria Freedom Forever*, syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com, a blog dedicated to the struggle of the Syrian people in their uprising to overthrow the Assad authoritarian regime and to build a democratic, secular, socialist, anti-imperialist, and pro-resistance Syria. A Ph.D. student in Development, he works as an assistant at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. He was interviewed in Geneva on October 22, 2014, by New Politics board member Riad Azar, with some email updates. For additional questions on Kobanê and Turkey, see the New Politics website, newpol.org/content/koban%C3%AA-turkey-and-syrian-struggle.

NEW POLITICS. Your writings give voice to those persons and groups who are often ignored in the international media's portrayal of the crisis in Syria. I would like to ask you some questions regarding the United States' recent entry into the battlefield and how you believe this will affect the various actors in the region.

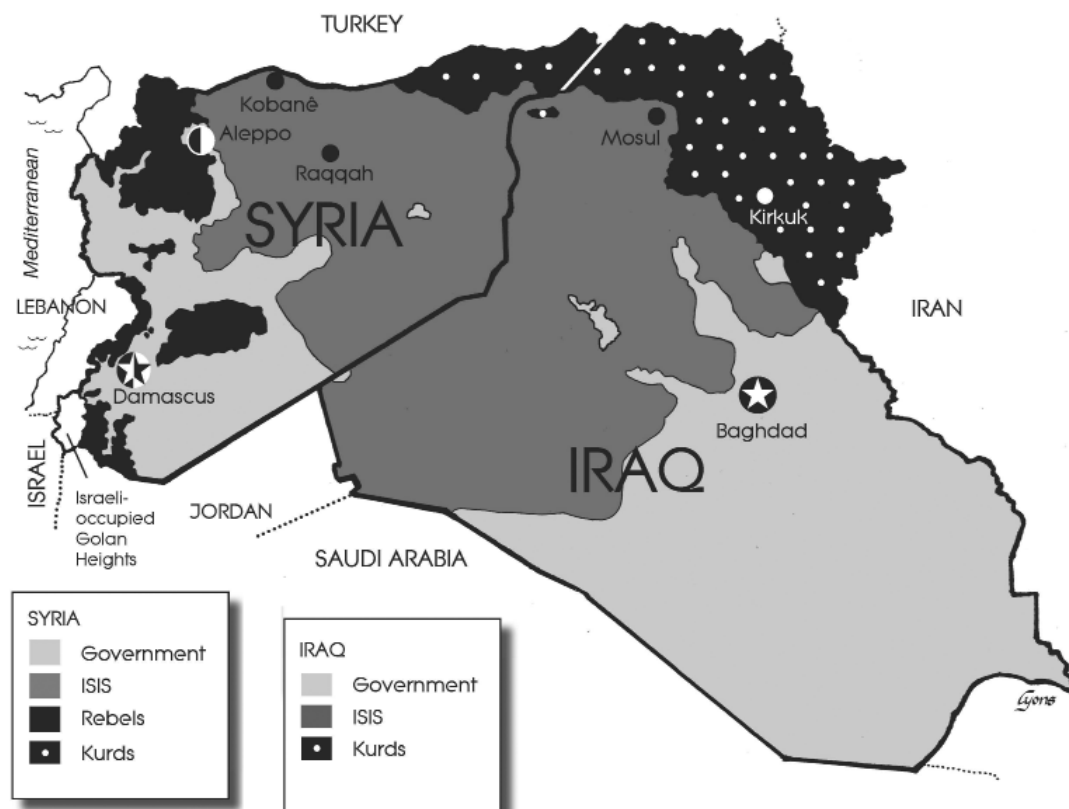
The crisis in Syria is often painted as a conflict involving the Assad regime and the Islamic State (ISIS), with barely any mention of other players

within the country. How do you understand the current state of Syria, taking into account all of the groups vying for power?

JOSEPH DAHER. The dominant narrative, especially since 2012, has been to portray the Syrian revolutionary process as not a part of the other revolutionary processes in the region, for democracy, social justice, and equality. Instead the ongoing events in Syria have been seen as either a sectarian conflict between religious minorities against a religious majority, or through a geopolitical perspective where different imperialist and sub-imperialist states of the region oppose each other. This is especially the case with the so called "axis of resistance" argument, based on Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, with the support of Russia, opposing Western imperialism led by the United States and allied with the reactionary monarchies of the region: Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This ignores the dynamics from below of the Syrian revolutionary process.

Both of these analyses are problematic because they ignore the deep and objective conditions of the Syrian revolutionary process, which are similar for all of the countries that went through—and are still going through—revolutionary processes. In short, the driving forces have been the desire for democracy, the socio-

Areas of control Syria and Iraq, November 2014



Source: Adapted from Thomas van Linge
https://pietervanostaeyen.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/img_3915.jpg
https://pietervanostaeyen.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/img_3914.jpg

economic crisis, and a will for emancipation and liberation towards more equality.

Firstly, remember that Syria was also an authoritarian regime, ruled for the past 40 years by one family, and it is also a bourgeois regime that went through a process of neoliberalization and privatization, accelerated considerably with Bashar al-Assad's arrival to power. Sixty percent of the population was living under or just above the poverty line in 2011. Syria was subjected to the same form of crony capitalism that is prevalent in the region. For example, in Egypt it was the Mubarak family that benefitted mostly from the privatization and neoliberalization; in

Tunisia it was the Trabelsi family, of the wife of the dictator Ben Ali; and in Syria it is Makhoul, the cousin of Assad, who owns 60 percent of the country's wealth. In the end what we have are neoliberal and authoritarian systems, and Syria is no different in this regard.

Secondly, by saying it is all simply a conflict between ISIS and Assad, one ignores the popular movement that has been ongoing for the past three years *despite* the fact that the movement was undermined first by the regime and then by Islamic reactionary forces. However, this popular movement is not only still alive but it is still playing an important role. Members of

this movement were the original actors of the revolution and are still upholding the objectives of the revolution.

Thirdly, the Assad/Islamic State dichotomy ignores the fact that the Assad regime helped the development of ISIS and all the Islamic reactionary forces, by releasing from the prisons of the regime the different individuals who would become the heads of these reactionary forces. In various amnesty decisions during the start of the revolutionary process, leaders of various Islamic reactionary forces were freed, while democratic activists were imprisoned, tortured, and oppressed. We should realize that the Assad regime targeted and still targets mostly the democratic and progressive activists as well as the Free Syrian Army, while it allowed ISIS to grow.

The best example is the city of Raqqa, which was under the domination of ISIS since October 2013, and was only targeted for the first time by the regime at the end of August 2014. This is when ISIS gained a lot of territory in Iraq and when the U.S.-led coalition for bombing Iraq and Syria was organizing. And one must also not forget that the first to oppose ISIS and other Islamic reactionary forces was the popular movement. Since the beginning of 2013 in various areas there have been popular mobilizations and demonstrations to condemn the authoritarian practices of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front.

A popular uprising occurred in the beginning of 2014 in some neighborhoods of Aleppo and in northern areas of Syria against ISIS. ISIS was expelled militarily from several areas due to the pressure of the masses. Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front also participated in these military fights against ISIS because of the opposition of the masses and the increasing defiance and violence of ISIS against them. We can see that the popular masses in Syria oppose those who don't uphold the objectives of the revolution and practice authoritarian policies.

Of course this does not mean in any way that Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front, or

other Salafist forces, should be considered allies of the revolution for democracy, social justice, and equality; they are part of the counter-revolution. We have seen just recently that Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State cooperated in

This ignores the dynamics from
below of the Syrian revolutionary
process.

expelling the Syrian Revolutionaries Front from Rif Idlib and that Ahrar Sham (a Salafist group) has just attacked Free Syrian Army forces in a neighborhood of Aleppo called Bustan Qasr.

Finally, seeing the conflict as solely between Assad and ISIS actually serves no one but the regime and ISIS, and both alternatives are reactionary. In some ways it also serves Western imperialism, which wants to portray the conflict as choosing between the lesser of two evils. The Assad regime welcomed the U.S.-led coalition's bombardment, and supported "all international counterterrorism efforts." Assad wants to appear to the various international imperialist actors in the West as the person that can help them in their fight against "terrorism." This last perspective has unfortunately pushed many—from conservative right-wingers to ill-informed anti-imperialists—to take the view that Assad is a lesser evil than the Jihadists. In fact we should oppose both, because they nurture each other and are each seeking to establish an authoritarian system.

So definitely this view of seeing only a conflict between ISIS and Assad is negating the popular revolutionary process in Syria, and the strength of the popular movement. Even though it has been undermined, it is still present, still fighting, and still upholding the objectives of the revolution.

NP. What do you believe are the objectives of the

U.S.-led airstrikes and arms supplies in Syria and Iraq?

JD. First, in Iraq, they serve to protect American allies. The U.S. military intervention, despite its “humanitarian” propaganda, is nevertheless part of established political objectives that are: to protect American diplomatic personnel sta-

The driving forces of the Syrian revolutionary process have been the desire for democracy, the socioeconomic crisis, and a will for emancipation and liberation towards more equality.

tioned in Erbil (which is also home of a CIA base); to protect the large multinational companies in the hydrocarbon/oil sector such as Mobil, Chevron, Exxon, and Total who are exploiting the oil production in the region and have already invested more than \$10 billion; and, perhaps most importantly, to keep the alliance with the Iraqi regime, inherited from the American invasion. The United States did not intervene when Mosul fell and more than 200,000 refugees were on the road to Iraqi Kurdistan, but only got involved militarily when ISIS was threatening to conquer the Kurdish areas of the north and the capital Baghdad in the south.

That is why the United States only wanted cosmetic and superficial changes in the Iraqi regime, replacing only the prime minister, Maliki, who was also let down by his Iranian ally because of his catastrophic mismanagement of the country. The new prime minister, Haidar al-Abadi, is far from representing any radical change. He is a close partner of Maliki and a member of the same party, Dawa. He was Minister of Communication in the interim government set up after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

This new Prime Minister, al-Abadi, has received international support including from Iran. Ex-prime minister Maliki has nevertheless tried to remain in power, but finally gave up. Following this announcement, American officials said that they could accelerate the economic and military aid to Iraq if the new government of al-Abadi were more inclusive, particularly towards the Sunni population of Iraq. But this forgets that it is the current political system of the Iraqi regime and the same political forces that have led Iraq into this situation today as I have explained in different articles on my website.

It is worth mentioning American assistance to the Iraqi army for those who doubt that this regime is an ally of the United States: the Pentagon has provided Iraq with \$650 million worth of ammunition and small arms this year alone. Before 2011, the United States had spent \$24 billion on arming and training the Iraqi army. Finally, on October 22, the United States declared that it was negotiating to sell \$600 million worth of armor-piercing tank rounds to Iraq.

The airstrikes in Syria are definitely not in favor of the Syrian revolution. Washington from the beginning claimed it would be targeting ISIS, but it has targeted other reactionary forces as well, such as Jabhat al-Nusra or forces linked to it. While we as members of the revolutionary-left current in Syria have opposed these reactionary forces, we also oppose this intervention in Syria because the objectives of the U.S.-led coalition are not to assist and help the Syrian revolutionaries or to protect them from ISIS or the regime. The objective is to reimpose their hegemony over the region and guarantee a form of stability, especially to the reactionary regimes of the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, by putting an end to the revolutionary processes.

These strikes are also in the framework of reaching a “Yemeni” solution, as was the goal since the beginning. In other words, reaching an agreement between the Assad regime (or a section of it) and the opposition linked to Western and Gulf regimes. The approval by the U.S.

Congress of \$500 million to support President Obama's plan to arm and equip 5,000-10,000 Syrian rebels, whom Washington describes as "moderate" in their fight against ISIS and Syrian regime forces, goes in the same direction, as we can see in the text of the resolution:

The Secretary of Defense is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustainment, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

1. Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL [another term for ISIS]), and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.
2. Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.
3. Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria.

The desire of the United States to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests is nevertheless thwarted by the reality on the ground. This is because of the decision of a large majority of opposition groups to cooperate with Washington only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision making, and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime. Colonel Riad al-Asaad, the leader of the Free Syrian Army, for example said he would not join the alliance against ISIS without a commitment to oust the Syrian regime. He added, "If they want to see the Free Syrian Army on their side, they should give assurances on toppling the Assad regime and on a plan including revolutionary principles." Other armed groups present in the Supreme Military Council of Syria, close to Washington, also expressed their resentment of the United States and other Western forces for their lack of support. They said that coalition airstrikes against ISIS targets were not enough; the strikes must also hit Assad's forces. One

of the commanders said that "we need to deal with this problem at its root cause: Assad, the gangs that support him, and Daech [an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State]. Those are the three problems every Syrian deals with." Many armed groups were also critical of the way the strikes were being carried out and many inside the country on the side of the revolution reject these bombings.

The jihadi and Islamic reactionary forces are used by the Western imperialist and regional forces as the entry point for this new military intervention. At the same time, the expansion of the jihadi groups, which has ignored state borders and created instability, has reached the point where it is threatening Western and regional imperialist interests. We should remember that ISIS, which was established in 2006, was of no interest to these powers when they were confined to specific geographic locations in Iraq and later Syria. They were even financially supported by some Gulf private networks in the beginning. Although ISIS and other sister organizations are a factor of instability for the global imperialist system, we should be clear they are in no ways actors for the emancipation and liberation of the people of the region; they are very much the opposite. At the same time, the bombings from the U.S.-led coalition have

The popular movement is not only
still alive but it is still playing an
important role.

killed civilians and destroyed much-needed civilian infrastructure.

These are the reasons we should oppose these bombings. Airstrikes by U.S.-led forces have killed more than 32 civilians during the first month of bombing in Syria, according to official data. At the same time the Assad regime has continued its war against the population

and combatants of the Free Syrian Army in the “liberated” areas. Thus, Assad’s siege of Aleppo is almost complete. He has made significant progress in the countryside of Damascus (Al Ghouta) and has bombed on a daily basis the Al Wa’ar neighborhood in Homs for the last two weeks. This has elicited the complete silence of the media.

In addition, to believe that ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other similar organizations can be defeated with the same tools that created them is completely insane. These reactionary forces are indeed the consequences of the criminal authoritarian regimes (for example Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq) and foreign

By saying it is all simply a conflict
between ISIS and Assad, one
ignores the popular movement.

interventions (mainly Western countries led by the United States and regional states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Iran). This new military intervention has indeed no objective of overthrowing the Assad regime. As a banner held by a Syrian protester in Aleppo last week said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, Albert Einstein,” and below, “Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Syria 2014.” The only political groups that will benefit from these bombings are the two sides of the counter-revolution: the Assad regime on one side, and on the other the reactionary Islamic and jihadi political forces.

The Assad regime will most probably benefit in the short term militarily, with the weakening of strong military actors. Assad’s forces have actually continued their attacks on various areas of the country, but in addition the regime sees a chance to regain “legitimacy” with the West as part of an alliance in the War against Terrorism.

The bombing will likely militarily weaken in the short term ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other reactionary forces, but will most likely prove counterproductive for the Syrian revolutionaries by increasing the popular support for the jihadi fighters, driving even more recruits to their ranks. These forces are already painting themselves as the only serious anti-imperialist movement, rather than the reactionary and sectarian outfit they are. Several reports have already noted that these bombings have boosted the appeal of these organizations, with new recruits arriving every day. There is also competition between the organizations; for example, Jabhat al-Nusra must further radicalize its discourse to prevent the departure of its members, especially foreigners, to ISIS. Following the bombing of their positions in Idlib, some members have claimed their willingness and readiness to fight alongside ISIS.

Further, when we look at the example of Kobanê, this intervention can really be questioned by studying its consequences on the ground; in particular it has been unable to stop the offensive of ISIS. Let’s remember that when the U.S.-led coalition intervened in Syria in mid-September, ISIS was 60 kilometres away from Kobanê. Today ISIS—even though the U.S. started bombarding—is occupying half of the city. This tells us that this new intervention is not at all helping the revolution, and is more propaganda than anything. Lastly, we can see who supports this U.S.-led coalition: Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the centers of counter-revolution in the region.

This intervention is in the interests of Western imperialism and also those of the different sub- and international-imperialist forces. You can see that Russia is not really opposing this kind of bombardment, although there’s criticism of *the way* it is led. The same with Iran; it criticizes the way it is led but does not directly oppose these bombings. All of these actors want some form of stability, which was challenged by the revolutionary processes that began in 2010.

When the United States says it is targeting ISIS, we have to remember that ISIS grew out of al-Qaeda, which was present since 2005 in Iraq. When ISIS expanded, especially by intervening in the Syrian revolutionary process, it was not a problem for Western imperialism and other sub-imperialist forces. But when the expansion of ISIS became too powerful for them to ignore, they chose to intervene at this moment. So it is *the level* of expansion of ISIS that was a problem for the United States, not the fact that ISIS is a reactionary force. When ISIS was not directly challenging Western political interests, and the forces of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the latter nations even supported it financially before 2011, and even after.

NP. Journalist Jeremy Scabill has recently said in an interview that the idea that ISIS is made up of strictly ultra-orthodox Islamists is false. He claims that figures such as Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, a prominent Ba'athist, are also a part of it. Do you agree?

JD. One must understand that the fall of Mosul was due to two factors. First of all it was due to the corruption and the complete unpopularity of the Iraqi state, because of its sectarianism and authoritarianism, which is why the army and police forces left so rapidly. Second, it was a *coalition* that took over Mosul, led first of all by ISIS, but composed also of Sunni tribes and former Ba'athists. However, directly after the takeover and occupation of Mosul, ISIS became the dominant force and eliminated the other forces, including tribes and the Ba'athists, and al-Douri as well. So it's not right to say that al-Douri is part of ISIS; he's not.

At the same time, you have former Ba'athist military commanders that became jihadists and Salafists after the American invasion, and only after joined forces with al-Qaeda and later ISIS. So, yes, the military leadership of ISIS is composed mainly of former Iraqi military commanders from the Iraqi army.

NP. What is the state of the Free Syrian Army mili-

tarily? After losing territory to Assad's forces, and the rapid growth of ISIS, do they still have a chance?

JD. First we need to understand that the Free Syrian Army is not a single and united institution, but rather a network of independent military groups fighting under its umbrella. The various forces of the Free Syrian Army have been increasingly and considerably weakened over the past two years, because unlike its opponents it has not been supported significantly by any international forces either by direct military intervention or by supplies of advanced weaponry. It has lost a lot of ground to the Assad regime, which concentrated its offensive against them, and also to the growth of Islamic reactionary forces, not only ISIS but Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic front as well, which attacked and killed commanders of the Free Syrian Army.

Nevertheless, before the U.S.-led coalition intervened, there was a new form, a new growth of some factions of the Free Syrian Army, of people coming back to the idea and appeal of a Free Syrian Army defending the objectives of the revolution. These people were disappointed with the Islamic reactionary forces. The reason people had joined those forces was not based on ideology most of the time, but due to the fact that the jihadi groups were well funded and received arms from the reactionary monarchies of the region, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and with Turkey closing its eyes to the passage of jihadi forces into northern Syria. But people are coming back. More and more, we have seen in the past weeks demonstrations with slogans saying, "We need to go back to the spirit and objectives of the revolution," and various forces of the Free Syrian Army were building on this kind of popular mobilization. On a military basis the democratic components of the Free Syrian Army represent the will of the people, the popular movement. You still have a lot of slogans and songs for the Free Syrian Army, so it's still a power, but it lacks any kind of unity. There are still a lot of problems. There are still

regional differences in the Free Syrian Army. By unity I mean, not a unity in objectives, but rather in military strategy to defeat the regime and the Islamic reactionary forces. They have been fighting on both fronts: against the regime for the past three years, and against Islamic reactionary forces increasingly for more than one year. But nevertheless, they still have a chance because for many people on the ground, for the popular classes, the Free Syrian Army really represents the armed hand of the revolution.

The democratic components of the Free Syrian Army still protect the objectives of the revolution. This is why we can increasingly see people going back to the Free Syrian Army with a discourse that is more democratic, some even acknowledging that they were wrong to collaborate with the Islamic reactionary forces. However in some regions you still have collaboration between Islamic reactionary forces and the Free Syrian Army, depending on the situation. But this is tactical cooperation; they do not share the same political objectives. This is important to clarify.

NP. Does the group still have political legitimacy? Are there any prospects for governing the country?

JD. Definitely, among the popular masses in support of the revolutionary process in Syria.

NP. What is the role of the revolutionary left in the Middle East and North Africa today in combating both the reactionary religious orthodoxy of jihadists and authoritarian dictatorships?

JD. The duty of the revolutionary left is to understand first of all that the solution is regional and cannot be based on only one country. We have to clearly oppose any form of counter-revolution, whether it is branded as Assad or el-Sisi. Or in Tunis as modernism, unity of the nation. All this kind of propaganda, “fighting against terrorism,” we have to oppose very strongly. But we have to oppose as well the Islamic reactionary forces whose rhetoric speaks of the unity of the Umma, authenticity, and moralism, when

in fact they share the counter-revolutionary goal of implementing neoliberalism, authoritarianism, patriarchy, sectarianism, and forms of nationalist-chauvinism. This is why we oppose both of them, and both of them are linked to different imperialist and sub-imperialist forces.

We need to build an alternative that is from below, a radical alternative that is democratic, in favor of social justice, and opposed to sectarianism, patriarchy, and nationalism. This means first that we need to build mass revolutionary socialist organizations, with clear principles, building collectives. And also at the same time we need to build a large democratic front that opposes counter-revolutionary forces, which is not only based on socialist revolutionaries but all the forces that share our objectives of democracy, social justice, and equality. This is the duty of the left. We must oppose using sectarianism to divide the people, especially now when we see the different authoritarian regimes or Islamic reactionary forces. We must understand that sectarianism is not a *heritage* from a medieval past but rather a modern phenomenon, which is used by dominant forces to divide the people.

NP. How do you envision an end to the conflict?

JD. I would prefer the term “solution to the revolutionary process,” which is not going to come tomorrow. We need to think in terms of a long-term revolutionary process, because right now the situation in Syria is catastrophic, where you have half of the population displaced, 80 percent of the people now living close to the poverty line, total destruction of urban infrastructure, and two counter-revolutionary forces that are still strong: the Assad regime and the jihadi groups. A solution is only possible with crushing both of these forces and building an alternative that is democratic, in favor of social justice, against sectarianism and chauvinism, and for equality. This means building revolutionary organizations and re-empowering the popular movement that is still battling, with both material and intangible weapons.

We should support the sending of arms without any political conditions to the democratic forces of the Free Syrian Army, and the Kurdish popular forces as well, to defeat both sides of the counter-revolution. I would like to urge those who don't think arms should be provided to read Trotsky's text *Learn to Think*. Arms without any kind of political condition! If the West were really in favor of the revolutionary process in the region, it would provide arms. Its failure to do so shows the contradictions of Western imperialism. It does not want to strengthen a large popular movement that is democratic and in favor of social justice and against sectarianism. This is the way to build a new Syria.

But also without forgetting that the solution is not only in Syria, the solution is regional. If you don't overthrow the centers of the counter-revolution, which are Saudi Arabia and Qatar, a decent future for the region will be very difficult. Likewise, the Syrian revolutionary process will also need to challenge the Israeli state and help the Palestinian resistance. Israel is not only a threat to the Palestinians, but as we've seen throughout the decades, it is also a threat to the region as a whole. On many occasions since its establishment, Israel has intervened in the region to serve imperialist political interests, not only in Palestine. Lastly, any kind of people who are serious about helping Kurdish self-determination should help the Syrian revolutionary process, because they are directly linked.

NP. Do you believe that the growth of ISIS represents a failure of the left?

JD. I think that the growth of ISIS is not directly linked to the defeat of the left, because the defeat of the left is much older. It goes back to the 1970s, with the crushing of the left by authoritarian regimes. We should also remind ourselves of the position of the Stalinist left that allied itself with authoritarian regimes, which was destructive for the left. For example

in Egypt, where the Communist Party supported Mubarak until the last day, even before the crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and supported el-Sisi. This is terrible because then people ask, "Is this the left?" Or in Syria where we see a section of the left supporting the regime, and participating in the government. Or in Iraq, a section of the left was with Saddam.

This does not mean that Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front should be considered allies of the revolution; they are part of the counter-revolution.

So it is the crushing of the left in the 1960s and 1970s *in addition to* the opportunism of sections of the Stalinist left allied with authoritarian regimes that caused the defeat of the left.

At the same time, following the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, oil prices increased considerably, which allowed the Gulf monarchies to increase support to the Islamic reactionary forces in various countries, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1970s, for example in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was funded by the Gulf monarchies while being used by Sadat to crush the left. The Muslim Brotherhood was also successful because it presented itself to the people as an alternative. Nationalist forces were defeated in 1967, and became mostly corrupted and authoritarian. They also went back on their social policies, starting the "infitalh" policies, increasing neoliberal policies, and creating a highly unequal society, while the left was crushed and repressed.

On top of that, there was the defeat of the Palestinian resistance in Jordan and Lebanon, in the former during Black September in the 1970s and in the latter during the Lebanese civil war at the hands of both the Syrian regime and Israel.

This also crushed sections of the left that were allied with the Palestinian resistance. Finally, there have been the attempts by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to co-opt the Palestinian movement. So the Palestinian resistance has been attacked on all fronts.

This is why we say the liberation of Palestine requires the overthrow of all the regimes in the region. Arafat, on the other hand, played a bad role, saying that Palestinians shouldn't intervene in Arab states. This was very appealing to Fatah, which was playing to the different reactionary regimes, and was funded by them. Unfortunately, most of the Palestinian organizations follow this policy today. This is true of Hamas, which for example opposed the Bahraini revolution on sectarian and political grounds, and of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which has not taken any radical position in favor of the Syrian revolutionary process.

ISIS is a direct consequence of the American invasion and destruction of the Iraqi state and society. Contrary to what has been suggested by some media and so-called "analysts," the current events in Iraq are not the result of an ancestral hatred between Sunnis and Shiites that goes back hundreds of years, but truly are the result of contemporary policies.

In addition to the military invasion that came after more than a decade of inhumane sanctions, killing a million Iraqis and causing the forced displacement of four million people, the U.S. occupation policies are at the origin of the current debacle. These include fierce repression of any political opposition to the U.S. occupation, implementation of neoliberal policies and repression of the independent trade union movement, destruction of state institutions (military, public administration, university system, and so on), and the establishment of a political system based on political sectarianism as in Lebanon. The last-mentioned element was one of the main reasons for the terrible sectarian war between Shia extremist groups and Sunnis

between 2005 and 2008, resulting in a monthly average of 3,000 dead.

As I said before, some former officers of the Iraqi military joined ISIS after the American invasion. ISIS also finds its roots in the sectarianism of the Iraqi state led by Hizb al-Dawa, Maliki's political party. Dawa was an ally of the Iranian regime, but also collaborated with the United States, and it became an ally of sorts, collaborating politically and, as we saw previously, militarily. This does not mean that the previous regime before 2003 was ever good; it must be remembered that the country was under the bloody dictatorship of Saddam Hussein's clan which caused the death, exile, and imprisonment of huge numbers of people, not to mention the gassing of Kurds in Halabja in 1988. This regime was built on a totalitarian repressive apparatus that accepted no political opposition or independent trade unions, and on a clientelist tribal and sectarian basis.

We should also not forget that the rise of ISIS is linked to the repression of the popular protests that shook Iraq in early 2011 in the wake of other popular uprisings in the region. They started on February 25, 2011 with a "Day of Wrath," which then launched a weekly cycle of protests on Fridays in most major cities. Demands were diverse, ranging from the fight against unemployment, which is still very high, to condemnation of the lack or absence of services such as electricity, the release of political prisoners, and opposition to the whole sectarian political system established by the U.S. occupation. The movement was made up of members of civil society, women's groups, trade unionists, and so on.

Popular gatherings sometimes exceeded tens of thousands, while for example in the city of Mosul, protesters called for a general strike pushing the local governor, Atheel al-Nujaifi to support the popular protests and support the violation of the curfew imposed by the government. Popular demonstrations represented a serious challenge to Maliki's government, with

many local politicians resigning, including two in the city of Basra. Above all, the public squares where protests took place became politicized poetry sites and areas of cultural performances drawing on Iraq's rich cultural heritage.

The government was quick to react with systematic repression, using tear gas and live ammunition and the establishment of numerous checkpoints—forcing people to walk for hours in the scorching heat to reach public squares that were usually easily accessible. Security forces also forbade all pens, markers, poster board, and bottles of water to people going to public squares to protest. Political consolidation within the ruling elite of Iraq nevertheless allowed Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to co-opt local dissident politicians, as in Basra, while continuing the repression of the popular movement.

This Iraqi sectarian regime oppressed Sunnis and fired many of them from government positions, including the high command of the army. Maliki refused to integrate the “Sunni awakening” councils, which had fought al-Qaeda, into the army. He maintained the anti-Ba’athist law, established after the U.S. invasion against former leaders close to Saddam Hussein but which was mainly used by the Iraqi prime minister to suppress all Sunni political forces, while accusing leading Sunni politicians of supporting terrorism. This is a typical tool of repressive regimes in the region to suppress any opposition, as is seen in Egypt and Syria today.

In 2013, a popular movement in the Sunni-majority areas led a mass campaign of non-violent resistance against Maliki's government, and particularly its sectarian and authoritarian policies. Popular mass demonstrations and sit-ins were held in this period demanding the release of political prisoners, especially thousands of female prisoners, more jobs and better public services, and the replacement of the Iraqi constitution. The protesters especially opposed the “anti-terrorist laws” used by the Iraqi government to suppress opposition members with accusations of links with al-Qaeda or the Ba’ath

Party. At that time, leaders of the Iraqi Shiite group of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and of Moqtada al-Sadr's movement, who had their own grievances against the Maliki regime, expressed their solidarity with the protests organized almost entirely by Iraqi Sunnis, and threatened to organize their own demonstrations. Unfortunately, no trans-confessional solidarity materialized, nor inter-ethnic, despite Kurdish criticism of and opposition to the Maliki government.

The Maliki regime bloodily suppressed the popular protests, as it did the movement of February 25, 2011, when Iraq had earlier witnessed countrywide protests. The government also used tactics taken directly from the U.S. occupation: districts wholly or partially destroyed, mass arrests, and torture. Iraq has also been the battleground for the different sub-imperialist states in the region: Iran supporting the Iraqi sectarian regime under Maliki and other reactionary Shia militias and groups, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar supporting Islamic reactionary Sunni forces, including ISIS.

Finally, what allowed ISIS to grow considerably was the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process, and the intervention of ISIS in this process, where it gained military experience. It also was able, through the occupation of different oil facilities in Iraq and Syria, to build an independent military economy. (ISIS is no longer dependent on foreign funding, which has been mostly stopped by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.) So all these elements enabled ISIS to grow considerably.

The solution is of course to oppose the jihadi reactionary forces of ISIS, but also to oppose the Maliki government with its sectarian and authoritarian policies and reactionary forces that support it. These two actors feed each other and have to be overthrown and defeated in order to have any hope of building a progressive popular movement opposing sectarianism, enabling Iraq to end a nightmare that has lasted too long.

ISIS, Kobanê, and the Future of the Middle East

Statement by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy

AS WE WRITE ON Sunday, October 19, it appears that ISIS [Islamic State] forces have begun to retreat from their vicious assault on the Kurds in Kobanê. We hope that this is a resounding defeat for ISIS, and that it inspires a wave of grassroots resistance to ISIS throughout Syria and Iraq.

At the same time, and despite the role of U.S. bombing in driving ISIS out of Kobanê, we strongly believe that a democratic and peaceful future for Syria and Iraq cannot be built through U.S. military intervention, with bombing that kills innocent civilians; sordid alliances with authoritarian, reactionary regimes in the region like those led by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, and Recep Erdoğan in Turkey; and, as always, Washington's overarching imperial agenda. It should never be forgotten that the exercise of American power directly fuels the growth and power of violent,

retrograde groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. Nor is there any prospect for a free and decent life for the Syrian and Iraqi people as long as Syria suffers under the wanton, murderous rule of Bashar al-Assad and while Iraq is ruled by a sectarian and murderous anti-Sunni government in Baghdad.

The hope for real regional peace rests on a rebirth of the Arab Spring that can depose dictators and authoritarians throughout the Middle East, and on justice for the Palestinian people who have been repeatedly betrayed by the world's great powers. As Americans, we are committed to solidarity with movements for democracy, social justice, and self-determination in the Middle East and around the world, and to challenging our own government's domestic and international neoliberal economic policies, militarism, and persistent support for dictators and anti-democratic regimes.



The Campaign for Peace and Democracy works to advance a new, progressive and non-militaristic U.S. foreign policy—one that encourages democracy and social justice by promoting solidarity with activists and progressive movements throughout the world. We stand in opposition to existing U.S. foreign policy, which is based on domination, militarism, fear of

popular struggles, enforcement of an inequitable and cruel global economy, and—despite the democratic rhetoric—persistent support for authoritarian regimes.

Founded in 1982, CPD engaged Western peace activists in the defense of the rights of democratic dissidents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and enlisted East-bloc human rights activists against anti-democratic U.S. policies in countries like Nicaragua and Chile. Today, we continue our work for global solidarity from below. Check out our website at www.cpdweb.org for our work on Mexico, Greece, Iran, Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere.

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Interview with Yassin Al Haj Saleh

Syria and the Left

Yassin Al Haj Saleh is one of Syria's leading political dissidents. He spent from 1980-1996 in Syrian prisons and became one of the key intellectual voices of the 2011 Syrian uprising. He spent 21 months in hiding within Syria, eventually escaping to Istanbul. He was interviewed via email by New Politics co-editor Stephen R. Shalom in early November 2014.

NEW POLITICS. You have written eloquently about the ongoing struggle for progressive values in Syria. In most Western nations, particularly in the United States, the left has relatively little power. What do you think the Western left could best do to express its solidarity with the Syrian revolution?

YASSIN AL HAJ SALEH. I am afraid that it is too late for the leftists in the West to express any solidarity with the Syrians in their extremely hard struggle. What I always found astonishing in this regard is that mainstream Western leftists know almost nothing about Syria, its society, its regime, its people, its political economy, its contemporary history. Rarely have I found a useful piece of information or a genuinely creative idea in their analyses. My impression about this curious situation is that they simply do not see us; it is not about us at all. Syria is only an additional occasion for their old anti-imperialist tirades, never the living subject of the debate. So they do not really need to know about us. For them the country is only a black box about which you do not have to learn its internal structure and dynamics; actually it has no internal structure and dynamics according to their approach, one

that is at the same time Western-centered and high-politics centered.

The problem is that their narrow anti-imperialist worldview only sees Obama, Putin, Holland, Erdoğan, Khamenei, Qatari Emir Hamad, Saudi King Abdullah, Hassan Nasrallah, and Bashar al-Assad. Possibly they see also Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. We, rank-and-file Syrians, refugees, women, students, intellectuals, human rights activists, political prisoners ... do not exist.

I think this high-politics, Western-centered worldview is better suited for the right and the ultra-right fascists. But honestly I've failed to discern who is right and who is left in the West from a leftist Syrian point of view. And I tend to think that these are the poisonous effects of the Soviet experience, fascist in its own way. Many Western leftists are the orphans of the late father, the USSR.

Besides, what prevents them from seeing the victims of Bashar, when they see perfectly well ordinary people in Kobanê? Why wasn't there the slightest interest in the slaughter of 700 people at the hands of ISIS thugs themselves in Deir Ezzor last August? One is forced to ask: Do victims have different values based on who their murderers are? Why, as the regime is bombing many regions in the country every day, killing dozens of people every day, are the leftists in the West as silent as the rightists? Could the reason be that the public killer Bashar and his elegant wife are symbols of the First World inside Syria, a couple with whom those in the First World identify easily?

Before helping Syrians or showing soli-

darity with Syrians, the mainstream Western left needs to help themselves. Their views are totally misguided, and the Syrian cause was only a litmus test of their reactionary and decadent perspectives.

As a Syrian, I only need them if they are well-informed. Syria is a microcosm, and I do

There is a widespread illusion
amongst the leftists in the West
that the United States is siding
with the Syrian revolution.
Completely false.

not think that the nature of their understanding and their policies in relation to the macrocosm is in any way better when their position on the Syrian cause is mistaken to this degree.

Of course, these remarks are not meant to deny the existence of a small number of courageous dissident Western leftists who saved the moral and political dignity of the left in the United States and the West at large.

NP. Some Western leftists believe that they ought to oppose deliveries of arms by Western governments to the Free Syrian Army, or any of its constituent forces. Others believe that we ought to call for the provision of Western arms. And still others believe that we should neither call for nor oppose such deliveries. What is your view?

YHS. As I have already said, this is too late to be spoken about. The life of this discussion is now utterly separate from the actual facts on the ground. The FSA is far weaker and less unified now, after three years of its ascendance as an armed resistance against the fascist regime.

For one's position against arms deliveries to the FSA to make sense, two conditions would have to be met: 1) that the deliveries of arms from Russia and of personnel from Iran, Iraq,

and Lebanon are stopped in some way; and 2) that the regime expresses genuine preparedness for a political solution. Actually, for 44 months the regime never showed any willingness for power sharing or even real negotiations with the opposition.

When you do not help the ones who were compelled to take up arms to defend their people, and you leave the people killed in the hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, while the UN does nothing, and the Friends of the Syrian People group (supposedly formed to give legitimacy to helping Syrians from outside the UN Security Council, crippled by Russian and Chinese vetoes), led by Washington, is stricken with complete paralysis, what do you think will happen? Practically, you are encouraging increased numbers of Syrians to withdraw their trust from the world and international justice, and you are nurturing nihilism. I wrote a long essay about this in May 2012. Nihilism among the combatants was only beginning at that time.

There is a widespread illusion amongst the leftists in the West that the United States is siding with the Syrian revolution. Completely false. The United States government is far more against the revolution than it is against the Assad regime. Washington destroyed our cause far more than Iran and Russia did. Only a few months ago, the Harvard man in the White House spoke dismissively about the farmers and dentists who thought that they could topple the Assad regime. Is there a way to interpret this redundant observation but as a sign to the camp led by an ophthalmologist and Shabbecha [government thugs], supported massively by Russia, Iran, and its satellites in Lebanon and Iraq, that they can go unhindered in their killing business, with the blessings of the head of the Friends of the Syrian People group? And was the chemical deal in September 2013 interpreted differently by Syrians on both sides? The regime rightly thought it was license to go on with its killing business using other weapons. And in this the

opposition could not disagree with the regime's understanding.

I only want to add that the United States did not intervene against the regime after the chemical massacre in August 2013. Now, punishing a criminal ruling junta for its crimes against its subjects is far more just and progressive than is the custom for U.S. interventions around the world. That is why I do not understand why there were protests before an intervention that did not take place, and not a stir against the present intervention, which is less ethical and just in my opinion.

Do the leftists not really know that the "imperial center" is against the Syrian revolution? I do not believe that they are that ignorant. Maybe they are salvaging their archaic paradigms.

NP. Some Western leftists believe that they ought to oppose military training by Western governments to the Free Syrian Army, or any of its constituent forces. Others believe that they ought to call for such military training. And still others believe that they should neither call for nor oppose such training. What is your view?

YHS. Well, I do not trust U.S. intentions and I do not expect anything good from Washington. I do not share the essentialist anti-imperialism that does not understand imperialism as a relation and a process, only an essence ensconcing in Washington and maybe other Western capitals, never in Moscow or Tehran. Nevertheless, our experiences with American policies in our region justify more than just suspicion. The nihilist and fascist ISIS did not arise *ex nihilo*. One of its components is the absolute distrust of the international laws, institutions, and order. (The two other main sources are modernity-related Islam disease, and tyrannical corrupt regimes).

But, to come back to the question, for what and against whom do the Americans want to train Syrian personnel?

In the last two months the Americans have openly appended our cause to their war-on-

terrorism agenda. Their war on ISIS is saying that the regime that killed or caused the killing of more than 200 thousand people is only a detail; the thuggish entity of ISIS is the real danger. And of course American military training will follow the American political priorities, using Syrians as tools in their (the Americans') war, not for concluding our struggle for change in Syria.

In short, I think that the outcome of the American program of training Syrians will be to completely destroy the weakened FSA, converting it into cheap local mercenaries without a cause, confronting the fascists of ISIS for years for the Americans' sake, and giving their backs to the fascists of Assad.

In sum, I am among those who adamantly oppose the American military training of Syrians.

NP. The United States has conducted bombing raids in Iraq and Syria. How do you see these raids, in terms of their effects and in terms of their

The Harvard man in the White House spoke dismissively about the farmers and dentists who thought that they could topple the Assad regime.

justification?

YHS. Their effect is limited; their justification is not related to any ethical cause or universal values. The situation in my opinion is like this: the Americans, who are hardly innocent, are killing killers while turning a blind eye to another killer busy killing nearby, at times just a few hundred meters from the Americans' killing fields. Where is the just cause? Never mind justice, where is politics? Never mind politics,

what is the strategy behind this campaign?

I think this course of events will lead to nothing. Air bombardments may weaken ISIS, but it will keep its power to attack or even to expand. ISIS is not an army with heavy equipment nor a state with big infrastructure, which means that bombing it from the sky will continue to have limited effect. Two months of bombing ISIS around the small town of Kobanê, and

The regime rightly thought the
September 2013 chemical deal was
license to go on with its killing
business using other weapons.

ISIS is still threatening the town!

I am a “progressive” person; I do not cling to any given status of affairs, and I try to find new possibilities even in the worst situations. On many personally and publicly difficult occasions before, I was able to find new possibilities, unexpected openings, and new ways out for life, creation, and freedom. I am trying hard to find a progressive possibility in the American war in Syria, but in vain. I am not an essentialist or a nihilist (is there any difference between the two?), but I cannot ascribe or find chances for more justice and creativity in the newest American war in my country. Our American “friends” give me the impression that they worked hard in order that not the slightest hope of a better overall situation in the country could be given to the general public in Syria. This is while giving Assad greater hopes and expectations. Really impressive!

I do not have any essentialist grudge towards the United States, but the superpower was extremely inhumane towards my country,

and its present war is extremely selfish. It is quite feasible in my opinion to conclude from American policy in Syria that Washington is radically antagonistic to democracy and the rights of the underprivileged. I suppose this means that its war in Syria is reactionary, and that it will make everything worse for the majority in the country and the region.

Nothing could diminish the despicable crime the Obama administration has committed against Syria and its population. And history will not forget this for a long time.

NP. What other demands ought Western leftists to be making on their governments regarding Syria?

YHS. To be honest, I have to admit that I do not know what leftists in the West do. I mean they are safer, they have passports, they have more opportunity to learn foreign languages, they can buy the books they want to read or at least they have access to them. So why do so many of them know nothing about Syria, feel nothing, and do almost nothing?

Again, it is not a thing they have to be making their governments do for us; it is something they have to do themselves in their countries for themselves. When they are in good shape in the United States, the UK, Germany, France, and so on, this is very good for us. They are salvaging, by standing with us in our struggle or at least by showing some understanding of our struggle, our chances to resist identity politics and victim politics in our countries. As they are now, they are only helping our local right, whether “modernist” or Islamist, by being very Western-centered and high-politics anti-imperialists.

The mainstream right is often centered on identity, supremacy, and high politics. One cannot be a leftist by only giving different answers to the same questions. Less so, by giving the same answers to different questions.

SPECIAL SECTION: CRIME AND THE LEFT

Rethinking the Left's Approach to Crime

LYNN CHANCER

IN 1994, PAMELA DONOVAN AND I wrote an article for the journal *Social Justice* called “A Mass Psychology of Punishment: Crime and the Futility of Rationally Based Approaches.” We argued that the crime issue had become in that decade—as mass incarceration grew exponentially, and while rates of violence were steadily and contradictorily declining—a key psychosocial mechanism that facilitated redirecting and displacing anger at broad inequalities felt by lower- and middle-class people, among others, onto “criminals” (who were more than likely in the cultural imagination to be minorities, men, and poor). Moreover, she and I insisted, rationalistic arguments aimed at stopping the

Leviathan prison-building escalation merely through logical appeals to quantitative data and policy papers were having little effect: There was something unwittingly, unconsciously pleasurable about an issue that allowed, and had become a vehicle for, strong emotions’ expression *en masse*.

Our conclusion? For the U.S. left—social democrats and democratic socialists alike—crime could neither be ignored nor treated as a political afterthought. Quite the contrary: Its emotional valence from the 1980s through the present may have been a *sine qua non* for conservative hegemony taking persistent hold, including through the allegedly progressive but ironically “tough on crime” Clinton years, when the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act became the largest crime bill in American history, authorizing the hiring of 100,000 police officers and setting aside \$9.7 billion for prison building in its name. Crime and the left should have become symbiotically integrated both in theory and activism—but did that happen?

Looking back on my years as a sociology graduate student at the Graduate Center of CUNY evokes the 1990s again. I was a co-organizer of the Socialist Scholars Confer-

LYNN CHANCER teaches sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She has written many articles on crime, media, gender, and culture, and is the author or co-editor of five books including *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life*, *High Profile Crimes: When Legal Cases Become Social Causes*, and most recently *The Unhappy Divorce of Sociology and Psychoanalysis: Diverse Perspectives on the Psychosocial*. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Julius Jacobson, Lynn’s remarkable father-in-law with whom she will always wish she could still be debating this and other political questions.

ence—now the Left Forum—a yearly event at which American lefties were and are able to

In the U.S., crime is used as a way
to direct attention away from
uncivilized tolerance of worsening
poverty and inequality.

pretend, for a few days at least, that socialism in the United States was and is an acceptable rather than a still chronically stigmatized term of our cultural vocabulary. I was already interested in criminology, deviance, and law as academic subjects and, of course, as complicated real-world issues, and would note to friends and colleagues that out of well over 100 panels occurring annually at the SSC, most years few if any centered on the subject of crime.

Fast forward to 2014, to the most recent Left Forum. The situation had changed: The program featured at least ten panels on crime, aside from my own panel on which this “Crime and the Left” *New Politics* symposium is based. Strikingly, though, the presentations on the other panels did not focus on the issue of *crime* itself but rather, and to a one, on *criminal justice* issues. Speakers did not focus so much on the etiology and intricate causality of crime but rather on reactions to crime that have been part of the punitive turn in the United States, that sharp 1980s-to-the-present 180-degree veering away from rehabilitative notions still ostensibly circulating in the 1960s and 1970s toward the present dominance of more repressive policies and ideas.

Trying to stave off or reverse the conservative tide on crime has long been a concern of progressive criminologists. For instance, Elliott Currie’s *Confronting Crime: An American Challenge* was brave, if Pyrrhic, in endeavor-

ing to reach larger audiences through “public sociological” writing, offering rationalistic argumentation at its best. Now in 2014, though, progressives mostly focus on the rampant ills of the American system of punishment. The United States famously remains an advanced industrial outlier regarding capital punishment with (to other nations) incredible rates of incarceration. Notorious too is that, in addition to 2.2 million people in jails and prisons, another 5 million are under criminal justice supervision in the form of probation or parole. A dire problem indeed, one easily and deservedly targeted for redress by activists and lefties of different stripes and tenets—but still, why so little discussion of *crime itself*?

Why the Marginalizing of Crime by a Marginalized Left?

One would be hard pressed to develop a course on crime and the left, U.S. or otherwise, that relied largely for its syllabus on the writings of Marx. Marx’s work is peppered with occasional references to crime, but predominantly as an ugly by-product of the immiseration that capitalism systemically wrought in a *lumpenproletariat* with no real option for survival but illegal, often violent acts. Contemporary scholars from David Greenberg (see, for example, *Crime and Capitalism*) to Richard Quinlan, William Chambliss, and Jeffrey Reiman, among others, have developed what is often referred to and taught as “Marxist criminology.” It is an orientation, though, more likely to be derivative than independently expanding upon basic tenets of Marx’s own theoretical lexicon. Nor had crime *sui generis* been accorded much independent attention by socialism/communism’s founders, which means that the issue of crime was too simply reduced to one of class.

But a pair of other explanations for the marginalization of the crime issue on the left is at least as, if not more, germane. A fiercely divisive debate that took place among radical British criminologists in the 1970s and 1980s—

between so-called “left idealists” and “left realists”—had a parallel in left thinking about crime in the United States, though the connection was unwitting and not necessarily labeled as such. In the UK, scholars like Jock Young and John Lea held in *What Is to Be Done About Law and Order?* (1984) that the “real” concerns of working class people who feared and were often victimized by crime needed to be taken seriously by socialists, even as left idealists countered by focusing on race and class discriminations affecting how crime was defined and toward whom criminal justice measures were aimed. For the latter focus, the view echoing across the ocean among proponents of a U.S.-style “idealist” left was that crime had been created by, and was the fault of, capitalism; it was a “meta” phenomenon socially constructed so as to deflect attention from corporate and other crimes of the rich and powerful, and inseparable from a system that is racist and classist to its core.

Looking back, this “realist” versus “idealist” divide became counter-productively polarized, since valid points were made on both sides. Of course, crime in working class, poor, and racialized communities (and also among the more well-to-do) truly affects people’s lives and can arouse not unreasonable fears; then, too, crime disproportionately victimizes the poor and minorities. And of course it is also the case that corporate and other crimes of the wealthy and powerful are treated in the United States far more leniently with few exceptions, and the “system” overall is dreadfully discriminatory along class and racial lines (as Jeffrey Reiman has effectively pointed out in the many editions of his popular-with-criminology-students *When the Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*).

But here’s the rub: In the United States, the seeming dominance of idealist-reminiscent positions (as in my conference examples above) meant that, in the 1970s and 1980s, for a leftist to touch the crime issue—let alone prioritize it—was to risk being accused of racism and classism. This was precisely the uncomfortable

situation Jock Young found himself in when former colleagues turned angrily on British left realists for their apparently conservative new thinking about crime. Better, perhaps, to stay away from the issue altogether.

A third reason for the marginalized left itself to marginalize the issue of crime has been that developing a complex and “realist” position on crime (especially interpersonal crimes and “street crimes,” from domestic violence and rape to assault, robbery, homicide—again, all too often frightening to imagine and/or brutally real), was likely to raise, in one form or another, fraught issues of individual responsibility. Yet, arguably, a sophisticated theory of crime—one that would be worth its salt to and for the U.S. left—would have to be (and would have had to have been) sufficiently multidimensional so as to specify a) structural class and racialized disparities that insidiously skew the social/sociological backgrounds of both perpetrators and victims; b) considerations of how crime is regularly defined in a way that lets corporate and political entities off the hook (and by what institutions and agents within them); *and also* (not instead) c) how, commonsensically, something must be going on that explains, at the level of individual

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psychology and biography, why some people rather than others of a certain group engage in both street and suite/office/political brands of crime and violence.

Of course, it is precisely individual responsibility that is associated with conservative, rightward-leaning views on crime (take, as one of many classic U.S. examples, James Q. Wilson’s

Thinking About Crime), thereby, by extension, causing any discussion of individual agency to seem anathema for a progressive/leftist/socialist to focus upon, even if in the cause of offering an appropriately complex theory for specifically *left* “thinking about crime.” Note therefore, in returning to the 2014 Left Forum as opposed to Socialist Forums of the late 1980s and 1990s,

Without the crime issue and the
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been difficult to achieve.

two relationships of *continuity* appear. First, in both periods, crime itself (as opposed to criminal justice *reactions* to crime) has been overlooked; and, secondly, a leftist’s political righteousness on this issue is preserved (earlier and later) as racialized and capitalist injustices are foregrounded and questions of individual responsibility are relatively downplayed or omitted. In other words, what appears as a change in left attitudes to crime from past to present—that is, current (and valid) concerns about the massive moral and policy problem of mass incarceration, and the racism of criminal justice policy issues like stop and frisk—is actually fairly consistent, still failing to address or politicize how closely the persistence of growing class inequalities and *crime itself* may be, and have become, interrelated over the last fifty years. Little has altered about what might incur the kind of uncomfortable anger from colleagues and friends that a left realist like Jock Young had to endure for some years when he was shunned. For that matter, little has changed that might make it “safer” for an American politician to stand up and discuss “causes of crime”—vis-à-vis the necessarily multidimensional position I am advocating here—without having good reason to fear for

his or her job and re-election. But why does any of this matter?

So What if the Left Overlooks Crime?

It seems hard not to surmise that into the vacuum on the crime issue thereby created by the left—and consequent upon this trio of reasons—a conservative, largely Republican right was able to insert itself with greater ease than might have happened had the left unabashedly offered up a fuller and more sophisticated take on crime (that is, had it/we become less afraid of sounding right-wing itself/ourselves). And capitalize on the crime issue the U.S. right certainly did—on a grand scale—in several ways. For one, political traction on crime may have been unintentionally facilitated for the right insofar as the left’s omission of any psychological or psychosocial dimensions to the crime issue sounded like a form of denial, thereby making appeals based *only* on individual responsibility appealing by contrast. Thus, for example, two things may have been the case: No doubt presidential hopeful Michael Dukakis was politically bullied at the infamous debate where he was asked, in reference to escaped parolee Willie Horton, what *he* would do if someone raped *his* wife. Simultaneously, though, a progressive/Democratic position was not in the cultural air that would assist him in saying *both* that his own anger would make him want to proverbially “beat the shit” out of the offender *and* that by no means, though, was this good reason to go back to mindlessly punitive criminal justice policies that overall made no public safety, logical, or human(istic) sense. Of course Dukakis—as, on the crime issue, progressives and the left—lost.

But more than this: Once conservatives rushed into the void and made crime their own solely individualistic issue in the United States—almost a caricatural mirror image of the opposite over-simplification, namely, making crime *only* about societal class and racial injustices—then another opportunity arose and was seized upon. To wit: Crime was upheld as

a symbolic cultural-and-psychic object onto which rage could be directed both about the awfulness of a given crime and about social injustices people were often experiencing well beyond it. Indeed, as Michael Jacobson notes in *Downsizing Prisons: How to Reduce Crime and End Mass Incarceration*, the crime issue has an almost unique ability to call forth the venting of passionate emotions amidst its discussion; he compares it with other forms of policymaking, say regarding health care or education, where “best practice” policy can be heard, and heeded, with far less intense objections raised than with crime. At the level of classical sociological theory, germane too is Emile Durkheim’s analysis of crime’s ability to unite people in righteous indignation against a concrete moral wrong that may have occurred but—as is more to this essay’s point—can easily generate and facilitate the expression of “surplus” passions too.

These last decades, from the 1980s through the present, have seen ups and downs of recession and recovery, busts and booms, but—with no doubt—steadily worsening inequalities between the rich and the poor, creating often unbearable hardships for the latter as well as simmering, ongoing insecurities for huge numbers of middle class people as well. From the kind of long-range perspective that historians often bring to topics, one might even posit that indeed—without the crime issue and the “surplus” passions it aroused and permitted to be expressed—Republican hegemony from the 1980s through the present might have been difficult or even impossible to achieve. Where would Republicans at local, state, and national levels be without crime? It has not been their only issue, obviously, but it has surely been one of their most—if not their most—effectively emotive from the 1980s through the 1990s to the present (even as terrorism supplanted it from the early 2000s in public opinion, still the crime issue, and punishment, remains in the implicit and explicit backdrop of American politics). Katherine Beckett has made this case beautifully

in *Making Crime Pay*—if one can use that adverb to describe how persuasively she shows media and politicians’ disproportionately focusing on “crime,” even as social and class inequalities were becoming ever more skewed over the past decades. Loic Wacquant, a sociologist who came to be associated with “criminology” at least as much from his feelings of theoretical necessity as academic proclivity, writes in *Punishing the Poor* about the enmeshing of the welfare state and the penal state. The decline of the former and the rise of the latter are interconnected, he insists—an argument that may work best at a cultural and ideological rather than strictly empirical level. Indeed in the United States—unlike in Europe—crime is used, culturally and politically, as a way to direct attention away from uncivilized tolerance of worsening poverty and inequality.

Again, though, why should the left care? My own sense is that, if there is validity in this argument that the crime issue has become a major fulcrum for redirecting passions, then a left reversal is called for by way of remedy. Let’s say class inequality was approached—as one additional mode of discussing it—through, rather than away from, the issue of crime. And

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let’s say Americans are asked whether we really wish to be rid of violent crime of the kinds that disproportionately plague people according to their class and racialized and gendered characteristics. Then a left insistence may be in order about how crimes of this kind are so closely related to community poverty and inequality as to bring a Swiftian, modest proposal to mind.

What if poverty and inequality were noticeably decreased as part of a national effort to rid ourselves of crime (as well as, of course, poverty itself). Might not crime wither away? The left might pose a national experiment, a challenge indeed: If crime and inequality are related, then a host of jobs and housing and education and health programs in poor communities might do a great deal to eliminate violence. The only way to find out might be to see what happens if a current correlation—between the class and racial backgrounds of those in prisons, and of those in communities where violent crime still remains a scourge in people's lives—could no longer hold because discrimination had been relieved, or at the very least lessened from its starkly apparent levels.

Interestingly, arguing for reducing/eliminating crime *and* inequality may be possible on the American left in a way different from what happened in the UK. There, under Tony Blair's Labour Party politics, lefties were going to be "tough on crime and the causes of crime." But once in power, the "causes of crime" disappeared from Labour policies and rhetoric, which focused more on following the American punitive orientation than on inequality. In the United States, there is little to no structural

possibility that a labor or socialist party will be holding government office any time soon—but our ability to influence political discourse and cultural consciousness, in and outside the academy, in and outside social movement activism, may, paradoxically, be at a propitious moment.

Does this mean, though, that violent crime—domestic violence, homicide in poor and richer communities, rape, robbery, and assault—would not exist in an egalitarian society? Hardly. While addressing crime's social roots should and could reduce criminal behavior, unfortunately some individuals will continue for psychological reasons to pose anti-social problems for communities. To say otherwise is idealism of the kind astutely diagnosed by Marx—and regardless of whether he wrote directly about the issue. Thus, for the twenty-first-century U.S. left to rethink its approach to crime and not just to criminal justice will help not only with the specific problem of crime but with our ability to advance struggles for a better society overall. A multidimensional approach to crime, one that includes both social and psychic factors, inequality and responsibility, is consonant with rather than contradictory to the aims of democratic socialism.

Crime, Incarceration, and the Left

BRENDEN BECK

THOSE DISTURBED BY THE United States' largest-in-the-world incarceration rate have some new reasons to be cautiously optimistic. President Obama nominated an opponent of the drug war to the Justice Department's highest civil rights position, signaling the possibility that the costly and counterproductive imprisonment of drug users may be coming to an end. Conservatives from Newt Gingrich to Jeb Bush to Rand Paul are advocating for less incarceration and an end to employment discrimination for people with criminal records, hinting that crime panics won't be the campaign fodder they once were.¹ The public is also less concerned with crime. In 1994, 37 percent of respondents listed crime as the most important problem facing the country. In 2014, only 2 percent did.² That might be because only half as many people reported being the victim of a violent crime in 2013 as did in 1994. The incarceration rate is also declining (albeit slightly) after 40 years of steep increases.³

This pivotal moment presents the socialist and social democratic left with possibilities and pitfalls. With a less-fevered crime discussion, now might be the best time to adequately address the harms that crime visits on our communities. Obviously, stopping crime is important, but we must situate it as one harm among many. There are preventative responses to crime that

are likely cheaper than our current criminal justice response, that will avoid the human consequences of mass incarceration, and that will bolster a traditional social democratic agenda. There are groups pioneering community-based responses to violence that stop the causes of violence. The time has never been better to show that reducing inequality, providing health care, creating affordable housing, and reinvesting in schools are all crime-stopping measures. As some conservatives shift their positions on crime, we might be tempted to ally with the right. But, as I will argue, we should remember that the anti-prison right will be useful only in specific ways, lest we further dismantle social programs.

The left has good reasons to address crime. The working class, the poor, LGBT folks, and people of color are all at disproportionate risk for victimization.⁴ If we want an equitable distribution of wealth we no doubt also want an equitable distribution of safety. Addressing crime is important, and doing so will mean replacing the traditional, heavily loaded definitions of crimes. Drug use and theft are not the problems they are often made out to be.

Drug use on college campuses is as common as drug use on city streets, but drug laws are enforced much differently there. What qualifies as a crime for someone on a city street corner is more likely to be ignored—or met with treatment—on a college campus. If we look to reduce the harm of drugs, rather than reduce “crime,” our strategies will look more like public health and less like criminal justice, more needle exchanges and fewer police.

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Unlike drugs, theft causes real harms, but its impact is far less than often assumed. Unpaid taxes cost Americans 15 times more than property theft did in 2006 (the most recent year with data).⁵ Tax evasion and investment banks' ruinous schemes pose greater risks than burglars. That theft is more prevalent in poor communities reveals the need for jobs, not prison cells. Job creation is the best way to prevent theft, and, as will be explored below, restorative justice practices are better responses to theft than the criminal justice system. Police and prisons do little to address property loss in part because arrest and incarceration hurt the possibility for future employment, increasing the likelihood of people returning to theft for income. Voters in California showed in November 2014 that they are getting wise to the wastefulness of drug and theft arrests, as 58 percent of them approved a ballot measure reducing the penalties for many nonviolent crimes.⁶

It is perhaps easy to demonstrate that drug use and nonviolent theft would be better served by non-police responses. Violent crime requires a more difficult reckoning. Homicide is the second leading cause of death for men aged 15–24 (death from unintended injuries is the first). It is not easy to ignore. The harm is real, but contrary to stories told during political campaigns, homicides and other violent crimes are more likely committed by someone the victim knows than by a stranger.⁷ Police are ill-equipped to prevent such known-attacker violence. Later, I will describe groups that are providing non-police responses to violence and discuss how understanding the causes of such violence will help us understand possible solutions. First, though, it is important to see why one commonly proposed solution to violence causes more harm than good.

The Big “Reform” That Hurt

The government claimed that incarceration—its response to crime that defined the past four decades—would stop violence and “urban unrest,”

but instead it has helped shore up whites' economic and political advantage while devastating poor communities of color. The summary statistics are well known: between 1975 and 2005, the U.S. incarceration rate quintupled, putting 1 out of every 100 people behind bars, more than any other country in the world and more than at any time in U.S. history. Black and Latino people are a quarter of the population at large, but 58 percent of the incarcerated population. One in nine black children has a parent incarcerated.⁸

The racial disparity in incarceration has translated into a host of unearned benefits for white people. Obviously, people without criminal records, who are disproportionately rich and white, are favored in hiring decisions over people with criminal records. Of people who get arrested, most have jobs prior to the arrest,⁹ but incarceration interrupts those jobs and becomes time spent not gaining experience and skills, further pushing formerly incarcerated people into low-status and low-wage jobs. Because incarceration combines with racism to force many people of color to the bottom of the labor hierarchy, whites have disproportionately benefited from economic booms and have been buffered from recessions. Sociologist Bruce Western found that, over all, black men obtained no benefit in either jobs or wages from the 1990s economic expansion because of their overrepresentation in prisons.¹⁰

Mass incarceration has also helped increase white political power. One in 13 black men cannot vote because of a felony conviction, and in Florida, Kentucky, and Virginia the figure is one in five.¹¹ Sociologists Chris Uggen and Jeff Manza analyzed the outcome of U.S. senate and presidential races between 1978 and 2002 and found that if people with felony convictions had been allowed to vote, seven senate races and the 2000 presidential election that were won by Republicans would have been carried by Democrats.¹²

Does mass incarceration's role in reducing crime outweighs all of these negative effects?

The trouble is, the prison boom did not have a large effect on crime. The National Research Council convened a group of experts to determine whether the incarceration boom and the crime decline were related and they found, summarizing numerous multi-year studies, that “the growth in incarceration rates reduced crime, but the magnitude of the crime reduction remains highly uncertain and the evidence suggests it was unlikely to have been large.”¹³ One of the studies they cited found incarceration was responsible for 5-10 percent of the crime drop. On the other hand, sociologist Todd Clear has found that high incarceration rates so destabilize some neighborhoods that crime there actually *increases* in response.¹⁴

I linger on the effects of prison not just to show that the current government response to crime has been horribly counterproductive and supportive of white supremacy, but also because understanding how the current government response to crime has hurt helps us understand how it can be changed. For instance, state governments around the country currently spend the bulk of their corrections budgets in rural, mostly white towns where prisons are usually located. This government expenditure, what geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls “carceral Keynesianism,”¹⁵ redistributes money from the mostly urban neighborhoods from which prisoners largely come to the mostly white towns where prisoners are sent. In 2004, there were 35 “million-dollar blocks” in Brooklyn, New York, blocks whose residents the state spent over one million dollars locking up. Government capacity could be redirected to benefit—rather than cage—the residents of those blocks.¹⁶

Police and corrections budgets are ripe to be redirected toward more beneficial ends. Local government spending on police has grown 300 percent since the 1970s to an average of \$295 per person. Shifting this spending towards housing, jobs, healthcare, and education would combat inequality, removing the conditions of poverty that often cause crime. Reparations for slavery

would be an especially beneficial use for old corrections dollars because it would address the racialized way that incarceration has benefited white people and hurt black people.

Community Responses to Violence

Public housing is usually thought of as a nexus of crime, places where poverty and poor conditions combine to foster drug use and violence. But in a study of Mount Laurel, New Jersey, sociologist Douglas Massey and his colleagues found that locating public housing in the town did not increase crime rates.¹⁷ Residents who moved into the subsidized housing benefited from lower crime levels, and their neighbors experienced no more crime after the public housing was built. That the Mount Laurel initiative included high-quality homes that were well maintained and not crowded likely contributed to their safety—but these should be characteristics of all public housing. Other studies have shown that prenatal health care, quality pre-K, and steady employment are all correlated with lower crime rates.¹⁸ The success of these preventative measures show that a more holistic approach is needed to reduce crime. The criminal justice system need not be our primary response to harm. It also indicates that a traditional socialist platform is consistent with—indeed supportive of—lower crime rates.

Holistic preventative measures will help, but even with them, interpersonal violence will occur. Fortunately, community-based responses to violence are beginning to replace individualistic ones. One approach, called restorative justice, takes into account not just the perpetrator and a punishment, but the whole range of people affected by a crime: the victims, the offenders, and their communities. As people who understand that solutions take a village, socialists and social democrats are natural proponents of restorative justice. Rather than seeking a prison term, a restorative justice conference seeks discussion and restitution in a manner that more closely resembles a truth and reconcilia-

tion committee than a gulag. While the exact implementation of such practices varies across the United States, they are undergoing wide adoption as alternatives to traditional criminal justice procedures for crimes as diverse as theft and murder.¹⁹ Schools like New York City's Lyons Community School are avoiding suspensions and detentions using a restorative justice model.²⁰ Developing community-based justice practices will not just address the narrow slice of harms that get defined as crimes, but will deal with inter-personal harms that happen more frequently.

Restorative justice work helps address harm after it has happened. There are groups working to stop violence *before* it happens without appealing to the criminal justice system. Cure Violence, a group made famous in the 2011 documentary *The Interrupters*, takes a public health approach to violence. The group employs "violence interrupters" who are from the neighborhoods in which they work and were often previously involved in violence themselves. The group views killings in retaliation for other killings as a disease that can be stopped. To this end they meet with victims of violence and their families to discourage retaliation and to settle grievances through other means. A Department of Justice-funded study found the group was responsible for a reduction of violence between 40-70 percent in seven neighborhoods in Chicago,²¹ and the group has expanded to Kansas City, New York, New Orleans, Baltimore, and three international cities. If overlarge police budgets were spent on violence interrupters, we could not just react to, but prevent, violence.

Addressing intimate-partner violence will require some different approaches from those employed to stop the cycle of retaliation killings. A moment in 2012 demonstrates two distinct approaches to addressing domestic violence. That year, the New York state legislature considered two bills. They could have passed the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act, a bill being pushed by many grassroots feminist and

anti-mass incarceration activists that would have decreased the penalties for women convicted of crimes against their abusers. Or the legislature could have passed a bill that made penalties more severe for men who repeatedly abuse their partners or children.²² When faced with divergent approaches—one that called for less prison and one for more—the legislature voted for and the governor signed into law only the bill that increased prison, sending violent men to violent prisons for a longer time and keeping women who lash out against their abusers in prison. A law criminalizing repeat abuse without recognizing that prisons make violence more likely is starkly ignorant of the causes of violence.

In addition to the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act, there are many responses the left can adopt to reduce both the harms of incarceration and the harms of intimate-partner violence. Universal day care would provide the financial and child care independence some women need to leave a partner who is abusing them and their children (as well as reducing violence against children from stressed-out parents and parents' partners). Rape crisis centers provide women and their chosen communities a chance to determine the best response to abuse without fear of police or child protective services getting involved. Championing these responses to crime will help stop violence while also avoiding what sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein and others have called "carceral feminism,"²³ which responds to violence against women with demands for more police and harsher sentences.

Alternatives like restorative justice practices, neighborhood patrols, and rape crisis centers are bold demonstrations that police are not the only or the best response to violence. These on-the-ground responses, coupled with jobs, housing, health care, and schools, are the basis of the left response to violence.

"Right on Crime"

Conservatives have historically had electoral success appealing to voters' crime fears. This is

starting to change, however, and the realigned political landscape could be a moment of opportunity. The right is opposing incarceration not out of compassion but because of spending. As incarceration rates have ballooned, so too has spending on prisons. States typically spend between \$15,000 and \$55,000 per person incarcerated per year, with New York spending over \$60,000.²⁴ Some big names on the right—who were previously comfortable with the contradiction of promoting small government for social programs and big government for police, prisons, and defense—are starting to doubt the wisdom of mass incarceration. Newt Gingrich, Jeb Bush, and Rand Paul all support the Texas-based organization Right on Crime, which advocates less spending on the “out of control unaccountable [criminal justice] bureaucracy.” The conservative Heritage Foundation is working to end “overcriminalization” by publicizing how engagement with the criminal justice system is detrimental for so many. Can we use this shift on the right to both end mass incarceration and build strong social programs?

Anti-prison leftists partnering with conservatives in local campaigns to stop this jail construction or close that prison can be useful. On single-issue campaigns we can use strange bedfellows without advancing their anti-poor, small-government agendas. But, as historian David P. Stein has warned, to ally with anti-prison conservatives at the state and national levels would serve a different function.²⁵ Bolstering their credentials by partnering with them would likely shrink prisons only to grow other forms of economic and social inequality. The right would be OK with releasing people from prison and watching them return to communities without quality jobs, schools, or homes. Reducing crime through preventative measures and ending mass incarceration will likely be cheaper than the previous, prison-based response, but it will require a reallocation of resources that conservatives will oppose. Still, national conservatives can act as symbols, signs that we no longer need to be

“tough on crime.” They can be what we point to when we are holding liberal policymakers’ feet to the fire, telling them that opposing prisons need not have negative electoral consequences.

The waning significance of crime is due in part to the reduced whipping up of panic by politicians and media. Crime fear is not an organic emotion that bubbles up from the grassroots; it follows after news coverage. Sociologist Katherine Beckett has shown that from the 1960s to the 1990s, political initiatives and media coverage of crime were better predictors of public opinion on crime concerns than were crime rates.²⁶ This does not mean we can ignore crime because public concern over crime is merely an artifact of fear mongering. We know that crime has serious consequences, especially among marginalized groups. What this does tell us, though, is that there is room to reshape the public’s view of crime and prisons. Indeed, crime fears are low at the same time that people think crime rates are high. Crime is down almost 50 percent since its high in 1993, yet 65 percent of respondents to a recent poll said that crime had increased or stayed the same in the last 20 years.²⁷ The public’s seemingly contradictory beliefs that crime is high and that crime is not the country’s most pressing problem shows that the left can frame crime as one harm among many that need to be addressed. Crime is a problem, but so are inequality, climate change, and mass incarceration.

The modern prison is about two hundred years old. During its tenure we have innovated better responses to disease, a larger (though not large enough) welfare state, and vast public transportation networks, but we still respond to crime and violence in the same way, by putting people in cages. As crime continues to decline and as innovative responses to violence grow in acceptance, we have a unique moment to advance social democratic, non-prison ways of preventing and responding to crime. Punitive and regressive forces might again surge, promoting “tough” penalties. We might repeat past

errors, mistaking criminal justice responses as the best solution. But it is also possible that we will build alliances and organize the grassroots to advance these innovative crime responses, finding that one day soon both wealth and safety are distributed equitably.

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The Right Anti-Death Penalty Movement?

Framing Abolitionism for the Twenty-first Century

COLLEEN EREN

SINCE THE YEAR 2000, VICTORIES CLAIMED by death penalty abolitionists have seemed significant. In 1999, the United States executed 98 death-row inmates, the highest number since capital punishment's reinstatement following the *Gregg v. Georgia* Supreme Court ruling in 1976. Subsequently, however, executions have been on the decline, with 39 inmates killed in 2013. Additionally, after peaking in 2000 with a death-row population of 3,593, there has been a reduction to 3,054 inmates awaiting execution, with a 62 percent decrease in new death sentences passed down between 1998 and 2007. Public support for the death penalty in 2014 in the United States remained around a 40-year low of 63 percent. Adding to the sense of optimism, Maryland abolished the death penalty in 2013, making it the sixth state in six years to do so, and raising the total number of states without the death penalty to 18 (Death Penalty Information Center, DPIC).

However the tactics and frames through which anti-death penalty organizations sought to obtain their objectives in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which I witnessed as a community organizer, deserve attention. Herbert Haines' excellent overview of abolitionist movements in the United States, *Against Capital Punish-*

ment, emphasizes that from the beginnings of abolitionism following the American Revolution through the mid-1990s, the anti-death penalty movement had primarily tried to achieve its objectives through a "moralistic critique" (Haines, 163). In other words, those arguing against capital punishment have linked their arguments to human rights, to concerns about racism and unequal treatment of the poor, and to religious concerns about the sanctity of life. These arguments, according to Haines and more recent scholarship by Jolie McLaughlin, have been unsuccessful because they have not sought to appeal to the rational self-interest of non-progressives. They have been too emotive, and to use the cliché, they have been preaching to the choir. And largely, the actions of key anti-death penalty organizations (ADPOs) indicate that they have philosophically sided with the analyses of McLaughlin and Haines.

My intent here is to explore how the leading ADPOs' framing of the issue since 2000 has shifted away from "moralistic," allegedly "emotional/non-rational," traditionally progressive arguments to "rational," "consensus-seeking," crime-prevention frames and arguments that parallel those found in rightist, conservative movements, in the false belief that doing so is the best way to win abolition. I make the case that recent advances in abolitionism should not be attributed primarily to this change in framing, and argue that the historical precedent for achieving progress in abolitionist sentiment in the United States is not predicated on a move to the right, but rather a move toward the *left*, and

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toward a paradigm of more radical economic and racial justice. I also argue that appealing to commonsense rationality as a strategy ignores the way in which the right's opposition to capital punishment has been primarily characterized by retributive emotionality. To obtain any type of significant change, the movement against the death penalty must be allied with a larger movement against mass incarceration that taps into the emotions of those individuals and communities whose lives have been most affected. Otherwise, ADPO strategies will have the unintended consequence of bolstering mass incarceration's impulse and logic, rendering any victories fragile and subject to swings of the economy.

New Century, New Frames, New Leaders

The anti-death penalty movement has never had extensive financial resources. In 1981, the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty received contributions that after inflation would amount to \$23,000 today (Haines, 62). Certainly, even today its funding is insufficient to run television campaigns or take out ads in prominent newspapers. It has relied primarily on the efforts of volunteer activists, notably lawyers and clergy who have donated extensive amounts of time. However, several key ADPOs in the 2000s have been able to move away from relying only on volunteers and to increase their resources through grants given by foundations such as Atlantic Philanthropies, JEHT Foundation, and George Soros' Open Society Institute to hire full-time paid staff to strategize, organize, and lobby. For example, public records show that in 2013, the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty had \$1.3 million in revenue, with its executive director garnering \$136,000 in compensation. Death Penalty Focus, located in California, in 2012 reported \$1.2 million in revenue. The same year, Equal Justice USA reported net assets of \$2.3 million.

With the hiring of full- and part-time staff,

messaging could be honed, and the ears of politicians reached without demonstrations or legal actions in court. Since the late 1990s, the framing of the debate against capital punishment by these largely white, middle-class professionals has moved increasingly to adopt center-right rationales for abolition that fit congruently with conservative ideologies. Most prominently, the issues that are brought to the forefront are cost-inefficiency benefits, innocence, the "true" needs of law enforcement, and better meeting the needs of particular (that is, white) victims of crime and their loved ones.

Cost, Inefficiency, and "Alternatives"

"[Capital Punishment's] fatal flaw is not its immorality ... but rather its enormous lack of cost-effectiveness," Herbert Haines concludes in *Against Capital Punishment* (1993). Indeed, in the characteristic move away from 'moralistic' and emotional arguments in the late 1990s, ADPOs have endorsed this perspective: that we can all have different philosophical opinions about whether capital punishment is ethical, but during a period of budgetary restraint and slow economic recovery, we must all agree that it is too expensive. McLaughlin notes that arguments about cost were not used in the anti-death penalty movement until the late 1990s. "More and more anti-death penalty organizations now cite cost to taxpayers as the *number one reason*, or at least a top reason, why the death penalty should be abolished" (McLaughlin, 705). On Death Penalty Focus' webpage, the second reason they list for abolishing the death penalty (the first being innocence) is cost. "It costs far more to execute a person than to keep him or her in prison for life," they argue. The understanding here of course is that life without parole is the default, unquestioned alternative.

Along with the framing of the death penalty as *expensive*, there has been a concomitant emphasis on it being *ineffective* and *inefficient*. Inefficiency and costliness are entirely compatible with neoliberal discourses and conservative

framing of the issue, and hence more likely to garner support from at least some segments of the right-leaning constituency. The group Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty, in giving its primary reasons for supporting abolition of the death penalty, cites the “alarming cost,” calling it an “inefficient, bloated program.” Montana Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty joined the anti-death penalty movement because of their belief that the “death penalty is another institution of government that is wasteful and ineffective” (McLaughlin, 703). The language of cost effectiveness also gives “cover” to politicians who might want to take action to end the death penalty but not risk being accused of being too liberal (soft) on violent offenders. Governor Martin O’Malley, after signing the anti-death penalty bill in Maryland in 2012, was quoted as saying, “We have a responsibility to stop doing things that are wasteful and ineffective.”

Law Enforcement

The framing of the death penalty as wasteful or ineffective plays directly into a second narrative, which further confirmed the movement of ADPOs to the right—that of saving money on capital punishment in order to spend *more*, not *less* on law enforcement, part of a strategy to win over cops and corrections officers to the side of abolition, appealing to their needs. The obvious conservatism of tacitly upholding the prison-industrial complex by siphoning money from state-sanctioned executions to fund other law enforcement endeavors is striking. Haines goes so far in *Against Capital Punishment* as to suggest that abolitionists advocate for expanding the construction of prisons (182). It doesn’t appear that this suggestion has been taken up directly by anti-death penalty activists, but “In NJ, CT, and NM advocates proposed that the money saved as a result of abolishing the death penalty should be used to provide additional law enforcement officers or victim assistance” (McLaughlin, 692). In Illinois, law enforcement

programs have been directly granted resources that would have been allocated for the capital punishment system.

Key ADPOs have actively solicited the voices of law enforcement. Equal Justice USA, Death Penalty Focus, National Coalition to Abolish, and New Yorkers for Alternatives to the Death Penalty amongst others have reached out extensively to this group, positing them as voices that are honored and respected and authoritative on issues of safety. Equal Justice USA, for example, attempts to obtain the support of law enforcement on their website, writing, “As a current or former police officer, prosecutor, or corrections officer, the public looks to you for guidance about issues of crime and punishment. People respect your opinion about the effectiveness of our criminal justice system because you have been on the front lines, devoting your skills and your time to keeping our communities safe” (Equal Justice USA). While such organizing amongst law enforcement may bring nontraditional bedfellows into the anti-death penalty movement, it does nothing to challenge (and in fact, buttresses) mass incarceration. ADPOs have not acknowledged the conflict that has existed between police and minority communities, as evidenced in extensively documented accounts of police brutality, racial profiling, and dehumanizing treatment of prisoners.

Innocence

Using the possibility of executing innocent persons as a way of framing opposition to capital punishment is not entirely new to the anti-death penalty movement. The controversial executions of Barbara Graham and Caryl Chessman brought the issue national attention in the 1950s. However, it wasn’t consistently and deliberately used until the end of the twentieth century. Prior to the National Conference on Wrongful Conviction and the Death Penalty held in Chicago in 1998, “advocates had not focused on wrongful convictions in capital cases as

an area of serious concern” (McLaughlin, 691).

The way in which focusing a lion’s share of attention on the innocent plays into conservative narratives is twofold. First, it strengthens what Silvia Federici in “Why Feminists Should Oppose Capital Punishment” calls ontological apartheid—“the existence of two ... ontologically different humanities: on the one side the ‘rational’ citizens for whose benefit executions are allegedly carried on. On the other, the beastly criminals, to whom anything can be done, since ... they have placed themselves outside the boundaries of our humanity.” There are, then, two types of death-row inmates—those who are innocent, ontologically different from those who are guilty. Of course, the act of incarcerating an innocent human being is morally reprehensible and shocking. Yet, a progressive message should not be that we should not have the death penalty *because* innocent people are killed. Even if the death penalty were to be 100 percent error free, the right to take the life of one rendered defenseless must be beyond the reach of the state.

The second way in which focusing on innocence dovetails with conservative narratives is by appealing to the pro-life movement. While white conservatives are often staunchly anti-abortion, they are the least likely demographic group to oppose capital punishment. This seeming paradox is reconciled and rationalized by those on the right by pointing to the idea that a fetus is innocent, untarnished life, whereas the life of the death-row inmate has been sullied with sin and therefore forfeit.

Victims

The victims’ rights movement has been a powerful voice in the United States since the mid-1970s. To help neutralize the powerful retributionist language provided by the right in terms of providing justice for the families of murder victims, increasingly the voices of this group are sought by ADPOs, and proposals made to use “savings” from executions to give them support,

which is often severely lacking. In New Mexico, for instance, activists called attention to the ways in which the death penalty siphoned money away from victims’ families (McLaughlin, 698). Equal Justice USA writes on its website, “We believe repeal of the death penalty and increasing services for surviving families must go hand in hand. In many of the states where we have won repeal, we are still working to meet this second goal. ... As a surviving family member, your voice is so important in the death penalty debate—no matter how you feel.”

There have been advantages to the overtures, as organizations like Murder Victims’ Family Members for Reconciliation (MVFR) and Murder Victims’ Family Members for Human Rights have been visible and active in the anti-death penalty movement. MVFR, for instance, played a large role in the effort to defeat the death penalty in New Mexico, and murder victims’ family members have testified against the death penalty at the Maryland Judiciary Committee and at the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, among many other examples.

Of course, the inclusion of voices of victims against capital punishment has the potential for a strong emotional and moral impact. And I am not suggesting that the voices of victims and their families should *not* be heard. However, the way in which the anti-death penalty movement has used victims and their families has the potential to advance an agenda that is useful to the right and which supports already-in-existence stereotypes of who the victims are and who the offenders are. In his work on the victims’ rights movement, Markus Dubber concludes (177), “The victims’ rights movement has been dominated by whites at all levels, and most certainly at the levels of power, both outside and inside government. ... The paradigmatic victim of the victims’ rights movement is white. The paradigmatic *offender* of the victims’ rights movement is black.”

Allegiance to those victims who do not

support capital punishment furthermore carries with it contingencies that obviate broader progressive advocacy on criminal justice issues. For example, when murder victims' family members lobby legislators on behalf of the ADPOs, there is often the understanding that the organizations will not challenge life without parole because many of these family members *would not testify* if life without parole were not a possibility. In some instances, murder victims' family members supporting ADPOs have continued to advocate for juvenile life without parole very vocally. These individuals are fully entitled to their opinions and emotions. However, as a movement, the anti-death penalty movement must re-examine indirectly advocating and normalizing life without parole, a punishment that has seen a "historic rise" in recent years in the United States, where some 50,000 prisoners including juveniles are serving life sentences, but which has been eschewed by the European Court of Human Rights.

Looking Back to Look Forward

The annals of those executed in New York State tell a particular story of the way in which executions in the United States have always been rooted in the reality of slavery. Between 1712 and 1742, approximately 65 slaves were hanged, burned, or hung in chains for the crime of "revolt." Today, one in three black men will be incarcerated during his lifetime and the United States incarcerates a greater percentage of its citizenry than any other country on the planet. The anti-death penalty movement's tactical framing away from emphasizing issues of inequality, poverty, and race should be of concern to political progressives and radicals. Instead of the anti-death penalty movement aligning with—or at best being silent on—initiatives and practices that only serve to perpetuate the system of mass incarceration (such as life without parole, more resources to law enforcement, and so forth), activists should be encouraged to look historically at the way in which the *greatest*

victories were achieved. We are not currently in the era in which abolitionist sentiment has been strongest, nor in the era in which state victories in overturning the death penalty are at their peak. This period occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s as a direct consequence of the civil rights movement.

Abolitionist victories and sentiments in the United States can be said to have peaked during the 1960s, "a period characterized by diverse forms of collective action and generally liberal outlooks within the federal government's executive and judicial branches. ... The effort that produced the short-lived judicial ban on capital punishment (1972–1976) was a direct outgrowth, both organizationally and ideologically, of the 1960s civil rights revolution" (Haines, 21). Haines notes, "The Civil Rights movement paved the way by mobilizing members who would later venture into ... other movements, by loosening up the political center and making it more receptive to demands for change of various kinds" (41).

From the vantage point of the 1960s and early 1970s, the abolitionist movement could not have looked stronger. In 1966, a Gallup poll revealed that only 42 percent of Americans supported capital punishment (DPIC), compared to over 60 percent today (which is nevertheless touted by anti-death penalty activists as a victory over 1990 levels). In 1971, 13 states had effectively eliminated capital punishment, either *de jure* or *de facto* (with no one on death row), and two states had anti-death penalty bills reach the floors of their legislatures (Haines, 37). Beginning in 1968, there was not a single execution until 1977, which saw only the death of Gary Gilmore. And, in 1972, the *Furman v. Georgia* case resulted in a temporary halt to executions as the death penalty's arbitrary application was ruled unconstitutional. It was not until 1984 that executions began once again to number in the double digits, at the same time as growing support for death-penalty implementation, as the tough-on-crime era blossomed in the move

towards conservative politics. It appears that key, better-funded ADPOs have forgotten this radical history of using mass mobilizations around broader issues of justice when considering what leads to change on contentious issues, or have abandoned a grander vision as too idealistic.

ADPOs also, when claiming their victories vis-à-vis the 1980s or 1990s, have not considered the socio-historical reality of the 2000s and 2010s. Americans no longer place crime as a central concern—in fact it ranks amongst the least of Americans' worries (Gallup 2014). We have experienced starting in 2008 the Long Recession—the longest and deepest recession since the Great Depression. The lack of centrality of crime as an issue and excessive attention to fiscal austerity have made conditions unusually ripe for arguments framed around cost and efficiency. However, recessions do not last forever, and a high-profile violent crime is always waiting to receive national media attention and rekindle the retributive flames. Even in the absence of such factors, support for the death penalty increased in 2014, and the anti-death penalty movement is nowhere close to where it was in the 1960s, or even during earlier abolitionist eras. In the 1830s and 1840s, abolitionism was characterized by radical, broad demands that were not single-issue. Activists advocated for prison reform and an end to slavery. They realized that the connection amongst these issues was profound. During the second abolitionist era at the end of the nineteenth century leading up to World War I, abolitionists “rode the waves of Populist and Progressive Reform [and] a socially conscious form of Christianity,” which resulted in ten states banning capital punishment (Haines, 10).

It will not, in the final analysis, benefit progressive ADPOs to limit their vision of change,

to claim “neutrality” on other issues, to privilege a focus on the rational and non-emotive when rightist movements have been very successful in using emotional appeals for retribution to their benefit and rational arguments when convenient. Progressives have at their disposal the emotional power of recent events that have brought attention to the ways in which class and race have intersected to continue disparities and oppression in a system of mass incarceration, for example the Troy Davis, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner cases. Abolitionists must harness this energy, and incorporate more black and brown voices—the populations who are at ground zero—into a movement that is almost exclusively white and affluent. Abolishing the death penalty would be a tremendous step forward, saving about 50 lives a year, but this must be achieved while not at the same time abandoning the 2.3 million behind bars for whom a struggle must also be waged.

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Tribute to Betty Reid Mandell

SCOTT MCLEEMEE

THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF *New Politics* is saddened by the loss of one of our own: Betty Reid Mandell, who, with her husband Marvin Mandell, served as one of the journal's co-editors for most of the past decade.

Betty was also one of our most popular writers. Her articles from the magazine and her commentaries posted to the *New Politics* website have been the pieces we're most often asked for permission to reprint. (Most often by a large margin, according to those who handle the requests.) Readers seem to have picked up on Betty's genuine commitment to not just the rights but the *dignity* of the poorest and most disenfranchised people in this, the wealthiest society in the history of the planet.

It was just two issues ago that we thanked Marvin and Betty for their years of service to *New Politics*. The only people who know enough to write a proper account of Betty's life are members of her family, who have enough to bear for now. But some kind of tribute is in order.

Here, then, are a few notes that may be of interest to *New Politics* readers—many of whom will join us in offering condolences to Marvin, and to their daughters, Christine and Charlotte.

BETTY REID WAS BORN in Denver, Colorado, on November 4, 1924. "I like to think that keeping my mother from voting for Coolidge was my first political act," she wrote not long ago, adding that it was "as effective as most of my



subsequent political acts." (This and most other quotations here are taken from a manuscript of personal recollections she prepared for her family, who have graciously shared it.)

The youngest of four children, Betty grew up in Roggen, a town with a two-digit population about fifty miles northeast of Denver. Her father farmed a small tract of land acquired under the Homestead Act. It was not an especially fertile plot, and the threat of financial ruin would have been in the air even without the ecological catastrophe of the Dust Bowl.

Betty's mother was a loyal and active Republican, and the source of her earliest political memories, including visits to their home by GOP candidates. "Although my mother opposed Roosevelt and said any improvements he made were actually due to Herbert Hoover,"

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Betty recalled, “she nevertheless was thrilled over the New Deal program of the Tennessee Valley Authority and my father participated in the New Deal program of the ‘ever normal granary,’ which involved not planting wheat but letting land go fallow on alternate years.” When Betty had to write a composition for school expressing excitement at finally having electrical lighting, her mother helped: “In fact, I suspect that my mother wrote most of the essay.”

Woven into Betty’s childhood memories—along with the chickens she helped raise and the sounds of coyote howls and train whistles she sometimes heard before falling asleep—were traces of agrarian radicalism and Progressive-era reformism still lingering in the 1920s and 1930s. Among these were her mother’s membership in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, a group now much maligned, but one with a strong labor and feminist aspect in its heyday, and aligned with the Knights of Labor. There was also the Grange Hall. Like the church, it was one of the town’s social centers (with the important difference being that dances were held there) but it also embodied the solidarity of farmers against the power of the railroads and other middlemen.

While writing her memories, Betty did some Googling and learned that Grange members “had been active in establishing rural free delivery of mail, the county extension service, and cooperatives. They were also active in women’s liberation. Susan B. Anthony delivered one of her speeches in a Grange Hall. Roggen had two cooperatives—the gas station and the grain elevator. I wonder if the Grange Hall was instrumental in that, or was it the influence of the Farmer-Labor Party?”

These details seem meaningful with the advantage of considerable hindsight. But they don’t add up to a destiny, no matter how you reckon them. At least as pertinent to Betty’s future course was another side of American life expressed at the Grange Hall: “The Cooper boys stood on the sidelines, never daring to ask any white girl to dance. Jim Cooper was hand-



Circa 1939, the year Betty won the National Western Stock Show in Colorado.

some and I wished I could dance with him, but understood the unspoken taboo against black men dancing with white women.”

Her anti-racist streak seems to have been nurtured by a Methodist youth group at college. Conscientious objectors from a nearby camp where they were interned sometimes attended meetings. Betty read in the group’s national magazine about the forced relocation and detention of Japanese Americans, which she denounced in a speech at the local Rotary club. Betty had entered Colorado State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts at Fort Collins in 1940, at the age of 16, meaning that her protest occurred while the internments were still underway. It would have been a courageous act anywhere in the United States at the time, much less in front of the Rotary club. And when the atom bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, she understood it as an atrocity. Her rebellion against Roggen norms may have taken no bolder form than registering as a Democrat, but she was on the way to something more radical.

BY HER OWN ACCOUNT, Betty learned about Marxist theory in the mid-1950s, after falling in love with Marvin, whose gregarious manner and years in the Workers Party and Independent Socialist League undoubtedly

made him the ideal tutor. But a decade passed between finishing her undergraduate studies at Colorado State and meeting him in New York City. In retrospect her twenties look like a time of steady movement from being “religious in a diffuse and unfocused way” (she says she prayed without feeling, not “very convinced that it did any good or that anyone was listening to me”) to commitment to the very worldly challenges of social work.

That was to be her profession, both as practitioner and college professor, and something of the scale of her contribution to it is obvious even to a layperson. *An Introduction to Human Services*, a textbook she co-authored, is now in its eighth edition, while *Survival News*, the newsletter she helped start in 1986, continues to report on and contribute to the struggles of low-income women. One of her colleagues really ought to make a project of collecting tales of her work in the trenches of social work—not just as advocate for the poor but as someone who worked with people in need, helping them fight their way through bureaucratic obstacles built into the systems that are supposed to help them.

Betty Reid Mandell approached social work not as a liberal (hoping to make an easily distracted democracy live up to its claims of decency) but as someone who could—and did—cite Hal Draper’s essay on “socialism from below” as a statement of basic orientation. In a two-part essay published by the journal *Social Work* in 1971, she characterized the evasive, invasive, humiliating, and arbitrary practices of the existing welfare system in provocative terms:

Mechanization and depersonalization of life have become pervasive social problems. As Arendt says: “Political, social, and economic events everywhere are in a silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous.” If we can help welfare recipients find a sense of community together, we will be working toward a society in which people care about what happens to each other.

Fuzzy communitarianism was not the solu-

tion she had in mind, as her next sentence makes clear: “History teaches us that democratic power is not given to the dispossessed; it is achieved through their own struggle.” Here the influence of “The Two Souls of Socialism” seems quite clear. (Probably that of Marvin as well, though only Draper is cited in the footnotes.)

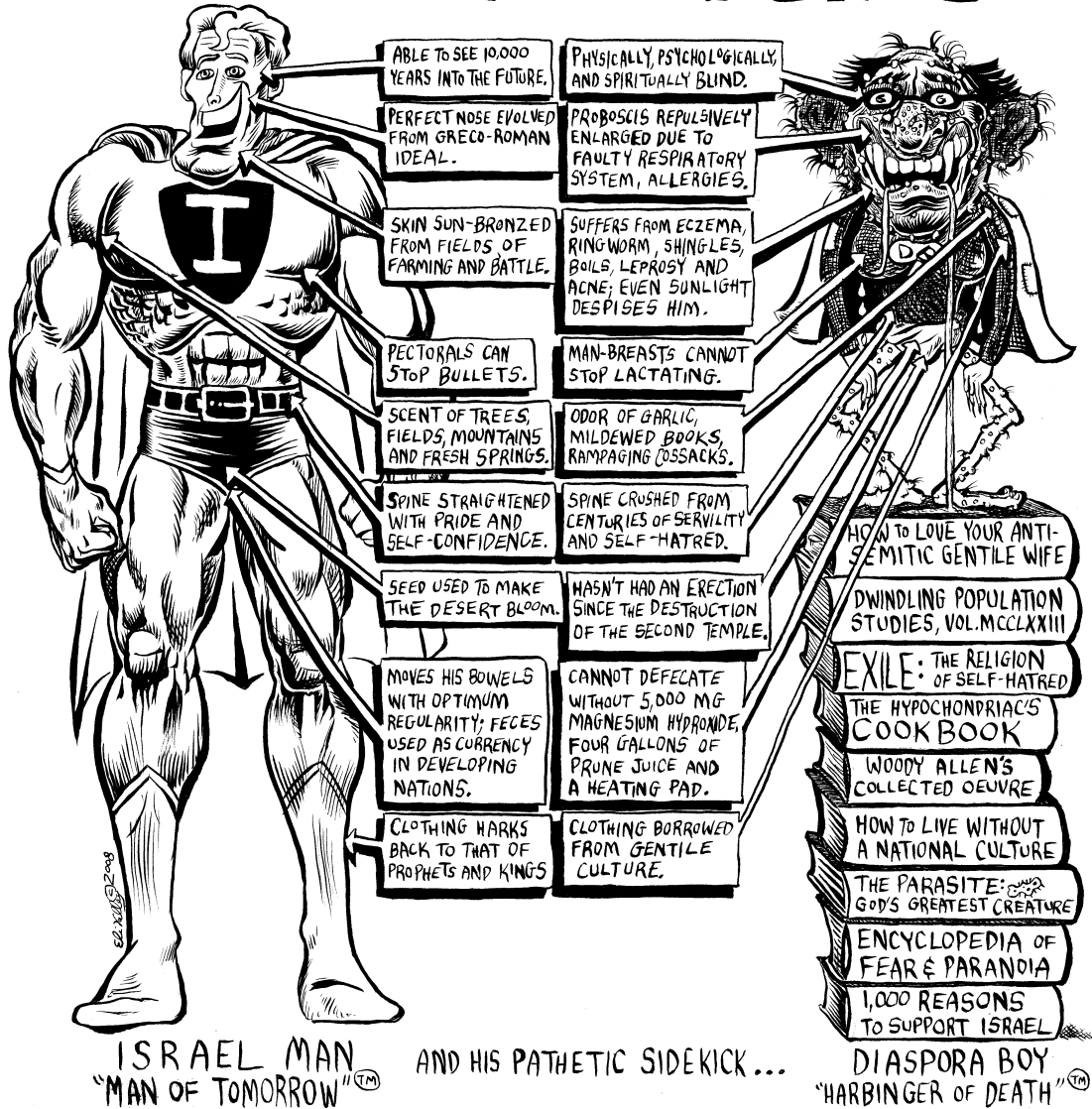
“LOOKING BACK OVER MY HISTORY of wearing political buttons,” Betty writes in her memoir, “is an interesting way to view my political education. In 1936 I wore a sunflower button for [Republican presidential candidate] Alf Landon. In 1952 I wore a button for Adlai Stevenson. In the 1960s, I wore a peace button against the Vietnam War. I don’t remember how we got it, but Marvin and I owned a black anarchist flag with the anarchist A on it. In 2011, I wore an Occupy Boston button.”

Betty once quoted a passage from Hannah Arendt that might serve to sum up the perspective that took shape across the seventy years of her steady movement leftward:

[E]quality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights.

For Betty this seems to have been not a doctrine but a pledge. Like Marvin, she was in it for the long haul. They devoted most of their eighties to *New Politics*—in solidarity with its aims, of course, but also in tribute to their longtime friends, the late Phyllis and Julius Jacobson, who founded the magazine. Only someone who has been trapped in a room with the editorial board of a socialist journal can imagine what Marvin and Betty put themselves through by taking the helm. We will always be grateful to them for it, and hope the generation that took its first political steps during Occupy will learn to see in her an inspiration and a standard of the commitment to expect from themselves.

ANATOMY OF OUR HEROES



Excerpt from "Israel Man and Diaspora Boy," Jewcy (2008).

Interview with Eli Valley The Highest Art Form

PAUL BUHLE

THE MOST VIVID AND WITHOUT a doubt, the most disliked (make that, hated) comic-artist critic of Jewish power plays, from Tel Aviv to Los Angeles, Eli Valley ranks high among the most *Jewish* comic artists anywhere in the world today. He has been publishing his comic art for less than a decade, and it appears most influentially in the (Jewish) *Forward*, the English-language heir to what was, a century ago, the most widely circulated Yiddish daily newspaper in the world. There, his satires on big shots Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, American billionaire Sheldon Adelson, Anti-Defamation League (ADL) boss (until his recent retirement) Abraham Foxman, and such, inspire outrage among politically conservative and other *Israel First* readers. His work also appears on line in *+972 Magazine*, the voice of the Israeli left and its allies, and doubtless meets a friendly reception there. But it's not clear whether Eli enjoys appreciation or rage to any greater degree. He loves to stir the pot.

As a comic artist, he is also *sui generis*, even if he gives us good reasons to look for influences in the old comic book art and in some cases, fairly recent work. There is something

about the Jewish, make that cryptic-Yiddish, identity of *Mad Comics* (1952-55) before the franchise became milder and aimed at younger readers. That something is an intensity, a vibrancy, that the Gentile artists also reflected toward *Mad* targets ranging from superhero comics to beer commercials to the McCarthy Hearings. It is an intensity rarely equaled. *Mad Comics* was the creation of young people, and perhaps that helps explain their psychic and artistic energy. Let's hope that Eli Valley can hold on to that verve for decades to come.
PAUL BUHLE

PAUL BUHLE. Your background offers some surprises—your father's a rabbi and your parents are



"Ariel Sharon" (2014).

PAUL BUHLE has been interviewing comic artists since 1975. He published *Radical America Komiks* in 1969, then overcome a 35-year lapse with a string of historical comics beginning with *Wobblies!* (2005). His latest is *Abraham Lincoln for Beginners*.



Excerpt from "It Happened on Halloween," Jewish Daily Forward (2013).

divorced. Did your secularish mom help give you a sense of contrast that found its way into your comics?

ELI VALLEY. There are a lot of streams that probably flowed together, but the divorce and the contrast between reverence and irreverence in my family played a part. But it's also various experiences I had growing up. I went to Jewish day school through the eighth grade, and in some ways it was rigorous and critically minded, but in others—okay, Israel—it rubber-stamped a lot of stuff that maybe it's better to question if you want to have your brain working at full capacity.

PB. And then after college you worked as a tour guide to Jewish Prague, home

of Kafka and the triumphant return of Western consumerism, and so on. Was that another source of inspiration?

EV. Maybe it was, indirectly. I moved there after growing up in the Northeast, where we're sort



Excerpt from "Never Miss an Opportunity," Jewish Daily Forward (2011).



Excerpt from "Code Name: Evangelator," Jewish Daily Forward (2011).

of saturated and satiated on everyday Jewish culture. We take it for granted, it's ubiquitous, and the sense of power when you just look at the communal infrastructure alone is awe-inspiring. Coming from that culture and then moving to post-Communist Prague, I met all these young people who wouldn't even think of taking Judaism for granted, because it had been sidelined, hidden, and persecuted over the previous decades. It was eye-opening to see people approach it as something new to cherish and value. I think I started looking at it that way only once I was outside of America. So I think my passion for Jewish culture and history came out of Prague.

I know I romanticize it, but that too is a Jewish tendency: idealization of earlier eras of supposedly pristine culture that we're probably deluding ourselves about. But it was only when I came back to America, to New York, that I was reminded of the somewhat jaded attitudes towards the culture I grew up on. That can be expected in a place like America, where Jewish acceptance and accomplishment are unprecedented, but that didn't make it any less jarring. It's possible that sort of collision eventually found its way into my comics. And as a side note, living in Europe felt like an entry into Jewish history in ways I never felt in America or in Israel. European Jewish history is my heritage

in ways that the Maccabees and Suez Canal fighters are entirely foreign to me—which is why I think a "Birthright diaspora" would be much more logical than "Birthright Israel." Not to mention more generally Prague's tradition of humor, savoring of free expression and the use of art and literature to subvert corrupt power structures, but that sounds arrogant so I'll stick to my *Ostjuden* reverie.

PB. Your comics hit a nerve among American Jews and Israelis. Is there something about the current period we're in? Why these kinds of comics now?

EV. Jewish satire has a long history, but I don't think my particular style of comics and satire could exist outside a community that's achieved an unprecedented degree of power. But also, I think we're at a turning point, both in Israel's trajectory and in Jewish history more generally, and it's exciting to be drawing comics during a time of upheaval and transition, even or especially if that upheaval causes anxiety in every other arena.

Just in the past five years you can see the tensions in the disparity between Obama and Netanyahu. Sure, there's been a lot of disappointment in Obama on the left, but back in 2008 he captivated the imagination of a majority of American Jews in ways it's hard to say for any other group aside from African Ameri-

cans. Even if it wasn't necessarily accurate, it's how we perceived him: He was the outsider, he was an intellectual, he was motivated by social justice and universalism—that is, he was Jewish in a way that American Jews historically view ourselves. Meanwhile, who rose up in Israel? Benjamin Netanyahu, an anti-intellectual who stokes flames of racial incitement, anti-democratic hysteria, and xenophobia. So there's this huge divide in the two dominant communities of Jewish life—but it's complicated by the fact that American Jewish leadership, which has little in common politically, culturally, and religiously with their supposed constituents, genuflects before their prince on the other side of the ocean. There's a seismic internal fissure between the values of the majority of Jews and this small subgroup that insists it knows what we really want and who we really are.

PB. That brings us to the next question: Politically, your assault upon neoconservatism and personalities like long-time ADL Director Abraham Foxman instantly recalls the cries of self-hating Jew or, for

people like me writing along similar lines, "anti-Semite." How do you deal with this nonsense?

EV. Honestly, if we define Judaism by the values and practices of the majority of American Jews, then Sheldon Adelson is virulently self-hating. Netanyahu can't look in the mirror without grimacing in disgust. Abe Foxman cries himself to sleep in self-loathing revulsion. But we live in this inverted landscape, in which Jewish pride—pride in our secular traditions of humanism and universalism—is equated with self-hatred, and men like Adelson, Netanyahu, and Foxman can claim to be acting on behalf of all the Jews in the world.

I'm fascinated by the concept of self-hatred and how it's used to police discourse, partly because it offers a grand psychology of the people doing the labeling. More than "hatred," actually, I'm interested in the "self" side of the equation, because the labelers are really talking about the power to define the Jewish Self: who is a Jew and which Jewish values, cultures, and means of identification are legitimate.

If you love secular Jewish culture, Yiddish



Excerpt from "Stuart, the Jewish Turtle," Jewish Daily Forward (2009).

culture imbued with the humanistic and universalist values that were the bedrock of Jewish identity for generations and formed so much of European and American Jewish identity and politics, you're likely to be called self-hating by the defenders of Jewish communal life today. That's insane.

PB. Are your comics a way of creating or reflecting a new Jewish authenticity?

EV. My comics are satire of what's going on. Really, there's no such thing as Jewish authenticity. You can find textual support for social justice and for genocide. But when a minority of Jews claim to be legitimate and label others as self-hating, it's offensive. Today, the flag of authenticity is waved most stridently by Orthodoxy and Zionism. So you can't win: If you question either of those and say "Hey, Jewish values are something beyond segregation of women or segregation of Arabs," then the "self-hatred" labelers insist you're questioning yourself.

So I don't know about "authenticity," but it would be great if we dismantled or reappropriated the term "self-hatred." Just recently, graffiti in Israel condemning a monumental new anti-democratic bill and warning of book burnings was called "anti-Semitic." So to be anti-fascist makes you anti-Semitic? What's "Semitic" then, fascism? Maybe in the minds of the labelers, which is why we need to stop letting them label things.

Or look at Jews for Jesus. They consider themselves to be fuller, more realized Jews, right? So in their eyes, I must be self-hating to reject Jesus as the Messiah. For me, when Orthodox or Zionist or Republican Jews claim to represent Jewish authenticity, it's as ridiculous as claiming that Jews should get baptized and take communion in order to be authentic. I think we should take these terms back, or at least neutralize them. Or start calling Jewish Republicans "Jews for Jesus." It doesn't really advance the conversation, but it feels cathartic.

PB. You are wildly controversial and proud of it,

but drawing for the Forward as well as left-leaning Israeli publications such as +972 Magazine, how do you do it? Ever get death threats?

EV. Sometimes there are ripples here and there, but mostly it's confined to online comments, which I like to say should be read in tandem with the comics themselves—it becomes a text of internal commentary and argument, like a page of the Talmud if the Talmud were written by paranoid schizophrenics. More than individual comments, though, it's troublesome when institutions or their representatives start shouting—like when the Anti-Defamation League applies pressure on Jewish communal media, or when the editor of *Commentary* calls me a "Kapo" and insists I not be published—that's shadier than lone wolves on the internet, because it has the desired effect of silencing expression and limiting open, free-wheeling debate. And those forces are only getting louder and more empowered. But aside from all that, just from the perspective of self-interest, I don't like being silenced.

PB. Artistically, you are in the finest Harvey Kurtzman tradition of what I call "immanent critique," tearing apart shallow truisms by assault upon the revealing details. What other comic artists/editors have meant the most to you, and are they mostly Jewish?

EV. I love a range of writers and artists, some mostly for the art, some for the narrative, and some for both. I love the entire pre-code EC (Entertaining Comics) canon, including icons like Elder, Wood, Davis, Feldstein, Kamen, Krigstein, and Craig, but I also really like the non-EC titles because even though the art was less reliably solid, the narratives had no rules and sometimes went off the rails in amazing ways. Fletcher Hanks and Basil Wolverton are amazingly inspiring in art and narrative too. I've semi-recently gotten into Tarpé Mills's "Miss Fury," which I love for its camp and noir and insanity.

In terms of non-pre-code work, I love

Robert Crumb, Julie Doucet, Charles Burns, and Rutu Modan. I've recently been reading Lisa Hanawalt, Simon Hanselmann, and Julia Gfrorer, and it's great, funny and/or disturbing stuff. But most of the comics I end up reading are the pre-code 1950s stuff in collected form.* It's largely available online but—especially when the colors are reproduced in a way that mimics the original pulp—I love the printed page.

PB. What about that old high-versus-low-art bugaboo that reached its apex with the New York intellectuals of the 1950s, Cold War liberals on the take (in the Congress of Cultural Freedom, and so on)? An old story but still one held up against "comics" of any kind. Aren't you bashing the snobs by what you are doing? Is comic art an accepted art and do you think of it as an art?

EV. Comics and film are the highest art forms that exist. I don't know whether comics are an "accepted" art—I guess maybe not yet, as every month seems to bring another headline along the lines of "Pow! Kablam! Comics—They're Not for Kids Anymore." In terms of the snobs, it's hard to say—all culture merges into a stew,

and I don't think there's much barrier behind "high" and "low" anymore. As for the Jewish content, I do think there's a snobbery that favors the written word. Maybe that gives me more license as a visual artist, I don't know. Boss Tweed allegedly said, referring to Thomas Nast's cartoons, "My constituents don't know how to read, but they can't help seeing them damned pictures!" The opposite might be true in the Jewish world. The people I satirize, yes they get upset, almost reflexively, but I'm not sure they understand the work. They don't know how to read comics. It's a foreign lexicon to them. They're visually illiterate, and maybe that's one reason comics drive them mad.

*The Comics Code Authority was established in 1954 as an alternative to government regulation of the comic book industry following Senate investigations and the publication of psychologist Frederic Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent: The Influence of Comics on Today's Youth*. Approved comics received the Comics Code Authority stamp of approval, shown here. —EDS.



A Broken Romance? Israel and American Jews

DAVID FINKEL

NORMAN FINKELSTEIN HAS MADE his career taking the nasty assignments. It's been dirty work, but presumably someone had to do it: plowing through the works of Joan Peters, Daniel Goldhagen, Elie Wiesel, Alan Dershowitz, and a small army of official and unofficial Israeli state propagandists. The result has been a series of enormously valuable analytical and polemical works including *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (Verso, 1995); *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (co-authored with Ruth Bettina Birn, Henry Holt and Co., 1998); *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (Verso, 2000); and *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* (University of California Press, 2005. 2nd updated edition, June 2008, with an appendix written by Frank J. Menetrez, "Dershowitz vs Finkelstein. Who's

Right and Who's Wrong?").

The last work included a dissection of Alan Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel*, with Finkelstein explosively showing how much of the book

closely resembled, without attribution, Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial* (1984). The latter purported to be a study showing that the Arab population in Palestine was built on immigration induced by the economic benefits of Zionist settlement, which Finkelstein himself had shown two decades earlier to be a monstrous fake.

Dershowitz, the supposed civil liberties lawyer (who endorses torture and collective punishment by

Israel and the United States in the "war on terror"), attempted to suppress the University of California's publication of *Beyond Chutzpah*, and subsequently launched a vendetta that resulted—"allegedly," inasmuch as Dershowitz and DePaul University denied it—in Finkelstein's dismissal from his teaching position at that institution, whose administration cited as its official grounds Finkelstein's supposed "non-Vincentian" style.

Old Wine, Broken Bottle. Ari Shavit's Promised Land

NORMAN G. FINKELSTEIN
OR Books, 2014. 83 pp. + notes,
paperback, \$10

Knowing Too Much: Why the American Jewish Romance with Israel is Coming to an End

NORMAN G. FINKELSTEIN
OR Books, 2012. 454 pp. + notes and
index, paperback, \$20

DAVID FINKEL is an editor of *Against the Current* and an active member of JVP in Detroit.

Exiled from academia with an unspecified settlement from DePaul, Finkelstein turned to independent scholarship and political writing, mostly published by OR Books (New York). Titles include *This Time We Went Too Far: Truth and Consequences of the Gaza Invasion* (2010); *Goldstone Recants*. Richard Goldstone

Finkelstein says American Jews
will no longer swallow a narrative
of the Middle East that amounts
to “*Exodus* with footnotes.”

renews Israel's license to kill (2011); *What Gandhi Says About Nonviolence, Resistance and Courage* (2012); and the two recent books on which I concentrate here.

Old Wine, Broken Bottle is a brief book, a trenchant essay-review of the celebrated liberal Israeli journalist Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land*, highly acclaimed for its supposed boldness in facing up to some unpleasant facts of ethnic cleansing in the formation of the State of Israel. Quite the contrary, says Finkelstein; Shavit largely repeats the facts documented by Israeli “new historians,” notably Benny Morris (on whom more below), while putting his own shiny gloss on the Zionist pioneers in order “to justify Israel's creation at the expense of the indigenous population” (21).

“I am no judge, I am an observer,” Shavit declares, but alas, he observes through the judgmental lens of an unreconstructed European imperialist. ... In Shavit's distillation, even the sheep of these [indigenous peasant] Palestinians are “gaunt.” Meantime, the Zionist pioneers manage, while making the desert bloom, also to peruse Marx, Dostoyevsky and Kropotkin, revel in Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn, and are even green-friendly, as they adopt a ‘humane and environmentally friendly socialism’ (he doesn't say whether they

recycle paper and soda bottles) (22, 24).

The above paragraph is typical of Finkelstein's style, and there's plenty more where that came from. He is particularly scathing when it comes to Shavit's lavish celebrations of Tel Aviv's steamy night life, his praise of Operation Cast Lead (Israel's 2008–09 invasion of Gaza, predecessor of the recent carnage), and the self-promoting way Shavit has positioned himself as a reformed critical leftist, in a manner calculated to sustain his own prestige:

In his youth he was a “peacenik,” who opposed settlements, supported a Palestinian state, and championed human rights. ... It's not so much that he has inched, let alone lurched, across the Israeli political spectrum, but rather that the whole Israeli spectrum has shifted to the right, and he has, conveniently, moved right along with it. His personal odyssey (which parallels that of Israeli historian Benny Morris) is thus exemplary of the morphing Israel itself has undergone in recent years, *one that has estranged it from the moral universe of American Jews* (71, emphasis added).

That last phrase is key to Finkelstein's bold hypothesis laid out in *Knowing Too Much*, which I'll scrutinize in more detail. Interestingly, *Old Wine, Broken Bottle* received fleeting attention in a recent *New York Review of Books* piece by Jonathan Freedland—not for its substance, unfortunately, but only with a muddled quotation of Finkelstein's rendering of a Yiddish joke. (Enjoy the joke for yourself on pages 82 and 97, fn 2.)

If the demolition of Shavit is a quick and breezy read, *Knowing Too Much: Why the American Jewish Romance with Israel Is Coming to an End* is a challenging text, which Finkelstein has described as his most important book. Although published in 2012 and mostly written several years earlier, the book deserves attention now in the wake of the recent Gaza massacre, which offers a striking opportunity to test its central tenet.

“Recent surveys strongly suggest that American Jews are ‘distancing’ themselves from Israel,” Finkelstein begins. For supporters of

Palestine to turn this development to political account, he argues,

it must be shown to American Jews that the choice between Israel's survival and Palestinian rights is a false one; that it is in fact Israel's denial of Palestinian rights and reflexive resort to criminal violence that are pushing it toward destruction. ...

It must be shown that what is being asked of them is not more but also not less than that they be consistent in word and deed when it comes to the people of Palestine. If it can be demonstrated that the enlightened values of truth and justice are on the side of Israel's critics, then it should be possible—the evidence is already there—to strike a resonant chord among American Jews that goads them into action (xiii, xix).

The book then proceeds with a full-length demonstration that indeed, “truth and justice are on the side of Israel's critics,” that these values are indeed incompatible with Israel's behavior and with the deteriorating state of Israeli society, that American Jews remain broadly committed in their majority to enlightened values, and that they (and others) will no longer swallow a narrative of the Middle East that amounts to “*Exodus* with footnotes.” (Note for readers too young to remember: “Exodus” here refers not to the Biblical text but to the 1958 Leon Uris novel, one of the most racist works of all time—most worthless as literature and most spectacularly successful as political propaganda—and to the blockbuster movie it spawned.)

Before surveying the somewhat contradictory evidence for Finkelstein's optimistic hypothesis, it is worth briefly summarizing the wide ground he covers. It repays close reading. As in some earlier works, he points out that the full-contact American Jewish “romance with Israel” really flowered not in the early days of the Israeli state, but after its smashing victory over Arab armies in 1967, when “Israel came to incarnate for American Jewish intellectuals the high cause of Truth, Justice *and* the American Way, to which they could now assert a unique

connection by virtue of blood lineage. ... The most zealous of these newly minted supporters of Israel were the Jewish liberals who metamorphosed into right-wing neoconservatives” (41).

Finkelstein goes on to a detailed critical dissection of the thesis of professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, “that the lobby has so skewed Washington's foreign policy that, acting on Israel's behalf, it even caused the George W. Bush administration to attack Iraq in 2003 although the war did not serve American interests” (45).

It's an important discussion, in that sizeable chunks of the pro-Palestinian movement have fixated on the diversionary notion that Israel, or Zionists, or Jews, are the driving force behind U.S. regional or even global policies—as if imperialism didn't exist.

Finkelstein concludes this section with a sharply drawn contrast: “Israeli Jews most resemble white evangelical Protestants and Mormons in their mutual preference for a militaristic foreign policy. ... The gap in mindset between American Jewry and Israelis on war and peace and kindred issues verges on an abyss” (89). Setting aside this somewhat stereotypical rendering of Mormons and white evangelicals, I'll suggest below that the most important “abyss” may exist not between Israeli and American Jews, but *within* the latter community.

In the book's central chapters, Finkelstein

The most important “abyss” may exist not between Israeli and American Jews, but within the latter community.

proceeds with a close reading of Israel's human rights record and a critical assessment of how the discussion around these matters has evolved.

Regarding the torture of prisoners during the first Palestinian intifada, he contrasts Jeffrey Goldberg's account (in *Prisoners: A Muslim and a Jew across the Middle East Divide*, which Finkelstein calls "a sophisticated work of ideology" that "registers the limits of what is currently permissible to acknowledge in popular literature on the Israel-Palestine conflict") with the brutally detailed reporting of Ari Shavit in his long-ago early days (102, 104-5).

He indicts the reporting of Human Rights Watch on the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 for what he calls "human rights revisionism" in HRW's conclusion to its report *Why They Died*. The conclusion flew in the face of HRW's own investigative findings, stating "that 'strong evidence' existed that Hezbollah committed war crimes, whereas it found no evidence that Israel deliberately targeted civilians and reserved judgment on whether Israel committed war crimes" (136).

He juxtaposes the ravings of Alan Dershowitz on Israel's wars with the informed scholarship of Israel historian Zeev Maoz, and Michael Oren's propagandist account of Israel's defensive 1967 war with the work of Maoz and with what U.S. military and intelligence experts knew at the time about Israel's full confidence in its military superiority and its aggressive intentions.

Finkelstein sums up his premise "that current academic scholarship on the Israel-Palestine conflict has achieved impressive levels of objectivity, that this historical record is better known, and that consequently more and more people are able to see through the propaganda from which Israel has benefited for so long. The battle, however, is far from over" (183). Obviously, the entire book is an intentional, and important, intervention in that long battle.

A vital chapter details the evolution of Benny Morris, from a pioneering "new Israeli historian" whose scrupulous archival research revealed the facts of Israeli ethnic cleansing and expulsion of Palestinians during and after the

1948 war, to an apologist and advocate of those very acts. Morris never resorted to *nakba* denial but instead came to argue that expulsion was essential to Israel's existence and should have been, if anything, carried out more fully. (Or as Ari Shavit puts it in recounting the destruction of the village of Lydda, "If Zionism was to be, Lydda could not be.")

To explain "the roots of Morris's bizarre transformation from a relatively judicious liberal historian into a ranting right-wing crackpot," Finkelstein suggests,

It seems Morris now aspires to become Israel's court historian. ... It is also true that the political left, and the tiny space Morris carved out in its vicinity, barely exists any longer in Israeli life [and that] to become a court historian he had to forsake both his professional calling and political sensibility. ...

Still, it has *not been so much his personal liabilities as the liabilities of Israeli society that have nudged Morris ever more rightward*. To become Israel's court historian he had to keep pace ideologically with it. ... If Morris has gone berserk, it is because he aspires to be the official storyteller of a nation that itself has gone over the cliff (294, 295-6, 297, emphasis added).

It remains to assess Finkelstein's optimistic contention that American Jews, with their traditional attachment to liberal politics and social justice principles, are moving away from the Israeli embrace, with potentially a long-term impact on politics.

There is certainly positive evidence. The growth of the organization Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP, www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org) is a striking example, as are the growing numbers of Jewish activists in campus Students for Justice in Palestine chapters, BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) campaigns, and similar efforts. Jewish as well as other academics have rallied in outrage to the defense of Professor Steven Salaita, whose promise of a tenured position at the University of Illinois was peremptorily cancelled after the school came under donor pressure over his angry twitter posts on the

Gaza massacre (www.change.org/p/phyllis-m-wise-we-demand-corrective-action-on-the-scandalous-firing-of-palestinian-american-professor-dr-steven-salaita).

A similar effort has sprung up in defense of San Francisco State University Professor Rabab Abdulhadi, who is under attack by the tiny but heavily funded rightwing Zionist “AMCHA Initiative” (see www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4220).

Earlier this year, at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of North America held in Detroit, Jewish activists partnered with the Israel Palestine Mission Network of the church, as well as Friends of Sabeel North America and young Palestinians, in a closely contested and ultimately successful initiative for divestment of church funds from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions, three U.S. corporations engaged in some of the dirtiest and most murderous profiteering from the Israeli occupation.

In October as this review is written, Jewish students have organized a large “Open Hillel”

conference at Harvard University, with the purpose to “create a space for open conversation on Israel/Palestine and other issues of importance to the Jewish community, without external restrictions. Because Hillel International limits the kind of conversations we can have, we decided to show the limitless potential of a conversation not bogged down by ‘standards of partnership’ and the political whims of big donors” (www.openhillel.org/conference.php).

This initiative was a response to the official partnering of the Hillel organization with AIPAC and its policy of barring Hillel campus chapters from participating in events where any co-sponsoring organizations are supporters of BDS. (Proud disclosure: this reviewer’s daughter was one of the conference organizers.) Drawing over 300 mostly young participants and a diverse array of speakers and viewpoints, the event received substantial and generally favorable comment in the October 13 *Jewish Daily Forward*, an organ that would more likely have ignored or trashed it in earlier times.

The Hillel exclusion policy seems remi-



Where's that list of settlement products to boycott?

niscent of the Catholic Church's pronouncement of papal infallibility—not in medieval times when Church authority was powerful, but in the nineteenth century when it was already eroding (or more recently when the Soviet Union proclaimed “the leading role of the Communist Party,” not under Stalin when no one dared to question it, but in 1964 when its credibility was visibly fraying). It has produced a significant backlash, with at least one Hillel chapter, at Swarthmore, openly declaring its noncompliance.

All this is to the good, but hardly the full story. For one thing, American Jewish support of enlightened values may not be all that it once was. Besides those Jewish neocon militarists, there's the concentrated influence of the ultra-Orthodox in certain localities. The well-publicized scandal of the Hasidic sect that took control of and utterly gutted the East Ramapo Central School District in Rockland County, New York—as viciously as any fundamentalist Christians could have done—is a frightening example.

As well, official U.S. political culture remains unaffected as yet by signs of Jewish disaffection from Israel. At the height of the most recent Gaza massacre, we saw the United States Senate voting *unanimously* in support of Israel's maximum (and unattainable) war aims, including the dismantling of Hamas and the breaking of the barely formed Palestinian unity government.

That loyalty oath to Israel was passed by “unanimous consent,” with 79 cosponsors. (The socialist Bernie Sanders and the liberals' newest icon Elizabeth Warren were not among the 79, but they raised no objection to the resolution—to the dismay of many of their supporters.) This despite the fact that President Obama's global credibility in the overall Middle East meltdown can't exactly be enhanced by the spectacle of Benjamin Netanyahu kicking him in the face, over and over again.

There are also serious shortcomings, to put it mildly, in the organizational expression

of liberal Jewish uneasiness over Israel's insubordination to Washington's pleas for restraint. Take J Street (please). This is the organization created to form a “pro-Israel, pro-peace” counterweight to the power of AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), which operates in essence as the political lobby of the right wing of Likud. Despite (or because of) that vapid and essentially meaningless slogan, J Street has attracted significant support from American Jews unsettled by Israel's increasingly embarrassing rampages.

The problem is that J Street is firmly committed to a policy of doing nothing beyond issuing statements, and opposing those who actually do anything. While opposed on paper to Israeli settlement expansion, it not only opposes BDS but refuses to endorse even boycotts of settlement products. (Another organization, Partners for Progressive Israel formerly known as Meretz USA, to its credit does support the settlement-products boycott.) One of J Street's representatives turned up at the Presbyterian Assembly to oppose the church divestment initiative. Proclaiming itself “pro-peace,” it supported the Israeli “Protective Edge” slaughter in Gaza. J Street's theme song should be “Everyone Knows this is Nowhere,” and its slogan “Don't just do something, stand there!”

The stark contrast between J Street's stated anti-occupation principles and its do-nothing practice suggests that the “abyss” that Norman Finkelstein hopefully cites may be opening, but slowly. It seems that J Street tries to occupy a meaningless middle ground in a polarized debate that's opening up within the U.S. Jewish population (I hesitate to say “community”) at least as much as an “abyss” between Israeli and American Jews. A sign of real progress would be an exodus from J Street of those, especially young Jewish activists, who want to *act* on their principles and who really belong in Jewish Voice for Peace, or the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, or similar efforts.

Although beyond the scope of this review,

it's worth mentioning that Finkelstein has become controversial within some sectors of the Palestine solidarity movement for critical comments he's made regarding the BDS campaign. (In fact, he supports BDS while dismissing some rather extreme illusions within the movement that BDS is capable of liberating Palestine.) At the same time, he's been highly pessimistic—somewhat overly so, in my view—about the

degree to which Mahmoud Abbas will completely capitulate to U.S. and Israeli demands for unconditional surrender of Palestinian demands.

Leaving those issues aside for another discussion, *Knowing Too Much* is essential reading for understanding Finkelstein's real views, why the debate in the U.S. Jewish population exists, and the critical importance of deepening it.

Reflections on Crisis: Capitalism, Climate Change, and Resistance

DONALD HANOVER

"My baby saw the future; she doesn't want to live here anymore. It's lousy science fiction, gets on your skin and seeps into your bones..."

DAVID BYRNE, *DANCE ON VASELINE*

AS THE MOST RECENT (April 14, 2014) report from the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] clearly indicates, the earth's ecosystem is undergoing a radical transformation. A key conclusion of the new IPCC report is that sea-level rise has accelerated in recent years. Yet, before many, many more people become climate refugees as their communities become submerged, most people on the planet will be confronted by

extreme weather events. Record-breaking hot months now occur five times more frequently than they would in a stable, unchanging climate; these heat waves cause droughts, wild fires, proliferation of contagious diseases, widespread extinctions, poor harvests, and, inevitably, loss of life. The increase in the earth's surface temperature means more warm air rising, carrying more evaporated water into the atmosphere, which entails greater condensation and precipitation,

thus a significant increase in violent flooding across the globe, hence more landslides, and more loss of life. As atmospheric carbon dioxide levels rise due to anthropogenic climate change, average temperatures will also

continue to rise causing weather patterns to become less and less stable. Rainy seasons throughout the world, for example, which used to occur more consistently due to the interconnected planet climate systems, have now become erratic, prone to extreme shifts, which entail

Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence

CHRISTIAN PARENTI
New York: Nation Books, 2011

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positive-feedback loops accelerating climate change itself.

In light of such dire planetary conditions, and some scientists now believe that the IPCC report is conservative, it seems appropriate to reflect upon the many insights offered in Christian Parenti's latest book *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*. In the following pages I offer a review of Parenti's work in order to better assess how climate change is impacting the geopolitical landscape of our world, but first I will briefly introduce another thinker's recent contribution to an essentially related topic: planetary resource control. Michael Klare's investigations, spanning the past thirty years, into the global pursuit of vital resources have profoundly shaped the discourse of geopolitical analysis, and thus his work seems highly relevant to Parenti's own investigations into the structural dimensions of our global political, economic, and social realities.¹

In Klare's most recent book, *The Race for What's Left: The Global Scramble for the World's Last Resources* (Picador, 2012), readers are presented with a stark depiction of a global reality wherein existing energy and vital mineral resources are "being depleted at a terrifying pace and will largely be exhausted in the not-too-distant future" (12). Governments and resource corporations, with full knowledge of the rapidly declining reserves, are embarking on a concerted drive to control the remaining sources of the world's raw materials base. The "global drive to find and exploit the world's final resource reserves," Klare explains, will engage the consuming powers in "an intense competitive struggle, and will also, if the future resembles the past, likely erupt in armed combat in contested resource zones" (12, 17). Worse still, Klare avers, "in the near future, the most precious natural resource of all—food—will also become scarce in many parts of the world" (11). From this disturbing glimpse into the future, Klare draws the sobering conclusion that if the world is to avoid war, widespread starvation, or

a massive environmental catastrophe, "what is required is nothing less than a complete transformation of industrial society, with all finite resources [being] systematically replaced by renewable alternatives" (234). In what is perhaps his most succinct explication of his work's findings, Klare writes:

As the race for what's left gains momentum, it will intrude with greater force into world affairs, threatening the survival of animal species, local communities, giant corporations, and entire nations. The global economy as it currently stands cannot grow and prosper without an increasing supply of numerous critical resources—but acquiring these materials will pose an ever-greater threat to the safety and stability of human society and the natural world. Only if we abandon the race altogether, focusing instead on developing renewable resources and maximizing efficiency, can we hope to avoid calamity on a global scale (210).

Klare's assessment may be read as a call for a movement of transformative social change, his forceful command to abandon the race for the planet's remaining resources is akin to what philosopher Istvan Meszaros, in *Beyond Capital*, refers to as the process of forming a new system of "social-metabolic control," by which Meszaros means a post-capitalist sustainable society formed through multiple anti-capitalist struggles in various, and reinforcing, environmental, social, economic, and political spheres of activity. It is from this framework of anti-capitalist struggle, therefore, that the following review of Parenti's work can be considered, although it should be made clear from the outset that Parenti himself does not offer such a standpoint. His own view, as will become apparent, is for capitalism itself to deal with the problem through the workings of its dominant political manifestation as plutocratic "representative" democracy. Once we have reviewed his work as a whole, we can better judge such putative solutions.

In *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*, Christian Parenti

takes the reader on a selective tour to some of the front lines of Klare's somewhat dystopic future, though it is not actually to the future that Parenti intends to guide us, but to the past and the present. As Parenti points out, his book may, at first glance, appear to be "a book about the future, [but] in fact [it is] a book of history." And such a history is needed to "better analyze both the present and the dangerous future ahead" (11). Consisting of four parts and covering three continents, Parenti's engaging tour explores five conceptual categories of recent geopolitical history: *violence*, *poverty*, legacies of *the Cold War*, *neoliberal economic policies*, and, most importantly, *climate change*. These five categories of social disruption coalesce into what Parenti refers to as "the most colossal set of events in human history: the catastrophic convergence ..." (5).

Between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer lies the eponymous "Tropic of Chaos" that "belt of economically and politically battered post-colonial states ... [that] violent and impoverished swath of terrain around the mid-latitudes of the planet," wherein "we find clustered most of the failed and semifailed states of the developing world" (9, 11). It is from this geographical region of the planet that Parenti draws his alarming prognosis of the doleful portents the catastrophic convergence has already reaped and will continue to reap from climatically triggered social breakdowns. The catastrophic convergence may be summed up as the "collision of political, economic, and environmental disasters ... [which] compound and amplify each other, one expressing itself through another" (7). Parenti's fifth category of analysis, climate change, is of course the most recent addition to the global disaster team he has assembled, and, as Parenti avers, it "now joins these [other] crises, acting as an accelerant [or as] the Pentagon calls it a 'threat multiplier'" (9). "In the case of climate change," Parenti informs us,

the prior traumas that set the stage for bad

adaptation, the destructive social response, are Cold War-era militarism and the economic pathologies of neoliberal capitalism. Over the last forty years, both these forces have distorted the state's relationship to society ... [thus inhibiting] society's ability to avoid violent dislocations as climate change kicks in (8).

It is here that Parenti's historical insights throughout the book become the most chilling for readers who are left to ponder the only slightly unimaginable horrors that lie in our planet's future.

Whether it is the slow doom already underway of the clustered geographical territories within or near the chaotic belt, or the gradual deterioration of the "neofascist islands of relative stability" elsewhere in the world, Parenti's analysis can leave us in little doubt that our futures will of necessity be more difficult, and many throughout the globe will surely have no future at all. For developed economies like the United States, their futures as "fortress societies" marred by the "politics of xenophobia, racism, police repression, surveillance, and militarism" may already appear unavoidable. This ghastly future of grim global ecodeterioration will precipitate in such advanced economies what

Parenti's analysis can leave us in little doubt that our futures will of necessity be more difficult, and many throughout the globe will surely have no future at all.

Parenti calls "the politics of the armed lifeboat," (11). "But," Parenti wearily adds, "a world in climatological collapse—marked by hunger, disease, criminality, fanaticism, and violent social breakdown—will overwhelm the armed lifeboat. Eventually, all will sink into the same

morass" (20). Indeed, it is clear from Parenti's work that climate change is the radical "game changer" geopolitically, as it endows its unholy inheritance, global poverty, violence, Cold War remnants, and neoliberal economic policies,

"Sadly, the dialectical connections
between climate change, war,
and environmental degradation
become mutually reinforcing."

—PARENTI

with a colossal destructiveness that only nature itself can manifest, and in comparison to which even the most outrageous human carnage has always appeared diminutive.

In the first part of *Tropic of Chaos*, "Last Call for Illusions," Parenti introduces his main ideas for the text as a whole, which I have, in part, summarized above, and he also provides a historical framework within which those ideas may be situated. He calls this framework "the geography of empire," which has involved continual conflicts over resources and produced war as its most reliable feature. "War," Parenti explains, evoking the first two categories of his analysis of the catastrophic convergence, violence and poverty, "has an uneven geography that follows the history of imperialism and the uneven development of capitalism on a global scale" (18). Coupled with war is "permanent counterinsurgency as planetary crisis management [which involves containing] and policing failed states ..." (19). Parenti explains that "counterinsurgency has been central in setting up the catastrophic convergence of poverty, violence, and climate change" (25).

The history of counterinsurgency has simultaneously been the history of what Parenti refers to as the United States' "small wars,"

which have followed three distinct phases: (1) "asymmetrical wars," which involved European and U.S. imperial conquests of the Global South from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century; "counterinsurgencies" against communist or nationalist liberation struggles; and "postideological" containment conflicts which inaugurated the era of open-ended counterinsurgencies that now permeate our global reality, and usher in a future of an ever "rising tide of violence" (26-27). This contemporary historical moment, the era marked by "the social wreckage of counterinsurgency," has in the past twenty or so years displayed basically uninterrupted military interventions intensified by climate change and hence has significantly increased violence around the globe. As Parenti rather starkly puts it at the end of part one: we now live in the "militarized adaptation to climate chaos: dirty war forever" (36).

In the second part of *Tropic of Chaos*, Parenti focuses upon Africa, in particular the legacies of post-Cold War militarism and neoliberal economic restructuring in East Africa, which are being imbricated with the deleterious effects of climate change. Flooded with cheap weapons provided by Cold War competitors, several East African countries now confront national disintegration. Parenti cites Somalia as a prime example of this horrible tendency, writing that its "war and constant instability have infected the entire region. The flow of weapons, ammunition, contraband, and armed men across borders has created a lawless zone" (86). Parenti concludes the second part with what appears to this reader as a very realistic speculation: "If conventional war making produced the modern state, then asymmetrical warfare, social breakdown, intercommunal strife, brigandry, and open-ended counterinsurgency in the age of climate chaos may well be the modern state's undoing" (94).

In the third part of his text, Parenti takes his readers to Asia where water shocks—droughts and floods—in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyz-

stan, and India are becoming the new normal. Climate stress, in places like Afghanistan, fuels violence. Parenti explains this causal relationship by describing what the catastrophic convergence looks like in Afghanistan: "... eroded soil, limited water, greedy police, foreign troops, popular anger, and an insurgency that protects poppy crops from eradication" (99). In Kyrgyzstan and India, neoliberal economic shock therapy provides the backdrop to climate change. Neoliberal reforms removed from agriculture many government subsidies in these countries thereby trapping farmers in a downward economic cycle due to the extensive debt they incur in order to invest in well and irrigation systems required, in large part, because of climate-change-precipitated droughts (147). The internal wars in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and India provide a stark example of the catastrophic convergence. In such nations, "poverty," Parenti writes, "[is] made worse by neoliberalism [and then tragically combines with] counterinsurgency, repression, [and] climate-driven ecological crisis" (153). "Sadly," Parenti notes, "the dialectical connections between climate change, war, and environmental degradation become mutually reinforcing" (110). Parenti views the introduction of climate change into the already toxic mix of poverty, violence, Cold-War-inherited counterinsurgency, and neoliberalism as likely to promote ever greater social disintegration, and thus makes societal collapse in many of these nations of Asia a realistic possibility.

In the fourth and final part of the *Tropic of Chaos*, Parenti returns to the West with examinations of Brazil, Mexico, and the United States. In Latin America, rapid urbanization, weather shocks, severe water stress, and displaced populations are the outcomes of the catastrophic convergence. Parenti writes that "... the climate crisis adds its propellant power to the already unfolding, highly destructive legacy of neoliberalism and Cold War military adventures" (182). In Rio, for example, Parenti witnesses a form of "societal rot" produced, in

large measure, by neoliberal economic policies, which have resulted in higher unemployment, rising poverty, crime, and massive growth of peri-urban areas as the rural poor migrated to Rio to find work. Parenti finds "a whole society infected by the gangrene of sub-rosa economics, corruption and violence" (171). Essentially, Parenti views the social polarization produced by neoliberalism in Brazil and Mexico as exacerbating deprivation, and he sees climate change converging with the legacies of repression and criminality in each state to produce a vortex of social anomie and violent class apartheid (199).

In the United States Parenti sees an authoritarian, crypto-racist state encapsulated by the war on immigrants that projects a menacing sadism as its chief mechanism of control and promotes fear, resentment, and hatreds that are fundamentally changing the dynamics of our society. The U.S. is returning to its more primitive state, Parenti concludes, "a *herrenvolk* democracy based on segregation and routine violence, in which race and nationality mask raw power. ... Immigrants are the canaries in the political coal mine, and immigration is the vehicle by which the logic of the 'state of emergency' is smuggled into everyday life, law, and politics" (209). Parenti wants his readers to

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grasp the ideological spectacle taking place in the United States as a symptom of his book's overarching theme in order to properly assess how the empire is responding to the catastrophic convergence. "The flow of people from south to north," Parenti explains, "people deracinated by

the structural violence of neoliberal economics, Cold War militarism, and now climate change—is met not only with walls, armed patrols, and cells but also with the calumny, hatred, and ideological spittle of right-wing demagogues” (215).

Parenti does locate pockets of resistance to neoliberal capitalism in the Global South, citing such examples as the landless people’s movement [MST] in Brazil’s northwest. Parenti describes a community engaged in land occupations and “a form of mixed-crop agroecological farming, agroforestry, and integrated pest management ...” (174–175). And in his final chapter Parenti brings up that shining star of radical resistance Bolivia, a poor country of the South that has seriously challenged all the typical socio-economic and political barriers of underdevelopment by organizing itself, and is now proceeding on “a new path of mixed economic development, [that takes] environmental issues seriously, and then ... [brings] all of this to the international stage

“The fact of the matter is time
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Either capitalism solves the crisis,
or it destroys civilization.”

—PARENTI

with dignity ...” (236). These pockets of resistance, however heroic, do not seem to provide, in Parenti’s mind, a robust alternative to the late capitalist neocolonial, inter-imperial onslaught he describes so well over the course of his book. It is on this point that I would like to offer my final reflections, for I find Parenti’s proposals for dealing with the catastrophic convergence profoundly limiting in imaginative scope if not hopelessly utopic.

Parenti concludes *Tropic of Chaos* with two

basic proposals for dealing with the catastrophic convergence in the United States: adaptation and mitigation. Both of these are to be engaged primarily through political and technological avenues: first, pressure the EPA to lower emissions of greenhouse gasses, and second, direct government procurement of clean energy technologies as a catalyst to spur private sector investment in the same. Such tepid solutions are the only that remain viable, according to Parenti, because there is no longer enough time, nor the likelihood even, for large-scale fundamental social change. Parenti forcefully writes,

The fact of the matter is time has run out on the climate issue. Either capitalism solves the crisis, or it destroys civilization. Capitalism begins to deal with the crisis now, or we face *civilizational* collapse beginning this century.

We cannot wait for a socialist, or communist, or anarchist, or deep-ecology, neoprimitive revolution; nor for a nostalgia-based *localista* conversion back to the mythical small-town economy of preindustrial America as some advocate (241).

But surely the two solutions Parenti offers in the face of the terrible probability of civilizational breakdown are themselves, in light of his own work, insufficient to genuinely help us avoid the worsening collapse he anticipates if those solutions are not implemented. How, for example, is the U.S. EPA to be spurred to implement the drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, which, as Parenti points out, would require the closure of coal-fired power plants (238), and dramatic restrictions on fossil fuel extraction, to name only the two most necessary actions, if not by the construction of a mass revolutionary movement to pressure the executive of the ruling class to such radical implementation? Furthermore, such a movement, if it is to develop in the United States, is already structurally insufficient as anthropogenic climate change is an *international* crisis. Parenti clearly informs us that climate change is not “a *technical* problem, nor even an *economic* problem:

it is, fundamentally, a *political* problem” (226). But, as Chris Williams correctly pointed out in his 2011 review of Parenti’s book, “capitalist nation states are prevented from genuine international solutions by economic competition for markets as expressed by inter-imperial conflict. The evidence to back up such an analysis is confirmed by almost twenty years of fruitless international negotiations specifically meant to address climate change.”²

After presenting in such devastating detail over the course of two hundred pages capitalism’s corrosive effects on various societies around the chaotic global belt, and conclusively demonstrating the irrational and structurally destabilizing nature of the capitalist social formation itself, particularly in its latest death-dealing, monstrously destructive configuration, neoliberalism, Parenti’s putative solutions ring hollow, and his hopefulness, if it is that, barely sounds at all. Parenti must be aware of the overwhelming evidence of the many failures regulatory schemes have endured in the last twenty years when seeking to even slightly ameliorate the externalities that capitalist production necessarily produces. Witness the tiresome charade we must repeatedly endure whenever the United Nations attempts to address climate change. Yet, with apparently full awareness of late capitalism’s fetish for short-term thinking oriented solely toward profit maximization, Parenti seems to somehow believe that the contemporary capitalist political formation can deal with the long-term consequences that the catastrophic convergence portends. Parenti cites the development of sanitary standards in the Progressive Era as a successful model of governmentally imposed transformation to follow, but that model appears antiquated in light of today’s socio-political reality. In an oligarchic society wherein corporate dominance of the political system is nearly total, I find waiting for the abusers to change less compelling and

less attractive frankly than attempting to build anti-capitalist resistance movements intentionally designed to confront the abusers and remove them permanently from the scene of their many crimes. The many struggles to resist capitalism that have been and are being waged throughout the globe that Parenti clearly cherishes, fraught with limitations though they be, hold out greater prospects for the type of transformative change the catastrophic convergence requires if we are to have a world left to fight for at all.

Tropic of Chaos is an important book. In a growing body of literature concerned with the contemporary environmental crisis of global capitalism, it presents, in jargon-free prose readily accessible to nonacademic activists, a disturbing portrait of an unfolding planetary crisis. The friendly, yet critical attention here to the weakness of its recommendations in no way diminishes the profound insights into our present that the book does offer. If Parenti’s prescriptions for resistance seem, to this reader anyway, as less than useful, if not, indeed, unwittingly obfuscatory, then his profound analysis of the present must require ever greater imaginative verve on the part of those struggling to respond to the catastrophic convergence in the interests of the human and nonhuman exploited and oppressed everywhere.

NOTES

1. Furthermore, the link to Klare’s work seems particularly germane as the subtitle of *Tropic of Chaos* appears to mimic the title of the final chapter of Klare’s brilliant 2001 text *Resource Wars*, “The New Geography of Conflict.”
2. See Chris Williams’ “Capitalism’s Environmental Chaos,” in *Socialist Worker*, September 14, 2011. Although I had nearly completed this review when my friend and colleague Mark Clinton gave me Williams’ review of Parenti’s book, and I had already come to quite similar conclusions as Williams, my discussion of Parenti’s solutions gained immense precision and clarity from reading Williams’ astute analysis.

Science and Sex: Hirschfeld's Legacy

PETER DRUCKER

IN THE MOSTLY FORGOTTEN HISTORY of early twentieth-century movements for sexual freedom, Magnus Hirschfeld's name is one of the most familiar—and one of the most contested. As a Jewish scientist who championed sexual deviants, he made a perfect target for the Nazis, who were tragically successful in extirpating much of his life's work. In Western Europe today, where gay rights is virtually a civic religion, he risks becoming one of its plaster saints; the Federal Republic of Germany established an official, publicly funded Magnus Hirschfeld Foundation in 2011.

Yet proponents of very different causes can quote Hirschfeld. In the introduction to the U.S. edition of Ralf Dose's welcome biography of Hirschfeld, Dose asserts that contemporary theorists of genetic homosexuality like Simon LeVay "can easily be located in the research tradition of Magnus Hirschfeld." But, Dose adds, Hirschfeld's concept of "sexual intermediacy" has attracted "an entirely new kind of interest" from queer theorists (10), who have as little use for LeVay as LeVay does for them. In short, "Hirschfeld's is a complicated legacy" (15).

Politically, too, different currents can claim

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Magnus Hirschfeld: The Origins of the Gay Liberation Movement

RALF DOSE

translated by Edward H. Willis

Monthly Review Press, 2014. 144 pp., \$23.00

him. Clearly he was a man of the left, a socialist. Caught up in the German revolution of 1918, he became tremendously influential in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Yet once the Nazis had consolidated their power in 1933, two years before his death, he wrote that "the three great democracies—France, England, and America"—were the world's main hope for escaping both fascism and Bolshevism (91).

In this respect history did not fully vindicate him. France, Britain, and the United States did ultimately win World War II, putting an end to the Nazi regime. But the Allied victory did not entirely undo the Nazis' suppression of the pre-war left and sexual liberation movements. In West Germany laws against homosexuality remained on the books until the late 1960s, and were repealed only after the shattered gay movement managed to rebuild itself. One writer observed in 1962, "For homosexuals the Third Reich has not yet come to an end" (14).

Concise Introduction

Dose's short book gives a sense of how renowned Hirschfeld was in his time as the director of the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. Over the years celebrities like André Gide and Sergei Eisenstein visited the institute. Walter Benjamin, Christopher Isherwood, and Ernst Bloch actually lived there for a time. The book's many pages of photos show how extraordinarily ex-

tensive the institute's collections were—raided and burned in 1933 in one of the Nazis' first acts after taking power.

In barely 100 pages, Dose manages to give most readers the basic facts of Hirschfeld's life. He begins with an account of Hirschfeld's family, childhood, education, medical practice, religious beliefs, literary interests, finances, and personal habits. Only after this does Dose move on to what most readers will probably care about most: Hirschfeld's path-breaking roles as a sexologist and campaigner for sexual freedom.

The biography is particularly useful in piercing the veil of Hirschfeld's own personal life, about which he was understandably discrete. Karl Giese, a much younger working-class man, moved in with Hirschfeld in 1919 and took over the housekeeping, though some of Hirschfeld's close associates only realized later that the two were a couple. In Hirschfeld's last years the young Chinese man Li Shiu Tong moved in with the two of them, prompting much gossip among those who knew them. These details shed light on Hirschfeld's special interest in same-sex relationships between people of different generations and/or gender roles.

"Third Sex"

For Hirschfeld, "Only an objective and scientific study of [humanity], and of sex, can prepare the way for the complete realization of human sex rights" (63). He is probably remembered most for his theory that homosexuals—or at least some of them—constituted a "third sex." The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, founded at his initiative in 1897 to campaign for decriminalizing homosexuality, cited the theory often to argue that homosexuality was congenital and therefore innocent. The committee's informational brochure on homosexuality, published in 1903, was even entitled *What Should the People Know about the Third Sex?*

Yet Dose shows that Hirschfeld's thought was subtler than the phrase "third sex" suggests, and subtler than many theories of "sexual

inversion" that preceded his. Like Alfred Kinsey later, Hirschfeld had the insatiable curiosity of a collector, and his writings made clear the great variety of human sexual impulses, which no one theory could circumscribe. His wide-ranging ideas about "sexual intermediacy," both physical and cultural, foreshadowed the study today of both intersex and transgender identities. Harry Benjamin, later a pioneer in working with transsexuals in the United States, was in close contact with the Institute for Sexual Science in the 1920s. Hirschfeld's thought also constitutes an enduring challenge to what Lisa Duggan has called "homonormative" definitions of lesbian/gay orientation,¹ which try to purge it of any hint of gender nonconformity.

The third-sex conception was vigorously contested in Hirschfeld's own time, both in his own circle and even more in the broader German gay movement. Scientific-Humanitarian Committee member Benedict Friedländer considered the approach a "beggarly theory" that portrayed homosexuals as "psychological freaks of nature" and "poor female souls" (43). Adolf Brand's Community of the Special, a rival organization to Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, opposed the theory even more fiercely. Brand was interested only in defending men whose love for other men was manly and preferably impeccably German and martial.²

Magnus Hirschfeld also makes clear that homosexuality was not always the main focus of the organizations Hirschfeld worked in. Dose points out that the World League for Sexual Reform focused more on issues like birth control, abortion, and sex education than homosexuality. Hirschfeld himself was well known in his own time as an advocate of eugenics. The Nazis' vicious measures against people with disabilities, up to and including extermination, have rightly given eugenics a very bad name on the left. Before World War II the left as well as the right was complicit in some of the worst of eugenic thinking. Yet historians have not yet fully explored the content of pre-war left-wing "eugenics," or made

clear whether “eugenics” meant exactly the same thing on the left as on the right.

Sex and Socialism

Dose gives some interesting background to Hirschfeld’s lifelong association with the socialist movement. Hirschfeld was a student when he first met Social Democratic leader August Bebel. Their personal connection was useful in inducing Bebel to introduce and defend the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee’s petition for the decriminalization of homosexuality in the Reichstag. Hirschfeld was himself an active member of the Association of Socialist Physicians.

Besides socialism, Hirschfeld had close ties to German feminism, notably the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform. He joined feminists in campaigning for reform of the divorce laws and for abortion rights. Among his acquaintances and allies in the United States were Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger.

Hirschfeld’s Jewish background inclined him to the left, since the German right in his time was so anti-Semitic. In the 1920s anti-Semitic right-wingers once beat him up and left him for dead. Even within the gay movement, Hirschfeld’s right-wing adversary Adolf Brand printed an anti-Semitic caricature of Hirschfeld in Brand’s magazine *Der Eigene*. Although like many German Jews Hirschfeld had a strong sense of German identity, in the end he wrote, “If I frame the question as: ‘Are you a German—a Jew—or a world citizen?’ then my answer is always ‘world citizen’ or ‘all three’” (37).

Dose does not give a full sense of how closely Hirschfeld was sometimes associated with the far left. Hirschfeld called, at the outbreak of the German revolution in November 1918, for a “true people’s state with a genuinely democratic structure” and a “social republic.”³ He had a significant influence on Soviet sexual policies in the 1920s. His work was cited for example in the discussions that led to the decriminalization

of homosexuality in the Soviet Union in 1922. Soviet Health Commissar Nikolai Semashko and Institute of Neuropsychiatric Prophylaxis director Lev Rozenshtein visited the Institute for Sexual Science; Hirschfeld reciprocated with a visit to Moscow in 1926.⁴

“Just Begun”

The praise that Dose’s book has received, from both gay and queer activists like David Fernbach and Peter Tatchell and historians like James Steakley, John D’Emilio, and Dagmar Herzog, suggests how badly a biography of Hirschfeld was needed. But when it comes to summing up Hirschfeld’s legacy, Dose’s book is more tantalizing than definitive. The book’s subtitle and its occasional passing references to contemporary debates raise fascinating issues, without delving deeply into any of them. As Dose writes, the debate on Hirschfeld’s legacy “has just begun” (15).

The history of the twentieth century has made us more skeptical of the idea that there is a straight road leading, in the words engraved on Hirschfeld’s tomb, “through science to justice.” Yet understanding remains indispensable in the quest for freedom. Dose’s biography reminds us of the contribution that Hirschfeld made to both.

NOTES

1. Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (eds.), *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 2002), 179.
2. My article “Gays and the Left: Scratching the Surface” (in *Against the Current* no. 68 (1997)) suggests there are links between these opposed conceptions of homosexuality in interwar Germany and class and political conflicts.
3. John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864–1934)* (Times Change, 1995), 27–8.
4. Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 129, 132–3, 141, 138.

What's *Fair* About Fair Trade?

RIAD AZAR

THE IDEA OF “VOTING WITH YOUR pocketbook” is giving rise to a new global movement of ethical consumption. Industrial capitalism and its ills, it is thought, can be redeemed through personal consumer choices. “If only I bought the *biodegradable* bag of potato chips,” one may think to oneself watching a column of waste management vehicles pass on their way to the dump.

Political economist Ndongo Samba Sylla—a Senegalese researcher for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation—seeks to understand the phenomenon of capitalism with a human face by probing one of its prized institutions: fair trade. His book, *The Fair Trade Scandal*, is a meticulously argued exploration of the fair trade movement, its economic effects in both the Global North and South, and how it lives up to its own goals. *The Fair Trade Scandal* is not an attack on fair trade, but rather an attempt to draw out the contradictions of the movement by critiquing what its own protagonists claim the movement produces: namely, an alternative to neoliberal globalization (147).

Sylla opens the book with a brief summary of why fair trade efforts exist by analyzing the theoretical claims of market liberalization.

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The Fair Trade Scandal: Marketing Poverty to Benefit the Rich

NDONGO SAMBA SYLLA
Ohio University Press, 2014, 224 pp.,
paperback, \$26.36

Free and open markets, as has been argued from Ricardo to Friedman, are pathways to prosperity regardless of the counter evidence offered by the economic history of developed

countries. By introducing the book with this discussion, Sylla shows that international trade is never about *laissez-faire*, but that free markets in themselves are a power relation. What Sylla calls “Asymmetric Game Rules” (31)

force the least developed countries (LDCs) to specialize in products that will keep them impoverished—such as agriculture and the export of raw materials—while the governments of the Global North go back on their word and subsidize industries, dumping the surplus on the global market. The organizations that laid the ground work for the modern fair trade movement found their voice in challenging this unequal exchange, and sought to pave the way for a more democratic globalization.

Recounting the history of the fair trade movement shows the internal tensions that existed among the actors. The movement initially drew on solidarity economics that originated within the school of dependency theory—and promoted direct trade between the North and South based on social justice—but by the 1980s had become a labeling initiative. Sylla correctly magnifies the unspoken relationship that exists between marketing the “fair trade” label and global neoliberal economic reforms.

Three levels of analysis—the global level, the North, and the South—are introduced

to show the economic field within which fair trade was operating as a result of neoliberal reforms. Globally, institutions that regulated North-South trade had eroded. In the North, the agro-industrial complex became increasingly oligopolistic, and value chains—the steps that a particular industry takes in transforming raw material into a finished product for sale on the market—crowded with middlemen looking for a cut of the pie. The South saw a period racked by economic crisis and a shrinking regulatory state within the agricultural supply chain. As Sylla summarizes, “Fair trade took advantage of a relative institutional void to take over a global political space” (43). With the state out of the picture, the labeling initiative was able to stand as a testament to the ethical consumer: “Buy me and you too can save the world.”

Fair trade as label poses interesting theoretical problems, a few of which Sylla takes on. The first is that of commodity fetishism, what Marx described as the social hieroglyphic that obscures the exploitive relationships between capitalists and workers. According to Marxist theory as laid out in *Capital*, an object begins to be fetishized when it emerges as a commodity with an attached price. Consumers believe that the commodity itself somehow possesses value, without recognizing the labor power of the worker which makes possible the commodity's existence. Sylla advances this analysis by arguing for the emergence of a further fetishism of the *ethical* product, what he calls “the commodification of sustainability” (57). Not only do consumers neglect the production process, they believe that they are helping to guarantee the worker behind the process a better life. He summarizes, “Given that ‘ethical’ consumers ignore these assumptions of the FT economic model, they tend to believe, wrongly, that fair trade challenges or subverts the existing price system; this false belief feeds on the mystifying shroud of marketing communication and is the basis of a new form of fetishism” (88). Fair trade works within the same logic as free trade.

To lay bare the “assumptions of the FT economic model,” Sylla focuses on empirical data to demonstrate the problematic nature of the case studies that fair trade supporters rely on to support their positions. His critiques focus around the price theory of fair trade, which he argues is no different than that of free trade. Producers in the Global South require a fair trade certification in order to access fair trade markets in the North. Consumers in the North make an active choice to support products with the label, and pay a small fee factored into the price for the privilege. The problem is that fair trade producers have no guarantee that their products will be sold according to the higher price. In fact, Sylla argues that only a portion succeed, leaving surplus produced under fair trade guidelines to be dumped into the common market and sold according to market prices. His data shows that when factoring in the cost of certification—and considering the losses that are encountered when dumping takes place—fair trade producers' gains are negligible. Data used by fair trade protagonists to argue their cause, Sylla claims, suffers from severe methodological problems of selection bias. He hypothesizes that producers who benefit from fair trade already have “significant organizational predispositions, a certain ‘social capital’ and regular access to FT markets” (119).

Sylla points to how—adding insult to injury—most of the value added through the fair trade process remains in the developed world. When comparing the amount of fair trade sales in the United States in 2008, an estimated \$1.1 billion, with the \$34.7 million of additional income for the South—that is, income above the market price—one concludes that every dollar paid by consumers in the North results in only 3 cents of additional income for the South. While he admits that he does not have the data to observe how much more consumers are paying for fair trade products, he reasonably assumes that the added cost is higher than 3 cents, leaving one to wonder which intermediaries along the

supply chain are reaping the benefits.

How could a movement that was envisioned to help the poorest end up in such a mess of ideology? Sylla's conclusions focus around the misconceptions regarding poverty that are promoted in the neoliberal era. Fair trade focuses on agriculture, while history shows that poverty is reduced via economies that focus on the export of manufactured products and diversification; the agricultural production of most LDCs is for subsistence. Fair trade fails to consider the issues around the commodification of labor, leaving most farmers who suffer a bad year to suffer at the hands of the market without any social protection. Finally, fair trade is seen as an alternative to neoliberal globalization, while it is more correct to understand fair trade as being in a dialectical relationship with neoliberalism. "On the one hand, it needs the neoliberal market system to attract the economic resources necessary to occupy a comfortable position in the concert of alterglobalist voices. ... On the other ... it needs its destructive support" (141).

Fair trade is an ideological veil rationalizing the free market. While the movement has gained significant success in the North through suave media and marketing, the impact in the South has been insignificant or non-existent. Due to the lack of a solid understanding of why poor countries are poor, while working within the economic framework that cements relationships of domination, fair trade cannot serve as an equalizer, less still as a guarantor of social justice. Sylla doesn't call for what is really needed—international socialism—but he urges adoption of the crucial reforms won over the years by the global labor movement: stabilizing prices, enhancing food sovereignty, refocusing agriculture to meet domestic concerns, and so forth. Anything short of these measures, which work to transform social relations of production, plays into the hands of those who are a part of the problem. The ills of contemporary global society cannot be solved with personal consumer choices.

Atoning for Vietnam

ALI SHEHZAD ZAIDI

THREE PHOTOGRAPHS IN PARTICULAR have come to define the decade-and-a-half-long U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. They show the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk, burnt children in tears as they flee an aerial napalm attack, and the Saigon police chief executing a captive in the street. In a journalistic style as

powerful as those iconic photographs, Nick Turse, in a new history of the Vietnam War, examines the decisions and policies that led to that disaster. *Kill Anything That Moves*, which just won a 2014 American Book Award, is a work of compassion and fury that deserves to be in every public library.

Unlike standard histories of the Vietnam War that dwell on diplomatic overtures, military tactics, and the grave deliberations of political

Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam

NICK TURSE

Picador, 2014. 361 pp.

ALI SHEHZAD ZAIDI teaches first-year Spanish language courses at the State University of New York at Canton.

leaders, *Kill Anything That Moves* shows how American atrocities in Vietnam came to happen. First, drill instructors subjected recruits to shock, deprivation, humiliation, and stress in order to turn them into programmed killers who saw Vietnamese as subhuman *gooks* (26-28, 39). Second, the U.S. military designated vast stretches of Vietnam as “free-fire zones” where, according to a U.S. Senate study, three hundred thousand Vietnamese civilians would be killed by 1968 (59-60). Third, officers and soldiers were motivated to kill since higher body counts earned them more beer, food, medals, vacation time, and chances of survival (44-45). Fourth, with rare exceptions, American soldiers could not communicate in Vietnamese, a language with six tones that varied in pitch and length (36). Finally, the U.S. military routinely covered up war crime allegations from whistleblowers, who were ostracized, injured, or even murdered by fellow soldiers (38).

The book title comes from Captain Ernest Medina’s response to a soldier who asked whether the captain’s order to kill everyone in the village of My Lai included women and children. Although publicity of the My Lai massacre helped turn public opinion in the United States against the Vietnam War, other large massacres in Vietnam, as Turse explains, went unnoticed for lack of documentation and investigation. That the My Lai massacre became known at all was largely due to the persistence of a few courageous individuals: Ron Ridenhour, a young Vietnam veteran who collected testimony from witnesses to the massacre, Ron Haeberle who took photos of the massacre that were later published in *Life*, and Seymour Hersh whose articles broke the story (3-4).

Turse argues that the war would have been averted, and hundreds of billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars saved, had the United States not sabotaged Vietnam’s quest for independence. After World War II, the United States backed the French occupation of Indochina with weapons and funds, eventually covering 80 percent of

France’s war costs in Indochina. After defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the French agreed to a ceasefire and to a division of North and South Vietnam pending reunification after elections to be held in two years. Those elections never took place because the United States feared victory by Ho Chi Minh who had led the Vietnamese independence struggle both against the Japanese and the French (7-8).

The ensuing war resulted in 3.8 million deaths, mostly civilian, according to an estimate by researchers at Harvard Medical School and the University of Washington (13). U.S. soldiers routinely destroyed Vietnamese villages and massacred peasants in what the military euphemistically termed “rural pacification.” Corporal Kenneth Ransbottom describes how he ordered his engineers to blow up a bunker full of screaming babies and terrified Vietnamese women and old men, some of whom “were down on their knees like they were praying to Buddha” (113-114). Turse highlights the complicity of Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington in crafting brutal methods to subjugate the Vietnamese people. Huntington advocated forcing peasants out of villages and into slums so as to deny the Viet Cong popular support in the countryside (145-146).

During Operation Speedy Express, the 9th Infantry Division reported killing 10,899 enemy soldiers but recovered only 748 weapons, one of the many statistics that Turse cites to show that the murder of civilians in Vietnam “was neither accidental nor unforeseeable” (248-249). Among the chilling cases that Turse culls from official documents and eyewitness testimony is one in which an officer “captured two unarmed and unidentified Vietnamese males, estimated ages 2-3 and 7-8 years, ... and killed them for no reason” (15).

In another incident, American soldiers killed ten Vietnamese civilians in an ambush. An investigation found that the dead, who included women and children, had been gathering limes and bamboo shoots shortly before they were

shot. No weapons were found on them and no one was punished or held responsible for their murder (18-19).

U.S. soldiers engaged in sadistic games in Vietnam, sometimes deliberately swerving their vehicles to run over Vietnamese in a game that some referred to as "gook hockey" (156-157). The U.S. soldiers who carried out this kind of mayhem were in Vietnam ostensibly for the protection of the Vietnamese people. Many of the worst atrocities were carried out with chemical weapons:

The jellied incendiary napalm, engineered to stick to clothes and skin, had been modified to blaze better and longer than its World War II-era variant. An estimated 400,000 tons of it were dropped in Southeast Asia, killing most of those unfortunate enough to be splashed with it. Thirty-five percent of victims died within fifteen to twenty minutes, according to one study. Another found that 62 percent died before their wounds healed. For those not asphyxiated or consumed by fire, the result could be a living death. Noses and lips, nipples and eyelids would be burned off or melted away, while charred skin would flake off as a chemical-scented powder (83).

Chemical weapons wrought ecological havoc on Vietnam. Turse notes that the U.S. military burned or bulldozed vast areas of forest in Vietnam, and sprayed over 70 million liters of herbicides to destroy vegetation (94-96). A quarter of the dioxin from those herbicides, including Agent Orange, is still detectable today in the soil and in animal tissue ("Agent" 15-16). Roughly three million Vietnamese suffer from the effects of chemical defoliants, which include

cancer and birth defects (Cohn and Mirer).

Turse's lasting achievement is to have brought to public awareness several episodes of mass slaughter worthy of remembrance alongside the My Lai massacre. Those episodes took place in villages that bear such names as Thuy Bo, Phu Nhuan, and Lang Vei. Turse, who does not waste a word in this well-written book, devotes eight lines to the names of the villagers killed at Phi Phu, prompting us to imagine the lives to whom those names belonged, lives cut short by the actions of the U.S. military.

In his afterword to the 2014 edition, Turse recalls that many veterans contacted him in the year after the first edition. One marine wrote, "I saw daily the horrors that you have documented. ... The only way to truly end the Vietnam War is to make amends. Telling the full story of the war is an important step forward" (267). In this regard, *Kill Anything That Moves* is an act of atonement for the Vietnam War. The unspeakable sadness that it conveys is deepened by the knowledge that U.S. foreign policy remains militaristic, shortsighted, and bent on world domination.

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The New “Russian Question” of the Twenty-First Century

DAN LA BOTZ

THE “RUSSIAN QUESTION,” that is, the question of the nature of the Soviet Union, dominated much of Marxist debate throughout the twentieth century as first anarchists and Leninists, and later Trotskyists and Stalinists, and then Maoists argued about the economic, social, and political character of Soviet Russia (and then also of Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and North Korea).

A great deal was at stake in these debates. In asking whether the Soviet Union was a workers’ state, socialist, capitalist, or “bureaucratic collectivist”; whether there was a ruling caste or class there; whether that class exploited the working class; and whether the Soviet Union was imperialist, those debates elucidated the relationship between socialism and democracy.

Now Ruslan Dzarasov, a senior research fellow at the Central Institute of Economics and Mathematics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, offers us an important and much-needed Marxist study of contemporary capitalist Russia in which he poses some of those same sorts of big questions. Drawing principally on the theory of Leon Trotsky, but also indebted to Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, and Robert Brenner, Dzarasov describes the central mechanisms of what he calls “the new

social system” in Russia. This system has, he argues, its own unique form of capitalist accumulation, which he calls “insider rent,” and which is responsible both for the instability of Russian enterprises and for the tendency toward technological stagnation. His sources are both official government reports and a great number of recent empirical studies of the

Russian economy in both English and Russian. He clearly sees himself as providing a kind of *Das Kapital* of the unique Russian capitalism.

Dzarasov’s book thus resembles other recent Marxist attempts to analyze the transformation of the former Communist social systems into among the most rapacious and authoritarian capitalist systems, such as Au Loong Yu’s important *China’s Rise: Strength and Fragility* (Pontypool, Wales: Merlin and IIRE, 2012). Yet, if his methods and inspiration are Marxist, Dzarasov’s final conclusions about the possibility of social change in Russia today are social democratic, and see change coming through the establishment of market socialism and social welfare programs for the working class. Nevertheless, his account of the rise of the new Russian capitalism and its contradictions represents an incisive critique that could be borrowed to propose a revolutionary strategy of struggle from below.

Dzarasov begins by locating the origins of contemporary Russia, that is, Vladimir Putin’s Russia, at the intersection of the neoliberal

The Conundrum of Russian Capitalism: The Post-Soviet Economy in the World System

RUSLAN DZARASOV

Pluto Press, 2014. 288 pp., paperback, \$40

DAN LA BOTZ is a co-editor of *New Politics*.

globalization of the world economy and the collapse of the Soviet system, which occurred more or less simultaneously in the 1980s and 1990s. For the author, Western capitalism had become a “financialized capitalism” into which the new capitalist Russia will be inserted.

With that context established, Dzarasov then turns, in two fascinating chapters, to the origins of the new system. In Chapter 2, “From Central Planning to Capitalism,” he lays out in step-by-step fashion the way in which during the 1980s Russian factory managers came gradually to take control of most of the largest units of production. Then in the 1990s, often in collusion with criminal organizations, they took advantage of Premier Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms to turn their already existing *de facto* control into privately owned enterprises. In Chapter 3, “Russian Big Business: Corporate Governance and the Time Horizon,” Dzarasov examines the actual structure and functioning of the Russian corporations. He demonstrates that they are run by groups of “insiders,” both owners and managers (or owner-managers) who operate with great autonomy from stockholders or other stakeholders in the enterprise. In a political system without clear and strong laws protecting their property, and threatened constantly with criminal piracy in Russia’s free-for-all capitalism, the insiders maintain a hold on their companies’ strong security organizations provided either by criminal gangs or state police organizations that control their managers and accountants. Such security operations are necessary because in Russia a “hostile takeover” may be carried out by men with guns who simply arrive at corporate headquarters and seize control or who engage in extortion to gain mastery of another firm. In one anecdote he describes a criminal gang dressed in military uniforms who take over a company, seizing the central offices and computers and throwing one of the corporation officers out the window. A “hostile takeover” indeed.

The heart of Dzarasov’s book is Chapter

4, “Rent Withdrawal, Social Conflict, and Accumulation,” in which he argues that Russian capitalists derive their wealth from “insider rent” based on their control of the corporations’ “financial flows.” Insider rent not only enriches the insiders, but it also tends to minimize the benefits of the stockholders, creating conflict within the corporate bureaucracies and antagonizing the companies’ workers. The insiders’ tendency to siphon off the money, argues Dzarasov, undermines any attempt to establish long-term corporate strategies or to develop new machines, products, or services, which only invite hostile takeovers. As one can see, this is a world of enormous instability and, the author argues, one condemned to technological backwardness. In Chapter 5, “Accumulation of Capital by Russian Corporations,” Dzarasov uses empirical studies to show the situation he has described has become “a major institutional obstacle to the investment required for the national economy’s effective economic growth.”

What is missing from Dzarasov’s account of the Russian system (as it is missing from Marx’s account of capitalism in *Das Kapital*) is a theory of the Russian state. Still, I think it is clear how our general knowledge of the Russian state created by former high-level KGB security agents fits with Dzarasov’s depiction of Russia’s robber-baron capitalism. The KGB agents like Putin were able to provide the sort of strong state needed in a piratical capitalism where capitalists and their criminal allies were likely to literally take over another corporation by force. Putin and his ilk became both the leaders and the organizers of the oligarchs who control the largest of these Russian corporations, prepared to exile or imprison them when necessary for the greater good of the rest of the pirates. Dzarasov’s book would have been more complete with a description of the interrelations between government and corporations elucidating the role of the state.

What sort of alternative does Dzarasov then propose? Surprisingly given the Marxist theory

and inspiration of the book, the author offers no scenario for the transformation of the existing system based on any sort of social conflict, reform movement, or labor upheaval. He simply proposes that Russia would be better with the rule of law—that is regular capitalist protections for private property—market socialism, and social welfare programs for the working class

based on the German model. After reading such a brilliant analysis of Russian capitalism within the context of globalization, one is struck by the naiveté of such a proposal given the character of the Russian state and its ruling class and the possibilities offered by capital in the age of austerity. Russian workers will have to write a new ending for this book.

Nonfiction Comics

KENT WORCESTER

THE CARTOONIST WILL EISNER used to say that there are two kinds of comics, entertaining and instructional. Over time, he speculated, instructional comics would become the more popular of the two, as teachers and everyone else finally figured out that comics convey information more efficiently than ordinary prose. Eisner passed away in 2005 but presumably would have regarded the past decade's outpouring of graphic nonfiction as confirming his thesis. Artists and/or writers as stylistically and thematically diverse as David Axe, Peter Bagge, Alison Bechdel, Paul Buhle, Guy Delisle, Sarah Glidden, Larry Gonick, Sabrina Jones, Peter Kuper, Didier Lefèvre, Josh Neufeld, Nate

Powell, Ted Rall, Joe Sacco, Marjane Satrapi, and Osamu Tezuka represent only a tiny fraction of a much larger community of cartoonists

who are using words and pictures to craft histories, biographies, memoirs, and travelogues. Even a motivated fan of the medium would find it difficult to keep up with the recent

torrent of serious-minded books by cartoonists. As a result of their collective efforts, librarians, educators, book critics, and booksellers are far more attuned to the nonfiction comics category than ever before.

Nonfiction cartooning often, but not always, leans in a leftist direction. The fact that a “contrarian” text like Ilan Stavans and Lalo Alcaraz's *A Most Imperfect Union: A Contrarian History of the United States* has been published by Basic Books testifies to the genre's progressive tilt as well as its newfound mainstream viability. A few years ago a project like this would have

A Most Imperfect Union: A Contrarian History of the United States

ILAN STAVANS

with illustrations by Lalo Alcaraz

Basic Books, 2014. 256 pp. Hardcover \$26.95

KENT WORCESTER's latest book, Peter Bagge: *Conversations*, will be published by the University Press of Mississippi in spring 2015.

appeared from a comics publisher or small left press. Now it comes in hardcover with glossy paper and high-profile endorsements from the likes of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

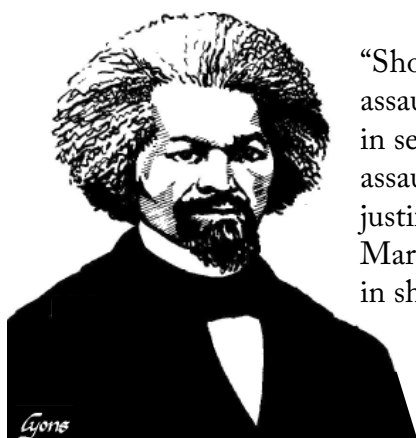
The book's creators share a similar sense of humor and make an effective team: Ilan Stavans teaches Latin American history and literature at Amherst College, while Lalo Alcaraz is an editorial cartoonist and the creator of *La Cucaracha*, the first nationally syndicated daily comic strip that reflects a Latino perspective on current affairs. Their first collaboration, *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*, was also issued by Basic Books. Stavans has written novels, political histories, and children's books, and has edited numerous anthologies; his artistic collaborator excels at caricature, favors foregrounded figures over detailed backgrounds, and is good at finding ways of inserting as much text as possible onto every page without overwhelming the visuals.

The book itself is aimed at general readers rather than specialists, and it covers a vast swathe of historical terrain, from pre-European agriculture to Trayvon Martin. As a result, its treatment of specific episodes and controversies is often brisk if not hurried, and some readers may feel cheated by the jaunty quality of the discussion. It is difficult to imagine that anyone would

regard this book as the final word on anything. In the acknowledgements, Stavans references some of the authors who have influenced his approach, and for the most part they are the kinds of writers who are known for deploying broad brushstrokes, such as Doris Kearns Goodwin, Charles C. Mann, George Packer, and Howard Zinn. That said, the book usefully zeroes in on certain key themes in U.S. history, such as the provisional nature of historical knowledge, the persistence of racial divisions, the gulf between myth and evidence, and the role of popular culture in expressing and sharpening political debate. These themes surface again and again even as the pages move from the agrarian eighteenth century to the technological marvels of the twenty-first. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the book is the way in which hand-drawn avatars for Stavans and Alcaraz regularly turn up to tell jokes and break the fourth wall. Some of their punch lines are a bit stale but others provide a welcome note of deconstructive sarcasm. A witty, critical-minded, but scattershot survey of U.S. history, *A Most Imperfect Union* would probably make a more appropriate gift for a bright high school student than a grad student who labors in the archives.

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“Should a slave, when
assaulted, but raise his hand
in self defense, the white
assaulting party is fully
justified by southern, or
Maryland, public opinion,
in shooting the slave down.”

—**Frederick Douglass**
1855

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