

Worker Upsurge in China
Jenny Chan and Au Loong Yu

66 NewPolitics

An Independent Socialist Journal

Vol XVII No 2

\$7.00 (\$9.00 Canada)

Winter 2019

The fires this time

Symposium on THE AMERICAN LEFT AFTER BLACK LIVES MATTER
with Cedric Johnson, Jay Arena, Touré F. Reed, Mia White

ECOSOCIALISM: A Greener New Deal? *Ashley Dawson*
A Radical Direction for the Environmental Movement, *Richard Smith*
Ecosocialists on the Climate Movement, *Nancy Romer*

U.S. POLITICS:
Whistling Past the Graveyard: The 2018 Midterm Elections, *Michael Hirsch*
The Left and the Democratic Party, a History, *Dan La Botz*

ARTICLES on Syria, The Philippines, Palestine
by Ella Wind, Alex de Jong, Toufic Haddad

Book Reviews, Letters and more...



***new* POLITICS**

An Independent Socialist Journal

Editorial Board

Aaron Amaral
Riad Azar
Saulo Colón, co-editor
Barry Finger, business mgr.
Thomas Harrison
Michael Hirsch
Nancy Holmstrom, co-editor
Dan La Botz, co-editor

Micah Landau
Scott McLemee
Jason Schulman, co-editor
Stephen R. Shalom
Bhaskar Sunkara
Lois Weiner
Reginald Wilson
Julia Wrigley, co-editor

Sponsors

Stanley Aronowitz
Elaine Bernard
Jon Bloom
Stephen Eric Bronner
Mari Jo Buhle
Paul Buhle
Lynn Chancer
Noam Chomsky
Lorraine Cohen
Michael Eric Dyson
Barbara Ehrenreich
Barbara Epstein
Samuel Farber
David Finkel
Barbara Garson
Richard Greeman

Justin Grossman
William Kornblum
Nelson Lichtenstein
Ravi Malhotra
Deborah Meier
Gwendolyn Mink
Kim Moody
Kai Nielsen
Martin Oppenheimer
Frances Fox Piven
Nancy Romer
Ronnie Steinberg
Stephen Steinberg
Adaner Usmani
Stuart Weir
Cornel West

Former Editors, In Memoriam

Sam Bottone (1926-2016)	Joanne Landy (1941-2017)
Julius Jacobson (1922-2003)	Betty Reid Mandell (1924-2014)
Phyllis Jacobson (1922-2010)	Marvin Mandell (1927-2017)

NEW POLITICS is published by New Politics Associates, 294 New York Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11216, USA

e-mail: newpoliticsjournal@gmail.com

on the web at: www.newpol.org

NEW POLITICS is indexed in The Left Index and in Alternative Press Index, as well as Political Science Abstracts, the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, and International Political Science Abstracts. Cover design and illustrations by Lisa Lyons.

Subscriptions: A one-year, two-issue digital subscription is \$20 (a PDF will be emailed to you while we update our website). If you also want the print issue mailed to you, the cost of digital plus print is \$30 for U.S. subscribers, \$40 for Canadian subscribers, and \$55 for other foreign subscribers. Institution rate (print and digital): \$50, in Canada \$60, other foreign \$70. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency drawn on U.S. banks. Or subscribe on line at newpol.org.

©2019 New Politics Associates ISSN (0028-6494)

VOLUME XVII • NUMBER 2 • Winter 2019

 TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITORS	1
WHISTLING PAST THE GRAVEYARD: NOTES ON THE 2018 MIDTERM ELECTIONS... 3 Michael Hirsch	
THE LEFT AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY: THE EXPERIENCE OF A CENTURY 8 Dan La Botz	

THE AMERICAN LEFT AFTER BLACK LIVES MATTER

WHO'S AFRAID OF LEFT POPULISM? ANTI-POLICING STRUGGLES AND THE FRONTIERS OF THE AMERICAN LEFT	21
Cedric Johnson	
ONLY A CLASS POLITICS CAN SAVE US FROM POLICE VIOLENCE AND FASCISM: LESSONS FROM ROSA LUXEMBURG TO CEDRIC JOHNSON	38
John Arena	
BLACK EXCEPTIONALISM AND THE MILITANT CAPITULATION TO ECONOMIC INEQUALITY.....	43
Touré F. Reed	
IN DEFENSE OF BLACK SENTIMENT: A COMMENT ON CEDRIC JOHNSON'S ESSAY RE: BLACK POWER NOSTALGIA.....	47
Mia White	

ARTICLES

SYRIA, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE LEFT	52
Ella Wind	
THE PHILIPPINE LEFT IN A CHANGING LAND	67
Alex de Jong	
PALESTINE ON A PRECIPICE	75
Toufic Haddad	

TWO ARTICLES ON POLITICAL AND LABOR UPHEAVAL IN CHINA

JASIC WORKERS FIGHT FOR UNION RIGHTS	84
Jenny Chan	
THE JASIC STRUGGLE IN CHINA'S POLITICAL CONTEXT	90
Au Loong Yu	

SYMPOSIUM ON ECOSOCIALISM

A GREENER NEW DEAL.....	95
Ashley Dawson	

(contents continued)

A RADICAL DIRECTION FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT	103
Richard Smith	
WHAT DO ECO-SOCIALISTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT? ...	111
Nancy Romer	

REVIEWS

AN ECONOMIST'S CASE FOR SOCIALISM	114
Barry Finger	
review of Nasser, <i>Overripe Economy</i>	
FROM MARX TO ECOSOCIALISM.....	117
Michael Löwy	
review of Saito, <i>Karl Marx's Ecosocialism</i> , and Wallis, <i>Red-Green Revolution: The Politics and Technology of Ecosocialism</i>	
REMEMBERING THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION	120
Daniel Johnson	
review of review of Rees, <i>The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in England, 1640-1650</i>	

LETTERS

EXCHANGE ON THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION.....	124
<i>Bennett Muraskin, Norman Epstein; reply by Thomas Harrison</i>	

Subscribe Now

Subscription Rates: *New Politics* comes out twice a year. All subscriptions are for one year, two issues.

	<u>in the U.S.</u>	<u>Canada</u>	<u>other foreign</u>
Individual Digital subscription*	\$20	\$20	\$20
Individual Print and Digital subscription*	\$30	\$40	\$55
Institutions: Print and Digital subscription	\$50	\$60	\$70

**a PDF will be emailed to you while we update our website*

Payments can be made in U.S. dollars payable to **New Politics Associates** by filling out this card, or online at newpol.org

Name.....

Address

City State..... Zip Code.....

E-mail address

Card number

☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ AmEx Expiration Date

NEW POLITICS • 294 New York Avenue • Brooklyn, NY 11216 • USA

From the Editors

THE TITLE OF THIS ISSUE DRAWS on a famous line and a frightening vision. “The Fire Next Time” is a line from the moving gospel song “Oh Mary Don’t You Weep,” which draws on a story from the Christian Bible, as well as the title of a powerful collection of essays by the great American writer James Baldwin, one of which ends quoting the song: “God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water the fire next time.” The notion is that human iniquity once led God to destroy the world in a great flood of water, but God promised that if human beings continued in their wicked ways, then “the fire next time.”

One need not be a Christian or religious at all to feel that the human race, if it does not change its behavior, seems to be heading toward an apocalypse, toward the destruction of the planet and human life. Global warming and climate change have contributed to the conditions that cause the raging, wind-whipped forest fires that we have recently seen in California and in Europe. And contrary to the Bible, we have both floods and fires, as rivers around the world overflow their banks, glaciers melt, and sea levels rise. Some inhabited islands have already disappeared beneath the ocean’s surface and many coastal cities are threatened with destruction in coming decades. The long-term changes promise to transform agricultural land into deserts and set tens of millions of migrants in motion in the search for new homes. In this issue, we take up the threat of climate change in a symposium with contributions by Ashley Dawson, Richard Smith, and Nancy Romer.

While the temperature rises and the forests burn, there is also another fire threat-

ening to consume us; the increasing heat of nationalism and racism is melting political institutions and parties and torching democratic and labor rights. Throughout the world from India to Turkey, from Hungary to Brazil, and from the Philippines to the United States rightwing leaders wield nationalism and racism, often accompanied by religious self-righteousness, as a political weapon, to take and hold power. The personal or party dictatorships in places like Russia and China also often invoke nationalist and racist appeals to their populations. Looking at the world situation in various regions in this issue we have articles by Ella Wind on Syria, Alex de Jong on developments in the Philippine left, and Toufic Haddad on the precarious situation in Palestine. And we also feature two articles on China’s political and labor situation, one by Jenny Chan and the other by Au Loong Yu.

The rising racism in the United States requires us once again to reexamine the relationship between the struggle for racial equality and the fight for working class power. And so we do in a symposium titled “The American Left after *Black Lives Matter*” with an article by Cedric Johnson and discussion by Jay Arena, Touré F. Reed, and Mia White. And looking at American politics we have Michael Hirsch on the mid-term elections and Dan La Botz on the “relationship” between socialists and the Democratic Party.

The temperature is rising everywhere and all around us the fires are raging, and we must all become volunteer fire fighters wherever we may live. So in the struggle against nationalism, racism, and religious bigotry, in the fight to stop climate change and to change the system, we take up our

rakes and our shovels, our buckets and our pumps and begin the task. We know from history and from the events taking place right now, such as the Yellow Vests in France and the Sunrise climate change movement here, that sometimes when the fire seems about to engulf us, tens of thousands can suddenly appear to help us douse the flames.

We hope with this issue, as well as in our day-to-day work in the movements and in our unions, to start the backfires, to contain the blazes, and to build up the forces that

will allow us eventually to be able to declare that the fire is out. We aim to rebuild, but not to rebuild the capitalist system we have inherited. We want to build from below the democratic socialist society within an actually sustainable environment for the good of all who inhabit our planet.

SAULO COLÓN

DAN LA BOTZ

NANCY HOLMSTROM

JASON SCHULMAN

JULIA WRIGLEY

CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE



— **James Baldwin**, *social critic, novelist, essayist, playwright, author of 'The Fire Next Time'*

"To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time."

"Color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality."

"Ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have."

"I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do."

"Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor."

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

"Freedom is not something that anybody can be given. Freedom is something people take..."

"The point is to get your work done, and your work is to change the world."

Whistling Past the Graveyard

Notes on the 2018 Midterm Elections

MICHAEL HIRSCH

FOR THOSE WHO EXPECTED the midterm elections to be a slow grinding of the far right and the nation's wax museum-Bonapartist president, the mills of the gods on election night operated as if on seasonal layoff. The much-hoped-for Blue Wave flood of liberal Democrats sweeping reactionary Republicans out of office in both houses of Congress, fueled by the largest proportional turnout for a midterm election since the 1960s, never reached even high-tide levels. Trump-enchanted GOP voters were energized, too, part of a noxious Red Tide aided by the anomaly that far more Democratic than GOP Senate seats were in play this year, and the results for a rejuvenated electoral left in the United States seem more tortured than had Democrats either swept the two houses of Congress or were savagely cut back in both.

Here's why.

Had Democrats secured a Senate majority, the party would have made a squat target for an energized left, under sharp scrutiny and pressure to deliver on promises never fleshed out or systematically developed and forced to rejigger its pose as the lesser of the two indebted corporatist flanks in politics. Conversely, had the Democrats remained a minority in both houses of Congress, the two-party-shuffle game would have been up and independent political action perforce made at least more viable than at any time since the 1924 effort to form a labor party.

Saying as much is not posing a celebration of joy amid the ruins or a revisit to the German Communist Party's *Nach Hitler Uns* (After Hitler Us) pre-1933 sectarian madness, only recognizing that a third-party initiative would have had more of an opportunity to grow under neutered Democrats than it has now.

As it stands, with the Democrats soon in control of just one house of Congress, the egregious Trump still ensconced in the White House, an enlarged Republican majority in the Senate, and the mainstream parties roughly equal in gubernatorial offices, the run-up to 2020 looks to be one long round of gestures and media catnip. Any left-wing advances will likely be extraparliamentary, rife with possibilities but with little interim electoral analogue or spillover. Welcome to the brave, new world.

Election Pluses and Minuses

The fact that the Democrats' House of Representatives take-back majority was slim is no tragedy. As in sports, the operative phrase "they don't ask how you won but did you win" applies to politics, too. As practiced in the USA, politics is much like a spectator sport, as anyone gorging on MSNBC or Fox News can attest. Still, given the huge impediments to a fair election, gainsaying any win may seem puerile. A key question then is what reforms the Democratic leadership will promote, especially given that party leaders will again hold majorities on and chairs of congressional committees. With control of the House, committee chairs will have extraordinary capacity—if they choose or are pressured—to initiate, move, or block legislation.

MICHAEL HIRSCH is a New York City-based politics and labor writer. A New Politics editorial board member, Hirsch is a moderator with the Portside news service.

For example, Massachusetts Rep. Richard Neal will head the Ways and Means Committee, which, as the *Wall Street Journal* (November 8, 2018) explains, has among other powers “jurisdiction over taxes, trade, health care, and Social Security.” If Medicare for All, and not simply the protection and modest expansion of the Affordable Care Act—the arbitrarily convenient limit on which too many Democrats campaigned—has hope of eventual passage, it’ll start through this committee, as would Social Security benefit increases and mooting Trump’s tax-all-but-the-rich initiatives. Similarly, California’s Maxine Waters, slated to head the Financial Services Committee, could wage war against banks over predatory lending, including Wells Fargo and Deutsche Bank, regular targets of hers, at least rhetorically.

The new committee chairs are also in a plum position to initiate impeachment proceedings against five-and-dime-king Trump, if fear doesn’t make them wet themselves first. New York City’s Jerry Nadler will head the Judiciary Committee, whose duties include investigating grounds for impeachment. A House veteran and liberal on things that don’t spell Israel or Palestine, Nadler was among those House members voting impeachment proceedings against Richard Nixon in 1974. Anyone betting on the outcome of any of these options?

Democrats also scored well in statewide races. Vox reports (November 9, 2018) how “Democrats flipped seven governorships, six state legislative chambers, and more than 300 state House and Senate seats on election night.” Among the victors: New York State Democrats, who, with one exception in the 2009 never controlled the state Senate for decades, making legislation passed by the Assembly notoriously known as “one chamber bills.” As with the House Democrats, they can no longer blame Republicans for failing to enact progressive legislation.

Even the limited act of voting is problematic today, and ripe for defending. Voter suppression alone—and its partner in crime,

gerrymandering—is likely to explain the failure of several ostensibly promising midterm candidates. A split Congress won’t likely touch it, but social movements must, if only as a hedge on the right and center.

Voter Suppression, Gerrymandering, and Ballot Questions

Liberal writer Michael Tomasky (*New York Review of Books*, November 8, 2018) called 1982 “a zenith for voting rights in the United States.” That was when the unlikely Ronald Reagan stepped in to bulk up the Voting Rights Act, signing into law in 1982 significant amendments to the original 1965 legislation. A notable change made it easier to sue states and localities under the act’s Section 2, which affirmed that plaintiffs did not need to prove discriminatory intent in voting laws, just discriminatory effect. The nadir came when it was undone in 2013, as a split Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that the bill was ancient history that unfairly burdened localities. Today we see the spectacle of local election officials in Georgia closing seven out of nine polling places in one predominantly African American county, shamelessly claiming the sites weren’t compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. No such largess, as it were, was proffered for the differentially abled in predominantly white districts.

Schemes such as gerrymandering; byzantine identification requirements aimed largely at blacks, Latinos, and youth; and the refusal of many states to enfranchise ex-felons while insisting that voter fraud—newspeak for political exclusion—is rife and requires “ballot security” when such fraud is virtually unknown; serve a right-wing agenda to keep millions outside of the election system. The defeat of Trump water-carrier and rank xenophobe Kris Kobach in the Kansas governor’s race was in part payback by many state Republicans for edging out the incumbent governor in the state’s primary, then blasting school funding and being outspent two to one by his Demo-

cratic opponent, and not least for his noxious role in spearheading Trump's fake voter-fraud investigations. As Kansas Secretary of State, Kobach gained national infamy by moving a predominantly Hispanic-populated town's solitary polling place far beyond the city limits, inaccessible by public transit.

It's also a sign of just how degenerated politics has become that a moral crusade is required, and a sterling leader such as North Carolina's Reverend William Barber II has to launch a nationwide effort, not for socialism or national health care or decent housing or an end to imperial adventures, but for elementary voting rights. Or that the poison exuded by the far right's Paul Weyrich in 1980 that "our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting population goes down" is now a benchmark of Republican policy.

Certainly the victories of insurgent Democratic candidates running as democratic socialists are worth appreciating, though victories such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York, Rashida Tlaib in Michigan, and Ilhan Omar in Minnesota (who replaces Keith Ellison, elected the state's Attorney General) speak as much to the myopia of centrist establishment Democrats in not taking their challengers seriously as they do to the commitments of challengers and successes of cohering insurgent campaigns. The test for these will have to be the degree to which the new breed of reformers are accountable to a progressive constituent base.

In Wisconsin, the far-right governor Scott Walker, who headed up, even before the High Court's malicious Janus decision, the eradication of state public sector unions and was considered a potential future GOP presidential candidate, lost narrowly to his Democratic challenger, State Superintendent of Schools Tony Evers, after seeing a huge increase in the votes not only of state-capital residents but of black voters and previous GOP supporters in Milwaukee and its suburbs (*Chicago Tribune*, November 7, 2018). Evers will have his hands full, as the state leg-

islature is still dominated by the Republicans.

On the face of it, Florida's outsized 65 percent approval vote to enfranchise the state's 1.4 million formerly incarcerated felons would seem to privilege former black prisoners, who comprise a significantly higher proportion of the state's black population than do white felons vis-à-vis whites. Here's the rub, which could be counterintuitive: As reported by *Politico* (November 8, 2018), those convicted felons who completed the terms of a criminal sentence include sizable numbers of whites as well, and no evidence can be cited as to how any of those affected, whatever their ethnicity, would prize one party over any other.

Where establishment party machines took their challengers seriously, results were not so rosy. In California, Jovanka Beckles, a two-term Richmond City Council member, children's mental health specialist, and a leader of the Richmond Progressive Alliance, was the first of the independent group's cadre to campaign for public office as a Democrat. Beckles ran a spirited, more than 1,000-volunteer campaign for the state Assembly in an East Bay district stretching from communities north and east of Richmond, home of the disaster-prone, pollution-spewing Chevron Oil, and down the San Francisco Bay coastline to Berkeley and northern Oakland. Her November 9 letter to supporters characterized her campaign's effort as an

unprecedented coalition of labor unions, democratic socialists, environmentalists, and progressive organizations that came together in this campaign to form the solid core of a new phase in progressive politics in the East Bay and California. ... Together, we took on the wealthiest and most powerful players for the benefit of the many, not the few. Because my campaign has been powered by this mighty movement of people over profit, we have been able to inspire and mobilize thousands of working people across the East Bay with a platform with something to offer them—Medicare for all, housing

for all, and quality, public education.

Beckles was defeated by establishment handpuppet Buffy Wicks, who garnered 56 percent of the 15th Assembly District vote, thanks in part to backing from top Democratic officials and heavy funding from in- and out-of-state Democratic sources. (California's unique election system institutionalizes nonpartisan primaries, allowing the top two contenders to compete in the general election, regardless of party affiliation.) Despite this being her first run for office, Wicks was a party insider, having served in Barack Obama's two presidential campaigns and as deputy director for the White House Office of Public Engagement.

Especially heartbreaking was the loss of Question 1 in Massachusetts, the Nurse-Patient Assignment Limits Initiative, which if passed would have mandated rational patient-nurse staffing limits for the state's overworked healers. The hospital industry mounted a fierce disinformation campaign, saying the limits would harm not only hospital bottom lines but nurses themselves. Opponents of the ballot question, including the American Nurses Association of Massachusetts, an employer lobby, cried poormouth and said the patient-capping proposal and the need to hire added staff would cost some \$1 billion annually.

That loss was offset to a degree by ample passage of two other Massachusetts ballot questions. One will establish a commission to prepare an amendment to the U.S. Constitution overturning the High Court's invidious 2010 Citizens United decision granting otherwise human rights to corporations, thus allowing them to spend unlimited sums on political campaigns. A second will outlaw discrimination based on gender identity.

In other news, *Propublica* (November 8, 2018) reported three states passing same-day or automatic voter registration measures, while in Colorado, Michigan, and Missouri, voters overwhelmingly approved measures that aim

to limit or end gerrymandering. Utah, which heavily backed Mitt Romney's ascension to the Senate, also approved an independent commission to draw its district lines.

That skewed mix of insurgent hopes and establishment wins by candidates and ballot issues held nationwide with rare exception. As noted by Nick Brana, a disabused founding member of Our Revolution and now national director of the Movement for a People's Party, there were actually very few congressional wins by candidates endorsed by the various progressive organizations (Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, Brand New Congress, and the Democratic Socialists of America), and of those few, several were already incumbents. "Only two of the House winners were actually opposed by the party and unseated establishment Democrats in the primaries—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley," the latter the first African American woman elected to Congress from Massachusetts. And, as Brana points out, "[t]here are 435 members of Congress" (*Independent Voter Network*, November 7, 2018).

Conservative political scientist-cum-election maven Norman Ornstein summed it up bluntly: "Democrats elected many more pragmatic progressives and moderates, along with just a few Bernie Sanders acolytes. ... Democratic Socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was more the exception than the rule" (*New York Daily News*, November 11, 2018).

So Where Do We Go from Here?

The late I.F. Stone said, "The only kinds of fights worth fighting are those you're going to lose, because somebody has to fight them and lose and lose and lose until someday, somebody who believes as you do wins."

Granted, much of this essay is dour, but elections have a place on any socialist's dance card. What is pertinent is fixing on the appropriate arabesque. Regardless of what happened or could have happened on November 6, the rebellion that percolated just before the

election surge that changed the leadership in the lower house of Congress does not depend on the complexion of the governing class's congressional alignment. In fact if mass movements are taken into account, much did happen, just not electorally. From the numerous women's marches, the defense of immigrants, the fight waged by the indefatigable Reverend Barber and others to protect and expand voting rights, to the West Virginia teachers strike, the Google walkout, and the growth of socialist consciousness and militant organization among a new generation of union and community activists—these are seedbeds not just of resistance but of rebellion.

Saying that should put paid to competing assumptions rife on the left that electoral activity is either the golden road to socialism or a snare that hobbled movements in the past and will do so again. The election results offer ample evidence supporting both approaches. Or neither. Capitalist rule dominates politics as it does every aspect of civil society. Similarly, the contending electoral perspectives boosting either a Democratic Party insurgency or its assumed alternative, independent

political action—that is, the endless debate over working “inside” versus “outside” the Democratic Party—do not exhaust the possibilities for effecting social change. Neither are they necessarily in irreconcilable contention, especially if the Holy Grail of politics is mistakenly translated one-dimensionally as voting with little attention to base building.

This is not a call to abandon an electoral focus—a key weakness of radical syndicalism despite its many strengths—but to situate it better. A politics of class struggle goes way beyond pumping for candidates or casting a ballot, the latter a solitary if necessary act that is one more *de minimus* consumer choice, not a collective activity except in the aggregate. Class politics can't be subsumed into such limited boundaries, and militant working class parties historically knew as much. Whatever choices opted by the left, as even the vagaries of this contentious midterm election demonstrate, vote-getting comprises just one among many needed expressions of struggle. The fact that some would stoop to deny the democratic right to vote is at least reason enough to defend it.



“I have a natural instinct for science.”

The Left and the Democratic Party

The Experience of Almost a Century

DAN LA BOTZ

WHAT CAN SOCIALISTS TODAY learn from the experience of the left in the past as it grappled with the issue of electoral politics? Over the last 50 years, American leftists have in general adopted two alternative strategies for dealing with the question of electoral politics. On the one hand, some attempted to build a movement to reform or even to take over the Democratic Party, while others chose instead to work toward an independent political party to the left of the Democrats. Each of these strategic approaches has encountered tremendous difficulties in making headway in the American political system. Today, with Donald J. Trump as president, with the Republicans controlling Congress and most state governments, and after Bernie Sanders' remarkable campaign for president and the astonishing growth of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), debate over political strategies is more intense than it has been for decades. So we turn here to look at the first of these strategic approaches, the attempt to reform the Democratic Party, to influence it, or simply to use its ballot line.

The idea that the left should work to reform the Democratic Party in order to defend democratic rights and the standard of living and social benefits of the working class, as well as to prepare the ground for a struggle for socialism, actually has a long history that

goes back to the 1930s. The Communist Party (CP), which had been founded in 1919 and been illegal and underground until 1921, finally emerged in the mid-1920s with a legal organization prepared to engage in political campaigns. Communist candidates in the 1920s received only a tiny number of votes in those elections.¹ In 1922 and 1923, the CP attempted to take over the Farmer-Labor Party movement, but ended up driving out other labor groups.² With the stock market crash of 1929, followed by the beginning of the Great Depression, Communist strategy began to change.

The Communists ran William Z. Foster, one of the country's leading labor union strategists and organizers, as their candidate for the presidency of the United States (his third campaign) in 1932. Foster strongly opposed Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt that year and also opposed the first New Deal; following the ostensibly revolutionary line of the Communist International at that moment, American Communists warned that FDR could become a fascist.³ Their slogan was, "Fight for Socialism, or the Blue Eagle [symbol of the New Deal's National Recovery Act] Will Wear a Brown Shirt." But after Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party took power in Germany in 1933, virtually unopposed because of the disastrously sectarian stance of the German Communist Party as well as the passivity of the German Social Democrats, Joseph Stalin, who had become the leader of the Soviet Union, changed the Communist International's line. In 1935, the Communist International adopted the Popular Front strategy, arguing that the Communists should

DAN LA BOTZ is a co-editor of *New Politics*. This article is based on a chapter in his book *Le nouveau populisme Américain: Résistances et alternatives à Trump* (Paris: Syllepse, 2018).

form a bloc with all other anti-fascist parties, including capitalist parties, to oppose fascism and to pressure their governments to strengthen their military forces and form alliances with the Soviet Union.

The Communist Party of America had some difficulty for a few years attempting to figure out what this new Popular Front policy meant for the United States, where neither a parliamentary system nor political coalitions existed, and where two capitalist parties, Republicans and Democrats, dominated. In the mid-1930s, the Communists once again worked with other leftists in an attempt to form a Farmer-Labor Party, but in 1936 they also ran Earl Browder as a Communist candidate for president and unofficially and tentatively began to support the Democratic Party.⁴ When a group of Socialist Party (SP) members broke away and created the American Labor Party to support Roosevelt, many Communists in New York State voted for Roosevelt on the ALP line.

Led by Browder, the Communists decided by 1937 that Roosevelt's New Deal coalition was the "specific form of the Popular Front in the United States."⁵ The Communists argued that their role in the Democratic Party was to strengthen the New Deal wing of the party against more conservative Democrats and to push for a foreign policy of "collective security" against the Axis powers. Then, when Stalin signed the Nonaggression Pact with Hitler in 1939, collective security was abandoned, and Roosevelt was suddenly denounced as a warmonger. After Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941, however, the Communists, principally to support the USSR, became fervent supporters not only of Roosevelt and the Democratic Party but also of the U.S. government and its war effort. Support for the war led the Communists to work to suppress workers' strikes and to oppose black civil rights protests or demands that might weaken support for the U.S. government, disrupt war production, or undermine the fight against

the Axis powers.⁶

The Communists' commitment to the Democrats in the late 1930s also made them opponents of building any party to the left. As Browder explained to the CP's tenth convention, held in 1938, the Democratic Front was not fighting for a socialist program, but,

If we cannot have socialism now, and obviously we can't until the people change their minds, then in our opinion, while the present capitalist system exists, it is a thousand times better to have a liberal and progressive New Deal, with our democratic rights, than to have a new Hoover, who would inevitably take our country onto the black and sorrowful road of fascism and war.⁷

This argument, calling for support for the Democratic Party as the lesser evil, together with the view that the Republican Party was ultimately the party of war and fascism, has been the CP's fundamental position from the 1930s until today. And even when, in the 1930s and again in the 1970s, the Communists ran their own candidates for president and vice president, the party and its members often actually worked in the Democratic Party and supported its candidates. From the view that the Democrats were the lesser evil flowed the Communists' opposition to the creation of a labor party or any other left party. In the later 1930s, the Communists opposed "launching artificial third parties, which can only split the people's ranks."⁸

The CP ran no candidate in 1944, unwilling to challenge Roosevelt even symbolically while he led the United States, which was allied with the Soviet Union during World War II. When, as the war was ending, Roosevelt died and the more conservative Harry Truman succeeded him, Congress began to turn to the right and the Cold War began. The Communists suddenly rediscovered independent political action. Particularly motivated by the change in the U.S. government's hostility toward the Soviet Union, the Communists supported the presidential bid

of Henry Wallace, Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture. Communists played a very large role in the new Progressive Party created to be the vehicle of Wallace's campaign, which had a platform calling for national health insurance, an expanded social welfare system, nationalization of the energy industry, and, most important for the CP, a friendly posture toward the Soviet Union. The Communists became the principal organizers of Wallace's campaign, though many of the party's union leaders refused to go along, arguing that it would lead to greater division in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In the end, Wallace won only 1,156,000 votes out of about 49 million votes cast, a demoralizing defeat for him and the CP.⁹

The Wallace campaign, however, represented an aberration; the Communists soon returned to support for the Democratic Party. The Communists' consistent if sometimes critical support for the Democratic Party and its presidential and congressional candidates through all of the vicissitudes of the Democrats' history meant that, even if it preferred progressives, it usually ended up in the general election backing the Democrats' regular capitalist candidates, virtually all of whom were defenders of American militarism and imperialism abroad and of exploitation and racism at home.

The political efficacy of the Communists' strategy, beyond the occasional election here or there of a more progressive congressional representative, mayor, or city councilperson—such as Vito Marcantonio¹⁰—is extremely difficult to measure, but certainly it has not been significant. During the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s, the period of the McCarthyite persecution of the Communists—as well as of the Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian Revolution and Nikita Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—the party, reduced in size and influence, had virtually no political impact. From 1968 to 1984 the CP once again ran its

own presidential candidates, though as before the party simultaneously continued to support Democrats. Their support for Democrats had no impact on the rightward movement of the Democratic Party from the 1940s to today. Yet, the CP continues to have a strategy of working within the Democratic Party with the goal of pushing it to the left and strengthening the progressive forces within it.¹¹

The Socialist Party and Independent Politics

Let's turn further back now to look at the experience of the Socialist Party of America. The SP actually had a long history of independent political action dating back to its early years. As the party's most popular leader and perennial presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs, said himself, "It is for me to say to the thinking workingman that he has no choice between these two capitalist parties, that they are both pledged to the same system and that whether the one or the other succeeds, he will still remain the wage-working slave he is today."¹²

Debs was the SP's presidential candidate in every election from 1900 to 1924. In 1912 he received over 900,000 votes, 6 percent of the total, a record never equaled again by himself or any other leftist candidate in a U.S. presidential election. Presbyterian minister and SP leader Norman Thomas picked up the mantle in 1928, but received only 267,000 votes that year. After the stock market crash and the Great Depression, in 1932 voters turned against Republican Herbert Hoover and elected Franklin D. Roosevelt by an overwhelming 22.8 to 15.7 million votes. Thomas's vote total in that election reached 884,000, nearly as large as Debs' vote in 1912, but with a much larger population and many more voters, it represented a far smaller percentage than Debs had achieved.

The SP declined throughout the 1930s, principally as a result of the attraction of Roosevelt and the New Deal, but to a lesser extent because of the loss of part of the or-

ganization—all of the California Socialist Party—to the Trotskyists who had entered the party and ran away with a significant piece of it.¹³ The SP's "Old Guard" split away, and its most prominent labor leaders, Sidney Hillman and David Dubinsky, and labor attorney Louis Walman created the American Labor Party in 1936. Their plan was to make support for Roosevelt palatable to socialists who didn't want to vote for him on the "bourgeois" Democratic Party line.¹⁴ That year of Roosevelt's greatest victory, Thomas received only 188,000 votes. As Thomas's biographer writes, "The Socialist Party lay in ruins."¹⁵

During the rest of the Norman Thomas era, the SP became ever smaller and weaker. Thomas's vote declined to only 98,560 in 1940. Thomas did worse in 1944 and a little better in 1948 with about 160,000 votes, but by the mid-twentieth century, the SP seemed unlikely to break out of its marginal position. After the outbreak of the Cold War, Darlington Hoopes stood as the party's candidate in 1952 but received only 20,000 votes, and the SP put forth no presidential candidate in the period from 1956 through the 1960s. With the SP out of the picture, the old Socialist Labor Party and the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party ran candidates, but their candidates received a miniscule number of votes.

The Realignment Strategy

What then, after such a debacle, should be socialists' political strategy? In 1958 Max Shachtman and a group of his comrades from the Independent Socialist League (ISL) entered the SP bringing with them a new political strategy.¹⁶ Shachtman, a former Trotskyist and leader of the ISL, soon became one of the dominant figures in the SP and offered the party a way out of the political doldrums in which it had been stalled for more than twenty years. His theory was that the SP could play a key role in transforming the Democratic Party into a progressive force for social change.

In the postwar period, Shachtman, a former revolutionary socialist, had begun to rethink his politics. He came to believe, for example, that the Labour Party government in Britain "had demonstrated the *possibility* of expropriating the bourgeoisie by parliamentary means."¹⁷ He had begun moving toward the Democratic Party in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁸ By 1961, Shachtman for the first time actually advocated that Socialists support a Democratic Party candidate, and soon he was suggesting that his followers work in the Democratic Party reform clubs, a message he carried into the civil rights movement as well just a few years later.¹⁹

Shachtman now developed a broad political strategy, which came to be called "realignment." His realignment strategy was based on the idea that the SP could be the catalyst of an alliance between the labor unions and the civil rights movement within the Democratic Party. As part of that strategy, Bayard Rustin, a member of Shachtman's organization, worked with Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. to organize the March on Washington, which was supported by Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers and the progressive labor leaders and their unions. In the mid-1960s, Shachtman's strategy seemed to have legs.

Shachtman and his followers actively pursued this strategy while also modifying it. Initially oriented toward the progressive, formerly CIO unions, by the late 1960s he and his followers became supporters of the conservative union leader George Meany, head of the AFL-CIO, as well as of the more moderate wing of the black movement led by Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph. Most important, Shachtman and his group, breaking with the socialist tradition of opposition to imperialism, became supporters of the U.S. war in Vietnam.²⁰ They did so not only because of their belief that Stalinist Communism (in the Soviet Union, China, and other Communist states) was a system more reactionary than capitalism, but also

because of their affinity with the Johnson administration and the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. In the 1972 presidential election, this view led Shachtman to first support candidate Henry M. “Scoop” Jackson, a hawk. Then when Jackson was eliminated in the primaries, Shachtman rejected George McGovern’s anti-war campaign and backed the liberal Hubert Humphrey, who had the endorsement of the AFL-CIO.

Michael Harrington, a protégé of Shachtman and a supporter of his Democratic Party realignment strategy, had long been disturbed by his mentor’s rightward drift and finally broke with Shachtman in 1972 over the Vietnam War, calling for a negotiated peace—but not, like the anti-war movement, for immediate withdrawal. Harrington and his supporters opted to back the liberal anti-war candidate George McGovern for president. The split between Shachtman and Harrington effectively destroyed what remained of the old SP, and Harrington went off to form a new organization in 1973, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, which later merged with the New American Movement to create DSA in 1982.²¹

Harrington, however, continued to believe leftists should be, as he often said, “the left wing of the possible,” which meant in practice the left wing of the Democratic Party. Harrington had become close to Democratic Party leaders in the 1960s as a result of his journalism. His book about poverty in the United States, *The Other America* (1962) was an enormous success and gave him personal entrée to the highest echelons of the Democratic Party. He came to work with President Lyndon B. Johnson’s aides Sargent Shriver and Frank Mankiewicz and had opportunities to meet with Cabinet members. As Harrington wrote, “It was all very heady and exciting to be arguing with Cabinet officers and indirectly presenting memos to the president.”²² All of this led him to turn right. “By 1960 I had begun to understand how wrong I had been to accept the simple, revolution-

ary scenario of the young Marx. The change began when I first made real contact with workers and blacks and realized, among other things, that the Reutherites were the genuine, and utterly sincere and militant, left wing of American society.”²³

In his book *Socialism*, published in 1970, Harrington argued that under the impact of the labor upheaval of the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt’s Democratic Party had been transformed into a social democratic party. Subsequently, during the postwar period, Harrington argued, the unions had built “a political apparatus which is a party in everything but name. ... Then in the elections of 1968, special circumstances revealed the extent to which the unionists had become a political party in their own right.” And, he added, “As a result the unions were the decisive element in the Humphrey campaign in a way that had not been true in the Kennedy and Johnson races of 1960 and 1964.”²⁴ Harrington recruited to his new group, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, not only many United Auto Workers officials, but also other labor leaders such as Jerry Wurf, head of the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, and William Winpisinger, top official of the International Association of Machinists.

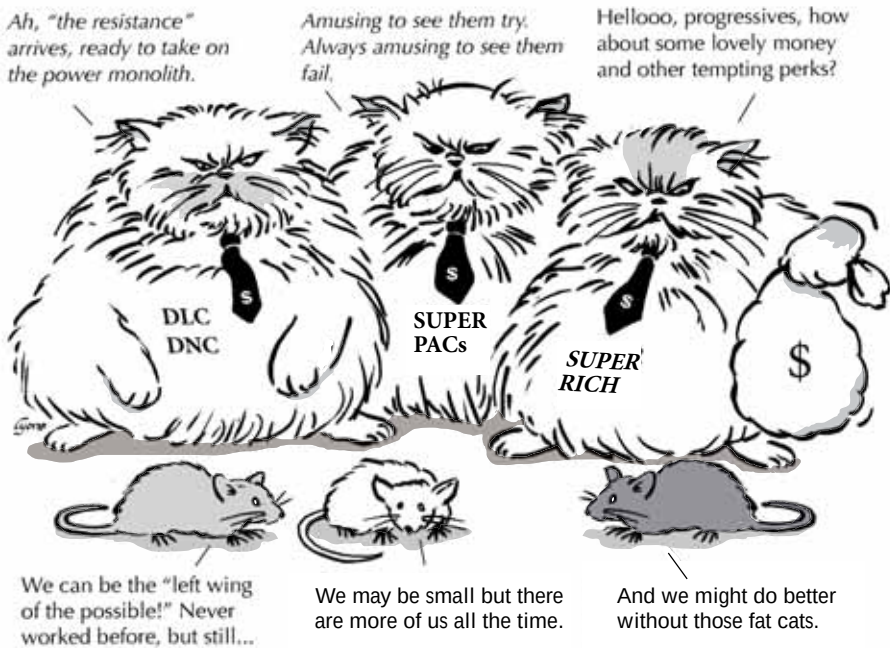
Harrington’s central political realignment strategy remained fundamentally that of Shachtman, but now with a new twist: Socialists could be the catalyst that would fuse not only labor and the black civil rights movement, but also anti-war liberals, and could make the Democratic Party a labor party capable of bringing socialism—by which Harrington now meant social democracy—to America. Economic and political developments, however, did not go as Harrington had foreseen.

The Democratic Party: Crisis and Reaction

The Democratic Party that emerged from

the New Deal era of the 1930s and existed until the early 1960s was, as it had always been, firmly under corporate domination. But it also included a congeries of interest groups: wealthy capitalists, professional politicians, leaders of the corrupt big-city machines, southern white racists, labor union officials, and northern black leaders. The decisions about the party's candidates and its platform were made in the famous "smoke-filled rooms," where a handful of white men struggled to advance their groups' interests. Though some states held party caucuses and a few others held primary elections—in the South they were "white primaries" that excluded black voters—nevertheless, the choices of candidates and rulings on policy were made by a handful of power brokers and generally confirmed at the national convention by delegates who were professional politicians and loyalists.

The enormous social upheaval of the 1960s—the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement, together with the ghetto rebellions that burned cities across the country as well as the emergence of the women's movement—began to challenge the Democratic Party leadership as well as the old structures and policies. Before 1972, though blacks represented 12 percent of the U.S. population, they had only about 2 percent of delegates at the Democratic Party's National Conventions. In Mississippi, where black people were routinely denied the right to vote, civil rights activists organized a rival state party convention in 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). They elected delegates and sent 64 representatives, led by black activist Fannie Lou Hamer, to the Democratic Party National Convention. The Democratic Party Convention, however, refused to seat the MFDP delegates, so liberal



Senator Hubert Humphrey and party leader Walter Mondale arranged a “compromise” to seat two MFDP delegates alongside the all-white regular delegation. The MFDP refused the insulting offer. This enormously increased the pressure on the Democratic Party. Lyndon Johnson’s support for the civil rights acts of the mid-1960s drove many southern whites out of the Democratic Party and attracted the newly enfranchised southern black voters. They wanted a voice and vote in party decisions. And blacks were not the only ones demanding greater representation; so too did the party’s anti-war activists and the newly organized feminists, as well as increasingly active young people.

In 1968, after incumbent Lyndon Johnson—facing tremendous opposition because of the Vietnam War—had withdrawn from the race, Hubert Humphrey won the Democratic Party’s nomination, defeating peace candidate Eugene McCarthy despite the fact that Humphrey had not won a single primary in his own name. His victory at the convention took place as Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley’s police department beat and arrested left-wing protestors outside in what a U.S. government report called a “police riot.”²⁵ The scandal of Humphrey’s nomination led the Democratic National Committee to create a special commission—the McGovern-Fraser Commission—to rewrite the rules of the party. The commission’s new party rules did three principal things. First, they reduced the role of state party officials as delegates to no more than 10 percent and restricted the number of political office holders. Second, they relaxed the rules for choosing delegates, eliminating literacy tests and residency requirements used particularly in the South to exclude black voters. Third, they established criteria for affirmative action to insure the inclusion of racial minorities, of women, and of young people proportional to the population. These rules were accompanied by an expansion of the political primary system to more states, 40 out of 50 (the others using

party caucuses).²⁶ These rules had a dramatic effect on the 1972 Democratic Party Convention, which was effectively taken over by the party’s left wing—with disastrous results for both the party and the party’s left.

In 1972, at the peak of the anti-war movement, the liberals—using the new rules—succeeded in winning a majority of the delegates to the Democratic Party National Convention and chose the liberal, anti-war South Dakota Senator George McGovern as the party’s candidate. Faced with the insurgent rebellion, the party leadership, which remained deeply committed to the war in Vietnam and largely opposed to a greater role for blacks, rebelled. The Solid South’s politicians and white voters accelerated their exit from the party, migrating en masse over the following years into the Republican Party. The big-city machines abandoned McGovern, who had betrayed them by throwing Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley out of the convention and replacing him with a delegation led by the black leader Reverend Jesse Jackson. Under the leadership of George Meany, the AFL-CIO for the first time in its history did not endorse the Democratic Party candidate, taking an official position of neutrality in the contest between McGovern and Nixon—while Meany, who refused to meet with McGovern, went golfing with President Nixon and his Cabinet,²⁷ thus making his preference clear.

The Black Political Convention of 1972 also failed to endorse McGovern. Utterly abandoned by the Democratic Party—with the exception of California and Washington, DC—McGovern went down to defeat, winning only 37.5 percent of the vote to Richard Nixon’s 60.7 percent, while the Electoral College vote was an astounding 520 for Nixon and 17 for McGovern, the 17 being the votes from the state of Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. The lesson of 1972 was clear: If the Democratic Party’s left wing succeeds in taking control of the convention, the party organization and the unions will walk

away, preferring to see a Republican victory than to yield control to a left-wing insurgency. Harrington's realignment strategy had been given a practical test and had failed.

The result of the disastrous 1972 election was that in less than a year the Democratic Party repealed some of the McGovern-Fraser reforms and went on, over the next several years, to reinforce the power of the party's central leadership. In 1981 the report of the Hunt Commission, chaired by North Carolina Governor James Hunt, led the Democratic Party to create the so-called "superdelegates," and so by 1982, the party leadership was firmly back in control. The superdelegates were described in 2016 as "the embodiment of the institutional Democratic Party—everyone from former presidents, congressional leaders, and big-money fundraisers to mayors, labor leaders, and longtime local party functionaries. Nearly six-in-ten are men, close to two-thirds are white, and their average age (as best we could tell) is around 60."²⁸ The superdelegates, who were pledged to no particular candidate, made up almost 15 percent of the Democratic Party National Convention that year; there were 4,765 delegates of whom 714 were superdelegates. Democratic Party reform had been crushed. Was reform still possible at all?

Things had not developed as Harrington had projected. His plan did call for driving out the southern racists, but it did not work out as expected. Following Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, most of the Solid South's white voters gradually left the Democratic Party, which in some areas became a party of the black minority. Almost the entire region became Republican. At the same time, the Democratic and Republican parties both turned to television advertising, diminishing if not eliminating the significance of the big-city machines. As for the radicals and liberal activists, by 1975 the anti-war movement and the civil rights movement were both practically dead, and those forces largely evaporated.

The labor movement, on which Harrington put the entire weight of his strategy, had begun to come under attack in the late 1960s, a process that continued relentlessly and mercilessly into the 1980s and beyond. By the late 1970s, employers were closing plants and moving production to the South or overseas, demanding contract concessions, opening new non-union workplaces, and wherever possible eliminating unions altogether. The unions' leaders, including those aligned with DSA, provided no vision, no strategy, and most important, no action to defend the working class.

The premises of realignment strategy had completely disappeared. Nevertheless, DSA continued to pursue its orientation to the Democratic Party, though without any real strategy or clear goals. Harrington's biographer writes that in 1976, "Harrington was prepared to support virtually any candidate the Democrats nominated that year, except for [the Southern racist George] Wallace." Harrington would work to influence the platform.²⁹ During the period from the 1980s to the 2000s, DSA's position on American elections differed little from that of the Communist Party. It worked to support liberals in the primaries, but then backed virtually any Democrat against the Republicans while the entire Democratic Party slid to the right.

The Inside-outside Strategy

The Maoists developed another strategy, or at least a variant of an old one. When in the early 1960s the Soviet Union and China fell out, Mao accusing Nikita Khrushchev and his successors of having followed the "capitalist road," the world Communist movement also divided. The pro-Soviet Communist parties split, as the Maoist factions went off to found their own communist parties that flourished between 1960 and about 1980. Initially extremely sectarian and ultra-left, some Maoists became interested in electoral politics by the 1980s. As descendants of Stalinist Com-

munism, even if some were critical of that experience, the Maoist groups—and there were many—tended, once they became interested in electoral politics, to pursue the old pro-Soviet Communist Party's Popular Front approach of working in the Democratic Party.

The campaign of the black Representative Harold Washington for the mayoralty of Chicago in 1982-1983 was a turning point for the Maoists. Washington—a longtime member of the Chicago machine, never a civil rights activist, an opponent of abortion rights, and not even a liberal—was running as a Democrat against both the Republicans and the racist Democratic Party political machine of which he had been a part.³⁰ The Maoists rallied to his campaign as a struggle against racism, which it absolutely was, providing operatives and foot soldiers. After his hard-fought victory, Washington chose some of the Maoists to serve in the new city government.

So, with the Washington experience under their belt, in 1984 when Jesse Jackson ran for the presidential nomination in the Democratic Party on a progressive platform, the Maoist organizations quickly moved to support him. This was the old Communist Popular Front, but with a difference. Some of the Maoists also worked to build Jackson's campaign organization, the Rainbow Coalition, as an independent organization or social movement.³¹ Jackson put forward a very progressive platform, and he and the Rainbow Coalition appeared at the sites of struggles against racism and at labor union picket lines around the country. That year he won 3.2 million votes, 18 percent of the total, carried two states, and sent 358 delegates to the convention—a quite significant showing, though some on the left viewed Jackson as a protest politician whose authority derived not from the black working class, but from recognition by the business and political elites.³² Jackson and his supporters went on that year to back the Democratic candidates in the general election.

Jackson ran again in the 1988 primary

campaign involving five candidates, which was won by Michael Dukakis with ten million votes (42 percent), while Jackson came in second with nearly seven million votes (29.4 percent). Jackson's supporters on the left hoped that with such a spectacular showing he would run as an independent candidate, but he went to the Democratic Party Convention and made his famous speech, the heart of which was this passage:

Common ground. That's the challenge of our party tonight—left wing, right wing.

Progress will not come through boundless liberalism nor static conservatism, but at the critical mass of mutual survival. It takes two wings to fly. Whether you're a hawk or a dove, you're just a bird living in the same environment, in the same world.³³

Jackson had made it absolutely clear in this abject capitulation to the party's establishment that he wanted his followers to remain in the Democratic Party, to back its candidate—the neoliberal Dukakis. A part of the left, among them many Maoists, had kept the Rainbow Coalition alive from 1984 to 1988, but when Jackson returned to the Democratic Party, the Rainbow disappeared, and shortly afterwards so too did most of the Maoist parties. Now much smaller, Maoist groups continued into the 2000s to support Democratic Party candidates while also building independent social movements outside the party, but without any general strategy for changing the Democratic Party itself.

In the 1984 Democratic primaries, DSA declined to support Walter Mondale and also failed to support Jesse Jackson, though many DSA members worked on the Jackson campaign. Only after Mondale won the nomination did DSA endorse him. In 1988, DSA endorsed and worked hard for Jackson in the primaries. The two Jackson campaigns briefly revived the old hopes of realignment among some DSA members, though by the 1990s the left's influence had

declined dramatically and the neoliberal Bill Clinton's star was rising. At present, no left group appears to believe, or at least no group takes an official or public position, that it or some coalition it might lead could take over the Democratic Party.

In practice, by the 1990s, there was little difference between the strategies of Communists, Maoists, and DSA. All backed Democratic Party progressive candidates in the primaries and called for voting for the Democrat against the Republican in the general election. Those with better connections in the labor, black, or women's organizations attempted to influence the platform, for what that was worth. Most worked to build social movements outside of the party, though when Election Day arrived, they often attempted to turn those movements out to vote for Democrats. Yet, while most of the small American left was working to push the Democrats to the left, the party now led by Clinton's Democratic Leadership Council continued to move, apparently inexorably, to the right. Interestingly, in 2000 the DSA membership was torn between Democrat Al Gore and Green Party candidate Ralph Nader and consequently failed to endorse anyone.

Socialist Candidates in the Democratic Party

The Bernie Sanders Democratic presidential campaign of 2016 suddenly offered another possible model for the left. Sanders ran as a self-declared "democratic socialist" candidate in the Democratic Party. His campaign had an enormous impact on the country and especially on the broad left, leading thousands to join DSA. Furious at the Democratic Party for its treatment of Sanders, frightened by Trump, and inspired by the Sanders campaign, some DSA activists now propose to run openly socialist candidates within the Democratic Party with the goal of building from these experiences a future independent

socialist party. So far, DSA has endorsed only a few such candidates, so this strategy remains untested. And other DSA members have remained committed to the old strategy of supporting progressive Democrats.

What Are the Chances of Changing the Democratic Party?

Some still believe the Democratic Party can be reformed, but socialist Kim Moody argues that "the Democratic Party appears even more impregnable" than it did in the past. It is ever more centralized, and, as he writes,

The party has become a well-funded, professionalized, multi-tiered hierarchy capable of intervening in elections at just about every level. It selects candidates, provides funding, furnishes endorsements, offers media relations, and supplies computer and digital campaign and get-out-the-vote services. In Congress and most state legislatures, its leaders impose a high level of party discipline, such that for the last two decades 90 percent of floor votes in both houses have been along strict party lines.³⁴

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Democratic Party's precinct work was done by armies of labor union and community volunteers who staffed phone banks and went door-to-door campaigning and then getting out the vote. Today things are quite different. By the 1960s, radio and television ad campaigns had begun in many areas to carry the burden of campaigning. Today, "paid consultants, mass mailings, pollsters, computer experts, media gurus, and services from profit-making outfits specializing in campaign wizardry have replaced the old clubhouse (or reform club), union, or county foot soldiers."³⁵

With the growth of economic inequality, Democratic Party donors, flush with hundreds of millions of dollars, exert enormous influence on the three major committees that disperse their money: the Democratic Party National Committee, the Democratic Con-

gressional Campaign, and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Large corporations such as Microsoft, Pritzker, Time Warner, and Blackstone Group, and wealthy individual donors, contribute far more money to these committees than do the labor unions. Crowdfunding, managed by groups such as ActBlue, is supposed to have democratized political fundraising. But it becomes another source of money from business and the wealthy because of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision, which allows corporations, labor unions, and individuals to give as much money as they wish to Super PACs, which can advocate for or against candidates. As Moody writes, "All of this adds up to a party that, even more than in the past, is both highly undemocratic and structurally tied to the business PACs and wealthy donors that fund their committees and preferred candidates."³⁶

As Moody suggests, few challenges to incumbent Democrats are successful: "Since World War II, only between 1 and 2 percent of congressional incumbents have lost a primary challenge, with the rate of incumbency hovering above 90 percent." Bernie Sanders' campaign confirmed the Democratic Party leadership's commitment to the organization and opposition to challenges from the left. Moody points out that of 712 superdelegate votes, Sanders won only 44 and a half, just over 1 percent. Of the 232 Democrats in both houses of Congress, only ten endorsed Sanders, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus, with 75 members, gave Sanders only one endorsement. Finally, "of the 3,170 Democratic Party state legislators, Sanders won the endorsement of just 91, less than 3 percent."³⁷

The Problem of the Democrats' Influence on the Left

Beyond the issues raised by Moody about the virtual impossibility of having an impact on the Democratic Party, there is the question

of the Democratic Party's influence on those leftists who attempt to work in it. Given the Democratic Party's organization, its fundraising capacity, its size, and its influence, it would be naïve to think that one could work in that party without being seriously affected by it. After all, when one enters an organization, one becomes subject to its rules, to one degree or another accepts its program, forms relationships with its leaders and members, becomes involved in its activities, and may become dependent upon its organizational and financial resources.

Consider the Democratic Party principle that all primary candidates are expected to endorse and work for the winner of the primary, who becomes the candidate in the general election. A progressive Democratic candidate opposing a regular Democrat with the usual problems—neoliberal politics, belief in austerity, support for militarism and imperialism—must now endorse and work for that same person. Of course, one can on principle refuse to do so, but that will certainly make that person an enemy of the party, which will in the future be on guard and take revenge. The party platform, almost surely full of fine phrases about equal opportunity and a better life for all, also often contains commitments to balanced budgets, a strong military, and defending America's interests abroad. What does one do?

Take the case of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a DSA member whose victory in a Democratic Party congressional primary in New York in June 2018 stunned the country and thrilled DSA members. Just a few weeks later, she came out for all Democrats, which included Andrew Cuomo and all Democrats. The New York City DSA leadership criticized Ocasio-Cortez for her endorsement of Cuomo and other Democrats, writing, "We reject the illusion that the Democratic Party is, or will become, an institution serving the interests of the U.S. working class."³⁸ Nevertheless, the candidate that DSA had endorsed turned to support a devious and conservative

Democratic Party governor.

Leftists thus sometimes find themselves backing candidates whose principles and programs they oppose, providing a left cover for the candidate while discrediting themselves.

There is another problem as well. As leftists in the Democratic Party form relationships, they will be exposed to the blandishments and perquisites of power, the easy availability of money, equipment, cars, and other resources, as well as further access to even more influential people with more to offer. The temptations are many, and while not all succumb, the Democratic Party can exert a powerful negative force on left groups and individuals.

Today the Democratic Party liberals are doing everything they can to keep the Resistance from becoming an independent movement. The Democratic Alliance, a foundation made up of liberal donors that wishes to move the Democratic Party to the left, is giving millions of dollars to groups such as Indivisible, which now has a staff of 40 and 6,000 volunteers. Billionaire George Soros is giving large donations to progressive groups such as the Center for Community Change, Color of Change, and Local Progress. The clear if unstated goal is to keep Resistance activists voting for liberal Democrats, rather than setting out in an independent direction.³⁹

We have more than a hundred years of socialist electoral experience in the United States, and some 80 years of leftists attempting to influence or reform the Democratic Party. The history suggests that there is little if any chance of ever doing so. The history of the nineteenth century suggests that only a genuine national crisis, accompanied by a massive national movement—in that period a movement for the abolition of slavery—can lead to a realignment of the political parties. And the experience of the twentieth century suggests that only in periods of tremendous mass upheaval do we see even the beginnings of independent political action, a subject that we will turn to in a future article.

NOTES

1. The Communists ran William Z. Foster and Benjamin Gitlow for president and vice president in 1924 and again in 1928; out of about 30 million votes cast in 1924, the Communists received 36,396, and in 1928 with about 36.5 million votes cast, the Communist candidates received 48,770 votes. (See the *Encyclopedia Britannica* accounts of the elections available on line.)
2. Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (Random House, 1986 [1960]), 29–51.
3. In 1932, Foster won about 100,000 votes out of approximately 38 million votes cast. (See the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on line for accounts of the elections with votes cast for each candidate.)
4. Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1957), 332. In the 1936 election, Browder won just over 80,000 votes out of 63 million votes cast.
5. Cited in Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 115.
6. Charlie Post, “The Popular Front: Rethinking CPUSA History,” *Against the Current*, July–August, 1996, www.solidarity-us.org/node/2363.
7. Cited in Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (Basic Books, 1984), 210.
8. Cited in Howe and Coser, 332.
9. Howe and Coser, 470–78; James Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 232–35. The Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party candidate Farrell Dobbs got only 13,613 votes that same year.
10. Alan Schaffer, *Vito Marcantonio: Radical in Congress* (Syracuse University Press, 1966), 52. Earl Browder first insisted that the Communists back Marcantonio.
11. John Bachtell, “A radical third party? I agree!” *People’s World*, January 22, 2015. www.peoplesworld.org/article/a-radical-third-party-i-agree/. Despite the title, Bachtel, Chair of the Communist Party USA since 2014, argues for working politically through the Democratic Party.
12. Eugene V. Debs, “Outlook for Socialism in the United States,” *International Socialist Review*, September, 1900, www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1900/outlook.htm.
13. David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party: A History*

(The Macmillan Company, 1955), 253-54.

14. Robert J. Fittrakis, *The Idea of Democratic Socialism in America and the Decline of the Socialist Party* (Garland, 1993), 185.

15. S.A. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas: The Last Idealist* (Charles Scriber's Sons, 1976), 206.

16. Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the "American Century"* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1994), 262, 271-77.

17. Max Shachtman, "Aspects of the British Labor Government," *New International* (17, January-February 1951), 12; *Labor Action*, July 23, 1951, cited in Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (Basic Books, 1987), 56.

18. Drucker, 242-43.

19. Drucker, 270-71.

20. Drucker, 288-89.

21. Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (Public Affairs, 2000), 256-302.

22. Michael Harrington, *Fragments of the Century* (E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), 175.

23. Harrington, *Fragments*, 178-79.

24. Michael Harrington, *Socialism* (Bantam Books, 1973), 306, 324-25.

25. The Walker Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, summary at chicago68.com/ricsumm.html.

26. Judith A. Center, "1972 Democratic Convention Reforms and Party Democracy," *Political Science Quarterly* (Vol. 89, No. 2, June 1974), 325-350.

27. Bruce Miroff, *The Liberal's Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of

Kansas Press, 2009), 184-89.

28. Drew Desilver, "Who Are the Democratic Superdelegates?" Pew Research Center, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/05/who-are-the-democratic-superdelegates/.

29. Isserman, *The Other American*, 330.

30. Florence Hamlish Levinsohn, *Harold Washington: A Political Biography* (Chicago Review Press, 1983), *passim*. Hamlish Levinsohn makes it clear that Washington was not only not a radical, he was not even very liberal. Gary Rivlin, *Fire on the Prairie: Chicago's Harold Washington and the Politics of Race* (Henry Holt and Company, 1992), *passim*.

31. Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (Verso, 2002), 275-78.

32. Adolph L. Reed Jr., *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 123-26.

33. Jesse Jackson, Democratic Party National Convention Address, 1988, www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jessejackson1988dnc.htm.

34. Kim Moody, "From Realignment to Reinforcement," *Jacobin*, January 26, 2017, www.jacobinmag.com/2017/01/democratic-party-campaign-fund-raising-wasserman-schultz/.

35. Moody.

36. Moody.

37. Moody.

38. "NYC-DSA Statement on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Endorsement of Andrew Cuomo and 'All Democratic Nominees,'" www.socialists.nyc/statements/ocasio-cuomo/.

39. Kenneth P. Vogel, "The 'Resistance,' Raising Big Money, Upends Liberal Politics," *New York Times*, Oct. 7, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/10/07/us/politics/democrats-resistance-fundraising.html.

THE AMERICAN LEFT AFTER BLACK LIVES MATTER

HISTORIAN CEDRIC JOHNSON'S ESSAY "The Panthers Can't Save Us Now," published in 2017 in the new socialist journal *Catalyst*, generated a lot of discussion and won the Daniel Singer Memorial Prize.

Addressing a historic discussion about the tensions between race and class for socialist strategy, Johnson argued against the legacy of racial essentialism in contemporary political movements, and for a class analysis rooted in a materialist understanding of Black political life.

We asked Cedric if he would be willing to extend his argument for New Politics and he graciously agreed to do so. We then asked three scholars and activists (Jay Arena, Touré Reed, and Mia White) to comment on the significant political issues he has raised, though they do so without having seen Johnson's new essay.

We are pleased to offer this further elaboration and discussion of Johnson's important article. We hope this symposium clarifies issues critical to building an effective socialist movement in the United States, one that has been growing quickly and significantly recently.

Who's Afraid of Left Populism?

Anti-Policing Struggles and the Frontiers of the American Left

CEDRIC G. JOHNSON

MY 2017 *CATALYST* ARTICLE, "The Panthers Can't Save Us Now," was addressed to a specific conundrum within contemporary left politics and anti-policing struggles in particular: that is, the strategic problem of building a counterpower capable of winning in the context of renascent black-

nationalist thinking, sheepishness on the left about class analysis, and a pervasive reluctance to think about black political life with much sophistication. In a sense, the article was less about the historical Black Panther Party for Self Defense than the dangers of sixties nostalgia that afflict contemporary struggles, namely the revival of the racial essentialism, the colonial analogy, and black vanguardist posturing. Such notions were limited as a means of advancing black political life during the sixties, and inasmuch as they preserve the fiction that societywide, revolutionary changes can be won either by the actions of numerical minorities or sectarian tendencies, they are ill-suited to the challenges we face today.

My argument then and now is that Black

CEDRIC G. JOHNSON is Prof of AfricanAmerican Studies and Political Science at the University of Illinois Chicago. He is the author of *From Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics (2007)* and *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism and the Remaking of New Orleans (2011)*, as well as the *Singer Prize-winning* essay "The Panthers Can't Save Us Now" that appeared in *Catalyst* 2017

Lives Matter, and cognate notions such as the New Jim Crow, have been useful in galvanizing popular outrage over policing and mass incarceration, but these same banners have simultaneously enshrouded the very social relations they claim to describe and led away from the kind of politics, one predicated on building broad, popular power, that is necessary to roll back the carceral state. That 2017 article was conceived as an historical materialist antidote to racially reductionist thinking and attempted to excavate the origins of black ethnic politics as we know it. A key conceptual distinction here is between *black ethnic politics*, that mode of ethnic representational and electoral practices that was expanded and institutionalized nationally through the confluence of civil rights reform and Black Power mobilizations, and *black political life*, the heterogeneous, complex totality of shifting positions, competing interests, contradictory actions and behaviors that constitute black political engagement historically. That 2017 article was written as a plea for a more mature view of black political life, and a left politics that proceeded from careful analysis of society *as it exists* toward building popular constituencies around a more just vision of what society might be.

In what follows, I expand the arguments of my *Catalyst* article in three ways. First, this essay addresses the prevailing hesitation to engage in class analysis of black life. Many left activists and academics continue to abide the notion of black exceptionalism, that there is something unique and incommensurable about the experiences of blacks that prohibits any substantive discussion of class position and interests whenever the black population is concerned. This posture is wrong and dangerous. It is not grounded in any close empirical sense of actually existing black life, but retreats toward the most unidimensional sense of the black population as noble, long-suffering victims of oppression and the moral conscience of a white-dominated nation, rather than a people possessing all the social

contradictions, ideological diversity, foibles, heroism, and frailties found throughout the American populace. This failure to understand the complexities of black political life leaves intellectuals and activists unable to see the ways that particular segments of the black population, both elites and popular constituencies, have historically supported the carceral expansion and continue to play a crucial role in the reproduction of the highly unequal, unjust neoliberal urban order. Genuflecting before identitarian politics, whether under the guise of Black Power nostalgia or Black Lives Matter sloganeering, does little to help us understand and contest these power alignments. The second part of this essay offers a brief overview of these concomitant processes of black governance, central-city revanchism, and mass incarceration.

This essay concludes by addressing the Trump phenomenon and the clear problems his ascendancy poses for anti-policing struggles going forward. Trump is a dangerous figure, and his first term has put his oafishness, sexism, racism, and incivility on full display, but as some have noted, Trump's Tweets and antics are a distraction. He is no doubt a powerful booster for authoritarian policing and securitization, but even if he were removed from office before the end of his first term, the carceral state, which has been built up through local and state-level legislation over the course of decades, would remain; its legitimacy is anchored much deeper within American life and institutions. Moreover, the myth that Trump rode into office on a wave of resurgent white supremacy has only entrenched liberal anti-racist posturing, overgeneralizations about and demonization of white workers, and a prevailing sense that popular left politics are not only out of reach, but not even worth pursuing.

Class and Actually Existing Black Life

The last few years have seen the resurgence

of racially reductionist thinking about black political life and a corresponding political defeatism regarding class solidarity. Such thinking is sedimented and reproduced through social media discussions, which are at best proto-political but often anti-political, precluding public-spirited conversation and the possibility of communion and action in face-to-face contexts. The explosive popularity of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, as well as the expansion of blogging and podcast platforms, has not only displaced the centrality of corporate news sources in the lives of many Americans, but these media have also produced an artificial leveling in terms of public debate. In this new landscape, access is more universal but expertise and rigorous investigation are devalued in spaces where sensationalism, conspiracy, and dilettantism breed and flourish underneath ebullient travel photos, cat memes, fish-kiss selfies, and cute toddler videos.¹

The revival of race-centric approaches to thinking about inequality did not begin with Black Lives Matter. For decades, liberal think tanks, civil rights organizations, and academics working in area studies have promoted various strands of liberal anti-racism. But we might trace the more recent origins of the Black Lives Matter/New Jim Crow frame to the optics of the 2005 Katrina disaster and the subsequent ways both academics and activists came to understand the 2008 foreclosure crisis.² Rapper Kanye West may have offered the most memorable statement of this sensibility when he went off-script during a live telethon for Katrina survivors. “America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off, as slow as possible,” West said, before punctuating his impromptu speech with the charge that “George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” His conviction, that racism was the primary motive for the death and misery in New Orleans, has been rearticulated and expanded in a small library of books and essays over the past decade.³ The *Nation* columnist Mychal Denzel Smith claims that for

his cohort of black millennials, West’s words were “our first relatable expression of black rage on a national stage,” and that expression has since inspired resurgent waves of black political activity, from the election of Barack Obama to the anti-police brutality protests in Ferguson and Baltimore. Given the media optics of the Katrina crisis, where thousands of black residents crowded the Superdome in search of relief, it is not surprising that so many concluded the disaster was caused by structural racism.

The focus on racial disparity gets much of the Katrina story wrong, however, because it substitutes metanarratives of racial oppression for a more critical and rigorous analysis of the city as a totality, the place-specific institutional and social roots of the disaster, the balance of class forces on the ground, and the power of actual constituencies in shaping disaster preparation and recovery policies in New Orleans, none of which is simply reducible to the legacies of Jim Crow segregation or the hubris of the Bush administration alone. A more critical post-Katrina literature and cinema has situated the governmental failures of disaster evacuation and relief, and the highly uneven politics of reconstruction, within the volatile and crisis-laden processes of urban neoliberalization.⁴ The racial-justice frame does not discern class contradictions within the black population and the variegated experiences of recovery. This framing fails to capture how the contraflow evacuation process worked effectively for middle-class blacks with access to cars, as it had for whites of similar means. The property owner-centered reconstruction programs supported by city, state, and federal governments also helped middle-class homeowners, black and white, to restore their property and lives, while the same governing coalition pushed a wave of evictions and public housing demolitions that created hardship for black working-class residents and made it more difficult for them to return.

In the wake of the “race-class” debates

that accompanied the 2016 Democratic Presidential primary challenge of democratic socialist and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, many within academe and activist circles have sought to defend the virtues of identity-based appeals and organizing strategies. The defenses often begin from an interpretation of U.S. history that sees popular, cosmopolitan forms of left alliance as anomalous and too often doomed by the reactionary behaviors and interests of whites, sometimes with the most venom reserved for the “white working class,” often portrayed as though it constitutes a self-conscious and unified social category in utero.⁵ Such anti-left populist arguments are often guided by an odd view of history, devoid of any useful sense of conjuncture, and positing wrongly that what did not work in the past clearly will not work now, so why bother. This posture not only sweeps aside meaningful and plentiful examples of cross-racial class solidarity in the U.S. past, but it also amounts to a loser’s view of political life, lacking imagination and courage. The Trump phenomenon, and the prevailing myth that his presidency was the result of resurgent white supremacy and not the reverse, has only further intensified hyperbolic racist arguments and antipathy toward class analysis and working-class solidarity in some corners.

Asad Haider’s *Mistaken Identity* is addressed to this new context of Trumpism and attempts to recuperate what he sees as the more radical, progressive origins of identity politics in the nexus of the black political struggles and second-wave feminism of the seventies.⁶ Haider reminds us that the phrase “identity politics” was coined by black lesbian feminist activists who formed the Combahee River Collective (CRC), but their initial formulation, which sought to bring anti-racist and anti-sexist sensibilities in as correctives to the limitations of revolutionary socialism as they saw it, was ultimately appropriated and corrupted by liberal elites. Although he makes numerous references to the CRC’s participation in strike actions, and reproduc-

tive rights and domestic violence activism, Haider does not pause to evaluate the relative political impact and utility of the CRC vis à vis other organizations that actually made life demonstrably better for the greatest number of African Americans. That is to say, we know that the group is significant in the genealogy of black feminism and women’s studies as that scholarly discipline evolved out of the sixties and seventies migration of activists into academe, but what political victories can we point to that make CRC an indispensable vein for the contemporary left to mine, especially for strategic lessons concerning building powerful left opposition? Why should we focus on the CRC and not the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Montgomery Improvement Association, the various grassroots organizations and networks that elected Harold Washington to the Chicago mayoralty in 1983, or for that matter, The Links, Incorporated? Let us be clear. The CRC emerged during a period of pervasive demobilization, amid the jetsam of Black Power, women’s liberation, and the New Left, literally on the eve of the Reagan revolution, and despite whatever interpretative value we might wring from their critique of U.S. society, there is no practical reason to afford the CRC with a privileged place in contemporary left strategic and tactical thinking. Haider is not alone here, but rather he indulges a common practice of many academics: confusing the scholarly subject that piques one’s curiosity and may be interesting within the novelty-driven dynamics of academic credentialing, conferencing, and publishing, with those historical phenomena that are politically impactful and resonant.

Setting aside this problem of the CRC’s historical amplitude and relevance to contemporary efforts to revitalize the left, a bigger problem with Haider’s analysis is his neglect of how the empowerment discourse of new social movements emerges from a peculiar deployment of standpoint epistemology, the view descendant from Hegel and Marx that

those who endure similar social conditions possess common ways of knowing the world. For Marx, the common predicament of the proletariat alone did not generate solidarity; rather, such was clearly the outcome of political organizing and social struggle. Sixties appropriations of standpoint epistemology, however, often falsely equated common predicament, the experience of the black ghetto or of patriarchal order, with shared political sympathy and interests. Haider is well-aware of the ways that identity politics and intersectionality have become corrupted and misused in the time of Black Lives Matter, too often deployed as a means of making territorial-knowledge claims, staking out authority based on relative disadvantage (epistemic deference), and undermining the prospects of open democratic engagement and the possibility of solidarity. We agree on these latter-day problems. Haider sees some value, however, in the prelapsarian version of identity politics first articulated by the CRC, but his historical account forgets how sixties and seventies black radical and feminist politics also abided problematic notions of standpoint epistemology that conflated identity with political constituency.

Standpoint epistemology forms the foundation of identity politics whether articulated in Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's 1967 manifesto, *Black Power*, which was heavily informed by the ethnic pluralist claims of Cold War American political science; in the Panthers' desire to liberate the "black colony" within American inner-cities, which was in practice ethnic pluralism with anti-colonial patina; in Amiri Baraka's work to forge an institutional mechanism for national black political unity; or even in the CRC's efforts to infuse socialism with analyses of interlocking oppressions. In the classic CRC statement that Haider celebrates, the territoriality he rightly condemns in latter-day movement circles was already gestating: "This focusing on our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe the

most profound and potentially most radical politics came directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression."⁷ The tendency to equate racial and ethnic identity with political constituency did not first emerge within African American political life during the sixties, but was already hegemonic, a consequence of the exclusion of the black masses from civic life for the first half of the twentieth century, the prevalence of Jim Crow racism beyond the Mason-Dixon line, and the ethnic patron-clientelist practices that dominated most urban governing regimes during the Fordist era. The view of sacrosanct racial constituency, however, is tough to abide when we take a closer look at black political life during the sixties, which was rife with public debate and political rivalry, teeming with different agendas, priorities, and class interests despite the prevailing popular expressions of black unity and soul power.

Haider's critical claim that liberal identity politics is the "neutralization of movements against racial oppression," is an earnest re-statement of the familiar cooptation thesis that falls flat when the internal contradictions and limitations of those movements are subjected to rigorous analysis and scrutiny. These black movements were not simply neutralized by the machinations of elites, but rather, as many historians and social scientists have illustrated, sixties black political tendencies abided the same flawed logic of racial constituency that Haider sees as emerging at a later point in history.⁸ Black Power was not some grassroots phenomenon that sprung up organically only to be quelled by agents of the state. Black Power took shape within a context of omnibus civil rights reforms; the on-going evolution and internal debates of interracial organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality who helped secure such reforms; the work of sympathetic national politicians and liberal benefactors who sincerely wanted to improve the lives of

black Americans, albeit under the terms of the postwar consumer society; the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty, which provided federal block grants to develop anti-poverty programs at the local level; and the growing sense in black neighborhoods and communities nationwide that shifting demographic and political conditions made increased black control of governing institutions a real possibility. What the calls for black power and self-determination came to mean in operational terms cannot be separated out from the broader urban and national political processes that shaped black life during the last days of Jim Crow segregation. There is more to African American political development than the heroic political tendencies that leftists fetishize.

Against left critics of identity politics, Haider claims that there is a "materiality of race" as a social relation. This is the formulation du jour for some on the left, but when applied to black social life beyond the originary context of antebellum slavery, it is a conceptual evasion that evokes material conditions only to make a racially reductionist point about some common predicament of blacks (or whites) regardless of class position. If the notion were to have any integrity as an analytic frame, then Haider and others would need to actually explore in greater depth the historically specific material conditions, the situated-class experiences of blacks under capitalism. Such analyses would include not only the sharecroppers union, the Scottsboro boys' legal defense campaign, or the League of Revolutionary Black Workers—favorite topics of the academic left that Haider evokes in a Verso blog defense of his book.⁹ Any helpful discussion of the "materiality of race" would also need to take seriously those manifestations of bourgeois class position, aspiration, and ideology that contend for influence within black political life at every historical juncture and often secure legitimacy and devotion among layers of the black working class, for instance the reign of Tuskegee

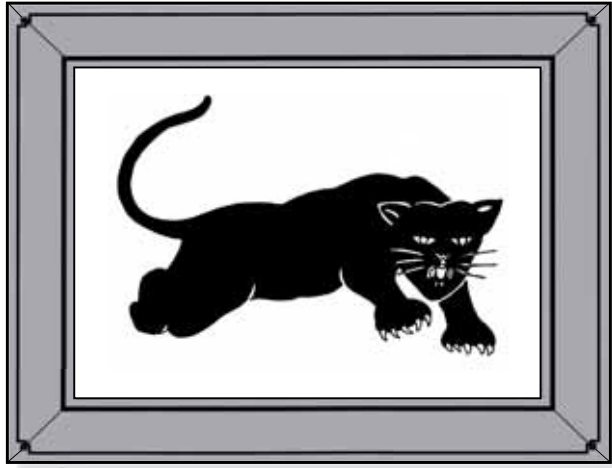
Machine; the role of the Afro-American Realty Company in the making of Harlem; the Geddes Willis Funeral Home and scores of others in every major city and small town with a sizable black population; the business ventures of black entrepreneurs such as Jesse Binga, Madame C.J. Walker, A.G. Gaston, and legions of other race women and men; the black professional organizations that were also born out of Black Power; the anti-public housing stances of black New Democrats; the expansion of black tourist-entertainment niches such as the annual Essence Fest; and on and on. "A materialist mode of investigation," Haider contends, "has to go from the abstract to the concrete—it has to bring this abstraction back to earth by moving through all the historical specificities and material relations that have put it in our heads."¹⁰ This particular outing for Haider, however, falls short of making good on that methodological commitment.

Throughout the text, Haider offers pithy statements about the centrality of race and anti-racism to revitalizing the left. "As long as racial solidarity among whites is more powerful than class solidarity across races," he writes, "both capitalism and whiteness will continue to exist."¹¹ "In the context of American history," Haider continues, "the rhetoric of the 'white working class' and positivist arguments that class matters more than race reinforce one of the main obstacles to building socialism." Of course, it is quite possible for capitalism to exist without white racial domination in the United States, as it does in other parts of the world—think Lagos. Also, we have already witnessed in many American cities how heritage tourism; ethnic cultural markers such as Mexican murals, blues music trails, immigrant commercial thoroughfares, and so on; and multiracial coalitions have been central to place-branding, real-estate valuation, and neighborhood revitalization in ways that facilitate capital accumulation and the empowerment of some people of color alongside the massive displacement of oth-

ers. As well, despite Haider's historicist point about the "main obstacles to building socialism," there are powerful examples of biracial and interracial unionism, where anti-black racism among workers was clearly an impediment to organizing but ultimately did not prevent striking dockworkers and teamsters in post-bellum New Orleans, or miners in the West Virginia Coal Wars, from achieving meaningful solidarity and collective advance. Such ambitious statements may score points

in the seminar room or basement study group, but this rhetoric, however well-intentioned, has little to do with the internal workings of political life, how people perceive their immediate interests and priorities in real time and space, and the ways that union drives, city council campaigns, class-action lawsuits against polluters, parent-teacher meetings about pending state tests, and the like—contexts where race and class are not always the chief preoccupation or animating logics among citizens that left activists and academics suppose them to be. The underlying claim in *Mistaken Identity* that foregrounding anti-racism might secure more extensive commitments of people of color to the nominal left is shop worn, unproven, and descendant from the recruitment strategies of the Socialist Workers Party during the sixties and still prevalent among elements of the International Socialist Organization and the revived Democratic Socialists of America. This strategic posture, which reduces the expressed needs and diverse interests of blacks, Latinx, and other people of color to the "struggle against racial oppression," is at best misguided, at worst patronizing, and will continue to lead us toward a dead-end.

To his credit, Haider does allude to the



sharpening of class conflict within post-segregation black political life, especially in a chapter dedicated to the life and serial ideological conversions of the late poet and activist Amiri Baraka.¹² This discussion of class and black politics, however, is rather perfunctory, derivative, and at a level of theoretical abstraction that dances above the moil of black political life as it is experienced in everyday social relations, grounded organizational contexts, and historical class interests in motion. It would seem that a focus on these quotidian matters would be central in a book that hopes to rescue some radical kernel of sixties and seventies identity politics from latter-day appropriations and use whatever lessons gained to build left opposition in the present. I am not suggesting that Haider needed to address the full spectrum of black political tendencies and personalities in this particular book, which is clearly intended as a provocation and work of theory rather than accurate interpretation grounded in a deep reading of historiography and primary sources. It would seem, however, that the most useful normative political theory, especially one that evokes Lenin's "concrete analysis of concrete conditions," would be informed by a more critical-empirical understanding

of black life as it exists, especially when twentieth-century black political developments and the “black radical tradition,” which is essentially an exercise in canon formation, are used to underwrite his claims. Put another way, if black political life has become more complicated over the last half century by the extensive integration of the black population into the consumer society, the expansion of the black middle class, the process of black political incorporation, and the worsening conditions of the most submerged segments of the black working class, why should we recuperate racial identity politics, however refined, as a framework for understanding our times and as a basis for political organizing?

In line with Haider, political scientist Joe Lowndes casts doubt on left analyses that criticize the limits of racial identity politics in favor of class solidarity. In a recent *Baffler* essay assessing the perils of left- and right-wing populism, Lowndes laments, “Populism is as populism does,” before concluding that “just as right-wing populism draws on democratic and egalitarian desires, left-wing variants can have a cramped notion of the people that alienates the politically vulnerable and marginal.”¹³ To illustrate the historical problems of populism, Lowndes rehearses an all-too-familiar “constraint of race” narrative, an interpretation of American political development where socialist and progressive left politics are undermined as white workers are time and again seduced by the siren song of reactionary politics, siding with the power of capital and against people of color, from Jacksonianism through the rise of the New Right. It is difficult to dispute the broad outlines of this account. The United States is a nation founded on African chattel slavery, indentured servitude, the conquest and removal of indigenous peoples, the disenfranchisement of the unpropertied, and the domestication and exclusion of women from full civic life, a condition that would last for over half of the nation's history. The devil does not live in the granular details of history, but rather

he sets up his workshop in the generalities and occlusions of such “constraint of race” narratives. As with Haider's *Mistaken Identity*, the level of abstraction in Lowndes's account actually leads away from the kind of critical historical analysis that might reveal the rich and contradictory archive of working-class struggles, the specific conjunctural challenges we face now, and those quotidian concerns that may form the basis for building viable left opposition.

As is common nowadays, Lowndes offers the obligatory criticism of the New Deal. Franklin D. Roosevelt's “vision shored up producerist ideology,” Lowndes writes, “a strictly gendered division of labor, and, through the distinction between ‘entitlements’ and ‘relief,’ a sharp divide between the deserving and undeserving poor.”¹⁴ This is certainly true, but there is more to the story. The New Deal coalition under Roosevelt's leadership shored up a consumerist ideology as well. Indeed, he saw raising the vast consumer capacity of Americans as a remedy for the problems of overproduction that in part precipitated the Great Depression. Likewise, as a consequence of labor shortages and mass activist pressure during World War II, Roosevelt's administration was compelled to momentarily break down racial and gendered divisions of labor through integration of the defense industries.¹⁵ This historical development is significant and prefigures the postwar civil rights movement and the birth of second-wave feminism, but such facts get in the way of the kind of criticism of left populism Lowndes wants to craft. We should be fully aware of the patent limitations of midcentury American liberalism and the inequalities produced by the New Deal coalition, especially the real-estate driven growth trajectory established after World War II, but Lowndes's accounting, like so many others, leaves out the ways that the expansion of the social wage and labor protections, and the institution of national public works initiatives like the Works Progress Administration and

the Civilian Conservation Corps, benefited African Americans in unprecedented ways.

¹⁶ Lowndes's summary thesis, which repeats claims that have become conventional wisdom in some corners of the left, does damage to the complex legacy of the New Deal, and underwrites a left cynicism we cannot afford.

Oddly enough, Lowndes's account of the misadventures of populism does not mention the pervasive power of Cold War red-baiting and witch hunts against Communists and leftist trade unionists. This domestic trench warfare against the left played out in the televised hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee, FBI interrogation rooms, police raids, death threats, imprisonment, the financial ruin of accused reds, and disappearances and assassinations, and it would have a lasting impact on the American left, dividing the laboring classes against themselves and defeating more progressive-to-radical left political possibilities. It would seem that this grim episode would be central to any intellectual appreciation of the difficulty of building a viable left populism.

Lowndes insists, "We need a left-wing populism that puts anti-racism, immigrant rights, and refugee solidarity at the center of its politics." If Lowndes's point here is simply that progressive left and socialist organizations must confront reactionary thinking and behaviors—anti-black racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, and so on—whenever they arise in the actual context of organizing and building solidarity, then there is little here that anyone with progressive left or socialist commitments should find disagreeable. In the particular context of policing and prison reforms, activists must, for instance, contest and overturn hegemonic underclass narratives that treat poverty as a consequence of the alleged cultural failings and behaviors of the poor and that justify mass incarceration and punitive social policy. The problem with such declarations that we centralize anti-racism, however, is that in many local political battles

and campaigns, race and racism are not always a central concern.

Moreover, the liberal anti-racist frame reduces what are in fact common class conditions felt more widely across racial and ethnic populations to matters of racism and racial disparity. To emphasize the need to centralize anti-racism, Lowndes closes out by praising the militant protests that erupted in the Bay Area following the killing of Oscar Grant by transit police, the battles against ICE deportations, and other struggles he sees as "opening out onto broader vistas with populist dimensions." Those vistas could be broader still, especially when we take seriously the actual patterns of police abuse, which defy liberal anti-racist canards. Of the ten cities with the highest per capita fatal police shootings of civilians, only one approaches a majority-black population, Baton Rouge (50.4 percent black), followed closely by St. Louis (49.2 percent) with Las Vegas trailing well behind (11.1 percent). Of the remaining cities, the black population constituted less than 3 percent: Kingman, Arizona (.04 percent black); Las Cruces, New Mexico (2.4 percent); Billings, Montana (.08 percent); Pueblo, Colorado (2.4 percent); Rapid City, South Dakota (1.1 percent); Westminster, Colorado (1.23 percent); and Casper, Wyoming (1 percent).¹⁷ Black Lives Matter protests have galvanized opposition to police abuse, but clearly, there are neighborhoods and communities in the U.S. hinterlands that some on the left have written off, that endure over-policing, violence, and precarity but fall out of the race-centric, metropolitan framing of these problems favored by activist and academics.

Evocations of the "materiality of race," or "confronting the meanings of race," especially as prerequisites for building a majoritarian left politics, are a ruse. These are more sophisticated statements of Black Lives Matter sloganeering; they are valuable as a means of signaling one's ethico-political commitments in academe and within majority-white left

sectarian circles and social media networks. Race is not always the central axis of conflict, nor the primary organizing impediment in local contexts, not in the dominant sense that Haider or Lowndes might have us believe—not even among black people. We should certainly condemn and fight racism in all its manifestations. However, in political life, we should also proceed from a careful investigation of the felt needs, shifting political positions, and expressed interests of blacks and all other Americans, rather than assuming black exceptionalism—that African Americans constitute a discrete political constituency who can never find common cause with nonblacks. This is simply not true. The irrationality and falsehood of such thinking becomes especially clear when we rehearse the historical evolution of the carceral state, which was made possible through a circuitous and tragic combination of a social forces that were not limited to the Reagan-Bush rendition of the War on Drugs, white suburban voter anxieties, and myths of black criminality alone. The path toward building the popular opposition that is needed to produce substantial criminal justice reforms does not begin with “confronting the meanings of race” as a therapeutic or proselytory stance, but rather with a clear sense of the peculiar political alliances that have produced our current order and the difficult work of changing public perceptions and securing support for more just forms of public safety.

Policing the Revanchist City

The expansion of the carceral state and more aggressive policing of urban minority communities coincided with the rollback of the welfare state at the national level, and the almost universal pursuit of urban downtown redevelopment as an antidote to the loss of manufacturing jobs in many U.S. cities. As others have noted, the carceral build-up of the late War on Drugs era was not merely the handiwork of conservative Republicans.

Rather, mass incarceration was the creation of various constituencies—black and white; urban, suburban, and rural; liberal and conservative; New Democrats, black nationalists, victims’ families, drug rehabilitation clinicians, social workers, and community activists—who supported expanded police protection, more punitive sentencing laws, increased funding for prisons, and the like. Some supported these policies for staunchly ideological reasons, while others did so out of desperation, seeing punishment as the only plausible cure for worsening crime and social disorder, especially as the tangible benefits of social democracy were no longer part of the lived experiences and popular memory of millions of Americans. The roots of this dilemma lie in the Cold War liberal turn away from public works and redistributive public policy and toward civil society and cultural solutions to urban poverty. Moreover, the ramping up of the War on Drugs during the Reagan-Bush years coincided with an intensifying class war and the aggressive removal of the poor from the urban center where the policing strategy of pacification was central to the postindustrial growth model driven by the financial, insurance, and real-estate industry and the tourism-entertainment sector. The late geographer Neil Smith characterized this process in terms of the *revanchist city*.

While the postwar transformation of the urban landscape created physical distance between the new suburban middle class and those left ghettoized in the inner-city core, the taking back of the city through gentrification and real-estate valorization beginning in the eighties brought these disparate classes into direct confrontation—with middle-class urban pioneers, the investor class, and tourists on one side and minority communities, the unemployed, the itinerant poor, and countercultural enclaves on the other. “This revanchist anti-urbanism,” Smith holds,

represents a reaction against the supposed ‘theft’ of the city, a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked

in the populist language of civic morality, family values, and neighborhood security.

... More than anything the revanchist city expresses a race/class/gender terror felt by middle- and ruling-class whites who are suddenly stuck in place by a ravaged property market, the threat and reality of unemployment, the decimation of social services, and the emergence of minority and immigrant groups, as well as women, as powerful urban actors.

Smith continues, "It portends a vicious reaction against minorities, the working class, homeless people, the unemployed, women, gays and lesbians, immigrants."¹⁸ These processes of revanchism have occurred in fits and starts, more successful in some cities than others, but securitization has been at the heart of this phenomenon, making the city safe for more upwardly mobile residents and visitors. Pacification and removal of the poor, architectural innovation, and new forms of enclosure have produced a new central-city landscape, one where class contradictions are managed through manifold technologies of policing, surveillance, and certification that permit ease of movement across urban space for those of economic means while regulating and constricting the poor. This is a new metropolitan landscape defined by Airbnb, Uber, helipads for the nouveau rich, artisanal grocers, novelty fitness clubs, private roads, and relentless condo tower construction, and equally by bum-proof benches and ankle monitors, pretext police stops, the demolition of public housing, ubiquitous closed-circuit cameras, a criminalized and informal economy, predatory lenders, and check-cashing centers.

One immediate casualty of this new urban warfare, as Mike Davis reported some time ago, was the elimination of the very notion of the public. "The universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space," Davis wrote. "The American city is being systematically turned inward. The 'public' spaces of

the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined spontaneity."¹⁹ This war on the public has created new opportunities for profit-making and philanthropy for the investor class, and made already vulnerable segments of the working class even more desperate, insuring a ready and cheap reservoir of servant labor.²⁰ These processes of urban fortressing were further entrenched in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which precipitated a wave of federal and state spending on policing and surveillance programs under the pretext of national security. At the center of these processes of urban neoliberalization and revanchism was the liberal black political elite who governed many American cities through a period of manufacturing decline and postindustrial renaissance. Their complex role is neglected in most accounts of the carceral build-up, yet the fact of multiracial support for policing and incarceration remains a formidable barrier to the kinds of reforms promoted through Black Lives Matter protests.

In the decades after demands for black power, black political incorporation became a reality, with most major American cities electing black mayors and often majority-black city councils. These black-led cities, however would inherit a number of well-known constraints on their capacity to govern, such as declining tax bases, population loss, capital flight, the drought in federal investment, the expanded power of bond-rating agencies and international financiers, antiquated infrastructure, and deteriorating social conditions.²¹ Likewise, the class-diverse black ghettos of the mid-twentieth century, which provided the spatial-demographic basis for black power demands for indigenous control, would undergo dramatic transformation, producing the hyper-segregation of the black poor. Within this dire context, citizens and civic leaders made even more difficult policy choices, with some blacks supporting anti-crime measures because of idiosyncratic political beliefs and others because of their

specific constituent interests as homeowners, shopkeepers, or victims' families.

Some common maneuvers whenever the subject of black class politics is broached are to emphasize the relative precariousness of the black professional-managerial class when compared to whites or to downplay the relative power of black political elites in public affairs. The first move is usually intended to shore up the view that race remains the primary social determinant in American life, which is not a difficult argument to make given the many documented disparities in wealth and income even between blacks and whites of similar levels of educational attainment. The second move is pitched for much the same reasons, to emphasize that even blacks who occupy positions of institutional authority will likely be constrained by the power of reactionary, superordinate whites, a claim that seems infallible during the reign of the New Right and the New Democrats. Class is not fundamentally a matter of gradations of income, but rather a matter of relative power within the social relations of production. The black middling and elite classes have certainly been historically smaller and generally more vulnerable than similarly situated whites. Despite its relative size and precarity, however, the black professional-managerial class often plays a role in society, especially during the post-segregation era, that many whites cannot fulfill: the role of legitimating and advancing Democratic Party politics and neoliberal privatization agendas at the local level. This is a social role that whites cannot play effectively given prevailing notions of black racial constituency, cementing black public consent and mediating the demands of popular and working-class constituencies, whose interests are often at odds with the dictates of city hall and the Washington Beltway. That said, conservative, pro-policing attitudes and interests are not strictly limited to African American elites, but at various moments specific local black constituencies have embraced tough-on-crime measures, especially during the

epoch of neoliberalization when the expansion of progressive social spending became increasingly difficult to pursue.

Yale law professor James Forman Jr. offers a highly textured account of how and why some residents, politicians, and activists in Washington DC supported a politics of incarceration during an era of black political control.²² In his study, we find historically discrete motives for black support of various anti-crime and pro-policing policies. Black civil rights activists in Atlanta during the 1940s and in the District of Columbia in the 1960s demanded the hiring of more black officers as a remedy to police brutality. During the seventies, black nationalists opposed marijuana legalization in the District because they viewed it as a "gateway" drug to more debilitating addictions. Some black judges insisted on harsh punishment for black violent offenders out of a moral obligation to black victims, who for too long were denied adequate police protection or court justice under Jim Crow. These decisions were made with an eye toward what might be done to reduce addiction, theft, and violence in black communities within a context of limited choices. The stories Forman presents contradict contemporary anti-racist sloganeering and analyses that portray the problems of policing and mass incarceration in stark black-and-white terms. Instead, he gives a more nuanced historical account of why certain urban black constituencies supported policies that would eventually have disastrous effects on black incarceration rates. He also illustrates, through a close analysis of attitudes toward policing in black professional and working-class neighborhoods, that there are distinct class experiences of policing, with working-class blacks more likely to be subjected to intensive and routine police surveillance and arrests.²³

Forman's work presents us with a political paradox that remains instructive in this era of resurgent liberal identity politics, that is, the fact of black political control did not protect black District residents from the

escalating problems of crime and policing. Rather, within the all-black context of the District, different constituencies combined to produce measures, like mandatory minimum sentencing laws, that had unintended consequences, contributing to the problem of mass incarceration. Racial affinity and ascriptive status should not be mistaken for political constituency, and an understanding of the discrete interests constituting black life will be crucial to any success that police-reform forces hope to achieve going forward. Former New Democratic black mayors like Adrian Fenty in Washington DC, C. Ray Nagin in New Orleans, and Stephanie Rawlings-Blake in Baltimore presided over a period of urban revanchism where the interests of capital were prioritized over the education, security, and livelihoods of black working-class neighborhoods, and, alongside black contractors and school-privatization advocates, such black leadership has played a crucial role in legitimating neoliberalization by providing it with a multiracial countenance.

In cities like Baltimore and Chicago, which possess integrated police forces and city administrations, massive anti-policing protests have been defused and placated through legal prosecution of police, suspensions, and token firings. Street demonstrations against police abuse have also been met with the mobilization of more centrist black political elements, who have called for modest technical reforms to correct police abuse, such as standard-issue body cameras, and who have advanced private-charitable projects and volunteer mentoring as solutions to poverty.²⁴ Moreover, electoral pressures and activist demands have produced a generation of public-relations-savvy black police chiefs, such as Charles Ramsey, former commissioner of the Philadelphia Police Department and before that, head of the District of Columbia's metropolitan police department, and Chicago superintendent Eddie Johnson, who have perfected skilled messaging and crisis management. This is not to say that black top-cops do not endorse the same pretext stops,

profiling, and aggressive tactics as their white counterparts. Ramsey presided over the mass arrest of protestors and preemptive raids of activist staging areas during the 2000 demonstrations against the World Bank in Washington DC. Unlike whites, however, they are able to emote effectively with some black audiences, marshal authenticity claims to gain trust from some of the most heavily policed neighborhoods, and deflect charges of racism. In large and complex urban areas, where black power has long been institutionalized and entrenched, analyses that ignore the actually existing class relations and interests shaping incarceration and the political arena will do little to advance the kind of substantive reforms touted by the most progressive elements of anti-policing protests. The combination of these local challenges produced by multiracial, neoliberal governing coalitions, and the ascension of Donald J. Trump to the presidency, should encourage activists now more than ever to work toward building broad popular consent for concrete alternatives to the current accumulation regime and its attendant modes of policing.

The Blue Lives Matter Presidency

Securitization and policing, racist exclusion, and repression were central features of Trump's ascension to the presidency. During the summer of 2016, when his election still seemed like a long shot to many, Trump was emphatic in his support for police. He seized upon two separate incidents where police were assaulted by black gunmen, saying, "We must stand in solidarity with law enforcement, which we must remember is the force between civilization and total chaos," echoing the core logic of the "thin blue line" that has animated U.S. law enforcement since the Cold War. Trump led a chorus of conservative voices who claimed that the Obama administration and Black Lives Matter protests had created dangerous conditions for police officers. Former New York City mayor and later Trump's attorney Rudolph Giuliani was quick

to attack activists, claiming that Black Lives Matter is “inherently racist because, number one, it divides us.”²⁵

Contrary to the overheated rhetoric of Trump, Giuliani, and others, policing is not the most hazardous occupation in the United States. In fact, it is not even in the top ten, with on-the-job police fatalities ranking well behind those of construction workers, groundskeepers, fishermen and women, garbage collectors, and loggers, among others. And contrary to the claim that the Obama administration enabled anti-police sentiment, violence against police officers actually decreased during Obama's tenure, especially when compared to the George W. Bush years. Moreover, conservative attacks on Black Lives Matter are simply unfounded. White men were responsible for 70 percent of the violence against law enforcement that occurred during the 2016 election year.²⁶ The mass shootings of police during the 2016 July Fourth week were tragic, but equally so is the fact of police suicide, which in recent years dwarfs the numbers of police officer fatalities by shootings and traffic accidents combined.²⁷ Yet improving working conditions and mental health care of officers is not at the forefront of the “Blue Lives Matter” chest thumping of Trump, Giuliani, and their ilk.

Since taking office, Trump has continued to deride any dissent against police violence and abuse. He infamously demanded that the National Football League's team owners fire any player who joined San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protests. Trump also openly joked about police violence during a 2017 address to law enforcement at Suffolk County Community College in Long Island. He went so far as to encourage rough treatment of suspects during arrests and minimized their right to due process.²⁸

Following the weathered playbook of GOP strategists, Trump's approach to campaigning and governing pits the deserving American middle class against the *relative*

surplus population of welfare dependents, the unemployed and unemployables, undocumented migrant workers, and low-wage workers in China and other countries. Surplus population, or the industrial reserve army, is understood here as those persons not currently employed who might be pressed into service to the advantage of capital.²⁹ Relative surplus population in any given historical context exerts downward pressure on wages. As a reservoir of low-wage, fragmented, and disempowered labor, they are employed as competitors to the relatively more secure segments of the workforce and as such can be used to foment division within the working class. Since the dismantling of the social wage and the rise of the New Right, the surplus population in the United States has been routinely evoked in campaign rhetoric that places the blame for the general social morass and public finance woes on the continued costs of welfare assistance programs, public support for noncitizens, Medicaid, anti-discrimination regulation in college admissions and private sector hiring, funding for public education, and the pensions of public sector employees. These underserving segments, we are told in every election cycle, do not pay their fair share of taxes and do not contribute much to the economic and social health of the nation.

Blaming the most vulnerable among the working class, however, merely absolves corporate elites of their culpability in producing wage stagnancy and worsening living conditions through their decisions, such as union-busting, off-shoring, the replacement of living labor with automation, and massive reductions in the taxation of the investor class. Blame-labeling the black urban poor and immigrants further distracts an already anxious middle class and secures their interests as consumer-citizens to the reproduction of the capitalist order. Trumpism appeals to the real economic anxieties of those Americans who can recall the last days of a vibrant manufacturing-based economy. His protec-

tionist ideas as well as his xenophobia beckon many Americans, not just whites, back to a nostalgic ideal of unending compound growth and middle-class consumption. This is where the legitimacy of the current carceral order resides, and it is unlikely that progressive left forces can create a more just alternative without engaging broad swaths of the population, wrestling with real and imagined anxieties, fears, and felt needs. Indeed, that is the only way to turn the tide against Trump's authoritarian populism and produce a more just, egalitarian society.

NOTES

1. Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (Oxford, 2017).
2. Both Smith and Ta-Nehisi Coates provide autoethnographic accounts of the origins of renewed liberal anti-racist politics during the Obama years. Coates's book, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, is a compendium of his writings during the tenure of Barack Obama. When he says "we" in the book's title, on one level he's referring to those liberal commentators who were given an enlarged platform by major news magazines, cable television networks, and other media because of the election of the nation's first black president. Coates is honest and self-effacing about how he and many others were made by that historical moment. They gained a wider audience than they might have previously imagined. Melissa Harris-Perry was catapulted into national celebrity as the host of her own MSNBC program, which drew extensively on progressive left academics, often people of color, for weekly commentary. There are other liberal black journalists who gained more notoriety during this period as well, such as Joy Reid of MSNBC, Charles Blow of the *New York Times*, writers like Vann Newkirk of *The Atlantic*, and so forth. Various bloggers, independent filmmakers, musicians, and creative writers also found greater opportunity and financial support during the Obama years. This is nothing new. The personnel and content of news agencies often shifts with the new mood created by presidential administrations. The election of Obama, as well as the re-emergence of anti-racist struggles, helped to lay the foundation for the ascendancy of a black liberal commentariat. Mychal Denzel Smith, "The Rebirth of Black Rage: From Kanye to Obama and Back Again," *Nation*, August 31, 2015, www.thenation.com/article/the-rebirth-of-black-rage/;

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power* (One World, 2017).

3. For a sampling of writings that rely on the racial frame to understand the Katrina crisis, see Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (Basic Civitas, 2005); South End Press Collective, ed., *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation* (South End Press, 2007); Hillary Potter, ed., *Racing the Storm: Racial Implications and Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina* (Lexington, 2007); Kristen Lavelle and Joe Feagin, "Hurricane Katrina: The Race and Class Debate," *Monthly Review* (Vol. 58, No. 3, August-July 2006).

4. Following are some of the critical works that discuss the Katrina crisis and its aftermath in terms of neoliberalization: Adolph Reed Jr., "Undone by Neoliberalism," *Nation*, September 18, 2006; Adolph Reed Jr., "Three Tremés" *Nonsite*, July 4, 2011, nonsite.org/editorial/three-tremes; John Arena, *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (Duke, 2013); Megan French-Marcelin, "Gentrification's Ground Zero" *Jacobin*, August 28, 2015; Thomas Jessen Adams, "How the Ruling Class Remade New Orleans," *Jacobin*, August 29, 2015, tinyurl.com/ybq645u9; Cedric Johnson, ed., *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans* (University of Minnesota, 2011); Aaron Schneider, *Renew Orleans? Globalized Development and Worker Resistance After Katrina* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg, *Crisis Cities: Disaster and Redevelopment in New York and New Orleans* (Oxford, 2014); Anna Hartnell, *After Katrina: Race, Neoliberalism and the End of the American Century* (SUNY Press, 2017); Thomas J. Adams, Suzanne-Juliette Mobley, and Matt Sakakeeny, eds., *Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity* (Duke, 2019).

5. The economic appeal of the Trump campaign, and his success in parts of the midwestern industrial heartland, has provoked a rash of pop cultural explanations and social media invective centered on the "white working class." J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* shot up the *New York Times* bestsellers list, and as Chris Maisano writes in an excellent review of the new literature on the white working class, the book helped Vance "become the punditocracy's go-to native informant on all things white trash." ("The New Culture of Poverty," *Catalyst* (Vol. 1, No. 4, Summer 2017), catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no2/new-culture-of-poverty-maisano.) This

contemporary focus on the white working class is a variation of the “white backlash” argument, a now commonsensical explanation of the social origins of the New Right, which depicts anti-civil rights sentiment as central to the Republican Party’s courtship of a new southern white base and to shaping its market-libertarian and states-rights policy stances. In its scholarly and pedestrian forms, however, that argument centers race and in particular, white working-class racism, rather than the interests of powerful blocs of capital as the primary drivers of the New Right ascendancy.

The view that Trump was elected because of angry white working-class voters applies to some who supported him, but as an explanation of why he won, white racial anxiety has been greatly exaggerated and misdiagnosed. The median income of Trump’s white supporters was higher than the median for whites overall, and as Michael A. McCarthy details (“The Revenge of Joe the Plumber,” *Jacobin*, October 26, 2016, jacobinmag.com/2016/10/trump-small-business-whites-xenophobia-immigration), there is reason to believe that Trump’s protectionist, anti-tax, and xenophobic platform resonated most loudly with small business owners, more “Joe the Plumber” than the blue collar, Archie Bunker archetype. “Trumpism is no oddity,” McCarthy writes. “It’s the expression of the anxieties of the petit bourgeoisie and a result of a break between two wings of the capitalist class in the Republican Party that began with the emergence of the Tea Party.” But the “angry white worker” line misses too much. Trump did not grow the GOP base substantially, though he outperformed McCain in 2008 and Romney in 2012 by over two million votes. More importantly, Trump did not secure a larger share of the white vote than Romney did. Trump performed well among blue-collar voters, former Obama voters, wealthy whites, nonunionized workers in coal country, the steel-producing belt and Right-to-Work states, building trades and contractors, proto-entrepreneurs, and minorities. One-third of Latino voters supported Trump, as did 13 percent of African American men.

Trump’s campaign mobilized racist, xenophobic sentiment and created a platform for fringe right-wing elements, within the White House and throughout the country. His response to the Charlottesville march led by white supremacists and neo-Nazis, which ended in the death of Heather Heyer and injury of dozens of other counter-protestors, was craven and reprehensible. His election, however, is not evidence that right-wing ideas have triumphed, but instead proof that contemporary Democratic Party liberalism has lost nearly all popular legitimacy—alienating many of

its former beneficiaries and supporters.

If Trump’s election was evidence of resurgent white supremacy then we should have expected to see some electoral coattail effects to that end. Perhaps the most graphic evidence against this line of reasoning can be found in David Duke’s failed 2016 bid to become senator from Louisiana, where he polled less than 3 percent. Keep in mind that Duke was a serious contender in the 1990 race for the same congressional seat, garnering over 600,000 votes, some 43.5 percent of the statewide total votes cast. And again, in 1991, he came close to seizing Louisiana’s governorship, winning over 670,000 votes and 38.8 percent of the total. In both of those earlier contests, he was defeated by a coalition of liberal and Democratic whites and high black voter turnout. If white supremacy is on the rise, why was Duke’s performance so abysmal in the very state where he had so much support in the past? The answer to why Trump was elected lies in the ideological crisis of the Democratic party, and more specifically in the implosion of Hillary Clinton’s campaign, both problems having their root in the New Democrats’ neoliberal political agenda and pro-corporate strategic and governing priorities. See Connor Kilpatrick, “Burying the White Working Class,” *Jacobin*, May 13, 2016, tinyurl.com/jcvmfq6.

6. Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (Verso, 2018), 7–9.

7. Haider, *Mistaken Identity*, 8. See Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket, 2017), 17.

8. See William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (W. W. Norton, 2013); Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Anchor, 1969); Dean Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Adolph Reed, Jr. “The Black Urban Regime: Structural Origins and Constraints,” in *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Postsegregation Era* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 97; Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (University of Georgia Press, 1996).

9. Melissa Naschek, “The Identity Mistake,” *Jacobin*, August 28, 2018, tinyurl.com/ybntk5w3. Asad Haider, “Zombie Manifesto,” *Verso Blog*, September 1, 2018, www.versobooks.com/blogs/4002-zombie-manifesto.

10. Haider, *Mistaken Identity*, 11.

11. Haider, *Mistaken Identity*, 51.

12. Haider, *Mistaken Identity*, 67–82.

13. Lowndes, "Populist Persuasions."
14. Lowndes, "Populist Persuasions."
15. See Rhonda F. Levine, *Class Struggle and the New Deal: Industrial Labor, Industrial Capital and the State* (University of Kansas Press, 1988); Meg Jacobs, "'Democracy's Third Estate': New Deal Politics and the Construction of a 'Consuming Public,'" *International Labor and Working-Class History* (No. 55, Spring 1999), 27-51.
16. Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America* (W.W. Norton, 2005); Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* (Vol. 74, Fall 2008), 1-32.
17. Matt Hudson, "Billings has one of the highest rates in the nation for fatal officer-involved shootings," *Billings Gazette*, April 13, 2018, tinyurl.com/ya8gpd7c.
18. Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (Routledge, 1996), 211; Neil Smith, "Revanchist Planet: Regeneration and the Axis of Co-Evilism," *Urban Reinventors* (No. 3, November 2009), 1-18.
19. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Vintage, 1992), 226.
20. Cedric Johnson, "Working the Reserve Army: Proletarianization in Revanchist New Orleans," *Nonsite*, September 4, 2015, nonsite.org/article/working-the-reserve-army.
21. Reed, "Black Urban Regime"; John Arena, "Bringing in the Black Working Class: The Black Urban Regime Strategy," *Science & Society* (Vol. 75, No. 2, 2011) 153-179; Cedric Johnson, "The Half-Life of the Black Urban Regime: Adolph Reed Jr. on Race, Capitalism, and Urban Governance," *Labor Studies* (Vol. 41, No. 3, 2016) 248-255.
22. James Forman Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2017). For other nuanced treatments of black politics and the expansion of the carceral state, see Michael Javen Fortner, *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Harvard University Press, 2015); Donna Murch, "Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs," *Journal of American History* (Vol. 102, No. 1, June 2015), 162-173.
23. See Nathaniel Lewis, "Mass Incarceration: New Jim Crow, Class War or Both?" People's Policy Project, 2018, peoplespolicyproject.org/2018/01/30/mass-incarceration-new-jim-crow-class-war-or-both/ (accessed 2/6/18); Lester Spence, "Policing Class," *Jacobin*, August 16, 2016, www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/baltimore-police-department-of-justice-freddie-gray/ (accessed 10/7/16); Adolph Reed Jr., "How Racial Disparity Does Not Help Make Sense of Patterns of Police Violence," *Nonsite*, September 16, 2016, nonsite.org/editorial/how-racial-disparity-does-not-help-make-sense-of-patterns-of-police-violence (accessed 10/7/16).
24. Cedric Johnson, "Afterword: Baltimore, the Policing Crisis, and the End of the Obama Era," in James DeFilippis, ed., *Urban Policy in the Time of Obama* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
25. Sarah Larimer, "Rudy Giuliani: Black Fathers Need to Teach Kids 'the Real Danger to Them Is Not the Police'" *Washington Post*, July 11, 2016, tinyurl.com/yb38bd58; Lydia O'Connor, "Rudy Giuliani Says Black Parents Need to Teach Their Children to Respect Police," *Huffington Post*, July 10, 2016, tinyurl.com/y759jm4p.
26. Shaun King, "White Men Killed More Police Than Any Other Group This Year, But Conservatives Won't Address the Facts," *New York Daily News*, May 11, 2016, tinyurl.com/gr6cv43.
27. Andy O'Hara, "It's Time We Talk About Police Suicide," *Marshall Project*, October 3, 2017, www.themarshallproject.org/2017/10/03/its-time-we-talk-about-police-suicide; Peter Nikeas, "Chicago Officer Kills Himself in Police Station Parking Lot, Officials Say," *Chicago Tribune*, July 10, 2018, tinyurl.com/ycfxjre4; Rosemary Sobol and Zak Koeske, "Days After Cop Committed Suicide at South Side Station, Another Officer Collapses and Dies There," *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 2018, tinyurl.com/78oy6xjy; Marla Donato, "Pulling Back the Curtain on Police Officers' Suicides," *CityLab*, May 22, 2017, tinyurl.com/yeh99hv8.
28. "Police Brutality Is No Joke, Mr. President," *Washington Post*, July 31, 2017.
29. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I* (Penguin, 1990), 783, 794-797; Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013 [1978]); Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Duke University, 2009); Loïc Wacquant, "Class, Race, and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America," *Daedalus* (Summer 2010), 74-90; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007); Theodore G. Chiricos and Miriam A. Delone, "Labor Surplus and Punishment: A Review and Assessment of Theory and Evidence," *Social Problems* (Vol. 39, No. 4, November 1992), 421-446.

Only a Class Politics Can Save Us From Police Violence and Fascism

Lessons from Rosa Luxemburg and Cedric Johnson

JAY ARENA

THE WINTER 2019 EDITION of *New Politics* marks the 100th anniversary of the Social Democratic-led German government's assassination of the towering Polish-born German Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, along with her comrade Karl Liebknecht. An appropriate way to commemorate her life and work is the symposium in this issue dedicated to engaging the award-winning essay by political scientist Cedric Johnson, "The Panthers Can't Save Us Now." Johnson's class dissection of a black version of ethnic politics, his emphasis on democratic organization and debate for social-movement success, his views of the centrality of class struggle at the workplace and in the community and of the need for unifying class demands, all highlight central themes in Luxemburg's work. Below I discuss how Johnson's critique of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement elaborates on these Luxemburgist themes and provides a path to addressing not only police killings, but also the larger capitalist assault that drives them.

The Nationalist Line Is a Class Line

A defining feature of Luxemburg's work is a

withering critique of all forms of nationalism and what we would now call identity politics. This comes through in her 1896 article, "The Polish Question at the International Congress in London," which polemized against the Fourth Congress of the Second International supporting independence of Poland, to her 1918 work, "The Russian Revolution," which critiques Lenin's advocacy of the "right of self-determination of peoples" and was written months before her brutal murder. Luxemburg, in these and other works, always emphasized the bourgeois class interests that lie behind nationalist politics' pretenses of speaking for the whole people.¹ "[T]he famous 'right of self-determination of nations,'" she caustically remarked in her polemic against Lenin's famous thesis,

is nothing but hollow, petty bourgeois phraseology and humbug. Under the rule of capitalism there is no self-determination of peoples. ... In class society each class of the nation strives to "determine itself" in a different fashion. ... For the bourgeois classes, the standpoint of national freedom is fully subordinated to that of class rule.²

Like Luxemburg in critiquing the nationalists—of both the oppressed and oppressor variety—Johnson interrogates the claims of Black Power advocates, such as Stokely Carmichael, coauthor of the 1967 classic, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, and the contemporary "Black Power nostalgia" exponents, such as Alicia Garza, co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter. They all promote what

JAY ARENA is an associate professor of sociology at the City University of New York's College of Staten Island, and author of *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012). He recently ran as the *Jobs and Equal Rights for All* candidate for Essex County (NJ) Executive. He can be reached at john.arena@csi.cuny.edu.

he terms a problematic “black unity” politics. This politics is rooted in the theory of “black exceptionalism,” whose proponents “insist on the uniqueness of the black predicament and on the need for race-specific remedies.”³ Blacks of all classes face, according to Garza, who is a leading light among the new cohort of black unity exponents, a world where they “are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.”⁴ The political practice that flows from this theory of black oppression is a unified black politics—with white and other “allies” possibly assisting—directed toward combatting a set of common oppressions and winning a set of demands that address the needs of a unitary black subject.

Johnson subjects “black unity” political theory and practice to historical interrogation and finds that it has produced what he terms an “elite brokerage politics.” This is one that has delivered real material benefits to more-privileged layers of African Americans—who invariably speak for and define the interests of the “black community”—while failing to build a mass, democratically based, “counter-power” that could deliver real benefits to the black working-class majority. This is clearly seen in the evolution of 1960s Black Power to a 1970s and onward black ethnic politics that informs black municipal governance—“really existing Black Power.” The fruit of this politics, Johnson finds, has been the “ascendancy of post-segregation patron-client relations between an expanding black professional-managerial class and the mainstream parties, corporations, and private foundations.”⁵

BLM activists have attempted to resurrect the rhetoric and trappings of an earlier, radical Black Power version of this politics, with an intersectional twist that now incorporates women, gays, and transgender African Americans. But, as exemplified by leading BLM avatars such as DeRay Mckesson and the three founders of #BlackLivesMatter—Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—these activists replicate the racial-broker role. Just as with their older, male, heterosexual

competitors whom they seek to displace, they use their mass and social media-conferred movement leadership as “a vehicle,” as Johnson argues, “for entrepreneurial branding and courting philanthropic foundations.”

Johnson does acknowledge that the black unity politics that informs BLM has produced demands, such as those outlined in the *Vision for Black Lives*, that speak to the needs of black working-class communities. But the class-vacuous language deployed by black unity politics, the “black exceptionalism” theoretical framework from which these activists operate,

The enormous expansion in class inequality over the last forty years among African Americans makes the search for black unity a chimera.

and their own class origins or aspirations tend to result in “movement” demands being repositioned to address the interests of the affluent and pose no real challenge to the capitalist conditions that produce police killings and terror. The rapid response by Ford and other foundations to the BLM phenomenon, in the form of the \$100-million Black-led Movement Fund—which was embraced by BLM activists, many of whom come out of the nonprofit-industrial complex—is designed to guarantee that trajectory.⁶

Like Luxemburg, Johnson unearths the material conditions that guarantee, even more so than in the 1960s and 1970s, that a black-unity politics will be one that serves the black professional-managerial class and their corporate partners. The enormous expansion in class inequality over the last forty years among African Americans, which is even more pronounced than the gargantuan

growth of inequality within the class structure as a whole, makes the search for black unity a chimera.⁷ One expression of this growing class divide has been the prominence among the BLMers of charter-school supporters and administrators tied to the finance capital that has pushed for privatizing public education and has sold privatization as “the civil rights movement of our day.” Yet, due to black-unity politics, leaders such as Patrice Collors support working with the increasingly influential black charter-school supporters and other

black neoliberals.

How Do We End Capitalist Violence?

While critical of BLM and the racial-unity politics that informs activists who operate under this umbrella, Johnson does recognize the kernel of “good sense” embodied in the *Vision for Black Lives* agenda. The demands address the oppression and exploitation that black working-class people face at both the workplace and in social reproduction. The

importance of a working-class movement addressing the needs of workers on various fronts echoes the criticisms that Luxemburg made in her classic work, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions*. In this seminal study, written in 1906, she criticized the social democratic trade-union leaders who encouraged workers to “place the highest value on the smallest economic achievement” at the workplace, but in the process “gradually lose the power of seeing the larger connections and taking a survey of the whole position [of workers].” Thus, while the German trade-union leaders at the dawn of the twentieth century congratulated themselves on winning wage gains and shortened hours, they were blind to “the simultaneous and immense reduction of the proletarian standard of life” by such methods as “land usury, by the whole tax and customs policy, by landlord rapacity

BLACK PANTHER CAUCUS



UAW LOCAL 1364
FREMONT, CALIFORNIA



FROM THE ARCHIVES: Front cover of the Black Panther Party autoworkers newsletter, GM Fremont, CA, circa 1969.

which has increased house rents to such an exorbitant extent, in short by all the objective tendencies of bourgeois policy which have largely neutralized the advantages of the fifteen years of trade-union struggle.”⁸

Luxemburg’s emphasis on the whole worker and the need to fight on various fronts, including housing, is central to the political project Johnson advocates. The policing crisis, he emphasizes, cannot be understood as a product of an unchanging, ahistorical “anti-blackness” or a “New Jim Crow.” Rather, it must be placed within the larger context of the four-decade capitalist war from above that has led to the marginalization of increasingly wide swaths of the population. The most marginalized have been the primary victims of the police killings, and while disproportionately black, many whites, along with Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans, have been targeted as well. In fact, Johnson emphasizes, contrary to the “New Jim Crow” analogy BLM and other activists use to characterize police killings, whites constitute the largest number of those killed by the police. This underscores for Johnson that only a broad, multiracial class movement can end police violence. This movement must bring in not only the most marginalized, who are so often the targets of police violence, but the broader working class who are also under attack on various fronts, from loss of pensions to outsourcing, home foreclosures, and other forms of capitalist-induced insecurity and dispossession.

To build this movement, one that can draw in large swaths of the working class, Johnson advocates a program that goes well beyond the limited U.S. welfare state. He calls for the decommodification of housing, health care, education, and other basic needs and the creation of well-paying, socially productive, democratically run jobs and workplaces. This would require a mass direct-government program of employment in public works and public services, one on an even a larger scale

than what Bayard Rustin and A. Phillip Randolph called for in their *Freedom Budget* of the mid-1960s.

Rustin, like Johnson, “insisted that black progress could only be achieved through the development of broad, interracial coalitions dedicated to social democracy, a position that drew the ire of some Black Power radicals.”⁹ Presciently, Rustin predicted that the Black Power advocates he crossed swords with in the mid-1960s turning point of the civil rights movement would end up creating a “*new black establishment*” (emphasis in the original).¹⁰ But at the same time, Rustin’s strategy of operating within what he called the “consensus party”—the Democrats—including acquiescence to and support for the Vietnam War and the larger U.S. war machine, doomed any chance of winning his much-needed *Freedom Budget* or even concessions. Johnson’s support for Rustin’s interracial class politics, while criticizing his later turn to “insider politics,” implies that the movement Johnson proposes will need to have its own working-class, democratically controlled political vehicle if it is to make any advances.

Capitalist Barbarism or Revolutionary Socialism

I am finishing this article in the days after the October 28, 2018, election of the fascist Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil. Far from an outlier, he is the most dangerous version of a whole layer of fascists, proto-fascists, and authoritarians who have arisen in the decade following the 2008 global capitalist crisis—which continues for broad swaths of the global working class. As Luxemburg powerfully wrote from a jail cell during the carnage of World War I, either humanity advances toward socialism or we face the further “regression of bourgeois society into barbarism.”¹¹ These words have particular resonance today. Either we provide a real, working-class, socialist solution to the multiple capitalist-produced crises confronting

wide swaths of the globe, or the fascists will impose theirs.

To find a path out of the horrors of capitalism requires the global working-class movement to engage in serious criticism of our past mistakes. “Gigantic as his problems are his mistakes,” wrote Luxemburg as she sat in a German jail cell in 1915 for her opposition to the war that her former comrades in the German Social Democratic Party supported.

No firmly fixed plan, no orthodox ritual that holds good for all times, shows him the path he must travel. Historical experience is his only teacher, his *Via Dolorosa* to freedom is covered not only with unspeakable suffering, but with countless mistakes. The goal of his journey, his final liberation, depends entirely upon the proletariat, on whether it understands to learn from its own mistakes. *Self-criticism, cruel, unsparing criticism, that goes to the very root of the evil is life and breath for the proletarian movement* [emphasis added].¹²

The cruel and unsparing, but needed, criticism that Cedric Johnson provides, particularly of ostensibly progressive forces like Black Lives Matter, is exactly what we need if we are to avoid the mistakes of the past and confront the barbarians at the gates today.

NOTES

1. Rosa Luxemburg, “The Polish Question at the International Congress in London,” [1896] Marxist Internet Library Archive, www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1896/07/polish-question.htm; Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” in Mary-Alice Waters (ed.) *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (Pathfinder Press, 1970). Also see her article on the ineffectiveness of Polish nationalists in combatting the oppression of Poles in eastern Germany and the necessity of united, cross-ethnic, working-class solidarity as the only effective weapon. Rosa Luxemburg, “In Defense of Nationality,” [1900] especially Section 4, “Nobility, bourgeoisie and people

in Poznan province,” Marxist Internet Library Archive, marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/nationality/index.html and www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/nationality/chap4.html.

2. Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” 502–503.

3. Cedric Johnson, “The Panthers Can’t Save Us Now,” *Catalyst* (Vol. 1, Issue 1, Spring 2017), catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no1/panthers-cant-save-us-cedric-johnson.

4. Cited in Johnson.

5. Johnson.

6. For critical analyses of the Black-led Movement Fund, of which the Garza-Cullors-Tometi Black Lives Matter group is a leading recipient, see *World Socialist Website*, “Billionaires Back Black Lives Matter,” October 11, 2016, www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/10/11/pers-o11.html; Bruce Dixon, “Who Owns the Movement and Where Are They Taking It?” *Black Agenda Report*, January 12, 2017, www.blackagendareport.com/who-owns-the-movement%3F; Paul Street, “What Would the Black Panthers Think of Black Lives Matter?” *truthdig*, October 29, 2017, www.truthdig.com/articles/black-panthers-think-black-lives-matter/. For the list of fund recipients, see Borealis Philanthropy, “Black-led Movement Fund,” borealisphilanthropy.org/grantmaking/black-led-movement-fund/grantees/. On the groups that came together for the vision statement, see The Movement for Black Lives, “About Us,” policy.m4bl.org/about/.

7. On growing intra-racial inequality among African Americans, see the study published by Credit Suisse and Brandeis University’s Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP), “Wealth Patterns Among the Top 5% of African-Americans,” November 2014, iasp.brandeis.edu/research/RWG/Top.html.

8. Rosa Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions,” in Mary-Alice Waters (ed.), *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (Pathfinder Press, [1906] 1970), 285.

9. Johnson, 2017.

10. Bayard Rustin, “‘Black Power’ and Coalition Politics,” *Commentary* (September, 1966), 36.

11. Rosa Luxemburg, “The Junius pamphlet: The crisis in the German Social Democratic Party,” in Mary-Alice Waters (ed.), 357.

12. Rosa Luxemburg, “The Junius pamphlet,” 348.

Black Exceptionalism and the Militant Capitulation to Economic Inequality

TOURÉ F. REED

CEDRIC G. JOHNSON'S "The Panthers Can't Save Us Now" is a compelling, historically grounded critique of contemporary anti-racist campaigns against police brutality and mass incarceration. While Johnson is encouraged by the swell of organized opposition to the carceral state and to the vigilantism precipitated by the murder of Trayvon Martin, he is pessimistic about the capacity of groups such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) to deliver on comprehensive prison reform. Specifically, Johnson contends that BLM's insistence on viewing the carceral state through the lens of "black exceptionalism" has produced narrow demands for race-specific remedies to problems—such as police violence, hyper-incarceration, and income inequality—that are rooted in political-economic processes that transcend race. Johnson traces this tendency, in part, to "a prevailing nostalgia for Black Power militancy" that has encouraged "continued pursuit of modes of black ethnic politics." Identifying the vindicationist bent of recent scholarship on Black Power as a major source of the appeal of disparitarian

critiques of hyper-incarceration and inequality, Johnson challenges "black exceptionalism" by detailing the framework's origins as well as its inadequacies.

Johnson convincingly argues that the centrality of identitarianism to contemporary activist and scholarly critiques of mass incarceration and income inequality not only obscures the political-economic roots of what we tend to call racial disparities, but it also encourages counter-solidaristic politics. Non-blacks, as Johnson notes, comprise the majority of both the inmate population and those murdered by police officers. Yet legal scholar Michelle Alexander's commitment to viewing the current era of hyper-incarceration through the anachronistic lens of Jim Crow has led her to cast non-black inmates—who comprise 60 percent of the total incarcerated population—as "collateral damage." Similarly, even as whites accounted for nearly 40 percent of Flint residents poisoned by Michigan Republican Governor Rick Snyder and former Flint City Manager Darnell Earley, activists, scholars, and even presidential candidate Hillary Clinton decried this man-made tragedy as evidence of systemic racism, implying, whatever their intent, that Flint's non-black residents either deserved their fate or were beside the point. As Johnson forcefully argues, the carceral state was not birthed simply of white racism—even if racism is among the issues informing profiling and sentencing disparities—but rather, zero-tolerance policing and hyper-incarceration function as mechanisms

TOURÉ F. REED is a professor of twentieth-century U.S. and Afro-American history at Illinois State University. He is the author of *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League and the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (UNC Press). Reed is currently working on a book titled *Why Liberals Separate Race from Class: The Conservative Implications of Race Reductionism* (Verso Books).

for dispatching late-stage capitalism's surplus population, whatever their race. Snyder's and Earley's sociopathic actions were, likewise, part and parcel of the neoliberal governor's broader assault on the public sector and on poor and working-class people.¹

While liberal disparitarians' tendency toward theoretical or metaphorical abstractions often obscures the ugly class politics to which ethnic exceptionalism is frequently bound, neoliberal technocrats' disregard for poor and working-class people of all races is transparent. Just ahead of the 2016 Republican primaries, pundit Fareed Zakaria published an op-ed titled "America's Self-destructive Whites," which laid bare neoliberal identitarianism's counter-solidaristic and inhumane conclusions. Zakaria attributed the soaring rates of suicide among middle-aged, working-class whites to a collective sense of entitlement—or what some might term "white privilege." Treating neoliberalism's contribution to "white working-class" despair as simply the product of a rationally functioning market, Zakaria dismissed economic malaise as the culprit via comparison with African Americans and Latinos—compatriots who "face greater economic pressure than whites." Since blacks' and Hispanics' mortality rates had actually declined over the past few decades, Zakaria reasoned that after hundreds of years of slavery, Jim Crow, and racism, African Americans "developed ways to cope with disappointment and the unfairness of life: through family, art, protest speech, and, above all, religion."²

Operating as if the objects of his contempt had been divested of the franchise, Zakaria described working-class whites as "an elite group" who had once been "central to America's economy, its society ... [and] its very identity," but whose time has since passed. Zakaria went on to assert that Donald Trump had promised to restore their former greatness and then chastened Trump's working-class white supporters for their delusional embrace of the real estate mogul's pitch.³

Some may be unfazed by Zakaria's contempt for working-class white Trump supporters; however, the implications of his characterization of African Americans are no less callous. Indeed, Zakaria not only held up blacks as role models for lowered expectations in the age of neoliberalism, but he did so through a narrative of African American exceptionalism. In his unintentionally ironic case for religion as the opiate of the black masses, for example, Zakaria described Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech as an example of African Americans' acceptance of suffering as their lot in life.⁴ Of course, Zakaria made no mention of the fact that King and the organizers of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom—black labor leaders A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin—had demanded a more expansive role for government in the nation's economic affairs with the end of opening pathways, for blacks and even poor whites, to the stable working class. Zakaria's reflections on the so-called white working-class elite, likewise, ignore the fact that blacks have long been overrepresented among union members. Unionized black workers earn higher wages, are more likely to have pensions and health insurance, and are less likely to experience a racial wage gap than are their non-union counterparts. Blacks have, therefore, been hit harder by the decline of the manufacturing sector and the neoliberal assault on the public sector than have whites.⁵

A staunch opponent of progressive redistributive policies in the United States and around the globe, Zakaria's neoliberal agenda could not accommodate such historicist interpretations of black life. Instead, "identitarianism" allowed Zakaria to see blacks as noble, long-suffering victims of ontological racism rather than of economic processes, while neoliberalism's "entitled" white losers were simply getting their comeuppance.

BLM's Vision for Black Lives proposed the kind of egalitarian agenda that is anathema to the likes of Zakaria. Still, according

to Johnson, BLM's embrace of "black exceptionalism" has led activists to understate the impact of issues like automation, the decline of unionization, deregulation, and public sector retrenchment on the plight of blacks and other working people. And while the Vision for Black Lives attempted to broaden BLM's scope, Johnson argues that its commitment to ethnic group politics—which, among other things, presumes that shared racial status can bind black leftists, liberals, and conservatives in common cause—undercuts activists' capacity to mobilize a broad constituency, motivated by common interest, for either police reform or income equality.

Johnson ultimately traces the appeal to contemporary activists of black exceptionalism, in part, to popular conceptions of Black Power, which have failed to take stock of either the movement's origins or its actual political legacy.

Black Power, according to Johnson, reflected a conservative turn in postwar liberal politics. The decline of left-labor militancy during the Cold War combined with a growing spatial divide between working-class whites and poor and working-class African Americans to engender a postwar liberal discourse that—in contrast to New Deal liberalism—uncoupled inequality from political economy. By the 1960s, this tendency would lead Democratic policymakers to devise an inadequate War on Poverty centered on the combination of growth initiatives and race-specific remedies. The Great Society's War on Poverty on the cheap predictably failed to eliminate the root causes of racial disparities; however, Johnson makes clear that programs like Job Corps, Community Action Program (CAP), Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and Model Cities not only nurtured a nascent black professional middle class, but CAP's "maximum feasible participation" encouraged urban African American activists to embrace a vision of democracy rooted in ethnic pluralism and racial group authenticity.

The reactionary implications of Black

Power's ethnic pluralist framework were plain to the movement's contemporary left critics. Bayard Rustin—a critic of both Black Power and the War on Poverty—noted, in 1966, that the growing tide of cultural nationalism aided and abetted an anemic War on Poverty. According to Rustin, Black Power's embrace of ethnic-group succession diminished both the government's and the union movement's indispensable contributions to white ethnics'

Zakaria's reflections on the
so-called white working-class
elite, likewise, ignore the fact
that blacks have long been
overrepresented among union
members.

ascendancy from tenements to suburbs. In other words, black cultural nationalists' Moynihan-like tendency to attribute white ethnics' economic mobility to group culture rather than, say, the National Labor Relations Act and the Federal Housing Act was not only wrong, but it also validated the War on Poverty's rejection of the kind of interventionist policies that had, in fact, improved the material lives of millions of white workers from the New Deal through the 1960s. Rustin ultimately warned that Black Power's emphasis on racial-group representation would serve the interests of an aspirant African American political and managerial class at the expense of the vast majority of poor and working-class blacks. Identifying automation and the deindustrialization of American cities, rather than white supremacy, as the principal culprits, Rustin insisted that race-specific remedies were incapable of redressing racial disparities. Instead, he, A. Philip Randolph, and economist Leon Keyserling proposed

the Freedom Budget for All, which—like the failed Full Employment Bill of 1945—would have mandated a living wage and guaranteed public sector employment to the nation's unemployed.⁶

Rustin, Randolph, and Keyserling's Freedom Budget was not to pass, as neither the War on Poverty nor Black Power could accommodate the type of class-based politics that they and other labor liberals believed was essential to redressing 1960s-era disparities. By the 1970s, however, the political training that War on Poverty initiatives like CAP provided Black Power "radicals" helped usher in the first wave of black elected officials since Reconstruction. According to Johnson, many of the black urban regimes of the 1970s and early 1980s addressed their black constituencies' concerns about police brutality. But with the War on Drugs, black officials threw in with draconian policing—pressured not just by the federal government, but by *black* constituencies in high-crime neighborhoods in cities rocked by deindustrialization.

In the wake of the 2016 presidential election, the value of Cedric Johnson's important article is clear. The Clinton campaign successfully used identitarianism to counter a Sanders insurgency that traced disparities to a quarter-century of bipartisan commitment to neoliberalism. Clinton's efforts to use this tactic to both push back left critics and woo black voters may have been more transparently opportunistic than the Lyndon Johnson administration's efforts to co-opt Black Power militants; nevertheless, both tactics diverted attention from the political-economic roots of disparities and undercut the prospects for a better politics for disproportionately black and brown poor and working-class people. While some have taken Donald Trump's successful use of white identity politics, also known as white nationalism, as proof of race's

realness and racism's permanence, Trump's cabinet and Supreme Court appointments make clear that his presidency—which will likely usher in a return to Lochner-era labor and regulatory laws—does not bode well for *anyone* who works for a living. Indeed, even if Trump's regular vilification of black and brown people ensures that the horrific implications of his presidency are clearest for people of color, his Supreme Court picks will deal major blows to not just antidiscrimination laws and abortion rights, but the right to collective bargaining, protections from employer coercion and caprice, environmental protections, food and drug safety, and more. When read in the full context of the past half-century of American politics, then, the crucial takeaway from Johnson's trenchant analysis of Black Power-thinking is that when it comes to identity politics, fighting fire with fire only ensures that poor and working people—a grouping that encompasses most people of color—will get burned, while capital warms itself in the glow of victory.

NOTES

1. Josiah Rector, "Neoliberalism's Deadly Experiment," *Jacobin*, October 16, 2016, www.jacobinmag.com/2016/10/water-detroit-flint-emergency-management-lead-snyder-privatization/.
2. Fareed Zakaria, "America's Self-destructive Whites," *Washington Post*, December 31, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/americas-self-destructive-whites/2015/12/31/5017f958-afdc-11e5-9ab0-884d1cc4b33e_story.html?utm_term=.848616fda812.
3. Zakaria, "America's Self-destructive Whites."
4. Zakaria, "America's Self-destructive Whites."
5. Cherrie Bucknor, "Black Workers, Unions, and Inequality," Center for Economic Policy and Research, cepr.net/publications/reports/black-workers-unions-and-inequality.
6. Bayard Rustin, "'Black Power' and Coalition Politics," *Commentary*, September 1966.

In Defense of Black Sentiment

A Comment on Cedric Johnson's Essay Re: Black Power Nostalgia

MIA WHITE

Now to talk to me about black studies as if it's something that concerned black people is an utter denial. This is the history of Western civilization.

C.L.R. JAMES¹

A FORMIDABLE AND RESPECTED scholar at the University of Illinois-Chicago, Cedric Johnson has written an important essay, “The Panthers Can’t Save Us Now” (*Catalyst*, Spring 2017). Johnson is adamant about the need to strongly and collectively advance left social justice demands in a political context that is starved of “the popular power needed to end the policing crisis.” The author wants those of us in the United States to grapple with the challenge of mobilizing substantial numbers so as to be a significant enough force to effect “concrete political gains” in an era of neoliberalized power. In particular, Johnson is concerned that “Black Power militancy and nostalgia” (as perpetuated by the “digital afterlife of movement imagery”) and the related “Black ethnic essentialism,” such as the author locates in contemporary Black Lives Matter activism, forestall the development of broad, interracial coalitions that can together create lasting social change. For Johnson, race- or identity-based political organizing belies the cultural and class diversity of Black America. Johnson points out that those with proximity to power opportunistically use identity-based politics for their own gains, building a conservative “elite-driven”

Black-professional-managerial class that profits from a patron-client “bourgeois class politics.” The production of this kind of “Black exceptionalism” co-constructs what Johnson frames as “commercial Keynesianism,” and he posits that these are practices that doom working-class solidarity across ethno-racial lines because there is a tendency to “see urban Black life as fundamentally distinct from that of whites.” Johnson’s standard for critique is whether we are moving closer to “achieving concrete, substantive reform that might curtail police violence and ensure greater democratic accountability.” For these reasons, Johnson posits that Black ethnic politics “forestalls honest conversations about the real class interests dominating today’s neoliberal urban landscape.” In response, the author wants us to prioritize a “class-centered politics.”

It has been somewhat difficult to figure out how to feel about the positions Johnson takes in his important piece—positions that I can gather many people have and perhaps do not speak openly about, and positions I respect. The difficulty is partly because we are both Black people in academia (I am a mixed-Black woman of African American and immigrant Korean heritage), and for me our Blackness matters in the sense that these ambiguously overlapping histories make a feeling in my speech and in my mind—something of a contradiction perhaps to what the author is asking for. He in fact

MIA WHITE is a professor at the Schools of Public Engagement at the New School for Social Research.

asks the reader not to pivot on certain ethnically motivated political affiliations (for the purposes of sustained social change) lest we lose our class-conscious focus, and yet I find myself thinking about Black study (a condition of possibility, see Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus*, 2014) as I write and respond here, specifically about the ways Blackness is constructed in the arguments presented and how that matters. Wherever the differences in approach lay, I believe we need Johnson's perspective just as much as we need loving resistance to it. To address some of the author's concerns I offer the following.

We can agree that "racial identity" as a given set of universally held and experienced ideas may not exist (or may be a series of dream-killing enclosures), and we can agree that as a concept, it fails to grasp and attend to the galactic expression of Black diasporic experience that the author points to. In this vein, "race" requires clarity. Weheliye's straightforward formulation for race is helpful:

Race should be viewed not as an ideology or the erroneous ascription of social meaning to existent biological classifications ... but, in the words of Dorothy Roberts, as "a political system that governs people by sorting them into social groupings based on invented biological demarcations. ... Race is not a biological category that is politically charged. It is a political category that has been disguised as a biological one"²

Operationally, race is "an ongoing set of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of non-white subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west."³ This system produces racism as defined by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (*Golden Gulag*, 2006) as premature vulnerability to state-sanctioned violence, functioning on different scales simultaneously—body, city, state, memory,

and territory—and justified by race-based common sense.

Thus, race as an assemblage (where race, location, and time together inform what it means to be human, see Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter on Being Human as Praxis*, 2015) produces certain expressions of "Black ethnic politics," and though these expressions might represent a complex and evolving Pandora's box, we know for certain that Black identification processes far predate the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and that they exist as a source of survival and support against a violent modern humanity committed to a "race" system (which of course, includes white people). What I suggest with these ideas is that a truly "interracial" landscape of working-class solidarity with white people is most deeply possible through and with Black study, with a naked focus on race. If we thought about race in the manner of Sylvia Wynter, McKittrick, and Weheliye, there would be no way to circumvent capitalism, genocide, and immigrant and migrant dispossession. There would be no way to exclude white people. This would address our need for a more syncretic narrative of practical history, one which is found for example in the work of Lisa Lowe (*The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 2015), where she "investigates the often obscured connections between the emergence of European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, and the east Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." In a similar effort, Ciccariello-Maher explores the need for a radical dialectical politics, writing that "for those relegated to nonbeing and condemned to invisibility, to even appear is a violent act—because it is violent to the structures of the world and because it will inevitably be treated as such."⁴ Thus, these scholars suggest that concrete resistance requires we avoid "ontological apartheid" (the impulse to rank and make commensurate our histories and emplaced experiences). Intimacy would require that we deny the divisibility of

class from race and gender (where one must become the standpoint through which the others are subsumed), in order to engage in a dialectical tension that keeps our solidarities stretching and unfinished.

Johnson develops a critique that the Black Panther Party movement (BPPM) failed to marshal broad-based support on the level of the New Deal, as an example of a universal program purported to have helped everyone. Yet the New Deal is widely critiqued for failing Black people,⁵ specifically because most New Deal programs discriminated against Blacks, authorized separate and lower pay scales for Blacks, refused outright to support Black applicants (for example the Federal Housing Authority refused to guarantee mortgages for Blacks who tried to buy in white neighborhoods), and the Civilian Conservation Corps maintained segregated camps. The Social Security Act excluded those job categories Blacks traditionally filled (domestic work), and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration policies forced more than 100,000 Blacks off the land in 1933 and 1934. At the same time there was widespread working-class nonsupport for an anti-lynching bill and a bill to abolish the poll tax.

We could posit that it would be difficult to name a movement (including the BPPM) that was or is not limited in scope, scale, and purpose and that we could reframe our understanding of the impact of movements to continue learning from them. A counterdiscourse would be one that admitted we do not always understand, or could not always have understood, a movement's shaping forces. "It is not possible," Ciccariello-Maher writes,

to decolonize without radicalizing. Any process of decolonization that shies away from incessant dialectical tensions, the contingency of struggle, and the indeterminacy of the future risks reiterating the history of actually existing decolonization that Fanon unceremoniously dismissed as the "dead end" and "sterile

formalism" of bourgeois nationalist rule.⁶

However, specific to the BPPM it does bear noting that in fact this movement did produce the sort of tangible policy outcomes Johnson finds most compelling⁷—notably the nationwide adoption of the Black Panther Party's (BPP's) free breakfast programs. Heynen investigates "how the BPP's Free Breakfast for Children Program was used as a political program for ensuring survival and social reproduction, but also how it was central to a dynamic rendering of utopian politics around the Black Community"⁸ (our own Pandora's box), finding that

the ways in which the BPP struggled for social reproduction through their breakfast program in their Black communities, and how it allowed them to organize chapters across the United States, and then produce an internationally recognized moment of revolutionary potential, exhibits how individual actors transform and reproduce the material foundations of life in scaled ways, and transform the geographies of survival.

Alondra Nelson finds that the BPP led the first nationally organized breakfast program in the United States, either in the public or private sector, and that the party's focus on health care was ideological, proceeding from the idea that Black people's access to health was a basic human right.⁹

Johnson speaks of a "mystification" whereby an adherence to "racial-standpoint epistemology" (BLM providing a key example per the author) obscures the "differing and conflicting material interests and ideological positions that animate Black political life in real time and space," yet he requires his Black readers take up this very same elision in order to prioritize "working-class interests" before commitments to the divisive Black ethnic politics he outlines. This seems like a double-mystification that requires a second sight that is not reciprocated (the terms of which DuBois spoke of with "double consciousness" in *The Souls of Black Folk*), one in which Black

Americans in fact have historically engaged every midterm and general election. Much has been made of the very durable trend of Black women voters (followed by Black male voters) overwhelmingly aligning with the Democratic Party up and down midterm and general-election tickets. These are the most predictable Democratic voters in the United States, and they already and loyally vote with a diverse, white-led political party that purports to be about the people but falls victim to its “neutrality” and to neoliberal capital pranks on a regular basis. In other words, there is little evidence that Black voters are not already doing what Johnson ask they do because when Black folks are overwhelmingly voting Democratic, they are not voting with a Black Power sentiment—they are voting to make the best decision possible under conditions of heteropatriarchal, capitalist, imperial white supremacy. We are still where we are, surveilled and killed while walking, breathing, doing our jobs, leaving a vacation, visiting friends, or driving a car. Thus, to ask Black readers to shrug off race as a central analytic is to ask them to 1) do what they already do on a regular basis to survive as good liberal subjects, as if they don’t, and 2) pretend that the very reason survival is so fraught has nothing to do with the same reason we are ignored as an electorate. As Lentin states, “If the function of race is to determine the boundaries of who is considered human and who is at its borders (not-quite-human) or indeed, completely outside (nonhuman), then any attempt to theorize race without placing centrally the thoughts and experiences of those precisely defined as not-quite and nonhuman reenacts a racializing violence.”¹⁰

Finally on this point we might also ask ourselves whether in public life we could ever make similar political demands of indigenous North Americans or any indigenous group without risking real incredulity from even the most cynical Fox News pundit. It likely surprises no one for instance, to hear that indigenous tribes living in the Amazon

rainforest are protesting (on the basis of *eco-genocide*) Brazilian President-elect Jair Bolsonaro’s public commitments to state-sponsored violence and neocolonial dispossession. On what basis could we suggest that their problems lay in their militancy (as Johnson suggests with regard to BPPM and BLM)? In the North American indigenous context, we know that “Indians” were often consolidated onto multi-tribe “reservation” enclosures, speaking different languages and having distinct geographical and cultural ways-of-knowing, and yet despite these diversities and diasporas, nonindigenous audiences witness a simultaneous, ongoing demand that indigenous cosmologies, treaties, and lives be reckoned with.

Black Solidarity: Politics, Not Biology

At the end of his magisterial book *We Who Are Dark* (2009), Tommie Shelby chooses to quote W.E.B. Du Bois’ thinking and feeling from *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), where Du Bois examines a kind of “pragmatic nationalism” (not related to the nation-state):

But one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history, have suffered a common disaster, and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group vary with the ancestors that they have in common and many others: Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery, the discrimination and insult, and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa.

Shelby uses this excerpt as a founda-

tion for two related positions: 1) that Black political solidarity as understood through the common experience of racial oppression (one's vulnerability to anti-Black racism) continues to be a valuable source of motivation and strength in the face of unrelenting vulnerabilities, death, alienation, despair, and self-doubt—and toward a vigor “necessary for both self-respect and collective self-defense,” and 2) a more robust solidarity must include a “specifically political mode of Blackness practiced through certain principles such as anti-racism, equal educational and employment opportunity, and tolerance for group differences and individuality, and to emancipatory goals, such as achieving substantive racial equality—especially in employment, education, and wealth—and ending ghetto poverty.” Interestingly, Shelby explicitly calls for Blacks to resist political centralization, for the very reasons Johnson points to, and says Black self-organization is important, should be voluntary, and should be rooted in particular communities of interest—a multi-sited public sphere focused on dialogue and participation. In this sense, while Black interests can be advanced through multiracial associations or within a multiracial polity, the well-being of Blacks always also requires—as a means to attend to accumulating, historical, unfair disadvantage—a collective sense of Black self-determination.

Johnson critiques “the liberal decoupling of race and class that supplanted more radical versions of working-class left politics,” citing the BLM and the BPP movements as examples of why focusing on race is misguided and critiquing these movements for a lack of outcomes. We can agree that the decoupling is a problem, but it is a problem because race-class is an always-present (and often ignored) intersectional assemblage, present whether or not the guise is a focus on “class-consciousness.” The influence of these movements cannot be measured only in static outcomes (although there are in fact real outcomes, such as the federal free breakfast program and a

deeper public tension and engagement with Black vulnerability to “premature death”; see Gilmore's 2006 *Golden Gulag*). The benefits of universal programs such as the New Deal cannot be misremembered as materially transforming for the better the lives of the most marginalized Black Americans. Continued deep grappling with race and white supremacy by Black Americans can help us cultivate a Black political consciousness and solidarity from which to strengthen race-class articulations, whereas the pivot to support class political interests along party lines with the kind of power and influence Johnson seeks has not demonstrated to Black Americans the kinds of mutuality and support required in an ongoing, historically and cumulatively race-class reality.

NOTES

1. C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Spear Press, Second Edition, Revised, 1969).
2. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014).
3. Weheliye.
4. George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Duke University Press, 2017).
5. Adolph Reed, “Race and the Disruption of the New Deal Coalition,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly* (Vol. 27, No. 2, 1991), 326–333; Eric Rauchway, *The Great Depression and the New Deal: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
6. Ciccariello-Maher, 11.
7. For an example of the dominant scholarship, see Brady Thomas Heiner, “Foucault and the Black Panthers,” *City* (Vol. 11, No. 3, 2007), 313–356.
8. Nik Heynen, “Bending the Bars of Empire from Every Ghetto for Survival: The Black Panther Party's Radical Anti-hunger Politics of Social Reproduction and Scale,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Vol. 99, No. 2, 2009), 406–422.
9. Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: the Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
10. Alana Lentin, “Thinking blackly: Beyond biopolitics and bare life,” March 22, 2017, www.alanalentin.net/2017/03/22/thinking-blackly-beyond-bio-politics-and-bare-life/.

Syria, the United States, and the Left

ELLA WIND

AS THE WAR IN SYRIA DRAWS to a close, the debate on the U.S. left over that conflict seems as intractable as ever. The immediacy of Syrian politics for Americans seems to ebb and flow as the war impinges on a shifting but surprisingly broad scope of issues salient to U.S. politics: migration, Islamism, foreign intervention, terrorism, and relations with Iran and Russia. At times its relevance crashes in sudden waves. The photo of Alan Kurdi washed up on a beach seemed to suddenly offer the possibility of a more concerted international effort to resettle refugees humanely. But other waves come, just as fierce as those before. For many, the ISIS-affiliated attacks in France seemed to sweep away the sympathy for the plight of refugees just as quickly as Kurdi's photo had brought it.

The controversies feel near-mechanical at this point. There are of course the now well-trodden quarrels over the veracity of reports on gas attacks or on the origins of various groups inside Syria. A more general debate pivots on uncovering the "true" nature of the opposition and revolt: Was it an anti-democratic uprising to install an Islamist regime, or was it a democratic and secular revolutionary attempt? What was the exact ratio of these two opposed camps, and when did one or the other take dominance?

As with other international conflicts, there has been contention over how to characterize the involvement of third countries.

Many argue that censure of Russian and Iranian involvement in Syria should take second place to condemnation of the United States and its allies' role. A less persuasive version of this argument, which claims that the United States is at root the primary cause of the world's woes, suffers from a bizarre version of U.S.-centrism, being overly dismissive of the importance of internal and regional political dynamics. A more compelling case for the U.S. left to retain a primary focus on the imperialism of their own country is offered by Noam Chomsky: "Even if the United States was responsible for 2 percent of the violence in the world instead of the majority of it, it would be that 2 percent I would be primarily responsible for. And that is a simple ethical judgment."¹

This essay does not seek to make an intervention on any of these well-worn debates, as necessary as any of them might be. Whether or not one accepts Chomsky's argument about a primary moral responsibility for one's own country's actions, it does seem that there is an especially large gap on the U.S. left regarding a big-picture understanding of the nature of U.S. involvement in Syria over the past eight years. A less muddled analysis of our government's actions and intentions is needed.

The argument has often been made that the left is so weak that any foreign policy stance it takes is mostly irrelevant in any case. Yet, in the last few years, with the rise of left groups like the Democratic Socialists of America with some degree of influence on American politics, a future in which leftist debates over far-flung countries might have actual consequences has become less diffi-

ELLA WIND is a PhD student in sociology at New York University and a union organizer with GSOC-UAW 2110. She lived in Syria from 2010 to 2011.

cult to imagine.² These debates about moral responsibility are not merely philosophical but also empirical questions. The correct diagnosis requires an accurate understanding of the situation to be resolved. Such an understanding of Syria is unquestionably absent on the left today.

Drawing Clarity from Complexity

It is true that the Syrian situation is incredibly complex. The degree of temporal and geographical variation of the war impedes clear assessment of the conflict's most relevant events and actors. Syria in the last eight years has contained multiple uprisings and multiple subconflicts that have created a pile of information for observers to sift through. Of course, one obvious challenge is that of separating fact from fiction in a war reported largely via smuggled videos, second-hand recounting, and citizen journalists. Yet beyond this, the media must undertake the task of distilling this heap of facts into a coherent analysis—understanding which events constitute game changers and which are minor side stories. All this in a country that, prior to the 2011 uprising, was of almost no interest to most Americans, who only have the barest knowledge of the historical, political, and social context of the region, especially beyond its intersection with U.S. affairs. The difficulty of this undertaking is a major reason why it is possible for two people, each basing their analysis on well-established facts, to arrive at such wildly differing narratives.

The Syrian conflict can be described as having passed through five stages. Of course, these stages generally don't have clear-cut turning points. They overlap, in part due to the wide geographical variation in how the war's dynamics have unfolded. In the coastal areas around Latakia and Tartous, where Alawites are concentrated, the regime has managed to hold a relatively firm grip on power throughout the conflict, although not without challenges. Syria's major cities—Aleppo,

Hama, Homs, and Damascus—running like an urban spine down the non-coastal Western region of Syria from the Turkish to the Lebanese borders, have wavered between being held by various militias and the regime. Eastern Syria, where the relatively less dense population clusters around the fertile agricultural strips and bodies of water breaking up the otherwise arid desert landscape, has seen fierce fighting in the second half of the conflict because of the strategic importance of its oil and wheat fields, its shared border with Iraq, and its concentration of Kurdish populations.

Stages of the Conflict

The first stage of the Syrian conflict was dominated by the grassroots uprising sparked in February 2011 in the small southern city of Deraa. It began when the regime arrested and brutally tortured schoolboys who had graffitied anti-regime slogans on a wall. Public outrage grew when police fired live rounds into the crowds of the boys' families. Demonstrations erupted across the country, led by the smaller urban centers of marginalized rural provinces and later by the large (but also marginalized) city of Homs. The brutal tactics used by security forces against peaceful protesters swayed many people from soft support or timid neutrality to open anger at the regime.

This was followed by the militarization of the opposition, a process that began slowly in the second half of 2011 but picked up speed significantly over the course of 2012. The early stage of militarization was spearheaded by the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a somewhat hodge-podge group composed of defected military officers and ordinary Syrians who had taken up arms. From even its earliest days, the FSA operated somewhere on the spectrum between an official organization and a brand name, the adoption of which by a militia would signal a broad orientation toward democracy, secularism, and Syrian identity.³

By late 2012, militarization edged toward the third phase, in which the FSA began to be eclipsed by militias relatively more oriented toward Islamism and in some cases with much less concern for representing Syrians qua Syrians. This turn was driven by the superior fighting capabilities and heightened discipline of militia fighters who were veterans of other struggles in the region, coupled with the escalating race by Gulf funders and others to build client networks inside Syria via massive quantities of arms shipments.⁴

ISIS' emergence onto the world stage would give birth to the fourth stage of Syria's tragedy. In 2014, the capture of Mosul dominated international news headlines, with the group seemingly (for those who had not been following Syria) coming out of nowhere. In September, Obama announced the beginning of an open-ended campaign of airstrikes in Iraq and eastern Syria against ISIS and the obscure "Khorasan" group.⁵ While Russia had supported the Assad regime with military and political aid from the beginning of the conflict, in September 2015 it undertook a full-scale intervention alongside an Iranian-led ground offensive, granting Syria's civil war the dubious distinction of being the first conflict Russia had fought outside of the borders of the former USSR since its fall.⁶ While this constituted a major turn for the geopolitics of the conflict, for many of those on the ground in Syria, the professional airstrikes of these major powers were not a terribly dissimilar experience from the barrel bombs dropped by the regime for the previous years.

In 2017, the three-year blitz by the United States and the Syrian Democratic Forces, their Kurdish-led on-the-ground proxy force, finally brought ISIS completely to its knees. The Russian-Iranian surge, along with the latitude given to Assad to not have to deal with ISIS, all but sealed Assad's victory over the other rebel militias. A sixth stage is now emerging, that of the final negotiations over the terms of the victory, for which some questions still remain unanswered: What

happens to the Kurds in a postwar Assadist Syria? What happens to the millions of refugees stranded abroad by this brutal conflict? And what will United States postwar policy toward Syria look like?

U.S. Goals and Strategies in Syria

The nature, depth, and goals of U.S. involvement in Syria have been a huge source of confusion on the U.S. left and elsewhere. As with other confusions around the conflict, these are based on a misunderstanding of the relative importance of a variety of programs of intervention and how they have changed over time.

From amidst the noise, we can draw out a signal of broad trends in Washington's orientation. From the perspective of the U.S. foreign-policy establishment, Syria and the Arab Spring have essentially offered a range of possible outcomes, none of which are ideal. It is true that the United States has a historically cold relationship with the Assad regime.⁷ Yet this did not mean that the uprising was viewed as an unambiguously clear chance for the United States to oust him. The most fitting interpretation of the many contradictory statements and leaked policy documents regarding Syria indicates that the various branches and institutions tasked with developing foreign policy and military strategy were wracked by debate over "the autocrats you know or the Islamic extremists you fear."⁸ The United States saw itself presented with a set of unpalatable solutions, among which it attempted to navigate toward those that offered the highest chance of survival for its client regimes in the Middle East and the least direct threat to its interests. This meant that while Washington, at periods, hoped to weaken Assad, it always remained skeptical of a full takeover by the much less-known popular revolutionary movements or militia groups that organized themselves in Syria in the last eight years.

The Obama administration's ambiguity

on challenging Assad too aggressively was well-illustrated in the August 2013 decision not to attack the regime after the Syrian military crossed Obama's stated "red line" by gassing hundreds of civilians in a Damascus suburb. While many worried that a U.S. attack seemed likely, Obama chose to seek congressional approval. This stalling created space for Russia to offer a deal to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons program, allowing the United States to save face on not following through on its threat.⁹ While some attributed this to protests, in fact, demonstrations against the airstrikes were small and not very well-organized. The decision not to strike came from within the government itself and was unlikely influenced by the minor public outcries where they occurred.

The broad orientation being stated, understanding the twists and turns of how the United States sought to pursue this vision requires a closer examination of the changes over time. Military intervention into Syria has taken place in large part via three large distinctive programs, which changed in relative importance as Washington responded to changes on the ground. In rough chronological order, first was the State Department's provision of nonlethal weaponry to the FSA; second, the covert CIA training program Timber Sycamore; and third, Operation Inherent Resolve, the Pentagon's formation of the anti-ISIS coalition in alliance with the Kurdish People's Protection Units, the YPG, in Syria. I will also discuss, to a lesser degree, the role of U.S. regional allies.

Support for the FSA

Early on in the conflict, the U.S. foreign policy establishment had extremely fractious internal disagreements around what sort of role Washington might play in Syria. Initially they settled on a policy of the State Department providing materials such as food rations, medical supplies, communications equipment, and vehicles to the FSA through

the Supreme Military Council of the opposition, with the total value amounting to around \$250 million dollars. These contributions were bolstered by additional supplies provided by Britain and France.¹⁰

Syria's civil war has the
dubious distinction of
being the first conflict
Russia fought outside the
borders of the former USSR
since its fall.

These supplies were enough to give the militarized opposition hope for larger infusions of resources later but fell far short of anything that could overthrow the regime. Essentially, the supplies maintained the momentum of the war, leaving each side to be just weak enough to neither win nor lose. As the second year of the Arab Spring crept to a close, Syria did not seem to offer up any of the resolutions¹¹ that had been reached by that time in other Arab Spring countries, such as the geopolitical negotiations that led to transition in Yemen, the holding of Egypt's first legitimate elections in half a century, or the capture and killing of Qaddafi in Libya.

Instead, Hezbollah's definitive entrance into the war in 2012 on Assad's side, and escalating Iranian and Russian involvement, served to bolster the Syrian regime's lagging fortunes and further prolong the fighting. But the opposition's military capacities were also reinforced at the same time by a kaleidoscope of militia groups that gradually eclipsed the FSA. These groups, with their alliances and splits shifting with each turn on the battlefield, ranged from secular and nationalist to Islamist, with the latter growing ascendant. The program to supply the FSA was eventually suspended in December 2013

when shipments were seized by the Islamic Front.¹² In any case, by that point the Obama administration had turned its focus to other ways for dealing with the unfolding conflict in Syria.

Operation Timber Sycamore

In 2012, CIA Director David Petraeus first put forth the concept of a covert program to train rebels to fight Bashar al-Assad. This was initially shelved, considered too aggressive a step. It was not Bashar al-Assad's turning fortunes that would eventually put this option back on the table; rather Washington's regional allies dragged it deeper into the conflict. The influx of massive foreign support for the rebels from these allies over spring and summer 2012 led to an unprecedented proliferation of distinct armed groups across Syria. The United States at first sought to ensure that arms supplies were guided to the "right hands" by limiting shipments of any overly powerful weaponry, with the CIA monitoring arms supplies by the Turks, Qataris, and Saudis.¹³

But the war continued, and the voices calling for intervention in the form of more arms deliveries grew louder. In the spring of 2013, Obama granted the CIA permission to organize Timber Sycamore—a Jordan-based program for providing arms and training to particular rebel groups, supplemented by backing from some Gulf countries.¹⁴

Yet the new administration remained wary of repeating the mistakes of the occupation of Iraq. Many attributed the major failure there to the total destruction of the country's government institutions. The administration did not want to risk any of the newly emergent militias simply taking power. Instead, the administration hoped that with a moderate strengthening of the rebels with whom it had relations, Assad could be persuaded to undertake a Yemen-style deal: a gentle transition of the head of state while leaving most of the governing institutions

in place, guided by local and international powers. This fine balancing act was destined to fail. Of course, many others besides the United States administration had a stake in building client networks among rebels in Syria. The Americans were trying to add just the right amount of salt to a stew that had ten other cooks. And as money flowed in from other countries, groups, and individuals around the world, maintaining influence and discipline over any particular group only grew more complicated.

Ironically, the biggest game changer would come from a group that relied much less on this web of funding networks: ISIS.¹⁵ With the capture of Mosul and the theft of at least half a billion dollars from banks in northern and western Iraq in summer 2014, the administration could no longer justify its primary focus on the regime. ISIS would have

**The U.S.-led coalition
is estimated to have
conducted over 15,000
strikes in eastern Syria,
killing at least 6,575
civilians.**

to take greater priority. The covert Timber Sycamore program continued on, but in September, Congress authorized the Pentagon to train and equip Syrian rebels against ISIS as part of an international coalition with NATO allies.¹⁶ This entire program proved to be a fiasco. The \$500 million training program began with the initial goal of producing 5,000 fighters. In the end, it produced around five. Beyond the more direct challenges of attacks from other militia groups, the program's failure was attributable at least in part to the rebel fighters' frustrations over being directed to fight ISIS instead of Assad—the whole reason

many had taken up arms in the first place.¹⁷

Timber Sycamore, which was more targeted against Assad, was somewhat more successful in its mission. In 2015, using tank-destroying missiles, militias from the program trounced government forces in northern Syria. But Russian intervention on the side of the regime soon overwhelmed them, just as the U.S. administration was becoming increasingly oriented to dedicating its military efforts to defeating ISIS. Trump's official closing of the \$1 billion program in 2017 did not therefore constitute a major turning point: It was already clearly on its last legs.¹⁸

While both the CIA program and the Pentagon train-and-equip efforts fizzled out, another experiment in how the United States would weigh in on the Syrian outcome would prove more enduring, and its beginnings constitute a major turning point of the Syrian civil war overall. This program, like the train-and-equip program, was not focused on fighting Bashar al-Assad, Iran, or Russia, but in taking out ISIS. However, in this case, Washington's chosen proxy fighters on the ground were more effective, perhaps because for them also it was the fight against ISIS, rather than Assad, that was their own urgent concern.

Operation Inherent Resolve

ISIS' origins and continued presence in Iraq, coupled with their insistence on relative financial independence—preferring oil smuggling and extortion to begging wealthy foreign funders for money—meant that their expansion into Syria began from the Iraq border into the country's concentration of oil fields in the northeast.

ISIS' push into northeast Syria had brought them into intense conflict with the YPG, the Kurdish militia affiliated with the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, which had long challenged the government of Turkey. The YPG had in previous years wrested control of Syria's majority Kurdish areas

from the Assad regime. Since the uprising, they had also established a unified military and political dominance in what had previously been a more heterogeneous Kurdish political landscape. When Washington first announced an open-ended military campaign against ISIS in September 2014, it saw eastern Syria's Kurdish regions as a tangential concern to the majority Sunni Arab regions captured by ISIS, such as Raqqa and Deir Ezzor.

This changed in a period of a few weeks with the battle for Kobane. As YPG fighters successfully slowed the advances of ISIS militants, U.S. policymakers took notice and soon began providing intensive military support to the YPG in the form of airstrikes. From August to December of 2014, the United States self-reported having conducted 559 airstrikes in Syria, of which over three-fourths took place in Kobane.¹⁹ But because of the YPG's deep ties to the PKK, designated by the United States as a terrorist group, a workaround for a legal military alliance needed to be created. Thus was born the "Syrian Democratic Forces," a YPG-dominated group that also incorporates some minor Sunni Arab militias approved by the United States.²⁰ The group acquired other regional and international backers, including France, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.²¹

In a pattern that would be repeated across every major city in Syria that had been captured by ISIS, the U.S. coalition showered the city with hundreds or thousands of airstrikes while YPG fighters provided the ground support. As the strategy proved militarily effective, Washington put more boots on the ground (estimates range from 2,000 to 4,000 at the peak). By 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIS since fall 2014 was announced to be \$14.3 billion, with an average daily cost of \$13.6 million, far eclipsing any of the other forms of United States involvement in Syria.²² By the metric of human life, the impact has been devastating: The coalition is estimated to have conducted over 15,000

strikes in eastern Syria, killing at least 6,575 civilians, and many of the “liberated” cities were left hollowed out, with infrastructure destroyed, residents displaced, and few prospects for rehabilitation in the medium term.²³

Abdelaziz Alhamza is a founding member of *Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently*, a major underground reporting effort that smuggled out information on life in Raqqa under ISIS. In an interview with the *New Yorker* after the United States coalition announced it had successfully shaken ISIS’ grip on its former capital, he explained why American and SDF celebrations of Raqqa’s recapture were not matched among Raqqaans themselves:

I am not happy. How could I be? It is true that ISIS is defeated now in Raqqa. But ninety percent of the city is destroyed; there is rubble everywhere. Thousands have been killed. Hundreds of thousands are living in miserable conditions. People are sleeping outdoors in the desert heat. They are lucky if they have a tent. ...

People told me that when the international coalition started bombing Raqqa, in 2015, the air strikes were targeted at ISIS fighters, at their headquarters and their vehicles. They knew that being home was not a problem, they would be safe. They did fear Russian air strikes and Assad’s forces. But then the strategy of the coalition seemed to change; the strikes seemed more random, less accurate. They felt that the main goal was only to get rid of ISIS without caring enough about thousands of civilians who are living there.²⁴

While the foreign policy establishment’s main insight from the failures of Iraq is that destroying governing institutions to overthrow a dictator may do more harm than good, one wonders if a future lesson from Syria may be that the indiscriminate razing of cities to save them from occupation by a tyrannical jihadist group is rather counter-productive as well.

Misreading of the United States Intervention

By virtually every metric, the intervention against ISIS has been the major intervention of the United States in Syria. If we can use dollars as a proxy, the FSA provisions amounted to a few hundreds of millions of dollars in cumulative costs, and the CIA program came to \$1 billion. The failed anti-ISIS effort, the train-and-equip program coupled with the eastern Syria airstrikes campaign, completely eclipses the costs of all of the other programs summed, clocking in at well over \$14 billion in spending (and still rising).

And yet, what the average American has in mind when discussing (whether criticizing or praising) “United States intervention in Syria” remains myopically limited to intervention against Bashar al-Assad. This can be illustrated in a number of ways. For example, Google Trends, which provides a metric for analyzing the volume of search queries over periods of time, shows that searches for “United States intervention in Syria” show distinctive peaks around April 2017 and 2018—not around the times when United States announced new escalations of the anti-ISIS coalition or when air strikes reached their peak, but when the United States threatened to strike assets held by Bashar al-Assad.

Similarly, while some protests have taken place whenever the United States has proposed airstrikes against assets belonging to Assad, there have been virtually no protests against the United States anti-ISIS airstrikes in either Iraq or Syria.

The reason we have diverged so far from the actual facts of U.S. involvement appears to be overdetermined by a number of overlapping factors. It seems as if many of us have an overly narrow conception of the form U.S. imperialism should be expected to take—that Washington should be expected to intervene primarily for the purpose of regime change and not against non-state actors found in a

given country. Of course, many U.S. interventions do have the goal of regime change. But the rise of non-state groups engaged in asymmetrical warfare against the United States has led to the rise of military involvement against non-state targets in Afghanistan, Colombia, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and elsewhere. The shift to this type of warfare aligns with the “jihadist threat” of small militia groups replacing the threat of Communism, which was largely represented by USSR-aligned governments. Massive and prolonged bombing campaigns against militia groups shouldn’t be unexpected, yet they still seem to go much less noticed than do similar actions against governments, even if they are just as fatal, morally dubious, and costly.

Second, some faulty analysis results from falsely assuming an identity between the goals of U.S. allies and of the U.S. policy establishment itself. Washington of course deserves criticism for the many immoral actions taken by countries to which it provides weaponry and support. Yet it is an analytical overstep to claim that the entirety of these countries’ actions simply represent Washington’s true intentions that the U.S. is unable to carry out on its own because of PR optics. It should be clear by now from the public and heated fights between U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia and Qatar or Canada, as well as the U.S. funding for a group affiliated with the PKK, longtime bugbear of the Turkish government, that allies held together by a bundle of shared goals may still at times find themselves with different interests and different strategic perspectives that may lead them to act not in coordination, but at odds with one another. Even the often lumped-together “Gulf Arab countries” have had a range of policy orientations toward Syria. This is not to excuse the immorality of alliances of convenience with bad actors, but rather to point out that a theory of allies’ perfectly homogenous interests across the board tends to obscure more than it clarifies.

Some might point to another argument:

If we misunderstood the American intervention, it is because the American media seek to hide the truth about Syria because of their single-minded focus on smear. This is a peculiar explanation. For all their faults, main-

Some critics seem to imply
the anti-ISIS intervention
is a minor side-project
to the primary goal of
overthrowing Assad via the
backing of Islamist groups.

stream U.S. outlets like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have done extensive reporting on the anti-ISIS coalition, including some admirable investigative work revealing both the human toll and the undercounting of deaths in U.S. reports.²⁵ U.S. officials have publicly spoken with journalists about Operation Inherent Resolve and its deep military involvement in eastern Syria, including regularly with outlets like the BBC. Airwars, a transparency project based at the University of London, has done a great journalistic service by providing independent and well-verified assessments of international military actions in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. *Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently*²⁶ has reported extensively on the “war of annihilation” committed by the U.S. bombing campaign.

It is not the primary-source journalists who have failed to undertake their fourth-estate duties. Rather, in this case many leftist writers on Syria resemble those who scour the obscure corners of the Internet for evidence of the New World Order, while sufficient evidence of the unprecedented power of society’s “cabal” of CEOs and Senators gets reported in the news every day. While latching onto every occurrence²⁷ that supports the thesis that the United States has been on a single-minded

and undifferentiated campaign from day one to take Assad out of power at whatever cost, they ignore the many other facts working against their thesis.

In many cases, these analyses of U.S. policy in Syria merely misrepresent by omission, devoting entire articles or interviews to explicating the U.S. establishment's unquenchable thirst to oust Assad and put the rebels in power, while failing to even mention the fact of the larger U.S. bombing campaign against ISIS already many years underway.²⁸ Another often-used form of misrepresentation is to demonstrate the scale and ferocity of the U.S. intervention by a series of factual tidbits related to the topic, without a sense of scale, importance, or relationship between them. Take this paragraph from a recent article in by Greg Shupak in *Jacobin*:

The U.S. admits it has between 2,000 and 4,000 American troops in Syria. Between late 2016 and May 2017, the U.S. bombed pro-government forces at least three times. The U.S.'s support for armed groups in Syria has gone far beyond its backing of Kurdish groups, as America and its conservative allies in the Middle East have supported groups fighting the Syrian government, including reactionary religious fundamentalists guilty of sectarian violence.²⁹

All of these facts are true of course; they aren't pulled out of thin air. But through their list-like juxtaposition, they present a picture of the American intervention that seems to imply the anti-ISIS intervention is a minor side-project to the primary goal of overthrowing Assad via the backing of Islamist groups. In fact, the 2,000 troops acknowledged by the Pentagon in Syria are there supporting the U.S. coalition against ISIS, in cooperation with the SDF—a fairly important contextualization that gets obscured.

As another example, Shupak is technically correct that the United States has bombed government forces in Syria “at least three times.” He refers to an article discuss-

ing three such attacks—the 2016 air raid in Deir Ezzor, Donald Trump's airstrike against the government Shayrat airbase following the Khan Shaykun chemical attack, and the attack on government forces in the Al-Tanf deconfliction zone in May 2017. What is not mentioned is the fact that almost all the U.S. strikes against the Assad government occurred when its forces threatened to encroach on the SDF and were not part of any effort to topple the regime.

Whether such analyses can be attributed to a genuinely naïve lack of knowledge or a concerted effort to present only a certain picture, they have contributed to the poor understanding on the left of the extensive U.S. involvement in Syria. While the debates over gas attacks, how to characterize the opposition, and the origins of ISIS continue to rage on, clear and informed discussion of the U.S. strategy of airstrikes against ISIS remains in short supply.

Loose Threads

The war in Syria is drawing to a close, and, for the near and medium term, the Assad regime looks to have won. Still, some questions about the postwar situation remain, most pressing among them the future of the Kurds and of the many Syrians who have left. Washington will have some influence on the final terms of the victory, though with the current administration in place, the left's ability to shape these terms in the next few years will remain admittedly limited.

Rojava

In Syria, the Kurdish strategy has often been called *realpolitik*—a fine-grained balancing act between the different powers to ensure achieving some gains in a postwar Syria. While the YPG has already conceded on the point of an independent Kurdish nation-state, they have called for a federal system that secures minority rights for Kurds and retains YPG policing of Kurdish-majority

areas.³⁰ On the balance sheet in their favor in negotiations, the SDF currently controls roughly a quarter of the country, making it the single largest power-broker besides the regime. Furthermore, the regions they hold include strategic oil fields and breadbasket areas. The ability to reacquire access to this territory without a drawn-out fight has obvious appeal to the regime, and Assad's deputy prime minister has opened the door for discussion of Kurdish demands.³¹

The de facto Kurdish autonomous region in Syria is formally known as the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria but is still commonly known as Rojava. Social arrangements there have many positive aspects, including democratic structures and feminist practices. Yet, as Yasser Munif points out, there were also hundreds of other local councils practicing democratic governance in Arab-majority areas of Syria.³² The Rojava project was able to survive and thrive initially due largely to a strategic decision on the part of the Assad regime to withdraw its military forces from Kurdish-majority areas in July 2012, to free up troops for fighting elsewhere and to placate the historically rebellious Kurdish regions.³³ This divide-and-conquer strategy worked, perhaps better than the regime could have imagined. Cooperation remained limited between Arab-majority and Kurdish-majority militias on major military offensives against the regime. The arrival of ISIS on the scene further exacerbated the split, as the group represented the primary existential threat to the Kurds in eastern Syria, while militias in the Arab-majority regions faced Assad and Russian airstrikes as a greater danger.

In the short term, adhering to the terms of the regime's divide-and-conquer strategy has been successful for the Kurds. But now, the regime looks poised to win the entire war. It is possible that the threat of YPG's military capacities on their own could compel the regime to continue with some version of a pacification. But the Assad regime's ability to tolerate a radical experiment in

democracy anywhere in Syria, as it retains a tight authoritarian grip on the rest of the country, seems questionable at best. Such an arrangement will only become more difficult due to the neighborhood in which Rojava sits. As a reconsolidated Assad regime seeks to rebuild relations with its neighbors, who

The United States faces two mutually exclusive choices: abandoning the Kurds, or further antagonizing several of the region's major poles of power.

have already made their opposition to the Rojava project clear, it will also have a growing material interest in returning the Kurds to their pre-2011 status as fully dominated under a centralized regime.

The Kurds' territorial wins in the last several years are due in great part to their intensive four-year military alliance with the United States. While the YPG's battlefield capabilities against ISIS were enough to attract the United States to recruit them as proxy fighters, their effectiveness against the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian militaries, freed up from fighting on other fronts, as well as from potential Turkish and Iraqi pressures at the borders, seem less sure. At the very least, it seems likely that some assurances of further U.S. backing are indeed required to garner Kurds the leverage needed to tip negotiations over potential Syrian federalism in their favor.

For this reason, many leftists hope the United States stays in eastern Syria to protect the Kurds' autonomous and democratic future. In an article in *In These Times*, Meredith Tax addresses many of the arguments used by the left to oppose interventionist policies, arguing that Washington should honor its

military commitments to the Kurds to ensure the continuation of a progressive enclave faced with “jihadis and fascist states that want to destroy them.”³⁴ Yet this is revealing of where the realpolitik strategy of the Rojava project becomes muddled.

The United States faces a great deal of pressure from both the Iraqi government and its NATO ally Turkey to discourage the creation of any sort of Kurdish territory in the region. Both of these countries have engaged in decades-long campaigns to brutally suppress movements for Kurdish autonomy in their own countries.

Essentially, the United States faces two mutually exclusive choices in Syria: abandoning the Kurds when it comes to holding up their tacit end of the bargain in the anti-ISIS coalition, or further antagonizing several of the region's major poles of power by maintaining an expensive and dangerous military presence in northeast Syria until a deal favorable to the Kurds is achieved (if it is achieved at all).

Making confident forecasts about Trump's foreign policies is a fool's errand, and Syria is no exception. On the one hand, Trump has made statements to the effect of intending to leave Syria as soon as possible, while his senior foreign policy advisers seem intent on remaining indefinitely.³⁵

Yet, an example just across the border already provides grounds for the prediction that the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's realpolitik may rely on an overly optimistic view of Washington's commitment to establishing a Kurdish region. The Kurds in Iraq also served as U.S. proxies against ISIS, and following the success of that military campaign, Masoud Barzani, the president of the region of Iraqi Kurdistan, held a September 2017 referendum for statehood, with the confidence that Iraqi Kurds could reap the rewards of their U.S. alliance.

In response, the Iraqi government sent troops into territories that had been held by Kurdish armed groups for three years and

then expanded even further into Kurdish-held territories, seizing even the strategic Kirkuk oil fields, with the dual blessing of Iran and Turkey. In contrast to Barzani's calculations, U.S. officials publicly scolded him for holding the referendum and sat on the sidelines as the oil fields were seized.³⁶ Considering that so many of the same geopolitical conditions were in place in Iraq as now hold in Syria, no one should be especially surprised if the United States once again steps aside to let a central government roll over Kurdish territorial gains won with the help of U.S. weaponry, airstrikes, and training.

Of course, the U.S. military establishment has no deep interest in ensuring human rights abroad—its alliance with the Kurds had nothing to do with the democratic nature of the Rojava project and everything to do with the Kurds seeing ISIS as the primary threat, whereas Arab militias were much more reluctant to turn their guns away from Assad to fight Washington's war on ISIS.

Seen from this view, relying on an alliance with the United States to mitigate potential rollbacks in autonomy under Assad's reconsolidated Syria, with its two anti-Kurdish neighbors, seems more like a high stakes, risky gamble than shrewd realpolitik.

The Refugees, Exiles, and Emigrants

Syria has been the largest contributor to the world's worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. Of the country's original population of 22 million, around 5.6 million have registered as refugees with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and another 6.1 million people are internally displaced.³⁷ Furthermore, these numbers may understate the number of Syrians who have fled the country since the beginning of the conflict, as the count of refugees (defined as those officially registered with the UN under the Convention on the Status of Refugees) misses Syrians who chose not to register, reside in the United States under temporary protected status, have

pending asylum applications, or live in places like the Gulf that are not signatories to any refugee conventions.³⁸

The last anticipated major battle of the war—the battle for Idlib—is unlikely to end with a trickle of people fleeing. Up until now, many of the agreements negotiated to banish fighters and accused fighters from areas recaptured by the regime have sent them on buses to the rebel stronghold of Idlib. When Idlib is taken back, there will be no other “Idlib” to send them to—rather, we can expect to see another major surge of people fleeing over the borders, as many as 700,000 according to some estimates.³⁹

What happens to the Syrians living outside the country once the final battles are fought? With increasing insistence, politicians in Damascus, Beirut, and Amman are claiming Syria is now a safe place for those refugees to return to. The Syrian state media have been posting photos and accounts of such returns as part of their victory lap.

For many refugees, perhaps especially for the majority residing in countries neighboring Syria, there is an ardent desire to return. Refugees in these countries face especially high barriers to accessing basic legal protections, economic opportunities, and services—a study of 400 returnees earlier this year found that lack of secure income was the primary reason for the return of 61 percent of those who came back.⁴⁰

But there is good reason to believe that many refugees will never again live in their home country. First there is the obvious reason that at this point, some who left Syria have been living abroad for as long as seven years—enough time to find work, start a family, learn a new language, and lay down roots in a new place. Economic success abroad, for those who have found it, adds another obstacle to justifying return to a now war-ravaged country. In countries with a relatively straight-forward path to naturalization, achieving full citizenship provides yet another substantial tie to their new homes.

Many young Syrian men left primarily to flee mandatory military service. To go back and not be drafted, they must pay an \$8,000 fee, quite a hefty sum for people who may be looking to return primarily for economic reasons.⁴¹

The regime's implementation of Law No. 10 presents another potential barrier to return. Law No. 10 of 2018 grants the government authority to confiscate and redevelop property without due process or compensation to owners, and it will be especially onerous to displaced residents who cannot return to the country to make property claims in the designated 30-day window.⁴²

Beyond these practicalities, a great number of Syrians have very little faith in regime promises for amnesty, and with good reason. In areas recaptured by the regime where amnesty was supposedly implemented, returnees have been reported to face significant threats, arrests, and even death.⁴³

In terms of refugees, the debate in the American left should be rather simple. In the face of continuing anti-refugee rhetoric, we should push to roll back the revised form of Trump's Muslim ban, expand the quotas for accepting refugees to the United States from Syria and other unsafe countries, and fight for an extension of Temporary Protected Status for Syrians. Where this proposal becomes more controversial is in the understanding in the pro-refugee movement of what caused Syrians to become refugees in the first place. This relies in part on an understanding of why, for many Syrians, a Syria under Assad will never again feel like a home they can return to, and an acknowledgment of the destruction Assad has wrought on his own people. It also requires an acknowledgment that depictions painting all Syrians opposed to Assad as jihadis or jihadi-sympathizers serve as fuel to the fire driving Islamophobic anti-refugee attitudes on the right and center of the American political spectrum.

Unfortunately, Syria is unlikely to be the last civil war of its kind. Authoritarianism and

strife in the region remain in ample supply and may even be growing stronger. Yet the U.S. left is growing stronger too, and may have more sway over foreign policy in the future. A clearer understanding of what happened in Syria, where our collective blind spots were, and what went so wrong is essential if the left is to have a better grasp on future conflicts.

NOTES

1. Noam Chomsky, *On Power and Ideology* (Pluto Press, 1987), 51.
2. Daniel Bessner, "What Does Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Think About the South China Sea?" *New York Times*, September 17, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/09/17/opinion/democratic-party-cortez-foreign-policy.html.
3. Although of course, each group's commitments to any of these principles might vary significantly.
4. Aron Lund, "How Assad's Enemies Gave Up on the Syrian Opposition," The Century Foundation, October 17, 2017, tcf.org/content/report/assads-enemies-gave-syrian-opposition/?session=1.
5. Dan Roberts and Spencer Ackerman, "Barack Obama authorizes air strikes against Isis militants in Syria," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/obama-speech-authorise-air-strikes-against-isis-syria; "Khorasan" was most likely a strange euphemism for Jabhat al-Nusra. See Kia Makarechi, "Did the government invent an 'imminent threat' to bolster support for war?" *Vanity Fair*, September 29, 2014, www.vanityfair.com/news/politics/2014/09/khorasan-group-invented-imminent-threat; Glenn Greenwald and Murtaza Hussain, "The Fake Terror Threat Used to Justify Bombing Syria," *The Intercept*, September 28, 2014, theintercept.com/2014/09/28/u-s-officials-invented-terror-group-justify-bombing-syria/.
6. Maria Tsvetkova and Anton Zverev, "Ghost soldiers: the Russians secretly dying for the Kremlin in Syria," *Reuters*, November 3, 2016, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-insight-idUSKBN12Y0M6; Aron Lund, "Not Just Russia: The Iranian Surge in Syria," *The Carnegie Middle East Center*, May 23, 2016, carnegie-mec.org/diwan/63650.
7. That being said, the absolute and uninterrupted chill of the relationship has been overstated by some contemporary commentators. It is easy to forget nowadays that before the Arab Spring an Obama-brokered agreement between Syria and Israel was seen as something that could be in the cards:

Seymour Hersh, "Syria Calling," *The New Yorker*, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/04/06/syria-calling. Syria was also cooperative in the initial years of Bush's "War on Terror," serving as one of the most common destinations for prisoners subjected to extraordinary rendition: Ian Cobain, "CIA rendition: more than a quarter of countries 'offered covert support,'" *The Guardian*, February 5, 2013, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/05/cia-rendition-countries-covert-support.

8. William Burns, "American Strategy in a New Middle East," *Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*, March 17, 2011, 2009-2017, state.gov/p/us/rm/2011/158516.htm; Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, "U.S. military document reveals how the West opposed a democratic Syria," *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 24, 2018, monde-diplo.com/outsidein/syria-democracy-documents.
9. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525.
10. "U.S. committed to providing non-lethal aid to Syria opposition," *The Telegraph*, April 21, 2013, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10008468/US-committed-to-providing-non-lethal-aid-to-Syria-opposition.html; Louisa Loveluck, "What's non-lethal about aid to the Syrian opposition?" *Foreign Policy*, September 20, 2012, foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/20/whats-non-lethal-about-aid-to-the-syrian-opposition/; "United States and UK suspend non-lethal aid for Syrian rebels," *BBC News*, December 11, 2013, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25331241.
11. Which, of course, all proved to be fleeting in any case.
12. Mark Landler, "U.S. Considers Resuming Non-lethal Aid to Syrian Opposition," *New York Times*, January 9, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/01/10/world/middleeast/syria-aid-may-resume-despite-fears-over-where-it-will-go.html.
13. Eric Schmitt, "CIA Said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition," *New York Times*, June 21, 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/world/middleeast/cia-said-to-aid-in-steering-arms-to-syrian-rebels.html; Nour Malas, "Syrian Rebels Get Missiles," *Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2012, www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390443684104578062842929673074.
14. Aron Lund, "How Assad's Enemies Gave Up"; C.J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid from CIA," *New York Times*, March 24, 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/middleeast/arms-airlift-to-syrian-rebels-expands-with-cia-aid.html.

15. Despite the persistent curiosity around the question of who funds ISIS, the answer appears to be mostly—itself. Most credible reporting points to the majority of ISIS funding coming from a combination of oil and antiquities-smuggling activities supplemented with taxation and theft from local populations in the areas it has conquered.

16. Denver Nicks, “U.S. Forms Anti-ISIS Coalition at NATO Summit,” *Time*, September 5, 2014, time.com/3273185/isis-us-nato/.

17. Paul McLeary, “The Pentagon Wasted \$500 Million Training Syrian Rebels. It’s About to Try Again,” *Foreign Policy*, March 18, 2018, foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/18/pentagon-wasted-500-million-syrian-rebels/.

18. Mark Mazzetti, Adam Goldman, and Michael S. Schmidt, “Behind the Sudden Death of a \$1 Billion Secret CIA War in Syria,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/world/middleeast/cia-syria-rebel-arm-train-trump.html.

19. Aron Lund, “Why the Victory in Kobane Matters,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, February 13, 2015, carnegie-mec.org/diwan/59061?lang=en.

20. Aron Lund, “Origins of the Syrian Democratic Forces: A Primer,” *Syria News Deeply*, January 22, 2016, www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2016/01/22/origins-of-the-syrian-democratic-forces-a-primer <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/62158?lang=en>.

21. Matthew Yglesias, “Donald Trump’s corruption means he’ll never be a ‘normal’ commander in chief,” *Vox*, April 16, 2018; Marc Cher-Leparrain, “The UAE has it in for the Muslim Brotherhood,” *The New Arab*, February 22, 2017, www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2017/2/23/the-uae-has-it-in-for-the-muslim-brotherhood/; Wladimir van Wilgenburg, “Saudi Arabia to invest \$100 million to SDF-held northeastern Syria,” *Kurdistan 24*, August 17, 2018, www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/b51aa096-797d-4e2e-95b2-9dd3b1286003.

22. “Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve. Targeted Operations to Defeat ISIS,” *Department of Defense website*, dod.defense.gov/OIR/ (accessed 10/31/18).

23. Glen Johnson, “Battered Syrian city deals with post-victory reality check,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 2015, www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-syria-kobani-20150202-story.html.

24. David Remnick, “The Tragic Legacy of Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently,” *New Yorker*, October 21, 2017, www.newyorker.com/news/as-told-to/the-tragic-legacy-of-raqqa-is-being-slaughtered-silently.

25. For example, Ben Hubbard and Ivor Prikett,

“Raqqa Was the Capital of ISIS. Can It Ever Be Home Again?” *New York Times*, July 11, 2018; Helene Cooper, “U.S. Strikes Killed Nearly 500 Civilians in 2017, Pentagon Says,” *New York Times*, June 1, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/us/politics/pentagon-civilian-casualties.html; “Reports: Dozens killed or wounded in east Syria airstrikes,” *Washington Post*, October 19, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/reports-dozens-killed-or-wounded-in-east-syria-airstrikes/2018/10/19/a4f12162-d3d7-11e8-a4db-184311d27129_story.html.

26. Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, www.raqqa-sl.com/en/; “Thousands of Syrians stuck in the desert risk starvation,” *Washington Post*, October 29, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/thousands-of-syrians-stuck-in-the-desert-risk-starvation/2018/10/30/134a8c22-dc0a-11e8-8bac-bfe01fcdc3a6_story.html.

27. For a particularly egregious example of this, see this interpretation of the most recent U.S. airstrike against the regime: twitter.com/RaniaKhalek/status/984962912497340416.

28. For a few examples of this, see As’ad AbuKhalil, “The Left and the Syria Debate,” *The Real News Network*, December 19, 2016, therealnews.com/columns/the-left-and-the-syria-debate/; Branko Marcetic, “The Elite Consensus on Syria,” *Jacobin*, August 4, 2017, www.jacobinmag.com/2017/04/syria-airstrikes-trump-assad-gas-attack-chemical-weapons-hillary-clinton.

29. Greg Shupak, “U.S. Out of Syria,” *Jacobin*, April 18, 2019, www.jacobinmag.com/2018/04/syria-war-us-intervention-bombing-trump.

30. “Kurdish-led council deepens authority across Syrian north and east,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2018, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-council/kurdish-led-council-deepens-authority-across-syrian-north-and-east-idUSKCN1LM25I; Joost Hilterman, “The Kurds Once Again Face American Abandonment,” *Atlantic*, August 30, 2018, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/syria-kurds-assad-ypg-isis-iraq/569029/.

31. “Damascus says Syrian Kurdish autonomy negotiable: report,” *Reuters*, September 26, 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds/damascus-says-syrian-kurdish-autonomy-negotiable-report-idUSKCN1C10TJ.

32. Yousef Khalil and Yasser Munif, “Syria and the Left,” *Jacobin*, January 9, 2017, www.jacobinmag.com/author/yusef-khalil-and-yasser-munif/.

33. Nader Atassi, “Rojava and the Kurdish Political Parties in Syria,” *Jadaliyya*, May 3, 2014, www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30299.

34. Meredith Tax, "Socialist Foreign Policy Must Center Climate Change," *In These Times*, October 10, 2018, inthesetimes.com/article/21506/socialist-foreign-policy-climate-change-rojava-fascism-isis.

35. "Trump instructs military to begin planning for withdrawal from Syria," *Washington Post*, April 4, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-instructs-military-to-begin-planning-for-withdrawal-from-syria/2018/04/04/1039f420-3811-11e8-8fd2-49fe3c675a89_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f70b66731f04; John Haltiwanger, "Trump now plans to keep U.S. troops in Syria until Iran gets out, which means America may never leave," *Business Insider*, September 24, 2018, www.businessinsider.com/trump-to-keep-us-troops-in-syria-until-iran-leaves-2018-9.

36. Joost Hiltermann and Maria Fantappie, "Twilight of the Kurds," *Foreign Policy*, January 16, 2013, foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/16/twilight-of-the-kurds-iraq-syria-kurdistan/.

37. By way of comparison, Iraq's refugee population at its peak in 2007 stood at 2 million, in a country of 26 million before the U.S. invasion of 2003.

38. Ishaan Tharoon, "The Arab world's wealthiest

nations are doing next to nothing for Syria's refugees," *Washington Post*, September 4, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/04/the-arab-worlds-wealthiest-nations-are-doing-next-to-nothing-for-syrias-refugees/.

39. Jean-Pierre Goykynian, "A visit to Aleppo shows the story of Syria is still being written," *The Globe and Mail*, September 7, 2018, www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-a-visit-to-aleppo-shows-the-story-of-syria-is-still-being-written/.

40. Saskia Baas, "The Real Reasons Why Syrians Return to Syria," *Refugees Deeply*, March 6, 2018, www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2018/03/06/the-real-reasons-why-syrians-return-to-syria.

41. *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada*, December 2, 2015, www.justice.gc.ca/sites/default/files/pages/attachments/2016/02/02/syr104921.e.pdf.

42. "Q and A: Syria's New Property Law," *Human Rights Watch*, May 29, 2018, www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/29/qa-syrias-new-property-law.

43. Sally Hayden, "Arrests and torture of Syrian refugees returning home reported," *Irish Times*, March 17, 2018.

The Socialist Challenge Today

SYRIZA, SANDERS, CORBYN

Leo Panitch & Sam Gindin

The social democratic embrace of neoliberal globalisation now lies threadbare. Multiple economic, ecological, and migration crises have opened political space for the far right, with its ultra-nationalist, racist, sexist and homophobic agendas. Yet, a significant shift from protest to politics on the contemporary left, has renewed the socialist case for transcending capitalism as necessary to realise the collective, democratic, egalitarian and ecological aspirations of humanity.

Presenting a powerful and inspirational argument for transcending earlier social democratic and communist practices, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin stress the need for renewing working-class politics through new kinds of socialist parties. Most important, they insist, will be to foster the development of strategic and practical capacities to democratically transform state structures – so as to render them fit for realizing collective democracy, social equality, sustainable ecology and human solidarity.

Available from good bookshops or as an e-book In the USA www.ipgbook.com Pbk US\$10.00
In Canada: fernwoodpublishing.ca CA\$15.00 In Europe: www.merlinpress.co.uk Pbk £6.99

The Philippine Left in a Changing Land

ALEX DE JONG

ON OCTOBER 21 NINE MEMBERS of the Philippine National Federation of Sugar Workers were shot dead while participating in a protest. The killers are assumed to be employed by local capitalists. Killings of union, peasant, and other activists have increased sharply under President Duterte. Dozens of activists have already been killed. Under Duterte's authoritarian rule, the Philippine left is faced with new difficulties.

Three weeks before the killings of the trade unionists, the *Philippine Daily Enquirer* published the headline "Duterte fires last leftist in government." The leftist in question is Joel Maglunsod, undersecretary of the Department of Labor and Employment, formerly a leader of the Kilusan Mayo Uno trade-union movement.¹ Meanwhile, attacks by the armed wing of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army (NPA), increased after a ceasefire broke down in early 2017. Lasting roughly half a year, it was the longest ceasefire ever between the NPA and a Philippine government. But even when it still had allies in the government, the CPP had begun to denounce the Duterte regime as fascist and a pawn of the United States.

How to explain such contradictions? Much international news about Duterte is concerned with the "war on drugs" he unleashed. Since Duterte assumed office in July 2016, conservative estimates indicate that the police or state-sponsored death squads have

killed more than 12,000, almost exclusively from the most impoverished sections of Philippine society. The real number of casualties is likely much higher.

During his presidential campaign, Duterte made clear that he was planning to organize large-scale violence. But there was another side to Duterte's election. He combined macho posturing as a crime buster with demagoguery about taking care of the weak and the poor. His campaign slogan "compassion and strength" was typical of his approach. Duterte went so far as to describe himself as a socialist.

Allying with Duterte

This approach convinced significant parts of the left that it could cooperate with Duterte for progressive reforms. Others, who were skeptical about Duterte's claims to be a "leftist," thought it better to keep their fears and criticism to themselves. It had become clear that Duterte had massive support, including among the poor, and parts of the left feared they would alienate themselves from this audience if they strongly criticized the candidate.

The convergence between parts of the left and Duterte peaked in late 2016. Angered by the outgoing Obama administration's tepid criticism of human rights violations, Duterte denounced U.S. neocolonial interference and reminded his audience of atrocities committed by U.S. troops during their occupation of the Philippines in the early twentieth century. Around the same time, he announced his geopolitical turn away from the United States and toward Russia and China. Supposedly

ALEX DE JONG is co-director of the *International Institute for Research and Education*, Amsterdam.

leftist writers cheered Duterte's "nationalism" and "independent orientation," while trying to downplay the growing number of murders. One academic declared Duterte had "exploded the century-long stranglehold of global finance capitalism" over the Philippines.

The part of the Philippine left that went furthest in this convergence was the National-Democrats, or NDs. The political and ideological center of this current is the CPP. The party leads a broad range of underground "sectoral organizations" that organize specific groups (youth, artists, church-people, women, and others). Some of these organizations are little more than empty shells, others are more substantial. Above ground, there is an equally wide alliance of groups that are identified with the political line of the party.

According to this line, Philippine society is not capitalist but "semi-feudal." Therefore, the CPP aims for a two-stage revolution. The first stage will be the National-Democratic revolution, "anti-feudal" as well as "anti-imperialist," to break the grip of foreign domination that supposedly has locked the country in this stage. A second phase will be socialist, by which the CPP means it will install one-party rule and a command economy. Aboveground supporters of this line often combine great militancy with surprisingly modest demands—the goal in this phase of the struggle being to confront not capitalism, but "semi-feudalism."

After his election in May 2016, Duterte offered cabinet posts to the CPP. The party politely declined, saying that as a revolutionary organization, it could not be part of the "reactionary state." Instead, four leaders of the aboveground ND movement received cabinet-level posts, while others (like Maglunsod) were given lower-ranking posts. "The alliance between the National-Democratic movement and the incoming Duterte regime continues to be forged," the CPP journal *Ang Bayan* rejoiced in June 2017; by offering cabinet posts to the CPP, Duterte had "strengthened his alliance with the National-Democratic

movement."²

Duterte's history as a mayor of Davao City, and his role in organizing a death-squad there during the 1990s and early 2000s, was not reason enough to refuse such an alliance. Back then, the NDs already had cordial relations with Duterte, who helped them gain political legitimacy. He coordinated with the NPA for the release of captured prisoners, spoke at rallies called by ND mass organizations, and hosted ND candidates on his slate for the city council elections. From their side, the NDs toned down their criticism. Most of the research on the human rights violations committed in Davao during this period comes from human rights groups outside the ND orbit.

After the presidential elections, it did not take long for the alliance to show cracks as it became clear Duterte was not willing to make real concessions to the NDs. They were serving in a government whose social-economic policies were in continuity with the previous market-liberal administration, while defending Duterte. One ND cabinet member, Social Welfare Secretary Judy Taguiwalo, in May 2017 claimed it was a "no-brainer" that Duterte was opposed to extra-judicial killings.³

An exception seemed to be the peace negotiations between the government and the CPP. The government panel went along with CPP negotiators in drafting an agreement that suggested far-reaching changes, such as land reform, the abrogation of international trade agreements, extensive social services, a break with the United States, state control over strategic sectors of the economy, and the expropriation of certain categories of capital. However, the Duterte regime never planned on implementing anything like it, and negotiations collapsed in early 2017. The last cabinet-level official from the ND ranks, Liza Maza, finally left the administration in August 2018.

The alliance between the NDs and Duterte as president was unique in how

far it went, but it was not the first time the ND current entered into agreements with bourgeois power holders. Since the turn of the century, the NDs have participated with considerable success in elections. In his study of the movement, Dominique Caouette describes how the project started in 2001 when ND organizations put up a political party, Bayan Muna (Nation First).⁴ By what Caouette describes as a series of “tractations,” or clandestine dealings, and through support for Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo during the revolt in which she replaced Joseph Estrada as president, the NDs were able to “secure support from the Macapagal-Arroyo clan.” Subsequently, Bayan Muna won three seats in Congress.

The NDs have expanded their electoral machinery and continue to make deals with bourgeois politicians to win seats in the notoriously corrupt Philippine elections. Embarrassingly, the NDs found themselves in the same alliance as Ferdinand Marcos—the son of the dictator of the same name, who would like to follow in his father’s footsteps—when in 2010 they supported businessman Manny Villar for president. When the campaign for president started in 2016, the NDs initially supported Grace Poe—a relatively inexperienced senator with an unremarkable track record. She owes her career mostly to her name: She is the adopted daughter of Fernando Poe Jr., a star of Philippine action movies.

During the 2016 campaign, though, it became clear that in the region of Mindanao where Duterte built his base, the NDs were campaigning for him instead. Jose Maria Sison, the ideologue of the movement (although in name only an advisor to its diplomatic wing) made this orientation clear by declaring that either a Poe or a Duterte win would be good for “national unity” and either could supposedly open the way to progressive reforms. Sison had (by Skype) a sympathetic interview with Duterte and made sure to praise the candidate’s supposed progressive credentials.

The Persistence of the CPP

Reading CPP statements today, it is as if this CPP-Duterte alliance never happened. The CPP calls for the overthrow of Duterte, and Sison describes the government as “weak” and “isolated,” suggesting it might be ousted in some months.

It is difficult to say how large the ND movement is today. As usual, the movement’s spokespeople and press claim that it is going from strength to strength. One way to gauge support for the movement is by looking at election results of the candidates most closely allied with it. In 2016, the ND candidate for Senate received almost 6.5 million votes (15 percent; the total population is over 100 million). But the picture is unclear; since such candidates run on platforms that are limited to “progressive reforms,” support for them does not necessarily entail support for even the first phase of the CPP’s projected revolution. In addition, in these elections, voters pick 12 candidates, with one vote per candidate.

But it is clear that the NDs remain by far the strongest current on the Philippine left. The movement has grown deep roots in Philippine society, and through its network of “sectoral” movements and the NPA, it has in a way become self-sustaining.

That in the last two decades the most remarkable successes of the NDs have been in elections and in sustaining their capacity for open protest is ironic, as the CPP considers armed struggle the primary means of achieving a revolution. In theory, all other forms of struggle and all other organizations, legal and illegal, are subordinated to it and ultimately should serve to strengthen guerrilla warfare. Part of the money raised by aboveground organizations, who often have a rather bland public image, is indeed funneled to the underground.

The reasons for the persistence of the NPA are structural. Large parts of the rural countryside are seemingly stagnant, with



people still facing the same problems they have faced for generations. Fewer than 10,000 individuals own over a fifth of the country's total agricultural lands, while almost two million farmers own less than three hectares each and divide among themselves 18.5 percent of the country's total agricultural lands. Still, a bit over half of the population live in the countryside, which is also home to over 70 percent of those officially considered poor. Since the seventies, not only NPA fighters but also commanders are increasingly the children of poor, landless peasants. But its "political officers" are still often drawn from the student movement, and the CPP remains under the leadership of the first generation, who often joined the movement as students.

A researcher at the National War College in Washington recently recognized that factors driving people to join the NPA are the same as they have been since its founding in the late sixties: "Many of the historical drivers of NPA recruitment remain in place today—widespread poverty and income disparity, land exploitation, labor exploitation, human rights abuses, political marginalization, and

discrimination in the rural hinterland." The government's recent claims to be on the cusp of defeating the NPA lack credibility.

The NPA is strongest in remote rural areas where there is little presence of state institutions. In such areas, the NPA can play a role in protecting the local population against bandits and in intervening in local conflicts. The NPA is also a source of financial means; it imposes "revolutionary taxes" on companies that operate in areas where it is active.

The NPA also has an important symbolic role. CPP imagery and texts often depict the strength and heroism of the guerrillas, ever surging forward. Those killed in combat are celebrated as martyrs and become subjects of books and articles. Such texts emphasize the conviction and sacrifice of those who chose the hard and dangerous life in the NPA. Such dedication is made into an argument for the movement's political line; disagreement would mean disrespecting the martyrs. The myth of the people's war, certain of final victory, still has power.

But 49 years after its founding, the NPA is far from its goal of "encircling the cities."

According to recent statements, the NPA has between six and ten thousand regulars and about half of its strength is based on the southern island of Mindanao. In late 2016, the CPP organized a congress (the second since its founding in 1968) at which, it claims, representatives of “close to seventy thousand members” were present. The movement has been known to exaggerate its strength; for example, in the early 2000s it claimed that the NPA numbered in the tens of thousands.⁵

The Left Against Duterte

Now mobilizing against Duterte, the NDs launched the Movement Against Tyranny, convened by a coalition of leaders of mass movements, priests, and political personalities. The ND mass organizations are the coalition's backbone and make it the opposition coalition with the largest mobilizing potential. Reflecting the usual ND strategy to build multi-class coalitions, its call is directed specifically against the Duterte regime's authoritarian attacks on the institutions and rules of liberal democracy.

The Movement Against Tyranny is not the only opposition. Another opposition coalition is Tindig Pilipinas, or “Rise Up Philippines.” Philippine activist Joshua Makalintal describes it as “a broad coalition that includes minority blocs from Congress; figures from the previous Liberal Party establishment; the social democratic party Akbayan, which coalesced with the liberals in the previous administration of Benigno Aquino; and the nationalist, anti-communist Magdalo group, composed of former junior officers of the armed forces led by Antonio Trillanes, Duterte's most vocal critic in the Senate.”⁶

Finally, there is Laban ng Masa, or “Struggle of the Masses.” A coalition of socialist and progressive groups and parties that opposed Duterte from the beginning, it is the only coalition to explicitly present itself as left-wing and to analyze the rise of the Duterte regime as a symptom of a structural

crisis of Philippine society. Since the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, the Philippines has been superficially a liberal democracy. In practice, however, cliques of capitalists (often families) have captured the state, combining economic and political power. Laban ng Masa targets this “elite democracy” and proposes “a system marked by real participatory democracy and real economic equality.”

Laban ng Masa is led by scholar-activist Walden Bello. Bello became a member of Congress for Akbayan in 2010, when it was allied with President Benigno Aquino and the Liberal Party. Although remaining a party member, Bello resigned his seat in 2015 in protest against Aquino's attempts to wash his hands of a bloody, botched police operation and corruption in the government. In 2016, Bello ran for Senate in a campaign that remained independent from bourgeois alliances and politicians and won a little over one million votes, coming in 36th in a contest where the top 12 won seats. However, Laban ng Masa lacks the resources of Tindig Pilipinas or the infrastructure of the Movement Against Tyranny.

Laban ng Masa brings together much of the more radical, non-ND Philippine left. The leaders of the NDs often label this part of the left as irrelevant, call it “counter-revolutionary,” or worse.⁷ During the 1990s and early 2000s, dozens of former ND activists as well as organizers from other progressive movements were killed by the NPA, and threats persist. The NDs used such violence to maintain their dominance.⁸ Although none of the non-ND groups have the strength of the NDs, they have become part of political reality and play significant roles in parts of the country.

The collapse of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, and of the Soviet Union a few years later, triggered a cycle of internal debates, purges, and splits in the CPP-led movement in the 1990s. Those who stuck with the CPP and the ND movement were labelled “reafirmists” or RAs, after the document in which

Sison laid down the line for the movement: *Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors*. Those who disagreed were consequently called RJs, short for rejectionists.

Undoubtedly one of the most important reasons why the CPP has proven so persistent is that millions of Filipinos are caught in poverty in a stagnating countryside. The CPP's attacks on "feudal landlords" ring true to them, as does its insistence on the agricultural character of Philippine society. But continuing uneven and combined development has produced sharply diverging realities in Philippine society. Parts of the countryside remain underdeveloped, but the share of total employment that is agricultural has shrunk to around a third. Stagnating agricultural productivity has meant that agriculture's share of gross domestic product has declined from 22 percent in 1990 to 11 percent in 2014. Over the past five decades the urban population grew by more than 50 million people, and cities now represent more than 70 percent of the country's GDP. The power of the traditional landlords *as landlords* has been declining, although some have managed to expand their operations into other, growing sectors such as services and mining.

Duterte's election was a symptom of such changes. Since the fall of the Marcos regime, the Philippines has been ruled by a dominant bloc that included the local capitalist class (among them landlords), the Catholic Church, and representatives of U.S. influence such as U.S.-trained military commanders and neoliberal technocrats.

Duterte does not come from the traditional, landed capitalist class, but instead built a coalition of local capitalists and ranted against "landlords" and oligarchic sugar planters (a reference to his rivals, the Aquino dynasty). Duterte is also defying another component of the old dominant bloc: the Catholic Church. Some years earlier, the struggle over the Reproductive Health Act made visible a relative decline of the church's political strength. This law was intended to

provide access to contraception, sex education, and family planning and was introduced after years of debate in 2012. Despite desperate attempts of Catholic clergy and media outlets, a majority of the population continued to support the Reproductive Health bill.⁹ Priests have criticized human rights violations committed under Duterte, and he has gone on the offensive against his religious critics by ridiculing Catholic sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy.

While confronting some parts of the previous dominant bloc, Duterte has attempted to integrate others. The United States continues to play an important role in the Philippines. Important representatives of its influence are American-trained army officers and technocrats. Duterte included both groups in his government, and military ties between the United States and the Philippines continue. Initially, Duterte's anti-U.S. rhetoric and seeming rapprochement with the Maoists led to doubts about support for him in the strongly pro-U.S. army. Duterte has, however, been busy trying to win the favor of soldiers, increasing their pay, visiting army camps, and appointing (retired) generals to high positions in his administration. Duterte has now given the army a free hand in its fight against the guerrillas. As he did earlier regarding the police in the "war on drugs," Duterte promised to protect soldiers who violate human rights.

Duterte's rhetoric about a "divorce" from the United States was proven to be overblown, but in terms of international politics he did move closer to Russia and especially China. This must be a source of dissatisfaction in Washington, especially since the United States has been pushing against China's attempts to extend its power in the region.

Duterte's reluctance to challenge Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea is a complicated issue for the Philippine left. Opposition to U.S. imperialism is a key element of the whole Philippine left, and the policy of the previous government to rely on the United

States against China was denounced as part of the neocolonial agenda to control the Philippines. But the days when the CPP referred to China as “an iron bastion of socialism” are long gone—it now considers that since the fall of the Gang of Four, China has restored capitalism.¹⁰ Chinese ambitions in the region have removed most of the left’s remaining illusions about Chinese “socialism.” At most, there is nostalgia for what was once a model for much of the Philippine left and the idea that the United States-China confrontation can somehow provide maneuvering space for progressive forces.

Different Paths

Diverging social developments mean that in different parts of the country, the left is faced with very different realities and is rooted among different social layers. Not surprisingly, this has produced different political trends. Although the influence of the ND tradition, in which many of the left’s older activists got their political training, is still visible, RJs have developed their own, diverging political lines. The Partido Manggawa (PM) or Labor Party, and the Partido Lakas ng Masa (Party of Strength of the Masses, although the party also uses Party of the Laboring Masses in English), for example, are two groups whose history can be traced back to the ND movement in the Manila region; these remain strongest among urban workers. PM’s orientation has been described as emphasizing “the gradual rebuilding of the strength of the labor movement in the short run, [enabling the party] to play a crucial role in the PALEA dispute,” referring to a trade-union struggle of the Philippine Airlines workers that drew international attention.¹¹

Other groups remain more orientated toward work in the countryside and among poor peasants. The Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines, for example, split from the CPP in the late 1990s. It considers itself heir to the ND tradition and sticks to the

Maoist strategy of “Protracted People’s War,” the gradual building of a rural, peasant-based guerrilla force. In the south of the country, also mainly in rural areas, the Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao is active. Its name comes from a failed attempt in the late 1990s to unite RJ groups in a Revolutionary Workers Party-Philippines. The Mindanao group rejected the surrender by this party to the government and separated. The RPM-M is a member of the Fourth International and is primarily rooted among rural proletarians and peasants. An important focus for the party is the indigenous people of Mindanao, called the Lumad. This poses specific questions, for example the protection of remaining traditions of communal ownership and the working of traditional systems of justice. It also means the party has to navigate conflicting claims over land by Lumads and the movements of the island’s Muslim population, the Moros.

The political differences are real but don’t necessarily preclude the formation of united fronts. Sadly, personal conflicts and rivalries, sometimes stemming from the acrimonious splits that produced the different groups, hinder the forming of alliances and weaken the non-ND left.

But against the violence unleashed by Duterte and the increasingly authoritarian state, the greatest left-wing unity is needed. Recent signs that such unity is possible are points of hope. During the latest protest on the occasion of the yearly State of the Nation Address, different groups, including aboveground allies of the NDs and non-NDs, mobilized together and shared the stage. And on May 1, labor organizations allied with the NDs rallied together with groups from other political backgrounds. Even the ND movement is not as homogeneous as its leaders would like it to be. Especially younger activists are growing weary of the divisions on the left. They are aware that Duterte’s rise, a symptom of the bankruptcy of “elite democracy,” was partly caused by the left’s

inadequacy as an alternative. As Philippine socialist Herbert Docena has written, only through “building a broad, united, and democratic mass movement” that is capable “not only of ousting Duterte but also of resisting other elites desperate to return to power” can an alternative become possible.¹² Philippine socialists deserve international solidarity in building this alternative.

NOTES

1. *Inquirer*, October 3, 2018. newsinfo.inquirer.net/1038554/duterte-fires-last-leftist-in-government. At the end of October, however, Maglunsod was still attending government meetings.
2. *Ang Bayan*, June 7, 2016, 1.
3. Rappler.com, “CA grills Taguiwalo over links to left,” www.rappler.com/nation/168701-ca-suspends-taguiwalo-confirmation-cpp-ndf-npa. This was during a meeting to consider confirming Taguiwalo in her cabinet position.
4. Dominique Caouette, *Persevering revolutionaries. Armed struggle in the 21st century. Exploring the revolution of the Communist Party of the Philippines*, vol. II (unpublished PhD thesis, 2004), 397.
5. CPP chair Armando Liwanag’s (Jose Maria Sison) message on the occasion of the 34th Anniversary of the CPP, December 26, 2002, claimed the NPA had “a sum total of at least three divisions or nine brigades or 27 battalions of full-time Red fighters with high-powered rifles.”
6. Joshua Makalintal, “The challenges of building a united resistance in Duterte’s Philippines,” *Waging Nonviolence*, March 14, 2018, wagingnonviolence.org/feature/united-resistance-duterte-philippines/.
7. A particularly grievous example was the December 2004 issue of *Ang Bayan*, which included an overview of “counter-revolutionary Trotskyites and Social-Democrats” that included much of the non-ND left at the time. Extensive documentation of the killings, and the CPP’s attempts to justify them, can be found at www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?rubrique14.
8. Alex de Jong, “Muddying the Revolution,” *Jacobin*, September 2, 2018, www.jacobinmag.com/2018/09/community-party-philippines-sison-ndf-murder.
9. In the end, the Catholic hierarchy had to use the recourse of the high court to gut the bill under the cover of “religious freedom.”
10. This view was part of Sison’s “rectification” in the CPP. During the late 1970s and the 1980s,

when Sison was in prison, the CPP continued to regard China as socialist and followed its line in international issues such as in expressing support for the Khmer Rouge and denouncing Cuban intervention in Africa as “social-imperialism.”

11. Ben Reid, “Duterte and the prospects for struggle in the Philippines,” *Marxist Left Review* (No. 16, Winter 2018), marxistleftreview.org/index.php/no-16-summer-2018/157-duterte-and-the-prospects-for-struggle-in-the-philippines.

12. Herbert Docena, “Why Duterte has to be ousted, and why even that won’t be enough to defend ourselves,” Rappler.com, August 26, 2017, www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/179410-why-duterte-has-to-be-ousted.

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:

1. Giving a specific amount or a particular asset. (“I bequeath \$ _____ to New Politics Associates.”)
2. Giving a percentage of your estate. (“I bequeath x percent of my estate to New Politics Associates.”)
3. Giving the remainder of your estate. (“After distributing the specific bequests listed above, I bequeath the remainder of my estate to New Politics Associates.”)

For further information, please write to us at *New Politics*, 294 New York Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11216.

Palestine on a Precipice

TOUFIC HADDAD

THE RISE AND EXPANSION of right-wing populism and the dramatic unfolding of global politics in the Trump era have had significant and alarming implications for the Palestinian people, leadership, and question overall.

In typical bombastic fashion, the Trump administration has taken a series of policy steps that appear to radically shift traditional U.S. positions regarding the “Israel-Palestine conflict,” resulting in direct financial and diplomatic pressures on the Palestinian movement.

While the true nature of these shifts is not evident without appreciating the broader arc of U.S. engagement, these measures nonetheless further embolden Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and effectively green-light—and even turbo-boost—the revisionist Zionist agenda he has led for the past eleven years in power.

Adding to these blows are a series of longer-standing dynamics that further weaken Palestinian strategic positioning. These include the ebbs and flows of the region’s post-2010 revolutionary/counter-revolutionary currents, which have sidelined the Palestinian issue, leading to less political and financial interest from donor states and the world at large; the abandonment of non-normalization norms by increasing numbers of Arab (particularly Gulf) states vis-à-vis

Israel, as survivalist instincts and anti-Iranian fixations consume them; and the internal Palestinian geopolitical divide between the Fateh-governed West Bank and the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, greatly complicating the formulation of a unified Palestinian institutional and political position capable of overcoming the grave contemporary and historical predicaments that Palestinians face.

The combined effect of these trends places the Palestinians—people and leadership alike—in an unenviable and complex position of historic vulnerability, insufficiently recognized, but not to be underestimated.

While disorientation and demoralization may be natural consequences of these trends, the situation is actually too dire locally and globally to allow a loss of focus or heart.

Alternatively, and as this article will argue, significant opportunities have actually opened up within these dynamics, allowing for real advances toward progressive causes, including in and *through* Palestine.

This article will attempt to unpack these entanglements with an eye toward informing progressive audiences and invoking debate, organizing, and action.

Trump on a Rampage

In a relatively short amount of time, the Trump administration has shifted a series of traditional U.S. positions vis-à-vis the “Israel-Palestine conflict.”

These shifts include the moving of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; the withholding of all funds to the Palestinian Authority (PA), excepting to its security services; the closing of the Palestine Liberation

TOUFIC HADDAD is the author of *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Territory* (I.B. Tauris), which appeared in paperback in 2018.

Organization (PLO) Mission in Washington DC; and the cancelling of annual funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which has been providing health and educational services to millions of Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and regionally since 1949.

While the rapid succession of these shifts indeed makes them appear radical in nature, a sober historical assessment reveals a more complex picture.

The formal relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, for example, represents a public acknowledgment (hardly hidden) of the truly bipartisan U.S. support for Israel's annexation of the city. It also simultaneously removes any pretense that the United States constitutes an honest broker regarding Israeli-Palestinian "final status" issues, of which the fate of Jerusalem is one.

Ever since the passage of the 1995 U.S. Embassy Act, both the U.S. House and Senate have overwhelmingly recognized Jerusalem as Israel's "eternal and undivided capital," despite the fact that Israel's occupation, annexation, and colonization of the city represent clear breaches of international law and were opposed by Washington in earlier years.

While all presidents since Clinton have

Trump appears to aim at the liquidation of Palestine's core facets from within—the issues of independent Palestinian political representation, Jerusalem, and refugees.

publicly supported the principle of Jerusalem as Israel's "eternal undivided capital," they nonetheless withheld the embassy's final

transfer citing national security concerns. Keeping the embassy in Tel Aviv was considered a nod of appeasement to the broader Muslim world and pro-U.S. Arab allies (inappropriately referred to as the "moderate Arab regimes"—Jordan, the Gulf Cooperation Council states, Egypt, and Morocco), allowing them to maintain close U.S. ties despite congressional recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Trump's decision to move the embassy thus aligns an existing, public, two-decade-old U.S. political position with operational reality, simultaneously removing pretenses that allowed for the coexistence of seemingly contradictory positions.

Removing More Cosmetic Pretenses While Tightening the Rope

U.S. cuts in non-security-sector Palestinian aid also echo the theme of removing cosmetic pretenses surrounding American imperial agendas.

This aid, which totaled \$230 million in 2018, will now be "reprogrammed" to other hitherto undisclosed priorities.

Non-security-sector U.S. aid to the PA used to ensure the buoyancy of Fateh as the animating political entity within it. This aid came in the form of budget support (subsidizing PA operating costs and debt), together with funding for developing and running certain infrastructure projects (particularly water and roads—often alternative networks needed because Israel closed off roads to Palestinian access). It also used to support Palestinian "private sector development," which can be read as code for indirectly supporting Fateh's businesspeople, who inevitably used to enjoy the lion's share of these economic perks.

By reprogramming this aid, however, while retaining its security dimensions, the United States has decided to tighten the rope around Fateh: In one swoop it weakens the ability of Fateh to create and retain economic loyalists, while also strengthening the security

networks within the PA that Washington views as vital to controlling the West Bank in a post-Mahmoud Abbas era.

The U.S. shift thus speaks to the squeezing of Fateh while aligning the public spectacle of U.S. diplomacy with the *actual and historically consistent* position of U.S. imperialism toward the Palestinians—namely, that the United States unequivocally opposes Palestinian self-determination, sovereignty, or statehood *anywhere*, and that the PA should be prevented from means that could enable it to realize sovereignty. From this U.S. view, the PA's role should be delimited effectively to that of an apparatus capable of administering constrained Palestinian autonomy while serving subcontracted Israeli security and governance interests. The persistence or existence of *any* genuine democratic or national dimensions to PA activity contradicts the reasons for its founding, and hence is summarily opposed by the United States and Israel.

Turning Back the Clock, Liquidating the Cause

When we analyze the final two major steps taken by Trump against the Palestinians, and combine them with the others, a sinister image of Trump's agenda emerges.

The shuttering of the PLO mission in Washington DC effectively turns the political clock back to the days before the Oslo Accord, when the United States refused to acknowledge or accept independent Palestinian representation. Before 1993, the United States designated the PLO as a "terrorist entity," and attempted to enforce Jordanian suzerainty over Palestinian affairs. Today the issue of enforcing Jordanian suzerainty is back on the table, as floated by Jared Kushner and U.S. Middle East Envoy Jason Greenblatt in September 2018.

Whether Trump actually believes he can turn history that far back is ultimately less important than the fact that the closure

of the PLO mission means that the Trump administration is only interested in dealing with the PA, and particularly its security services, and not the PLO. Despite the latter being the nominal body to which the former is accountable, *de facto* the PA is financially and diplomatically accountable to donors and Israel, with *only* these actors occupying the commanding heights over PA political legitimacy and finance.

Similarly, U.S. cuts to UNRWA funding also aim to strike a decisive blow to another core "final status" issue—namely the Palestinian refugees. The United States used to be the largest funder of UNRWA, providing \$6 billion since 1950, and \$360 million in 2017. But come 2019, these streams will end entirely.

UNRWA is the main supranational body linking the Palestinian issue to international legal norms protecting their right to return to the properties from which they were expelled or fled during the 1948 War. The agency's very existence creates institutional continuity with the legal regime protecting Palestinian refugee rights *qua* refugees and hence is a very public obstacle to the elimination of the Palestinian question overall.

U.S. cuts to UNRWA aim to break this continuity and institutional guardianship, weakening the ability of Palestinians to use UN fora—or *any* fora—to argue their case.

Of course the United States historically financed UNRWA not because it supported Palestinian refugee rights, but because it understood that social provisions to this constituency provided a modicum of social and political stability in countries where Palestinian refugees were located—particularly within Jordan, a key U.S. ally where the largest concentration of Palestinian refugees reside. The decision to defund UNRWA thus throws caution to the wind regarding Jordanian stability and that of other Palestinian refugee host states, while aiming also to aid the institutional and political weakening of Palestinian claims overall.

The Trump Agenda in Sum

To summarize these steps: Trump's bombastic moves appear to *aim at the liquidation of Palestine's core facets from within*—chiefly the issue of independent Palestinian political representation, the question of Jerusalem, and the question of refugees. The elimination of these core facets is believed to *remove the need for negotiations at all*, as it clears the way for a Trumpist vision of U.S. imperial interests to be consolidated and aligned with Revisionist Zionist interpretations of “securing Israel” and accomplished without the hindrance of a Palestinian “partner.” When combined with the Trump administration's broader regional efforts to bring about public Israeli-Arab state normalization, seen as necessary to confront Iran, we begin to understand what Trump means when he speaks of his “Deal of the Century.”

Of course a good many of these maneuvers—like much of the Trumpist spectacle in general—relies upon a not inconsiderable dose of sleight of hand.

Defunding organizations like UNRWA cannot magically disappear millions of refugees, their legal claims, memories, organizing efforts, and institutions. There are other possible donors to the organization, while lessened aid also lessens U.S. influence and leverage.

Equally so, U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel cannot and will not discount Palestinian claims to and presence within the city, nor the wide swaths of other interests (Arab, Muslim, and Christian among others) that equally resent Israel's commandeering of the “holy city.”

But there is no question that these moves complicate the task at hand in a context where the Palestinians have few reliable allies.

Even if we can expect Trump's moves to simplify and unravel years of more carefully constructed U.S. regional diplomacy and political arrangements, further narrowing U.S. influence and leverage and raising its risk

level, and those of its partners, the task before the Palestinian movement remains daunting.

The Israeli Front

The gravity of U.S. moves, however, can only be fully appreciated once we combine them with Israeli maneuvers in the shadow of Trumpist encouragement.

Indeed, since Trump's election, Netanyahu and his coalition of unapologetically racist, fascist, neo-messianic settler allies have made a dash to pocket as many political, demographic, and legalistic achievements as possible in the service of their broader agenda.

This includes the ratcheting up of genocidal policies in the Gaza Strip, including tightening the 11-year siege; mass maiming and killing of thousands of civil protestors attempting to bring attention to the devastation the siege has caused; a robust colonization impetus in the West Bank that includes accelerated land grabs, preparing for Israeli annexation (minus the areas of dense Palestinian population—Areas A and B in the language of the Oslo Accords—which total roughly 40 percent of the West Bank) and where 2.8 million Palestinians reside; the strategic and targeted ethnic cleansing of 300,000 Palestinians from the areas prepared for annexation (Area C), especially in and around Jerusalem (Khan el Ahmar) and the Jordan Valley; and the elevation of apartheid legislation within Israel to constitutional status through the “Nation-State” bill, aiming to permanently disenfranchise Palestinian citizens of Israel and undermine their ability to use the limited democratic channels afforded within the “Jewish democratic” state for purposes that might protect their individual, let alone collective, rights.

This non-comprehensive list of assaults under Netanyahu, encouraged by Trump, is hardly trivial and more often than not entails the exercising of brutal colonial force of different orders and magnitudes.

Ground Zero: The Gaza Front

The most brutal of these frontiers is unquestionably the Gaza Strip, where weekly showdowns between Palestinian protestors and Israeli snipers separated by a narrow buffer zone of fencing and barbed wire have led to recurrent bloodbaths of varying intensity.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the human toll of the Great March of Return stood at 228 Palestinians killed between March 30 and mid-November 2018; 43 of the killed were children and two were women. An astonishing 24,362 persons have also been injured (nearly a quarter of whom are children), while 12,778 of these have been hospitalized—5,866 from live gunshot wounds. According to an October 21 report from the World Health Organization, 86 amputations have taken place, while 1,200 patients require long-term limb reconstruction.

These gruesome statistics from the Israeli-Gaza Strip frontier only couch an even longer list of yet more brutal humanitarian statistics documenting 11 full years of besiegement. Gaza today suffers from 53.7 percent unemployment, with 85 percent of the population being food dependent. The UN already considers the Gaza Strip to be an unlivable toxic wasteland, with poisoned water, crumbling infrastructure, a collapsed economy, and with indications that the territory's biosphere is now prone to the spread of waterborne diseases thanks to chronic electricity shortages and the lack of sewage treatment. (A recent RAND Corporation report warns that if the chronic state of emergency in Gaza's water and sewage sector continues, an epidemic disease outbreak or other public health crisis is imminent, with the risk of it spreading to Israel and Egypt.) In the past five years alone, the strip's population density has increased by more than one thousand persons per square kilometer—from 4,383 people/km² to 5,479.

Qualitatively, the siege aims to isolate

and target the expression of any new forms of Palestinian political organization. Its initial imposition came in the wake of Hamas' dramatic winning of the 2006 Legislative Council elections in which the movement promised to implement a wide series of democratic civil governance reforms to the PA while realigning its political agenda. The realignment was to include acknowledging that the Palestinians were still in a phase of "national liberation" and had "the right to

The "peace process" laid waste
to the historical, political
and institutional structures
launched locally and in the
diaspora to protect and mobilize
the Palestinian people and
movement.

strive to recover their own rights and end the occupation using all means, including armed struggle." This collective agenda resonated with Palestinian society in the context of heavy disappointment with the structure and outcomes of the Oslo process (which had never been put to a national referendum), the disappointing performance of the Fateh-led PA during 1990s, and the devastation wrought on Palestinian society in the wake of Israeli repression during the second Intifada. After a 2007 U.S.-backed coup attempt through right-wing Fateh elements was exposed and aborted, Israel and the international community imposed a full-blown siege on the territory, attempting to contain and suffocate this reformist political tendency. The aim was to force Palestinians to accept the Oslo process framework, and its strict political parameters designating the PA as a subcontracted Israeli security-provider, as

the “only game in town.”

By combining horrific military assaults with siege tactics, Israel—and Egypt and the Western bloc of states who observe the siege—aims to generate humanitarian, political, and financial crises that create leverage over the Palestinian movement, while scuttling the ability of Hamas to perform its political and reformist mandate.

As it did with Fateh previously, Israel seeks to tame Hamas by forcing it to internalize compromises generated through the management of these crises. Israel thus works to divide the Palestinian front by splitting it between its Gaza and West Bank wings, ensuring that each individual territory is governed by Oslo or Oslo-like arrangements. Israel becomes the overseer of an indirect governance arrangement of Palestinian affairs, leveraged and managed through the self-preservation instincts of each of the two main political parties of Palestinian politics today—Fateh and Hamas. International donor aid subsidizes this arrangement at no cost to Israel, with Western funds used in the case of the West Bank, and with Qatari/Turkish/Islamist funds plus residual Western aid (through UN bodies and NGOs) subsidizing Gaza.

Through these means, Israel effectively divides and rules the Palestinian polity, with Gaza receiving the stick to Fateh and the PA's West Bank carrot, albeit with the latter also being whittled down in size. Between the two, Palestinian organizing is hamstrung and with it the possibility of generating significant leverage on the regional and international fronts. Israel is seemingly absolved from its responsibility to conform to international legal norms or even to engage in negotiations, thus freeing it to accelerate its settlement project without restraint.

Oslo's Carnage

This cunning approach to liquidating the Palestinian question has made important advances since the Oslo process began a quarter

century ago. The “peace process” laid waste to the historical political and institutional structures that were launched locally and in the diaspora to protect and mobilize the Palestinian people and movement. Of course the PLO's deterioration preceded Oslo and in fact led to its signature of the accords. The Oslo agreement has since successfully coopted or corralled significant sections of the rich field of popular committees and organic intellectuals who emerged across the OPT after the 1967 occupation and who witnessed the height of activity and political effectiveness during the first Intifada. A quarter century of peace process effectively led to the mass demobilization of wide swaths of these actors, as the creation of the PA, and the process of NGOization, set in motion powerful institutional and political parameters for activity and finance that *reversed* accountability, from the grassroots to donors and the Oslo agenda. This led to exposing the vulnerability of Palestinian communities and their historical political agenda and rights, generating the shift of popular support toward Hamas.

The nature of PA “self-rule”—autonomy rather than sovereignty—also ensured Israeli control over borders and movement, thereby allowing Israel to funnel Palestinian economic activity toward its own designs. Israel's imposition of Palestinian de-development ensured that no forms of horizontal economic linkages and synergy could be created between the OPT's fragmented parts. The result was the geographical, political, economic, and institutional fragmentation of the OPT, dependent on Israel and donors. All of this occurred beneath the rubric of “peace building,” “state-building,” and “security,” funded by Western taxpayers. The de facto apartheid archipelago that has emerged has meant that Palestinians are now fragmented into more than 200 different islands across the OPT, while more than 150 Israeli settlements enjoy territorial contiguity, with an infrastructure that is integrated into pre-1967 Israel.

Within the new territorial and insti-

tutional map emerging from Oslo, it is the Gaza Strip that actually represents the largest single demographic and political obstacle for Israel, despite its smaller territorial size and population in comparison to the West Bank. The latter's effective transformation into Swiss cheese through Oslo has meant that Gaza now carries the majority of the historical and political mantle of the Palestinian cause. If Gaza can be broken, Israel will win another generation of settlement expansion across the West Bank, while conducting mop-up work across the individually fragmented West Bank cities. This process will be accelerated in the post-Abbas era as there is no clear successor within Fateh powerful enough to assert leadership over the entire movement. Fractious dynamics and Israeli deal-cutting with local elites and security bosses will increase.

However, if Gaza can withstand its predicament, the moral, political, and institutional model can continue to influence and spread beyond its borders, weakening Western- and Israeli-backed designs for the West Bank and the view that the PA is "the only game in town."

The Importance of the Great March of Return

Gaza's grave humanitarian predicament and the historical and political questions it encapsulates have thus transformed the territory into an erupting volcanic fount of political, social, and military magma.

The launching of the Great March of Return demonstrations by ad hoc popular committees, working with political factions, was an attempt to direct the process of combustion, ensuring that it was an explosion rather than implosion. The weekly confrontations on the front lines in Gaza, despite their enormous costs to a population with little means, have subsequently provided inspiration to Palestinian communities across historical Palestine and beyond.

On top of this one cannot ignore or

discredit how Gaza has also produced a not-insignificant military potential led by Hamas (but including all other factions, including non-Abbas-led Fateh branches), which includes a wide range of infrastructure (bunkers and tunnels, potentially *hundreds* of kilometers long, described sometimes as an "underground city") and industries (for rockets, weapons, and bomb production).

While Israel clearly enjoys asymmetric military superiority over its Gaza rivals, there is also no question that the Palestinian experience with employing armed force in Gaza has significantly matured. The Gaza armed force is now significant enough to selectively hold in check Israeli military excess, through targeted disruption of "normal" life in the south, as well as potentially beyond. It is able to do this not because its military might is so significant, but rather because it has developed tactical field acumen and coordination through the creation of a unified, 13-faction-strong, *joint* command and control room. It is also able to exploit the fact that Israel has become increasingly concerned with Gaza's grave humanitarian conditions and its potential to impact Israeli communities in the south and beyond: diseases don't respect human-made barriers; Gaza's sewage flows into the sea with currents that head north to Israeli beaches; rocket barrages weaken investment and tourism, as well as Israel's strategic interests in "strengthening the [Jewish] population of the south"; resistance factions also retain the ability to hit areas further north (including the airport) for extended periods of time, creating factors that Israel cannot summarily discount. Israeli militarism is somewhat restrained through these factors, especially in a context where Israel does not intend to invade and eliminate Hamas because it would subsequently become responsible for the horrendous humanitarian situation in Gaza. In fact, this responsibility is precisely what Israel was attempting to free itself from through Oslo and the 2005 Gaza "disengagement" in particular.

The strategic, tactical, and political alignment in Gaza around one agenda (resistance), with its multiple forms—chiefly popular unarmed demonstrations but retaining a military option—has taken the initiative away from Israel, while giving it to Palestinian actors in Gaza. Gaza today should be identified as the key site where contemporary and future questions about Palestine will be determined, especially if dynamics around resistance, and principles and practices of field unity, can be generalized to other Palestinian theaters.

Projecting Gaza Beyond

One should not discount the moral, political, and organizational implications of what is happening in Gaza for the other Palestinian theaters, particularly the West Bank and Jerusalem, although it is unclear at this stage how those implications will take form.

There is broad consensus across Palestinian society that the Oslo process and Fateh's approach have failed to protect or achieve Palestinian aims and that the two-state solution is by this point chimerical. What replaces this vision and strategy has yet to be definitively determined; however, all eyes look to Gaza as providing some of the most mature articulations of the answers.

While reproducing the "Gaza model" is not practical for the other clusters of Palestinians, what these dynamics have done is shift the center of gravity of Palestinian political and moral legitimacy from the West Bank and the PLO/PA and definitively posited them in Gaza.

Concomitantly, the West Bank and Jerusalem struggle in their own right to resist the wave of Israeli repression and colonization as it articulates itself locally.

Both territories have actually been in distended states of low-intensity conflict for the past two years, as evidenced by the persistence of almost weekly stabbings, car ramblings, and shooting attacks, to say nothing of daily confrontations with settlers and

soldiers. Most of this activity is unorganized, and it often reflects the actions of individuals under conditions of particular despair. One also should not discount the fact that the West Bank and Jerusalem—unlike Gaza—are under more-immediate forms of occupation, in the sense that Israel does not even respect or observe the PA's self-policing role in Area A and simply enters these areas when it pleases to conduct arrests or assassinations. (Israel has less room to maneuver for this in Gaza.) This means that the political and institutional organization of these areas is much more difficult, as political actors are forced to operate much deeper underground in comparison to Gaza.

One also should not forget that Jerusalem witnessed a short-lived but significant mass uprising in the summer of 2017, when Israel attempted to impose new restrictions and electronic metal detectors in and around the Al Aqsa Mosque compound. The mass mobilization and fightback by Palestinians in East Jerusalem was so powerful it actually forced Israel to fully retreat. Though the nature of the mobilization was defensive—to return the situation in the Old City to the status quo before the imposition of metal detectors—the episode demonstrated that the Palestinians in Jerusalem had not been bought off because of their more privileged identity-card status, which allows greater freedom of movement and economic opportunities within the Israeli labor market. On the contrary, it demonstrated that despite the immediate and daily confrontation that East Jerusalemites have with the occupation, they can organize around collective goals and win.

Concluding Thoughts

The point here is to emphasize that in the post-Oslo world, the main clusters of Palestinian communities in historical Palestine from the river to the sea—those in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Palestinian communities in Israel—all interact and experience

Zionist settler colonialism differently, in ways particular to the historical and local evolution of conflict dynamics and Israel's particular interests in each locale together with other factors. While the Oslo process did indeed do grave damage to the Palestinian movement overall, it did not succeed in killing it. What it did do was fragment it and develop sophisticated means of controlling it, which in turn transformed the way the conflict was experienced collectively and subsequently the relationship of the Palestinian movement to itself and to its oppressor. The resulting diversification of national expression that emerged regionally and institutionally remains a process in flux, but one that is not all negative.

Today, Trump's demagoguery and the very public association of his tenure with Israel have set the stage for more organically integrating the question of Palestine into the vocabulary and actions of the broad progressive countercurrents to that agenda and slowly making moves to gain traction against it.

Moreover, the United States and Israel have largely exhausted the traditional carrot-and-stick toolbox used to such effect against the Palestinians since the Oslo process began. Though these techniques have certainly chalked up important strategic advantages in managing their "Palestinian problem," the victory is pyrrhic in that these methods have not fundamentally altered or defeated Palestinian aspirations for national self-determination. The result is the diversification of Palestinian national activity and expression, politically, institutionally, and territorially. Palestinian national resiliency now manifests itself in resurgent ways across Palestine's fragmented landscape. While this poses problems in coordination and communication, it nonetheless creates conditions to imagine a genuine post-Oslo politics and movement, both locally and internationally, un beholden to the cynical buzzwords around "peace" and

"state-building" that derailed the movement and its supporters for the past quarter century. Moreover, especially after the launch of the Great March of Return popular movement in Gaza, a defiant political movement and tenor is emerging that will continue to influence the other theaters of conflict, doing so in dialectical fashion according to its own time frame and according to the particular local structure and articulation of power therein.

As these dynamics play themselves out, it is incumbent upon progressive political actors in the West to inform themselves of the new and evolving dynamics of Palestinian politics and to find ways to integrate those dynamics into their politics and action. Palestinian oppression is directly subsidized by Western military, diplomatic, and financial support, such that it is possible to articulate a clear conflict of interests between the interests of average U.S. taxpayers and those of imperialists and Zionist sympathizers. The case can indeed be strengthened when one considers the central role Israel has played in the post-9/11 world, fashioning itself as a chief research and development facility for the control, surveillance, and repression technologies used globally—from the Mexican-United States frontier, to the scandals of Israeli private investigations corporation Black Cube. Moreover, since revisionist Zionism under Netanyahu has sought to capitalize on global right-wing populist trends and abandoned the pretense of representing liberal Jews and their concerns, important cleavages between these have been more clearly exposed and can now also be widened. These contradictions must be exploited as part of a broader strategy of building left political forces that can pose an alternative to the slippery slope of fascism down which world politics seems to be sliding. The fate of Palestine, and of a great many other causes of global concern—and survival—appears to be held in the balance.

Jasic Workers Fight for Union Rights

JENNY CHAN

ON JULY 27, 2018, POLICE arrested thirty protesters in Shenzhen, including 29 Jasic Technology workers and a university student. Shen Mengyu, the recent graduate who stood in solidarity with the protesting workers, has since been completely cut off from communications. More recently, the clampdown on Dagongzhe Zhongxin, literally translated as Migrant Workers' Center, whose staff-in-charge was allegedly linked to the Jasic protest, was apparently intended as a warning to other activists that they have gone too far in their interventions.¹ According to state media, the fundamental conflict was caused by the "illegal, violent actions" of dismissed Jasic workers² and the instigation of an "unregistered illegal organization."³ Contrary to these claims, this article argues that the central problem was the blatant violations of workers' rights and interests by both the

Jasic employer and the Chinese government, including the country's only official trade union organization, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU).

Earlier this May, several Jasic workers reported to a labor bureau the company's arbitrary imposition of punitive fines and irregular work shifts, as well as underpayment of the housing fund.⁴ Some were advised by district-level trade union officials to safeguard themselves in accordance with the law. Under the Chinese Trade Union Law, all types of enterprises with 25 employees or more are supposed to have "basic-level trade union committees" on the shop floors (Article 10). An enterprise union shall be approved by the next higher level trade union (Article 11).

A primary socio-political goal of the ACFTU is to pre-empt the development of independent unions outside the party-state. In spite of the push of the Chinese trade union federation since the 1990s, when labor strikes and protests were scattered but growing throughout the country, only 33 percent of the some 480,000 foreign-funded enterprises, and less than 30 percent of private enterprises, had set up unions by mid-2005.⁵ Under provincial trade union officials' stepped-up organizing drive, Guangdong aimed to "see trade unions in 60 percent of the foreign-invested enterprises" by the end of 2006, and "in all firms funded by the world's top

JENNY CHAN is an assistant professor of sociology at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and vice president of communications at the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Labor Movements. She also serves as an academic advisor of Hong Kong-based Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior. The author thanks New Politics editorial board members Nancy Holmstrom and Lois Weiner, along with Richard Smith, for their warm encouragement and solidarity support in the writing process.

500 multinationals” by 2007.⁶ By December 2009, “unions had been set up in 92 percent of the Fortune 500 companies operating in China,” including such giants as Foxconn and Wal-Mart.⁷ By the end of 2016, there were 2.8 million enterprise-level trade unions with more than 302 million registered members throughout the country, making China the world’s largest unionized workforce.⁸

Jasic Workers Struggle for Union Organizing

Jasic Technology Company, founded in 2005 and listed on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in 2011, is widely known as a specialist in the welding industry and one of the top 500 enterprises in Guangdong.⁹ Less known is that Jasic had failed to set up a trade union since its opening 13 years ago. Evidence shows that Jasic management has long evaded its responsibility to facilitate workers to participate in collective consultation over work and employment issues such as wages, working hours, health and safety, and welfare benefits for both male and female employees. Not until this May did the company claim that it has begun to “establish a union in an orderly fashion.” Obviously, the corporate move was a strategic response to unprecedented labor challenges from the bottom up.

Jasic worker leaders, with trust and confidence from co-workers, had quickly gathered 89 signatures out of a factory workforce of 1,000 for the union membership application. At this point, the authorities withdrew their original “verbal support” for workers’ unionizing. Instead, they recognized only the efforts of management, who likewise submitted their intent to “set up a union in accordance with the law.” The relationship between Jasic management and the government cannot be closer, as revealed in this fierce worker-led struggle for union rights at the factory level.

By early August, Jasic had taken full control over union organizing by crushing the workers’ initiatives. Candidates nominated by

the workers were all excluded from the newly formed company union.

In Jasic and other workplaces, bargaining through workers’ direct actions, such as collective protests and strikes, has always been risky and dangerous even when it is a viable way to address workers’ shared grievances under despotic management and inadequate legal protection. In this case, workers did not win any concessions over wages and welfare benefits. Worse, the worker organizers were accused of “illegally unionizing,” assaulted by company security officers and local police, and fired. Yu Juncong, Liu Penghua, Mi Jiuping, and Li Zhan were charged with the crime of “gathering a crowd to disturb social order.” Their family members, and the lawyer who represents them, have been repeatedly harassed and threatened.

Tim Pringle, in assessing the future of Chinese union reforms in light of growing labor unrest, stresses the need not only for “more accountable enterprise-level union chairpersons and committees,” but also “more supportive, interactive, and, at times, directive relationships between the higher trade unions and their enterprise-level subordinates.”¹⁰ Conspicuous by his absence, the Beijing-based ACFTU chairperson, Wang Dongming, in effect endorsed discrimination and retaliation by Jasic against its employees, particularly those who had fought for setting up a representative union.

Contentious Labor Relations

Labor struggle for economic and political rights (for instance, demanding union elections) has drawn increasing government attention. To maintain government legitimacy, the state under President Xi Jinping continues to search for mechanisms to resolve labor conflicts and manage social discontent. Time and again, settlement of high-profile worker protests through direct government mediation is undertaken to restore “social harmony.” Indeed, officials have skillfully developed a wide

array of “protest absorption” techniques to settle labor disputes at the scene. These include lowering workers’ “realistic” expectation of claims to compensation, pressuring management to grant some economic concessions to adversely affected workers, and simultaneously manipulating workers’ familial and social relations to silence the resistance. Worker solidarity has frequently dissipated when leaders were intimidated, arrested, or bought off.¹¹

Following strikes, officials and corporate executives have jointly developed multi-pronged tools to monitor labor conditions, if not for outright repression. As a well-documented example, at a Honda car-parts assembly factory, Kong Xianghong, vice-chair of the Guangdong Federation of Trade Unions, presided over the direct election of shop-floor union representatives in 2010 and subsequent collective bargaining on wages in 2011. Many workers were disappointed, however, that the discredited factory union chair was permitted to remain as head of a partially reformed union, and the two “elected” vice-chairs were top-level managers, reflecting continued managerial control. Moreover, while the company was forced to yield on the important issue of wages under pressure from the provincial trade union, in the name of restoring “industrial peace” it was able to ignore all other 100-some worker demands, including those for women’s rights and improved welfare benefits (paid maternity leave and a one-hour meal break among them). As a result, the union committee quickly lost the confidence of rank and file workers.¹²

In “buying stability” by “dishing out cash payments or other material benefits in exchange for compliance,” the government undercut wider reform and the growth of labor mobilization aimed at influencing government policy.¹³ At the same time, significant coercion was involved in state efforts to manage labor disputes and social unrest. Top-down intervention in the arbitration and litigation system is commonplace. In handling collective lawsuits, judges have insisted that

cases be filed individually to fragment and isolate the plaintiffs.¹⁴

As China’s officials make extensive use of their discretionary power to resolve major labor crises rather than enabling workers to exercise fundamental rights to freedom of association, it is unclear how long this government-led strategy will remain viable, particularly when workers’ basic rights and interests are routinely violated.

Chinese Students: “We Support Jasic Workers!”

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, students and intellectuals played a critical role in the nascent labor movement of China’s modern history. Today, in a deeply marketized economy under the auspices of the party-state, university students and workers involved in the Jasic incident similarly show a heightened sense of social awareness.

From late July, scholars¹⁵ and activists of a wider coalition of labor rights organizations¹⁶ have petitioned online for the Chinese government to release the detained Jasic workers and their supporters. Importantly, on the ground, concerned mainland students from more than twenty universities have formed a fast-expanding network to support Jasic workers and their families. The self-identified Jasic Worker Support Group has set up an email account (jiashishengyuantuan@gmail.com), a social media platform (twitter.com/jasicworkers), and a website (jiashigrsyt.github.io/) to mobilize public support, while battling against Internet censorship and surveillance. In one group photo, 42 young students and recent graduates wore white T-shirts with the slogan in bold red, “Unity is strength.”

In service learning and participatory social research projects, more and more university students have entered the lives of low-paid campus cleaners and canteen workers, construction laborers and coal miners with fatal pneumoconiosis, evicted peasants losing their homes and land, and rural migrant

workers living at the city margins. Some have chosen to work on the assembly line to gain a better understanding about the transnational labor process behind the production of the iPhone.¹⁷ The others have joined hands to launch a #MeToo-style blog to share stories of sexual harassment and other forms of gender violence at the university and in the larger society. Despite diverse socio-economic backgrounds, the student organizers have come together to rethink the sources of durable inequality and injustice. They aspire to have equality, love, and freedom. They read and debate the classical works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, and Lu Xun, among many others.

In the wake of the July 27 worker crackdown, the multi-university Jasic Worker Support Group addressed the authorities by making an open call, grabbing the headlines of local and international news: “Return to us our comrades; return to us our workers!” Students posted blogs, photos, videos, and big-character letters to mobilize urgent support for the release of protesting workers and fellow classmates. On August 24, in Huizhou City adjacent to Shenzhen, the riot police raided a rental apartment and arrested about 50 Jasic-worker supporters, including students and workers.

Yue Xin, 22, a fresh graduate of Peking University who majored in foreign languages, was forcibly disappeared after the raid. No news about her whereabouts is available to date.

Li Tong, a final-year undergraduate and a member of the Marxist Society at Nanjing University, has been placed under house arrest.

Hu Hongfei, a final-year journalism undergraduate and member of the Marxist Society at Nanjing University, was placed under house arrest for 46 days until she made a narrow escape on October 11. She continued to be closely monitored by the police. In the face of great pressure from parents and university higher-ups, she nevertheless persisted,

proclaiming, “Give out heat and light, like a firefly lights up in the dark.”

Thus far, supporters including Gu Jiayue (Peking University graduate), Zhang Shengye (Peking University graduate), Wu Jiawei (Renmin University graduate), Xu Zhongliang (University of Science and Technology Beijing graduate), Yang Shaoqiang (University of Science and Technology Beijing graduate), and a few unnamed ones, were either detained or placed under house arrest by the “comprehensive social management teams” directed by the authorities at different levels.

Students who were “set free” testified that they had been threatened with investigation and disciplinary action if they did not withdraw from the action. Their freedom, including the use of the Chinese messaging app WeChat and other communication tools, was significantly restricted.

Taking Aim at Student Organizations

In a new semester starting in September, university authorities looked into the registration, composition, and organizational goals of the Marxist societies and Maoist study groups at Peking University, University of Science and Technology Beijing, Renmin University, and Nanjing University, to name only a few. Sweeping inspection of these left-leaning student associations shows authorities’ intolerance of an emergent worker-student coalition, a non-negligible force of progressive social change.¹⁸

Qimin Xueshe, a six-year-old Marxist study group at the University of Science and Technology Beijing, was on the verge of being closed permanently on October 12. Student activists were pressured by the university party committee to stop making any further efforts at mobilization. The outcome will not be a deadly silence, however. A student organizer pledged that “the body” of *his* organization could be crushed by de-registration in the hands of the university bureaucrats under

the newly amended “Student Society Management Rules.” But “the spirit” of pursuing social justice will not die. He clenched his fists, showing great determination to carry on the fight.

Rebuilding Labor, Revitalizing Unions

“Realize the great Chinese Dream, build a harmonious society,” intones a government banner. The definition of that dream and the determination of who may claim it remain contested. The evolving consciousness and praxis of the Chinese workers, with growing support of students, academics, and labor rights activists at home and abroad, is pivotal to charting the future of China in the globalizing economy.

Jasic workers have stood up against all odds to fight for their dignity and political rights. They have inspired their peers and youthful students to take concerted actions. On October 20, Cornell University’s ILR (Industrial and Labor Relations) School suspended a long-term student exchange program with Beijing-based Renmin University to convey profound concern about the Chinese university’s blatant suppression of students’ participation in Jasic-worker support campaigns (and other labor and social struggles) over the summer. The severe punishment of the blacklisted Renmin University students by the stability-obsessed state and its delegates “represented in sum pretty gross violations of academic freedom,” in the words of Eli Friedman, director of international programs for the ILR School.¹⁹

Without effective union leadership, workers from Jasic and other companies are impelled to rely overwhelmingly on their own efforts to fight for economic compensation and benefits, many of them stipulated in the law. Discrepancies are huge between the rights promised on the books and those delivered. Labor challenges, including notably the rebuilding and revitalization of grassroots

trade unions, will inevitably confront a tactical mix of reconciliation and repression on all fronts, resulting in uncertainty and instability.

NOTES

1. Dagongzhe Zhongxin, or Migrant Workers’ Center, has provided free legal services and other support to Chinese migrant workers in Shenzhen industrial towns since 2000. The center has long collaborated with Worker Empowerment, a Hong Kong non-governmental labor rights group. See “Statement from Worker Empowerment,” August 27, 2018, www.workerempowerment.org/en/updates/334. Also see the joint statement of Shenzhen Dagongzhe Workers’ Center and Worker Empowerment entitled “Release Fu Changguo Now!” September 13, 2018. For further discussions, see Tim Pringle and Anita Chan, “China’s Labour Relations Have Entered a Dangerous New Phase, as Shown by Attacks on Jasic Workers and Activists,” *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, September 19, 2018, www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2164817/chinas-labour-relations-have-entered-dangerous-new-phase#comments; Elaine Hui and Eli Friedman, “The Communist Party vs. China’s Labor Laws,” *Jacobin*, October 2, 2018, www.jacobinmag.com/2018/10/china-communist-party-labor-law-jasic; a series of articles on “The Jasic Workers’ Struggle in China” at *Labor Notes* (starting from November 5, 2018), www.labornotes.org/jasic.
2. *Xinhua*, “Investigation on So-called Worker Incidents in Shenzhen,” August 25, 2018, www.xinhua-net.com/english/2018-08/25/c_137416700.htm.
3. Zhao Yusha, “Chinese Workers Warned Against Foreign-funded Advocacy Groups,” *Global Times*, August 26, 2018, www.globaltimes.cn/content/1117160.shtml.
4. According to China’s Social Insurance Law, effective July 1, 2011, employees are legally entitled to five types of insurance (medical insurance, work-injury insurance, old age pensions, maternity insurance, and unemployment insurance) and a housing fund (designed to ensure that workers save to purchase housing).
5. All-China Federation of Trade Unions, “ACFTU Marks 80th Anniversary,” 2005, print edition.
6. Zhan Lisheng, “Guangzhou: Hotbed for Rise of Trade Unions,” *China Daily*, August 29, 2006, www.newsgd.com/business/zones/200608290055.htm.
7. Mingwei Liu, “Where There Are Workers, There Should Be Trade Unions: Union Organizing in the Era of Growing Informal Employment,” in

- Sarosh Kuruvilla, Ching Kwan Lee, and Mary E. Gallagher, eds., *From Iron Rice Bowl to Informalization: Markets, Workers, and the State in a Changing China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 157; Jenny Chan, Ngai Pun, and Mark Selden, "Chinese Labor Protest and Trade Unions," in Richard Maxwell, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Labor and Media* (Routledge, 2016), 290-302; Anita Chan, ed., *Walmart in China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).
8. "Number of Grassroots Trade Unions by Region (2016)" and "Trade Union Members in Grassroots Trade Unions by Region (2016)," *China Labour Statistical Yearbook 2017*, 410-13.
9. "Jasic Technology's corporate history (2005-present)," Jasic Technology, www.jasictech.com/html/en/about-jasic/corporate-profile/corporate-history/.
10. Tim Pringle, *Trade Unions in China: The Challenge of Labour Unrest* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 162.
11. See, for example, Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Yang Su and Xin He, "Street as Courtroom: State Accommodation of Labor Protest in South China," *Law and Society Review* (Vol. 44, Issue 1, 2010), 157-84; Xi Chen, *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Yanhua Deng and Kevin J. O'Brien, "Relational Repression in China: Using Social Ties to Demobilize Protesters," *The China Quarterly* (Vol. 215, Sept. 2013), 533-52; Benjamin L. Liebman, "Legal Reform: China's Law-stability Paradox," *Daedalus: The Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Vol. 143, Issue 2, 2014), 96-109.
12. Chris King-chi Chan and Elaine Sio-ying Hui, "The Development of Collective Bargaining in China: From 'Collective Bargaining by Riot' to 'Party State-led Wage Bargaining,'" *The China Quarterly* (Vol. 217, 2014), 221-42; Dave Lyddon, Xuebing Cao, Quan Meng, and Jun Lu, "A Strike of 'Unorganized' Workers in a Chinese Car Factory: The Nanhai Honda Events of 2010," *Industrial Relations Journal* (Vol. 46, Issue 2, 2015), 134-52.
13. Ching Kwan Lee and Yonghong Zhang, "The Power of Instability: Unraveling the Microfoundations of Bargained Authoritarianism in China," *American Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 118, Issue 6, 2013), 1486.
14. Feng Chen and Xin Xu, "Active Judiciary: Judicial Dismantling of Workers' Collective Action in China," *The China Journal* (Vol. 67, 2012), 87-107; Mary E. Gallagher, *Authoritarian Legality in China: Law, Workers, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
15. "Scholars Demand the Shenzhen Government Release Jasic Workers Arrested for Attempting to Unionize," RC44 – Research Committee on Labour Movements, www.rc44labour.org/scholars-demand-the-shenzhen-government-release-jasic-workers-arrested-for-attempting-to-unionize-30-july-2018/.
16. "Global Call on China to Release Arrested Workers, Activists, and Students in Jasic Struggle," Action Network, September 2018, actionnetwork.org/petitions/call-on-china-to-release-arrested-labour-activists/.
17. Ngai Pun, Yuan Shen, Yuhua Guo, Huilin Lu, Jenny Chan, and Mark Selden, "Worker-intellectual Unity: Trans-Border Sociological Intervention in Foxconn," *Current Sociology* (Vol. 62, Issue 2, 2014), 209-22.
18. Jenny Chan, "Shenzhen Jasic Technology: The Birth of a Worker-student Coalition in China?" *Hong Kong Free Press*, September 1, 2018, www.hongkongfp.com/2018/09/01/shenzhen-jasic-technology-birth-worker-student-coalition-china/.
19. Elizabeth Redden, "Cutting Ties," *Inside Higher Ed*, October 29, 2018, www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/10/29/cornell-ends-partnership-chinese-university-over-academic-freedom-concerns.

The Jasic Struggle in China's Political Context

AU LOONG YU

THE JASIC CASE, IN PARTICULAR relationships that were forged between students and workers, reveals important developments in China's politics. China's 1989 democratic movement saw intellectuals and students excluding workers from the very beginning. After the failure of that democratic movement, intellectuals soon divided into liberals and the New Left, cleaved by the false dichotomy of "state versus market." Intellectuals may have adopted New Left rhetoric about "fairness" but remained indifferent to workers' situation. Students simply retreated to their study. It was not until the 2009 strikes by Guangzhou sanitation workers that workers began to receive some support from students, mostly as individuals. Small circles of leftist students had started debating and practicing *ronggong*, literally "mixing with workers," that is, going to work in factories after graduation and trying to organize there. Key to this development has been the role of students who identify themselves as Maoists.

At the turn of this century, some older Maoists in the North were active behind the scenes in resisting the privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), viewing SOE workers as having more revolutionary potential. This older generation of Maoists invited rural migrant activists and students

to their classes and training but did not view rural migrants as having sufficiently advanced political consciousness. After Maoists splintered in 2012 following a failed effort to push the party to the left, one wing became more vocal in criticizing the party, arguing a qualitative capitalist change had taken place. They became more explicit in appealing for resistance from below, although they continue to try to win over leading party cadres, invoking the "socialist" principles enshrined in the constitution or in Mao's legacy. Thus the Jasic struggle represents a new generation of Maoist students interested in workers, and this time they are working with rural migrant workers in the South. This new generation of young Maoists has also changed tactics, choosing high-profile resistance and support for the Jasic workers, which is very unusual given the highly repressive political situation in China. During the height of the Jasic campaign, old and young Maoist supporters carried photos of Chairman Mao and called for support "for the sake of working class's awakening, for the sake of Chairman Mao!"¹ Another Maoist supporter published an article, "Where Has Janggangshan Gone? On the Jasic Struggle and Revolutionary Revival,"² linking the Jasic struggle to Jinggangshan, the mountain where Mao first established his guerilla base in 1927. Although the escalation of the Jasic struggle from a workplace trade union organizing drive to a political struggle against the local officials has been described by some as an indication of the political transformation of Chinese workers' consciousness, that seems too bold a claim. It is also doubtful

AU LOONG YU is a writer based in Hong Kong. He has been writing on China for twenty years. His most recent book, *China Rise: Strength and Fragility*, was published by Merlin Press in 2012, and was translated into French, Chinese, and Japanese.

that making a direct comparison between Jinggangshan, a symbol for guerilla warfare, and the Jasic workers is really helpful to the latter's struggle.

Although the Maoists have accumulated a lot of experience in the North in supporting the rights of SOE workers, their experiences cannot be directly applied to the private enterprises of the South without substantial modification. When the SOEs underwent privatization, the workers sometimes directly confronted corrupt local officials, as they were the criminals who were directly responsible for the theft of public property. Therefore, workers' actions often began with political resistance and called on the revolutionary ethos of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a spiritual basis. This was natural and was even sometimes useful. But in the private companies of the South, it is different. The conflict is chiefly between the employees and the employers. Moreover, the revolutionary ethos of the CCP is less likely to resonate with migrant workers, and so if actions escalate into political resistance those workers are less likely to be motivated. Surely in the Jasic case, as in many other cases, when the local government cracked down on workers then the struggle could potentially have become political. But to escalate the struggle one must also ask whether workers are fully prepared for a political confrontation. Experiences already tell us that they were not.

The state paid no attention at all to the Maoists' appeal to the "socialist" principle or to Mao. Though Xi Jinping continues to demand the people learn from Marxism-Leninism and Mao's thought, the state continues to crack down on any independent and collective effort at seriously studying left classics—and to crack down even harder when these efforts carry an aspiration to sympathize with working people. This should not surprise us. Back in 2004, the Zhengzhou police arrested and charged local Maoists who tried to assemble to pay tribute to Mao. Maoist website Red China had placed their hope for a left turn

within the CCP led by Bo Xilai. Minqi Li, a Chinese scholar currently lives and teaches in USA and also the theoretician of the Red China, argues in his book that Bo represented "the last significant faction that was in opposition to neoliberal capitalism", and that "by purging Bo Xilai from the party, Communist Party leadership may have foregone their last and best opportunity to resolve China's rapidly escalating economic and social contradictions in a relatively peaceful manner."³

The "Social Democrats"

About three years ago, liberal left labor activists suffered a similar crackdown. On December 3, 2015, the state arrested eight activists from four labor groups and later prosecuted and sentenced four of them. This was to curb these groups' campaigning for collective bargaining, an effort supported by China Labor Bulletin (CLB), an NGO in Hong Kong founded by Han Dongfang, a worker leader in the 1989 democratic movement. That year also saw the arrest of more than a hundred lawyers for the "crime" of making a legal defense for prosecuted dissidents.

With the tremendous growth in the number of rural migrant workers and their spontaneous strikes since 2000, a new current of liberals emerged. On top of calling for constitutionalism and civil liberties, they began to support rural migrant workers and call for the three basic labor rights (the rights to freedom of association and to strike as well as to collective bargaining). From a labor perspective, this is a step forward. One of their main writers was Wang Jiansong. He, along with Han, described themselves as "social democrats," a term that should be treated with care in the China context, for reasons explained later. He criticized the capitalists for being "too dependent (on the party officials)," "never daring to fight for their civil rights, and only being interested in bribing officials, either actively or passively." He contrasts the ability of rural migrant workers, understood as the

new working class, to organize democratically to fight for their rights.⁴

The social democrats, however, did not support the SOE workers' struggle against privatization earlier—or at most confined themselves to calling for better compensation—something the Maoists never forgave nor forgot. Unlike the Maoists, they opposed the “socialist tradition” of the 1949 revolution and saw the SOE workers as privileged, conservative, and alien. In contrast, rural migrant workers, who do not share the political consciousness of SOE workers, are now considered by the social democrats as both super-exploited and the new social bearer of changes, although previously the social democrats, or liberals in general, mainly looked to party leaders like former premier Wen Jiabao as agents of change.

Han Dongfang has long dropped his previous position of campaigning for independent unions and has argued instead for reform within the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. In 2013, Han saw Xi Jinping's speech for ACFTU reform as a signal of real pro-worker change. In March 2015, Wang Jiangsong initiated a campaign for collective bargaining and was endorsed by 15 labor NGOs and a hundred individuals. This campaign was also supported by CLB and helped to spread the idea of collective bargaining among workers. Yet in June of the same year, Han spoke at the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives, reassuring the audience that “President Xi was going in the right direction with his very important 3rd Plenum Decision in 2013.” He observed, “It is not in the CCP's interests to crack down on civil society,” and, “This is the first time in the history of modern China that the interests of the CCP and the workers have been fully and beneficially aligned.” To help the CCP go in that direction, Han said he was prepared to “depoliticize an overly politicized labor issue” by “targeting workplace collective bargaining, rather than freedom of association.”⁵ However, the state

replied to Han's goodwill with arrests and prison terms in 2015-2016. And then in less than a year the state struck again—and this time the victims were the Maoists. Ironically, both the social democrats and the Maoists nurtured hope in the party, with the former looking to the “liberal” wing of the party while the latter appealed to those party leaders who are still committed to the “socialist tradition,” but both received the same treatment from the state.

It is a good thing to advocate for collective bargaining or workplace union organizing, but it is problematic to link these efforts with the idea of supporting this or that wing of the party leaders and to make political concessions to them. It is time to stop nurturing the illusion of party self-reform. Doing so will simply lead labor to play into the hands of the faction fight among top leaders, leaving labor with nothing except more repression and hopelessness. Instead of self-reform, the CCP is evolving into a “totalitarian” regime (a debatable term, surely) which now aims at brainwashing the population to the degree that not only are all potential dissidents repressed, but that everyone must think the same as Xi.

Only a united resistance from labor could stop this madness. Precisely how to achieve this is doubtless a big question and there is no easy answer available. The increasing repression also implies that Xi's regime is much more ruthless than its predecessors, hence existing legal channels for collective action are closing up as well. At this stage, however, we can at least preserve our forces as much as possible and not become involved in hopeless confrontation. The time for an offensive will come, but it is not now. Secondly, in the face of repression we should try to forge a united front among labor groups and support each other. This is possible through public debate: Despite repression, on-line discussion is always heated among activists in mainland China, since all labor currents run websites both inside and outside the country.

Maoists Against Social Democrats

It is sad to review the past twenty-year intellectual history of China. Both the liberals and the New Left treated each other as the main enemy while both sides pledged allegiance to the party-state so as to maintain links with the two main ruling cliques. When the Zhengzhou Maoists were repressed in 2004, certain liberals forgot about their commitment to freedom of speech and stayed silent, giving tacit support for the arrests. In 2008, the New Left and the Maoists applauded the conviction of Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate. These are just the most famous cases of intolerance from both currents.

In recent years, such hostility between the two sides has receded a bit as both are increasingly facing repression. The rise of social democrats in China, who are also mildly critical of the right-wing liberals, has laid a common ground for all labor currents to fight for basic civil and labor rights. However when the state repressed the NGO that supported Wang's campaign for basic labor rights in 2015, the Maoists did express solidarity with them. Minqi Li has recognized the need for basic labor rights and has added that they are far from enough (which is true), and that what is also needed is a class struggle to reestablish public ownership (which is desirable). As Minqi Li debates the future and notes that "when the time of a labor movement climax arrives" it will necessarily make class struggle sharpen to a point where class collaboration and even collective bargaining will be impossible, he challenges Wang by asking, "Which side will you be on when the time comes?"⁶ But we should ask as well about the present, when the state is ruthlessly persecuting everyone.

From a left perspective, a socialist transformation in China is surely desirable. But a debate about program and class strategy, however necessary, should not be counterposed to a common struggle to win basic

civil rights at present. Without these rights it is very difficult for spontaneous strikes to develop into organized struggles, let alone a "socialist transformation," especially when government's control is so strong that underground work is very difficult if not impossible in most situations. The inconvenient truth is that long before the arrival of "the labor movement climax" we may all be already crushed by the state.

In China, these two constitute the main labor currents. Now both are in a dire situation, and the world labor movement must come to their aid, learning from the bitter fruits of sectarianism, as in the failure of the German Communist Party and the Social Democrats to forge an alliance against the Nazis in the late 1920s. As China is quickly evolving into a totalitarian state, the greatest danger among labor activists is being sectarian. Although the German case is not entirely comparable, it is common sense that ideological differences between the two main labor currents should not become an obstacle to tactical alliance for civil and labor rights at present. Different currents will continue to disagree among themselves on many things, but right now we should recognize that there is also something in common, and then even if we march separately let us strike together.

There are indications this is occurring, with Chinese social democrats more willing to express solidarity with the Maoists. CLB, for instance, endorsed the solidarity statement—prepared by other Hong Kong labor groups—with the Jasic Maoists. These Hong Kong groups are slightly to the left of Han Dongfang, as they have less illusion of a self-reform of the CCP under Xi. Despite ideological differences with the Maoists, they also came out in support of the Jasic struggle, partly because they focus on practical work rather than theoretical debate.

The Revolutionary Marxists

Besides the two main currents as described

above, there has existed since the turn of the century a tiny stream of Revolutionary Marxists (RM). The RM often turns to Trotsky, not Mao, as their chief theoretical reference point. As Minqi Li puts it, besides their own “Marxist-Leninist-Maoist” faction there is now a “Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist” faction. The RM cannot be compared in influence to the social democrats and the Maoists, who have strong connections to the institutions and the establishment and hence enjoy much more resources. The RM is at best composed of individuals and a few tiny groups with little resources and connections. On top of this the authorities see them as even more dangerous than the other two currents. Hence, they are very low-profile, if not entirely underground or hidden in NGOs and such organizations.

Some members of the RM have done good work, such as introducing European Marxist writings and working on labor rights. The more visible RM members are usually those who are active on the internet (and in private gatherings). Their debate with the Maoists on the character of the Chinese regime did pressure the latter to respond to this important question, and thus contributed to a rethinking process among leftists. Probably they were also among the first set of leftists who started debating about *ronggong*, or students going to work in factories. Therefore even when the RM is so seemingly marginal and insignificant, in relation to leftist ideas it is still worth noting. Individual RM members, however, sometimes curiously echo a Maoist tendency to deny the progressive nature of winning civil liberties during the present stage. They criticize social democrats like Wang Jiangsong as “reformist” (which is true) and treat them as the main enemy (which is

problematic).

To sum up, we need to get rid of the idea of self-reform of the ruling clique and rely on the awakening of the working masses instead. In order to accomplish the latter task, it is important that labor currents come to the understanding that a common struggle to win basic civil and labor rights is paramount for a labor future and that ideological disagreement does not hinder this struggle. In the end, instead of treating an “-ism” as dogma or even worse, a new religion, labor should treat it as their working hypothesis in the practical fight against a new totalitarian regime.

A version of this essay first appeared in Chinese in the Mingpao Daily, August 30, 2018. All information reported here comes from the internet or personal contacts.

NOTES

1. *Wu Jingtang—benfu shenzhen pingshan! Weile gongrenjieji de juexing, weile Maozhuxi!* (Wu Jingtang—Rush to Shenzhen Pingshan! For the Sake of Working Class Awakening, for the Sake of Chairman Mao!), www.shidaixianfeng.tk/archives/12887.
2. *Jinggangshan jinhezai?* redchinacn.net/portal.php?mod=view&aid=36329 (accessed 10/21/18).
3. *China and the 21st Century Crisis*, Pluto Press, 2016, pp. 38 and 183.
4. *Weishen Yao Zhijing he Xuexi Lide Gongren* (Why We Need to Learn from Lide Workers and to Pay Respect to Them) blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4d8d48790102vz1j.html.
5. Hearing: China's Rise: The Strategic Impact of Its Economic and Military Growth, <https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=103639>.
6. *Dang Gongren Yundong Gaochao Lailinshi, 'Laogongjie' Hequhecong?* (When the Climax of the Workers Movement Arrives, Where Should Labor Go?), redchinacn.net/portal.php?mod=view&aid=25703.

SYMPOSIUM ON ECOSOCIALISM

DESPITE THE DIRE THREAT POSED by our multiple ecological crises, and despite shelves of books theorizing the relationship between capitalism and our ecological crisis, even radical environmentalists find themselves lost for a strategy. How do we move forward? How do we blend the need for a long-term perspective that recognizes the need to transcend capitalism with steps that we can take here and now? In the following symposium, "Radical Visions and Strategies for the Environmental Movement," which began as a panel at The Left Forum 2017, three longtime eco-socialist thinkers and activists tackle this all-important issue.

A Greener New Deal?

ASHLEY DAWSON

DEMANDS FOR A GREEN NEW DEAL (GND) are a beacon of hope in an otherwise dystopian contemporary landscape. In her platform document, for example, newly elected Representative and Democratic Socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez states that "it's time to shift course and implement a GND—a transformation that implements structural changes to our political and financial systems in order to alter the trajectory of our environment." Ocasio-Cortez is not alone. Other members of the insurgent

left who have embraced the idea of a GND include recently elected Michigan Democrat Rashida Tlaib and Florida gubernatorial candidate Andrew Gillum. For these candidates, a GND would confront the twin threats of a brewing capitalist crisis based on stagnating wages and a biocrisis that includes not just climate change but also a massive loss of biodiversity (often referred to as the Sixth Extinction), increasing scarcity of fresh water, desertification, and loss of marine fisheries, among other crises. Traditionally, these twin threats have seemed insuperable precisely because the solution to one would exacerbate the other: Creating new jobs in order to address the economic crisis would contribute to economic growth that ravages the environment. Conversely, protecting the environment would mean cutting growth and thereby contributing to a worsening economic picture. The idea of a GND promises an exit from this contradiction through the creation of legions of good, green jobs. As Ocasio-Cortez puts it in her platform, a GND that is "based on radically addressing climate change is a potential path toward a more equitable

ASHLEY DAWSON is a professor of English at the CUNY Graduate Center and the College of Staten Island. He is the author of two recent books on environmental issues, *Extreme Cities: The Peril and Promise of Urban Life in the Age of Climate Change* (Verso Books, 2017), and *Extinction: A Radical History* (O/R Press, 2016), as well as two previous books on topics relating to race, imperialism, and literature. Dawson recently founded the Climate Action Lab, which brings together activists, researchers, and artists to reimagine climate politics through the lens of the city.

economy with increased employment and widespread financial security for all.” It’s a win-win scenario.

The notion of a GND of course harkens back to the policies adopted under the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to pull the U.S. out of the Great Depression. But there is also another precedent, one that is all too seldom acknowledged in today’s references to a GND: debates that circulated after the Great Recession of 2008 about how to jump-start advanced capitalist economies while also dealing with the gathering climate crisis. Prominent advocates of a GND after 2008 included the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), the Green European Foundation, and the Center for American Progress. In response to the proposals put forward by these prominent progressive institutions, members of the climate justice movement articulated a number of radical critiques of the growth-oriented underpinnings of GND programs. For these critics, a GND must be centered on targeted de-growth of industrial production and a rejection of the imperial mode of living that characterizes the energy- and resource-intensive lifestyles of the wealthy in the Global North. Notions of a GND that remain tethered to a capitalist economic system predicated on ceaseless compound growth rates, climate justice activists argued, would simply exacerbate the underlying bio-crisis. These critiques of proposals for a GND are freshly salient in the context of efforts by insurgent socialists in the U.S. today to offer solutions to the twin economic and environmental crises of contemporary capitalism.

In what follows I sketch a genealogy of the GND idea, beginning with an assessment of the highly flawed nature of the New Deal during the 1930s and continuing with a critical account of the major GND proposals of the period following the Great Recession of 2008. The essay concludes with some suggestions about what a genuine exit from the present crisis might entail—what, in other

words, a wholesale program of ecological and economic reconstruction might require. As the green think tank Bios recently noted, we currently lack viable models of economic governance since the dominant economic theories of today were all developed during an era of energetic and material abundance. It is precisely such unexamined and yet ubiquitous assumptions about ceaseless growth that we must overturn, and yet doing so raises the very serious specter of mass unemployment and attendant social turmoil. We are already faced with a global upsurge of popular authoritarianism, and we have only begun to experience the economic and ecological disruptions that the twin crisis holds in store. To suggest that there is an easy win-win approach within a capitalist economic system, that we can have our environmental cake and continue with current levels of frenetic consumption, is to cultivate the most rash form of naïveté about the increasing unsustainability of capitalism in both economic and ecological terms. It will not be enough to reframe ideas of de-growth away from overwhelmingly negative associations with locally woven, organic carrot-pants and pathogen-encrusted compost toilets to ones of abundant and meaningful time for engagement with other people in projects of collective transformation. We need to be clear that such a transformation in values must come within the context of carefully managed policies of ecological reconstruction that move us very quickly to complete energy transition while also building social resilience through the expansion of non-consumption-based sectors of the economy. Such an ecological and social reconstruction cannot take place within the framework of a capitalist economy.

New Deal Illusions

Contrary to widely accepted myths concerning the efficacy of programs such as the Works Progress Administration established under FDR during the 1930s, the New Deal did not solve the contradictions of capitalism. Un-

employment spiked from 4.2 percent of the labor force in 1928 to 23.6 percent in 1932, the worst moment of the Great Depression, then fell back down to 16 percent in 1936, but climbed back up to 19 percent in 1938.¹ It was ultimately the U.S. entry into World War II and the massive, state-orchestrated transformation of the economy onto a war-time footing that dramatically brought unemployment down. In addition, despite nostalgic ideas about the “universalistic” or nonracial character of the New Deal, most New Deal policies were anything but race-neutral, or, for that matter, gender-neutral. Some programs, like the initial Social Security old-age pension program, were established on a racially invidious, albeit officially race-neutral, basis that excluded agricultural and domestic workers from coverage at a time when those categories included nearly 90 percent of Black workers.² Other New Deal programs, like FDR’s housing policy, gave federal support to the creation and reproduction of an explicitly racially exclusive residential housing industry. This does not mean to say that women and people of color in the United States did not find ways to take advantage of New Deal policies, but again, it is hard to imagine that the benefits of these policies would have become as widely distributed as they did without the impact of wartime mobilization.

For this reason, advocacy of a GND today often slides quickly into rhetoric of full-scale social and economic mobilization along the lines of World War II. So, for instance, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s platform document states that “we need to avoid a worldwide refugee crisis by waging a war for climate justice through the mobilization of our population and our government.” Environmental activist and writer Bill McKibben goes even further by declaring that “we’re under attack from climate change—and our only hope is to mobilize like we did in World War II.”³ While they draw attention to the massive scale of mobilization that is now necessary in order to avoid planetary ecocide, there are

some problems with such rhetoric. For one thing, it implicitly equates nature with the behavior of fascist powers like Nazi Germany. But of course climate change is not some authoritarian despot bent on totalitarian rule, but rather a result of the escalating carbon emissions generated by a specific economic system: fossil-fueled capitalism. McKibben is not so much concerned with the exactitude of the analogy, though; what he’s really trying to do is to establish the legitimacy of the kind of “wholesale industrial retooling” that took place in the United States during World War II, a retooling that in this case would involve a massive buildout of the country’s capacity for renewable energy generation. McKibben cites Mark Wilson’s book *Destructive Creation* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) to challenge the notion that private industry rolled up its sleeves and went to war. Instead, McKibben argues, business had to be dragged into the war effort kicking and screaming, and, according to Wilson, “it was public capital that built most of the stuff, not Wall Street.” If firms refused to take directions from public authorities, McKibben declares, FDR ordered them seized. In his account of a state-controlled economy dedicated to full employment, McKibben is careful to steer clear of the word socialism, but that of course is what he is advocating. And yet it is his refusal to broach this mobilizing idea that makes his plangent question of whether “we can find the collective governance will to fight back in this war against global warming, as we once fought fascism” so ironic. Surely we will never be able to mobilize our collective will for such a fight unless we are able to speak frankly about the need for institutions and forms of public governance necessary to embody that will. Such organs of collective will only emerge from widespread acceptance of the notion that solidarity and the public good are important ideals to fight for.

But the problems with invocations of the New Deal—and of wartime mobilization—run deeper. As Matt Huber has argued,

the New Deal helped catalyze a wholesale transformation of life in the United States, one centered on mass consumption of cheap energy.⁴ FDR believed that cheap energy was central to what he termed “abundant life,” and consequently helped oversee a transformation in social and energy policies that paved the way to the culture of conspicuous consumption which dominated postwar America. During the period from 1932 to 1942, for example, the federal government spent roughly \$4 billion on highway construction, creating the precedent for the 1956 Federal Highway Act and the creation of the massive U.S. interstate highway system.⁵ Public funds were used during these years to create the auto-highway-suburb complex, ensuring private mobility (for white homeowners) and abundant profits for capital. No thought was given to the environmental impact of this new, sprawling geography of mass consumption, but today, with per capita carbon emissions in the United States at roughly double the levels of those in Europe, the impact is dramatically clear. In addition, this domestic geography of fossil-fueled consumption also necessitated interventionist imperial policies around the globe, an imperial cartography established when FDR met Saudi King Abdul Aziz aboard a U.S. battleship anchored in the Suez Canal in 1945. During this meeting, FDR fatefully pledged political and military support to the oil-rich dictatorship. A mobilization based on endless expansion of a capitalist economy thus generated both environmental and political outcomes whose devastating contradictions are all too evident today.

The Great Recession and Proposals for GND

A genealogy of proposals for a GND takes us back to precedents such as the Pearce Commission's *Blueprint for a Green Economy*, published in Britain in 1989, and, before that, to earlier ecological debates that include the Brundtland Report's exploration of the

prospects for sustainable growth (1987) and the Club of Rome's famous report on *The Limits to Growth* (1972). As the title of the latter explicitly highlights, the contradictions between economic growth and a finite terrestrial resource base are prominent in the earlier moments of these conjoined economic and environmental proposals. For example, despite advocating sustainable growth, the Brundtland Report alludes to a tension between sustainability and economic growth that might entail making “painful choices” in order to ward off environmental collapse.

By the time of the Great Recession of 2008, however, such fears had been thoroughly banished. In its 2009 plan for a Global Green New Deal (GGND), UNEP argued that “the world economy needs the stimulus provided by a GND because the unregulated market cannot resurrect itself on its own.” The UNEP proposal thus envisages the GGND as a kind of Keynesian state-based economic stimulus package for an ailing global capitalist economy. The idea quickly garnered support from some of the key institutional incarnations of that order: the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, among others. As a liberal alternative to the draconian austerity programs imposed around the world after the 2008 crash, the GGND held many attractions for liberal commentators and members of the public. Not only did it intend to revive the world's economic fortunes, but it promised to do this through investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies that boosted the image of a clean, green capitalist order on the horizon. Yet many of the solutions advocated by the UNEP proposal were of a neoliberal stamp, including the idea of dealing with the spiraling carbon emissions caused by fossil-fuel consumption through global carbon markets. In addition, there was little understanding in the document of the underlying contradictions in measures such as improvements in energy efficiency within a capitalist context. Historically, such efficiency measures

have promoted fresh rounds of economic growth rather than reduction in the cycles of material consumption.⁶

Underlying these arguments for a program of Keynesian environmentalism is the assumption that economic growth is beneficial. As the UNEP report put it, “the greening of economies need not be a drag on growth. On the contrary, the greening of economies has the potential to be a new engine of growth, a net generator of decent jobs, and a vital strategy to eliminate persistent poverty.”⁷ These ideas have become widely accepted, as is evident from the writing of Bill McKibben, who argues that a global mobilization to defeat climate change

wouldn't wreck our economy or throw coal miners out of work. Quite the contrary: Gearing up to stop global warming would provide a host of social and economic benefits, just as World War II did. It would save lives. ... It would produce an awful lot of jobs. ... It would provide safer, better-paying employment to energy workers. ... It would rescue the world's struggling economies. ... And fighting this war would be socially transformative. (Just as World War II sped up the push for racial and gender equality, a climate campaign should focus its first efforts on the frontline communities most poisoned by the fossil-fuel era.)⁸

McKibben's insistence on economic and environmental justice for the frontline communities most adversely impacted by fossil capitalism is dramatically different from the priorities in the UNEP report, but his faith in the egalitarian impact of GND is not wholly distinct from the assumptions about the benefits of Keynesian stimulus to capitalist economies that underlie that report. In addition, the idea that the present hyper-consumptionist economic system should be retained through massive conversion of existing energy generation from fossil fuels to renewable energy fails to address the deeper roots of the present biocrisis, which lie in the

capitalist imperative to grow ceaselessly. We all may wish for the kind of social transformation McKibben advocates, but we need to be extremely wary of GND proposals that do not imagine such transformations through a wholesale shift away from the inequalities generated by the capitalist system.

Growth only seems like a viable proposition to GND advocates because of assumptions that economic expansion can be decoupled from increasing energy consumption. This idea of decoupling is most ardently expounded by the Breakthrough Institute in its *Ecomodernist Manifesto*, which argues that “intensifying many human activities—particularly farming, energy extraction, forestry, and settlement—so that they use less land and interfere less with the natural world is the key to decoupling human development from environmental impacts.” Such arguments are perplexing given the fact that the global economy is five times the size it was after World War II and is expanding at such an exponential rate that it will be eighty times that size by 2100. As commentators such as David Harvey have pointed out, this rate of growth is totally at odds with the finite resource base and increasingly fragile environment on which humanity depends.⁹ To obscure the glaring contradiction of infinite economic expansion on a self-evidently limited planet, advocates of growth typically distinguish between relative and absolute decoupling. There is significant evidence, they argue, for declining resource intensities, or relative decoupling. Over the last thirty years, for example, global carbon intensity fell from around one kilogram per dollar of economic activity to just under 770 grams per dollar.¹⁰ But improvements such as these in carbon and energy intensity were more than offset by massive increases in the scale of economic activity in general. Not only is there no evidence, therefore, for overall reductions in resource throughput (absolute decoupling), but global carbon emissions from energy use have actually *increased* by 40 percent since

1990, the Kyoto Protocol base year. In addition, when one factors in global consumption of a range of nonfuel minerals such as iron ore and bauxite, global resource intensities have actually intensified dramatically in recent decades. As Tim Jackson explains, estimated rates of declining carbon intensity about equal projected population growth rates, but under business-as-usual scenarios, annual growth rates of 1.4 percent in income mean that by 2050 the advanced industrialized nations will be emitting *80 percent* more carbon than we are at present.¹¹ To make matters worse, such alarming statistics do not include estimates of carbon emissions from industrial behemoths like China, to which the West has displaced much of its industrial activities. As these statistics underline, the ecomodernists' assertions about decoupling are dramatically contradicted by the relentless increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, notwithstanding periodic downturns in the rate of emissions.

In addition, there is scant evidence to support the idea that a GND would be successful in economic terms. In fact, the outcome might be precisely the opposite, with GND programs finding their economic viability contingent on a continuation of precisely the environmentally destructive expansionist tendencies that they set out to ameliorate. Indeed, economists such as Bill Blackwater have argued that "in order for massive green investment programs to be successful as investments, they require underlying growth in the consumer economy to at least continue at the global level, and within the West, to accelerate." At the end of the day, in other words, environmental Keynesianism is predicated on economic expansion; since new growth means that fresh resources need to be exploited, any environmental benefits of more efficient technology and a transition to renewable energy will ultimately be undermined, and the biocrisis will intensify.

Another prominent element of GND proposals such as the one advanced by the Center for American Progress also merits

caution: the idea that green jobs that entail higher skill levels, better working conditions, and better wages will ameliorate today's glaring economic and social inequalities. Unfortunately, evidence suggests many of the common assumptions associated with green jobs are far too optimistic. Green jobs, it should be noted, do not necessarily use fewer environmental resources. In fact, they tend to be quite resource intensive. In addition, since most green jobs are located in sectors like agriculture, construction, waste and water management, and manufacturing, there is little evidence that green jobs are better jobs than average jobs. On the contrary, statistical evidence suggests that in terms of working conditions, green jobs are actually worse than average jobs.¹² In addition to the problem of green jobs' questionable quality, there is also substantial evidence to suggest that green jobs will not improve gender inequity, since most green jobs are in sectors with extremely low female participation.

A Crash Program of Ecological and Social Reconstruction

Proposals for a GND typically advocate a raft of interventions that include not only full-scale transition to renewable energy, but also investment in other forms of green technology, including energy efficiency, as well as the improvement of transportation and energy infrastructures. We need to fight for these transformations as a minimum condition to avert planetary ecocide, but we should be clear that by themselves they will not solve either the biocrisis or the myriad contradictions that afflict contemporary capitalism. The basic problem is that the biosphere is limited, but economic growth under capitalism is boundless. With this boundless economic growth comes necessary exploitation of nature and of frontline communities in the form of extreme extraction. Along with the forms of ruination and dispossession that attend extreme extraction, economic growth

also produces toxic byproducts that decades of environmental justice struggles have shown disproportionately affect people of color in the advanced capitalist nations, as well as large swaths of the Global South.

Proposals for genuine ecological and social reconstruction, therefore, cannot simply substitute renewable energy for fossil fuels while leaving the current global system of spiraling production and consumption untouched. Instead, the growth-based presuppositions of the New Deal and environmental Keynesianism must be challenged. What we really need, in other words, is a crash program to *shrink* those sectors of the economy that are environmentally destructive, while in tandem sectors that do no environmental damage are expanded. The latter is necessary not only because unemployment must not be allowed to spike as we shift away from fossil capitalism, a development that might discredit the transition program. In addition, the so-called caring economy should be built up because it is vitally concerned with building social resilience, an absolutely essential project given the increasing climate chaos that will inevitably afflict global society given the amount of carbon already in circulation. This program should be thought of as investment in essential social infrastructure. Since these sectors of the economy disproportionately employ people who are relatively marginalized by the capitalist system, a program of building social infrastructure would also help ameliorate the galloping inequality of contemporary capitalism.

Specific concrete demands that should be advanced within a program of ecological reconstruction should thus involve not just a shift to 100 percent renewable power, but also a reduction in total energy consumption. In addition, such a program would entail a radical diminution in the imperial mode of living that characterizes elites in the Global North and South, with their mega-mansions and first-class flights around the planet. It would involve a drastic cut in the industrial produc-

tion of useless products, with producers forced to guarantee the durability of anything they manufacture. It would involve the rebuilding of cities to emphasize mass transit and walkability. And it would necessarily hinge on an end to today's environmentally destructive and socially corrosive hyper-militarism.

A program of ecological and social reconstruction that involves simultaneous growth and shrinkage means that it is important to think carefully about currently popular demands such as a universal job guarantee: Might such a guarantee not lead to an expansion of destructive jobs? While it makes sense to fight against the precariousness and austerity that are central features of neoliberal capitalism, the imperative of a crash program to shrink environmentally destructive production and consumption means careful planning of the economy in a manner antithetical to dominant doctrines that represent command economies as inherently inefficient. Instead, forms of collective planning must be created that are founded in the understanding that the crash program of ecological reconstruction should *shift* the forms and conceptions of labor that are central to contemporary global capitalism. This involves not just material transformation but also a transvaluation that elevates public service and social care.

Beyond this, though, the notion of a universal job guarantee leaves current structures of excessive production and consumption untouched. In other words, it maintains the cycle of escalating production and consumption that was central to the New Deal and that was inherited by current programs of environmental Keynesianism. What we really need is not just fewer bullshit jobs, but less work. Work at present is not just excessive but also unequal and oppressive. The average amount of work done has increased in many countries in recent decades, and it has also grown more lopsided between those who work in the formal sector (who tend to be men) and those whose work is unpaid (overwhelmingly women). As men work more,

women are increasingly left alone to engage in unpaid domestic labor, fueling wider gender inequality.¹³ Working less, as feminists demanded in the 1970s, could help foster a more equitable distribution of the labor of social reproduction.

In addition, it turns out that working too much also destroys the planet. A number of studies have found correlations between working hours and ecological destruction.¹⁴ The United States has some of the longest work hours of any developed country and, not coincidentally, also has one of the highest levels of energy consumption. Excessive work, some scholars have concluded, leads to “time scarcity” that leads to “a more environmentally damaging mix of consumption and lifestyle practices.”¹⁵ Instead of staying at home and cooking a meal together, in other words, time-scarce yuppies tend to order food from take-out joints, generating masses of garbage in the process. Among 29 high-income countries, in fact, “countries with shorter working hours tend to have lower ecological footprints and carbon footprints and carbon dioxide emissions.”¹⁶ Working less, in other words, would decrease the scale of production and consumption. It would leave more time for social interaction and pleasure.

What such a program of ecological reconstruction would ultimately be reaching for, then, would be a new definition of the good life. Against the current obsession with GDP, with insatiable growth and entrepreneurial self-assertion, ecological reconstruction would involve the growth of leisure and freedom from both toxic pollution and competition.¹⁷ As we struggle for this new definition of the good life, it is worth remembering that one of the primary demands of radicals in Congress in the early years of the Great Depression was for a thirty-hour work week. It was to forestall this demand for less work, put before Congress by Senator Hugo Black in 1933, that the National Industrial Recovery Administration, a key plank in the New Deal, was launched.¹⁸ Collective bargaining

in the search for higher wages and levels of consumption was thus substituted for less work. Today, as agitation for a GND becomes a rallying cry for many progressives, we must make sure that this fateful embrace of growth is not repeated.

NOTES

1. Gabriel Kolko, “The New Deal Illusion,” *Counterpunch*, August 29, 2012.
2. Adolph Reed Jr., “Race and the New Deal Coalition,” *The Nation*, April 7, 2008.
3. Bill McKibben, “A World at War,” *New Republic*, August 15, 2016.
4. Matthew Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital* (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 2013), 29.
5. Huber, 40.
6. Christoph Herman, *Green New Deal and the Question of Environmental and Social Justice* (Global Labour University, 2015).
7. Edward Barbier, *A Global Green New Deal: Report Prepared for the Green Economy Initiative of UNEP* (2009), 16.
8. McKibben.
9. David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 224.
10. Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: The Transition to a Sustainable Economy* (Sustainable Development Commission, 2009), 49, www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=914.
11. Jackson, 54.
12. Herman.
13. Herman.
14. Kyle Knight, Eugene Rosa, and Juliet Schor, *Reducing Growth to Achieve Environmental Sustainability: The Role of Work Hours* (PERI Working Paper 304, 2012).
15. Anders Hayden and John Shandra, “Hours of Work and the Ecological Footprint of Nations: An Exploratory Analysis,” *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* (Issue 14, No. 6, 2009), 591.
16. Knight, Rosa, and Schor, 11.
17. Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough? Money and the Good Life* (Other Press, 2012).
18. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

A Radical Direction for the Environmental Movement

RICHARD SMITH

CLIMATE SCIENTISTS TELL US we face a “climate crisis”: Since the 1990s, scientists have been trying to convince governments to keep atmospheric CO₂ concentrations below 350 ppm in order to keep the global temperature below 1.5 degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels. They’ve failed. In 2013, CO₂ concentrations surged past 400 ppm, last month topping 410 ppm and climbing fast. Temperatures are soaring around the world, to 1° C above pre-industrial levels. If we don’t radically and quickly suppress emissions, temperatures could soar to 4°–6° C above pre-industrial levels by the close of this century, which would mean the end, the collapse of civilization.

So far, with temperatures up just 1° C from the nineteenth century, just look: Melting is accelerating from the Arctic and Greenland to the Antarctic, the world’s glaciers are shrinking, sea levels are rising enough to force people to pull back from shorelines,

an invading sea is already infiltrating Miami’s drinking-water sources, the American Southwest is facing near-permanent drought, the U.S. West now has a nearly 12-month fire “season,” and conifer forests are dying from southern beetle infestations. In parts of Africa and India, it’s become too hot to farm. Tibetan glaciers are melting, with huge implications for billions of people from China to India. Recently, as temperatures hit 117° F in Pakistan, people were collapsing, even dying in the streets.

Yet governments do nothing. The irony is that we all know what we have to do. It’s completely obvious. We need to radically suppress greenhouse gas emissions and production of fossil fuels and to stop deforestation, overfishing, and pillaging the planet to make products we don’t need. And we need to stop dumping all manner of pollution and toxics everywhere. None of these problems requires any big technological breakthroughs; mostly we just have to stop doing what we’re doing.

The problem is we can’t seem to stop, or even slow down. While global warming will kill us in the long run, stopping overconsumption would kill us in the short run because it would precipitate economic collapse, mass unemployment, and starvation. *This is the ultimate fatal choice of capitalism: We have to destroy our children’s tomorrow to hang on to our jobs today.*

Green Capitalism Can’t Stop Climate Collapse

To date, all market-based efforts to stop temperature rise, such as carbon taxes and

RICHARD SMITH *has published extensively on capitalism and the environment and on China’s ecological crisis in New Left Review, Monthly Review, Ecologist, Journal of Ecological Economics, Capitalism Nature Socialism, Real-World Economics Review, Truthout, Common Dreams, Adbusters, The Next System Project, and other media. His book Green Capitalism: The God That Failed appeared in 2016 (World Economic Association Press). His China’s Engine of Ecological Apocalypse will be published in 2019 (Verso). Richard is also a founder of SystemChangeNotClimateChange.org.*

This article is based on a talk at the Left Forum Conference, June 3, 2018.

cap-and-trade programs, have conspicuously failed because they're all subordinated to maximizing growth. Plus, they don't even address the other huge environmental crises we face: plasticization of oceans, deforestation, coral reef collapse, species extinction, the trash crisis. There's no "green capitalist" solution to our climate crisis or to any of these other related crises and problems.

In my "Six Theses on Saving the Planet" paper for the Next System Project (November 3, 2016, thenextsystem.org/six-theses-on-saving-the-planet), and in my book *Green Capitalism: The God that Failed* (World Economics Association Books, 2015), I said that it's too late for half-measures. The only way to meet the climate emergency is with an emergency industrial shutdown in the overproducing and overconsuming countries of the North including China: Park the cars, ground the aircraft, stop shipping slave-labor-produced goods from China. Stop building McMansions, stop producing SUVs, stop producing throw-away products, plastic junk, designed-in obsolescence products from plastic shoes to iPhones and IKEA furniture. Stop inventing stuff we don't need just to maximize profit.

I argued the following:

1. Capitalism is overwhelmingly the main driver of planetary collapse and cannot be reformed enough to save humanity.
2. Solutions are blindingly obvious and ready at hand, but we can't take the obvious steps because, given capitalism, the first result would be economic collapse.
3. If capitalism can't help but destroy the world, then what choice is there but to socialize most of the world's industrial economies and plan them directly for the common good? Here's what we have to do to save the planet:

- Radically suppress fossil fuel consumption in the industrialized nations across the economy, from energy generation to transportation, manufacturing, agriculture, and services.

- "Contract and converge" production around a globally sustainable and hopefully happy average that can provide a dignified living standard for all the world's peoples.

- Revolutionize the production of goods and services to *minimize resource consumption* and to produce things that are durable, rebuildable, recyclable, and shareable—instead of disposable.

- Steer investments into things society does need, like renewable energy, organic farming, public transportation, public water systems, environmental remediation, public health, and quality schools.

- Devise a rational and systematic approach to handling and eliminating waste and toxics as far as possible.

- Provide equivalent jobs for all those workers displaced by the shutting down of harmful industries. Not only is this a moral imperative, but it is also required to gain support of those workers for the huge structural changes we need to save the humans.

4. Rational planning requires democracy.

5. Democracy requires rough socio-economic equality.

We Need Different Strategies

The strategies put forward by the environmental movement are, in my view, way too timid and often wrongheaded. For example:

1. *The renewable energy-electric car tech fixit to save the planet*

Mainstream environmentalists have focused largely on pushing a tech solution to our climate crisis, especially by replacing fossil fuels with solar and wind energy and replacing gasoline-powered cars with electric cars. Thus in 2016 Bill McKibben and e-tech darling Elon Musk called for a "revolt against fossil fuels." That year, McKibben published a widely read article in *The New Republic* calling for a "World War II-style mobilization" to replace our hundreds of millions of fossil-fuel-powered cars with hundreds of

millions of solar- or wind-powered electric cars.¹ McKibben says nothing at all about suppressing production and consumption of anything else *except* fossil fuels. Thus the implication is that people can say, “Oh I can just buy a Tesla, help save the world, and carry on with my lifestyle more or less as usual.” Saving the world becomes all but painless (save for the sticker shock on the Tesla). No wonder mainstream environmentalists are gaga over Elon Musk. He doesn’t ask us to sacrifice anything. Just buy his cool “green” product and save the world in the bargain.

Sorry, it doesn’t work that way. First, as a German life-cycle study of petrol-powered vehicles found,

only 40 percent of an average car’s air pollution is emitted during the car’s “driving” life stage. The other 60 percent results from other life stages: the extraction of raw materials, the transport of raw materials, the production of the car, and the disposal of the car. Cars emit 56 percent of their pollution before they ever hit the road and 4 percent after they are retired. Thus efforts to decrease air pollution by getting “old, polluting” cars off the road to only replace them with new, “cleaner” cars are misguided—as such efforts have focused on pollution emitted solely during the driving stage and thus have missed 60 percent of the problem.²

The same applies to Elon Musk’s Tesla. We’re told that electric cars are “zero emission” vehicles. They don’t even have tailpipes. This is false advertising. They produce plenty of emissions. It’s just that most of the CO₂ and other emissions, the toxic and other wastes produced over the life-cycle of a Tesla occur *before it leaves the showroom* (plus a bit more when it’s disposed of at the end of its useful life)—just like petrol-powered cars. In fact it turns out that producing Teslas is even dirtier than producing petrol-powered Chevrolets. In a life-cycle comparison of greenhouse gas emissions from electric versus gasoline cars, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS)

found that “BEV [battery electric vehicle] production results in higher [CO₂] emissions than the making of gasoline cars—mostly due to the materials and fabrication of the BEV lithium-ion battery— ... [resulting in] 15 percent greater emissions than manufacturing a similar gasoline vehicle.”³

What’s more, electric cars typically weigh 25 percent more than comparable gasoline-powered cars because of the weight of the batteries. The 85 kWh battery in the Tesla Model S weighs 1,200 pounds, bringing the curb weight of the car up to 4,960 pounds—almost 1,300 pounds heavier than a comparable gasoline-powered Cadillac CT6 or Mercedes-Benz C 300. To compensate for that bulk, Musk specifies aluminum for the body and chassis of the Tesla. But it turns out that aluminum smelting is extremely energy intensive, ten times more so than steel production, releasing ten times more emissions.⁴

So if producing the aluminum body and chassis generates ten times more CO₂ emissions than the standard steel car body, and the manufacturing process of the Tesla adds 15 percent more emissions, and then you consume 25 percent more energy (whatever the source) to drive a 5,000-pound car instead of a lighter car to the grocery store, how green is that? How much CO₂, if any, are Musk’s Teslas really saving? And that’s just the Model S sedan. The new Tesla Model X SUV is so obese with its 6,768 pounds Gross Vehicle Rating (battery included) that it’s actually *illegal to drive over the Brooklyn Bridge* because the bridge has a posted vehicle weight limit of 3 tons!⁵ Could some Tesla salesman please explain to me how I’m saving the climate driving a three-and-a-half ton SUV to the store to pick up a few bags of groceries. And that’s just the cars. There’s also all the pollution resulting from mining and manufacturing those lithium and cobalt batteries. I’ll spare you the narrative here.⁶

Note further that the UCS life-cycle study did not take into account battery replacement. The Tesla Model S’s battery is

currently warranted for eight years or 125,000 miles. The retail price for a new battery is \$44,000, about half the price of the car, according to the Forums page of the Tesla website. My guess is that given the cost of the battery, even if that drops over time, most Tesla drivers will junk the car and buy a new car in eight or ten years, especially given that although the “New Improved 2026 Model” will surely get more miles per charge, just as surely those new batteries won’t fit in your 2018 “old beater,” so you’ll have to sell or junk it. But who is going to buy a ten-year-old secondhand Tesla that needs a \$44,000 battery? Not me. If there’s no secondhand market for Teslas, they’ll end up being crushed even faster than regular gasoline-powered cars, meaning their net emissions and waste will be that much greater than, say, my Volvo, if it ever dies.⁷ If this is the case, we’re still looking at something like an average eight- to ten-year lifespan for Teslas, the same life-expectancy of most gasoline-powered cars today (though those older Volvos commonly go 300,000 miles or more on un-rebuilt motors, while VW Beetles have a virtually endless lifespan). Here is my vote for the World’s Most Ecological Car: a 1953 or thereabouts Chevrolet being driven around Havana. Nineteen fifty-three Chevrolets got around 13 miles per gallon, about the same as the current 2018 Chevy Impala (rated at 14 mpg city driving).⁸ But the mileage is not the most important point. The most important point is that this car has a much smaller carbon footprint than any Tesla or Prius or Volt out there, not because it gets great mileage, but because *people have been driving it for 65 years*. Since the U.S. imposed its blockade on Cuba in 1962, we Norte Americanos have each gone through an average of six to eight cars—with all the pollution associated with their production and disposal, while the Cubans have thriftily and ecologically repaired that old Chevy and kept it on the road (not their own choice to be sure, but nonetheless).

The point is that it’s not what’s under

the hood that’s important. What’s important is the whole capitalist automobile *industry business plan* that is based on designed-in obsolescence to needlessly destroy the planet by needlessly convincing you that you “need” to junk your old car and buy that new car every few years. Like iPhones. Same system, same logic. That’s the real problem. When we talk about “ecological rationality,” we have to consider this from the standpoint of the whole economy, the whole society, the whole planet, not just from the standpoint of which motor is under the hood. That’s what McKibben and tech-fetishist environmentalists don’t get.

Of course, the best option is to do away with cars as much as possible. Expand public transit. Get out of our cars and onto our bicycles, or walk. But to the extent we do need cars, we need to build them to be small energy-sippers, not humongous and extravagantly wasteful 5,000- to 7,000-pound resource hogs. We need to make them rebuildable, upgradable, and recyclable instead of disposable—and make them shareable. That would be true sustainability.

2. Labor union-backed green jobs campaigns

Labor union calls for “a million green jobs” sound great.⁹ And they are great if those jobs are building renewable-energy capacity, retrofitting homes and buildings to improve energy efficiency, building public transit, and similar projects. There is much low-carbon work to be done: environmental remediation and upgrading our schools, our health care system, and our public infrastructure, and so on. But we can’t be for growth for growth’s sake, even green growth, and unsurprisingly, most union-backed green-growth programs fail to challenge the growth mantra. But if we build renewable energy utilities only to use the power to produce cars we shouldn’t build, wasteful luxury housing that should not be constructed, pointless new gadgets and disposable products of every sort—all the needless waste we produce now, it will all be for naught and we’ll still be on the road to

collective ecological suicide.

3. *Worker ownership in a market economy*

Rick Wolf and Gar Alperovitz call for worker ownership as the way forward. Worker ownership is great: It can provide better security for workers, it promotes collective work and sharing, and so on. But this model doesn't challenge growth or the market system. The limitations of the worker-owned company model come into sharp relief when we consider the massive changes needed to suppress capitalist overproduction and create a truly sustainable economy. Suppose, for example, that Peabody Coal and ExxonMobil and Chevron were actually worker owned. Well, what happens when we have to shut them down to save the planet? If we're going to "leave it in the ground" to save the climate, that means we have to shut down oil and coal companies. Or how about United Airlines or Avis Car Rental, both of which used be worker-owned companies, but both of which would almost certainly have to be drastically retrenched or even closed down to save the planet? The solution is not worker ownership of individual companies competing in a market economy, but public ownership and planning of most of the economy. To save the planet we need to completely reorganize and reprioritize the entire economy: Many fossil fuel producers and fossil fuel-dependent companies will have to be phased out, others reduced. New production facilities for renewable energy, organic farming, safer non-toxic chemicals, and others will have to be started up. At the same time, we need to create new jobs for all the workers in those industries we must eliminate to save the planet. No free market is going to do this. All these issues require rational planning, not market anarchy.

4) *The distraction of divestment*

Despite the hard work of so many well-meaning activists, I suggest that the divestment movement is a waste of time. It doesn't challenge growth, doesn't challenge current oil consumption, diverts the whole effort into managing stock portfolios, and is a distraction from the conversation we need to be having about suppressing fossil fuel production. No doubt many young people have been radicalized in divestment movements, which is great. But I bet they could have been even more radicalized if they'd been recruited to work in campaigns that actually try to suppress fossil fuel consumption on campus, in their communities, in commuting, in what they wear, what they eat, and so on, instead of focusing on stock portfolios.

5) *De-growth without de-capitalism*

The de-growth people are right as far as they go, but, here again, they don't challenge capitalism or the market. Besides, we don't need to de-grow everything. In fact we need to increase production of some things—renewable energy, organic farming, schools, health care, social services, environmental restoration, bicycles, and so on—so we can't



The color of money

leave this to the market. This requires rational planning. De-growth is promoted in part by people who want to live simpler lives but don't see a way to challenge capitalism. It's also become an academic cottage industry for professors and grad students who want to feel like they're doing something but don't want to criticize capitalism. Professors can talk and publish articles and books about de-growth all they want without threatening their promotion and tenure or amassing a radical-sounding publication record.

6) Productionist ecological-socialism

Even some eco-socialists are too timid, to my mind. They talk in abstract about eco-socialism in the future, but are afraid to talk about nationalization, afraid to talk about planning, terrified of mentioning rationing. They're afraid to say to workers, "Sorry, but to save the planet, your industry (oil, autos, H&M clothes, Ikea, for instance) has to go." They're afraid to say anything that smacks of "sacrifice"—because they're socialists, they want more for workers not less. I myself was criticized at a public forum at Bard College in 2013 over just this issue. ISO eco-socialists attacked *production* but not (workers') *consumption*. They rail against the "evil" oil companies, but don't challenge oil consumers. I reminded them that oil companies don't actually burn the oil and gas. WE burn the oil heating our homes, keeping the lights on, driving our cars, flying across the country, and so on. If we don't talk about this, then we end up sugar-coating the deep changes we really need to make. In my view, and in the view of climate scientists, these activists are just not grasping the gravity of the emergency we face. At this point, we have no choice: We can't suppress emissions by the 90 percent we need to, unless we shut down, or at least drastically retrench, whole slabs of industries from the U.S. to China—not just oil and coal, but also steel, aluminum, autos, airlines, shipping, construction, chemicals, plastics, electronics, apparel, furniture, tour-

ism, all kinds of retail, banking, advertising, entertainment, and more. Without doubt, that is going to mean sacrifice and lost jobs across the economy. On the other hand, there are going to be no jobs on a dead planet, so we better figure out how to cashier those fossil fuel companies and create new jobs for those workers.

There are not going to be enough green jobs to replace all these. We need to transition to an economy where we *produce a lot less*, where we *minimize* not maximize production, where we minimize not maximize work, where we don't have to spend our lives working overtime to survive.

Others have begun to move in this direction. Recently, University of Massachusetts-Amherst economist Robert Pollin was asked by *Truthout*, "Are fossil fuel divestment campaigns working?" He says that divestment campaigns raised consciousness, but they

have not been especially effective as a means of significantly reducing CO₂ emissions, and they are not likely to become more effective over time. ... Despite these substantial accomplishments, [I and co-author Tyler Hansen] nevertheless conclude ... that most efforts now devoted to divestment campaigns would be better spent on more direct efforts to drive down fossil fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions. We simply don't have time to lose in pushing as effectively as possible on the fundamental goal which we cannot lose sight of—which is to drive CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions down to zero as quickly as possible.

He's right. I'd go further: I don't see that five years of national divestment campaigns has even raised consciousness very much. There's some vague consciousness out there that we can't keep burning all the oil. But there's no real environmental self-consciousness out there:

- Last year Americans set an all-time record for number of miles driven and gallons of gasoline consumed.

- The biggest selling “cars” in America aren’t even cars, they’re humongous gas-hog SUVs and ginormous trucks. Consumers just keep buying those beasts with nary a thought to the implications this has for their children’s world. During the OPEC gas crisis of the early 1970s, Americans switched from gas hogs to mini-car gas sippers practically overnight, saving billions of gallons of gasoline. Today, our environmental “leaders” don’t even suggest that, hey, we should do that again.

- People buy ever more disposable clothes at H&M, Zara, and elsewhere, with huge implications for the environment.

- People are still slaves to fashion, to consumerism. They still think they “must have” that latest (trivially different) iPhone 6, 8, X—and don’t all those Chinese workers need the jobs?

- People jet off on vacations to Florida or Mexico or Bali with nary a thought to global warming consequences of this.

After decades of environmental activism in the U.S., where’s the environmental consciousness? It’s hardly surprising since environmentalists have rarely if ever talked about these issues. Huge billboards calling for “leaving the oil in the soil” have been put up by 350.org, but where are the billboards calling on people to stop burning that oil, stop driving humongous gas hogs, get out of their cars and ride a bike or take a train? Protestors by the thousands fought to stop a pipeline in North Dakota. But where are the protests at the headquarters of General Motors or Boeing or United Airlines—the biggest consumers of oil? Where are the mass protests against plastics? Where are the protests against gas-hog, planet-destroying SUVs? Environmentalists are afraid to challenge personal consumption or the priorities of capitalist production. Well, if they want to save the planet, they’d better start talking about these issues or there’s not going to be any planet left to save.

We Need to Change the Conversation

We need to be saying, “This has to got to stop.” We can’t have an infinitely growing economy on a finite planet. We can’t go on like this, or we’ll go the way of the dodo.

I’m an economic theorist and historian, not a movement strategist. But I agree with Robert Pollin that we need to change our approach. We need to focus our efforts directly on driving down fossil fuel consumption:

- We need to call for nationalizing fossil fuel industries and those dependent upon fossil fuels. That’s the only way to shut them down.

- We need to campaign for renewable energy but call at the same time for limits on energy consumption: get rid of gadgets, air conditioning, overconsumption.

- We need to campaign against gas-hog SUVs and cars in general. We should burn a papier-mâché SUV in front of GM’s headquarters, or offer SUV drivers a bike in exchange for their car.

We need to campaign against the production of waste, against single-use plastics. (System Change comrades are doing this on campuses in California.) We should join with Greenpeace and others against production of trash. I’ve often thought we need to campaign against Whole Foods’ organic produce wrapped in plastic that will be in trash mountains for centuries. Here’s the headline of a *Los Angeles Times* editorial this past May 25: “California has a recycling crisis. The only way to solve it is to stop making so much trash.”

That’s right. Too obvious. This is what we need to be saying. We need to be saying that “yes, your company, your job making disposable trash, all need to be abolished to save the planet.” Either we save your company and your job—for a while—or we save the planet. There’s no other choice. Thousands of companies from here to China have to be

shut down to save the planet. There's just no other choice.

We need to call for rationing airplane flights, to ban excessive air travel, trivial package tours, or business flights. And of course, if we're going to shut down industries then society has to provide other non-destructive jobs for those workers, guaranteed jobs—Just Transitions.

None of this is going to happen in a capitalist economy. We would have to transition to some kind of eco-socialism to get rational planning or to provide new jobs. But to get there, we need to change the conversation, to get people to talk about and debate these urgent imperatives.

We have to be telling people that the only solution is to cashier capitalism, transition to an eco-socialist planned economy, replace rationing by price with rationing by need. Replace market anarchy with rational planning, democracy, and equality.

Of course we'll be attacked and ridiculed: "Shut down industries, are you crazy? Rationing, what is this, Russia?" We should welcome their attacks. We want that global conversation. We invite the capitalists to attack us, because we can't lose on the science—because their only "solution" is more of the same growth that's driving us to collapse right now. There are no jobs on dead planet, and transitioning to some form of ecological-socialism is the only way to save ourselves, and the whales.

NOTES

1. Steve Hanley, "Musk, McKibben Call for Revolt Against Fossil Fuels," *Gas2*, May 6, 2016, gas2.org/2016/05/06/musk-mckibben-revolt-fossil-fuels. Bill McKibben, "World at War," *The New Republic*, August 15, 2016.
2. Umwelt-und Prognose-Institut Heidelberg, *Oeko-bilanz eines autolebens* (1993). See John Whitelegg, "Dirty from Cradle to Grave," (World

Carfree Network, 1993) for a translated summary of the German study, www.worldcarfree.net/resources/free.php.

3. Union of Concerned Scientists, *Cleaner Cars from Cradle to Grave* (November 2015), 3, www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/11/Cleaner-Cars-from-Cradle-to-Grave-full-report.pdf.

4. Geoffry Brooks, "The trouble with aluminum," *The Conversation*, May 24, 2012, theconversation.com/the-trouble-with-aluminium-7245.

5. Lloyd Alter, "New Tesla Model X Is Too Heavy to Legally Drive over the Brooklyn Bridge," *Treehugger*, February 25, 2016, www.treehugger.com/cars/new-tesla-model-x-too-heavy-legally-drive-over-brooklyn-bridge.html.

6. But here are some sources: Smith, *Green Capitalism*, 77ff, and sources cited therein. Also Kitco, *Tech Metals Insider*, December 16, 2014 (accessed 8/27/18), www.kitco.com/ind/Albrecht/2014-12-16-How-Green-is-Lithium.html; EPA, *Application of Life-Cycle Assessment to Nanoscale Technology: Lithium-ion Batteries for Electric Vehicles* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Gov, April 24, 2013), www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-01/documents/lithium_batteries_lca.pdf; Amy Westervelt, "Tesla's new batteries may be harder on the environment than you think," *Guardian*, June 10, 2015, www.theguardian.com/vital-signs/2015/jun/10/tesla-batteries-environment-lithium-elon-musk-powerwall; Rafael Sagarnaga Lopes, "Bolivia's lithium boom: Dream or nightmare?" *Open Democracy*, December 21, 2015, www.opendemocracy.net/democraciabierta/rafael-sag-rnaga-l-pez/bolivia-s-lithium-boom-dream-or-nightmare.

7. I bought a used 2004 Volvo station wagon in 2012 for \$10,000. Today, it's 14 years old, has 100,000 miles on the clock, and still runs like new with just regular service. I'm not anticipating any major expenses on this legendary vehicle for the next 100,000 or even 200,000 miles. But if I had bought a secondhand Tesla in 2012, I would need to spend \$44,000 for that new battery very soon if I had not done so already. Who would buy a used Tesla anticipating that kind of expense?

8. U.S. Department of Energy, www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/noframes/38824.shtml.

9. E.g., Campaign Against Climate Change, campaigncc.org/climatejobs.

What Do Eco-Socialists Have to Say About the Climate Movement?

NANCY ROMER

TO ME THE ROLE OF ECO-SOCIALISTS is to raise transitional demands, demands that bring a broader understanding of the role of capital in creating climate change and the ways that capitalism can be challenged by working people and people most affected by the vast inequality it has created.

Two criteria seem pertinent to me:

1) How do we articulate what it will actually take to save our planet for the humans and other species? That will require a deep transformation that will include locking out at least the fossil fuel and auxiliary corporations and economy, ending wars and militarization of society, taking up a race- and gender-based liberation politics, and creating a thoroughly transforming social-service safety net that expands human development and allows people to look at the whole of society and our planet and make responsible decisions. Without that transformation, certain sectors—by job, by race, by gender, by class, by region—will continue to exert uneven and inadequate pressure on climate-based decisions.

2) How do we create mass movements, often united fronts of a wide range of people and social-political sectors, that can join to-

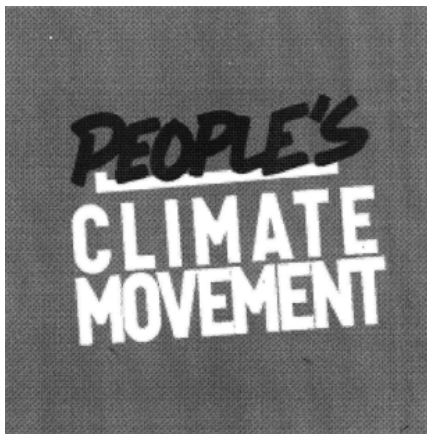
gether to exert power to make real change? How do we articulate demands that can bring the movements together while keeping those demands just a bit beyond the consensus, prodding the movement forward? How do we engage people in a mass-based struggle so that we begin the process of gaining the kind of power needed for the transformation described above?

I have spent much of my political life working in united fronts, organizational expressions of movements, coalitions, and so on, that put forward mass demands that raise consciousness, build power through the movements, and actually create some of the changes we need, not-quite-adequate as they may often be due to movements' weakness. I have also been a leftist without too much of a "brand" or group of socialists that I have formally joined. Right now I am in Democratic Socialists of America and feel the broad politics of the organization is what keeps it active, muscular, and pushing. They are good comrades to the rest of the climate movement—willing to show up, picket, petition, study, strategize, and to be kind and generous comrades. They are well-respected as a relatively new activist organization in New York. DSA existed for many years before Trump, but after Trump was elected the numbers have exploded—presently up to 50,000 nationally and 5,000 in New York City. Yes, DSA pushes for publically owned and operated, 100 percent renewable, energy now or as soon as possible. Yes, they call for an end to the fossil fuel regime and for a polluters tax. Outside of the "publically owned and operated" part of

NANCY ROMER, PhD, is professor emerita of psychology at Brooklyn College and an active member of Peoples Climate Movement-NY, Divest NY, Environmental Justice Working Group of the Professional Staff Congress of CUNY (AFT Local 2334), and a senior strategic advisor to Labor Network for Sustainability, a national labor-climate organization. She has been an activist in many social movements over the last fifty years.

the demand, these are the demands that our local climate movement has adopted. It is our job as eco-socialists to support the demands of the united front—in this case the Peoples Climate Movement and New York Renews—and push the demands further, specifically toward public power or public ownership of the new renewable energy grid. We need to articulate a fuller politics than can the united front coalitions due to their organizational support and membership, especially in the unions. That “prod” is essential for direction of the coalitions and movement.

As someone who has worked in the union and climate sectors, I can testify that this is a tough row to hoe. Labor is obsessed with its survival, especially in the face of the Janus decision and shitty contracts, with minimal union density among American workers—7 percent in the private sector and 35 percent in the public sector, and steadily declining—so much so that climate issues, truly an existential threat to humans and other living things, do not register as important to unions, so they don’t engage. And a significant sector of labor is busy defending fossil fuel and auxiliary workers: It twists the arms of the rest of the climate movement till it stops saying the words “fossil fuels.” And yet, if we don’t have the labor movement or some section of the labor movement involved, we won’t have a watchdog for good jobs, we won’t have the legitimacy among working-class people to actually be able to deliver. Unions are at their weakest point since World War II, but they still have more direct power—in politics, in public opinion, in crafting policies—than any other sector besides capital and the Republican and Democratic parties. So we cannot leave labor out of the movement—we need them. And while the rank and file members of many unions are truly further left and have much more radical climate politics than their leadership, so far the organizational and political articulation of those rank and file activists is small, if significant, and needs to be nurtured.



Climate justice activists—racially oppressed and economically marginalized people—have a directly critical view of capitalism and articulate the need to challenge racism and inequality as a motor force behind the climate movement. They seek both a regenerative economy and energy democracy. They often focus on local solutions that come from their direct community experiences. But their direct relationship to the hardship that capitalism, racism, and climate change have brought their communities has made their demands both radical and practical. They are the most likely sector to call for some sort of reparations, for repair and rebuilding after disasters, for jobs in whatever industries exist. In coalitions they are less likely to call for an end to capitalism or insistence on nationalization of energy. Without people from racially oppressed or economically marginalized groups, we cannot expect to either define an effective future or to win.

While I completely agree with my colleagues that we need to dramatically cut back our energy use, both personal and societal, I worry that the perfect will become the enemy of the good. The demon we must defeat is the fossil fuel industry first and foremost as well as a capitalist economy and culture based on continuous growth and over-consumption. How to stop it without evoking the “nanny

state” and a scolding stance is quite frankly beyond me. Yes, it needs to be articulated, but it can’t be front and center. We must look squarely at the worst of the devils—the fossil fuel industry—and drill down.

I would also like to briefly address the issue of divestment from fossil fuels by pension funds, endowments, and others. I have been active in pressing this demand over the last three years as an entry point to engage unions and to score a “win,” which is so badly needed. The point behind divestment is to make fossil fuels a pariah industry and to loosen up money that can be used to fund the development of publicly owned renewable energy and other pro-climate projects such as coops advancing sustainable goods and services. Right now the governments—city, state, federal—are not doing this anywhere near the rate that is needed. Divestment campaigns help workers—union members and non-members, foundations, and university students realize that “their” money is being invested in industries that can extinguish human life on earth and cause great suffering in the process. Changing consciousness on how we all are complicit in the deadly fossil fuel economy is an important step toward standing up against fossil fuels in particular and in learning about how capitalism implicates us all and thus needs to be changed.

We need to move to 100 percent renewable energy as immediately as possible for the survival of our species and others as well. But to just call out the demand for a nationalized renewable energy system without articulating how it will be funded is not at all realistic. To have a chance at survival we need to start the process of developing that renewable energy now. However, it is not going to be adequately “profitable” for us to rely strictly on the private sector or on our present governments, governments which right now are stuck on militarism and defense of corporate greed through, for example, minimal taxes for the rich and corporations. We will need a range of financial

instruments, such as government-guaranteed bonds and public banks that will allow pension, foundation, and university funds to invest safely in renewable energy development. Just as an example, right now New York state has only 4 percent of its energy coming from renewable sources. Hydropower, a questionable form of “renewable energy” adds another 15 percent to the mix. But that leaves about 80 percent of New York state energy coming from fossil fuels. This is not something that can be changed instantly—it will need an enormous amount of development, both of renewable energy sources and infrastructure, to deliver it. Revolutionary politics can help us understand what is happening, but I don’t see any signs that it will be embraced soon enough to make a significant difference in the development of renewable energy *in time*.

In time is key. A fossil-free economy is not inevitable at all. The ruling class as a whole is mixed on this issue, but the strongest sectors of the ruling class are perfectly comfortable with rising global temperatures, rising waters, and accelerated extreme-weather events including floods, wildfires, hurricanes, and droughts. They are comfortable with millions, perhaps billions, of people perishing in this period. They have not yet come to grips with the reality of those effects of reaching “tipping points” that their best engineers and mountaintop hideaways cannot protect them from.

So we need to see our roles as eco-socialists as two-fold: articulating what is really needed and articulating and organizing around what seems possible—moving the movement forward as quickly as we can. When more and more disasters keep rolling in, when people feel directly affected by the reality of climate change, eco-socialists will have developed relationships within the movement, pushed as hard as possible for demands that are winnable and transformative, and will have a fuller analysis to create more pathways to the world we want.



An Economist's Case for Socialism

BARRY FINGER

IT IS ALL TOO RARE THAT AN ECONOMIST makes the case: socialism or barbarism. Or, in Alan Nasser's more piquant alternatives, socialism or fascism. Economics is a hedging profession of carefully detailed countervailing forces and measured equivocation. Even the seemingly most radical among professional economists generally restrict their advocacy to a social democratic vision of managed capitalism.

And he makes the case for socialism with an attention to historic detail and eminent readability that, in themselves, mark it as a work apart. Though clearly working in the Marxist tradition, Nasser introduces a truly eye-opening appreciation of Keynes as an institutional socialist for having independently (of Marx) foreseen capitalism's inability to realize its own self-transcending potential.

Though Nasser does not make the genealogy of his work explicit, we can, without much resistance, place it within the broad domain of breakdown theories. Theories, that is, which zero in on the limits of capitalism's plasticity: to modify its form and expand without immiserating its working class, despoiling

the biosphere and eviscerating its limited democracy. Of course, no social system collapses on its own. But a capitalism unable to generate any broad reforms for fifty years and which rolls back past gains, which piles up levels of class inequality virtually unknown

in history, hollows out the "middle classes", and which can offer no uplifting vision of unity and cohesion beyond an ugly and tawdry nationalism envelopes its

economic stagnation with an alarming level of universal social decay.

The desertion of the working classes from socialism in the wake of its post-war expansion has now left it with no clear faith in a system that is increasingly failing them. Its loyalties are once again up for grabs. The social convulsions produced by economic crises generate the concrete context for social transformation. Neither revolution nor reaction raises itself as a possibility in the absence of this objective necessity.

The book is organized as an unfolding history of American capitalism from the tooth and claw competitiveness of the 19th Century, to the maturity of the industrial hay days prior to the Great Depression, through the exceptional era of its post-war Golden Age and its ensuing descent into austerity and financialization. American capitalism is treated, in effect, as paradigmatic in its

Override Economy

ALAN NASSER

London: Pluto Press, 2018

BARRY FINGER *is a board member of New Politics.*

maturity—offering a peak into the general arc of capitalist development from its most advanced vantage. Nasser's narrative confines and excepts itself, on this basis, from the ancillary issues of peripheral development, the rise of sub-imperialisms or imperialist rivalry. Implicit, I believe, is the unstated assumption that expansion into the exterior cannot ultimately compensate for capitalism's contraction at the interior.

The Marxist view of the inevitability of crises resides in the contradictory nature of capitalist *production*. The production of capital is at the same time the accumulation of capital, in which unpaid labor in the form of profits is converted into additional capital. Profits must be produced in sufficient mass to compensate capital for the relative expulsion of labor from the production process, an expulsion that coincides with an increase in labor productivity. When the relative increase in exploitation is no longer sufficient to compensate for the diminished base of labor exploited, the expansion falters. All the difficulties of capitalism reside in the absence of a sufficient expansion of profit, yet only by an increase in profits can capitalism overcome its difficulties. It is the class nature of capitalist production that imposes system-specific limits on economic growth. From the proximate vantage of the market place, the reality of this fall in the rate of profit is seen as an insufficiency of aggregate demand. For it is this very lack of sufficient demand that is seen as the immediate impediment against an increase in prices sufficient to offset declining profitability.

That, at least, is the raw material from which Marx built his framework for capitalism's periodic contractions. As Nasser explains, the six business cycles that defined the post-Golden Age of the late 1960s and early '70s coincided with a "long decline of the profit rate in the US, the withering of the framework stimulants fueling the Great Boom (transformative or epoch-making innovations—BF), the beginning of the Age of

Austerity and long-term stagnation, and the intensification of the economy's financialization." Keynesian stimulants have proven unappealing to the ruling classes. That such programs can increase output, aggregate demand, employment and wage growth is generally not disputed. But unless these programs also increase profitability, the ensuing expansion is, from the vantage of capitalism, a false prosperity and an unwanted detour.

Rather than allow for a diversion of resources and capacity to the public sphere as Keynesianism might suggest, the preferred means of addressing the prolonged stagnation is through its inverted image—privatization, the opening of new, and in many cases, subsidized, spheres for profit making from sectors previously walled off to capital. But, Nasser avers, capitalist production confronts a more immanent barrier that restricts the viability of such new avenues of accumulation for the same reason as it limits the expansion of existing channels.

Productivity under a fully mature industrial capitalism is not just labor displacing, it is, in a fundamental sense, capital displacing as well. Ever more productive means of production—AI, digitization and robotization—can be financed out of amortization funds, with an ever-diminished need for plowing profits back into production. Manufacturing's share of worldwide activity is declining globally. This, combined with an increasingly saturated demand for produced commodities, dissolves into a toxic formula. Capitalism finds itself with a surfeit of investment-seeking capital unable to find sufficiently lucrative branches of production within which to expand. There is both a lack of profits relative to existing capital and an excess of investment capital (yet to-be invested profits) relative to existing profit-making opportunities.

Capitalist accumulation begins to rot from the core degenerating into a zombie-like version of Marx's rough-hewn model. Instead of the expansion of tangible capital for production, investment begins to flow into

the accumulation and production of financial assets (commodified income-streams diced and re-bundled as securities arising from mortgage and credit card debt, corporate loans, pension funds, government debt and equities, etc., and securitized hedges derived from these commodities). “Fictitious” capital begins to displace production goods (plant, machinery, means of transportation, etc.) on corporate balance sheets and these financial assets yield a secondary stream of income *seemingly* independent of the production process that account for an ever mounting pile of profits. This income is, only in part, a redistribution of surplus-value among capitalists. But it also, and more importantly, signifies a supplementary stream of working class debt exploitation that converts paid time into unpaid time on the installment plan.

Debt driven demand artificially expands revenues in support of profit margins, so that profits appear to have been liberated from the detour of investment. But this just papers over the inevitable snapback to come as economic bubbles burst. For the same causes that make capital “superfluous” also make labor precarious. Mechanized jobs do not come back. This hollows out and degrades the wages of average, middle-skilled workers. Even the professions have reduced their need for skilled employees. Wage stagnation cannot long support the accumulation of consumer debt needed to avert collapse. Because of this, our outlived capitalism is doomed to stagger from crisis to crisis, as the replay of credit expansion and debt pay-down spirals.

Faced with the persistence of low rates of capital expansion and the slow-motion immiseration of a working class that had seen itself as a permanent “middle class,” a new disillusionment has set in. And for good reason. By 2014, the evidence indicated that half of Americans were in or near poverty. The abstract theoretical model upon which

Marx built his case for the inevitable decline and breakdown of capitalism did not preclude modifications that could extend its life. But these modifications have seemingly run their course.

No industrially mature society, argues Nasser, can achieve and sustain recovery except by re-cycling its mounting surpluses. Capitalists won't invest, nor can they possibly consume their lavish incomes without living multiple life times at once. Neither can the mounting overhead costs of holding the system intact by means of policing, prisons and militarization stabilize the system. These accumulating overhead costs neither add to system-wide profits nor profitability, though a proto-fascist such as Trump seems hell-bent on testing the limits of that proposition.

This leaves one avenue alone. That is why wage growth, through a carefully modulated, guaranteed basic income has been bandied about albeit without much traction beyond Silicon Valley. But a thoroughgoing downward redistribution of these surpluses required to sustain any industrially mature economy is a remedy that capitalism fears worse than its disease. It's a reminder of the limitations of capitalism for it awakens the call for production for need instead of profit.

I'll leave the last words to Alan Nasser. “Economic growth in the future must be led by public investment and, most importantly, by workers' wages. Alas, these conditions cannot be met under capitalism. This is the strongest case for the democratization of both the political and the economic spheres, i.e. for democratic socialism. This is the sole desirable and feasible alternative to a future of working-class austerity enforced by a militarized, repressive State.”

From Marx to Ecosocialism

MICHAEL LÖWY

THERE IS A GROWING BODY OF ecomarxist and ecosocialist literature in the English-speaking world, which signals the beginning of a significant turn in radical thinking. Some Marxist journals, such as *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, *Monthly Review* and *Socialism and Democracy* have been playing an important role in this process, which is becoming increasingly influential. The two books discussed here—very different in style content and purpose—are part of this “Red and Green” upsurge.

Kohei Saito is a young Japanese Marxist scholar and his book is a very valuable contribution to the reassessment of the Marxian heritage, from an ecosocialist perspective. It justifiedly polemicalises with those authors (mainly but not exclusively German) that denounce Marx as “Promethean,” productivist, and partisan of the industrial domination of nature. But Saito also criticises, in the introduction, what he defines as “first stage

ecosocialists,” who believe that Marx’s 19th Century discussions on ecology are of little importance today: this would include, among others, Alain Lipietz, Daniel Tanuro, Joel

Kovel and...myself. This seems to me a bit of an artificial construction... Lipietz calls to “abandon the Marxist paradigm,” the three others consider themselves to be Marxists, and whatever their criticism of (some of) Marx views on

nature, do *not* consider his views as “of little importance.” Since this issue is mentioned, but not really discussed in the book, let us move on....

One of the great qualities of this work is that it does not treat Marx’s work as a systematic body of writing, defined, from the beginning to the end, by a strong ecological commitment (according to some), or a strong unecological tendency (according to others). As Saito very persuasively argues, there are elements of continuity in Marx’s reflection on nature, but also some very significant changes, and re-orientations.

Among the continuities, one of the most important is the issue of the capitalist “separation” of humans from earth, i.e., from nature. Marx believed that in pre-capitalist societies there existed a form of unity between the producers and the land, and he saw as one

Karl Marx's Ecosocialism. Capitalism, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy

KOHEI SAITO
New York, Monthly Review Press, 2017

Red-Green Revolution: The Politics and Technology of Ecosocialism

VICTOR WALLIS
Toronto, Political Animal Press, 2018

MICHAEL LÖWY of France is a prolific author of books on Marxist theory, including on ecosocialism. His most recent book available in English is *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe*.

of the key tasks of socialism to *re-establish the original unity* between humans and nature, destroyed by capitalism, but on a higher level (negation of the negation). This explains Marx's interest in pre-capitalist communities, both in his ecological discussion (for instance of Carl Fraas) or in his anthropological research (Franz Maurer): both authors were perceived as "unconscious socialists." And, of course, in his last important document, the letter to Vera Zassoulitsch (1881), Marx claims that thanks to the suppression of capitalism, modern societies could return to a higher form of an "archaic" type of collective ownership and production. This is a very interesting insight of Saito, and very relevant today, when indigenous communities in the Americas, from Canada to Patagonia, are in the front line of the resistance to capitalist destruction of the environment.

However, the main contribution of Saito is to show *the movement*, the evolution of Marx reflections on nature, in a process of learning, rethinking and reshaping his thoughts. Before *Capital* (1867) one can find in Marx writings a rather uncritical assessment of capitalist "progress"—an attitude often described by the vague mythological term of "Prometheanism." This is obvious in the *Communist Manifesto*, which celebrates capitalist "subjection of nature's forces to man" and the "clearing of whole continents for cultivation"; but it also applies to the *London Notebooks* (1851), the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, and other writings from those years. Curiously, Saito seems to exclude the *Grundrisse* (1857-58) from his criticism, which is not justified, considering how much Marx admires, in this manuscript, "the great civilizing mission of capitalism," in relation to nature and to the pre-capitalist communities, prisoners of their localism and their "idolatry of nature"!

The change comes in 1865-66, when Marx discovers, by reading the writings of the agricultural chemist Justus Von Liebig, the problems of soil exhaustion, and the

metabolic rift between human societies and the natural environment. This will lead, in *Capital vol. 1* (1867)—but also in the two other, unfinished volumes—to a much more critical assessment of the destructive nature of capitalist "progress," particularly in agriculture. After 1868, by reading another German scientist, Carl Fraas, Marx will discover also other important ecological issues, such as deforestation and local climate change. According to Saito, if Marx had been able to complete volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*, he would have more strongly emphasised the ecological crisis, which also means, at least implicitly, than in their present unfinished state, there is no strong enough emphasis on those issues....

This leads me to my main disagreement with Saito: in several passages of the book he asserts that for Marx "the environmental unsustainability of capitalism is *the* contradiction of the system" (p.142, emphasis by Saito); or that in his late years he came to see the metabolic rifts as "the most serious problem of capitalism"; or that the conflict with natural limits is, for Marx, "the main contradiction of the capitalist mode of production."

I wonder where Saito found, in Marx's writings, published books, manuscripts or notebooks, any such statements...they are not to be found, and for a good reason: the unsustainability of the capitalist system was *not* a decisive issue in the 19th Century, as it has become *today*: or better, since 1945, when the planet entered a new geological era, the Anthropocene. Moreover, I believe that the metabolic rift, or the conflict with natural limits is not "a problem of capitalism" or a "contradiction of the system": it is much more than that! It is a contradiction between the system and "the eternal natural conditions" (Marx), and therefore with the natural conditions of human life on the planet. In fact, as Paul Burkett (quoted by Saito) argues, capital can continue to accumulate under any natural conditions, however degraded, so long as there is not a complete extinction of human

life: human civilisation can disappear before capital accumulation becomes impossible....

Saito concludes his book with a sober assessment which seems to me a very apt summary of the issue: *Capital* remains an unfinished project. Marx did not answer all questions nor predict today's world. But his critique of capitalism provides an extremely helpful theoretical foundation for the understanding of the current ecological crisis.

VICTOR WALLIS AGREES WITH the ecosocialists such as John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett who emphasize the ecological dimension of Marx. But he also acknowledges that there are illusions in the "technological neutrality" of the capitalist productive forces in some of his writings.

In any case, the object of his outstanding book is not Marx as such, but the Marxist perspective of a *Red-Green Revolution*. Being a collection of essays, the chapters do not follow a precise order, but one can easily detect the main lines of the argument.

The starting point is the understanding that capitalism, driven by the need to "grow" and expand at any cost, is inherently destructive of the environment. Moreover, through ecological devastation and climate change—the result of fossil-fuel emissions of CO₂ gases—the capitalist system undermines the conditions of life itself on the planet. "Green capitalism" is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms: it offers only false solutions, based on corporate interests and a blind faith in the "market," such as "biofuels," the trade in "emission rights," etc. A typical example of "green capitalism": the monitoring of global environmental measures has been entrusted, by the ruling class, to the World Bank, which invested 15 times more on fossil-fuel projects than on renewables....

Radical measures are the only realistic alternative: a revolution is needed to overcome the environmental threat to our collective survival. The aim is an ecosocialist society, without class domination and with life in

balance with the rest of nature. Of course there are risks involved in any revolutionary enterprise, but the risk of keeping things as they are is much greater...Long term species survival is contingent upon a nearly 90 percent reduction in the burning of fossil fuels. This requires to a sharp break with capitalist priorities: accumulation, profit-making, commodification, "growth." A key component of the ecosocialist project is conscious democratic planning, reorganizing production and consumption around the real popular needs, and putting an end to the waste inherent to capitalism with its artificial "needs" induced by the advertising industry, and its formidable military expenditures. Democratic planning is the opposite of the Soviet model of top-down directives: the identification of planning with Stalin is a dangerous relic of Cold War demagoguery, which could obstruct ecological conversion.

Ecosocialism requires also some key technological choices, for instance privileging renewable energies (wind, solar, etc.) against fossil-fuels. But there is no purely technical solution: energy use *must* be reduced, by sharply reducing wasteful consumption.

Victor Wallis insists, and this is one of the most valuable insights of his book, that ecosocialism, as a long-term objective, is not contradictory with short-range measures, urgent and immediate ecological steps: they can, in fact, reinforce and inspire each other. Similarly, to oppose local ecological communities to the global political struggle is pointless and counterproductive: both are necessary and provide mutual support.

Which are the forces that will lead this struggle for social and ecological change? In one of the essays, Wallis insist on the centrality of the working-class—in spite of the present anti-ecological position of most union leaders (in order to "protect jobs"). Is the working-class the "implicit embodiment of ecological sanity" (unlike its present leaders)? Is it the only force capable to bring together all constituencies opposed to capitalism?

I'm not so sure, but I think Wallis is right to emphasise that class oppression concerns the vast majority of the population—and therefore a radical change cannot take place without its support.

But there are also other social forces engaged in the process of resistance to the capitalist onslaught on the environment: for instance, the indigenous communities. This is another very important contribution of this book: to show that indigenous communities—direct victims of the capitalist plunder, a global assault on their livelihoods—have become the vanguard of the ecosocialist movement. In their actions, such as the Standing Rock resistance to the XXL Pipeline, and in their reflections—such as their Declaration at the World Social Forum of Belem

in 2009—“they express, more completely than any other group, the common survival interest of humanity.” Of course, the urban population of modern cities cannot live like the indigenous, but they have much to learn from them.

Ecological struggles offer a unifying theme around which various oppressed constituencies could come together. And there are signs of hope in the United States, in the vast upsurge of resistance against a particularly toxic racist, misogynist and anti-ecological power elite, and in the growing interest, among young people and African Americans, in socialism. But a political revolutionary force, able to unify all constituencies and movements against the system is still lacking.

Remembering the English Revolution

DANIEL JOHNSON

IN 1649, A PAMPHLET TITLED *Tyrani-pocrit Discovers* was published in Rotterdam. Fusing the terms “tyrant” and “hypocrite,” the anonymous author called for an end to economic, religious, and political oppression in England. The writer claimed tyrants

who ruled the country robbed the poor through the monopolization of land and exploitation of labor, while hypocritical clergy justified the people's impoverishment from the pulpits of the national church. However, since “God through nature had formed all men alike” economic and

The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in England, 1640-1650

JOHN REES
London, Verso Books, 2016

social inequality were contrary to “reason.” An equal distribution of wealth, political power, and education was by contrast consistent with nature and reason, and such a revolutionary transformation would make possible “univer-

DANIEL JOHNSON'S *writings have appeared in New Politics, Against the Current, Jacobin, and Monthly Review. He teaches in the Department of American Culture and Literature at Bilkent University.*

shall freedom” for “all mankind.”

Tyrannipocrit stands as an eloquent expression of radicalism during a revolutionary decade. At the beginning of the 1640s a political crisis between Parliament and King Charles I led to the breakdown of state control over the press, which was followed by an explosion of new ideas in print. After the beginning of civil war between parliamentarians and royalists in 1642, some radicals began to question the need for a national church altogether, leading to a division within the parliamentary movement between Presbyterians (who favored a hierarchical national church system) and Independents (who favored autonomy in local churches and religious freedom). By 1646 and 1647 democratic, and by the end of the decade even socialistic, pamphlets and petitions were published in London.

The climax of the Revolution came in 1648-9, with the defeat of Charles in August of 1648 and the king's subsequent trial for treason against the people and execution. Over the course of 1649 the House of Lords (the unelected upper house of Parliament) was abolished, the Church of England was disestablished, and a republic—the Commonwealth of England—was created. For many supporters of Parliament, however, the revolution had not gone far enough. Some activists and writers (like the author of *Tyrannipocrit*) demanded more sweeping political, economic, and religious transformation.

The revolutionary government therefore began a campaign of repression against groups like the Levellers, a radical democratic organization with whom the author of *Tyrannipocrit* clearly sympathized. (Some historians believe the well-known Leveller William Walwyn was the pamphlet's author.) Leaders were arrested and their writings were suppressed while army mutinies were crushed by the Puritan military leader Oliver Cromwell. In the early 1650s England undertook military aggressions in Scotland, Ireland, and the Americas, and in 1653 Cromwell became Lord Protector of England, essentially creat-

ing a military dictatorship. In 1660, two years after Cromwell's death, the monarchy was restored under Charles Stuart II. England's republican experiment was over.

While much has been written about the English Revolution and the Levellers, John Rees's *The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in England, 1640-1650* (Verso, 2016) is an essential book for those interested in revolutionary history as well as for activists concerned with questions of organization and strategy today. *The Leveller Revolution's* stated aim is to allow readers new to the period to enter into the world of seventeenth-century England, and Rees's argument is that this pioneering revolutionary group “arose out of wider currents of radicalism and through a process of differentiation with both opponents and allies they came to form a distinctive political organisation.” The book provides a fascinating bottom-up narrative of radical political organization during a decade in which the world was truly “turned upside down.”

Some of the wider currents of radicalism indispensable to Leveller organization explored by Rees include London apprentices, military radicals (known as “Agitators”), religious dissenters, and a network of underground printers that would make possible the dissemination of Leveller ideas to a wide audience. The city of London itself plays a vital role in Rees's story. Specific locations in London “constantly recur in the story of the Levellers as locations of gathered churches, the homes of revolutionaries and the hiding places of secret presses.” It was in the English metropolis that different radical currents came together and evolved in the revolutionary process.

One of the virtues of Rees's focus on organization and his placement of the Levellers in a wider social context is that, in addition to famous leaders like John Lilburne, Richard Overton, and William Walwyn readers meet lesser known—though crucial—Leveller supporters like Katherine Chidley. At a time

when women were considered by mainstream thought to be the inferior sex, Chidley's writings and activism place her as a pioneer of women's public involvement in religion and politics. Indeed, for many opponents of revolutionary radicalism—including conservative supporters of Parliament—in the 1640s it was women and other “mechanick preachers” (working-class writers and speakers) who posed the primary threat to the established order. Chidley and other Levellers were the political vanguard of this threat.

The Levellers did not emerge as a coherent group until 1645-6, though the organization's core leaders had long been active in London. The frequent jailing of Lilburne was a crucial rallying point for early Levellers and their sympathizers, and the publication of pamphlets and petitions in support of “freeborn John” were essential in creating this grassroots support. In 1646, *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens*, authored by Overton and Walwyn, was simultaneously a petition occasioned by Lilburne's imprisonment and a founding statement of Leveller principles. Addressed to the House of Commons, the *Remonstrance* claimed members of Parliament were mere servants of the public and were obliged to do the people's bidding—an assertion of popular sovereignty as radical as the suggestion the English people should worship as they thought fit. A political movement rooted in the principles of natural equality and government by consent—the first in history—was born.

The New Model Army, established by Parliament in 1645, was ordered to disband in 1647 after the victory over Charles in the “first” Civil War. Not only did soldiers refuse to demobilize—they proceeded to elect their own representatives, and many of these Agitators were allied with the Levellers. The Leveller manifesto *An Agreement of the People* was the subject of the Putney Debates, the famed meeting between pro-Leveller Agitators and “Grandeess,” Independent military leaders Oliver Cromwell and his son-in-law

Henry Ireton, in late 1647. Cromwell and Ireton believed only men of wealth should be allowed to vote and thought the *Agreement's* democratic demands would logically lead to threats to property. This led Agitators like Edward Sexby and Leveller spokesperson Colonel Thomas Rainsborough to question what ordinary soldiers had been fighting for. In a legendary democratic declaration Rainsborough stated:

I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly, Sir, I think it's clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under.

Though the Agitators, and Leveller hopes, were soon defeated by the Grandeess, the Second Civil War (1648-9) further polarized the nation, making possible Levellers' influence as a serious political power. For Rees, a new alliance between Levellers and moderate Independents, together with an intensified publication strategy, was essential to Parliament's ultimate victory. The funeral of Rainsborough, assassinated (probably by royalists, though some believe conservative parliamentarians—perhaps even Cromwell—may have played a role) in late October, became a mass Leveller-led demonstration as thousands of mourners wearing the Leveller color of sea-green paid tribute to the colonel. A flood of pamphlets and more demonstrations characterized 1648, a year in which Leveller power peaked.

The alliance between Levellers and Independents did not last, however. After Charles's execution and the abolition of the House of Lords the “the political bloc that had accomplished the Revolution's victory shattered on the rock of its own success.” Some Levellers, notably Walwyn and Lilburne, were critical of the new regime; others were placed in positions of authority in the

new republic. Grandee leaders like Cromwell (“Silken Independents”) were put on the defensive by a radical pamphleteering offensive against the government; the regime responded by aggressively moving against the Levellers. As the movement’s leaders were arrested, former allies like religious dissenters began to support mainstream Independency since freedom of worship was won with the creation of a republic. While Levellers remained active in print and in army mutinies and Leveller activists continued to write and agitate into the 1650s, by the end of 1649 the movement was effectively destroyed.

Toward the end of the book Rees addresses theoretical and historiographical issues raised in his narrative. In the view of this reviewer arguments over whether the English (or French, or American) Revolution was a “bourgeois” revolution are not particularly useful. More important is Rees’s compelling refutation of revisionist historians’ rejection in recent years of the Levellers’ significance to the Civil Wars. As Rees convincingly shows, Levellers’ ability to adjust to rapidly changing circumstances and make alliances allowed them to contribute substantially to the outcome of events in the 1640s.

This claim is related to the contemporary

relevance of the Levellers. Rees argues that although the Levellers were not a majority organization or a political party (these did not exist in the modern sense), groups with “a relatively small social weight can have a decisive political impact.” In repeatedly drawing attention to Levellers’ ability to adapt to the contingencies of the revolutionary process, Rees suggests astute political maneuvering can allow small organizations to have important influence. Is Rees implying that minority socialist movements can, in Leninist (or apparently Leveller) fashion, seize the revolutionary initiative in certain moments today? Can socialist organizations work with other progressive groups to bring about radical social transformation through peaceful means? Or must revolutions in capitalist society be worker led in order to be successful?

Works like *The Leveller Revolution* help to address such questions of strategy with historical examples in interesting and novel ways. Rees’s ability to fuse incisive analysis with narrative skill only adds to the book’s appeal. Whether or not democratic socialists will agree with every argument Rees makes, *The Leveller Revolution* should be on every leftist’s bookshelf.

Please ask your librarian to subscribe to *New Politics*.

Russian Revolution

THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY MAY have been unrepresentative, but the appropriate response would have been to call new elections. This the Bolsheviks had no intention of doing.

The soviets were no substitute. They were less representative than the Constituent Assembly, which was elected by universal suffrage. Far fewer votes were cast for the soviets than were cast for the Constituent Assembly. The soviets, by their nature, disenfranchised vast numbers of people who were not workers, peasants, or soldiers.

I remember reading Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism* where he described how the soviets would govern, and I recall him writing that direct elections would only take place on the local level. After that all of the higher levels of government would be elected indirectly. Furthermore, millions of people were to be officially denied the right to vote at any level because of their bourgeois background. Anyone who thinks that the Bolsheviks were in favor of political democracy should reread this book.

Once the Bolsheviks took power, they were determined to keep it, regardless of the will of the workers, peasants, and soldiers. Or the rest of the population. It is true that the first soviet government included representatives from the Left SRs, but the Bolsheviks held all the levers of power. Since they were absolutely certain that history was on their side, it did not take long before they decided to rule by force.

BENNETT MURASKIN

I READ WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION the articles on the Russian Revolution and its aftermath in Issues 62, 63, and 64 of *New Politics* and was disappointed to find that some important events during the period 1917-1921 were

entirely overlooked or given short shrift.

For example:

1. On November 14, 1917, just weeks after the Bolsheviks had achieved state power, they decreed workers' control of the factories. Five months later, in April 1918 and at Lenin's insistence, the decree was terminated by replacing the factory committees in charge of production by corporate-style "one-man management."

2. In 1920, Trotsky proposed that the Union of Transport Workers be transformed into a branch of the state bureaucracy, thus initiating what Stalin completed with all the unions some years later.

3. The reaction to Trotsky's proposal, and to the increasing distance between the Bolshevik "vanguard" and the factory workers they presumed to represent, was the formation that same year of the Workers' Opposition (mentioned without elaboration by Shalom). With supporters in several cities, its leading representatives in the top party echelons were the metal-workers trade-unionist Shliapnikov and the radical feminist Alexandra Kollontai. They agitated for trade union autonomy and worker decision-making, rather than one-man rule, in the factories.

4. A year later, in 1921, almost simultaneously with Trotsky's Red Army suppression of the Kronstadt sailors' revolt for the restoration of soviet democracy, the Workers' Opposition was terminated by Lenin's angry but successful motion that it was heretofore illegal to form factions within the party. Harrison discusses this ban on factions, but without mentioning that it was almost explicitly aimed at the Workers' Opposition.

The failure to adequately report on these events by two Editorial Board members of *New Politics* in their assessments of the Russian Revolution does not jibe well with the journal's commitment to "socialism from below." Stephen Shalom alone dates "the

crushing of the Workers' Opposition and Kronstadt" as the unambiguous beginning of the Soviet Union's repressive character, and appropriately reminds us that "there can be no socialism without democracy."

Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, though they were icons of *New Politics'* WP-ISL precursors, should by now be de-lionized. The Bolsheviks, whose leaders were almost all intellectuals without any experience of factory life, claimed to be the vanguard of the factory workers. The whole notion of the Vanguard Party with its "democratic" centralism, invented by Lenin and adopted by Trotsky when he joined the Bolsheviks, should be subjected to thoroughgoing examination and criticism by those committed to revolutionary democratic socialism.

NORMAN EPSTEIN

Reply to Muraskin and Epstein

TO NORMAN EPSTEIN'S CLAIM that the repression of the Kronstadt uprising was the "unambiguous" sign that the Bolshevik state had become thoroughly repressive and, presumably, unworthy of socialists' support, I can only reiterate the reasons given by Soviet leaders and overwhelmingly endorsed by the Tenth Party Congress: Conceding to the sailors' demands would mean relinquishing power at a moment when (a) workers' revolution in Europe was still a real possibility, and (b) there was no other organized political force in Russia capable of preventing a bloody triumph of the counter-revolution. These reasons seem plausible to me. Not only would international revolution have been nipped in the bud, but the form taken by counter-revolution in Russia would have been essentially that of fascism. The massive atrocities committed by the White Armies during the Civil War—described in my article—which included genocidal massacres of Ukrainian and Russian Jews and far eclipsed the worst excesses of the Cheka, were but a glimpse of what the old order had in store for Russia should the Bolsheviks fall.

As for the "crushing" of the Workers' Opposition, Epstein is right that the ban on factions was aimed above all at the Workers' Opposition, but its members were hardly crushed. They were politically defeated and

required to dissolve as an organized faction. But the Opposition's leaders continued to write prolifically for the party press and internal publications, and several of them, including Alexander Shlyapnikov, were elected to the Central Committee. Both of its principal figures, Shlyapnikov and the great Marxist feminist Alexandra Kollontai, remained active party members—Shlyapnikov until he fell victim to Stalin's purges in the 1930s, while Kollontai made her peace with Stalinism and died only in 1952 after a long career as a Soviet diplomat. (Impossible to imagine Trotsky, whom Epstein thinks should be "de-lionized," living out the rest of his life quietly as a loyal Soviet ambassador in Oslo and Stockholm, as Kollontai did.)

At the Tenth Party Congress, the same resolution by Lenin, "On Party Unity," that called for a ban on factions also praised the "services of the Workers' Opposition" and stated that "every practical proposal concerning questions to which the Workers' Opposition group, for example, has devoted special attention, such as purging the party of nonproletarians and unreliable elements, combating bureaucratic practices, developing democracy and workers' initiative, etc., must be examined with the greatest care and tested in practice." Promoting workers' democracy, rolling back bureaucratism, these continued to be mainstream Bolshevik goals. Banning factions, outlawing opposition parties, and other anti-democratic measures were seen as deplorable short-term necessities—not as legitimate components of a "socialist" program—necessary to hang onto state power during the terrible interregnum of the "delayed world revolution," a phrase Lenin often used.

The Workers' Opposition was constituted in part as a response to Trotsky's proposal for militarizing labor, a panicky but mistaken and dangerous position he put forward to deal with the collapse of industry and of labor discipline (for example workers in factories hoarded supplies that were needed by other factories) and the desperate need for coordinated planning; later, Trotsky himself repudiated it. But neither Trotsky, Lenin, nor most of the Bolshevik Old Guard and the party as a whole regarded the economic program of the Workers' Opposition as anything but utterly utopian—and suicidal, if implemented. The Opposition's demand that management of the entire economy be turned

over to the trade unions and a “National Producers’ Congress,” including representatives of an anti-socialist and numerically overwhelming peasantry, simply made no sense under the conditions of 1921. Its call for the distribution of free food and housing, the abolition of money as a means of exchange, as well as for the immediate revival of the workers’ democracy of 1917—these were policies realizable only in an economy in which scarcity had been abolished, not when massive famine and epidemic disease stalked the land (the worst of the famines, the one that killed an estimated five million, had broken out in the spring of 1921), when industrial production had almost come to a halt, when transportation—and thus food distribution—was completely disrupted, and the working class was demoralized, atomized, a meager shadow of its former self. An indication of the Workers’ Opposition leaders’ lack of realism was Kollontai’s bitter speech at the Third Congress of the Comintern that same year attacking the New Economic Policy—the only possible way, as Lenin knew, to establish some sort of *modus vivendi* with the peasantry.

Epstein quotes Stephen Shalom’s reminder that “there can be no socialism without democracy.” Yes indeed, which is why those in the tradition of “socialism from below,” which *New Politics* has always championed, regard anti-democratic parties and regimes that lay claim to socialism as authoritarian frauds. Despite a superficial resemblance between some of these elements, on the one hand, and Soviet Russia during the Civil War and the early 1920s, on the other, however, there is all the difference in the world. I continue to insist that at least the core of the Bolshevik leadership during this period—except, of course, for renegades such as Stalin—regarded the suppression of democratic rights only as temporary and a lesser evil to collapse and defeat before the European, especially the German, revolution could come to Russia’s aid. In stark contrast, self-proclaimed socialists like Fidel Castro, Ho Chi-Minh, Josef Tito, and Daniel Ortega—not to mention Stalin, Mao, Kim Il-sung, or Enver Hoxha—considered the one-party police state not as a lesser evil but as the very essence of “socialist” government. Lenin, in fact, explicitly denied that Soviet Russia was socialist; it was a workers’ state only in an extremely “deformed” way—mainly

insofar as it was led by a party that had socialist intentions. But these intentions could be fulfilled only when help arrived from successful revolutions in the West.

Bennett Muraskin challenges the legitimacy of the October Revolution itself, not simply the violations of democratic rights committed by the Bolsheviks *after* they took power. His defense of the Constituent Assembly is based on the purely formal criterion that it was elected by universal suffrage, while the soviets were elected only by workers, soldiers, sailors, and some of the peasantry. He doesn’t question the evidence I presented that the November election, based on outmoded party lists, produced a body that did not reflect the political will of the majority of the country’s citizens, but nevertheless claims that the Assembly was more representative than the soviets. The Bolsheviks took power on November 7, 1917, because the majority wanted what the Bolsheviks promised to achieve: peace, land redistribution, and a soviet government—and in areas where non-Russians predominated, national self-determination. The Constituent Assembly majority, composed of a large plurality of Right SR deputies along with their allies among the Right Mensheviks and Cadets, wanted to continue the war and continue postponing land reform (and in the case of the bourgeois parties, prevent it altogether). They demanded that the Soviet government dissolve itself. Instead, of course, it was the Assembly that was forcibly dissolved, because it had become an alternative, not a complement, to soviet power, and a rallying point for the counter-revolution. That’s why the Cadets were such ardent defenders of the Constituent Assembly, which they had previously wanted to postpone indefinitely.

Muraskin states that the appropriate response to an unrepresentative Constituent Assembly would have been to call new elections. Lenin, in defending the dispersal of the Assembly, wrote that not only was it a counter-revolutionary threat, but that the Soviet Republic already in existence represented a higher form of democracy. This was not some *ex post facto* excuse, but a position Lenin had been defending since returning from exile in April. Parliamentary states, he argued, had a built-in tendency toward oligarchy. Surely, American representative

democracy—in which every few years voters choose among representatives of the ruling class, their campaigns financed by corporate money, who gather in a city far from most Americans but swarming with lobbyists and pro-business think tanks—is a prime example. The system is heavily rigged. In my article I explain, as Lenin did, why government based on directly elected workplace councils—the soviets—would be more democratic than any parliamentary system, and I won't repeat those arguments here, both for reasons of space and because Muraskin doesn't present any counterarguments. I will note one curious point, however: Muraskin seems to think there was something sinister in the fact that direct elections in the soviet system would only take place at the local level. But this merely meant that popular control was supposed to flow from the bottom up in a pyramidal structure of workplace, district, city, and national soviets; delegates elected to the district soviets would elect delegates to the city soviets, who would elect delegates to the national soviet. Especially with the addition of the right of immediate recall, it was a way of *maximizing*

democratic power in a large nation, of creating a living, *continuous* connection between representatives and their constituents.

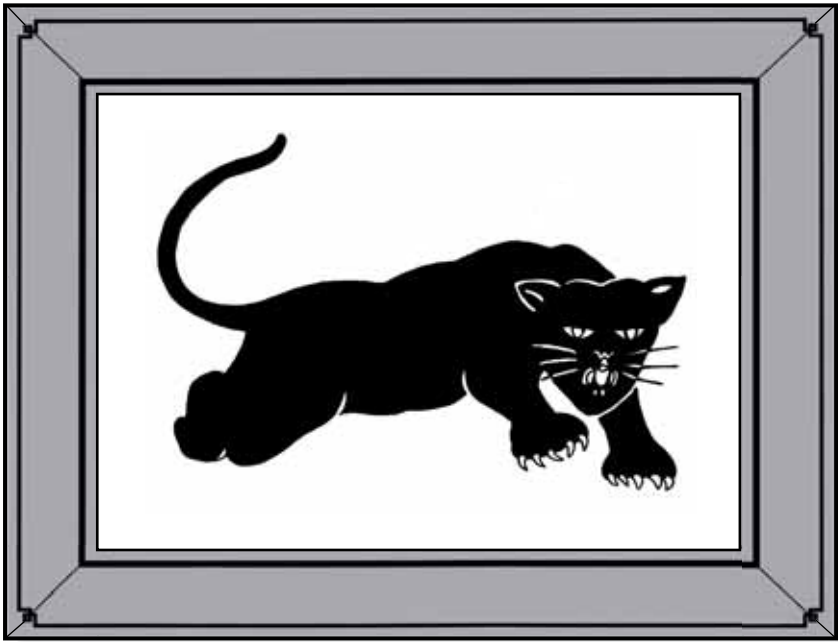
Epstein remarks that my assessment of the Revolution “does not jibe well with the journal's commitment to ‘socialism from below.’” The phrase comes from Hal Draper's magnificent article/pamphlet, *The Two Souls of Socialism*. In distinguishing between socialism from above and from below, Draper, who nonetheless had his criticisms of Lenin and Trotsky, placed the Bolshevik tradition firmly in the latter camp, and I strongly agree. In 1917, the workers, soldiers, and sailors of the Russian Empire made a conscious, highly informed political choice among competing political tendencies. They were not tricked into deciding for the Bolsheviks, and the overthrow of the Provisional Government did not take place behind their backs. They chose a party that, unlike almost all of its rivals on the left, stood foursquare against imperialist war and national conquest and oppression and for the immediate destruction of capitalism and empowerment of the working class.

THOMAS HARRISON

Visit *New Politics* on the Internet at www.newpol.org

New Politics
294 New York Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11216 USA
Address Service Requested

NONPROFIT
ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BROOKLYN, NY
Permit No. 84



ALAN