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U.S. Imperialism and Africa's "Perfect Storm"
■ Lee Wengraf

NewPolitics

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Summer 2020

THE NEW MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

Haley Pessin

SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZING AFTER BERNIE

Activists Respond

■ Taheerah Barney ■ Bill Fletcher Jr.
■ Mindy Isser ■ Natalia Tylim

THE COVID CRISIS

■ Dan La Botz and Sherry Baron
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Authoritarianism, "Left" and Right**

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Listening to Dylan During COVID-19

■ Jordy Cummings

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From the Editors

EVEN THOUGH IT IS ONLY HALF OVER, 2020 has already proved to be one of the most tumultuous—and inspiring—years in recent political history. It has been a year of dramatic swings backwards and forwards, with hope giving way to despair, and despair being replaced almost as rapidly by a massive, unexpected, and international uprising against police violence and racial inequality.

The year began with many leftists in the United States holding high expectations for the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders. After Sanders garnered the most votes in the Iowa caucus and then won the New Hampshire and Nevada primaries in February, the enthusiasm reached fever pitch. An article in *Jacobin* announced that “After the Nevada Blowout, It’s Bernie’s Party Now,” and even some commentators in the mainstream media began viewing Sanders as the favorite to win the Democratic Party nomination. These hopes were short lived. When Joe Biden won big in South Carolina, the Democratic Party establishment united in lockstep behind him. A week later, Biden swept the Super Tuesday primaries and Sanders’ challenge was effectively over. The establishment had demonstrated that the Democratic Party remains a capitalist party in their grip—their party, not ours.

Just as the Sanders campaign was winding down, the United States found itself facing the worst public health crisis in living memory, which the Trump administration, with its lack of preparation, its refusal to take the crisis seriously, and its general incompetence made even worse. By mid-March, much of the country was in lockdown and the economy was in free fall, with unemployment soaring to over twenty percent. The

U.S. and world economies were facing serious problems before the emergence of a new and deadly coronavirus, but the pandemic accelerated and exposed the underlying economic weaknesses of the capitalist system.

One effect of the economic crisis was to sharpen inter-imperial rivalries between the major powers, particularly the conflict between the United States and China. As tensions on a world-scale increased, authoritarian leaders in a number of countries—Trump here, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Modi in India, etc.—moved further to the right. In the United States, Trump cheered on right-wing protesters who held armed demonstrations around the country demanding that the economy be re-opened immediately. While there were walkouts and strikes by low-paid essential workers opposing unsafe working conditions, the pandemic seemed to have largely muted opposition to Trump’s policies.

All that changed on Memorial Day, with the brutal police murder of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American man, in Minneapolis. Floyd’s death, the result of officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on his neck for nearly nine minutes, with Floyd—who was already handcuffed—gasping that he could not breathe, was caught on video. The response was as explosive as it was unexpected. Mass protests against racial injustice broke out, first in Minneapolis, then in every major U.S. city and smaller communities, and then in cities around the world. Suddenly there was a movement led by Black youth but multiracial in character, bigger than anything we have seen in this country for decades. Polling showed that the protests had the support of a large majority of the population.

Predictably, Trump’s instinct was to meet

the uprising with mass repression. But his threat to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 and mobilize the army against the protesters backfired. Leading military figures (including his own Secretary of Defense), aware of significant support for the protests in the ranks, spoke out publicly against using the military against U.S. citizens. For the time being, the resistance has been strengthened and Trump's poll numbers are dropping, making November's election look more like it's the Democrats' to lose, though Biden has many problems, including facing a contested accusation of sexual assault by a former member of his staff, Tara Reade.

However, as socialists we know that getting rid of Trump will not be enough. Joe Biden has built his political career on coddling corporations and the rich, expanding the prison industrial complex, and supporting U.S. military interventions around the world. Biden has no solutions for the problems we face, from systemic racism to the climate crisis, and a Biden administration would need to be opposed just as vigorously by the left as Trump. The good news is that the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement against police violence, racism, and inequality provides the chance to rebuild a new, stronger left.

The articles in this issue of *New Politics* take up many of these themes:

- Black activist Haley Pessin discusses why "The Movement for Black Lives is Different This Time." We thank her for writing this article even as the events were taking place and she was involved in organizing in New York City.
- Dan La Botz and Sherry Baron look at the impact of COVID-19 and the economic

depression on the United States. Alejandro Reuss examines the pandemic and its effect on the world economy. And Gérard Chaouat discusses how different national health systems have dealt with the disease and with research to deal with such plagues.

- We ask: What will those who supported Bernie Sanders and his progressive platform do now? Taheerah Barney, Bill Fletcher Jr., Mindy Isser, and Natalia Tylim offer their views on organizing after Bernie, commenting on social movements, electoral politics, the Democratic Party, and the role of socialists.

- With militarism and authoritarianism on the rise worldwide, there is a crucial need for updating and strengthening a politics of socialist anti-imperialism. So in this issue we have the symposium, "Anti-Imperialism and the Rise of Authoritarianism, 'Left' and Right."

In addition, Lee Wengraf examines U.S. imperialism in Africa, Ann Ferguson offers a review essay on capitalism, patriarchy, and racism, and Frederick B. Mills on the Pink Tide in Latin America. Also Jordy Cummings gives us a music review of Bob Dylan's latest song, and as always there are several book reviews. Finally we have an exchange on surrogacy between Sara Lee and Alexandra Holmstrom-Smith.

We know that as some of you are isolating and some observing social distancing while participating in the protests against racism and police brutality, and as all of us are concerned about the national reopening of the economy and the coming presidential election, you will find sustenance and solidarity in these articles.

The Movement for Black Lives Is Different This Time

HALEY PESSIN

LATE MAY AND EARLY JUNE SAW the biggest wave of mass rebellion in the United States since the 1960s. Protests erupted in every major city and in all fifty states, demanding an end to racist police brutality. The character of these uprisings has been less like protests and more like rebellions, with tens of thousands of people taking to the streets, blocking highways, and burning and destroying police cars along with other symbols of economic and racial oppression. At the time of writing, in New York City alone 47 police cars have been damaged or burned.¹ More than 11,000 people have been arrested across the country.² And, in Washington DC, protests outside the White House temporarily forced Trump to flee to his bunker—allegedly to “inspect” it and not in abject fear of the riots.³

Meanwhile, the police, who already function as an occupying force in poor and Black neighborhoods, have responded as if they are at war, spraying tear gas and launching rubber bullets, even when confronted by peaceful protesters. In Dallas, a protester lost his eye after being hit by a “nonlethal” police projectile, as did a journalist in Minneapolis who was hit by a “foam” bullet and another



one in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who was struck by a tear gas canister.⁴ In Louisville, police killed 53-year-old protester David McAtee, leading to the firing of the city’s chief of police.⁵ In Brooklyn, corrections officers at the Metropolitan Detention Center killed Jamel Floyd, who died after officers pepper-sprayed him in his cell.⁶ Cops regularly kill Black people with impunity even when there is no social unrest. There is little reason to believe they will stop unless we make them.

Police killings of Black people are the sharp edge of American racism. They are the starkest testament to how little Black life matters in a society that devalues Black people in every other arena. Thus, the immediate cause of this rebellion is the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. The viral video of Floyd’s death depicts an officer kneeling on his neck for nine minutes while Floyd repeatedly gasps, “I can’t breathe.”

HALEY PESSIN is a member of the *Afrosocialist and Socialists of Color Caucus of the Democratic Socialists of America* and a rank and file member of 1199 SEIU. She organizes with the group *Legal Workers Rank & File* in New York City.

It is lost on no one that these are the same words Eric Garner uttered six years ago as a New York police officer choked him to death. Nothing has changed significantly in those six

It is damningly obvious that while large sectors of society were put on pause due to the health crisis, everyday racism was not.

years to stop police from killing Black people, who are more likely to be viewed as a threat, even when unarmed.

In many ways, this rebellion feels like a repeat of 2014, during which nationwide protests were organized in response to the police murder of Michael Brown and the subsequent rebellion in Ferguson, Missouri. Then as now, a succession of similar deaths at the hands of police made it devastatingly clear that Black people acting in entirely ordinary ways are, nevertheless, treated as uniquely criminal and dangerous: Ahmaud Aubrey was followed and lynched by racist vigilantes while out jogging;⁷ Breonna Taylor was killed while sleeping in her apartment.⁸ George Floyd was killed for having allegedly used a counterfeit \$20 bill, a crime of poverty at a time when tens of millions have lost their jobs due to the pandemic and food lines around the country stretch for blocks.⁹ Meanwhile, Black people have been brutalized for violating social distancing orders and are more likely to face fines and arrest than their white counterparts.¹⁰ Pandemic aside, one could easily dust off a protest sign from six years ago without anyone batting an eye. It is damningly obvious that while large sectors of society were put on pause due to the health crisis, everyday racism was not.

Yet, these protests are not just about police brutality. They are also a reaction to the utter failure of state governments and the Trump administration to respond to the horrific death toll and economic devastation caused by the pandemic. There is now a bipartisan push to reopen the economy, even as deaths due to COVID-19 continue to rise in a third of U.S. states.¹¹ Virtually every medical expert has made clear that if we rush to reopen, many more people will die, and the ruling class has decided that this is a price they are willing to pay.

That price is not being felt equally. There is ample evidence that the pandemic is disproportionately impacting Black communities around the country, with one study finding that Black people are dying from COVID-19 at a rate nearly three times higher than whites.¹² This is no coincidence. The United States' historic and ongoing forms of anti-Black racism ensure that Black people are concentrated in low-wage jobs, are less able to work from home, and are denied access to adequate health care.¹³ And on top of all this, racist police brutality has continued unabated. Black people cannot catch a break, not even at a moment when the whole country should be focused on how to protect our collective

This latest wave of anti-racist protest suggests that the radicalization goes much deeper than either the Sanders campaign or the DSA alone.

well-being and safety. This is nothing new.

What is new is that today's protests have been more militant and have spread more rapidly than those that occurred at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, and

they are occurring in defiance of curfews and stay-in-place orders imposed by mayors and governors. Today's protests appear to be more multiracial, although most are decisively being led by young Black people and not by any existing organizations. What's more, police repression has failed to dampen the turnout or win public sympathy. Instead, the protests are widely seen as justified, with one Reuters poll showing 64 percent of Americans support them.¹⁴ If the previous upsurge of anti-racist struggle helped expose the systemic racism of policing and the criminal "justice" system, then today's protests are delegitimizing the economic and political actors who enable and abet those systems. After all, when the government responds this quickly to quell mass protest but cannot find the will or resources to fight a mass pandemic, it is clear that our health and safety are not its priority.

As with other aspects of the pandemic, demands that were once confined to small pockets of anti-racist activists and the radical

Ultimately, activists and labor militants must find ways to connect labor actions against racism to the fight against a reopening that will only result in more deaths.

left are suddenly on the table. The call to #defundthepolice has become a central demand of the protests, as many draw the connection between bloated police budgets and the



Daniel Del Toro (@iggdch) has worked on award winning mobile activations for Black Lives Matter and is a new illustrator with a focus on making political art.

drive to cut back resources for health care, education, and adequate housing. There is a greater willingness to question the notion that armed agents of the state are the best response to a wide range of social problems, from mental illness to poverty and crime, or that police are necessary to keep us safe.¹⁵ In a move that would have seemed inconceivable two weeks earlier, on June 2 the Minneapolis Public School Board voted unanimously to terminate its contract with the city's police department.¹⁶ Portland, Oregon, followed.¹⁷ On June 7 the Minneapolis City Council vowed to disband the police force entirely.¹⁸ We are not in a revolutionary situation in the United States, and we are far from a point where demands to abolish the police altogether are commonplace. But perhaps we're not as far as one might think. None of this would have happened without the rebellion.

Some on the left have argued that the political radicalization of the last few years is primarily attributable to the 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns of Bernie Sanders.¹⁹ This same cohort tends to downplay the role of social movements in shifting consciousness, locating the main expression of this

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radicalization in Sanders' campaign as a socialist and the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America. But this latest wave of anti-racist protest suggests that the radicalization goes much deeper than either the Sanders campaign or the DSA alone. If

anything, the immediate, national response and the composition of these protests point to the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement in changing consciousness about the role of the police and the need for transformative, radical change. One sign of this growing consciousness is that 74 percent of Americans view Floyd's death as an issue of racial injustice—a 30-point increase over how Americans responded following the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.²⁰ Today, militant protests against police brutality have fundamentally changed the terrain of struggle and revived mass action as the way to win social change. The speed with which prosecutors charged all four officers involved in George Floyd's murder, as compared to the months it took before Ahmed Aubrey's killers were even arrested,²¹ can be attributed to this fact: Minneapolis fought back.

That said, there are significant challenges to realizing the radical potential of this moment that we need to think through collectively. First, how can we make protests safer during a pandemic? The entire logic of protest runs counter to the requirements of social distancing, given that our power and safety lies in numbers. We will need to continue to build on creative methods of protest, like car caravans and virtual rallies, to amplify our physical presence in the streets and to navigate the danger of a possible resurgence of COVID-19 in the fall.

Second, Trump has doubled down on positioning himself as the president of law and order. He has given a green light for cops to use the utmost force, calling for looters to be shot²²—a power he may not have, but which nevertheless puts a target on our backs.²³ For now, the Pentagon has bucked Trump's orders to send in the army. However, there is another danger that Trump has created with the charge of "outside agitators." This effort to separate the "good" protesters from the "bad" protesters—such as Antifa, which Trump has threatened to designate as a terrorist group—is in fact designed to condemn

us all. We should reject any such attempts to divide the movement. At the same time, it is unlikely that we will be able to sustain the current level of open rebellion without creating space for more of us to come out in

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large numbers, including those who are undocumented or otherwise cannot risk arrest. Strength in numbers helps us to better stand our ground, while greater preparation and coordination can be among our best safety measures against police violence.²⁴ There is a lot to be learned from international struggles, as evidenced by the militants from Hong Kong, who have tweeted out from their own pro-democracy struggle advice on how to resist teargas and out-maneuver police.²⁵ We must share their lessons, too.

Finally, despite the nascent grass-roots organizations that have formed since 2014, there remains a vacuum of spaces where new layers of activists—particularly the Black youth leading these struggles—can contribute to developing long-term strategy through the ebbs and flows of protests. We will need to develop networks and infrastructure that can better coordinate national actions, campaigns, and demands, as well as share the lessons of our successes and failures across the country. There have been many inspiring examples of the role that organized labor can play in this fight. In Minneapolis and New York City, bus drivers and their unions refused to transport

arrested protesters to COVID-filled jails.²⁶ Rank and file educators, parents, students, and racial justice advocates are challenging the United Federation of Teachers, which refused to demand cops out of schools or to criticize liberal politicians for their complicity.²⁷ Ultimately, activists and labor militants must find ways to connect labor actions against racism to the fight against a reopening that will only result in more deaths. Instead, we must insist on a humane response to the pandemic that addresses the communities most impacted by COVID-19, while taking power and funding away from the police. This goes hand-in-hand with the demand to make the real looters pay: We must tax the rich and insist that this country, founded on genocide and slavery, finally pay its due in reparations. While mainstream media have fixated on incidents of “looting” and property destruction, the wealthiest Americans became \$400 billion richer during the pandemic.²⁸ At a time when 40 million people are unemployed, this only serves to highlight the fact that this capitalist society puts a greater value on profit than on human life. The rebellion against racist police brutality has exposed these deadly priorities like no other force. All of us participating with rage and hope must take this struggle as far as it can go.

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SPECIAL SECTION: THE COVID CRISIS

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS HAD AN ENORMOUS IMPACT on the peoples of the world, on the global economic system, and on politics in many countries. As we go to press, nearly half a million people have died worldwide and 115,000 in the United States; many sectors of the global economy have declined, and globally one billion are falling into poverty. In this section Dan La Botz and Sherry Baron look at the impact of the coronavirus and the economic depression on the United States. Alejandro Reuss examines the pandemic and its effect on the world economy. And Gérard Chaouat discusses how different national health systems have dealt with the disease and with research to deal with such plagues.

Pandemic, Depression, and Authoritarianism

We Must Fight for the Future

DAN LA BOTZ AND SHERRY BARON

THE UNITED STATES CONFRONTS AN uncertain future in the face of an unprecedented situation. Environmental changes, perhaps caused by industrial agriculture, have produced a new virus and a pandemic

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DAN LA BOTZ is an editor of *New Politics*, a retired college teacher, a writer, and activist.

that in turn triggered an altogether unique economic crisis. Today (June 1) the country has over 104,000 COVID-19 deaths and 43 million unemployed, over 25 percent of the workforce, a level not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Overseeing this catastrophic situation is an erratic, authoritarian president unconcerned about the health and well-being of the American people who has as his first priorities winning reelection and returning business to profitability. And in this vertiginous context we have a looming constitutional crisis over the conduct of the November election, a realignment of the Bernie Sanders forces with Joe Biden and the Democratic Party establishment, right-wing militias brandishing arms, outbursts of worker resistance, and the continuing growth of the small socialist left. This may be the greatest crisis in all of American history, and we, as

socialists, must project a vision for the future and a strategy to fight for it. To do so we have to understand where we are and how we got here.

The cause of this catastrophe we are living through is the world capitalist system, which in the last 75 years, propelled by coal, oil, and nuclear power and driven by high-speed machines that are managed by computers and operated to enrich the 1 percent, has virtually destroyed the planet's environmental equilibrium, brought about an era of perpetual wars, and impoverished hundreds of millions. Industrial agriculture and unplanned sprawl created conditions for the generation of viruses that, mutating, spread from wild creatures to domestic animals and to humans. We have always had plagues, but international commerce, mass travel, and mass migration have spread this one around the globe more rapidly than ever before. When the disease arrived in Asia, Europe, and then the Americas and Oceania, it came up against health and social-welfare systems severely weakened from forty years of the neoliberal free-market model and austerity budgets.

Capitalism, once the creator of the wealth that might have made another world possible, has become the destroyer of the planet, the disrupter of production, the sower of disease, the generator of authoritarian governments, and the purveyor of irrationality. Never before has socialism—a democratic and collectively owned and managed society—been more urgently needed, and not since the Fascist-Nazi period has the challenge of bringing it about seemed greater.

The Failure of Government

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that produces the COVID-19 disease, popularly referred to as the coronavirus, was a new virus that could cause severe illness and death, a virus to which no human being had immunity and for which there was no vaccine or medical treatment. When it first arrived in the United

States from Asia and Europe in January 2020, President Donald J. Trump's administration failed to take rapid action to contain it and misled the public about the dangers. The first U.S. case was confirmed on January 21, but Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said on January 24, "We don't want the American public to be worried about this because their risk is low. The American people should not be worried or frightened by this. It's a very, very low risk to the United States, but it's something we, as public health officials, need to take very seriously."

Since the disease has a typical and sometimes symptom-free incubation period of four to five and sometimes as long as 11 to 12 days, the virus had an opportunity to spread silently across the country. Then the first person-to-person transmission was confirmed on January 30, leading Trump to declare a public health emergency on January 31. Trump's only significant action at the time, however, was putting travel restrictions on China on January 31, which failed both because 40,000 Americans were allowed to return from China and because the disease had already entered the United States via travelers from both Asia and Europe. Research on the spread of the virus suggests that the East Coast of the United States was infected with the European strain while the West Coast was infected with the Asian strain of the virus, and most of the subsequent spread came from the east, moving westward throughout the country.

The first death in the United States occurred on February 6, but it was not until February 21 that Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the Center for Disease Control's (CDC's) National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said that a pandemic was likely, that it would "disrupt our lives," and that businesses might close. As a result of her remarks the stock market plummeted and Trump excluded her from his televised COVID-19 press conferences. A few days later, on February 26, Trump appointed

Vice-President Mike Pence, who is not a public health expert and who as governor had ignored other public health warnings, to head the coronavirus epidemic team. Trump then declared another travel ban on March 11, this one on Europe, the UK, and Ireland. (Later there would also be travel bans on Canada and Mexico and now on Brazil too.) Still there was little information on the actual spread of the disease because of a lack of testing.

Testing was a debacle. The United States failed for over a month to develop a polymerase chain reaction assay to determine whether someone was actively infected with the virus. China had sequenced the genome of the virus by January 10, and a week later German scientists had developed a diagnostic test. In the first week of February, the World Health Organization shipped about 250,000 tests to 159 laboratories around the world. The United States, however, decided not to use the WHO test and to develop its own. The Food and Drug Administration approved the U.S. test on February 4, and CDC shipped ninety test kits to state public health labs on February 6 and 7. But on February 12 the CDC disclosed that the test produced inconclusive results and it was not until late February that the CDC produced an acceptably accurate test. An additional problem was that at first all tests had to be sent to the CDC laboratory, which delayed reporting of results by days to weeks. Complicating this process further, testing was at first limited to those who had traveled to China or been in contact with a confirmed case and had symptoms, meaning some early cases went untested. At the end of February, the CDC allowed hospitals and state laboratories to develop and use their own tests. Yet throughout March and into May the number of potential cases quickly overwhelmed the available testing capacity. As Fauci told Congress on March 12, “The idea of anybody getting (a coronavirus test) easily, the way people in other countries are doing it—we’re not set up for that. That is a failing.”

Following these initial, disastrous missteps, what would prove to be devastating errors and delays continued. Trump declared the coronavirus pandemic to be a national emergency on March 13 but then waited three

The front-line health workers dealing with the sick are largely female.

days more to issue nonmandatory guidelines, which called for 15 days of limiting social gatherings to ten people and suggested limited discretionary travel. Apparently now facing reality, he said that to mitigate the virus the country might maintain such restrictions through July or August. This finally began what was in effect a national shutdown of the economy, as governors around the country ordered the closing down of businesses and stopped public events, though each state’s rules were different, some loose and some strict. From the first confirmed case *it had taken nearly two full months to establish a national public health policy to begin to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.*

The same failure to act quickly and strongly was also true of state governors. In New York, which became the epicenter of the disease, after the first cases appeared Governor Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio both failed to take rapid and decisive action to contain the contagion, and both initially suggested that it wouldn’t become a major problem. Cuomo did not declare a state of emergency until March 11, when the state had 216 cases. California Governor Gavin Newsome did not declare a state emergency until day forty of the coronavirus in California, after several California counties and cities had already done so. Other governors, such as Jay Inslee of Washington, the state that had the first

case in the country, did not shut down until March 23. Everywhere the entire month of February was wasted, as the disease spread silently through the population and few measures were taken to stop it. The failure of containment meant that governments then had to turn to mitigation in the months of March and April, through measures such as social distancing, with the goal of “flattening the curve,” that is preventing peaks in the disease that would overwhelm hospitals as happened in New York City.

Why Did Government Fail?

The U.S. government’s failure to react in a timely and decisive way is particularly shocking when one considers that the outgoing Obama administration had warned Trump of the dangers of a pandemic, and multiple government agencies—the CDC, Health and Human Services (HHS), Homeland Security, the National Security Council—were all aware of the possibility and had made plans to respond. HHS even conducted an exercise called *Crimson Contagion* that envisaged a novel coronavirus originating in China and brought into the United States by a man returning home with a “dry cough.” In the fictional scenario, the CDC issued guidelines urging social distancing from the beginning. The mock pandemic drill revealed bureaucratic bungling, lack of preparation for some issues like the handling of school children, and inadequate equipment and supplies. Congress was briefed on the situation in December 2019 (with the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee selling off his stock just in time). In January the National Security Council (NSC), trade advisor Peter Navarro, and HHS Secretary Alex M. Azar II also warned Trump of the danger of a pandemic. Navarro told him it could kill half a million people and lead to trillions of dollars in economic losses. Trump presumably failed to act in a timely manner because he feared that the public health experts’ plans would disrupt the

economy, the basis for his reelection campaign. So he not only ignored all the warnings but also resisted advisors and took no serious action until March 16—and then it was too late to prevent hundreds of thousands of cases and tens of thousands of deaths.

When Trump finally did decide to act, he found the government ill prepared. COVID-19 manifested itself principally as a severe respiratory illness, meaning that the most important tool to reduce deaths was the ventilator that helps patients breathe. Trump boasted that the government had 10,000 ventilators in reserve, but 2,100 of them were broken. Some 170 faulty ventilators were shipped to California. The Defense Department found 1,065 more, but they were a nonstandard type that requires special training. Similarly with medical masks, essential in dealing with a respiratory disease: Many of those in the government stockpile had rotted. Montgomery County, Alabama, received 5,000 rotten masks. All of this put health workers’ lives in danger, and indeed some died. There were also numerous delays in the development of test kits throughout March and April, and no state had the capacity to conduct contact tracing—testing and contact tracing being the two things essential to containing the virus. Americans and observers around the world were astounded to see the American president dither and the most powerful and wealthiest nation utterly stymied.

Faced with these problems, the Trump administration failed to take responsibility to organize the purchase or the production and distribution of medical equipment and supplies, so individual hospitals, cities and states, the federal government, and governments around the world competed in the market as supplies went to the highest bidder. Even individual nurses sought to buy their own masks. The situation was chaotic, and of course, in this bidding war the biggest losers were the poor nations of the Global South. As the *Washington Post’s* writers put it on April 4,

The administration often seemed weeks behind the curve in reacting to the viral spread, closing doors that were already contaminated. Protracted arguments between the White House and public health agencies over funding, combined with a meager existing stockpile of emergency supplies, left vast stretches of the country's health care system without protective gear until the outbreak had become a pandemic. Infighting, turf wars, and abrupt leadership changes hobbled the work of the coronavirus task force.

The *New York Times* reported that a Columbia University diseases modeler's report estimated that there might have been 36,000 fewer deaths had social distancing begun two weeks earlier on March 1.

Trump's failure had been prepared over many decades by his predecessors of both parties. Unlike other developed nations, the United States failed after the Great Depression and World War II to create a national health care system. Instead there were federal agencies, fifty state health departments, and thousands of private players: insurance companies; public, nonprofit, and private hospital systems; pharmaceutical companies; and drug store chains. The irrational, competitive, and profit-driven system would have impeded any administration from tackling the problem. Still we should note that even some countries with national health systems—Italy, Spain, France, Sweden, and others—also failed the test. And countries with very different political systems did quite well: South Korea and Vietnam, for example.

Trump's Disdain for Science and Health

The American health care system has had enormous problems for decades; the United States spends twice as much per capita for health care as other developed countries with no better results—including on coronavirus—and still leaves many millions without adequate access. President Barack

Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2014, popularly known as Obamacare, was a reform that preserved all of the elements of the private, for-profit system, while expanding coverage by about 20 million people through reorganizing insurance markets, changing some Medicaid rules, and offering government subsidies. Nevertheless, in 2018 some 27.9 million nonelderly individuals were uninsured. The coronavirus relief legislation (the CARES Act) provided for COVID-19 related diagnoses and treatment during the pandemic, nevertheless, many who had not had adequate health care entered the pandemic with chronic diseases that made them more vulnerable to coronavirus death.

Pandemic preparedness was no priority of the Trump administration. In May 2018, the Global Health Security and Biodefense unit of the NSC was disbanded and its head, Timothy Ziemer, the top White House official in the NSC for leading U.S. response against a pandemic, left the Trump administration. Trump's disdain for medical science and public health could be seen in his budget proposals in 2017, which would have made deep cuts in both the National Institutes of Health and the CDC, though Congress did not ultimately make those cuts. While Trump is not now proposing to repeal Obamacare, the *New York Times* reports that he would, in his 2021 budget proposal, cut "about \$1 trillion out of Medicaid and the ACA's premium subsidies, the two pillars of the law's expansion of insurance coverage." With the coronavirus still spreading and taking lives, Trump's proposed 2021 budget would also cut the Health and Human Services budget by ten percent.

The Economic Crisis

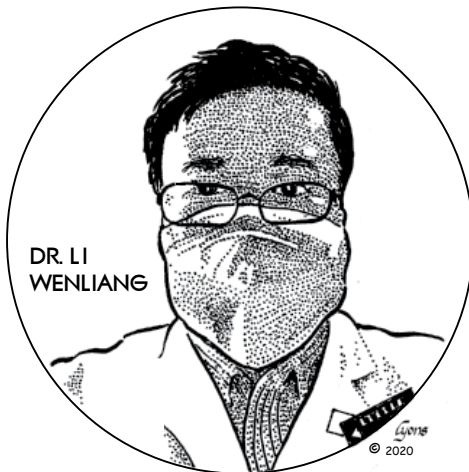
The U.S. economy had already slowed before the coronavirus, and with the pandemic and the shutdown it virtually collapsed. Trump's decision on March 16 to initiate the national lockdown with his voluntary guidelines, fol-

lowed by state governors' shutdown orders, closed many schools and universities and workplaces from manufacturing plants to service businesses of all sorts: bars, restaurants, barbershops, and beauty salons. The lockdown triggered an economic depression in an economy that was already beginning to slow down. During March, April, and May 43 million workers lost their jobs, millions of small businesses closed, and at least 100,000 of these closed forever. The closures led to a

plunge in state, county, and city taxes and to the greatest fiscal crisis of modern America. Everywhere state and local government began to plan cuts in their budgets that would also mean more unemployment.

The United States had not experienced such a crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Everyone recognized that the federal and state governments' social safety net, a patchwork of programs with varying coverage and benefits, could never handle the needs of

CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE



— Dr. Li Wenliang, 33, Wuhan China, sounded the alarm about a new coronavirus in an online chat room for medical school classmates.

When his role in revealing the news became known, Dr. Li was forced, in early January, to “sign a statement denouncing his warning as unfounded and illegal rumor.” He made this public on social media.

A month later the Chinese Supreme People's Court said the rumor “might not have been entirely unfounded,” and, “It might have been a fortunate thing if the public had believed the ‘rumors’ then and started to wear masks and carry out sanitization measures, and avoid the wild animal market.”

Dr. Li wrote, “If the officials had disclosed information about the epidemic earlier, I think it would have been a lot better. There should be more openness and transparency.” “I think that there should be more than one voice in a healthy society, and I don't approve of using public power for excessive interference.”

Dr. Li contracted the coronavirus on January 8. “After I recover,” he wrote, “I still want to return to the front line. The epidemic is still spreading, and I don't want to be a deserter.”

Dr. Li died on February 6. There was an outpouring of grief and anger in China after his death. Over 17 million people had been following a livestream of his status. An action for free speech was launched in his memory entitled, “I blew a whistle for Wuhan tonight.”

In honor of whistleblowers, and the dedicated doctors, nurses and other health care workers around the world who are risking or who have lost their lives caring for others

the millions without jobs and incomes. Over several decades, wages for workers had stagnated while health care costs and rents had increased. Many Americans lived hand-to-mouth existences, and before the shutdown four out of ten couldn't afford an unexpected \$400 expense. Before the pandemic, tens of millions were already getting groceries from food banks.

Faced with such an economic crisis, the U.S. Congress passed the unprecedented \$2.2 trillion CARES Act. The bipartisan act was principally aimed at supporting business, though the support for workers was unprecedented. There was \$349 billion supposedly for small businesses, though much of it went to corporations; \$500 billion for big businesses, with \$46 billion going to the airline corporations and their employees; \$339 billion for states and municipalities; and \$130 billion for hospitals and medical equipment companies. There would also be processing fees for banks that would eventually amount to \$10 billion and \$174 billion in tax breaks for wealthy individuals and large corporations.

The act also provided that all who had a Social Security number and had income of less than \$75,000 would receive a one-time payment of \$1,200 to individuals, \$2,400 to couples, plus \$500 per child. Those who in addition filed for unemployment were given an additional \$600 per week to supplement state unemployment benefits. Republicans fumed that roughly half of American workers, most of them low-wage workers, might receive more money during their forced layoff than they had earned while working. Many workers, though they paid taxes, would find themselves excluded from the CARES Act's benefits, most explicitly some 4.3 million undocumented immigrants who were denied government testing and care, cash rebates, and unemployment insurance. The act also excluded the U.S. citizen children of undocumented immigrants and may also deny payments to couples where one is an undocumented immigrant. While the Democrats

fought for more extensive benefits for workers, they ultimately joined the Republicans in passing the pro-business act; only Alexandria Cortez-Ocasio voted against, explaining that it didn't address her constituents "and the core issues facing working families."

To receive the CARES Act supplemental \$600 payment, recipients must be registered with the state unemployment benefits office, but many states make it difficult to get unemployment insurance and don't pay much. The Pew Research Center, using U.S. Labor Department figures, found that "in March, just before the pandemic really began wreaking havoc on the economy, 65.9 percent of unemployed Massachusetts residents received benefit payments but only 7.6 percent of jobless Floridians did. ... Overall, about 29 percent of unemployed Americans, or 2.1 million out of 7.37 million, received benefits in March." Weekly benefits also vary greatly, from \$823 in Massachusetts to \$235 in Mississippi and \$190 in Puerto Rico. And with unemployment offices overwhelmed, even those who were entitled often could not get their benefits for days or weeks. The failure of the United States to build a genuine social security system in the postwar period left tens of millions in the lurch.

The Social Crisis

The combination of the pandemic and the economic depression created a social crisis of enormous dimensions. In April nearly a third of renters couldn't, and therefore didn't, pay their rent. The closing of schools meant that almost 30 million children who usually get one, two, or even three meals a day at their schools might not. An advocacy group for children's nutrition reported that by April, one in five children were hungry. In cities across the country, lines of cars miles long formed as people waited to get groceries from food banks. When the government told people to stay home, the country's estimated 568,000 homeless had no home to go to and feared stay-

ing in the crowded homeless shelters. Prisons and immigrant detention centers became petri dishes for breeding and spreading the virus, as did nursing homes and meatpacking plants.

The American working class has always been deeply divided by gender, race, religion, and nationality, as well as by occupation, education and training, and other factors. The pandemic has revealed just how deep these divides are. During the pandemic, it is estimated that 29 percent of Americans may be working from home and being paid; they are mostly professionals like teachers, professors, engineers, information tech workers, middle-management people, and other white-collar workers. A second group, the unemployed refugees from millions of closed businesses, vary greatly, from those with unemployment and relief package supplements to those receiving nothing. Some of the undocumented immigrants among the latter group continue to go to street corners and hardware store parking lots in search of work. A third group, the frontline essential workers, includes workers in health, police and fire, transportation and warehousing, agriculture and food distribution, some food preparation, and grocery stores. A large percentage of this third group are black or Latinx, some are immigrants, and a great many are low-paid. The essential workers, some taking public transportation to their jobs and often working in close contact with the public, were among the most likely to become infected; many were and became sick, and some died. They are working and being paid, but putting their health and their lives, as well as those of their families, in jeopardy.

The epidemic has had very different impacts on black and white communities, revealing the profoundly racist economic and social structures of American society. In Chicago in late May it was reported that since the outbreak began though black people make up only 30 percent of the population, they accounted for 70 percent of the deaths, while in Milwaukee, where blacks make up 20 percent of the population, they made up 80 percent of

the deaths. In addition to occupational differences, these disparities are attributable to the social conditions that many black people face: environmental pollution, lack of access to health care, lack of healthy food, and lack of opportunities for exercise. The result is a greater prevalence of serious health problems such as obesity, diabetes, asthma or other respiratory disease, and cardiovascular issues. Black families are more likely to live in dense neighborhoods, in overcrowded buildings and apartments, and to include essential workers, who suffer more exposure to the illness.

The situation is quite similar for Latinx, whose access to health care and whose living and working conditions resemble those of blacks. While New Jersey is 19 percent Latinx, they made up 30 percent of COVID-19 cases as of May 13, 2020, and while Washington State was 13 percent Latinx, they made up 31 percent of COVID-19 cases. While there are no good statistics, undocumented immigrants of all races and ethnicities are likely to have equally high or higher rates because they often face similar conditions and have been denied health care or fear that seeking health care may lead to their deportation. Physicians have been alarmed by the much higher rates among Latinx than among the population as a whole, attributing some of the problem to their work in industries like agriculture and meatpacking and the associated living conditions. As described in a *New York Times* story,

They live in close quarters, often multiple families to a house or with several farmworkers crowded into a barracks-style room, where social distancing and self-isolation are impossible. They perform jobs that require interaction with the general public, in food service, transportation, and delivery; and some also work in meatpacking plants that have emerged as major hot spots.

Years of discrimination against Latinx and recent anti-immigrant policies, including immigrants' exclusion from CARES, have

taken a toll.

While men die at a higher rate, women have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic in many other ways. The front-line health workers dealing with the sick are largely female: 90 percent of nurses are women, as are 73 percent of respiratory technicians, and many other hospital workers of all sorts are women as well. Dozens of health workers have died of coronavirus, many of them women. Women also make up 90 percent of home health aids, serving clients who depend on them to visit and take care of them, and 90 percent of nursing-home workers are female, in an industry that has been a cauldron of coronavirus disease and death. Women also make up 72 percent of all cashiers working in grocery stores and pharmacies; deemed essential, these low-paid workers are also putting their health and lives in danger because of their constant interaction with the public. And women have been hard hit by unemployment. As the Economic Policy Institute notes, “The latest payroll employment data for March show that women were the hardest hit by initial job losses in the COVID-19 labor market; women represented 50.0 percent of payroll employment in February, but represented 58.8 percent of job losses in March.”

There is great concern that in their homes, some women now find themselves trapped with abusive partners who may injure them or their children physically and mentally, though given the situation it is hard to get statistics. And while all of this is going on, Republican politicians in several states have worked to take away women’s abortion rights.

Reopening and Resistance

Trump passed the month of April giving televised coronavirus press conferences in lieu of conducting campaign rallies. Surrounded by Pence and Azar, Dr. Fauci and Dr. Deborah Birx, a physician and diplomat who has served as the United States’ global AIDS coordinator since Obama, as well as CDC Director

Robert Redfield, Trump spent as much as two hours a day on TV contradicting the health experts, making happy talk, promoting the unproven and sometimes fatal hydroxy-chloroquine as a cure, speculating about the possibility of drinking bleach and shining ultraviolet light into the body as a cure, and praising his administration’s brilliant success. Meanwhile there were tens of thousands of deaths and the economy plunged to new depths with tens of millions unemployed. By this point Trump was practically jumping out of his skin, talking gibberish on TV and sometimes tweeting dozens of messages in a single night, blaming the virus on China, Obama, and the Democrats, and forwarding a tweet calling for firing Fauci. Fearing that the economic collapse was going to cost him the election, Trump decided to end the national shutdown and turn responsibility over to the governors, some of whom were also anxious to get the country back to the business of making money at whatever cost.

Big business certainly wanted to reopen the economy as soon as possible as did many Republican politicians and some Democrats. Trump and the Republicans encouraged a collection of kooky and dangerous groups, from white Evangelical Christians and anti-vaxxers to FreedomWorks, the Tea Party Patriots, and other conservative groups, some of them financed by the Koch brothers and other deep-pocket right-wingers, as well as armed militias. In mid-April Trump tweeted encouragement to the protestors demanding to “LIBERATE MICHIGAN” and to those in other states, and when the mob in Michigan showed up brandishing their high-powered weapons, Trump called them “very good people.” The demonstrations, which had the character of Trump rallies, included as well white nationalists and neo-Nazis who, as Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer noted, carried confederate flags, nooses, and swastikas. Trump had previously, during the neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, Virginia, said that there were “very fine people on both

sides,” but we are now in new territory as the U.S. president forms a tacit alliance with the neo-Nazis. Small-business owners, who saw the militia protestors in action, then began to hire them to protect their businesses as they reopened in violation of state regulations. When businesspeople turn to these far-right militias, fascism in America is no longer only a theoretical issue.

Trumped announced reopening as a “Transition to Greatness.” Guided by the

From the first confirmed case it had taken nearly two full months to establish a national public health policy to begin to mitigate the spread of Covid-19.

CDC, the White House established a set of rational health guidelines for the gradual reopening of the country—but then completely ignored them, encouraging governors to reopen everywhere as soon as possible. By May 15, the great majority of states had completely reopened, several others had reopened some regions, and others were planning to reopen soon, though some mayors resisted doing so. Dr. Fauci and other health experts testifying before the Senate warned against reopening too soon and too fast, when states’ case counts were still rising, and because the United States did not have the testing or contact tracing capacity to ensure the public’s health. Fauci warned that if business was put before public health, “there is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control.” That, he said, would result not only in “suffering and death,” but might also set back the economic recovery. Everywhere in the country Trump’s go-ahead signal, economic desperation, and the return of warm weather led many to abandon social isolation, social distancing, and the use of masks. While, as

we write, the consequences of this remain to be seen, it should be noted that many health authorities fear that the fall might see a return of the coronavirus combined with the seasonal flu. As whistleblower Rick Bright, former director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, who had been removed from his position because he resisted Trump’s promotion of hydroxy-chloroquine, put it, “Without clear planning and implementation of the steps that I and other experts have outlined, 2020 will be the darkest winter in modern history.” If reopening is not done safely, it could have deadly repercussions for workers, their families, and their communities.

Worker Resistance, Mutual Aid, and the Left

With the federal government and the states, as well as public and private employers, failing to take appropriate action, workers began to organize protests and strikes in defense of their health. Nurses and other hospital workers organized demonstrations to demand masks, gowns, and ventilators. Many nurses demonstrated at their hospitals, but, organized by National Nurses United, some went to the White House to demand that Trump invoke the Defense Production Act to order the mass production of personal protective equipment, ventilators, and coronavirus test kits. While there, in a moving tribute, they read the names of their colleagues killed by the virus.

Nurses were not alone. In mid-March teachers threatened a sickout to force the closure of New York Public Schools when Mayor de Blasio failed to do so and their own union, the United Federation of Teachers, had failed to take action. In hundreds of mostly small, brief, and localized wildcat strikes, essential workers who were forced to continue working without adequate safety and health protections either protested or walked off the job. Some of these actions, like a small

walkout at an Amazon warehouse in New York, garnered publicity but failed to find a mass following or to affect the business. Others, like a walkout at a meat-processing plant in Colorado, brought attention to the plight of workers facing dangerous conditions. In Washington state's Yakima Valley, where there is a long history of worker strikes, hundreds of fruit packers struck for safer working conditions and hazardous-duty pay. Where workers have acted, they have generally done so on their own without a union or, if they had one, without any union leadership. Bus drivers and construction workers are exceptions. The Amalgamated Transit Union supported its members who struck for health and safety measures in Detroit, Birmingham, Richmond, and Greensboro. The North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters, which represents about 10,000 workers in Massachusetts, ordered its members to strike on April 5 over concerns about COVID-19 and did not end the strike until April 20.

With the exception of the nurses unions, by and large most labor unions have provided little more leadership than have government or business in this hybrid health and economic crisis. Many unions issued statements calling for employers and government to protect their members, and unions have also put out helpful information and have lobbied Congress, but they have not attempted to generalize and raise the level of class struggle as might be possible. Some important unions capitulated early to reopening factories and resuming production, even though it is clear that it may put their members' health at risk. As early as May 5 the United Auto Workers conceded that the company had the contractual authority to resume production later that month at GM, Ford, and Fiat-Chrysler plants, without strong health protections.

Fearing the coronavirus, demobilized by the shutdown, then recalled to work without adequate protections, the crisis has further divided and demoralized much of the working class. As we write on June 1 there has been no

mass mobilization of workers on an industrial, regional, or national scale, though some in the left have that in mind.

The largest left organization in the United States, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which has been active among nurses and teachers, has undertaken some new initiatives. It joined forces with the small United Electrical Workers Union, known as the UE, which organizes in a variety of industries, and together they have created the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee (EWOC). EWOC is now training hundreds of volunteer organizers to help shop-floor activists in their workplaces. DSA has also begun to organize a network of restaurant workers in several cities. At the same time, *Labor Notes*, the labor education center, which helped to create the United Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (UCORE), a network of caucuses in the teachers unions in Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York, Massachusetts, and elsewhere, is now working to create a similar network in higher education.

Some in the left, especially the anarchist and anti-capitalist left, have also been engaged in organizing what is called "mutual aid," though their projects are few in number and small. While leftists sometimes talk about mutual aid as leading to "dual power"—a period in a revolutionary situation where there are two rival governments—there is no evidence of such projects representing any significant working-class movement or any alternative to government on any level, admirable as the attempt to build solidarity may be. Far more important than left-led groups in that work are the thousands of mutual assistance projects across the country that have sprung up from block clubs and neighborhood associations, involving bringing food to the hungry, checking in on the elderly and handicapped, providing health education, sharing books and educational materials, and myriad other good works. Those largely traditional community groups, however, seldom have a political dimension.

Latinx immigrant communities organizing through their neighborhood groups, workers centers, and other advocacy organizations represent some of the strongest and most genuine examples of real mutual assistance, and some of those centers engage as well in lobbying for legislation for their communities. One of the largest and most important of them, Make the Road New York, a community organization with around 25,000 dues-paying members, provides food pantries; takes part in efforts to organize Amazon warehouse workers, carwash workers, domestic cleaners, and others; conducts education on health and safety for essential workers; and advocates for legislation, including laws to provide undocumented immigrants with access to many of the benefits afforded to U.S. citizens.

The coronavirus crisis and its economic impact have revealed the enormous economic, racial, and gender disparities in society. It has lifted the veil on the relentless exploitation that existed even before this crisis. So far we have not seen this change in consciousness lead to significant mass action, but we're still early in the crisis and attempts to reopen workplaces without adequate health protections or with changes in employment security and wages could spark new actions, perhaps on a larger scale. Though as we finish this article, the national rebellion against the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 has roiled the country as tens of thousands have protested in 75 cities.

Populism, Politics, and the Threat of Authoritarian Government

Donald Trump's populist demagoguery has deeply divided American society since he first ran for president in 2015, promising to protect Americans from Mexican immigrants, Muslim terrorists, and Chinese competition, while excoriating the "fake news" media. He put himself forward as an alternative to the Washington insiders, promising to shake things up, to drain the swamp, and to "Make

America Great Again." His vulgar misogynist, racist, and xenophobic rhetoric and his white nationalism appealed to and won a following among about 40 percent of the American electorate, and remarkably, he has managed through scandals and failures of all sorts to hold on to that base. He succeeded in taking control of the Republican Party and has held its loyalty largely through his \$2 trillion-dollar tax cut, plus now billions more in relief packages. He has also become the central figure for the right-wing alliance of white evangelical Christians, anti-abortion forces, gun rights activists, and increasingly of quasi-fascist white nationalists. And, though he has worked constantly for the wealthy and against working people, he holds on to the support of a significant portion of white working-class families. He could well be re-elected president to lead what would without doubt be an even more authoritarian and right-wing administration.

The Democratic Party establishment, based in banks and corporations, with a powerful national political organization and deeply rooted in the state, succeeded following Biden's primary victory in South Carolina in uniting the other leading contenders—Amy Klobuchar and Pete Buttigieg—to support Biden and defeat Bernie Sanders, the champion of "democratic socialism," a struggle against the "billionaire class," and "political revolution." With coronavirus making further in-person campaigning impossible, Sanders, after several conversations with Barack Obama, withdrew and backed Biden. Then Elizabeth Warren also endorsed Biden. But Biden, a Democratic Party moderate with a long record of support for neoliberal policies and votes for racist programs on welfare and criminal justice, was now also being accused of sexual assault. A Monmouth poll found that 55 percent of Democrats believed that Biden was not guilty of assaulting his accuser Tara Reade. And leading women in the Democratic Party and in liberal and progressive circles—including

some like feminist writer Linda Hirschman who believe Reade—continue to back him in the belief that Trump, an admitted sexual abuser, represents the worse option.

In mid-May Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders announced that they were forming a coalition to shape the party's political agenda. Nominated by them were 48 legislators, labor officials, economists, academics, and NGO leaders, among them New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who many presume to be the inheritor of Sanders' mantle and political legacy. Some in the Sanders camp are disappointed and looking for alternatives, such as the Los Angeles branch of his organization Our Revolution, which left the Democratic Party to join the Movement for a Peoples Party. Still, most Sanders supporters can be expected to vote for, and some will work for, Biden.

The contest is now between a white nationalist authoritarian demagogue and an uninspiring, moderate candidate with a bad record on race issues who is accused of sexual assault. While there are disappointed Bernie supporters looking for alternatives and while socialism has become more accepted among American voters, and though millions of Americans' lives have been disrupted and in some cases ruined by the crises, unfortunately there is no significant and credible political party to the left of the Democrats for whom voters might cast their ballot. In the last presidential election, the Green Party, which with its national presence would be the one possible option, got only 1.1 percent of the vote, and it has elected no one to national office. The Movement for a People's Party, which attracted the southern California Bernie voters, does not have ballot status anywhere and has yet to run any candidates. Some on the left will vote for the Greens' presidential candidate Howie Hawkins in safe states, but in contested states many leftists will vote for Biden, being reluctant to contribute to a Trump victory.

There is now also the question of how

party conventions and an election can be conducted, especially if there is a second COVID-19 wave, or if the election will take place in November at all. In an interview, Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and advisor, raised the possibility of postponing the election. The U.S. Constitution states that "Congress may determine the Time of choosing the Electors, and the Day on which they shall give their Votes; which Day shall be the same throughout the United States." Still there have been discussions of presidential emergency powers. If Trump attempts to postpone the election, we would be entering a new, more serious period of authoritarianism. We would be on the slippery slope that slides toward dictatorship.

As we write at the beginning of June, in the midst of the complete or partial reopening of all of the states and of entire regions of the country, possibly on the brink of a new wave of coronavirus cases and deaths, we find it difficult to see very far into the future. Trump and the Republicans will fight to maintain their stranglehold on government, the Democratic Party offers a tainted candidate who has either failed to develop a serious political campaign or is keeping a low profile, the latter suggesting he may not want to campaign, letting Trump hoist himself on his own petard. And we have not developed an independent political alternative. If Biden becomes president, there is a chance that the depth of the crisis and the pressure of progressives may push him to the left, but the crisis will also lead to calls for austerity. Employers and legislators have moved not only to protect their interests but also to reimpose and strengthen their power in the workplace and society. We on the left have a responsibility to create movements and working-class organizations that can develop an alternative vision, a workable strategy, and an inspirational movement from below. Our principles remain the same: Rise up from below, fight for democracy, and advance the struggle for socialism.

Coronavirus and the World Economy

ALEJANDRO REUSS

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC has both detonated a global economic crisis and exacerbated a preexisting crisis, economic and political, of the capitalist world economy. The global Great Recession starting in 2007 was the deepest, most widespread, and most protracted economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Economies did not bounce back quickly after the crisis. Ten years later, output in most countries remained well below the pre-crisis trend.¹ The amount of international trade relative to output has flatlined and the volume of foreign direct investment has plummeted.² The economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis should be understood as compounding this existing crisis. In any particular country, the economic outcomes are a combination of the ways the impact is transmitted through the structures of capitalist economies generally, and variations in these shockwaves due to differences in structures and policies between different capitalist economies. These differences also depend on the different ways that national economies are inserted into the capitalist world system.

The long-term implications of the current crisis are difficult to predict. When the

coronavirus crisis itself subsides, one possibility is that the institutional structure of the world economy re-stabilize in something like its pre-crisis form. There is a recent precedent: the Great Recession did not spell the immediate end of neoliberal capitalism. It is also possible, however, that the broader crisis will mark the end of the current wave of capitalist globalization. That depends on the balance of power between opposing social forces. Right now, we do not entirely know what forces will take the field, still less what their relative strength will be. What we do know is that, during crises such as this one, people come into active conflict over what directions to take out of the impasse, and what their societies will look like afterwards. We stand at a crossroads, when dramatic changes are possible.

Global Health Crisis

The coronavirus has affected the entire world. The true numbers of infections or deaths around the world, however, are very difficult to determine. By and large, the data show fewer confirmed cases and deaths in low-income countries than high-income. These figures, however, depend on the extent of testing, which is much more extensive in high-income countries than low-income.³ At best, we can treat the numbers on infections and deaths as lower-bound estimates. They certainly do not support the conclusion that the global South has mostly dodged the pandemic. Even the available figures show that some countries of

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the global South have already been hit very hard. Brazil's total confirmed cases relative to population, for example, are similar to Italy's, even though its testing relative to population is less than 1/30 of Italy's. The numbers of confirmed cases relative to population for Chile and Peru, meanwhile, are higher than those for any of the high-income countries of Western Europe and North America.⁴ Looking at daily new confirmed cases and deaths, we see the figures for many high-income countries declining (which does not preclude a resurgence). The figures for some global South countries, meanwhile, are alarmingly increasing—suggesting that the first wave of the pandemic has yet to peak.⁵

In the absence of extensive testing, the best estimate of actual coronavirus deaths is excess mortality. In most countries and cities for which data are available, deaths *not* attributed to coronavirus have also spiked above pre-coronavirus baseline levels. The ratio of excess mortality to confirmed coronavirus deaths (starting from the onset in each country) ranges widely between different areas. Data compiled by *The Economist* show that in Sweden over 90 percent of excess deaths have been attributed to the coronavirus; in Italy, barely half. The variance is also large within the global South. In Istanbul, Turkey, the figure is similar to Italy's—about 50 percent. In Jakarta, Indonesia, the equivalent figure is less than 15 percent.⁶ Estimates of excess mortality compiled by the *New York Times* include more countries and cities of the global South, among them Brazil (five cities), Chile, Ecuador, Indonesia (Jakarta only), Peru, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey (Istanbul only). According to these data, as of late May, South Africa and Thailand have relatively low (less than 5 percent) excess mortality, as do some high-income countries (Germany, Denmark, Norway, Finland). New daily confirmed infections in South Africa, however, have reached new highs since then.⁷ The five cities in Brazil have similar excess mortality (about 50 percent) as Italy and the

United Kingdom. Ecuador has the highest excess mortality—over 80 percent—on the list. Moreover, only about 15 percent of its 10,000 excess deaths were counted as confirmed coronavirus deaths.⁸

The current crisis has sent shockwaves through the capitalist world economy.

The direct health impacts of coronavirus are likely to be different across different countries and world regions, in part due to differences in health-care resources. As the virus has spread, the concept of “flattening the curve” has gained traction because of the possibility that a wave of infections, during a relatively short period, could overwhelm existing health-care capacities. (It may be difficult to dramatically expand the numbers of hospital beds, trained health-care personnel, and other resources, at least in the short run.) Enough cases in a short enough period can swamp the care capacities of even high-income countries, as happened in Italy.⁹ The same appears to be happening in Brazil. Despite the relatively high level of important health resources, such as critical care hospital beds, news reports note that these are distributed very unequally and are being overwhelmed in some areas.¹⁰

Health-care capacities are, unsurprisingly, broadly correlated with national per capita incomes. Typically, higher-income countries have higher numbers of hospital beds, medical doctors, and nurses (relative to population) than lower-income countries.¹¹ (The correlation, of course, is not perfect—since these capacities depend on national policies and institutions. Cuba's hospital capacity relative to population, for example, would be in the middle of the pack for a high-income country, and its number of medical doctors relative to population is the highest in the world.¹²) In

“normal” times, global inequalities in health resources contribute to large disparities in health outcomes between countries. Death rates from vaccine-preventable disease, for example, are much higher in low-income countries than in high-income countries.¹³ Under conditions of a crisis like the current one, lower health care capacities mean lower thresholds before health care systems become overwhelmed.

The overall level of health resources in a country, moreover, is not the only determinant of access. There are major inequalities in access to health care within countries, based on personal incomes, access to employer-provided health insurance, coverage by public insurance, and access to direct public provision. In general, out-of-pocket health expenditures account for a larger proportion of total health expenditures in lower-income countries than higher-income.¹⁴ This suggests a greater dependence of access on personal incomes.

Global Economic Crisis

In the vast majority of the world's countries, capitalist relations of production dominate the “commanding heights” of the economy. The coronavirus crisis has had immediate impacts on both the supply (production) and demand (purchase) aspects of capitalist economies. The dangers of consumption activities involving close interpersonal contact with providers or other consumers (restaurants and hotels, crowd events, mass transportation, etc.) led to declines in demand for these goods and services. Workers who faced layoffs or cuts in hours reduced their spending, as did others fearing the same, creating a snowball effect of declining demand, output, and employment. In many countries, shutdown orders caused sharp declines in output. Reduced incomes for employers, self-employed proprietors, and employees resulted in reduced demand for consumption goods. Disruptions in production in a given industry impacted connected

industries, both “upstream” (through reduced demand for goods produced by these industries) and “downstream” (through reduced supply of goods required by these industries). In the United States, for example, we have seen disruptions upstream in the auto industry and downstream in the food production sector. The particular ways the crisis unfolded in different countries, of course, depended on their particular institutional structures and policies.¹⁵

The economies of different capitalist countries are interconnected, so economic conditions in one country can also be transmitted to other countries. By some measures, the degree of interconnectedness has, during the current wave of globalization, reached greater heights than ever before. Merchandise exports, for example, now account for about 25 percent of total output. The peak in 2008, before the brunt of the global Great Recession, was almost twice that of 1913, the high-water mark prior to the mid-1970s.¹⁶ Net foreign direct investment, as a percentage of GDP, increased more than tenfold from its 1970–1985 levels (averaging about 0.5 percent) to its peak at the start of the Great Recession (almost 5.5 percent).¹⁷ Other linkages between national economies—financial flows, migration, etc.—have also grown during the current wave of globalization.

The current crisis has sent shockwaves through the capitalist world economy. World Trade Organization (WTO) data, based on economies accounting for 90 percent of total world trade, indicate a decline in merchandise exports of more than half a trillion dollars between February and March 2020. Before this past March, China's merchandise exports were over \$210 billion for every one of the previous ten months. In February 2020, they peaked at over \$290 billion. In March, the latest month for which WTO data are available, they were down to \$185 billion.¹⁸ Since 2016, the WTO has compiled a Goods Trade Barometer, a multifactor index of merchandise trade, in which figures higher than 100

indicate faster-than-trend growth; figures lower than 100, lower-than-trend growth. For May, the figure was 87.6, the lowest level in its short history.¹⁹ The World Bank has forecast a decline in global output, for 2020 compared to 2019, of over 5 percent.²⁰

The global impacts span the primary (extractive), secondary (manufacturing), and tertiary (services) sectors. The decline in cargo

Immigrant workers are especially vulnerable to job loss and lack of eligibility for public supports.

and passenger transportation, for example, has resulted in a collapse in petroleum consumption and prices. Global petroleum consumption fell from over 100 million barrels per day in 2019 to an average of just over 80 for April and May of this year.²¹ Crude oil prices dropped from \$60-70 per barrel in December 2019 to less than \$20 in April. As restrictions eased and fuel consumption began to increase again, prices began to rise, but remained well below the pre-crisis level.²² Demand has also declined for other fuels, as well as non-fuel raw materials.

The crisis has also had large negative impacts on some manufacturing industries. The WTO describes the Goods Trade Barometer's automobile-sector component, down to less than 80, as the "weakest of all, due to collapsing car production and sales in major economies."²³ Automobile manufacturing is emblematic of today's globalized production processes, linking operations in numerous countries into complex "value chains." These chains connect the high-income countries of the so-called "core," where engineering, design, marketing, finance, and management are centralized, with the low- and middle-income "periphery," where fabrication and assembly

are increasingly located.²⁴ This involves linkages both between giant global companies' own production facilities, and between these companies and numerous contractors and subcontractors. Disruptions anywhere in the chain can create disruptions for the process as a whole. During the current crisis, WTO researchers note, "shortages of parts and components have interrupted production in industries characterised by complex value chains."²⁵ Some national economies, obviously, are especially significant in these global chains. China is the world's largest exporter of goods, as well as an enormous importer of inputs. The decline in China's exports, therefore, also reverberates to many lower-income economies, which face decreased demand for their exports (both raw materials and manufactures).²⁶

The impacts of the crisis on the services sector have been highly uneven. Some services, such as financial services, can be performed remotely, and in fact were to a great extent even before the current crisis. Some kinds of services, however, must be delivered in person. If the service provider and recipient live in different locations, this can involve either the provider or the recipient traveling to the other location. International trade in in-person services, not surprisingly, has been affected much more by the coronavirus crisis.²⁷ Restrictions on international travel, for example, have caused dramatic declines in tourism. The UN World Tourism Organization forecast, back in late March, a decline in international tourist arrivals of 20-30 percent for 2020, with a comparable decline in tourism revenues.²⁸ Low-income countries tend to be more reliant on tourism (average of about 15 percent of exports in 2018) than high-income countries (less than 7 percent). Small Caribbean countries average over one third of their exports from tourism; small Pacific island countries, nearly half.²⁹ It is low-income countries, then, that face the biggest immediate blow from its collapse.

A major non-trade linkage hit by the

coronavirus crisis is international migration, severely curtailed by travel restrictions (including opportunistic restrictions promulgated by nationalist and xenophobic governments). Large numbers of people already living and working abroad remain there, of course, but their incomes are among the hardest hit by the crisis. Immigrant workers are especially vulnerable to job loss and lack of eligibility for public supports.³⁰ Their incomes, moreover, not only support them and the family members that live with them, but also families and communities in their countries of origin. According to the World Bank, remittances to low- and middle-income countries totaled over \$500 billion in 2018. (Even this figure is likely a severe underestimate, due to untracked remittances through informal channels.) In early 2019, it projected that remittances for the year would exceed the level of total foreign direct investment to these countries, and more than triple the level of official development aid.³¹ In the wake of

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the coronavirus, the Bank now predicts that remittances will fall by about 20 percent.³²

International financial institutions and nongovernmental organizations warn that the economic crisis detonated by the coronavirus could plunge tens or hundreds of millions of people into poverty. In May, the World Bank estimated that the crisis could push “up to 60 million people ... into extreme poverty,” defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day.³³ (According to the *Guardian*, the Bank is expected to increase this estimate in the coming

weeks.³⁴) Back in April, Oxfam estimated the increase in global poverty under various income-decline scenarios. According to researchers’ calculations, a 5 percent decrease in income could push nearly 90 million additional people under the \$1.90/day threshold; a 10 percent decrease, about 185 million; a 20 percent decrease, over 430 million.³⁵

Global Inequalities

Mainstream development economics in the 20th century focused on economic growth—on increasing the average income in a society—as the central way to improve the quality of life and to reduce poverty. The economist and philosopher Amartya Sen argued, in one of the most influential recent critiques of this orthodoxy, that economic development should be understood instead as an expansion of “capabilities” or “freedoms” (especially basic capabilities like a long life, good health, a decent education, an ability to participate fully in one’s community, etc.).³⁶ Some countries, Sen pointed out, had achieved considerable economic growth without much improvement in basic capabilities (average life expectancy, educational attainment, etc.). (Writing in the late 1990s, Sen cited Brazil as a case in point.) The main reason was that people at the top, who already had the means to achieve these capabilities, largely captured the income gains. Other high-growth countries did experience major gains in basic capabilities, but only if they also adopted “support” policies, such as broad public nutrition, health, and educational programs. Economic growth might contribute to the expansion of basic capabilities, Sen argued, but only indirectly, by providing resources for these necessary supports. (He pointed to South Korea and Taiwan as examples of “growth-mediated” development.) On the other hand, some countries and sub-national political jurisdictions without much growth in per capita incomes, but with strong “support” policies, were able to achieve considerable gains in

basic capabilities. (He points to the Indian state of Kerala as an example of “support-led” development.)³⁷

During the current crisis, many countries face significant declines in incomes. In low-income countries, where the available resources are much closer to the minimum consistent with basic capabilities for all, the implications are more dire. In all countries, however, there are considerable inequalities, which means that there is also considerable latitude for redistribution of resources. In lower-income countries, income and wealth inequalities are generally greater than in high-income countries. Income inequality in a country is often measured using a statistic called the Gini index. A Gini index of 0 corresponds to a hypothetical state of perfect income equality, where everyone receives the same income; a Gini index of 1, to a hypothetical state of maximum inequality, where one person receives all the income. The Gini indexes for individual countries, based on the latest available data for each country from 2010–2015, range from 0.25 in Ukraine to 0.63 in South Africa. Of the 21 countries with Gini index figures below 0.30, 20 are Western European or Eastern European/former USSR. Of the 45 with Gini index figures above 0.40, 39 are either Latin American/Caribbean or Sub-Saharan African countries. (The United States, the only high-income country above 0.40, comes in at 0.41.)³⁸

A substantial decline in average income need not mean a disaster in human terms. It depends on how the decline is distributed. If it falls disproportionately on people who are already close to the minimum consistent with basic capabilities, or below it, the outcome is disastrous. Even if it falls proportionately on all, the outcome is disastrous for the most vulnerable, who cannot bear even a small decline in income. To prevent such disasters, those with a superabundance of resources—who can bear such a decline with no real hardship—must bear the entire impact of

the crisis. Policies to protect the vulnerable are well known. They include employment guarantees (such as public employment), public cash benefits (such as unemployment insurance), or direct public provision of goods and services (such as expanded public health systems). In response to the current crisis, Pakistan has expanded public employment in its massive tree-planting program.³⁹ Unemployment insurance is much more common in higher-income countries than lower-income countries. Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Nepal, Senegal, and South Africa, however, are among the low- and middle-income countries with unemployment protections.⁴⁰ Ireland and Spain have nationalized hospitals and clinics during the current crisis.⁴¹ It is possible, though, for even lower-income countries to develop public health systems with universal access and high-quality care, Cuba being the obvious example.

There is no reason, moreover, that the principle described above—that resources be distributed so none fall below an adequate level of well-being—should halt at national borders. The overall income inequality in the world is much greater than the inequality within any one country. According to economist Branko Milanovic, the world Gini index on the eve of the Great Recession was around 0.7. That means that the actual income inequality in the world was about 70 percent of the maximum hypothetical level (if a single person received all the income in the entire world).⁴² During the current crisis, calls have emerged for reduction of debt payments or outright debt cancellation (halting some income flows from low-income to high-income countries) as well as large-scale new aid from high-income to low-income countries. Oxford’s proposals, for example, include a total \$2.5 trillion in debt-payment reductions, expanded aid, and other measures.⁴³ Workers’ movements around the world should certainly support such proposals, especially wealth transfers from high-income to low-income countries, even while recognizing that (like

previous programs) they do not dismantle the underlying engines of global inequality.

Long-Term Prospects

The 1870s-1920s wave of globalization crashed on the rocks of the First World War, the Great Depression, and the Second World War, and the current wave could come to a crashing end as well. The coronavirus crisis arrived during a highly unstable situation, economically and politically, in which observers were already describing globalization (or the current form of it) as dead or dying.⁴⁴ In recent years, a backlash against capitalist globalization, including segments of both the ruling elites and the masses, has emerged in many countries. In some of the countries of the imperialist core, including the United States and the United Kingdom, mass resentment has to a great extent been channeled in nationalistic and xenophobic directions.⁴⁵ Governments controlled by such parties are already exploiting the pandemic as a rationalization for long-term immigration restrictions.⁴⁶

As worrying as the developments are, the rise of the racist and xenophobic far right is not the only possible political outcome of a backlash against capitalist globalization. In Latin America in the 1990s and 2000s, the turn against neoliberalism led to a wave of electoral victories of left and center-left political parties—certainly with serious limitations and failings—collectively known as the “pink tide.” (In the years since, the tide has receded, with left and center-left governments falling in several countries, due to electoral defeats and non-electoral machinations.) In Europe, in the wake of the global Great Recession and the devastating austerity that followed, some countries saw a pronounced growth of the nationalist right. Some, such as Greece and Spain, also saw the emergence of new left or center-left movements and parties (with their own limitations and failings), which to some extent may have stifled the growth of

the far right.

The future of the world economy should not be understood as just a matter of *how much* national economies are interconnected but also *how* they are interconnected.⁴⁷ Since the middle of the twentieth century we have seen two distinct periods, with national economies interconnected not only to different degrees but also in different ways. The period between the Second World War and the crisis of the 1970s was characterized by considerable

International financial institutions and nongovernmental organizations warn that the economic crisis detonated by the coronavirus could plunge tens or hundreds of millions of people into poverty.

state economic intervention, in both core and peripheral countries, including regulation of their linkages to the world economy. In peripheral countries, governments attempted various strategies for national economic development (especially industrialization). Examples include the import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategies that predominated in Latin America and the export-centered strategies of South Korea and other East Asian countries. The depredations of the imperialist core during this period, led by the United States, were legion. As economic historian Alice Amsden argues, though, the postwar global economic order also left room for peripheral countries to pursue strategies contrary to the “gospel of free trade.” The threat of social revolution, and the imperialist countries’ need to capture “hearts and minds” around the globe, certainly played a major part in this regard.⁴⁸ Neoliberal globalization, in

contrast, constricted this policy space. The ruling elites of the core countries pressed for “free market” or neoliberal policies across the world; in many countries, with the connivance of domestic ruling elites. This ushered in a new era not just more trade or more international investment, but a new global division of labor, with developing countries bound in their subordinate position in the new global value chains. As these previous eras illustrate, different forms of capitalist globalization are possible, so one of the current possibilities is the “death of globalization” followed by its rebirth in new form.

Still another possibility, finally, is the abolition of capitalism in one or more countries. This also happened, of course, just as the last wave of capitalist globalization was coming to its crashing end. The revolutionary socialists of that time understood very well how high the stakes were. The continued existence of capitalism, they thought, posed an existential threat to human civilization.⁴⁹ A century hence this is, if anything, clearer still. Along with all the everyday monstrosities of capitalist society, the continuation of capitalist “business as usual” for even a half century could leave much of the planet unfit for human habitation.⁵⁰ As widespread as the discontent with the status quo may be, as acute the crisis, and as dire the need for the reconstruction of society on different foundations, however, this does not ensure the quick emergence of political forces equal to the task. Today, the imperative is to build movements for a new kind of society and a new way of life, based on principles of democracy, equality, cooperation, and sustainability. The task is of the highest urgency, and nothing can be gained by delay.

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A Global View of Coronavirus, Medical Policy, and Research

GÉRARD CHAOUAT

IN 2019, A NEW VIRUS OF THE coronavirus family emerged in Wuhan, China, and the disease that was caused by this virus was named COVID-19 to indicate both the virus associated with it and the year it began. “Patient Zero,” the initial patient, appears officially to have started the epidemic in early December 2019 (though there are some unsubstantiated claims of cases as early as November or even September). For one month, the local Communist Party authorities concealed and later minimized the outbreak and even organized a 4,000-person banquet in Wuhan as the epidemic emerged. This is interesting because it sheds some light on the Chinese state-capitalist bureaucracy as well as the issue of local corruption. This behavior certainly helped the initial spread, while a very active containment strategy, such as was performed in Vietnam, might have strangled the epidemic at its very beginning in China. There is, however, no evidence that the Chinese government intentionally created such a virus. The sequencing of the genome has revealed that the virus originated as a bat virus modified by hybridization in a

pangolin. If it were intended for biological warfare, as some have suggested, it would have been much easier to work directly on a nonhybrid strain.

In fact, passage of diseases from animals to humans, be it by microbes or viruses, is as old as humanity. For example, the H1N1 epidemic started from a chicken-breeding plant in La Gloria, Veracruz, Mexico. HIV originated from African monkeys, and Ebola was originally from bats and then most often passed along by monkeys. Similarly with coronaviruses (SARS in 2002–2004 and MERS), not to mention the infamous 1918 “Spanish Flu” and of course the pests, transmitted and carried by rats, that caused the plague that swept Europe in the fourteenth century. Such passages of disease from animals to humans, especially for flu, are *not* exceptional, but what is new is the frequency of the emergence of such epidemics and their faster and faster dissemination.

This is not an accident and is obviously linked to the over exploitation of natural ecosystems. In Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, bats, for example, are a natural reservoir for a wide array of viruses, including a great number of coronaviruses. Capitalism has the effect of reifying nature and transforming every resource into a merchandised object, which has resulted in the brutal penetration and destruction of ecosystems. Areas that were secluded in jungles, savannahs, and rain forests are now in immediate contact with humans, devoid of any previous “mild”

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confrontation and thus of any prebuilt immunity. Add to that the construction of roads to rapidly transport goods to cities, and all of the conditions are met for the spread of disease nationwide. Then comes air transportation as well as merchant vessels and the carrying of infection via asymptomatic incubating individuals or on goods—especially since the virus or bacteria can stick to and stay alive on surfaces such as paper, plastic, and others for several hours, not to mention the aerosols caused by coughing or sneezing. Remember that an ordinary flight from Europe to the United States takes 6 to 8 hours, and the current Coronavirus can survive in an infectious form for 72 hours on plastic and up to 24 hours on paper or cardboard.

Most of the data on the emergence of COVID-19 indicates it originated in a food market in Wuhan via contact with a live pangolin sold for food, but some epidemiologists suggest that the patient zero might have been infected in November by direct contact with an animal in the adjacent woods of once-wild areas. Whatever the case, the repetition of such epidemic outbreaks is almost unavoidable in the future if the present brutal

The conclusion is that, obviously, a mode of production based on hyper-exploitation of ecosystems IS BOUND TO induce more and more frequent epidemics of this kind.

exploitation of natural habitats persists. At least some of the outbreaks and dissemination could nevertheless be prevented if minimal research cataloging animal viruses in transition areas where agricultural or urban land meets wild territory was correctly supported and if research was also conducted on “pan-vaccines” rather than only on “individual” ones. But this

requires long-term support and is not immediately profitable. We will discuss that later.

The conclusion is that a mode of production based on hyperexploitation of ecosystems *is bound to* induce more and more frequent epidemics of this kind, just as global warming results in the accumulation of CO₂ from mass burning of fossil fuels and massive deforestation for intense production of programmed-to-be obsolescent goods. A whole system of eco-destruction is in fact at the origin of the epidemics and will cause new ones if unchanged.

Heath Impact (as of May 10, 2020)

At present, five months after the start of the pandemic, we have more than 3.75 million cases worldwide and 263,831 deaths. The United States is now officially the worst case in the world, with a toll of 10,259,708 cases, and 74,851 patient deaths [more than 100,000 by June 2020]. These figures are officially released ones, but are considered significant underestimates. One salient example is India, where no one trusts the government’s statistics (52,959 cases and 1,789 deaths) but nobody is able to produce a reliable figure. I am reminded of a similar situation during the early AIDS history when I met with Françoise Barré Sinoussi, director of the Regulation of Retroviral Infections Division, Patrice Debré, now president of the French Association for the Advancement of the Sciences, and then Health Minister Sourav Ganguly, who said of India, “Everything is under control”—and then our missions discovered an HIV prevalence well above 10 percent in the slums of Delhi, Mumbai, and Calcutta. In Brazil, figures released by Bolsonaro’s government state there are 126,618 cases and 8,588 deaths, while scientists from São Paulo hospitals warn of more than 1.3 million cases and photos of mass graves have been widely released. We will discuss below the differential handling of the epidemic in different continents and countries, but it is

worth mentioning from the start that so far the announced catastrophe in Africa has not (yet?) taken place.

One must mention that people of every age are affected. While the disease is more severe in older people, especially those above 70, young children are also affected. And in the very young, aside from the well-known respiratory syndrome there are now reported cases with diarrhea and cardiac failure, akin to what is known as the “Kawasaki syndrome.”

Factors like pre-existing disease, obesity, poor nutrition, and so on are proven to worsen the outcome. And, of course, we will come to factors that also affect the possibility of accessing care. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in the United States, black communities are much more at risk than whites. For example, in April in Illinois, 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths were African American, but they represent only 15 percent of the state population, while in Louisiana, 60 percent of the first 900 deaths were African American.

Strategies

The responses to the outbreak vary greatly, from strategies aiming at confining the disease with various restrictions, as in most of Europe, to countries with almost no restrictions, as in Sweden.

Sweden and initially the United Kingdom based their strategy on the goal of reaching herd immunity, which is a way to stop the plague from spreading when there is no vaccine available. Using this approach Sweden recommended telework, regular hand washing, no meetings of more than 50 persons, no access to retirement homes, and closing of schools and universities. However restaurants and bars have remained open there. With this approach the hope was that the death toll would remain “moderate” and the population would become immunized within a few months, blocking the epidemic. Thus by May 7, in Sweden, which has 10 million inhabitants, there were 2,769 deaths

(1,463 in the capital of Stockholm). This can be compared to adjacent northern countries, which used greater restrictions to confine their populations, with death tolls of 493 in

And of course in countries where there is no global health coverage, the poor and, generally speaking, the working class are left disarmed.

Denmark, 240 in Finland, 214 in Norway, the three of which have a combined population of 16.7 million.

Vietnam has used the opposite approach. There, military-style rule was enforced: the closing of the borders, isolation in camps or hospitals for foreigners, up to 40 days quarantine of infected individuals and their neighbors, imprisonment for reluctant individuals or violators of the rules, denunciation of trespassers, and—almost on the other hand—no large-scale polymerase chain reaction (PCR) virus screening. A mobile-phone tracking of infected individuals and of nearby individuals indicated 75,000 persons or more had been quarantined this way. All that started in very early February, and confinement was enforced until April 1, though loosened in mid-April. The result, as confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and by Johns Hopkins University, is eloquent: 94 million inhabitants, 268 cases, 0 deaths.

Similar results are seen in the examples of Taiwan (420 cases, 6 deaths) and South Korea, but with no large-scale confinement. Both opted for mass PCR testing, contact tracing, isolation of infected individuals, and monitoring of their movements. Taiwan had very early screened passengers at airport entries and proceeded to a mass distribution of masks. South Korea had chosen, after the

experience of SARS 1 and MERS, to be ready for the next plague alert. Large-scale PCR screening was prepared, with up to 40 “mobile PCR clinics” and the necessary reagents stored. A large stock of masks was prepositioned, and quarantine was enforced by a mobile phone application and followed up by immediate tracking of credit card use. The fines for trespassing have few equivalents. Breaking confinement in France will cost you \$150, while in Seoul the penalty is \$2,500!

One can easily see that a) a capitalist country *can eventually* invest preemptively in pandemic readiness in order to protect the population as much as possible, and b) there is a cost to that as far as individual rights are concerned.

Let us now turn to Europe. With variations, European Union countries should have been ready to fight off the epidemic, having national health care systems implemented since the end of World War II and given adequate warning. Hospital care is totally covered most of the time, whatever the cost of the treatment. And the costs are paid directly by the state. The National Health System (NHS) in the UK is funded by general taxation, while Sécurité Sociale (SS) in France is financed by deductions from workers’ wages and taxes on employers. The SS does not fund hospitals, which are paid for out of the general budget. Still, the infrastructure of the health system has been subjected to a search for cost effectiveness and profitability rather than development of investments. The same is true for the NHS in Britain and the health systems in Italy, Spain, and more especially Germany, have kept its system at a higher state of readiness.

In these countries, since the 2008 SARS and the H1N1 epidemics, for example, the number of beds has been reduced, whole hospitals closed, and as with many industrial products, the production of drugs and chemical reagents has been moved to China or India, while the PCR reagent production plants in Europe were closed. Moreover, “un-

necessary stocks” too costly to maintain and replenish were destroyed. This was typical of the “just in time, just in sequence” policy linked to the world production model. In France, this went to absurd lengths when some stocks of masks were destroyed in February 2020.

It is thus obvious that, with variations from one country to another, national health systems, where they existed, have been under mounting pressure for “cost reduction” and in some places, such as Italy, were brought to the verge of collapse.

Production Becomes the Goal

This social liberal policy is evidenced by the way that the end of the lockdown is treated. In France, as in other social liberal countries, resuming production for profit as fast as possible is the motto. The reopening of the subways on a large scale with the slogan “you **MUST** be spaced one yard from each other,” while every video shows people crowding and as packed “as before,” shows how ridiculous this approach is. Governments have deliberately taken the risk of a “second wave” of cases, particularly with the reopening of the schools, despite trade union and other protests. We will see what happens ...

This policy has been carried to the extreme in Brazil, where Bolsonaro a) grossly underestimates the magnitude of the epidemic (see figures above), and b) says 5,000 deaths “are nothing” when compared with

Medical research should be a
non-profit, nationalized sector.

the risks of paralyzing the economy by imposing a lockdown and stay-at-home orders. Moreover, his minister of commerce warns

of the risk of food shortages, which in fact have already taken place in the urban slums.

And of course in countries where there is no global health coverage, the poor and, generally speaking, the working class are left disarmed, facing an epidemic for which they can neither afford the costs of treatments nor the social costs of massive layoffs. This is particularly obvious in several Latin American countries, but it is becoming more and more evident in the United States if one compares the situation of even Obamacare and, of course, Bernie Sanders' proposals, with the present situation under the Trump administration.

Thus we come back to the post-World War II objective of NHS and SS: full health care protection *for any* individual. This is still largely met in Western Europe but absent in the United States.

Big Pharma

One must add to this discussion the search for profits made by the Big Pharma companies and also smaller start-ups. (I use this shortcut terminology of "Big Pharma" even though the conspiracy theory crowd also sometimes uses it.) The price of anti-viral drugs, monoclonal antibodies, is totally exaggerated. The example of SOVALDI is typical. It is a good remedy for hepatitis C, but Gilead was widely criticized for the drug's list price of \$1,000 per pill when it was launched—a total of \$84,000 per course of treatment! As far as COVID-19 is concerned, Gilead sought orphan drug status for remdesivir, an experimental drug that is being tested as a possible treatment. "Orphan drug" is a special designation giving drug companies a seven-year monopoly on sales, tax credits, and expedited approval. Bernie Sanders rightly termed such a request "truly outrageous," noting that Gilead had received "tens of millions" of dollars from the federal government to develop the drug. The consumer group Public Citizen and other health groups said in a letter, "This is an

unconscionable abuse of a program designed to incentivize research and development of treatments for rare diseases." They stated that "Calling COVID-19 a rare disease mocks people's suffering and exploits a loophole in the law to profiteer off a deadly pandemic."

In fact, what is at stake is the status of research and of the industry. Medical research should be a nonprofit, nationalized sector, and research on drugs should be conducted for their immediate *and* prospective interest, *not* for the possibility of large-scale, and if possible fast, profits. This is an approach that leads to, and has led in the past to, the neglect of various fields of investigation, notably for several parasitic and microbial diseases, because the "market" offered by the local populations affected was judged to be too small to produce enough profits.

Social Protection

A financial crisis was looming *before* the pandemic since after the 2008 crisis, nothing was really done to cure the problem, except impose more austerity on the working class. At present, we are faced with a typical overproduction crisis in several sectors, coupled, in the case of oil, with a commercial crisis (classical petrol fossil fuels from Saudi Arabia and Russia, versus shale gas and petroleum), hence negative prices for the barrel. But several key sectors are severely hit (aviation, tourism, restaurants, theaters, museums, festivals, and others), hence a massive rise in unemployment. Once again, as in 1929, the working class and middle class are to pay the price because unemployment benefits are too low, as in Europe or some states in the United States, or even nonexistent, as in India.

Another important issue is protection from layoffs. In that respect, the law passed by the Spanish Communist minister of labor banning job termination during the pandemic is an excellent example of what should be done everywhere.

At the very extreme, we have the state of

Uttar Pradesh in India, where the Bharatiya Janata Party of Narendra Modi has voted to extend the workweek from 48 to 72 hours.¹ This is emblematic of the policies of many developing countries that are, with tacit or direct approbation of political leaders, implementing policies that are the opposite of the widespread social solidarity that is needed.

Research Again

Could the pandemic have been avoided? The response is yes, or at least reduced.

Since the first SARS epidemic, it was obvious that bats and other creatures of the jungles, forests, and grottos were reservoirs for the creation of viruses that would sooner or later infect humans. Incidentally, that is one of the reasons for the creation of the Wuhan P4 laboratory, which does indeed study bat viruses, in part in cooperation with France, in part in cooperation with the United States. U.S. cooperation is via an Obama-era project launched by American scientists through the Eco Health Alliance, which does not provide direct funding to China, and especially not for the highest-level laboratories for P4 pathogen protection. The Trump administration, amongst rumors and claims of the virus originating in the Wuhan P4 laboratory, has cancelled the remaining \$400,000 allocated to the joint program.

France is a typical example of short-term views induced by the search for immediate benefits. The Pasteur Institute in Laos houses a lab dedicated to the study of bat viruses. The renewal of the *single* virologist there who goes trudging through grottoes to capture bats, sample and sequence their viruses, and culture them, had been delayed throughout 2019, despite protests by no less than Professor François Bricaire, former president of the National Ethics Committee ... Surprise! In March 2020 the position was immediately reopened.

In 2002, French virologist Bruno Canard started working on the crystal structure of

SARS-1 coronaviruses, and determined sites that were potential immunogens on the structure *and* common to the *whole* corona family and thus potential candidates to produce components of “pan-vaccines.” The program was reviewed and accepted, but the funds were cut as soon as the SARS-1 epidemic fell into oblivion,² and even at the European level, despite a very favorable review, funds for SARS research were cut and the programs to develop a pan-vaccine were halted.

The development of such vaccines needs long-term research (a vaccine can take five to ten years to develop) starting from what in France we call “*recherche sur projets*” (calls for proposals for research grants). The calls for funding proposals are increasingly devoid of projects without “immediate or short-term benefits.” The establishment has become totally opposed to fundamental research with the mixture of high risks but high rewards it encompasses. As a scientists’ motto says, “Electric lamps were not invented as a consequence of projects allocated to expanding the life or brightness of wax candles.”

Pan-vaccines are not necessarily a utopia. After the 2009-2010 H1N1 epidemics, work

The calls for proposals for funding are increasingly devoid of projects without “immediate or short-term benefits.”

has been conducted on a “pan-flu vaccine.” Indeed, the vaccine is now—this year—in a phase-1 trial.

Surprise: French scientists were asked in March to develop “crash programs” on COVID-19 for quick review in mid-May. And, surprise: Bruno Canard, whose earlier work had been stopped, was allocated an emergency allocation of 45,000 euros.

These episodes demonstrate again the need to move away from short-term, quick-profit strategies in medical research.

Short- and Long-term Strategies

The politics of health science is not necessarily *totally* blind. A comparison between France and Korea is worthwhile. After SARS 1, a mild epidemic of a new coronavirus emerged in Saudi Arabia and hit Korea. The alert was “mild” (937 cases, 341 deaths worldwide). But even the low toll in South Korea (186 cases, 35 deaths) was perceived as a warning, and hence the ample provision of PCR reagents and other supplies, together with the creation of 40 or more “mobile diagnostic clinics” in addition to the existing hospital network, for a quick and immediate diagnosis, immediate isolation, and contact tracing, without large-scale confinement of newly appearing clusters. Thus the country that had 7,869 cases at the end of March but only 60 deaths appeared to be a model. Unfortunately, to this day (May 11), with the abrupt appearance of 116 new cases, South Korea might be on the front line of a second wave.

The WHO is not totally exempt from criticism, except from those critiques by the Trump administration that are misplaced. The most severe criticism to be made is the one-week delay in declaring a pandemic because China would not vote for it and was se-

verely opposing it for reasons of its “prestige.” Viewed from France, where Health Minister Agnès Buzyn said in January that the risks of pandemic in France were “low” and in March that “we are ready” for a lockdown, but then permitted the “*municipals*,” that is the mayoral elections, one day before confinement, the WHO delay appears small by comparison. What remains sure is that many countries delayed, despite the imposition of border and especially airport controls.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have seen the confrontation of two logics. One is a short-term, predatory and destructive production system, destroying the environment and threatening more similar catastrophes, with only one way out: more exploitation, and more destruction.

The alternative is very simple: Power to the people, not to capital. As a French motto says, “*Plus rien ne doit être comme avant*” (“Nothing should ever be the same again”). This is the crude lesson of the pandemic.

NOTES

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Organizing After Bernie: Activists Respond

THE HISTORIC SANDERS CAMPAIGN has come to a close, and the strength of social movements will be critical after November, whether to build the left in the face of a Democratic president carrying out the party's neoliberal policies or to prevent a re-elected Trump from further institutionalizing his and the GOP's far-right agenda. So we asked the contributors to this symposium: What organizing projects do you see as essential following the election? Should we continue Sanders' project of working inside the Democratic Party? Should we build independent social movements, a new political party, networks of self-managed cooperatives? How do we mobilize the broad, diverse, and cross-generational excitement around Sanders' candidacy into concrete victories after November?

We Are the Saviors We've Been Waiting for Moving on from Bernie

TAHEERAH BARNEY

THE CONCERTED EFFORT OF THE media, Democratic National Committee, and Democratic establishment to bring Bernie's campaign to a grinding halt highlights the limits of electoral politics. On the campaign trail, Bernie proposed mild social-democratic reform that would widen the social safety net while keeping capitalism intact, but you wouldn't know that from the way the aforementioned reactionaries swiftly moved to put the kibosh on Sanders' campaign.

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The truth couldn't be plainer: Democrats would rather lose to Trump than upend their power status. They would rather lose to Trump than win with a politician who would implement milquetoast social democracy, and they will even abandon their purported principles to defend a candidate accused by a former aide of violating her sexually.

The Impotency of Electoral Politics

"My vote will probably not get me a job or a home or help me through school or prevent another Vietnam or a third World War, but it may keep me here long enough for me to see, and use, the turning of the tide—for the tide has got to turn." —JAMES BALDWIN

Baldwin gives a blistering account of the limitations of electoral politics, one that many leftists across the country share after Sanders' crushing loss.

While identifying the powerful interests that were a major impediment to a Bernie victory, I'd be remiss if I didn't address the shortcomings of the Sanders campaign. Bernie failed to bring in the legions of hard-boiled nonvoters who checked out of electoral politics ages ago. He performed worse than he did four years ago, despite the campaign's exhaustive mobilizing efforts. A few factors explain this. First, contrary to popular belief, young people did show up, but more older people turned out overall. One factor is likely the pandemic, with more younger people adhering to the advice of the medical community and avoiding crowds in order to decrease their chances of being infected and infecting others with the virus. Biden and his staffers, on the other hand, encouraged his older base to go out and vote in person.

Second, younger voters who did turn out were forced to wait in lines for hours. Scores of these folks had no choice but to leave before casting their vote lest they be late for work or school. Third, Bernie cleaned up in states like Nevada but underperformed in Rust Belt states that he swept in 2016, not because his politics changed, but because voters' perception of him changed. To people living in communities hollowed out by Clinton-era trade deals, Bernie's anti-TPP stance was a refreshing alternative. In 2016, more people voted for him because of who he wasn't—rather than for who he is, a factor that hurt him this time around.

When Bernie suspended his presidential campaign, many argued that this was a wise decision because he had no "clear path to victory," but creating a contrast with Biden, not securing a win, should have been his end game. For example, why didn't Bernie use the COVID-19 pandemic to eviscerate Biden's neoliberal insistence that health coverage continue being tied to employment, even as tens of millions of workers lose their jobs? Why didn't he highlight Biden bragging about putting the entire social safety net on the chopping block, which would shaft scores

of already struggling people? Why didn't Bernie address Biden's decades-long history of pathological lying, noting parallels to Trump's sociopathic behaviors? Why didn't he hammer Biden on his prolonged disappearance and lack of leadership regarding COVID-19?

Bernie refused to hold Biden and his record accountable post-dropout partly because of who Bernie is—a career politician—and where he ran—within a party controlled by lobbyists and big money. His social-democratic policies put him outside of the liberal establishment, but the limitations of his campaign and his person were shown in his 2019 pledge to endorse the eventual nominee, even when the other candidates refused to rule out pursuing a contested convention. After sharply criticizing his opponents' flaws for months, Sanders quickly fell in line behind them to endorse Biden, ignoring Biden's long history of opposing most of what Bernie had advocated in his campaign as well as Biden's new political baggage of rape allegation and naked contempt for anyone under the age of 50.

Could Bernie have run his a more cost-efficient and far-reaching campaign through a decentralized organization, like People for Bernie? Perhaps, but arguing in favor of that scenario assumes Sanders would be ready to lead an aggressive political struggle to break with the Democratic Party, which is what's needed now. Continuing to work within the confines of the Democratic Party is a colossal waste of time, and our resources are put to better use organizing amongst ourselves to change our communities and create solidarity with our comrades, both here and abroad.

Mobilizing the Broad, Diverse, and Cross-generational Base of Sanders' Supporters Beyond Bernie

One of the reasons why Antifa and the Black Lives Matter movement are so effective is that they're decentralized. Leaderless protests have the potential to introduce thousands of people across the globe to politics and to mobilize

them. The more that activists can scale this dissent, the more likely it will influence policy. What this might look like is organizing for national and international solidarity, sorely lacking within the American left.

We should build coalitions amongst the working-class left by taking a page out of the visionary 1970s Black feminist, socialist Combahee River Collective: bonding over our shared working-class identities while also acknowledging, centering, and learning the myriad of ways that capitalism oppresses through the identities of the group's most marginalized members.

Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor succinctly sums up the importance of building interconnected working-class alliances on the podcast "Hear the Bern": "Racism is the way for Trump and the Republicans to wage class warfare, and they've done it very successfully. We need our side to be organized around clear politics. ... We have to be able to articulate how these things [race and class] are connected. We can see that racial profiling is a policing strategy invented for black people, when you allow racism to exist for one group, understand that it can be weaponized for all. ... The billions of dollars that are going to police the border, to control the border, to imprison people on the border. That is about normalizing that for our greater society, to make it easier to do that to citizens."¹

COVID-19 is wreaking havoc and misery across the globe and laying waste to the myth of American exceptionalism at home. Trump callously ignored pandemic warnings for months; deaths in America are exploding and have surpassed 100,000. But Trump's indifference to human suffering is exactly what we should have expected under a ghoulish administration that tried to kick millions off their already anemic health care plans and an economic system that prioritizes profit over people. And since health care is a commodity tied to your employment instead of a human right in this country, if you've just lost your job and aren't one of the lucky

few who have the option of hopping on your parent's or partner's insurance policy, you're basically screwed.

Every political cause that we're fighting for converges upon the coronavirus, which is why we should organize around it. For example, Trump gave fracking, cruise, and airline companies, the same industries responsible for polluting the planet, hundreds of billions of dollars, while workers received a paltry one-time payment of \$1,200. This dovetails seamlessly with climate change and income inequality protests.

COVID-19 is a deadly viral truth serum that lays bare the systemic rot and structural inequalities that were always lurking just beneath the surface: health care, employment, wages, systemic racism, food supply chain, poverty, and so on. If you can name a cause, assume that COVID-19 is exacerbating the suffering.

We must also be wary of authoritarianism, with public fears in crises used to quickly jam through the most draconian legislation, which usually involves decimating our civil liberties as occurred in 9-11 and bipartisan support for the Patriot Act.

Now is the time for the left to push through our agenda and to use this virus to make our communities and the public aware of the alternatives to a failing economy that only serves the elites at the expense of the workers.

"No One Is Free Until We Are All Free." —MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

The term "mutual aid," meaning the act of caring and taking responsibility for one another (particularly the most vulnerable members of our society), is quickly approaching mainstream status. On the one hand, it's heartening to witness everyday citizens in a hyperindividualistic capitalist society such as the United States embrace selflessness and the idea of collective well-being, if only temporarily. During this harrowing pandemic, one of

the few bright spots is seeing so many people reach the same conclusion: that our economic system is designed to neglect the many at the expense of the few. However, what concerns me is that people will come to view today's version of mutual aid as the limit to our collective imagination and accept it as the end, instead of as a means to achieve something more far-reaching.

Mutual aid rooted in commodity exchange is a temporary fix in times of capitalism run amok; it was never designed for the long-term. And the reason why is simple: Mutual aid efforts that revolve around providing items to people in the absence of power aren't scalable. It's impossible for local community organizers, many of whom are working-class themselves, to scrounge up enough resources to feed every community. The goal of any mutual aid program should be to pressure local politicians to bend the knee to the people. Establishing class consciousness within a given neighborhood can be used to encourage civil disobedience at the state level to pressure local officials to use their resources to send quarantined people food care-packages, similar to what's been done in South Korea and China.²

A goal for socialists in this pandemic is to highlight human worth, seeing and treating all people as worthy and valuable, not for the labor they can provide but because they are human and exist. We can do this if we center class consciousness within our communities and establish anti-capitalism as the only viable economic alternative, by organizing to fill in the gaps that capitalism (by design) creates. In addition to providing people with the essentials, comprehensive mutual aid also builds relationships with disaffected voters who have long checked out of electoral politics and shines a spotlight on the cruelty that capitalism has wrought upon their lives.

An example of this took place during the 1970s with the gang-turned-revolutionary-socialists and -communists called the Young Lords. Of the first generation of children born

in America to Puerto Rican migrant parents, these teenagers had the foresight and vision to organize in ways that would rival adults twice their age. A standout victory is their comprehensive "garbage offensive," which resulted from the New York City Sanitation Department's neglect of their East Harlem neighborhood resulting in an overflow of trash compared to the pristine streets of white Manhattan neighborhoods. The residents teamed up and swept the garbage themselves. When they asked the racist Department of Sanitation for better brooms, they were denied, so they took matters into their own hands (literally) and swept the trash into a huge pile in the middle of a major street to block traffic.

This monumental protest, the first of its kind within the Puerto Rican community, was more than a courageous act of defiance. It was a searing indictment of capitalism for all in their neighborhood to bear witness to. These teens proved that even though the system is rigged against them via race and class, it's also fragile and can be inconvenienced with nothing more than a few brooms, a radical mindset, and a little imagination. The way forward is building "people power" by organizing in local communities, gaining the trust of residents by proving to them how capitalism has failed them, and then channeling their anger into building mass movements that put the screws to establishment politicians at the local and federal levels.

In short, we must break away from electoral politics and organize within our communities to build relationships with our neighbors and comrades.

Bernie's platform only scratched the surface of what is possible, and his vision is the bare minimum that we should demand.

NOTES

1. berniesanders.com/podcast/ep-19-building-coalitions-w-keecanga-yamahitta-taylor.
2. observers.france24.com/en/20200305-south-korea-coronavirus-COVID-19-kits-masks.

After the Sanders Campaign The Struggle for Power Continues

BILL FLETCHER JR.

THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN of Senator Bernie Sanders has been one of the most exhilarating moments in recent U.S. political history, irrespective of his not capturing the Democratic Party nomination. The mobilization capacity as well as the ability to shift the national discussion has had—and will continue to have—a lasting impact.

In the interest of time and space, I here identify certain important takeaways from the campaign and then offer recommendations on a possible road forward.

THE NARRATIVE. The Sanders campaign successfully articulated a narrative describing and explaining the declining living standard of the vast majority of the people of the United States. It expanded from its relatively narrow framework in 2016 to address foreign policy. It also expanded its discussion about race, though at key moments it continued to come across as an “add-on” as opposed to an integral component.

MOBILIZING YOUTH. The campaign was, once again, successful in inspiring youth, including youth of color. Youth became central to the campaign, including in staffing. At the same time, the campaign leadership misestimated its ability to bring into the campaign previously nonvoting youth (and nonvoting elders). This misestimation may have led the campaign to underestimate the strategic

importance of the South.

STILL DID NOT GET THE SOUTH AND MOVEMENTS OF PEOPLE OF COLOR. Perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of the campaign, and a weakness of much of the U.S. left and progressive forces, was the lack of a Southern strategy. This was linked with, though autonomous from, a larger weakness regarding an underappreciation of the strategic significance of racist and national oppression as central to the operation of U.S. capitalism (and of the corresponding movements opposing such oppression).

The lack of a Southern strategy is very curious considering the deficiencies in this arena in the 2016 Sanders campaign. While one might be able to argue that in 2016 Sanders and his core were never prepared for the response that they received and, therefore, had not appreciated the significance of the U.S. South, in the 2020 campaign there was no such excuse. Since 2016 Sanders has had plenty of time to “move South” and unite with the various movements in that region, most especially the African American movement. Inexplicably, this did not happen, with the South Carolina primary demonstrating what can happen when the South is ignored.

We are now in a post-Sanders moment and not only have to assess the campaign but also look at our immediate and long-term challenges.

The most immediate, and surprisingly controversial (within left circles), task is the defeat of Trump. This has become controversial in part due to a lack of a dialectical (and historically grounded) electoral strategy

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within much of the left as well as a tendency within the left to define acceptable electoral politics in terms of “who is close to us.” Let me propose an alternative framework by way of analogy.

The partisans of what became known as the New Right in the late 1960s, for instance Richard Viguerie, were deeply ideological right-wingers who debated whether to form a third party, in part due to the popular response received by the campaigns of Alabama Governor George Wallace. Instead they opted to work both inside *and* outside of the Republican Party and, in 1968, allied with an individual they despised: Richard Nixon. Surprisingly to some, the New Right—which existed as a fusion of right-wing populists (secular and religious) and economic conservatives—perceived Nixon as a political liberal. Nevertheless, they were prepared to unite with him as a means of advancing *their* agenda. What form did advancing their agenda take? Through measures such as court appointments, use of the media, appointments to agencies, and a greater role in the Republican Party, the New Right expanded its influence. The New Right seized on Nixon’s so-called Southern Strategy to build the Republicans as the *nonblack party*, indeed, to build it as the right-wing party of the white republic.

But the New Right had an *outside* element as well. They seeded and helped to instigate mass movements around guns, abortion, busing, and the Panama Canal, frequently uniting the cores of said movements. They took on court battles against affirmative action and abortion (and women’s rights generally). And they identified and trained candidates to run for office in both partisan and nonpartisan races.

None of this demonstrated any love for the Republican Party on the part of the New Right. They recognized the Republican Party as a *battlefield* within which they could engage and a battlefield where they were more likely to win rather than going the third-party route

that Wallace had once suggested. Through a long-term struggle, they chased liberals out of the Republican Party and effectively turned it into a hard right-wing party.

Within the left, we are a bit more confused. Due to an understandable hatred of the capitalist leadership of both parties, many of us assume that the answer to the electoral dilemma for the left resides in the construction of a third party, a party that will—hopefully—be progressive. Our strategies for the actual *construction* of such a party are largely nonexistent, take the form of assertions rather than strategy, or are based on one-time independent runs or relatively low-level or nonpartisan campaigns. What is characteristic of far too many of our electoral efforts is that we engage depending on how close we see a candidate being to our politics rather than making an assessment as to whether a particular candidate or campaign can advance a progressive agenda that we are helping to articulate.

It is this disconnect that makes it difficult for many progressives to understand the support from large segments of the right that someone like Donald Trump can receive despite his many foibles. The right-wing theocrats are clear, however. They recognize his weaknesses, but they see *all of us as sinners*, as one young Catholic leader said in 2016, or believe that Trump exists as a blunt-force instrument to advance the agenda of their movement. In that sense they care little for the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses and are completely hypocritical when, for instance, they attack a progressive for lack of so-called family values but will stand by and ignore the lack of those same so-called family values on the part of someone, who will go nameless, who advances their agenda.

In addition to strategic confusion and differences, many of us on the left have different appreciations of this historical moment and the social forces in play. Using arguments such as “Democratic center-rightists laid the basis for Trump” (an incomplete truism) or

that “a non-Sanders Democrat will simply capitulate and fail to carry forward a progressive agenda,” many leftists are proposing to take a pass on voting in November or to vote third party, effectively contributing to Trump’s reelection.

What is missed is the nature of the mass movement that Trump represents. We are not dealing with a simple conservative politician who advances reactionary stands, yet plays by the rules of bourgeois politics. We are dealing with an administration that is thoroughly corrupt, on top of which it encourages a broader right-wing populist movement—including but not limited to neofascists—that is revanchist in nature and seeks to obliterate much of what was won in the twentieth century. They also have an armed wing. This is no hyperbole, as anyone looking soberly at that which the Trump administration has advanced since 2017 can attest.

Whether Trump is, himself, a fascist is secondary to an understanding of the objectives of the larger movement. This movement is deeply rooted in U.S. history and, as such, does not require one to look to European 1930-ish fascism to find a model. The U.S. South, during the era of Jim Crow, and the Southwest, during the same timespan, were excellent examples of highly repressive, one-party, white supremacist, anti-women, anti-worker, xenophobic regimes. Trump and his base are as “American” as cherry pie, to borrow from the former H. Rap Brown (now Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin).

To understand what the right-wing populists seek to win, one need only look at contemporary Hungary, Poland, Turkey, or, for that matter, Russia. The aim is to smash dissent and to ensure that even if there are the outer appearances of political democracy, the essence of the State will be right-wing authoritarian rule. And that rule, one should add, though using the guise of populism, advances the objectives of capitalism, be that a transnational capitalist/domestic capitalist alliance, or in the case of the more fascist

element, a hoped-for national capitalist resurgence.

Thus, our immediate task is the forging of a broad front to defeat Trump. Defeating Trump necessitates that the Democratic

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candidate win. This does not mean simply voting against Trump. It means that Trump and the Republicans in Congress must be soundly defeated.

Which leads us to a second short- and long-term task: down-ballot races. Much of the left only focuses on elections during presidential years. This means that we have no strategy but instead, as we would say in New York City when I was a kid, we engage in the “selling of woof-tickets,” that is, woof-woof.

Electoral strategy necessitates electoral organization and not just program. That said, the left would be in a much stronger place if it helped in the construction of a working people’s agenda that was developed through the direct involvement of members and activists from within the movements of working people in the United States. I am talking about labor unions, tenant groups, food cooperatives, social clubs, and so on that are rooted within the working class. The development of working peoples’ agendas in local and state settings helps to codify a certain level of political consciousness and “common sense.” The working people’s agenda becomes the instrument or litmus test when identifying political candidates. But such an agenda cannot be the work of one group of leftists alone, regardless how strong they happen to be (or think that they are). It must be a po-

litical task that is addressed in a thoroughly anti-sectarian manner.

Thus, there is a need for two levels of organization in order to build an independent, progressive people's movement. One, a national left project. Two, a mass, electoral initiative capable of working inside and outside of the Democratic Party.

The National Left Project

The fragmented U.S. left lacks organization to address the scale and scope of our tasks. By polling estimates, there may be as many as 70 million people in the United States who are open to alternatives to capitalism. Even an organization with the size of the Democratic Socialists of America is dwarfed by such a challenge. And the problem is not simply that most of our organizations are small (or now extinct!) but that we think of organization on a small scale. To build an organization capable of tapping into at least 70 million people, we are talking about moving toward a mass, radical, left political organization that, whether it calls itself a party or not, becomes the political home for thousands of activists engaged in various social movements. But as a home, it must have a strategy rather than being a way station, otherwise it runs the risk of being a brain-dead confederation.

A national left project will, by necessity, be multi-tendenced and will have to accept that not every contemporary and historical question will be able to be answered immediately. But it must have sufficient unity in order to operate effectively in the real world. This means a sound electoral strategy, a recognition of the nature of the U.S. capitalist state, an unwavering commitment to opposition to racist and national oppression, an unwavering commitment to opposition to male supremacy, a practice of firm internationalism, and a deep belief in the importance of the "united front" at both the strategic and tacti-

cal levels. It certainly must be an organization that is democratic and promotes debate, but is capable of marching in a common direction when decisions are made.

What is critical about such a project/organization is that it operates in multiple social movements, attempting in each case to build an anti-sectarian left pole in said movements that is capable of leading said movements. Whether operating among the unemployed, building worker cooperatives, fighting police brutality, engaging in struggles for land rights, supporting a woman's right to choose, advancing a Green New Deal, or supporting oppressed peoples in foreign lands, this organization must put its brand on the work.

Yet this is not enough. Progressive, mass electoral formations are also essential. Organizations such as the Working Families Party, New Virginia Majority, California Calls, New Florida Majority, and Progressive Democrats of America are all examples of formations engaged in work inside and outside of the Democratic Party. These are not organizations of the Democratic Party but what could almost be described as "nonparty parties," or independent political organizations, that have or are developing clear constituencies and base areas and through that, moving a progressive, majoritarian agenda. The Democratic Party is only a battlefield rather than the final goal.

The Sanders campaigns of 2016 and 2020, much like the Jesse Jackson campaigns of 1984 and 1988, inspired millions with the vision of an alternative politics and an alternative political practice breaking from both cynicism and traditional political liberalism. Regardless of the outcome of the November 2020 elections, the tasks identified here must be fulfilled, otherwise the U.S. left will continue spinning, this time into the heart of the maelstrom.

After Bernie, DSA Will Be Essential

MINDY ISSER

THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT: Bernie Sanders' campaign for president has changed politics as we know it. Even more than in 2016, his 2020 race solidified issues like free college, a right to housing, Medicare for All, and a Green New Deal as not just leftist ideals, but as popular programs that the vast majority of people are willing to support. But because of Joe Biden's last minute boost, the Democratic National Committee's "anyone but Bernie" program, and the current COVID pandemic, Bernie ended his campaign.

When socialist or otherwise leftist candidates lose their elections, many console themselves with platitudes about "changing the narrative." But the left should want more than participation trophies—we need to govern, and we need to do so fast: The climate is counting on it; so are the millions who just lost their employer-sponsored health insurance because of the coronavirus. Moving the Overton window—the range of politically acceptable policies—is necessary to eventually create the kind of socialist world we deserve, but that motion has also done so much more: It has created an army of activists, volunteers, and organizers who won't back down until we win what we deserve. The big question, though, is how to actually win.

A mass democratic socialist left in the

United States is essentially new. Although the Democratic Socialists of America has been around since 1982, the organization's size stayed steady at around 6,000 members nationwide until Bernie's first presidential campaign, and then exploded when Trump was elected. Since then, a handful of democratic socialists have been elected to Congress, in addition to state and city seats around the country. While it's easy to feel defeat around Bernie's campaign—after all, we lost—it's important to zoom out and have some per-

The Democratic Socialists of America used Bernie's candidacy to recruit heavily, and it worked.

spective. Our movement has only been organizing in the electoral realm in earnest for five years. In those five years, we helped to elect Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib (among others). We also almost got a loud and proud democratic socialist to be the Democratic nominee for president of the United States, even with immense barriers, including a media blackout. That's no small feat, and we should be proud. We punch far above our weight.

Our outlook shouldn't be too rosy, however: We lost the race for the nomination. And we should be honest about why—not just about the structural challenges, but about our own mistakes, too. But overall, our movement,

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and our ideas, are winning. Finally, free health care and free college, among other social programs, are a normal part of our political discourse. The question is no longer “Will it ever happen?” but “When will it happen?” Unfortunately, *when* we pass Medicare for All

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and the like, it will be by using the Democratic Party. There has been no lack of discussion on what socialists should do electorally: bow out entirely, join or start a third party, or run socialists on the Democratic ballot line. Bowing out cedes unnecessary ground to centrists, and why would we, anyway? We’re winning the war of ideas, and we’re winning seats, too. That leaves running as a third party or running socialists as Democrats. But there is no current path to a viable third party. While many socialists would happily join a third party right now—and some have been calling for the creation of one for quite some time—we just don’t have the numbers and power necessary to do so. While it sounds like a wonderful idea, it’s just that, an idea: There is no legitimate space for one in our two-party system, and there is no plausible path to get there right now. If there were, the Green Party would be able to get more than 1 percent of the vote. And while the Working Families Party has seen some electoral success in Connecticut, New York state, and most recently, Philadelphia, these victories, while amazing, cannot yet be re-created outside of solidly blue states or cities, let alone on a national scale. But that doesn’t mean we have to stop running socialists for office. We just have to run them on the Democratic Party line. To do this well, we need to strengthen

both independent political organizations, like DSA, and the labor movement. In Chicago, the United Working Families Party has had some success with this. Their political organization is a coalition between two powerful local unions—the Chicago Teachers Union and SEIU Health Care—and two important community organizations—Grassroots Illinois Action and Action Now. It’s independent from the Democratic Party, but the coalition recruits and trains political candidates, along with endorsing other candidates, on the Democratic Party line.

For too long, socialist organizations in the United States were relegated to the sidelines. Our groupings were small, ineffectual, and plagued with sectarianism. Although we have had important and powerful interventions—and invested heavily in different struggles—the unexpected fall of the Soviet Union disoriented much of the left and discredited the idea of socialism in the eyes of millions. The Bernie Sanders campaign reanimated our cause, and it didn’t just excite socialists and left-wing Democrats—it inspired thousands and thousands of working people who had never previously been involved in politics. The Democratic Socialists of America used Bernie’s candidacy to recruit heavily, and it worked. Both Bernie’s run and Donald Trump’s subsequent victory led to a huge boom in membership: The organization grew from around 5,000 members to nearly 25,000 by spring 2016, and now, DSA has more than 60,000 members. At DSA’s 2019 convention, members passed a resolution to grow the organization to 100,000 members by 2021. To do this, DSA should prioritize getting every Bernie volunteer and donor into the organization, which will take a ton of political education and a ton of work. It’s worth it: 100,000 is a huge number for a political ideology that the mainstream loves to declare as “fringe.” But even at that size, we are not enough to take power or to govern. To do that, we need to keep organizing among the working class, who are suffering from the

coronavirus pandemic.

We don't yet know exactly how long-lasting and how bad the effects of the coronavirus will be on the economy, but we do know that unemployment has been reported as greater than it was during the Great Depression, when it was at about 25 percent. Unions are being hit hard, as well: Their members are out of work, and so they're losing resources. Of UNITE HERE's membership, 80-90 percent have been laid off; it's difficult to imagine how and when the union will be able to bounce back. It's a really scary time for workers and their organizations, but there are some small glimmers of hope as essential and frontline workers fight for safety and respect on the job. We've seen transit workers, sanitation workers, grocery store workers, and of course, health care workers organize to demand the right to live (literally!) as they work without proper protections during a global pandemic.

And while logic might say that organizing follows job trends—so when the economy is bad, organizing is slow—we are still seeing an uptick in workers responding to the moment. DSA has just entered into an organizing partnership with the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) union. UE is arguably the most left-wing, democratic union in the country: They worked to build a Labor Party in the United States (1996-2007), they consistently speak out against centrist Democrats, and they endorsed Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primary, which was their first primary endorsement ever. They didn't even endorse Clinton in the general election, although they urged a vote against Trump. All of this to say: They are deeply principled and committed first and foremost to organizing workers—which unfortunately is more than can be said for many larger unions. It is huge news, and great news, that they chose to unite with DSA to form the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee (EWOC), a project that connects workers dealing with coronavirus-related issues to trained volunteers who can help

them organize.

This partnership not only supports workers who are trying to organize, but also grants DSA legitimacy as a fighting socialist organization that has the power to make real interventions in the labor movement. This is important as we head into an unknown, unstable future: an election between one sexist, war-mongering politician and another, and potentially a labor movement without its legs. While we don't know for certain what's to come, it's likely that things will get much worse before they get better. Many laid-off workers will scramble to find new work in the only jobs that are hiring: grocery stores, delivery, and Amazon. Many grocery stores are already unionized, and many delivery drivers are still fighting the battle for proper classification as employees instead of independent contractors. While socialists should, of course, support all workers who are looking for help organizing, we should focus our limited resources on the second largest private employer in the United States: Amazon. CEO Jeff Bezos is so opposed to unions that he is using mapping technol-

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ogy to predict strikes, organizing, and other union activity at Whole Foods Market. We should have no illusions about the difficulty of organizing at Amazon, and yet we have no other option than to try. This fight would be much easier if Bernie Sanders were president, as he has consistently called out Bezos for being a bad employer, even introducing the "Stop BEZOS Act" ("Stop Bad Employers

by Zeroing Out Subsidies Act”), which would have taxed the company in proportion to the number of employees receiving federal assistance. This move forced the company to raise its minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Whatever worker organizing we do needs to include the political education to move workers into DSA. This will take a lot of commitment, but is necessary if we want our organization to adequately reflect the working class.

Millions out of work means millions

But there is no current path to a viable third party.

unable to pay their rent or mortgage, and without more government intervention and protection, we will see a huge rise in foreclosures and evictions. Another example of why it’s necessary to continue electing democratic socialists to office is Ilhan Omar’s introduction of a bill to cancel rent and mortgage payments during the pandemic. There’s a lot we can learn from our past economic crises, though. During the Great Depression, socialists focused their organizing efforts not just on workers at work, but workers in their homes: tenants. DSA has already had successful tenant organizing campaigns and now has a Housing Justice Commission to lead work nationally. Many DSA chapters are endorsing

their local #CancelRent campaigns, which were formed at the start of the pandemic and have since gained steam, winning eviction moratoriums all around the country. DSA has also helped fellow tenants organize tenants unions, specifically in Metro DC DSA, with their Stomp Out Slumlords campaign. These relationships and new formations will be extremely important as the right-wing increases its attacks on our right to live.

While there are many battles worth fighting right now, socialists can’t do everything. DSA is growing, but we don’t have enough people or strength to organize around every single issue. That’s why we need to focus our limited resources on a few important tasks: organizing workers and tenants, and electing more socialists to office. Each of these priorities builds on the other. Electing socialists improves conditions for organizing. And organizing workers creates the infrastructure necessary to make worthwhile and powerful endorsements. Although Bernie Sanders is no longer running for president, his supporters are still here, hungry for political leadership and change. We should work to funnel them into DSA, along with workers and tenants that we are organizing. Without an organization to hold all of these campaigns and people together, socialists will be just as scattered as we were prior to 2016. We need an ideological anchor to connect all of this important work. Whether it’s electing socialists or organizing workers or tenants, DSA will be essential.

We're Not Just Along for the Ride

NATALIA TYLIM

UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF APRIL, Bernie Sanders was in the race to be the Democratic Party candidate. Now, we face the likely nomination of Joe Biden, a pandemic of historic global proportions, and a new economic crisis beginning to send shock waves through the capitalist system. This crisis did not start with COVID-19, but it is deepening as a result, and, along with it, the radicalization against capitalism. While the Sanders campaign raised expectations and energized socialists around crucial policy demands, it has left the question open as to how we build longer-lasting democratic organizations for the struggle and *independent* activity of working-class people. This is the question that we on the socialist left must answer. My concern in what follows is not about the strategy of Sanders but about how socialists who are in organizations outside of his campaign should operate and what this situation demands of us. We cannot adequately sort out our next steps if we conflate our goals with those of the campaign.

For many within the working class today, in all of its diversity, disdain for and fear of Trump is closely followed by distrust and disillusionment with the Democratic Party establishment. There is evidence that a significant minority are beginning to politically

harden in opposition to the lesser-evil logic that has dominated the political dynamics in the United States for decades. While liberal pundits continue to berate and cajole in the interest of keeping the Democratic Party unified around Biden, another dynamic is also at play. At the time of writing, with more than 40 million unemployed, more than 100,000—disproportionately Black and Latinx working-class people—dead from COVID-19, and the ruling class committed to forcibly reopening the economy in the face of all public-health logic, there is a wave of resistance. Wildcat strikes of essential workers in response to COVID-19 and the lack of basic health and safety protection are growing, while mass demonstrations against the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor are spreading from Minneapolis and Louisville to other cities. While all of these struggles are nascent in many ways, and overwhelmingly defensive, they point the way to what is needed in the face of the growing social crisis.

As protests, strikes, and socialist politics spread, Biden continues to reveal himself as incomparably incompetent, most recently telling African Americans who might consider not voting for him that they “ain’t black.” This is after writing off Latinx (and other) voters who question the Obama/Biden record on mass deportation, and women (and others) who have the temerity to believe Tara Reade, who has bravely pursued her allegations of sexual assault by Biden despite the liberal establishment’s smear campaign against her. There are layers of people, both inside and outside the organized socialist left, not willing to simply swallow disagreements with the

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only candidate on offer against Trump right now. This offers important opportunities for socialists, which we can take advantage of only if we are clear about the central importance of independent working-class political activity.

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By this I mean that socialist organizing cannot be restricted to the parameters of politics inside the Democratic Party; it must stand on its own principles and goals and the strategies that follow from those. Otherwise, we risk not projecting a socialist vision, but instead tailoring socialist politics to fit more conveniently within the two-party system, which will not line up with the logic of the protests and workplace struggles that are unfolding.

If the left needed to learn the lesson again, we have just seen firsthand that the Democratic Party is not going to be the cradle of a new left party. However high Bernie Sanders raised expectations and introduced important proposals for social democratic reforms, at the end of the day, the party has been able to blunt and absorb the radical edge of his campaign. Bernie created a joint task force with Biden¹ aimed at uniting the party around policy proposals. He also issued a five-page social-media agreement to his delegates,² asking them to pledge that they will refrain from making any negative comments about other candidates and warning that failure to comply can result in disciplinary action. Sanders appears to be doing his part, remaining relatively silent on the accusations against Biden and his consistently inept campaign. This is not brought up to denounce Sanders,

who has been crystal clear about his orientation toward reforming the Democratic Party.

I believe the majority of the 60,000 members of the Democratic Socialists of America, despite their commitment to Sanders, agree that ultimately the working class needs a party of its own and that the Democratic Party is not going to be transformed into a vehicle for social democracy (let alone socialism). This is evidenced by the overwhelming support at the 2019 DSA convention against endorsing any other Democratic Party candidate besides Bernie Sanders.³ The debate inside DSA isn't whether we need to break with the two-party system or not, it's about what strategy is going to get us from where we are starting—a situation of two-party hegemony and uniquely undemocratic structures—to a new, independent formation of and by working-class people. Here lies the heart of the question about the post-Sanders moment. If we agree about the end goal, then there is ample discussion to be had about what strategy we must take to reach that objective. The wind has been in the sails of those in the socialist movement who favor a tactic of running elections on the Democratic Party line, ostensibly until conditions are more favorable for a future break to a new party. Is this enough to pave the road for an alternative in the future?

I am concerned that in the lack of specificity about what we are trying to do, an electoral tactic becomes a default *electoralist* strategy, working against our agreed goal of an independent party. This risks carrying us along for the ride, instead of intentionally using a series of tactics that bring us closer to a new party. At present, the dominant approach is overly (not exclusively) focused on elections and carries with it unstated assumptions:

- Elections are the key avenue that we can use to “build power” and make change—either by having sympathetic candidates in office who can pass legislation or by being the catalyst for confidence that drives class struggle;

- Elections are the way we build movements and power;
- Elections are the primary way we get to an independent party.

My strategic argument has a different set of assumptions:

- While elections are an important piece of political activity, they are but a reflection, and not the driving force, of the balance of class forces in society at large;
- Winning elections is not the same thing as winning working-class power, which entails higher levels of class struggle, not more people in office (though there should be a way to do both at once);
- There is no equation we can apply that concludes elections over here equals struggle over there. The relationship between struggle, consciousness, and new parties being brought into existence is much more dynamic.

While the Sanders electoral campaign has given national scope to the socialist movement, his campaign did not create the conditions for those ideas. In fact, if you compare Gallup polls from 2010⁴ through 2020,⁵ you will see that support for socialism spiked in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, well before the Sanders campaign. Similarly, on support for single-payer health care⁶ this is also true. Rather than Sanders creating the socialist movement, the conditions of radicalization fed into his electoral success. Real activity and real movement of ordinary people have shaped and informed the Sanders moment as much as Sanders has inspired it. Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo, while they have not won their overall demands, have informed and continue to inform the post-2008 world.

There is an unfortunate dismissiveness by some in the new left, sometimes among those who themselves were first radicalized by Bernie in 2016, to invert cause and effect, insinuating that the left and the movement were for naught until Bernie came around.

This is a one-sided view of the relationship between movements and elections and a static understanding of the history of the international crisis of neoliberalism, especially since 2007–2008. In reality, the experience of those post-2008 mobilizations, their ups and downs, are part of what convinced those who participated in them of the importance of national political organization like that found in the Sanders campaign. It is not surprising, under the conditions of the U.S. anti-democratic republic, that this has found expression first inside the Democratic Party, but it must transcend those bounds.

Labor, anti-oppression, and social struggles will shape and define politics in the near term. Elections are important, but they are not the decisive battleground. We need to develop as many organizations and networks of working-class people as possible as the threat of budget cuts and mass unemployment is reshaping our lives. There are inspiring examples of this: The number of essential workers organizing themselves⁷ is an indicator, but also Amazonians United;⁸

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rent strikes;⁹ rank-and-file teachers caucuses putting forward solutions and demands to keep teachers, students, and families safe during the pandemic;¹⁰ and nurses in New York City protesting outside of the Rikers Island prison.¹¹ There are ample opportunities, but they must be prioritized over a never-ending electoral cycle. Rising class struggle—which includes anti-racist eruptions and community

and workplace organizing—will pose new political questions and will make possible much greater electoral advances, as what we have yet won, if we are honest, is limited.

Socialists should be the ones helping

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to lead these struggles and creating the democratic spaces where we can fully hash out these strategic and tactical discussions. If we misunderstand the breadth and depth of the radicalization, and the possibilities (and dangers) of the moment, we will end up acting as a brake on the instincts of radicalizing socialists, and once again (like our predecessors in the last two generations of radicalization in the 1930s and 1960s) miss the possibility of creating real vehicles for independent working-class politics.

A left party in the United States would be composed of working-class members who are themselves rooted in organizing and activity. The role of such an organization shouldn't be primarily to win elections, but to build an infrastructure that grows out of struggle and supports, sustains, and helps organize that struggle. The development of these layers of working-class activists is underway, and we should be guided by a strategy that puts as many of us at the helm of organizing as possible. This can and must be done now

and won't be achieved by running in elections as our overriding strategy, which often inadvertently takes people out of this type of workplace and community organizing instead of feeding it. I want a future left party with an *active and diverse* membership in the tens and hundreds of thousands, a party that can both lead struggle and independently contest elections. Organizing more working-class organs of activity is what will bring us closer to this goal, rather than continuing to limit ourselves to the confines the Democratic Party creates—always delimited by the needs of capital.

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U.S. Imperialism and Africa's "Perfect Storm"

Public Health Crisis, War, and Financial Crash

LEE WENGRAF

ON DECEMBER 24, 2019, the *New York Times* reported that U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper was weighing a reduction in troop levels in West Africa. Although the numbers involved were small, this news was met with official outcry and unleashed a fierce policy debate on the wisdom of such a drawdown. Military and elected officials have pushed back on the notion of a troop reduction as a "retreat" and a missed opportunity to counter both China's regional influence and terrorism. In fact, by the military establishment's own definition, "counter-terror" across the continent has failed: Attacks by militant groups have been sharply rising and have *increased* with foreign intervention. And devastating strikes by the United States have continued unabated: Somalia, for example, was the target of an unprecedented level of attacks in early 2020 alone.¹

For the anti-imperialist left, in the abstract, troop withdrawals would be a welcome development. Many in Africa have long opposed the latest round of militarization on the

continent, in particular the launch of the U.S. Army Command for Africa (AFRICOM) in 2007, which the African Union refused to house on their soil. Opposition to a widened military presence is a feature of the African left, both to the outright viciousness of drone warfare and to "boots on the ground," as well as to the substantial aid provided to "their" governments' defense forces. As Jean Nanga argues, "While proclaiming its opposition to the installation of new foreign military bases in Africa, the African Union counted on the financial support of the United States and the European Union for the organization of this army, which was supposed to enable Africa to resolve itself its security problems ... making Africa a terrain of experimentation and publicity of their new instruments of death."² The stakes are high for us to understand these policy shifts as an adjustment to U.S. imperialism but by no means a break from it: The human toll of these "instruments of death" and their related crises threaten catastrophe on a massive scale, all the more so in the context of global pandemic.

In reality, any reduction in U.S. forces in West Africa will be more than compensated for by an expanded presence elsewhere on the continent and globally. The leaked plans for a troop drawdown are consistent with a 2018 shift in U.S. global imperial strategy, from "counter-terror" to a focus on "peer competitors," chiefly China but also Russia and other powers. Then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis summed up the new "posture" as fol-

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lows: “To those who would threaten America’s experiment in democracy: If you challenge us, it will be your longest and worst day. ... We will continue to prosecute the campaign against terrorists, but great power competition—not terrorism—is now the primary focus of U.S. national security.”³ Thus, tactical shifts in troop levels—rather than a cause for celebration—are an expression of great power competition, one that will only intensify in this latest chapter of the “new scramble for Africa.” In the context of what Richard Wolff has described as a “COVID-triggered crisis,”⁴ the return of interimperial rivalries—and the social and ecological fallout—breaks open urgent questions of U.S. objectives in Africa and how the left must confront them.

The New Scramble for Africa

The African continent is an arena today of competition and conflict. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, primary commodity prices exploded, driven in no small part by the Chinese economic boom and a period of very rapid industrial growth. This boom drove an acceleration in extraction across Africa by multinationals from the Global North as well as by “rising powers” such as China, Russia, and India. From the oil fields of Nigeria to the copper mines in Zambia, from cobalt and coltan exploitation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the platinum mines of South Africa, this wave of extraction dramatically transformed the African continent. Unprecedented rates of economic growth and accelerated foreign investment have been accompanied by *increased* deindustrialization, class inequality, ecological devastation, and militarization. This recent history has been described as the “new scramble for Africa,” one reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Great Power partition and the rush for colonies, markets, and raw materials. The aims of today’s imperial scramble echo many of the objectives of the prior era: the drive for commodities, economic advantage, containment

of peer rivals, and the use of military might to shore up political alliances and maintain “stability.” Past colonial powers continue to wield influence in their former colonies; for example, as described by Jean Batou, France views its “credibility” in North and West Africa as key to an expansionist economic perspective into “new” regions of the continent.⁵ Yet history does not merely repeat itself, and imperialism in Africa today has its own unique dynamics, not least of which result from new African ruling classes. As Nanga explains, “Africa is continuing its (capitalist) social-historical vocation to be a field of economic competition for the old and new powers of economic globalization, especially with regard to the supply of raw materials, even though there is now the participation of private African capital in the circuits of neoliberal globalization.”

Investment and trade between African nations and their partners have risen sharply over the past two decades. Washington has long had economic ties to the continent: U.S.-based companies in oil production (such as Exxon and Chevron), agribusiness, mining, power generation, and telecommunications

Militarism, environmental
destruction and climate change
are also inextricably linked.

represent some of their key interests in Africa. The rates of investment and construction by Chinese firms on the continent have been exceptionally dramatic, increasing by over 600 percent since 2005, exceeding \$300 billion in that period alone.⁶ According to the Brookings Institute, China leads all nations with regards to foreign direct investment in Africa, followed by France, then the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and the

United Kingdom.⁷ China surpassed the United States in 2009 as the continent's largest trading partner, with over a third of Chinese oil coming from Africa.⁸ As the *Intercept* reports, "Trade between China and Africa has risen from \$765 million to more than \$170 billion in the last 40 years, and 39 of 54 African nations have now signed on to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative—a trillion-dollar plan to link infrastructure and trade via a vast new network of roads, rail lines, ports, and pipelines across Eurasia, the Middle East, and Africa."⁹

Russia's trade with Africa has tripled between 2009 and 2017 alone. Russia's role is dwarfed by China's; for example, its volume of trade is a tiny fraction of that between the continent and China or the United States. But Russia has been able to forge political allegiances where Washington has faltered, such as in the Central African Republic, Sudan, Eritrea, and Somaliland. Russian arms dealers are among the most active on the continent.¹⁰ In other words, as Tamás Gerócs writes, Russia's widening reach in Africa is an expression of both geopolitical ambitions and the need for markets and goods in the face of European Union sanctions.¹¹

Capitalism is fundamentally rooted in competition and conflict, and the expansionist dynamics on the African continent today are also an expression of a global interimperial rivalry between, above all, China and the United States. The U.S. foreign policy establishment recognizes that China's investment in Africa is a long-term, strategic priority, one that it has been pursuing on a range of fronts and from which it will not easily retreat. U.S. imperialism in Africa likewise has long-term objectives to support the interests of its corporate classes and to cultivate the policy tools to do so. Those aims have historically relied heavily on International Monetary Fund- and World Bank-driven neoliberal economic policies of austerity, debt, and terms of trade privileging the United States, and the fostering of allied African ruling classes. As these

policies spill over into crises across Africa, the U.S. approach has rested on further austerity and military might, with devastating results.

A Militarized Continent

Given these accelerating tensions between great powers, the 2018 U.S. "posture shift" and its significant strategic turn toward addressing "peer competitor challenges" comes as no surprise. For the Defense Department, the concern is the "gradual erosion of overmatch," meaning that China is leveling the imperial playing field. In particular, this concern is likely spurred by the 2017 opening of China's army base in Djibouti in the strategically crucial Horn of Africa region at the Gulf of Aden, with close proximity to the Middle East and the Suez Canal as well as adjacent to Washington's own main Africa base of Camp Lemonier. A government report revealed that "[Defense Department] officials told us how China and Russia are presenting growing security challenges on the continent. China, in particular, is expanding its presence throughout Africa, both economically and militarily, and starting to surpass the United States in terms of economic aid, information, and military assistance in many countries in Africa."¹²

The United States has long been the world's preeminent military power, placing a high value on its ability to project imperial force anywhere on the globe. This priority has of course come at great cost in human terms. As Rev. William Barber and Phyllis Bennis have pointed out, the United States has spent over \$6 trillion on wars since the turn of the millennium, with 800,000 lives lost.¹³ Over the last three years, U.S. defense spending has jumped by more than \$139 billion.¹⁴ Africa is no exception, and the United States now has approximately 6,000 to 7,000 troops on the continent, not counting private contractors. Outposts and military facilities span the majority of African nations, from small airfields and "capacity-building" training camps for

African troops to larger installations.

President Barack Obama vastly expanded military operations in Africa, and the increase in attacks continues under President Donald Trump. Major targets include Somalia, the Sahel, and Libya. Libya, for one, is a site

As with the left worldwide,
the African left is confronting
profound questions in this
nightmarish “perfect storm” of
public health disaster war and
economic meltdown.

of major instability as well as a corridor for refugees from other parts of the continent; its significant oil resources have transformed the country into a battleground for oil and infrastructure contracts between European nations, Russia, China, and the United States. Department of Defense strategists seem particularly concerned about perceived Russian intervention on NATO’s southern flank, where Moscow’s paramilitary forces support the Libyan National Army (LNA), in opposition to the UN- and (nominally) U.S.-backed Government National Accord (GNA)—though the Trump administration bizarrely gave its blessing to an attack by the LNA on the GNA, exacerbating the chaos.¹⁵

Horn of Africa trade routes, with their proximity to the Middle East, are among the most geostrategically and economically critical on the globe. Characterized by the Nairobi-based HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies as “one of the most terror-prone regions in the world,” the “Red Sea currently carries more than 10 percent of global sea-borne trade, feeding the demand for oil and gas in the west and North America (from the Gulf region) and facilitating the flow of goods between Europe and the

Asia Pacific.”¹⁶ In its war on the Al-Shabab militants, the United States conducted more air strikes in Somalia in 2019 than in any previous year. Samar Al-Bulushi’s analysis of the 13-year war in Somalia explains the widening scope of U.S. and African Union intervention, and the key collaboration of African states. Al-Bulushi wrote that while “initial rules of engagement permitted the use of force only when necessary, [African Union troops] gradually assumed an offensive role, engaging in counterinsurgency and counter-terror operations. . . . Support from the United States has been instrumental in emboldening the Kenyan military to engage in its own ‘war on terror’ at home and abroad.”¹⁷

According to Amnesty International, the United States has carried out hundreds of military strikes in Somalia, yet has only acknowledged *one* instance of so-called “civilian deaths.”¹⁸ As Allegra Harpootlian writes at the anti-war *Tom Dispatch* website,

Almost as alarming as the rate of civilian casualties from drone and other air strikes in the Obama years was the lack of information provided about them. . . . Soon after President Trump took office, his administration began to quietly dismantle the safeguards Obama had just created. His administration would subsequently expand the battlefields on which drones would be used, ease combat rules in Somalia intended to protect civilians, rescind most aspects of Obama’s executive orders, and stop publishing civilian casualty data entirely, while telling the public even less about the program. Not surprisingly, drone strikes across the Greater Middle East and parts of Africa would rise and a lot more civilians would start dying from them.¹⁹

Both the United States and France are heavily involved in counter-terrorism in what are called the G5 countries: the Sahel nations of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad. The United States recently opened the Agadez base in Niger, West Africa, in a region currently experiencing a surge in attacks by

al-Qaida, Islamic State in Greater Sahara, and others, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. France's major military initiative in the Sahel is Operation Barkhane, and approximately 4,500 French troops currently serve on the continent alongside thousands of G5-nation troops. Protests against the former colonial power's presence compelled France to shore up the G5 coalition at a January convening where President Emmanuel Macron claimed that "France is not there, contrary to what's heard sometimes, for neo-colonialist, imperialist, or economic reasons. We're there for our collective security and the region."²⁰

In spring 2020, a European counter-terror campaign called Takuba—with 11 countries contributing troops—was launched. As Ndongo Samba Sylla points out, military policy allows for expanded "monetary colonialism" and ambitions of expanding the euro-pegged West African currency the CFA franc (now renamed the eco) beyond its former colonies.²¹ Much like the United States, France relies on African partnerships to further its own aims and thwart imperial competitors. Thus, as Batou describes, it is "doing all it can to avoid resurrecting the image of France as the 'gendarme of Africa,' especially in a context where emerging countries can take advantage of their noncolonial past."²² All told, the entire Sahel region is highly militarized; according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, including those of the United States, the EU, the UN, and an array of regional contingents, the area currently hosts 25,000 troops.²³

Displacement and Ecological Crisis

Militarization has compounded already-existing social contradictions. Warfare has fueled a wide refugee crisis, and the number of internally displaced persons in the Sahel has almost tripled from January 2019 to March 2020.²⁴ Over a decade into the war in Somalia, approximately 5.2 million people require humanitarian assistance.²⁵

The rising commodification of land in Africa, meanwhile, has exacerbated land grabs and the displacement of rural communities. In countries such as Ethiopia, governments have signed agreements with multinationals for access to communal land; the Gulf states, vulnerable to food shortages, have actively pursued these "deals" as have U.S. agribusinesses and other multinationals. Mining and drilling likewise threaten communities with eviction, and activists across the continent have mobilized in protest, such as the South African campaign under the banner of "the right to say no." These movements have often been met with harsh repression, such as the 2016 assassination of well-known leader Sikhosiphi "Bazooka" Rhadebe, who led a years-long struggle with the Amadiba Crisis Committee to stop opencast mining in South Africa's Eastern Cape.²⁶

As a number of reports have made clear, incidents of terror have *risen* under conditions of war and displacement. Yet for the major powers in Africa today, such terrible costs in human terms are viewed primarily as threats to *stability*: problems in the competitive drive for extraction and capital accumulation, that is, for the broader imperial project in Africa itself. Nonetheless, Washington continues to funnel large amounts of military aid to key African "security allies," such as Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria. For example, the Nigerian government's U.S.-supported war on Boko Haram and the people of northern Nigeria has escalated terror attacks. As a Socialist Workers League (Nigeria) editorial describes,

There are generalized concerns about the level of insecurity including Boko Haram. ... We should recognize that insecurity and crime are a symptom of inequality, poverty, and high-level corruption. Insecurity cannot be dealt with separately. The money for the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in camps in and around [the northern city of] Maiduguru is being stolen. Is it any wonder then that young men continue to join Boko

Haram rather than just sitting around in the camps, watching their families starve to death?²⁷

Militarism, environmental destruction, and climate change are also inextricably linked. As elsewhere on the globe, civil wars have exacerbated environmental devastation. Likewise, the drive for extraction—and the resulting climate change—have deprived people of access to natural resources, displaced them from their land, and polluted their waterways. All of these dynamics create conditions for further conflict and militarized intervention at the hand of the state. Nnimmo Bassey of the Nigerian ecological think tank Home of Mother Earth Foundation writes extensively of these interrelationships. Again, in the case of Boko Haram, as he writes, “The occupation of the [Sambisa] forest by the insurgents clearly posed threats beyond those on the human population. Their activities posed direct threats to the trees, wildlife, and general biodiversity. Military action to flush out the insurgents from the forest has obviously inflicted harm on the forest ecosystem.”²⁸

Yet the origins of Boko Haram itself lie at least in part with the massive water loss in Lake Chad, which has decreased approximately 95 percent in size since the 1960s; Bassey estimates that at least 50 percent of the water supply loss is due to climate change.²⁹ Farmers and pastoralists have been displaced on a large scale, a major driver in the rise of insurgency. As an official of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification describes,

In much of northern Nigeria, Muslim herders are in competition with Christian farmers for dwindling water supplies. The so-called religious fight is actually about access to vital resources. It is not just about Boko Haram, in the Sahel belt; you will see almost the same challenge in Mali and in Sudan. Furthermore, men who were or would have been gainfully employed as farmers, fishermen, fish sellers, and pastoralists have now been conscripted into Boko Haram.³⁰

Mahmood Mamdani’s *Saviors and Survivors* (Pantheon, 2009) provides a similar explanation about the land-based conflicts underpinning the regional war in Darfur, Sudan.

Again, such crises pose a challenge to U.S. imperial interests where they undermine stability and disadvantage U.S. interests in Africa relative to competitors. A recent strategy document reported that “USAFRICOM has also identified extreme weather as an ‘emergent challenge’ to Africa’s security. For example, thousands of Somalis were displaced this quarter by floods. Displacement, food insecurity, and destruction of livelihoods due to natural events can create conditions that foster the growth of violent extremism.”³¹ The rationale for the construction of a U.S. drone base in Agadez, in central Niger, was precisely on the basis of these regional “security threats.” But according to the Department of Defense’s own figures, 2.9 million people in the Lake Chad basin require emergency assistance, yet the region received a mere \$400 million in U.S. humanitarian funding in the last fiscal year.³² Military intervention at the expense of aid will vastly compound the current human rights disaster.

Pandemic, Debt, and the Oil Price Meltdown

The imperial and neoliberal agenda of security, “stability,” and capital accumulation have meant the undermining of programs to meet human need. The contradictions of the forty-year global neoliberal agenda of cuts to social programs and privatization are particularly sharp in Africa, and the current pandemic has already exposed these dynamics on a devastating scale. Although at the time of this writing, in spring 2020, confirmed cases of COVID-19 were *relatively* low in much of Africa, the systemic crises outlined above have created the potential for catastrophic poverty, economic crisis, repression, and militarization.

African nations have long been saddled

with immense debt loads as the end-product of neoliberal structural adjustment imposed

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by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The vast amounts of debt repayments required under these schemes have distorted national budgets so that, in most African countries, payments on foreign debt exceed spending on health care. Oxfam reports, for example, that Ghana spends 11 times more on servicing its debt than on health; continentwide, there are 2.8 doctors and 11 nurses for every 10,000 people, compared with 33.8 and 80.6, respectively, in Europe. Yet the pandemic crisis is half of a “double whammy,” the other half a worldwide oil price collapse that caused a number of African economies to slow down *before* the pandemic hit, as commodity prices dropped to historic lows and 113 countries worldwide faced IMF-dictated austerity.³³

In African nations heavily reliant on oil exports, such as Angola, Nigeria, and Ghana, forecasted revenue for 2020 assumed oil prices at approximately \$55 per barrel. Global prices at roughly half that mark spell catastrophe for African budgets; Angola, for example, declared a state of emergency due to these economic conditions as early as March.³⁴ This picture is magnified by the vastly disproportionate reliance on extraction for export revenue and foreign exchange earnings in African oil-producing states, relative to other sectors of their economies. For some nations, such as South Sudan, oil revenue accounts

for up to 98 percent of the country’s foreign exchange revenue. Overall, oil comprises roughly 50 percent of sub-Saharan African exports. The Health of Mother Earth Foundation describes current conditions:

The news from South Sudan ... hits one painfully below the belt. A visit to the displaced people camps etches memories that cannot be easily erased. ... And to this, you add COVID-19. As if they did not have enough in their plate. They had a long war, then a long civil war. It has been misery upon misery. They have oil but for what? Recently we conducted a study on access to potable water in Juba and found that [the] majority of the people do not have water that is safe for consumption. You may wish that we could wash our hands with crude. ... The situation in the oil field communities here is indeed comparable to the situation in the Niger Delta. The difference may be one of scale, but the ecological damage is overshadowed only by the scars of open violence.³⁵

All told, this many-headed catastrophe spells deep economic crisis for the nations of Africa. The World Bank reported in spring 2020 that

COVID-19 will cost the region between \$37 billion and \$79 billion in output losses for 2020 due to a combination of effects. ... The COVID-19 crisis also has the potential to spark a food security crisis in Africa, with agricultural production potentially contracting between 2.6 percent in an optimistic scenario and up to 7 percent if there are trade blockages. Food imports would decline substantially (as much as 25 percent or as little as 13 percent).³⁶

The World Bank now predicts an economic contraction of 5.1 percent;³⁷ given that African nations experienced *growth* rates in this range in the recent past, this is a drop of huge proportions.

The question of how these and related crises are resolved is fundamentally one of the

balance of class forces: the ability of the great powers and “their” capitalist classes to pursue their aims in Africa regardless of the social, economic, and environmental costs. Recent

President Barack Obama vastly expanded military operations in Africa, and increased attacks continue under President Donald Trump.

history provides a small clue: The Ebola crisis of 2014–2016, centered in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, was characterized by the UN as “a threat to international peace and security.” Tellingly, the U.S. response, under the Obama administration, was to militarize a public health crisis, opting to send soldiers to West Africa over doctors. The strength of forces from below to challenge this agenda and impose new ones in the interest of the vast majority will determine how this crisis will be resolved.

As with the left worldwide, the African left is confronting profound questions in this nightmarish “perfect storm” of public health disaster, war, and economic meltdown. The Southern African People’s Solidarity Network Secretariat, for one, has called for a debt moratorium, stating,

Capitalist globalization implanted within the legacy of colonialism, neocolonialism, and elite-driven cronyism has locked Southern Africa into a multidimensional economic, social, and ecological crisis and has rendered the region ripe for another social catastrophe. The COVID-19 pandemic is that long-predicted catastrophe. ... The state of health in Southern Africa is rooted in the region’s

history of underdevelopment and domination. Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank eroded the initial post-independence gains in building a public health system responsive to the needs of the majority. In the face of harsh economic conditions, health budgets, and the budgets critical to the social determinants of health, were cut, as governments adopted neoliberal programs of austerity.³⁸

Of necessity, social movements and working-class organizations will be compelled to take on rising levels of repression in the fight for survival and for justice. As Gacheke Gachihi puts it, “Ordinary people are struggling to cope with the repressive measures which are inherently violent, disorganized, and dehumanizing as the state tries to curb the spread of infections from the developed world. Yet, with limited resources and a corrupt and illegitimate state, the challenges are enormous.”³⁹ Likewise, as the South Africa-based *Amandla!* magazine describes, rising levels of clashes with police and the army open up the possibility of “a generalized Marikana-like explosion.” Of necessity, the left must build a “movement that can act as a counter-power to the neoliberal state and the ruling and self-serving elites. The battle must be joined now over how the world emerges from this crisis.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

Today, the U.S. ruling class will not easily cede its preeminence as an economic and military power to its peer competitors—China in particular—in Africa or elsewhere around the globe, and a minor adjustment in troop levels belies that broader agenda. As Washington’s imperial project continues to run up against those of its rivals, the particular contours of the crisis in Africa will continue to be revealed and new dimensions will continue to arise. The vicious and racist treatment of Africans in Guangzhou, China, under COVID lockdown has created a diplomatic

crisis between African state leaders and the Chinese government, throwing a wrench into the works of its cultivated foreign policy of recent years. Wading into the dispute, the United States leaned on the long-standing trope of “concern” for Africa’s exploitation at the hands of China; a State Department official called the incident “a sad reminder of how hollow the PRC–Africa relationship really is.”⁴¹ Thus, while actual levels of U.S. investment and trade with Africa may remain lower than China’s, Washington has no intention of giving military or economic ground to its rivals on the continent so as to facilitate their rise on the world stage.

But as we have seen, the majority in Africa will pay the price for the U.S. agenda: war, displacement, devastation, and alliances with African ruling classes who exploit and immiserate their own working classes. As Femi Aborisade has pointed out, the current crisis is not uniform, and what he calls a “hunger virus” follows close at the heels of the coronavirus.⁴² As conditions worldwide approach Depression-era levels—in the Global North and the Global South—the class conclusions will be unavoidable. The left must urgently take up the calls from Africa to drop the debt and demilitarize the continent, to stop the land displacement and pollution caused by multinationals. To confront their imperialism, ours must be the global project of solidarity.

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Anti-Imperialism and the Rise of Authoritarianism, “Left” and Right

WITH MILITARISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM ON THE RISE in numerous global and regional powers, there is a crucial need for updating and strengthening a politics of socialist anti-imperialism. Historically, many on the left felt the need to ally with the Soviet Union or China against U.S. imperialism during the Cold War era and took a “camp-ist” approach that chose sides in the rivalries between repressive regimes. Although the Cold War ended nearly 30 years ago, significant elements on the left continue to adhere to this campist tradition. By contrast, the contributors to this symposium exemplify an authentic socialist internationalism, the tradition of “socialism from below,” which sides with the global working class and struggles for democracy everywhere. While opposing the governments of Putin’s Russia, Modi’s India, and Xi’s China, these analyses critically trace authoritarian trends on the left and right. Taken together, their critiques and practical suggestions offer a glimpse of what a strengthened and principled socialist anti-imperialism might look like in the twenty-first century.

From the Russian Revolution to Russia Today

ROHINI HENSMAN

IN THE *COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*, Marx and Engels argued that the first step in the proletarian revolution was to “win the battle of democracy,” by which they meant establishing a democratic republic under which an epochal “revolution in permanence” could be launched to carry out a socialist transformation of society.¹ Since they believed that the emancipation

of the working class would be carried out by the class as a whole, it made sense to affirm that the proletariat needed freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly; equality before the law and equal protection of the law; and the right to elect representatives in free and fair elections to prepare them to take over government and production.

Given the hostility to democracy on the part of the bourgeoisie as well as sections of the petty bourgeoisie, *it would be more useful to see the bourgeois and democratic revolutions as two separate revolutions*, with the bourgeois revolution being accomplished fairly quickly while the democratic revolution might drag on for decades. Indeed, even when a parlia-

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mentary democracy has been established, it can be demolished and replaced by a fascist state, as it was in Italy and Germany. Of course Marx and Engels envisaged a far more thoroughgoing democracy in a socialist society, but they saw the democratic republic as an essential step in that direction.

The Failure of the Democratic Revolution in Russia

Russia under the tsars was an absolute monarchy and imperial power. In 1861, Tsar Alexander II emancipated the serfs, but peasants received less land than they needed for survival and continued to live in poverty and squalor. The Narodniks and later the Socialist Revolutionaries fought for a peasant revolution. When the industrial working class expanded massively in the late nineteenth century, Marxist groups were formed. In 1898 Marxist groups formed the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party, which in 1903 split between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, with Lenin in the latter. At this stage, all Marxists agreed that the proletariat must expand and a bourgeois revolution take place before there was a chance to move toward socialism.

In the 1905 revolution, workers' militancy produced a new form of organization, the soviets (Russian for "councils"), that spread to several cities, and there were widespread demands for a democratic republic. In the countryside, there were peasant revolts demanding agrarian reform. The tsar first offered token concessions then unleashed severe repression.

A wave of nationalism accompanied the start of World War I in 1914. But as it wore on and Russia lost swathes of territory, food ran short, inflation soared, a million soldiers were captured, and more than 1.4 million were killed, people turned against the war and the tsar. This was the backdrop to the 1917 revolution, which is commonly divided into the February and October revolutions, but is more usefully seen as a continuous process starting on International Women's Day

(February 23 in Russia, which was still using the Julian calendar). Meetings and speeches on women's rights, the devastation of the war, and the impossible cost of living were followed by 90,000 women and men pouring out of the factories demanding bread, peace, and an end to the monarchy. The next day almost half the city's workforce came onto the streets and fraternized with rank-and-file soldiers, who refused to attack them.

The Duma (legislative assembly) formed a provisional government; a Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was formed at the same time. The soviet agreed to support the provisional government provided it convened a Constituent Assembly to introduce a permanent democratic republic; abolished discrimination based on class, religion, and nationality; and introduced self-government in the army. As the tsar fled on February 28, the soviet took over and sent messages around the country announcing the revolution. Effectively, the monarchy was overthrown.

The provisional government, led by Alexander Kerensky, implemented sweeping democratic measures but carried on with the war. Lenin, in exile in Zurich, sent "Letters from Afar," urging that Russia, an imperialist power, should pull out of the war and that the revolution should continue. Mass opposition to the war swelled support for the Bolsheviks, especially after Lenin returned from exile in April. By mid-June 1917 the bourgeois revolution in Russia had been completed and the democratic revolution was well underway. What was required from socialists, then, was full support for democracy and the establishment of a Constituent Assembly. Instead, from the latter part of June, Lenin wanted the Bolsheviks to take power by themselves, and this was more or less accomplished in the aftermath of the October Revolution.

Undermining Democracy, Putting Socialism in Jeopardy

Lenin's and Trotsky's reluctance to share power

even with other socialist parties meant that the Bolsheviks constituted a minority government that could survive only by means of repression. The soviets became a mere rubber stamp for decisions made by the Bolshevik Party. A Constituent Assembly had been a key demand of all anti-tsarist parties, including the Bolsheviks, and was undoubtedly popular; yet three weeks after seizing power, when Lenin found that less than a quarter of its elected representatives were Bolsheviks, the Assembly was dissolved.² In Rosa Luxemburg's carefully nuanced assessment of the Russian revolution, she acknowledges that democratic institutions like the Constituent Assembly have their shortcomings but argues that "the remedy which Lenin and Trotsky have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure."³

One must take seriously the argument that winning the civil war of 1918 to 1921, against a variety of counter-revolutionary armed groups backed by Western imperialist powers, required centralization and iron discipline. However, this doesn't explain either authoritarian measures taken before and after the civil war or the crushing of dissenters who were clearly on the side of the revolution. After the civil war ended, the suppression of factions like the Workers Group and Workers' Opposition within the Bolshevik Party stifled debate on crucial issues and empowered the most authoritarian elements in the party as well as the secret police known as the Cheka. And the crushing of dissent in the country as a whole reached alarming levels. The best-known example is the rebellion in the naval town of Kronstadt in March 1921. The demands of the Kronstadt rebels were clearly democratic, including free elections to the soviets and freedom of speech, press, assembly, and organization for workers, peasants, anarchists, and left socialists; they raised the original slogan of the revolution, "All power to the soviets!" Yet, in an operation bitterly condemned by anarchist Emma Goldman,⁴ their rebellion was crushed by

the Red Army in a bloody battle, after which thousands of prisoners were shot or sent to forced-labor camps.

The argument of the Workers' Opposition—that heading the state in a country with a heterogeneous population had forced the Communist Party to abandon its consistent espousal of a working-class program—makes sense. But the Workers' Opposition never acknowledged the elephant in the room: In that case, should a revolutionary socialist party have seized power in a country where the proletariat was vastly outnumbered by the peasantry? Is it possible to build socialism in a country surrounded by capitalist imperial powers?

In retrospect it should be clear to us that given the circumstances in which the Russian revolution took place, there was no chance of abolishing capitalism in the near future. At that point, the best chance of moving toward a socialist transformation of society lay in the Bolsheviks respecting elections to the Constituent Assembly and soviets, pushing for maximum democracy in a multiparty state, and continuing to represent working-class interests in it, rather than seizing power on their own. Their choice of the latter course of action was driven by the illusion that a vanguard party claiming to represent the working class could carry out a socialist revolution. But this was not the conception held by Marx and Engels, who insisted that the revolution would be carried out by the working class as a whole.

Stalin's Counter-revolution

In many ways, the Bolshevik seizure of power created the conditions for a counter-revolution, as Lenin recognized toward the end of his life, but it would be wrong to conclude that nothing changed between this early period and the period after Stalin took over state power. As the manifesto of Workers' Truth observed in 1921, a new technical organizing intelligentsia was merging with elements of the old bourgeoisie to form a *new ruling class*,

and the Bolshevik Party was becoming their representative. Simon Pirani agrees that the gradual exclusion of the working class from all decision-making roles, followed by the consolidation of a privileged elite's control over the party in 1923-1924, initiated the formation of a new ruling class, but adds that it took some years longer before it consolidated itself under the Stalinist dictatorship, which ruled not through its ownership of private property but through its "ownership" of the state.⁵ In other words, although some kind of capitalist ruling class would inevitably have emerged after the revolution given the circumstances in which it occurred, the association of the Communist Party with that ruling class and the consolidation of a totalitarian state power were by no means inevitable.

In the early post-revolutionary period, sweeping social-democratic changes were carried out, ranging from measures to strengthen women's rights to comprehensive provision of health care to all. It is true that nonparty dissidents like the Kronstadt rebels were crushed and the voices of inner-party dissidents were stifled under Lenin and Trotsky, but under Stalin, millions of opponents, rivals (including almost the entire Bolshevik leadership), and dissidents were eventually either exterminated—many after being tortured and blackmailed into making fake confessions in show trials—or banished to forced-labor camps, where many succumbed to hunger, exposure, disease, and ill-treatment. Stalin's control over the Communist International was used to murder socialists around the world and to propagate a completely fictitious account of the revolution and the doctrine of "socialism in one country," namely Russia.

Perhaps the most striking contrast was between Lenin's policies toward tsarist Russia's former colonies and those of Stalin. Influenced by Marxists in these colonies, Lenin supported bourgeois-democratic national liberation struggles in them. Although after Finland's independence was recognized in 1917 no other nation received the same

treatment, the larger nations of Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan became independent Soviet republics, while smaller nations (including the central Asian ones) became autonomous republics and autonomous regions responsible for local government, education, culture, and agriculture. The government promoted the political, economic, and cultural development of non-Russian peoples by giving priority to the local language, staffing the local administration as far as possible with local nationals, and a host of other measures.

Shortly before his death in January 1924 and crippled by a series of debilitating strokes, Lenin, in what came to be known as his "last testament," expressed alarm about Stalin's "imperialist attitudes towards oppressed nationalities," even describing him as a "vulgar Great-Russian bully." He was right to be apprehensive. Under Stalin, tsarist Russia's former colonies were once again oppressed, with some, like Ukraine and the Muslim nations (peopled by Crimean Tatars, Chechens, and so on), being subjected to what would soon be called genocide. The Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939-1941 also contained an imperialist element: In its secret protocols, the Nazis agreed to concede Finland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, and part of Poland to the Soviet Union in exchange for food products and raw materials. After the Yalta conference of February 1945, Moscow-dominated regimes were set up in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and later East Germany; in a pattern resembling U.S. imperialism, friendly dictators were installed and supported by the imperial power, with military interventions when the regimes were threatened. Stalin's "socialism in one country" was in fact a state-capitalist empire. The pattern persisted after Stalin's death and included the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the 1968 Prague Spring and the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. And although the wholesale slaughter of dissidents and ethnic minorities ceased after

Stalin died, the ultra-authoritarian imperialist state remained.⁶

Another Revolution ... and Counter-revolution

Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1985, and at a Central Committee meeting in January 1987 he declared “glasnost” (openness) and democratization to be the foundation of his “perestroika” (restructuring) of Soviet society. This move reflected a deeper and broader movement of disgust with the prevailing culture of corruption, lies, and assaults on the dignity of the individual, but it had an unintended consequence: the revival of demands for independence in Russia’s colonies. Gorbachev’s aversion to violence prevented him from sending in tanks when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, but hoping to prevent the disintegration of the Soviet Union, he drew up a new treaty to create a truly voluntary federation. Before it could be signed, hardliners launched a coup in August 1991, putting him under house arrest and sending tanks onto the streets of Moscow. The public came out on the streets to defend their newly won freedoms, and Boris Yeltsin put himself at their head.

The hardliners were defeated and Yeltsin came to power, but unlike Gorbachev, he had no interest in preserving the Soviet Union and in fact hastened its demise by seceding from it. He presided over the transfer of Russia’s public sector to a small number of oligarchs, while the bulk of the population suffered cruel austerity measures. The Soviet Union was succeeded by fifteen independent republics including the Russian Federation, but many of these continued to be dominated by Russia, and some of Russia’s former colonies failed to win their independence. Chechnya, for example, declared independence in 1991 but was invaded by Russia in 1994. There followed two wars, and by 2000 the Chechen independence movement had been crushed with the utmost brutality, in which crimes

against humanity played a decisive role.

Vladimir Putin was appointed prime minister by Yeltsin in 1999 and was elected president in 2000, riding on a wave of popularity gained by his “war on terror” against the people of Chechnya. His period in power, which still prevails in 2020, has witnessed a wholesale reversal of Gorbachev’s democratization measures and a return to neo-Stalinist and neo-tsarist despotism. Critics and potential rivals like journalist Anna Politkovskaya, human rights defender Natalya Estemirova, anti-corruption whistle-blower Sergei Magnitsky, and opposition politician Boris Nemtsov have been killed, and their deaths have been a warning to others not to emulate them. Putin has encouraged racism against minority ethnic groups, resulting in a resurgence of neo-Nazism, and his alliance with the most right-wing section of the Orthodox Church has resulted in legislation facilitating domestic violence against women and the persecution of sexual minorities.

Putin’s goal of making Russia great again includes nostalgia for both the original tsarist empire and its Stalinist version. Within the Russian Federation, this has entailed crushing independence movements, as in Chechnya. Dominating former colonies and invading or annexing parts of those that try to break free from such domination, as in Georgia and Ukraine, are also part of this agenda. Farther afield, it involves keeping far-right dictators such as Bashar al-Assad in power by bombing hospitals, schools, mosques, and markets in areas controlled by democracy activists in revolutionary rebellion against him.⁷

The global regime stemming from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been an obstacle in Putin’s path, hence his attempts to undermine it in ways that are matched only by those of U.S. imperialism. Blocking UN Security Council resolutions that would restrain human rights violations by his own regime or the regimes of his protégés has been one way of doing this, but there are also less visible strategies. One way of

simultaneously bolstering his own autocratic rule in Russia and supporting his despotic allies abroad is to create an impression that democracy doesn't work. This is especially important in neighboring countries, where the success of a democratic experiment could result in Russians trying to emulate it. Thus even where it has proved impossible, at least in the short term, to dominate a whole country like Ukraine, he has obstructed it from moving forward to democratizing and fighting corruption by annexing part of the country (Crimea) and creating a frozen conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Elsewhere in the world too, support for authoritarian regimes helps to promote the narrative that democracy is not the answer. Where substantial sections of the population are sufficiently wedded to the ideals of democracy to be able to impose them on their governments, they have to be undermined by promoting the far right, as Putin does in the United States and Western Europe. This support has ranged from material contributions, through supporting anti-immigrant hate-speech by driving thousands of Syrian refugees toward Europe, to propaganda promoting far-right narratives on social media and the Russian media. The transformation of the TV news channel *Russia Today* to the propaganda channel *RT* illustrates this process perfectly.⁷

Conclusion

We have seen in Russia a trajectory that runs from a democratic revolution in 1917, through an undermining of democracy by the Bolsheviks, to a return to forms of absolutism and imperialism under Stalin—then a renewed attempt at democratization and decolonization under Gorbachev, which ends in renewed despotism and efforts to rebuild Russian imperialism under Putin.

There is ample evidence that Putin presides over a far-right imperialist regime, yet sections of the left still support him, either

explicitly or by spreading his propaganda. Some of these supporters are old-style Stalinists, such as the World Peace Council set up by Stalin and its American section, the U.S. Peace Council.⁸ As in Stalin's time, they influence members of the social-democratic left. Another section can be described as neo-Stalinists, who seem to think that resisting U.S. imperialism entails supporting Putin's Russian imperialism and all his despotic allies. Thus when Russia invaded Ukraine, John Pilger published a series of articles on the Stop the War Coalition website supporting the war and denouncing the Ukrainian uprising as a fascist coup;⁹ Max Blumenthal, who had once supported the Syrian revolution against Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime, did an abrupt U-turn after visiting Moscow in December 2015, and thenceforth parroted Assad's and Putin's propaganda, including the claim that the White Helmets—rescue workers who have all too often lost their lives in airstrikes—were agents of U.S. imperialism and al-Qaida.¹⁰ And the Putin regime's denial of the Bosnian genocide by Serb forces, despite overwhelming evidence that it took place, was echoed in *The Politics of Genocide* by Edward Herman and David Peterson (with a foreword by Noam Chomsky), which accused the Bosnian Muslim victims of lying and killing their own people.¹¹

What is common to all these examples is the whitewashing of regimes engaged in mass crimes and the blanking out or demonization of their civilian victims and popular democratic uprisings. But what is confusing for those who may not be familiar with the situations that are being described is that this is being done by people who are seen to be on the left and who claim to be anti-imperialists. It may be true that they are opponents of U.S. imperialism, but in a situation of interimperial rivalry (in this case between U.S. and Russian imperialism), opposing one side and supporting the other is not genuine anti-imperialism but pseudo-anti-imperialism.

The argument that our task is to oppose

only our own country's imperialism and the regimes it props up is also faulty. In an interconnected world, one imperialism can strengthen another, one authoritarian regime can bolster another. Because of his contempt for democratic institutions, Putin has helped the far right in many countries, including the United States, to put in power authoritarian strongmen who are equally contemptuous of democracy. On the other side, allowing another imperialist power to destroy a democratic uprising against its ally can help an ally of your own imperialist state destroy a democratic struggle that challenges it; thus Assad's demolition of the Syrian uprising has had devastating consequences for "the capital of the Palestinian diaspora" in Yarmouk.¹²

The failure of most mainstream Western media to debunk the false story of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction has resulted in a healthy skepticism toward their reports. But it doesn't follow that all their reports lie, nor that all reports contradicting them tell the truth; what follows is that reports by all sides have to be subjected to critical scrutiny. Distinguishing genuine from fake anti-imperialism requires extensive fact-checking, using multiple sources and especially relying on agencies like Doctors Without Borders and Amnesty International, which also criticize Western powers, and examining whether or not the accounts are internally consistent and consistent over time (for example, looking at the way Russian explanations for the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 changed over time). This is time-consuming and tiresome, but it is important. In such cases, the enemy of my enemy is often equally my enemy, and socialists must stand in solidarity with all victims of mass crimes and all struggles for democracy by working people in all countries. Any kind of support for authoritarian, murderous regimes belongs squarely in the realm of right-wing politics.

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Authoritarianism and Resistance in India

The Fight Against Modi and Hindutva in the Era of COVID-19

SAMANTHA AGARWAL

EDITOR'S NOTE: *New Politics* board member Phil Gasper interviewed Samantha Agarwal in April 2020. The interview was subsequently transcribed and edited for length.

Phil Gasper for New Politics: *You have recently returned from India. You were there during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and you left a few days before the recent lockdown was put in place. Can you tell us about some of these recent events that have defined Indian politics on a national scale for some time now?*

Samantha Agarwal: I flew out from Bombay (Mumbai) on one of the last commercial flights before India's borders were sealed. I was surprised to see that in Bombay, the epicenter of the pandemic in India, the government was not taking any perceptible public safety or social distancing measures while I was there. In fact, right in the neighborhood where I was putting up, there were blowout wedding parties happening almost every night, with thousands of people attending.

Then at the end of March, after two months of almost no federally coordinated response to the pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi suddenly announced a 21-day

lockdown, which entailed closing subnational state borders and suspending all public transportation. And all of this was with less than four-hours' notice!

More than anything, this move has exacerbated the gross inequalities that are characteristic of liberalized India. In India's 1.3 billion population, 800 million people live on less than \$2 a day, and at least 81 percent of the labor force is in the informal sector. Most of these workers are unorganized, and they have very few rights and legal protections.

At the other end, India has 134 billionaires, whose wealth equals the nation's annual operating budget. When the news of the lockdown reached this latter section, wealthy India went out in droves and started hoarding wine and chocolate and other luxury commodities, to nurse their quarantine anxieties.

But, then, what happens to the common person? For example, what happens to the millions of internal migrants, who work for short periods of time, far away from home, while living in temporary settlements or tents that provide them little protection from the elements? How are you supposed to "shelter in place" if you don't have shelter in the first place? Their first instinct, obviously, was to go home—it's a human-enough instinct to want to be in the company of your family during a time of a crisis. But the government, shockingly, made no plan to get these people home.

So, in the absence of public transportation, there were hundreds of people who began walking home, sometimes up to 400

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kilometers. Some of them were too late to reach the state border and were turned back. Many of these people are now being housed in dilapidated shelters in towns where they lack necessary social networks.

Simultaneously, in some cities there were reports of hundreds of people being stranded at train stations—at the Howrah Train Station in Calcutta (Kolkata), for example, migrants were forced to share a single outdoor latrine for multiple days on end. People were literally being crippled by hunger and defecating on themselves.¹ There were other reports of people being hit by cars or run over by trains in their perilous journeys home.²

The whole situation is devastating. Most likely Modi and his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) will make it out of this moment without much loss to their popularity, because these migrants, who literally create the wealth of the nation, are invisible to the public imagination. One can only hope that this crisis, which has brought international attention to their plight, will be an impetus for some change.

NP: *What about the recent protests against the CAA and the National Register of Citizens? What role have they played and how have they been affected by the lockdown?*

SA: The BJP's passage of the NRC and the CAA can be seen as one defining moment in the longer arc of Hindu majoritarian consolidation. The larger motivation behind these two laws is, of course, to deem India's Muslims foreigners and to bring India a step closer to becoming a Hindu-only nation. The notion of India as a Hindu nation (or Hindutva) has been, since the 1950s, one of the main ideological planks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the paramilitary-cultural organization that is also the parent organization to the BJP.

In pursuit of this vision, the government plans to carry out a massive exercise on a national level to determine who is a legal resident and who is not, through a National Register of Citizens, the NRC. It would be

similar to the NRC that has already been rolled out in the northeastern state of Assam, where nearly two million people were essentially left stateless. Now these people are being asked to appeal to so-called "Foreigner's Tribunals." But if you lose your appeal, you can be sent to a detention center—and these detention centers are now cropping up all over the country.

While the process of the NRC on the national level will look somewhat different than in Assam because Assam has a distinct set of regional and ethnic forces, the commonality will be the fact that the people who are most affected will be those who are poor and those who lack citizenship documentation for a variety of reasons. A recent study showed that only about 62 percent of India's population even has a birth certificate, and among the older generations the numbers would be even lower. And, of course, the government knows that Muslims will be disproportionately affected in this situation because next to Dalits (members of the former "untouchable" caste), Muslims are the poorest and the most marginalized social group in Indian society.

The CAA, in contrast to the NRC, is aimed at giving citizenship "back" to people based on religion. It grants refuge to six religious communities, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis, from three different countries, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, while conspicuously excluding Muslims. According to the government's claim, the act is meant to protect persecuted religious minorities in those three countries that I named. But if that's the case, then why does the act not include the Ahmadiyyas or the Hazara Muslims, who are not even considered Muslims in their own countries and whose rights are continuously violated? Why doesn't it include oppressed populations in other neighboring countries like the Tamils in Sri Lanka or the Rohingya Muslims of Burma (Myanmar)?

The rhetorical defense that I've heard from members of the BJP is that Muslims

“have Pakistan and the Middle East,” and the non-Muslims in those countries should therefore be taken in by India. You can only buy this logic if you believe that Muslims are fundamentally oppressors, that there are no ethnic or class divisions in “Muslim society,” and that India is a Hindu state. It’s this last part that is in direct contravention of the Constitution, which says clearly that the Republic of India is a secular nation and will not discriminate against anyone on the basis of religion. It’s a kind of coup against the Constitution that’s happening under Modi.

The upshot of the CAA and the NRC is the unprecedented and sustained protests that they have generated. I think the intensity of the protests has surprised many of us because, while people are rightfully angry about the trashing of the Constitution, the NRC and the CAA are, as I said, part of a much longer process of fascist hegemony-building, which has been underway for decades.

There have been many organizations and individuals who have been speaking out against Hindu majoritarianism over the years. People stood up courageously against the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat, which took place when Modi was the chief minister of that state, and also against the hundreds of atrocities committed by the RSS since Modi came to power in 2014 at the federal level. Some of them even lost their lives, like the activist-journalist Gauri Lankesh.

But none of these moments generated the same amount of spontaneous outrage that we’re seeing now. On the one hand, I think this has to do with the fact that these two legal reforms threaten to upend the lives of so many people at once. On the other hand, I think we have to see it as an expression of discontent that has been festering for many, many years—a pressure cooker which is now exploding.

Altogether within India there are 139 million internal migrants, according to the national census, and over 200 million Dalits and a hundred million Adivasis (or indig-

enous people). All of these populations are incredibly precarious and increasingly dispossessed, and they too will be affected by these Islamophobic laws. That is one reason why the CAA and NRC have inspired a rebellion among these sections, especially Dalits. We’ve seen this in marches and rallies against the CAA and NRC led by the Bhim Army (‘Bhim’ refers to the Dalit liberation leader Bhimrao Ambedkar). These rebellions are particularly threatening to the BJP, because they don’t want Muslims to find solidarity with any section of Indian society that the BJP considers “Hindu.”

Many of the protests are also being led and attended by Muslim women, who in the worldview of the Hindu nationalists have no agency. I attended one of these protest sites in Bombay, where 200 to 500 people, mostly working-class Muslim women, have been sitting in for weeks. Many of the women there told me that this was their first time attending a protest, let alone partaking in any activity outside their homes for a prolonged period of time. These kinds of stories are emerging everywhere, not just in Bombay.

So these developments are extremely positive. Although, using the COVID pandemic as an excuse, the government has evicted many of these protesters, including from Shaheen Bagh (in Delhi), which is the epicenter of the resistance. But I’m optimistic that the uprising will resume very soon, because the anger is so widely and deeply felt right now. It’s not dying down.

NP: Like many of the things that the Modi government has done, the lockdown has been imposed with a very heavy, authoritarian hand. But let’s step back a little bit and talk about the nature of Modi’s political party, the BJP. Some people have described it as fascist. Others think of Modi as India’s version of Donald Trump. How would you describe the nature of this political formation, and how does that illuminate the way in which they have responded to the present crisis?

SA: This is a longstanding debate in India,

and I don't think it will be resolved any time soon, but I'll just give you a sense of some of the contours of the debate. On one side we have liberal commentators like Ramachandra Guha and Amartya Sen, who have long argued that India's democracy will or can act as a bulwark against the rise of authoritarianism and fascism on a large scale.

I remember before Modi's first election in 2014, there were some editorials from this camp that were reasoning that even if Modi and the BJP came to power at the federal level, the state governments would act as a counterweight to Hindutva politics, because enough of the states would not be governed by the BJP. They also argued that if some of the media fell into the hands of the Hindu authoritarians, there would be other voices in the media doggedly pursuing the truth. But I think the last six years under Modi's rule has made a mockery of this argument, frankly, because many of these so-called checks and balances have utterly failed us.

In contrast to the liberal commentators, there is a section of the left that claims that, while the Sangh Parivar (the network of Hindu organizations of which the RSS and the BJP are a part) clearly possesses some fascist tendencies, India is not in a fascist situation—at least, not yet. A fascist situation requires a mass movement, which the Sangh Parivar has successfully built, but it also requires a dictatorship, which they do not have.

People who espouse this view posit that in order for a fascist situation to emerge, there needs to be an economic and social crisis that pushes the national elites to abandon bourgeois democracy.³ This would also be predicated on the perception, or perceived threat, that the working class is growing too powerful and must be crushed.

Others on the left have rejected this view on the grounds that such formulations are based too heavily on the experiences of interwar Europe and cannot simply be mapped onto the case of India or the Sangh Parivar, which is a different form of fascism

with distinct characteristics.⁴

I think that both of these approaches by the left have validity and warrant further thought and debate. That being said, it is unlikely that the Muslim women who are

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sitting in against the CAA and NRC—some of whom have faced down an active shooter—are waiting for the left to resolve this question before they continue their fight. In other words, the resistance against Hindu authoritarianism doesn't rely on us resolving these theoretical dilemmas.

Moreover, whether we call it “fascist” or not, what we know is that the condition of Indian democracy is dire. Press freedom is at a low right now. Activists are being imprisoned, and minorities are being lynched by the RSS in pogroms such as the one that happened in Delhi in February, which resulted in at least 53 deaths (most of whom were Muslims).⁵ People who participate in these pogroms are treated with complete impunity. On top of that, an entire state of 12.5 million people, Kashmir, has been kept under a total lockdown and communications blackout for more than 200 days now.

Most frightening, perhaps, is the fact that the Hindu authoritarians, the Sangh Parivar, also constitute a mass movement, which spans civil society. The RSS, by its own estimate, has around five to six million members and more than 56,000 branches (or *shakhas*) across the country. The Sangh Parivar consists of hundreds of organizations that

penetrate right down to the household level. They have unions, women's organizations, think tanks, educational institutes, service organizations, and more. In this sense I would say that compared to the other new varieties of right-wing authoritarianism—or populism or whatever you want to call it—led by Le Pen or Trump or Bolsonaro, the movement that Modi is leading is perhaps the most advanced of all of them.

NP: *Can you say more about the structure of the BJP? Who is part of its base, and how has the party changed since its inception?*

SA: The BJP was formed in 1980, and since then it has been viewed as a party of the upper castes. Its founding members were mostly Brahmins, and it historically has had a high proportion of support from the upper castes, as compared to the middle and lower castes. I think that makes perfect sense, given its Brahminical worldview.

For example, the RSS, which is the leading cultural organization of the Sangh Parivar, openly aspires to replace the Indian Constitution with the Manusmriti. One of the leading ideologues of the RSS, Madhav Golwalkar, called the Manusmriti “the greatest lawgiver.” The Manusmriti is a religious text where the rules of the caste system are most clearly spelled out. It mandates that the lower castes, the Shudras, meekly serve the upper castes. It specifies a number of rules and punishments to be used essentially to keep lower-caste people subservient. One example of that is if a Shudra man has sex with an upper-caste woman, he can be castrated or put to death. This is a book that the RSS worships. By contrast, Ambedkar, one of the leaders of the Dalit liberation movement and one of the founders of India, used to publicly burn the Manusmriti.

These were and continue to be the ideological bearings of the Sangh Parivar. But I think it's important to understand that for the upper castes it's not simply a devotion to this particular interpretation of Hinduism that

draws them to the Sangh Parivar, it's also the fact that in India the category of caste and the category of class roughly overlap. So, in the mind of the capitalist supporters of the BJP (who are also upper caste) it's in their class interest to control and dominate the poor and laboring castes.

There's also a sort of dilemma that is operating here. Many political scientists posited that the BJP could not possibly establish a base among the majority of India, which is comprised of lower castes—OBCs [Other Backward Classes], Dalits, and Adivasis—given these groups' material interests are directly at odds with the programmatic orientation of the party.⁶

Also, to complicate the story, the BJP was formed in the 1980s, a time when the electoral system in India was being completely shaken up. The Congress Party “system” was in decline, and for the first time in independent India, the lower castes had begun to participate in elections effectively.⁷ In particular, there was a new party formed called the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which explicitly opposed the domination of lower castes by the upper castes and made it a point to expand representation of lower castes.

So, the BJP had a problem—specifically, how could it compete with parties like the BSP, which appealed directly and programmatically to the lower-caste populations? To address this problem, the BJP started to have internal discussions as early, I think, as the early 1990s. Based on these discussions, they experimented with different models to try to attract lower-caste voters, ranging from the cooptation of Dalit leaders and the appropriation of Dalit icons, like Ambedkar, to trying to extend patronage and service networks to Dalits and Adivasis.

But it's only really recently that these strategies have started to bear fruit for the BJP. Recently, in fact, the BJP has expanded its base significantly among the lower castes. It's said that part of the reason for their landslide victory at the federal level in 2019 was

because of a surge in support among Dalits, other lower castes, and, to a lesser extent, Adivasis, who had actually already started supporting the party a decade ago. Interestingly, the BJP meanwhile hasn't alienated its upper-caste core. This was something that the leaders of the BJP were afraid of in their social-engineering experiments, as they called them—in their efforts to try to rope in the lower castes.

NP: *How has the BJP managed to be successful in attracting the lower castes?*

SA: One clue can be found in a new autobiography called *I Could Not Be Hindu*, by Bhanwar Meghwanshi, who was an RSS member and also a Dalit.⁸ He joined the RSS when he was a child and quickly became a dedicated activist. But, gradually, the contradictions emerged for him. Despite the fact that he's this exceptionally capable cadre, he can never be promoted to a higher-level position in the RSS. He wants to become a *pracharak*, a missionary, but eventually he's taken aside by an RSS leader and told, "I personally have no problem with you being a Dalit but others in the organization would have a problem, so it's better not to disturb the peace."

While the author of the autobiography accepts these explanations for a while, he eventually can no longer tolerate the hypocrisy and leaves the RSS. For the author, and perhaps for many other former members of the RSS, the contradiction between the words (that Hindus are all part of one big, united family) and the actions (where some are treated as inferior) are too stark and they can't be reconciled.

But there's another interesting aspect of this autobiography, where the author is enumerating the various explanations or justifications the RSS uses to shut down so-called bothersome questions, like: Why are animals treated better than Dalits under Hinduism? Why, for example, do Hindus worship the dung of cows, but they won't share a meal with Dalits? One such attempt at an explanation

by the RSS is that the "worst" aspects of caste, like untouchability, were imposed by medieval Muslim invaders and were never part of the "original," ancient Hindu practice, which simply viewed the caste system as a means to efficiently divide labor in society.

I found his autobiography interesting because it explains the granular ways in which the RSS tries to ideologically indoctrinate lower-caste people. But there's also another strategy used by the RSS, which has been written about by Anand Teltumbde—another prominent Dalit intellectual, who was recently imprisoned for his activism. He's written about how the BJP is trying to aggressively appropriate the image of Ambedkar.⁹ If you read some of the BJP's texts, they claim that Ambedkar was a Hindu nationalist and that he was impressed by the RSS, for example. Of course, all these stories are baseless, but they've still met with some degree of success in winning over these sections, whose interests are directly at odds with Hindutva.

In addition to these forms of ideological conditioning, there are also material dimensions of Hindutva. In this regard there is growing research, the most important of which is by the political scientist Tariq Thatchil, which suggests that Dalit and Adivasi support for the BJP is incumbent not on, necessarily, the ideological buy-in, but rather because these groups have been steadily receiving reliable services from the BJP's partner organizations—private social service organizations that are affiliated to the Sangh Parivar.¹⁰ The most important ones are Seva Bharati (which mostly targets the urban poor) and Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (which targets Adivasis in remote areas).

Essentially, these organizations embed themselves in areas where there is a high concentration of Adivasis or Dalits and where the welfare system is failing to reach or provide for the people. These organizations will offer health care or education with no strings attached, thereby fulfilling an essential service for the poor. In exchange Dalits and Adivasis

reward the BJP with their votes. Thachil argues that the BJP was able to draw on this strategy for the many years when it wasn't in power either at the federal or the state level because these private networks of service

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don't rely on government funding. They rely on voluntary donations and voluntary labor, which is the hallmark of the Sangh Parivar.

Of course, now that the BJP has taken power, and they have a very strong electoral mandate, they're also using the state's financial resources to enlarge their support among these sections. There are a few initiatives that seem to have been more effective than others in this regard. There's a financial inclusion program, which was started in Modi's first term, an affordable housing program (the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana), and then there's a program that provides gas fuel connections for cooking to poor people. They've also provided public goods, such as the construction of roads and electricity.

Some analysis suggests that these programs did indeed help enlarge the BJP's support in the 2019 election, particularly among large sections of the rural population, including the rural proletariat and Dalits. I still think the fact that you see these classes giving their votes to the BJP is quite puzzling, particularly because in Modi's first term the economic conditions didn't unambiguously favor them. In fact, unemployment was at a 40-year high in Modi's first term. The government originally promised to create 20 million jobs and created maybe 1 or 2 percent of that. On top of that, in 2016, Modi initi-

ated a demonetization initiative, where 86 percent of the currency in circulation was suddenly declared illegitimate, bringing on financial catastrophe for small producers and poor people.

But perhaps as far as voting behavior is concerned, these new welfare programs and private sources of welfare have in a sense overshadowed the economic failures of the BJP, at least temporarily. I've seen some analysis that suggests it might be explained by the novelty of these programs. Some of them were newly created, while others were inherited from the previous Congress regime and simply rebranded. But Modi has also spent an unprecedented amount of money just touting the success of these programs through advertising. All of these variables need to be examined with much more in-depth historical and sociological study.

NP: That's fascinating and very important. They're very opportunistic, and, of course, because there's no coherent, plausible opposition at the moment it's easier for them to pull people in their direction. So, let's turn to the opposition and the left. How are various left forces intervening at the moment, and what steps do you think need to be taken to consolidate the opposition—the opposition around the CAA and to Hindutva in general? How can a viable political left be built in India?

SA: The organized parliamentary left in India, as probably in most of the world, has been in a long crisis, which spans decades. In many parts of the country, unions have been reduced to bureaucratic appendages of industrial management and have been unable to keep up with the rapid structural changes in the neoliberal economy. The proportion of temporary and casual or migrant laborers has shot way up compared to the permanent workers, who typically constituted the core union membership. Politically, the left really only viably contests for power in one state, which is Kerala.

But as far as the CAA and the NRC

protests go, there's a lot of potential for the left to begin to rebuild. In Kerala the Left Front government led by the CPI(M)—the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—has been carrying out regular rallies and protest meetings across the state, even in small towns and villages, where they're educating people about how their rights will be affected. They even organized a 600-kilometer-long human-chain, where people took a pledge to protect the Constitution against the Hindutva onslaught.

But the parliamentary left's presence has been more or less limited to Kerala and a few university campuses when it comes to their intervention in this particular political moment. And in these sit-ins, as I was talking about, where Muslim women are putting their lives on the line, very rarely do we see the parliamentary left showing up, organizing people, and providing resources. I think that is a missed opportunity.

In order for the left to constitute a real challenge to the rising Hindutva tide, it has to see these spaces as opportunities, not just to expand its own agenda but also to learn. I also think the left would benefit from a deeper engagement with anti-oppression activists who have been urging it to expand its definition of class struggle beyond the point of production to include struggles, not only for citizenship, but also against caste oppression, or against land grabs, or in support of #MeToo-type movements—what feminists call struggles around social reproduction. These are the areas where, I think, India has seen the most vibrant resistance in recent years.

So, the role of the left has to be first and foremost to listen to the members of these struggles, because, frankly, the left has been late to the game. They have to work with

these various groups who have been involved in these struggles, to build solidarity, to build trust. If they do this, I believe the left could play an important role in uniting these groups to build a larger counter-hegemonic force. This will be a long and drawn-out process, but, unfortunately, as the right tends to understand better than the left, there are really no shortcuts when you organize to change the course of history.

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China and the United States: A New Cold War

ASHLEY SMITH AND KEVIN LIN

THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA ARE locked in a spiraling conflict over everything from the pandemic to trade, investment, high tech, geopolitics, and military hegemony in Asia. “We’re essentially in the beginnings of a Cold War,” declared Orville Schell, the director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the Asia Society. “We are on a downward slide into something increasingly adversarial with China.”¹

Wang Huiyao, president of Beijing’s Center for China and Globalization, warned that “the level of trust between China and the United States is at its lowest point since diplomatic ties were first established in 1979.” He is worried this means that “the boom years of globalization will be over, and we might see the global system breaking into two parts. That would greatly slow down global growth, and developing countries would have to side with one of the two camps.”²

This new imperial conflict is precisely what the United States had aimed to prevent after the end of the last Cold War when

George Bush Sr. announced the rise of a “New World Order.” The United States had attempted to superintend this new order as the unrivaled hegemon, imposing neoliberalism on the states of the world, overseeing corporate globalization, and buttressing the situation with international and economic institutions it largely controlled. Now that project lies in tatters. Washington has suffered relative imperial decline, China has become its rising rival, and global capitalism has entered its deepest crisis since the Great Depression.

These new conditions will deepen the conflict between the two powers, regardless of the results of the upcoming U.S. presidential election. Presumptive Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden has adopted a position just as hawkish against China as the Trump administration. With interimperial rivalry returned for the first time since the end of the Cold War, and with each side whipping up dueling nationalisms, the left will have to stake out a clear position of international solidarity from below against both Washington and Beijing.

The Roots of the Rivalry

While Donald Trump has certainly intensified the conflict, its roots are deeper than the policies of this or that administration on either side. They lie in the neoliberal boom, the strategic failures of U.S. imperialism, the Great Recession, and China’s increasing weight as an economic and geopolitical power.

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These changes brought an end to the unipolar world that the United States secured after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Back then the United States possessed enormous unrivaled power; its dollar was the global currency, its economy was far larger than any other, and its military, with a budget larger than the next ten states combined, was without a rival. Washington developed a grand strategy to lock in its hegemony by incorporating all the world's states into a neoliberal world order of free trade globalization.

It used the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to pry open the world's economies, established the World Trade Organization to cohere an international free trade system, and deployed the U.S. military often, through the UN and NATO, to police so-called rogue states and "stabilize" societies wrecked by its neoliberal policies. Throughout, it sought to prevent the rise of any peer competitor.

Three developments in the world system undid Washington's unrivaled dominance. First, the boom from the early 1980s to 2008 restructured global capitalism.³ It produced new centers of capital accumulation, most importantly China, which has transformed itself from a marginal player in the world economy to the workshop of the world. The economic development of it and other states enabled them to become more geopolitically assertive.

Second, the United States suffered what General William Odom called the greatest strategic disaster in its history with its invasion and occupation of Iraq, which bogged it down in endless counterinsurgency warfare. That compromised the U.S. ambition to place the Middle East and its strategic energy reserves under Washington's thumb and thereby position the United States to bully its potential rivals like China, which depend on the region for oil and natural gas.

Third, the Great Recession disproportionately hammered the U.S. economy. The

ruling class did manage to drag it back from the brink of collapse with a combination of austerity and stimulus, but they have not been able to trigger a new boom. Indeed, the world economic system, and the United States and EU in particular, were locked in a global slump characterized by sluggish expansions alternating with deep recessions.

China, by contrast, managed to sustain its massive expansion with an enormous stimulus package of its own. Indeed, its boom sustained the economies of numerous countries, from Australia to Brazil, that export raw materials to meet the demand of China's manufacturing industries, construction of whole new cities, and building of modern infrastructure to support this development.

All of this led to the relative decline of U.S. imperialism. It no longer oversees a unipolar world order as it did in the 1990s and early 2000s. Instead, an asymmetric multipolar world order has emerged. The United States remains the dominant state power with the largest economy and military and the greatest geopolitical influence, but it now faces an imperial rival in the form of China as well as Russia, which has outsized geopolitical power because of its military might, and a host of regional powers like Iran, all of which are jockeying for advantage in an increasingly conflict-ridden state system.

The Rise of China

In this new order, Beijing has asserted itself as a global player. President Xi Jinping, who came to power in 2012, abandoned his predecessors' cautious grand strategy of developing the national economy and avoiding conflicts with other states and announced that his regime would instead pursue a "Chinese Dream" of reasserting China's rightful place as a great power.

Since this announcement, Xi has focused on turning China's economic might into geopolitical muscle. He launched the \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative infrastruc-

ture project in 2013. Beijing is exporting its industrial overcapacity to construct overland and oversea transit routes throughout Eurasia and parts of Africa, establishing itself in the process as the hub of the world economy.

Like other imperialist powers, China has financed all this development by extending loans to countries mostly in the Global South. As *Harvard Business Review* documents, “The Chinese state and its subsidiaries have lent about \$1.5 trillion in direct loans and trade credits to more than 150 countries around the globe. This has turned China into the world’s largest official creditor—surpassing traditional, official lenders such as the World Bank, the IMF, or all OECD creditor governments combined.”⁴

Xi is also determined to lead his economy’s long march up the capitalist value chain through another initiative, called China 2025. While China officially abandoned the project to avoid the appearance of conflict with the United States, it is still pursuing all of the project’s original goals. On May 20, *Bloomberg* reported that China will invest \$1.4 trillion over the next five years to fund national champions in high tech, especially 5G, to compete with rivals in the United States, Europe, and Japan, who until now

Like other imperialist powers,
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have dominated that sphere of the system. All these powers are now locked in competition in high tech not only for profit but also for its increasingly significant military role in cyberwarfare.

Based on its economic power, China

has modernized its military and used it to pursue expansionist aims in the Asia-Pacific. Xi has built up the country’s navy, deployed ships, established militarized islands in the South and East China seas to control shipping lanes, claimed undersea oil and natural gas reserves, and asserted rights to fisheries. Finally, China has become much more assertive geopolitically in every arena, from climate change negotiations to deliberations in the UN Security Council.

The Contradictions of U.S. Imperialism

China’s rise and the relative decline of the United States has thrown Washington’s imperial strategy into a quandary. In contrast to the Soviet Union, the United States is now faced with a geopolitical rival with which it is deeply integrated economically. U.S. multinationals use China as an export processing platform, and they covet the enormous Chinese market. On top of that, the U.S. state is deeply in debt to Beijing, which holds vast reserves of treasury bonds. This financial dependency famously drove Hillary Clinton to complain, “How do you deal toughly with your banker?”

Before Xi’s turn to imperial assertiveness, the U.S. policy toward China had been a combination of containment and engagement, or what analysts call “conengagement.” The United States tried to incorporate China and pressure it to abandon the state-capitalist organization of its economy and adopt free-market capitalism. At the same time, Washington remained vigilant because of Beijing’s reluctance to fully follow these dictates.

As a result, the United States shifted back and forth between emphasizing the two poles of the “conengagement” policy. As its last advocate, Obama tilted the United States decisively toward containment with his so-called Pivot to Asia. He aimed to extract the United States from its occupations in the Middle East and reorient U.S. imperialism toward projecting its power in the Asia-Pacific.

Obama hoped to integrate Asia economically into Washington's neoliberal order through the ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, which excluded China. He also aimed to shift 60 percent of the U.S. Navy to the Asia-Pacific to deter Beijing's military expansion. Finally, he planned to shore up and expand Washington's historic alliances, forged over decades of hegemony in Asia, and establish new ones like Vietnam.

Obama's pivot failed. The United States remained bogged down in the Middle East, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement never came up for a ratification vote, and U.S. alliances frayed as states doubted Washington's commitment to the region and opted for balancing between the two rivals. Thus, U.S. imperial strategy foundered in confusion over what to do about China's new assertiveness.

Trump's 'America First' Nationalism

The Trump administration, however erratically, has attempted to implement a new strategy of "illiberal hegemony" to solve Washington's imperial puzzle over how to confront China. This has four dimensions. First, Trump aims to strengthen the security state by policing its borders and surveilling oppressed people, especially immigrants and Muslims but also Chinese students in U.S. universities.

Second, he promises to onshore manufacturing and shift U.S. supply chains away from China. Third, he is shifting away from his predecessors' focus on the so-called War on Terror to "Great Power Rivalry," specifically against China. He has reoriented defense plans for a new buildup with that confrontation in mind. Fourth, he wants to put "America First" and establish a transactional relationship with both U.S. allies and adversaries.

Applied to China, this new imperial strategy moved the United States toward a New Cold War with Beijing. In economics, Trump has tried to batter down China

through a trade war. He wants to stop forced technology transfer between U.S. and Chinese companies, compel the privatization of Beijing's state-capitalist industry, open the country's markets even more to U.S. multinationals, and stop China's state support for national champions in high tech like Huawei.

But up until recently Trump's policy—like that of his predecessors—has been shot through with a contradiction. He has vacillated between, on the one hand, threats to decouple the two economies, forcing supply chains out of China, and on the other hand, calls for China to open up to U.S. investments and sales. Nevertheless, his administration's predilection is clearly for decoupling.

In geopolitics, Trump has tried to pressure U.S. allies to ban Huawei from their 5G infrastructure as a national security threat. And he is trying to shore up U.S. alliances state by state to prevent China from using its economic might to draw Eurasia under its influence. To enforce all of this, the United States is building up its defense forces to prepare for war with China, increasing its naval patrols in the Asia-Pacific, and selling more weapons to its allies including Taiwan.

Trump's Pandemic Blame Game

The pandemic and global recession have dramatically intensified the rivalry between the two powers. Both countries face economic disaster; China's economy, which had slowed to 6.1 percent growth last year, will contract by 7 percent this year, and the U.S. economy, which had been crawling along at 2.3 percent growth, will shrink by 6 percent in 2020. Amidst the crisis, each state has whipped up nationalism to solidify domestic support for even sharper conflict over geopolitics, economics, and military supremacy.

The Trump administration, which bungled the U.S. response to the pandemic at the cost of tens of thousands of avoidable deaths, has tried to deflect blame for the carnage onto China. Trump and others repeatedly called

COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” or “Wuhan virus” and peddled conspiracy theories that it was leaked from a research lab in Wuhan. His administration has even allowed U.S. states to override China’s sovereign immunity and sue it for compensation. Missouri has already blazed the trail, bringing a lawsuit against Beijing in April.

The Republican Party is lock-step behind Trump in China-bashing. Its leaders drafted a 57-page memo with talking points blaming China for the pandemic. *Politico* reports that they stress “three main lines of assault: That China caused the virus ‘by covering it up,’ that Democrats are ‘soft on China,’ and that Republicans will ‘push for sanctions on China for its role in spreading this pandemic.’”⁵

Steven Bannon, the dark prince of the alt-right and Trump’s former chief strategist, predicted that in the upcoming presidential election, “Trump’s campaign will be about China, China, China,” and, in a fit of wishful thinking, “hopefully the fact that he rebooted the economy.”⁶ Thus, Trump and the extreme nationalist, right-wing, anti-China forces have tried to play the disaster for their own advantage and press for their New Cold War.

The Democratic Party has enthusiastically joined the Republicans’ China-bashing. The Democratic National Committee developed a strategy document of their own, targeting Trump for absurd flattery of China. The party’s presumptive nominee for president, Joe Biden, has actually tried to outflank the Republicans on the right. He released an ad that, instead of criticizing the crumbling health care infrastructure in the United States, focused its attack on China, claiming that “Trump rolled over for the Chinese.”⁷

Such China-bashing is not restricted to establishment Democrats. Three self-described progressives argue in a February *Foreign Affairs* article provocatively entitled “The Left Should Play the China Card” that “stable, managed competition with Beijing is both necessary to secure U.S. national interests and likely to be beneficial for progressives.

The left should seize the opportunity afforded by foreign rivalry to advance a progressive domestic agenda—embracing an ambitious program of investment, innovation, social inclusion, and national renewal.”

Bernie Sanders of course has not stooped to such lows. But truth be told, while he has advocated radical domestic reforms, he has not paired those with similarly radical positions on international conflicts, especially in relation to China. Sanders has adopted a protectionist position against Beijing, blaming it for U.S. job losses, and also supported the formation of a “progressive international” against it and other authoritarian states. Thus, both capitalist parties have adopted extreme nationalistic positions against China.

Washington Flirts with Decoupling

Trump has channeled all of this into escalating the conflict to a fever pitch, going so far as to threaten to cut off relations with China and decouple the two economies. As the infamous “Dr. Doom” of bourgeois economists, Nouriel Roubini, put it in a May interview in *New York Magazine*, “We have a full-scale trade war, technology war, financial war, monetary war, technology, information, data, investment, pretty much anything across the board. ... So, decoupling is happening. We’re going to have splinternet. It’s only a matter of how fast.”

Trump is considering nixing the “phase one” trade deal he struck to lower tariffs on China because of its failure to follow through on its promise to buy U.S. farm exports. He has used national security to try to force U.S. high-tech firms to sever their relationships with Chinese companies. For example, he issued a new rule that bars high-tech companies that use U.S. technology, like Taiwan’s TSMC, from selling their semiconductors to Huawei. Huawei hoped to put a stop to this, declaring that the rule puts its very existence in jeopardy and with it much of the 5G infrastructure in the world.

But Trump and his GOP hawks will push it through. Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse celebrated Trump's edict, railing, "The United States needs to strangle Huawei. Modern wars are fought with semiconductors, and we were letting Huawei use our American designs. This is pretty simple: Chip companies that depend on American technology can't jump into bed with the Chinese Communist party. This rule is long overdue."⁸ As part of this campaign, the United States has expanded its blacklist to include 24 more companies and universities and another nine institutions, which it accuses of complicity with human rights violations in Xinjiang.

Trump has also opened a new front in the economic conflict by barring various international financial transactions. He forced the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, which manages \$600 billion in government workers' retirement funds, to stop buying stocks in Chinese companies. On May 20, the *New York Times* worried that this move "could roil financial markets in the United States and China, as well as cross border investment."

Finally, Trump has intensified pressure on U.S. corporations to divert their supply chains out of China. His U.S. Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, penned an op-ed in the *New York Times* that called for the decoupling of the two economies. He railed against corporations offshoring their production, denounced free trade agreements for eroding U.S. sovereignty and hemorrhaging American jobs, announced that reflexive offshoring is over, and declared the path to prosperity is the same for companies as it is for workers: bringing jobs back to America.

Whether corporations will follow his dictates is another matter. U.S. multinationals remain deeply integrated with China both for production and sales. Most Apple products are manufactured in China, and the country remains one of the largest markets for U.S. corporations like Ford. Nevertheless, the combination of the global recession and Trump's nationalism is driving a wedge deeper

between the two economies.

These pressures are having an impact. On May 11, the *Financial Times* reported, "Chinese direct investment in the United States dropped to the lowest level since 2009 last year—down from \$2.7 billion a quarter

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in 2018 and \$8 billion a quarter in the boom years of 2016 and 2017—amid souring bilateral ties." And "Chinese venture capitalist investment into the United States also fell off a cliff, slumping from \$4.7 billion in 2018 to \$2.6 billion last year." But in a sign of the persisting integration of the two economies, the paper found that "U.S. investments into China showed considerable resilience" and that "a majority of U.S. companies operating in China did not plan to move production and supply chains out of the country."

Still the trajectory is clear enough to lead the vanguard magazine of neoliberalism, the *Economist*, to predict a contraction of international trade, disintegration of global supply chains, a rise in protectionism, and restrictions on international capital flows. They concluded their article on May 14 saying, "Wave goodbye to the greatest era of globalization—and worry about what is going to take its place."

Warmongering and Sinophobia

Even more ominously, the United States has ratcheted up military tension with China. The Trump administration and U.S. allies—most importantly Australia—deployed a flotilla of naval ships to challenge China in the South China Sea over competing claims for control

of islands, fisheries, shipping lanes, and underwater drilling rights for oil and natural gas.

Trump has pressed ahead with retooling the U.S. military for great-power confrontation, specifically with China. He withdrew the United States from the Intermediate-

The Republican Party is lock-step behind Trump in China-bashing....The Democratic Party has enthusiastically joined the Republicans' China-bashing.

range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia so that he could build more nuclear weapons to close the so-called missile gap with China in land-based cruise and ballistic missiles. He is also ramping up plans to make high-tech weapons to win a possible war with China.⁹

As part of its Indo-Pacific strategy, the Trump administration intends to deploy these weapons throughout the region. One of the most threatening moves it has made against China is its increased weapon sales to Taiwan, which Beijing considers a rogue province. Last year the United States sold a \$2.2 billion package of F-16 fighter jets, M1A2t Abrams tanks, and portable Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Taipei. And it just announced plans to sell Taiwan 18 submarine-launched torpedoes for \$180 million and promised further sales of coastal missile defense systems, spy drones, and technology to aid intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.¹⁰

The United States will also bully states to stop them from drifting into the Chinese sphere of influence. And it will not hesitate to orchestrate military coups to replace hostile regimes with pliant ones in order to bring states back into its orbit. In fact, an op-ed in *Bloomberg News* in May predicted

that the “China rivalry may put the United States back in the coup business.” Of course, it actually never left it, so it would only be ramping up.

To justify this militarism, the U.S. ruling class has whipped up nationalist and xenophobic hostility to China. They have racialized the pandemic, portraying not just the Chinese government but the Chinese people as enemies. As a result, they have opened a new phase of anti-Chinese racism, including racism against Chinese- and Asian-Americans.

This nationalist campaign is having a dramatic impact on popular consciousness. The Pew Center reported on April 21 that 91 percent of Americans believe that the world is better off with the United States as its leading power, 71 percent have no confidence in Xi, 66 percent hold an unfavorable view of China, and 62 percent see it as a major threat to the United States. This Sinophobia has triggered a tidal wave of hate crimes against Asians, with over 1,500 incidents and climbing since March.¹¹

Trump even institutionalized this bigotry in his pandemic policy. He imposed an early travel ban on China, but not on Europe, with disastrous results. It was Europe, not China, that was source of the outbreak in New York City, which quickly spread through the northeast and the rest of the country.

China Parries and Postures as an Alternative

China has parried Trump's attacks, postured as a defender of the existing global order, and at the same time prepared for even great rivalry with the United States. Its first step has been to try to flip the script on its own disastrous mishandling of the pandemic.

China initially suppressed information about the outbreak, disciplined doctor Li Wenliang, who later died from COVID-19, for posting about it on social media, and thereby enabled the outbreak to spread from

Wuhan internationally. After the crisis was clear for all to see, the state locked down the city, imposed domestic travel bans, and mobilized its state resources to address the health emergency, building hospitals, conducting testing, and isolating those who contracted the disease.¹²

Faced with the Trump administration's unrelenting attacks and slander, hardliners in the regime rolled out their own set of conspiracy theories, blaming the United States for releasing the virus. For example, Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian tweeted that the U.S. Army might have brought it to Wuhan.¹³ Like Trump, Zhao and the "wolf warrior" diplomats hoped to deflect blame for the catastrophe on to their rival.

After the regime successfully controlled the initial outbreak, it went on the offensive to restore damage done to its reputation. It unleashed a domestic propaganda campaign celebrating its successes in order to reconsolidate its popular base of support in the country. It has whipped up Chinese nationalism just like Trump has whipped up U.S. nationalism.

China also has tried to rehabilitate its international reputation by mobilizing its enormous economic power to help address the pandemic. It sent ventilators to Italy and personal protective equipment to Iran and Serbia, while Jack Ma, the billionaire founder of Alibaba, delivered tests and masks to the United States and has promised to do the same for all of Africa's 54 countries.

Taking advantage of Trump's failure to coordinate an international response, China has used its pandemic efforts to project itself as an alternative leader in the world system. Thus, while Trump pulled funding and potentially U.S. membership from the World Health Organization, China increased funding for it. As Jude Blanchette, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, notes, "We are seeing version 2.0 of the assertiveness Beijing exhibited following the 2008 global financial crisis. It is a result of the conviction of their rising power versus

a West in decline."¹⁴

But rather than pose a frontal challenge to the United States, China has positioned itself as the one demanding collaboration even as they compete. Beijing rightly judges that it cannot supplant the United States now. So, the same Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Zhao Lijian, who spread the bizarre conspiracy theory against the United States stated, "Stable development of China-U.S. relations serves the fundamental interests of both countries. The two sides should strengthen anti-epidemic cooperation, win the war against the epidemic, treat patients, and resume economic production. But this requires the United States to meet China halfway."¹⁵

Matching Washington's Militarism

At the same time, though, China recognizes such cooperation may no longer be in the cards, and it is gearing up for a much more assertive geopolitical, economic, and military stance. As one commentator notes, "There is a major reassessment of the U.S.-China interdependence underway. ... Even if Xi might like to temporarily de-escalate the trade and technology conflicts to reduce pressure on the Chinese economy, there is now powerful momentum behind what we might call a 'security first' future."¹⁶

Beijing is pushing to develop its own internal market to insulate it from U.S. economic pressures. The *South China Post* documents that "exports as a percentage of China's gross domestic product (GDP) fell to 17.4 percent in 2019 compared to 36.04 percent in 2006. Imports fell from 23.37 percent of GDP at their highest point in 2011 to 14.45 percent last year. Trade in goods accounted for 64.4 percent of the Chinese economy in 2006, World Bank data show, compared to 32 percent last year."¹⁷

Confident in this internal economic potential, China has matched Washington's geopolitical bullying in kind. "The mindset

now is more to coerce counterparts to respect China's interests as cooperative security is seen as less and less effective," said Zhao Tong, a senior fellow at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy in Beijing.¹⁸ Already China has disciplined lesser powers for crossing it. For example, it banned import of red meat from four Australian abattoirs to punish Canberra for calling for an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19.

Beijing has stood up to Washington's military posturing. It has no intention of backing down to the United States and conceding its claims to its projected sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific. In April, it deployed its own naval vessels in the South China Sea and similarly deployed a flotilla led by its aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, in waters close to Taiwan, provoking Taipei to scramble its warships.

China is preparing to respond to Trump's plans to deploy new missiles in the region. *Reuters* reported May 6 that Senior Colonel Wu Qian had warned last October that Beijing would "not stand by" if Washington deployed land-based, long-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific and that China promised to increase military spending by 6.6 percent this year to fund the new arms race.

Repressing Dissent and Bashing Immigrants

China has taken advantage of the pandemic to crack down on dissent in Hong Kong as well as Xinjiang and Tibet. It pushed the Hong Kong government to arrest leading figures of the pro-democracy movement, including former lawmakers.¹⁹ Xi also planned to enact a new national security law for Hong Kong that will treat all political dissent as "treason, secession, sedition, and subversion" against the Chinese government. Even more ominously, this law opens the door for Beijing to deploy its national security forces to arrest and jail all sorts of activists under the cover of defending the Chinese state against "foreign-

backed terrorists."²⁰

Similarly, Xi will brook no dissent in Tibet as well as Xinjiang, where the regime has built a massive surveillance apparatus and interned more than one million Uighur Muslims in concentration camps. With the regime looking to develop its internal economy and market in the country's western provinces, it will double down on its repression of this oppressed nation and national minority.

This crackdown will produce resistance in these areas, perhaps most importantly in Hong Kong, which was rocked last year by a democracy movement that regularly put millions of people into the streets on mass marches. Already, thousands have hit the streets in opposition to Beijing's new national security law, and more will join them in the coming months. Hong Kong along with Taiwan will likely become the biggest flashpoints in the rivalry between Washington and Beijing.

Despite the resistance in Hong Kong, Xi's nationalist campaign has stabilized his domestic support. In fact, Cornell professor Jessica Chen Weiss told the *Financial Times* in May that his handling of the pandemic and geopolitical conflict has "strengthened Xi's grasp on power, despite the shockwave that the outbreak initially sent through the system."

But this nationalism has a dark side—xenophobia. Just like the United States, China has repressed immigrants, tightened border restrictions, and implied foreigners are responsible for re-introducing the virus. This scapegoating has triggered widespread discrimination and hate crimes against immigrants, especially those from African countries.

Death Rattle of the Neoliberal World Order

We have thus entered a New Cold War between the United States and China. The pandemic, global recession, and the unravel-

ling of Washington's neoliberal world order will stoke this rivalry over the next decade. Pre-existing trends are accelerating: U.S. decline, increased Chinese assertiveness, growing interstate conflict, and tilts toward protectionism against globalization.

In a stark article in *Foreign Affairs*, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd predicts there will be "slow but steady drift toward international anarchy across everything from international security to trade and pandemic management. With nobody directing traffic, various forms of rampant nationalism are taking the place of order and cooperation. The chaotic nature of national and global responses to the pandemic thus stands as a warning of what could come on an even broader scale."

Amidst this crisis, Rudd argues, "Strategic rivalry will now define the entire spectrum of the U.S.-Chinese relationship—military, economic, financial, technological, ideological—and increasingly shape Beijing and Washington's relationships with third countries." While this trajectory is clear, there remain counter-tendencies that will mitigate any open confrontation between the two powers.

First, China remains weaker and unprepared for now to supplant the United States from its dominant position. While it is rising as an economic superpower, it remains dependent on the United States for high-tech research and design and its currency cannot supplant the dollar as the global reserve. Its military, while regionally strong, cannot match the United States in global scope. And geopolitically, it has been deeply discredited by the pandemic and it is increasingly resented by countries deeply in debt to it.²¹ Therefore, it is likely to shrink back from direct confrontation, continuing to build its power to compete while it calls for cooperation.

Second, both countries' capitalist classes remain deeply integrated, again further dampening open conflict. Any decoupling

of the two economies remains in the earliest phases. Apple, one of the most significant U.S. corporations, has only just begun to consider diverting some of its production in mainland

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hostility to China.

China to other countries like Vietnam.

Finally, since both powers possess and are building bigger nuclear arsenals, any military conflict would end in mutual destruction. Thus, in similar and different ways to the last Cold War, conflict will be pushed into battles over other countries through proxies and allies and into "geo-economics," with each trying to carve out clearer spheres of influence. But, the crisis and its tendency to intensify nationalism, spur protectionism on the grounds of national security, and reorient supply chains into spheres of influence are driving the United States and China toward classic interimperial conflict.

Neither Washington nor Beijing, but International Socialism

The China-U.S. rivalry will become a pivotal and unavoidable issue for the left. In both states, the ruling classes—and especially their right-wing hardliners—will turn to nationalism to deflect blame for the deep crisis in the system on to their rivals and will rally their working classes behind their respective imperial projects. The left must chart an alternative path of working-class solidarity against both the United States and China.

In the United States, the left's first and foremost obligation is, to paraphrase the German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht, to

oppose the main enemy, our own imperialist state. It remains the biggest enemy of peace, equality, and democracy throughout the world. If anyone doubts this statement, look at the catastrophes the United States wrought in Vietnam in the 1960s and Iraq in the 2000s.

But in opposing the U.S. state, we should not support the Chinese state. This is an understandable temptation given the Trump administration's transparently cynical exploitation of the pandemic to attack China. Yet we must resist adopting the disastrous logic of "my enemy's enemy is my friend."

The Chinese ruling class and its state, while a lesser power compared to the United States, is no less capitalist and imperialist. It exploits its working class and peasantry, oppresses nations and national minorities like the Tibetans and Uighurs, and projects its power against the United States and throughout the developing world. Instead of supporting this oppressive state, we should align ourselves with workers and oppressed people in China who have organized, protested, and gone on strike for their rights and improvements in their wages and working conditions.

That is the only way to build international solidarity between workers and oppressed groups in each state. In the United States, we must win workers away from the siren song of economic nationalism, sung by both the right-wing nationalists and the liberal and social democratic protectionists, that will only bind us to our bosses and their state by painting Chinese workers as the main threat to jobs and wages.

We must also work with Asian-American groups who have mobilized to oppose Trump's China-bashing and racism. The Chinese-American community has been directly impacted by the rhetoric and actions of the U.S. state and is increasingly moving to push back against the U.S.-China rivalry. In a global economy, we have no choice but to organize from below across borders against both imperialist states, that is, the politics of genuine anti-imperialism and international

socialism.

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“Campism” and the “New” (Anti-) Imperialisms

BRYANT WILLIAM SCULOS

INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL DEBATES are the site of difficult, imperfect choices that are not amenable to entirely ethical or uncompromising decision-making or harmless actions. This is not to say that political practice cannot or should not be criticized from an ethical perspective or judged for the decision-making processes or consequences of particular actions. But it is to say that sometimes we are indeed compelled by various circumstantial forces to determine the lesser of two evils and act accordingly. When we are in a situation where we feel compelled to make such a choice, we must do so reflectively, and, as Rosa Luxemburg implored of all revolutionary socialists, never make a virtue out of a necessity.

What this exploratory essay aims to offer, building on the above premise, is that the most influential approaches to imperialism—campisms,¹ world-systems theories, and so-called “new” imperialisms—all share a problematic binary logic that undermines progress toward a genuinely democratic international-

ist socialism. While poststructuralists and postmodernists of various kinds offer a more philosophical critique of all binary logics, this essay, while informed by those arguments, makes a different kind of critique. The problem is not that the dualist logic of the most prominent articulations of (anti-)imperialism violates some anti-essentialist dogma, but instead, more directly that it is empirically imprecise and politically counterproductive. Put differently, the argument here, building on the critique of (theories of) imperialism developed by William I. Robinson,² is that any approach to (anti-)imperialism that reproduces the idea that there is a monolithic Global North, developed world, first world, the West, core, and so on that exists in an imperialistic relationship with a similarly monolithic (but not necessarily homogenous) Global South, developing world, third world, the East or non-West, periphery, and so on, ensures that socialists will continually be compelled to embrace human-rights violating, anti-democratic, pro-capitalist, and indeed imperialistic regimes, so long as they are from the Global South, periphery, non-West, developing world, third world, and so on. That is to say, a supposedly anti-imperialist reason becomes an imperialist reason.

While this essay is polemical and therefore itself engages in a degree of simplification and reductionism, it is important to note that not all of the “binary” theories of imperialism are equally binaristic, nor are they all forms of campism in the same way. However, they all, to varying degrees, have the implicit tendency

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to pit working classes in different parts of the world against one another, diminishing the propensity toward the development of global solidarity and transnational democratic movements, and, perhaps worst of all, abet the forces of capitalism—an entirely anti-socialist (or at least anti-Marxian) position.

Campism, a category of political theories of, or strategic approaches to, imperialism and, ostensibly, socialist anti-imperialism, is rooted in the necessity to make a choice—to pick sides. The problem is that “socialist” proponents of campism offer little empirical coherence or rationale for their choice of sides, and they often commit the sin of making a virtue out of what would, to others, perhaps, be simply a tactical necessity. However, at their worst, campists can also advocate, or incidentally support, imperialism in the guise of opposing a “greater imperialism.” Usually this means opposing everything and anything U.S. foreign policy-related, regardless of the political character of the “other side.”

Imperialism Without an Imperium

The most compelling of the contemporary theories of imperialism (the most recent of which are often referred to as “new imperialisms”) are those that build on world-systems theory and theories of uneven and combined development (for example, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Ellen Meiksins Wood, David Harvey, John Smith, John Bellamy Foster, and Intan Suwandi).³ For all of these thinkers and their impressive political scholarship, with all of the differences between them, generally speaking it is the particular relationships among and between nation-states that produce the world-system that can be characterized as “imperialism.” More specifically, the various arguments boil down to the claim that the economically advanced countries exercise domination over the less economically developed countries in the world. While the conceptual geographic specificity of the Global North is rarely clari-

fied with regard to why these nations should be treated as a coherent collective whole, the theoretical argument is that the Global North (or countries within it) similarly extract value and profit from advantageous trade arrangements with the governments of Global South countries and from the generally lower-paid

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wage workers in the region. Furthermore, these approaches generally understand that the use of military force by (or even the near-universal presence of the military of) the United States serves the specific interests of the Global North in general, and the United States more so as the hegemonic power within the Global North.

Conversely, for Hardt and Negri, the post-Marxist foils for many of these more classically Marxist, dichotomous theories, this is no longer the world we live in. For them it is better characterized as a deterritorialized, networked empire that co-constitutes an also deterritorialized, emergently networked multitude (a poststructural reformation of the relational concepts of the bourgeoisie and proletariat).⁴ Suffice it to say, more traditional Marxists had a few things to say about this complete rejection of any kind of traditional imperialist analysis. William I. Robinson, in addition to many of the aforementioned authors, rejected outright the arguments made by Hardt and Negri on theoretical, empirical, and political grounds. Wood, Harvey, Foster (and others like Smith and Suwandi, associated with *Monthly Review*), and Robinson all had *different* criticisms of Hardt and Negri.

Robinson's position, which I find most persuasive, challenges Hardt and Negri's amorphous networked theory of empire, as well as the dualistic division of the world that characterizes much of the new imperialist theories. Robinson argues that while capi-

The problem is that "socialist" proponents of campism offer little empirical coherence or rationale for their choice of sides.

talism has become a differentially integrated global system whose benefits in aggregate tend to accumulate among the capitalist classes of the Global North, this is only true at the broadest level and misses a great deal of complexity, diversity, and class divisions within and between the Global North and the Global South—insofar as these are coherent groupings at all (and Robinson is quite skeptical that they are practically coherent at all).

It is true that, in general, the Global North is in aggregate more wealthy and prosperous than the Global South. It also seems empirically true that workers in the Global South are super-exploited to the benefit of the capitalist class that is predominantly located in the Global North, as Smith and Suwandi among others show in great detail. However, Robinson's critique goes much further, questioning what the conceptual geographic categories of the "Global North" and "Global South" mean practically as foundational elements of the more traditional Leninist monopoly(-finance) capitalism versions of new imperialist theory, rooted still, however regionalized, in a reified conception of the modern nation-state. Robinson's strong critique of this dualistic model is correct: It is not the Global North

that exploits the Global South. It is not even the United States and Western European countries who are exploiting specific countries in the so-called Global South. How can it be that the United States or the Global North, as discrete wholes, are exploiting the Global South, as a discrete whole (even with diversity between countries within this area), given that most people in the United States and Global North do not actually benefit from the exploitative relationships that many U.S.- and Global North-based transnational firms maintain with governments, subsidiaries, subcontractors, and partners of various sorts in the Global South? It is also true that there are some insanely wealthy native-born and immigrant capitalists in the Global South who also benefit far, far more than most people in the Global North countries, in addition to it being historically true that national economies within the Global South have been developed to serve the interests of capitalists in the Global North. However, as Robinson argues, capitalism and the capitalist class are increasingly globalized, even if still headquartered more often than not in the Global North.

Beyond being empirically verifiable, the political and theoretical strength of Robinson's critical globalization perspective, as he calls it, is in its strong return to a more Marxian view of global capitalism as a *global* system of exploitation wherein the diverse global working class is exploited by a diverse global capitalist class. The practical value is that this approach offers a greater basis on which to build solidarity across borders, whether the workers are in the Global North or the Global South.

Intermezzo (Anti-) Imperialism

Anti-imperialist arguments that force us to either pick sides between an artificially simplified binary of choices or reify the entire population and internal politics of the United States or Global North reproduce the faulty

theoretical, empirical, and political reason of imperialists themselves. When workers in any nation or region of the world see their economic exploiters or political or cultural oppressors as representing their interests, the inhuman, unjust, undemocratic forces of global capitalism are hypostatized as trans-historically victorious—and concomitantly the vision of an egalitarian, democratic post-capitalist world, a socialist world, is dashed. This imperialist reason, or logic, thus is not only theoretically and empirically untenable, it is politically devastating. Anti-imperialist socialism must account for what Robinson calls "global capitalist imperialism" or what we might alternatively consider a kind of transitional period where we can acknowledge that imperialism is still occurring in some form, but it doesn't look like it used to: an *intermezzo* imperialism. The future beyond this imperialist interregnum will either be a more consolidated, seamlessly global, and horrifically destructive version of global capitalism that has moved entirely beyond classical imperialism, or we will be in the process of building effectively toward a range of possible post-capitalist worlds that we have yet to build.

To be clear, while workers in the Global South are generally worse off than workers in the Global North, they are quantitatively not qualitatively so. The quality of the exploitation may appear categorically different due to historical legacies of colonialism and even more recently of traditional relations of imperialism, which were driven more so by territorially bounded nation-states that functioned more cohesively in the interests of their national capitalist class. Still the quality of the exploitation is more similar than dissimilar. Beyond the similarity of the labor relations of production between and within the Global North and the Global South, the fact is that there are numerous communities within the Global North where the daily existence of the poorest and most oppressed is as unacceptably terrible as it is in the worst parts of the

Global South, even though there are more worse-off regions in the Global South. Reified geographic categorizations don't help us produce a form of socialist anti-imperialism that accounts for the genuine complexities of global class divisions and that could eventually produce the necessary solidarity among the global working class to achieve a form of post-capitalism worth calling "socialism."

Returning more explicitly to the problem of campism, and campism-adjacent, approaches to anti-imperialism that deploy a binary framework, it is also true that national governments that oppose the United States and its political allies but otherwise support nationally based capitalist classes, such as they actually exist in real terms, are not necessarily or likely allies of the socialist cause (and are just as likely as any capitalists to be practical opponents of the cause of global justice). Perhaps there are instances where the enemy of our enemy is our friend, but binary approaches to (anti-)imperialism, such as campisms, surely do not help us think through broader strategic and political complexities. In fact, campisms have often done more harm than good—or at least have not aided a globally integrated movement of struggle among the diversely oppressed and exploited people on our planet, regardless of

There is—or should be—a clear distinction drawn between democratically driven bottom-up liberation movements and established regimes that claim to stand against "the great Satan."

whether they are in Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, or the United States.

Anti-imperialist socialism is wholly

inconsistent with blind support for national capitalist classes and even more antithetical to support for political regimes that actively oppress their own working class; women; and sexual, ethnic, and religious minorities. Nationalist socialism is a contradiction in terms, and while there may be moments where it is vital that all socialists act in supportive solidarity with a particular movement for self-determination articulated on quasi-nationalist lines (for example, the movements of the Kurds, the Palestinians, and Catalonians), judgments or tactical decisions should not be made uncritically or be unqualified. There is—or should be—a clear distinction drawn between democratically driven bottom-up liberation movements and established regimes that claim to stand against “the great Satan” while undermining democratic struggles within their borders—and often around the world (such as China, Iran, Syria, and elsewhere). Democracy—tolerant, inclusive, diverse, pacifically minded, and egalitarian—is the dialectical cure for the complex, often amorphous, and dynamic global capitalist imperialism, an intermezzo imperialism that we must hope, and organize to ensure, is merely a temporary period on the road toward a democratic, egalitarian post-capitalist order.

NOTES

1. Campism originated in the earliest period of the Cold War among supporters of the USSR and other ostensibly “communist” regimes. By way of example, three contemporary sources of overtly campist arguments include editorials from *Telesur*, the pseudo-journalism site *Grayzone*, and the Party for Socialism and Liberation in the United States (though there are many, many other sources in the United States and around the world).
2. William I. Robinson, “Beyond the Theory of Imperialism,” in *Into the Tempest: Essays on the New Global Capitalism* (Haymarket Books, 2019). See also William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
3. For representative works by these thinkers, see Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale*, Vol. 1-2 (Monthly Review Press, 1974); Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Duke University Press, 2004); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003); David Harvey, *New Imperialism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005); John Bellamy Foster, *The Theory of Monopoly Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press, 2014); John Smith, *Imperialism in the 21st Century* (Monthly Review Press, 2016); Intan Suwandi, *Value Chains: The New Economic Imperialism* (Monthly Review Press, 2019).
4. The opening salvo of their theory of empire came in their aptly named book *Empire* (2000), which was heralded as the *Communist Manifesto* of the twenty-first century and continued through three sequels: *Multitude* (2004), *Commonwealth* (2009), and, most recently, *Assembly* (2017).

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Robbers, Takers, and Givers

Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Racism Exposed

ANN FERGUSON

AS TITHI BHATTACHARYA PUTS IT in the introduction to her edited collection, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, the central insight of the recent coalescing of a group of influential Marxist-feminist theorists around social reproduction theory is “that human labor is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole. ... The frame-

work thus seeks to make visible labor and work that are analytically hidden by classical economists and politically denied by policy makers” (2). The ten essays in this book are rich and fascinating attempts to understand the relations between capitalist production and reproduction relations and practices, both theoretically and historically. In the process they capture feminist insights from earlier debates about the role of unpaid domestic labor in women’s oppression as well as how both gendered and racial divisions of labor have contributed to institutional racism and sexism in the overall system of class exploitation in the capitalist system.

There are tensions among these authors in terms of how they theorize the relations between the historical processes of production

and reproduction within our contemporary neoliberal, racialized, patriarchal, capitalist order. In what follows, I organize my remarks around some of the key debates as I

see them from my own socialist-feminist perspective. One issue I will focus on is determining the most helpful way to analyze the perceived “spatial separation between production/public and reproduction/private”

that Bhattacharya and others argue is a “historical form of appearance” of capitalism (9). We know that previous pre-industrial-capitalist modes of economic subsistence on farms or fiefdoms, in which both productive and reproductive labor were done in the same space of the family household, were gradually destroyed by industrial capitalism as workers were dispossessed from the land into wage labor.

So, how now do we “theorize integratively,” in Bhattacharya’s words, the unpaid reproductive labor still required in the household with the paid labor in capitalist production? Do we see this unpaid reproductive labor, which is socially necessary for the reproduction of labor power, as exploited work that is producing exchange value and hence should be paid (as argued by the 1970s autonomous Marxist-feminist Wages for Housework campaign of Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James (1975), by Silvia Federici (2012), and by the dual-systems theory of Christine Delphy (2016)? Or do we see it as a precapitalist feudal system of production

Social Reproduction
Theory: Remapping Class,
Recentering Oppression
TITHI BHATTACHARYA, ED.
2017. Pluto.

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between husband/male kin and wife/female kin in the household that, like slavery, is a subordinate mode of production that comes to be subsumed under the dominant industrial capitalist social formation (Benston 1969)? Or, a third possibility: Do we perhaps take the dual-systems approach of Gayle Rubin (1975) and Heidi Hartmann (1981) and maintain that the reproduction of labor power in the home is governed by various male-dominant forms of the sex/gender system, which, as Rubin theorizes, used to be a part of the kinship mode of organizing both production and reproduction but now in advanced capitalism have been separated from capitalist production relations? And yet, according to Rubin, Hartmann, and Ferguson (1989, 1991), this sex/gender (or sex-affective) system continues to produce and reproduce compulsory heterosexual male-dominant sexual and caring relations in which men as a gender exploit women's unpaid caring labor and sexuality. Nancy Folbre (2001) continues a version of this argument when she contrasts the "invisible hand" of the economic market with the "invisible heart" of family care in advanced capitalist systems.

The authors in this collection skirt the so-called dual-systems way of posing the Marxist-feminist housework debate, assuming perhaps the Hegelian Marxist interpretation put forward by David McNally in his chapter, titled "Intersections and Dialectics: Critical Reconstructions in Social Reproduction Theory." McNally writes that the institutional racism and sexism embedded in our contemporary class relations of advanced capitalism have become necessary features "of the historical capitalism in which we live" (107). He critiques those 1970s Marxist- and socialist-feminists who tried to historicize forms of social reproduction as being the material base of male domination, agreeing with Lise Vogel and Iris Young that they "lapsed into a fundamental dualism which posited distinct modes of production and reproduction" (108). Instead, he allies with what he

terms "the most sophisticated theorists in this debate," presumably Lise Vogel and unnamed others, who theorized processes of production and reproduction "as two moments of a complexly unified social process" (108). Citing Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins, he argues that their historical analyses of class-, race-, and gender-based divisions of labor show that "the enslavement of black people in the South, the economic exploitation of Northern workers and the social oppression of women are 'systematically related'" (110, cf.; Davis, 66).

But McNally fails to be convincing to those of us who utilize versions of dual- (or multi-) systems theory, and also use Angela Davis' thought as well as Omi and Winant's theory of racial formations (1986), to incorporate historical racialization processes into our analyses (cf. Ferguson, 1991). Much seems to ride on the question of what it means for social processes to be "complexly unified." McNally provides a Hegelian metaphor having to do with the concept of life, which needs "dialectical," not merely "formal," categories to understand the becoming of things, "the coming to be of the object." Hegel's view is that "living systems—from the body to the objects in a household to systems of knowledge—are all informed by purposes" and that this is true not just for organs in a living body but also "for social collectivities, from the family to the state" (102).

However, the most "sophisticated" multi-systems theorists would agree with McNally that the United States at every stage of its development as a nation has been a complex social formation that has importantly involved structural racism and sexism as well as capitalist accumulation and worker exploitation, but those theorists would oppose McNally's functionalist (and Hegelian teleological) Marxist explanation of this history. A key question obscured in the rush to see our U.S. historical social formation as a complex unity is to what extent there are *semi-autonomous* logics involved in capitalist exploitation, racist

appropriation by certain racial-ethnic communities of others, and sexist appropriation of affective caring energy by dominant men who appropriate more care than they give from gender-subordinated caregivers. Theorizing at least these three social sites (class, race, gender) of exploitation/appropriation, domination, powerlessness, and violence (to borrow vectors from Iris Young 1990) may give us a better understanding of how both progressive changes and reactionary responses are involved in our social dialectic of white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy than the functionalist “internal relations” mantra of McNally.

For example, if the overall “purpose” or “logic” of the capitalist system is to grow so as to increase capital (profits), how does this explain historical contradictions that occur with the “logic” of male domination, which capitalism weakens by bringing women into the work force, thus providing a material base for greater independence of women from men, or when the “logic” of white supremacy based in racial slavery and colonial expropriation of native lands is undermined (briefly) by the Civil War, which represents the victory of Northern capitalists over white slave-owning planters? As a multi-systems socialist-feminist, I would argue that the evidence for the semi-autonomy of the systems of male domination and white supremacy is precisely in their *reactive* ability to retrench and reorganize in the face of these capitalist contradictions, for example, by male trade unions who supported the family wage and protectionism to exclude women workers (Hartmann 1981, Federici 2004) and by Southern white supremacists creating segregationist sharecropping, schooling, policing, and Jim Crow laws to reframe structural racism and reclaim power.

If we take the semi-autonomous multi- (or at least tri-) systems approach, we can reframe important insights offered by Nancy Fraser and Tithi Bhattacharya in their chapters here. Nancy Fraser, in “Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions

of Contemporary Capitalism,” argues that there is a crisis of care in neoliberal capitalism in its quest for unlimited accumulation, since the system’s ability to reproduce itself as welfare state protections are dropped is being challenged (12). She claims that the resolution to the crisis of care can only proceed through a rectification of the inherent injustice of the system as a whole by “reinventing the production/reproduction distinction and reimagining the gender order.” Fraser provides a particular historical dialectical analysis as to how capitalism as a mode of production tends to undermine the social reproduction of its working class. Her claim is that capitalism’s “economic subsystem depends on social-reproductive activities which are external to it” (23). I assume she means something similar to what I mean (Ferguson 2018) by claiming that the reproduction of sex and gender in modes of sex/affective production has a different logic from capitalism since it aims to promote sexual satisfaction, love, care, and solidarity not simply as means to serve the accumulation of capital but as ends for their own sake. And although Fraser disagrees with Bhattacharya as to whether the reproductive labor in this system or set of activities is external to the capitalist economy/processes of production, the content of this set of reproductive activities seems to be similarly not guided by the capitalist profit motive. In her chapter “How Not to Skip Class,” Bhattacharya, referring to Michael Lebowitz’s analysis in *Beyond Capital*, characterizes waged and non-waged activities as involving two different “moments of production,” which are composed of “two different goals, two different perspectives on the value of labor power: While for capital, the value of labor power is a means of satisfying its goal of surplus value, ... for the wage laborer, it is the means of satisfying the *goal of self-development* (my emphasis).” (Lebowitz quoted in Bhattacharya, 79) For Lebowitz and Bhattacharya, this is an internal contradiction of capitalism with respect to the

reproduction of labor power, because on the one hand the capitalist class seeks to limit the needs and consumption of the working class (to increase profit), but on the other it also must create new needs of the working class as consumers and satisfy these new needs with new commodities (79).

I do not deny that the capitalist system has an internal contradiction based on these two tendencies involving working-class consumerism and consumption. What I want to suggest is that a feminist analysis must go further to uncover the exploitative relations between women and men in systems of capitalist patriarchy. Since there is a different logic involved in the reproduction of labor power that involves not only meeting material reproductive and sexual needs but also self-development, then we need to bring into the analysis the other kinds of domination relations between humans and human communities connected to our human need for self-development that are embedded in socially created gender differences. Self-interest and the profit motive are ends that are different from those sets of needs we have as social beings to give and receive love/affection/care and attain social status and power in relation to others in our household and community(ies). In systems structured by gender and racial divisions of labor, the affective energy we exchange with others in these cooperative arrangements is key to whether we gauge that we have achieved our goals of self-development, as women or men (or gender queer, androgynous) or as members of a racial or ethnic group. Rita Manne argues (2018) that in patriarchal misogynous societies, the norms of masculinity and femininity create different self-development goals for most women (that of being *givers*, those who give more than they receive) than for men (that of being *takers*, those who take more than they give). In patriarchal reproductive systems this creates a psychological tendency for men to exploit women in the exchange of positive caring (affective) energy, which

in turn undermines women's self-esteem if they choose self-development goals such as success in careers or gender parity in politics (cf. Ferguson 1989, 1991).

To highlight this type of exploitation relation it is not enough for Marxist-feminists like Bhattacharya to acknowledge that those who do unpaid caring/reproductive labor are part of the producers of capital and hence of the working class (cf. Bhattacharya, 89), nor to acknowledge that neoliberal capitalism has made such labor more precarious while "simultaneous[ly] unloading the entire responsibility and discourse of reproduction on individual families" (90-91). Of course this is true, as Fraser also points out in her article: Since neoliberal financial capitalism requires public disinvestment from social reproduction, thus undermining the state protections of the stage of capitalist social democracy, the emerging precarity of reproductive workers creates both right-wing populist movements as well as new leftist social movements opposed to gender, sex, race, ethnic, and religious hierarchies (Fraser, 33). What Fraser's analysis does not allow her to highlight is how these latter movements are fighting both gender and race/ethnic exploitation practices in gender, sexual, and racialized systems with their own reactive tendencies to maintain material advantages—through exploitative practices—for example, of white communities to communities of color, and heteronormative men to heteronormative women in kin and sex/affective relationships (as couples, parents, and fellow workers). Since Fraser only theorizes exploitation as a relationship between capitalists and workers, she also tends to downplay the historical exploitation relations (not just domination or failure of recognition) that white communities have in their greater ownership of capital as compared to communities of color, who are historically disadvantaged because of the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman take an insightful approach to the changing

relation of the capitalist state to the demands of social reproduction in their chapter “Without Reserves.” They claim that “the history of capitalism can be understood as a complex process of subsuming forms of social reproduction under capitalist relations” (63). While industrial capitalism went hand in hand with workers’ formation of trade unions, because of the crisis of social reproduction that low wages and long working hours created, working-class struggles involved not only the factory floor but also food riots and bread, meat, and milk strikes against high prices by working-class women during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Indeed, the authors argue, struggles around social reproduction, over food, housing, and relief, were a key way the “American working class began to articulate themselves into a broader class unity,” not only by rent strikes that united black and white workers in Northern cities but also in the South by connecting unemployment to struggles against racism (52). The New Deal was a grand (class) compromise, in which capitalists headed by Roosevelt expanded the welfare state to accommodate these worker demands, but still in a way that created hierarchialized wage labor marked by racial and sexual divisions between more and less privileged workers, so as to undermine the precarious class unity achieved by Popular Front organizing strategies. Today this historic grand compromise is being undermined in the crisis of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century caused by neoliberal capitalism, which acts to defund previous state subsidies for social reproduction (in welfare, unemployment, health, housing, and social security payments). The authors end their chapter with sobering points: Since the current crisis in social reproduction is not a uniform condition, the world’s heterogeneous working classes are reacting to it in different forms, including attempts to rebuild communal life, social-democratic currents, and right-wing populism. Worldwide, U.S. military interventionism and neoliberal capitalist processes have created

world slums and migrant populations who come to the United States and take low-paying jobs in social reproduction—domestic labor, child care, food preparation, sex work, and personal-care health work. What are the key points on which political organizing can create working-class unity in disarticulated transnational processes of dispossession, crises of social reproduction, and patterns of capital accumulation (67)?

Several other chapters in the book offer insightful approaches to social reproduction that I can only touch on here. Susan Ferguson’s chapter on childhood and capitalism considers childhood learning through play and the extent to which, in capitalist schooling, it can be considered (socially reproductive) work. She refers to the concept in Marx’s *Grundrisse* of a liberating activity as one in which “merely external natural urgencies ... become posited as ... self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is, precisely, labor” (Marx 1973, 544). Thus the image of the child, and the historical bourgeois creation of the concept of “childhood,” creates a liminal figure and historicized concept that shows the contradictory nature of how we understand the division in capitalist society between leisure/play/reproduction of self, and work (for others and necessities). Teeple Hopkins, in “Mostly Work, Little Play,” gives vignettes from the lives of two Filipina racialized domestic workers in Canada to show how church-based community activities are an important support for their ability to do their ongoing social-reproductive work, but those activities are not easily categorized as either work, leisure, or play. This study of racialized migrant social reproduction workers therefore fits in an oblique way into the domestic work debate between the autonomous Marxist-feminists Dalla Costa and Federici, who argue that it does produce exchange value, and those Marxist-feminists, such as Himmelweit (1995) and Smith (1978), who argue that although it is socially necessary labor, it fits into

a new category between work and non-work. The ambiguous nature of what counts as socially necessary labor is also brought out in the essay by Serap Saritas Oran, which considers the role of workers' retirement pensions in the realm of social reproduction, pointing out that like housework, such state services have use value but not exchange value and hence must historically be struggled for as part of the standard of living for the working class.

Alan Sears, in his chapter "Body Politics: The Social Reproduction of Sexualities," provides a good Marxist-feminist analysis of how sexuality is alienated in capitalist society in a way similar to the way wage work is alienated (183). Rather than the shallow, liberal view that sees the so-called 1960s sexual revolution in advanced capitalism as true liberation, Sears takes a Foucauldian line that capitalism is organized as a "paradoxical double freedom, in which control over one's own body is always combined with forms of compulsion" (11). He uses Foucault's analysis of the bio-political disciplining of bodies in heteronormative and gender binary body training, using as historical examples different "same sex regimes" as they have defined and controlled non-heterosexual sexuality. He supports the analyses of Silvia Federici (2004), Angela Davis (1983), and Rosemary Hennessy (2013) that capitalism is a process of continued violent dispossession, not only of farmers off the land but by women's initial exclusion from wage labor and the devaluation of their paid and unpaid care work in relation to men, and that racial slavery dispossessed black women's labor even more than white women's.

Drawing on Marx's theory of human nature as differing from animals, Sears notes that

sexuality is part of the way we realize our humanity: It is part of the work on nature (internal and external) through which we make our mark on the world. Alienated life conditions link sex to compulsion and make it a means to an end rather than an

end in itself. This is fairly obvious in the case of paid sex work, but we are often put in the position of using sexuality to meet our life goals. (183)

He points out that in capitalism after the sexual revolution, the norms of heteromascularity "work as a cultural scaffolding for rape" (184), so that the line between consensual sex and sexual assault is problematic. And socially constructed toxic masculinity fosters aggression, which has often been used as a tool in organizing the male working class against capitalists (and, I would add, by white workers against workers of color, immigrants, and those of different ethnicity). But if white supremacist patriarchal capitalism involves multi-systems of domination, our praxis question needs to take a critical look at how this tool of resistance to capitalism may be reactionary by harming all working-class women as well as people of color.

One of the advantages of a socialist-feminist multi-system analysis for understanding the phenomena of the 2014 (and forward) Black Lives Matter marches and the 2017 (and forward) U.S. women's marches is that in globalized neoliberal capitalism there is no coherent working-class agent that is easily constituted. For this reason, solidarity around working-class social reproduction rights (to health care, housing, security from police oppression, a safe climate, freedom from racial and gender violence, reproductive justice, and income security) can be more easily achieved by leftist organizing around other identities than class per se, while still making sure that class issues are a part of the content of the demands. This is one way to interpret what Cinzia Arruzza finds in her analysis, in Chapter 10, of the historic international women's strike organizing that began with big marches in Poland in 2016 against wage inequality, in Argentina that same year protesting male violence, and in Italy in November 2016 around the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. All of these marches led up to yearly March 8 women's

strikes in more than 50 countries, and although they may have general demands that appeal to women across economic class, such as freedom from male violence, the strikes have also featured specific socialist-feminist content aimed at mobilizing working-class women, such as gender equality in wages, living wages, affordable housing, and health care. Arruzza's work here suggests that the classic Marxist critique of identity politics organizing is a misguided way to look at the political possibilities of coalescing such politics. In fact, semi-autonomous social movements against gender, racial, and ethnic oppression may give us stronger ways to challenge the toxic genderized and racialized modes of cooperation in the present racist capitalist patriarchal order, since historically, class and racial solidarities of movements resisting capitalism have continued to oppress women, queer people, and racial minorities.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this Marxist-feminist anthology of essays for its novel and engaging debates and research on the relevant history, theory, and politics of neoliberal, patriarchal, racialized, capitalist social reproduction that socialists, feminists, and anti-racists must engage with both our research and political work.

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Walking the Tightrope: Latin America's Pink Tide

FREDERICK B. MILLS

Latin America's Pink Tide: Breakthroughs and Shortcomings, edited by economic historian and prominent Latin Americanist Steve Ellner, offers a critical ethical theoretical framework for assessing the performance of left and left-of-center governments in Latin America during the Pink Tide. The "Pink Tide" refers to the wave of progressive governments beginning with the election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998. These progressive governments provided alternatives to the neoliberal economic model that had brought growing economic and social inequality, austerity, privatization of public resources, and political subordination to Washington to most of the region during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Pink Tide governments were brought to power by widespread disillusion with traditional political parties and were buoyed by social movements that sought economic and social justice and more democratic participation in the political life of their nations.

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The Pink Tide brought a period of economic nationalism, progress toward regional integration, and the inclusion, in various degrees, of formerly marginalized constituents in democratic procedures. Millions were lifted out of poverty through state-sponsored social programs, though without breaking free of rentier capitalism and therefore without achieving the significant structural

change necessary for sustainable economic development.

By 2015, with the cumulative impact of the world financial crisis that began in 2008 and the drop in commodity prices upon which many Pink Tide governments were dependent, one progressive government after another suffered electoral defeat by right-wing parties seeking the restoration of the neoliberal regime in partnership with Washington. These setbacks gave rise to a period of critical reflection on the shortcomings that debilitated left and center-left governments alike.

Eduardo Gudynas, a leading Uruguayan scholar on *buen vivir*,¹ has argued that the progressive regimes under consideration have evolved into a heterodox form of governance. This means that they have combined progressive and regressive tendencies. They were originally propelled to power by the popular

Latin America's Pink Tide: Breakthroughs and Shortcomings

STEVE ELLNER, ED.

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sectors, as in the cases of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Having secured leadership positions in the liberal democratic state, they wrest a degree of power from traditional elites, take more control over natural resources, redistribute rents, facilitate new forms of participatory democracy, recognize, to varying degrees, indigenous and Afro-descendent rights, and are anti-imperialist, insisting on national independence and regional integration. But over-reliance on hydrocarbon extraction in these South American nations has led to some regressive tendencies:

This progressive framework suffered (and suffers) enormous tensions. Progressivism encourages and protects development based on extractivism, whose serious environmental and social impacts increasingly generate conflicts with local communities, including farmers and indigenous people. Progressive [governments] are unable to exercise more control over these ventures, since they need part of that surplus. They are governments that on the one hand try to regulate capital but on the other hand yield to this [economic model].²

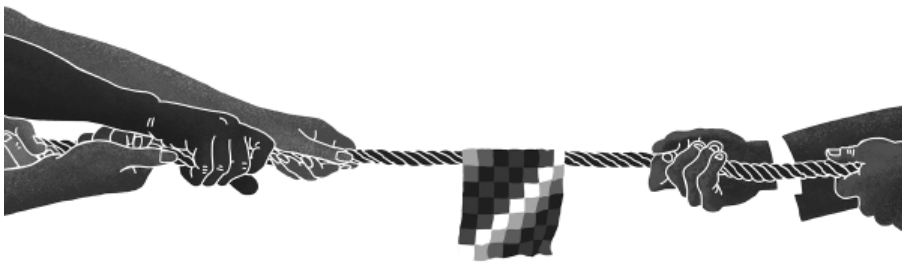
As political scientist Massimo Modonesi points out, such regressive tendencies within progressive governments, in combination with a regrouping of conservative forces, can lead to concessions to capital that undermine the long-term socialist project and sideline popular participation in governance.³

Are the reversals in the region, starting around 2013, due to an inevitable cyclic historical movement that alternates between conservative and progressive institutions and practices? Has the inevitable insertion of rentier economies in the global capital system prevented the advance toward economic development? Did progressive governments take full advantage of propitious moments to advance structural economic reforms? Or did they succumb to pressures from the right to make regressive concessions that curtailed popular participation in governance and left them vulnerable to a conservative restoration?

Latin America's Pink Tide provides us with the theoretical tools to critically inform our attempts to answer these questions. Rather than see the dynamics of the Pink Tide governments in relation to right-wing restorations as the result of deterministic cycles, each reading takes a more nuanced approach by taking into account the economic and political context of specific countries and the balance of forces at critical junctures. Here we will unpack the theoretical framework used throughout this edited work, with a focus on four exemplary essays.

Theoretical Framework

Although the essays in this reader cover a variety of left and center-left governments of the Pink Tide, the authors apply the same basic theoretical framework to each country.



Daniel Del Toro

The breakthroughs and shortcomings in each case are viewed as a function of the pragmatic measures adopted by the left or left-of-center governments to accommodate an often hostile domestic and transnational opposition. The pragmatic measures were taken in order to avoid economic boycotts and destabilization. At the same time, Pink Tide governments also adopted populist measures to fulfill the governments' promises of social investment and political inclusion of the popular sectors. This framework suggests a correlation between the degree of hostility of the opposition and the shortcomings of both the pragmatic measures and populist measures. It is like walking a tightrope. On the one side of the balance, the pragmatic accommodation of dominant sectors often fails to neutralize an implacable opposition, and on the other side, populism, without cracking down on corruption, tends to lend itself to clientelism and bureaucratism in the implementation of social programs. Both the pragmatic and populist measures, however, give rise to shortcomings whose corrections are feasible during times when the government has the upper hand over the opposition. This is what Ellner refers to as the element of timing.

This theoretical framework of dynamic tension between pragmatic and populist responses to the opposition is further determined by the inability of Pink Tide governments to move away from rentier capitalism, which embeds the economy in the global capital system and subjects these economies to the contingencies of commodity booms and busts. Rentier capitalism also comes into conflict with efforts to democratize institutions both inside and outside the state because it lends itself to top-down management of the economy, what some of the authors refer to as techno-bureaucratic statism.

Again, context and timing are all-important features of the theoretical framework employed in this reader. Ellner takes issue with neoeextractivists who fault Pink Tide governments with the failure to diversify the

economy and move toward import substitution but do not recognize the important differences between neoliberalism and neoextractivism. As Ellner points out, the Pink Tide governments, as opposed to neoliberal regimes, strengthened the role of the state in strategic industry sectors, advanced a more nationalistic foreign policy, and deployed a significant portion of rents for social programs. So while rentier capitalism does not give rise to structural change, progressive governments, to varying degrees, promoted "popular participation in decision making and the incorporation and empowerment of excluded sectors of the population" (9).

In addition, Ellner's theoretical framework views the dynamic between the progressive government and reactionary opposition not only in terms of the constituted power of the state versus its adversaries on the right, but also in terms of class struggle. Even when progressives are in the executive branch of government, elites still occupy "apparatuses" of power and compete with "power centers" representing popular aspirations. It is the mobilizing capacity of social movements that can both pressure the state to advance the process of change and resist challenges from the right to extract more concessions from, or overthrow, the government. Pink Tide governments, therefore, alienate the popular sectors and fail to democratize state institutions at their own peril.

Walking the Tightrope: Doing Too Much Versus Doing Too Little

In "Walking the 'Tightrope' of Socialist Governance," Marcel Nelson enriches the theoretical framework with a more detailed discussion of Nicos Poulantzas' strategic relational theory. Basically, Poulantzas points out that while a progressive government may attain control over one branch of government, it may be faced with opposition not only from outside, but also from "power apparatuses" within the state that represent the interests

of the dominant classes.

"When it comes to the 'democratic road to socialism,'" says Nelson, "governing from the left is likened to 'walking a tightrope' between pursuing transformative programs while managing challenges from dominant classes that retain their structural power" (60). Nelson applies these insights to three Pink Tide governments: Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. He uses the image of the tightrope as an allegory for the balancing act required in each case between a government doing too much, thereby provoking the dominant classes to violent reaction, or doing too little, by over-accommodating the dominant sectors. In the latter case, the government runs the risk of alienating the very popular sectors who provide the lifeline of potential popular mobilization by means of which these governments can possibly push back against the reactionary tide and advance, at propitious moments, the socialist project.

Nelson also points to a tension between the statist tendency toward centralization and the more horizontally organized expressions of popular power. In each case, rentier capitalism, which embeds governments over-reliant on extractive industries in the global capital system, requires democratization of the state and strong links to popular power if they are to advance a social project. This involves negotiating the tightrope without falling into techno-bureaucratic statism, on the one hand, or provoking destabilization by the dominant classes on the other.

Nelson gives a few examples. In the case of Ecuador under Rafael Correa and the Alianza País (AP), Nelson maintains that the government opted for a statist redistribution of extractive-industry rents and minimized the inclusion of popular movements within state institutions, missing opportunities to create democratic "centers of power" within the state. Instead, Correa forged strategic alliances with the dominant classes (and in particular the agricultural elites). For this reason there was limited land reform and

some clashes with environmental and indigenous groups, with the most infamous case being conflict over the expansion of extractive industry in Yasuni National Park.

Nelson puts the case succinctly: "The difficult relationship between the government and the social movements highlights the limits of pursuing an agenda of social transformation in the context of extractivism guided by a statist outlook" (67).

Nelson maintains that a similar situation took place in Bolivia. By accommodating the dominant classes of the Eastern Lowland agro-industrial sector, Evo Morales also succumbed to a largely extractivist agenda. By failing to expand its base through democratic mechanisms, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) was unable to fortify its relation with social movements, and the state took on a techno-bureaucratic form. This led to capitulation on a number of important features of the constitutional reform process that culminated in 2009. Over the next four years, the government developed a public-private partnership that was formalized in the 2013 "Agenda Patriótica 2025." This agenda ended up favoring the interests of the dominant classes. By failing to expand indigenous autonomy, Morales missed an opportunity to deepen democracy within and outside the state.

Nelson argues that the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela did more to open spaces for organized expressions of popular power, both within and outside the state, than other Pink Tide governments. For this reason, "Chávez was able to repel opposition from dominant classes more forcefully than the AP and MAS" (74). So when the dominant classes tried to overthrow Chávez in 2002-2003 by means of a coup and then an oil strike, Chávez was able to prevail thanks to the popular mobilization that demanded his return. As a result of gaining control over the oil industry and security forces after the coup and oil strike, Chávez was able to launch social missions that brought free education, health

care, and housing to formerly marginalized Venezuelans. Yet despite the gains brought about by the social missions, rentier capitalism has not been an optimal motor of socialist transformation. Notwithstanding efforts to empower democracy from below, Chavista governance has led to top-down statism. “The projects designed to democratize the Venezuelan state and society were undermined by the logic of rentierism by encouraging weak oversight by state personnel, corruption, and inefficiency” (75).

The essays that follow Chapter 3 employ the same theoretical framework and tightrope analogy to other Pink Tide governments and assess whether they did too much or too little to advance the socialist project, each in its own social, economic, and political context, and whether the government took advantage of propitious moments to make inroads against the dominant classes in order to bring about a measure of lasting structural change. What follows is a sampling of this very fruitful approach to the study of the Pink Tide.

Brazil

In Chapter 4, “The Rise and Fall of the Brazilian Workers Party (2002-2016),” Pedro Mendes Loureiro and Alfredo Saad-Filho argue that Lula da Silva was elected president in 2002 in the context of growing disenchantment with anemic growth, deindustrialization, and inequality imposed by the neoliberal economic model. Thanks to a boom in demand for primary goods, especially by China, and devaluation of the *real* (which gave a boost to exports) Lula delivered, for a time, an improved standard of living for millions of formerly marginalized Brazilians. As the authors point out, “Higher minimum wages and transfers, credit, fiscal activism, and booming exports sustained a circle of growth and distribution that drove an unprecedented reduction in poverty and inequality during the PT [Workers Party] administrations” (95).

These gains, however, were not structural in nature. Without a majority in Congress, the PT accommodated the dominant classes, and Lula, at the height of public approval, missed an opportunity to advance a socialist project. His pragmatic concessions to the dominant classes included allowing the exchange rate to float and making cuts in government spending. While raising the minimum wage, and social programs such as *Bolsa Família*, did indeed improve the lot of the poor, the lion’s share of growth went to the top 1 percent, who held 25 percent of the national income.

The decline that began around 2010 coincided with the election of Dilma Rousseff, and by the time of her re-election in 2014, Brazil was facing a US\$100 billion deficit. After Rousseff was re-elected in 2014, as Loureiro and Saad-Filho argue, the government responded to the economic crisis by adopting the very neoliberal measures she ran against: imposing austerity, cutting unemployment benefits, and cutting pensions. Yet all of this accommodation of the dominant classes did not bring about capital investment. Because of these pragmatic accommodations of the dominant classes, Rousseff and the PT were unable to mobilize in opposition to her impeachment. Loureiro and Saad-Filho conclude, “Instead of recognizing the limits of pragmatism, the PT chose to ignore them and stick to the path of least resistance in the economic, social, and political domains” (105). In 2016 Rousseff was removed from office in what the PT viewed as a parliamentary coup. On the tightrope of pragmatic accommodation versus advancing structural change, Loureiro and Saad-Filho conclude that Lula and then Rousseff did not do enough to promote change.

Uruguay

In “The Frente Amplio Governments in Uruguay: Policy Strategies and Results,” Nicolás Bentancur and José Miguel Busquets argue that the leftist party, Frente Amplio

(FA), which ruled for three terms starting in 2005, advanced a hybrid form of governance that combined liberal democracy with a significant measure of participatory democracy. During the period of economic growth from 2005 to 2017, the governments of President Tabaré Vázquez and later José “Pepe” Mujica were able to achieve impressive reductions in poverty and economic inequality and progressive reform of social welfare programs. Beginning with the economic slowdown in 2016, however, the FA faced an erosion of popular support and serious challenges from the right. What, according to Bentancur and Busquets, went wrong?

The democratic participation of broad sectors of civil society in deliberations that impacted legislation on important social issues constituted what the authors call a “hybrid” form of governance. The authors give a detailed account of the education policy debate in 2006. This debate led to a national conference during which consensus recommendations were hammered out for consideration by the legislature. Although the recommendations were only partially adopted, the input of various stakeholders gave the education reform a degree of legitimacy.

On the labor front, the wage councils included representatives from labor, business, and government. The councils played a key role in negotiating wages and other labor issues. Once again, such deliberations led to recommendations that were promulgated into collective bargaining laws in 2009. The authors indicate that “wage councils fostered an increase in real wages by 52 percent between 2005 and 2014” (118).

And in still another area of public concern, the reforms in social security policy had the benefit of a broad-based national dialogue, and agreements reached by the dialogue were reflected in legislation impacting the social security system. An advisory council for change was set up, and participants included labor, business, civil society, and public sector representation. The council had input on reforms

of the Health Care Services Administration.

In each of these cases, broad-based deliberation had an impact on legislation. Bentancur and Busquets point out that although the civic-state partnerships were forms of democratic inclusion of civil society in determining public policy, they did not

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include macroeconomic and tax policy deliberations, which remained largely at higher levels of governance.

Here is where the tightrope analogy becomes useful. “On several occasions the Frente Amplio had to choose between making commitments to civil society actors and reaching political agreements with opposition politicians” (125). The authors maintain that during the first two FA terms (2005–2015), the government, to a large degree, opted for the former, but without provoking destabilization efforts by the opposition. But beginning with the third FA term in 2015, a conservative offensive brought charges of corruption and mismanagement against the government. An economic downturn in 2016 brought pressure on the government to reduce public spending as well as taxes. By 2018 the opposition had formed a coalition, *Un Solo Uruguay*, that would soon pose a challenge to FA governance in the next election.

Bentancur and Busquets conclude that the hybrid liberal democratic model that combines participation from below on social

welfare matters with a more vertical form of decision making from above on macro-economic issues brought significant gains in poverty reduction and reform of public

“When it comes to the
democratic road to socialism,
governing from the left is
likened to ‘walking a tightrope’.”

services, but it fell short in challenging macroeconomic policy. In order to bring about more income equality, “it would be necessary to apply participatory mechanisms to other policy areas, such as macroeconomics and tax legislation, and to broaden the scope of debate to include objectives and priorities” (130). On the tightrope of pragmatism versus structural change, the authors suggest that while FA made great strides in democratic participation, by limiting the field of deliberation to social welfare policy, FA did not do enough.

Venezuela

Part III of the reader includes an introduction and three essays on the more radical Pink Tide governments. Steve Ellner, in “Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela: Pragmatic and Populist Policies in a Broader Context,” gives a clear illustration of the theoretical framework employed by other essays in this part. Hugo Chávez was elected president of Venezuela on the heels of widespread disillusionment with the neoliberal regime and the domination of elite parties (PuntoFijismo), which had relegated the majority of Venezuelans to poverty for four decades. Chávez ran on a platform that promised to “pay the social debt,” assert control over the nation’s natural resources, and promote national independence.

Ellner provides a detailed account of challenges to Chávez’s social project by the business sector and the pressure to deliver on paying the social debt by the popular sectors. In December 2001, in response to reforms derived from the new constitution of 1999 and Chávez’s plans to reform the oil sector, Fedecámaras (the Venezuelan Chambers of Commerce) organized protests that led to a short-lived coup in April 2002, followed by a strike against the oil sector later that year and into early 2003. In the aftermath of these attempts at regime change, Chávez took pragmatic measures to accommodate certain “productive” business sectors while shunning those that had participated in the Fedecámaras protests and strike. He also began the missions—social programs in health, education, and housing—to meet popular demands for a better quality of life.

Ellner points out that some critics of Chávez’s pragmatism charge that favor given to certain business sectors over others led to the creation of a corrupt class that took advantage of government contracts and favorable exchange rates to enrich themselves. And other critics, this time of the social missions, took issue with the clientelism, corruption, inefficiency, and bureaucratism that afflicted the programs.

A more nuanced approach, argues Ellner, would consider the pragmatic and populist measures in their political context. In order to counter the attempts by the opposition to bring about regime change, it was necessary to bring some of the business sector, if not to the side of Chavismo, then at least to some form of coexistence. In the case of the missions and government support for communes and cooperatives, the government was able to mobilize the popular sectors to its defense when under attack by the opposition.

Ellner defends, to a certain degree, the pragmatic approach to business because it allowed the Chavista project to blunt the attacks by the opposition bent on regime change. And he also rejects characterizing

the missions and government support for organized expressions of popular power as crass populism because, he argues, they had a lasting impact on building democratic participation and alleviating poverty.

Ellner maintains that timing, that is, seizing moments when the balance of forces are favorable to the government, provided opportunities to address the shortcomings in both pragmatic accommodation of the business sector and populist measures directed at the working class. Chávez had such opportunities in the 2000s and took advantage of them by nationalizing basic industries, expropriating companies that ceased operations, and prosecuting some corrupt businesspeople. He could have done more, however, to go beyond social programs and take measures to reform the exchange system and stimulate productivity.

Maduro also had opportune moments in 2013 (with Chavista victories in the municipal elections), after the defeat of the *guarimbas*⁴ in 2014, after the elections for a National Constituent Assembly in 2017, and again in May 2018 with his re-election. During each of these opportunities to address the shortcoming of pragmatism and populism, Maduro failed to take decisive action. Ellner sums up the crucial issue of timing and context:

Timing as a strategic tool was the key to overcoming the negative effects of pragmatic and populist measures. Victories provided the government opportunities to advance in the achievement of five basic objectives: deepening of the process of change (objective one); weakening of the disloyal opposition (objective two); renovation of the Chavista movement and government through measures in favor of internal democratization and against bureaucratization and corruption (objective three); prioritization of economic goals ... (objective four); and implementing unpopular policies (such as gasoline price hikes) in order to eliminate or minimize the negative effects of certain practices associated

with populism (objective five). (181-82)

Ellner provides us with the theoretical tools to make a fair-minded assessment of Chavismo in Venezuela. Chávez had gone further than other Pink Tide governments in promoting the political participation of marginalized sectors in both the government missions and the more autonomous community councils and other organized expressions of popular power. By building alliances with the business sector and building popular support, the government has been able to ward off the relentless attack by the U.S.-backed hard-line opposition. But by not doing enough in favorable moments to crack down on corruption, address economic problems, and democratize government institutions, Maduro makes it more difficult to face these issues in times when the government is under frontal attack.

Nicaragua

In a reader that is critical, nuanced, and fair-minded, the essay on Nicaragua stands out, in my opinion, as somewhat one-sided. In “The Rise and Fall of Sandinista Alliances as a Means of Sociopolitical Change in Nicaragua,” Héctor M. Cruz-Feliciano employs the same theoretical framework, examining the use of pragmatic alliances as well as populist social projects by the Sandinistas after their electoral defeat in 1990 and in particular in the years leading up to the presidential elections of April 2018.

Cruz-Feliciano focuses on three important alliances. First, the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) reconciled with the Catholic Church. The new, pragmatic alliance with the church began in 2004 and led to “the passage of legislation criminalizing therapeutic abortion, [Cardinal Miguel] Obando’s designation as head of the Peace and Reconciliation Commission, and his recognition as National Hero of Peace and Reconciliation by the Sandinista-dominated National Assembly” (277). Ortega also forged an alliance with former contras, inviting

former contra leader Jaime Morales Carazo to be his vice presidential candidate on the FSLN ticket, and assured the business sector of his belief in the market economy. The third alliance was with the business sector. Ortega's vice presidential candidate helped the FSLN gain the support of the Superior Council of Private Enterprise. The proposed alliance, Cruz-Feliciano points out, was based on Ortega's promise that poverty would be alleviated through policies that include private sector initiatives.

These pragmatic alliances, argues Cruz-Feliciano, were important to the FSLN electoral victories of 2006, 2011, and 2016 and were conducive to economic development:

Until April 2018, Ortega's tenure was characterized by an increase in economic cooperation, growth in the number of state-supported social programs, and a sustained decrease in poverty levels. For a country that has for decades been one of the poorest in the hemisphere, these accomplishments are not to be taken lightly, since they help to explain the immense popularity of the FSLN and its growth with each election. (280)

Cruz-Feliciano maintains that these pragmatic alliances came into conflict with the FSLN's expressed progressive agenda and curtailed participatory democracy. In some cases, the government used repression against dissent, such as the case of clashes between the Sandinistas and indigenous communities over the construction of the Grand Nicaraguan Inter-oceanic Canal project.

With regard to the attempted coup of April 2018, Cruz-Feliciano exceeds legitimate criticism of Ortega's centralizing tendencies with a one-sided account of the events of that month. Claiming to be on "leftist" ground, he describes the anti-government protests as a legitimate response to the government's brutal repression of peaceful demonstrators and suggests that as a result of this betrayal of constituents, the FSLN ought to find a new leader to replace Ortega to move forward.

Cruz-Feliciano further suggests that by

2018, the FSLN had lost its leftist way and was being challenged from the left. What he calls "most accounts" of the events that took place in April of that year are limited to anti-government perspectives; his own account conspicuously makes no mention of the U.S.-backed attempt to overthrow the elected government of President Ortega, the significant pro-government reaction, and the use of violence and murder by some sectors of the opposition.

Yorlis Gabriela Luna, in "The Other Nicaragua, Empire and Resistance,"⁵ gives a detailed alternative account of the demonstrations of April 2018, pointing out that not all anti-government violence was counter violence, but a significant dimension of those protests were motivated by a U.S.-backed right-wing attempt at regime change.

Cruz-Feliciano argues,

While by most accounts what ignited the popular uprising was the repression itself, many have observed that the repression served as a means of legitimating a massive demonstration of discontent with the government's lack of policy coherence and the imposition of a governance model that gives the impression of being inclusive but does not actually provide the means for effective participation. (282)

Overreaction to protest is never excusable. But a balanced view would also take into account that during the protests and road blocks—in response to the fact that some Sandinistas or persons associated with Sandinismo were attacked and in some cases killed—there was also a "massive demonstration of discontent" by Nicaraguans who were determined to defend their neighborhoods from anti-government violence. Unfortunately, such demonstrations are not mentioned by Cruz-Feliciano.

It is interesting that Cruz-Feliciano argues that the Sandinistas did not do enough to advance structural changes, which would have involved policies "unsettling to the church,

political associates, and business elites” (287). The Sandinistas, according to this argument, missed an opportunity prior to April 2018 to advance popular democratic participation at all levels of government. Cruz-Feliciano dismisses claims by the Sandinistas that some government critics of these very forces were involved in a coup attempt. “In much the same way that the government overreacted toward the civic protests, it attacked the business sector and the Catholic Church for allegedly being part of a plot to stage a ‘soft coup’” (286). For this reason, says Cruz-Feliciano, the FSLN ought to disassociate itself from Ortega and Murillo and return to its roots in order to recuperate its legitimacy. It is not clear, however, that the elected government has lost democratic legitimacy, though the events of April 2018 have indeed set the stage for a vigorous political contest, by means of democratic procedures, in the next presidential election scheduled for 2021.

The theoretical framework employed in *Latin America's Pink Tide* is a valuable tool for understanding politics in the region. It provides lessons for future governance and helps us ask the right questions. For example, in Mexico, will Morena degenerate into an electoral machine or retain its roots in grassroots organizing? Is Lopez Obrador doing what is feasible, or is he failing to take

advantage of his enormous popularity to bring about structural reforms? Can the FMLN in El Salvador renovate the party, reconnect with its base, and avoid the centralization that led, in part, to its electoral defeat? Can Alberto Fernandez avoid excessive pacts with the right? And will Nicolas Maduro be able to balance pragmatic negotiation with the moderate opposition with protecting the working class from the brutal and relentless assault by U.S. Monroeism? Each of these cases involves walking a tightrope, but one on which successful leaders will find the right balance between pragmatism and populism to continue advancing a progressive agenda.

NOTES

1. A social philosophy of collective wellbeing that stresses harmonious community development and ecological balance.
2. Eduardo Gudynas, “Los progresismos sudamericanos: Ideas y prácticas, avances y límites,” in *Rescatar la esperanza. Más allá del neoliberalismo y el progresismo* (Barcelona: EntrePueblos, 2016), 40. Translation into English by Frederick Mills.
3. Massimo Modonesi, “Fin de la hegemonía progresista y giro regresivo en América Latina. Una contribución gramsciana al debate sobre el fin de ciclo,” in *Viento Sur* (Number 142, October 2015), 23–30.
4. Violent street barricades.
5. Council on Hemispheric Affairs, www.coha.org/the-other-nicaragua-empire-and-resistance.

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Painting the Passports Brown

Listening to Dylan During COVID-19

JORDY CUMMINGS

“THEY’RE PAINTING THE PASSPORTS brown,” sings Bob Dylan in his enigmatic masterpiece “Desolation Row” from *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965). The brown seems a reference to the color of Nazi shirts. A nose-to-the-stone activist in the civil rights movement, Dylan here evokes the fascistic qualities not merely of the police and Klansmen killing his comrades. The “brown” quality was the developing culture in Dylan’s beloved America, a near-fascistic culture in which bourgeois white people relished the repression and even murder of civil rights activists. Dylan’s power as a poet and what I would call a cultural interventionist is that, at his best, he is able to crystallize the world in which he is embedded, to both reflect and refract the particular moment to illuminate its universality and the possibility of human emancipation: the chimes of freedom crashing.

If “Desolation Row” was his exposition of the desolation he perceived under Johnson’s Great Society, his COVID-19 opus, “Murder Most Foul,” has a deceptively “shaggy-dog” quality to it. Dylan starts by rattling off a great American signifier in the classic sense, the “day that lived in infamy.” Yet within a few lines he is paraphrasing his 1976 song “Hurricane” and, within a verse, riffing on the Beatles, Woodstock, Altamont, and even Gerry and the Pacemakers. He repeatedly

returns to increasingly horror-movie style descriptions of the assassination. If anything, his work here is more reminiscent of the legendary *Basement Tapes* or his playful work with the Traveling Wilburys than it is his “serious, folkie” side. Taking the basic poetic structure of “Desolation Row” with a talking blues rap-type delivery, he is backed by one of his most astounding compositions and arrangements. It is almost ambient and droney, “shoegaze”¹ for a string section with very few chord changes, yet it very much evokes Nelson Riddle or Gordon Jenkins’ classic arrangements for Frank Sinatra.

Like “Blind Willie McTell,” left on the cutting-room floor of *Infidels* (1983), “Murder Most Foul” is an outtake from his somewhat forgettable last album of original material, *Tempest* (2012). By releasing it during the COVID-19 crisis, Dylan has pulled off a spectacular cultural intervention. While titillating Dylanologists and befuddling critics, Dylan has re-attained his gravitas with a genuine affective contagion, an ability to bypass mystification and evoke catharsis by commiserating the abstraction called “America.” This would be an astounding moment even were it in response to an old mediocrity like “Things Have Changed” or “Brownsville Girl.”

Yet this is arguably his most ambitious song-poem since “Desolation Row” itself; it marks a return to that row, the inescapable and irresistible other side of the tracks. On this side of tracks, down by the boondocks as it were, everybody asks which side are you on. Are you with Ezra Pound and T.S. Elliott, or with Einstein disguised as Robin Hood?

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Underneath historic specificity, Dylan sees a desolate world, what Marxists call “class society.” “Murder Most Foul” takes as its McGuffin the assassination of John F. Kennedy. From the assassination of Kennedy, we get a signifier of a rotting behemoth lurking underneath the wings of the American eagle, a figure out of H.P. Lovecraft, the secret demiurge of Desolation Row. The anxiety of all this, it seems from a surface reading, leads the troubadour to demand the legendary DJ Wolfman Jack play his favorite songs, from the Eagles to Oscar Peterson. He then finally returns to Dealey Plaza, proverbially speaking, to the blood-stained banner of the murder most foul.

But, of course, this is no Oliver Stone conspiracy nail-biter. Dylan even makes wordplay with “magic bullet.” Conspiracies aside, Stone’s social-patriotic film expresses a left-liberal desire for an alternate history where Kennedy gets out of Vietnam and makes friends with Khrushchev and Castro. If the assassination of Kennedy has been a part of Dylan lore for nearly 60 years, the seeming purpose of “Murder Most Foul” is about troubling Oliver Stone’s Camelot narrative, while also speaking to an audience that has internalized it, like the images of Pearl Harbor and 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis and the rise of COVID-19. In this read, Kennedy’s murder serves to demystify the monstrosity that is American society, but also to set it against another America, the America of rock and roll and jazz, of Marilyn Monroe and Wolfman Jack, not unlike the “America” of the Simon and Garfunkel song, of Kurt Vonnegut and Duke Ellington, of Kermit the Frog and Fozzie Bear.

The Kennedy assassination marked a turning point in Dylan’s relationship with the Old Left when he drunkenly accepted a special award from the Emergency Civil Liberties Commission. This organization, founded by those affected by McCarthyite repression and purged from the more well-known ACLU, was well-respected among

the aging, Jewish, Communist Party USA fellow-traveler community in New York. From denouncing in no uncertain terms the milieu he was addressing as “old,” and counterposing them to those who had gone on a solidarity trip to revolutionary Cuba, Dylan went on to “bomb” while ending on a shout-out to the radical wing of the civil rights movement:

I’ll stand up and to get uncompromisable about it, which I have to be to be honest, I just got to be, as I got to admit that the man who shot President Kennedy, Lee Oswald, I don’t know exactly where—what he thought he was doing, but I got to admit honestly that I too—I saw some of myself in him. ... You can boo but booing’s got nothing to do with it. It’s a—I just a—I’ve got to tell you, man, it’s Bill of Rights is free speech, and I just want to admit that I accept this Tom Paine Award in behalf of James Forman of the Students Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and on behalf of the people who went to Cuba. (Boos and applause)

Here, as with Malcolm X’s talk of chickens roosting, Dylan was surely being a sly provocateur—a troll, as we say nowadays, but a troll of the highest order: a dialectical troll, a joker, and a thief. And the often-befuddled reaction to Dylan’s cultural production among socialists shows them taking the bait. The dominant tendency is to periodize his work as “before” and “after” his political commitments. Without making a hard break of things, the late socialist cultural critic Mike Marqusee saw Dylan as a veritable solid comrade until a song like “My Back Pages” and his drift away from the civil rights movement and organized left.² Yet as Marqusee and others point out, when asked by a journalist in 1965 why he no longer wrote protest songs, Dylan answered, in one of his most unambiguous statements, “All my songs are protest songs.” And indeed, as the Old Left—those who unplugged him at Newport and organized booing campaigns of his Europe tour with

The Band—dropped him, the New Left adopted him. Or rather, in a sense, and rather unconsciously, he adopted the New Left. His protests weren't for the movement, they were of the movement. Dylan was a cognitive cartographer for the New Left, whatever his ostensible political stance happened to be at any given moment.

The questions that Dylan raises for socialist intellectuals and activists are not at all predicated upon his individual political stance—indeed his stances are never as precise as they are made out to be. His position is akin to that of Walter Benjamin, who was a Messianic revolutionary and a synoptic seer puzzled by his own visions. As Enzo Traverso points out about Benjamin, he struck his two best friends, Brecht and Scholem, as in the former case, too Jewish; in the latter case, too Marxist. Dylan is large; he contains multitudes, not all of them with proper IDs.

The mythological Dylan, metamorphosing from agitating folkie to impressionistic troubadour—followed by androgynous rock

Dylan's frame of reference. And it is this "Old Weird America," in Greil Marcus' terms,³ to which he returns in "Murder Most Foul."

DYLAN LORE HAS IT THAT "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall" was inspired by one of the great eschatological moments before our present one (as of April 2020), the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis. But it also began a turn for Dylan's output, away from exceptionally vivid protest poetry (with a few love songs and deceptively profound talking blues mixed in) toward an impressionistic style. What is more, with the capitulation of Northern Democrats and even some of the civil rights establishment to the Dixiecrats at the 1964 Democratic Convention, Dylan started to see the limitations of the movement itself.

In "Murder Most Foul" Dylan constantly returns in grotesque or melodramatic fashion to the scene of the crime. Increasingly he breaks into what has been derisively labelled "doggerel," compared by critics to maudlin romanticism in the style of Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire" or Don McLean's "American Pie." In this common reading, Dylan is simply showing the "decline" of an America that can achieve partial salvation through the "great American songbook." But Dylan is engaging in immanent critique of this separation. This is akin to a scene in Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* in which one hears the sweet, sweet sounds of Americana, banjos, dobros, and a fiddle. Yet the camera pans and we see this music being played by poor southern white men, who are about to castrate an escaped slave who is hanging upside down from the barn ceiling. This is why Dylan at times plays "Dixie," of all songs, and grapples with themes of the South in the Civil War. The ugliness of America is inseparable from the beauty of America, akin to Benjamin's unpacked library existing alongside his conception of progress as piling corpses. Like Benjamin, Dylan is engaging in revelation.

It is for this reason that Dylan's sense of

His protests weren't for the
movement, they were of the
movement.

star, reclusive stoner, Christian fundamentalist, rabid Zionist, and so forth—is rooted in some degree of reality. Yet throughout all of these mythologized personae, he never strayed from the antinomian idiom of a mythological America: the America of the civil rights movement and the International Workers of the World, but also the "land of Coca Cola." This America is worth ringing the chimes of freedom when the ship comes in, as you've not seen nothing like the Mighty Quinn. Yet it is set against an America of desolation, of murder, of outright evil, even. Evil exists, in

humor has always been a key ingredient in his genius, as it is both surreal and dark, titillating and poignant. The double-entendres and inside-joke references have always been there. Take “Rainy Day Woman #12 & 35,” as much about having stones both literally and proverbially tossed at one’s person as about cannabis-induced intoxication. Or “The Mighty Quinn,” a joking reference to Anthony Quinn but also to the idea that the mere presence of a celebrated figure will make everybody “jump for joy.” Like the masterpiece that never gets painted, Desolation Row is inescapable, and is seeded by murders most foul. Dylan scholars, both professional and amateur, may have great fun picking out references that are embedded throughout “Murder Most Foul” and why they are included. Does Dylan ask Wolfman Jack to play Billy Joel’s “Only the Good Die Young” in a joking reference to his own song’s surface-level similarity to “We Didn’t Start the Fire”? Is jazz saxophonist Stan Getz merely there to rhyme with Dicky Betts (of the Allman Brothers), or is it vice-versa? These are Dylan’s particular charms, a series of maker’s marks. It reminds me of the Wu-Tang Clan tracks in which RZA shouts out all of the other MCs and friends from the neighborhood, people who have inspired him: corner kids and shopkeepers, Allah’s Five Percenters and community organizers.

Dylan’s art encourages engaged listening and processing, not use as passive background noise. Cultural consumption is certainly in the sphere of commodity production, but it also retains an aura, a parcelized amount of disalienated time that can move beyond mere leisure or contemplation and toward taking a side. It may be the devil, or it may be the lord, but we live in a political world. Dylan is quite clearly not a socialist. Yet his art can only be understood as springing

from a socialist frame of reference, as much Duluth as New York City. A well-informed generalist for whom nothing under the sun is alien—even the Eagles’ wretched “Take it to the Limit” and the significance of the number 33 and the three tramps partying on the grassy knoll—Dylan is our Heine, our Goethe. To quote another poet/rock lyricist, Robert Hunter, his “job is to shed light, but not to master.”

While one can oppose the existence of the Nobel Prize, there is no doubt that if anyone deserves a Nobel Prize for literature, it is Dylan. Yet in one of his greatest recent cultural interventions, Dylan gave a deliberately trolling and plagiarized speech to the Nobel Committee, mailed in just before the six-month cut-off date. As with probably every great work that he has ever produced—from his renaming a Celtic folk song “Girl from the North Country” and then even stealing from himself by using the same music for “Boots of Spanish Leather,” through to his lack of denial that he cribbed from Civil War poets on his 2001 album “Love and Theft”—he stole, he thieved, he did it in a way that he would obviously get caught. And not just from an esoteric source that some such Hardy Boys would find in the darkness of night. No; it was from the online Spark Notes. Like a first-year student, he dazzled the bourgeoisie with brilliance and baffled them with bullshit. Rub-a-dub-dub, comrades, it’s a murder most foul.

NOTES

1. For an explanation of the rock subgenre “shoegaze,” see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoegazing.
2. See Mike Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s* (Seven Stories Press, 2005).
3. Greil Marcus, *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan’s Basement Tapes* (Picador, 2011).



Theory in Revolutionary Times

The Socialist Register Since the 1960s

RAFAEL KHACHATURIAN

THE *SOCIALIST REGISTER* HAS BEEN a staple of Marxist analysis on the Anglophone left since 1964. Founded by Ralph Miliband and John Saville as an “unsectarian” journal of the “autonomous left,” the *Register* sought to carve out a space, in Miliband’s words, “somewhere between ultra-leftism and left Labourism.”¹ Following Miliband’s death in 1994, the *Register* carried on as a collaborative, international project, today edited by Leo Panitch and Greg Albo. It has continued to publish annual volumes that tackle the major questions of the contemporary left’s zeitgeist: class, democracy, revolution, capitalism, empire, nature.

The articles gathered in *Class, Party, Revolution* mostly span the journal’s first decade, coinciding with a period seen as a time of intense contradictions. During that time, mass-based working-class movements and

social democratic parties in the Global North made important gains in the advancement of social rights; at the same time, these gains came with the price of integration into a class-

inclusive national capitalism. Many of the essays collected here, written either shortly before or in the wake of the events of May 1968, demonstrate how this moment prompted theoretical re-evaluations that pushed the boundaries of Marxist

social analysis. As the volume’s title suggests, they meditate on the complex relationship between social movements, political organization, and the possibility of revolutionary social change in postwar capitalist societies. Although undoubtedly products of their time, they also contain kernels of insight for present struggles, as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century in the midst of escalating global contradictions that leave no part of the world untouched by crisis.

The period between 1945 and 1968 was one of liberal reconsolidation in the Global North. The working classes of the advanced capitalist countries were accommodated to the requirements of postwar, Fordist capital-

Class, Party, Revolution: A Socialist Register Reader

EDITED BY GREG ALBO, LEO PANITCH, and ALAN ZUEGE
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ism, with its managerial relations of production and patterns of mass consumption. As this arrangement entered a crisis during the late 1960s, the rise of the New Left and the global uprising of May 1968 also meant that previous understandings of political organization, the nature of the transition to socialism, and the working class as a political subject needed urgent reconsideration. As Rossana Rossanda pointed out in her 1970 piece "Class and Party," the May events prompted a rethinking of Marxist theory and practice, of the relationship between the working class and its vanguard, and between the spontaneous actions of the masses and established organizations like trade unions and parties.

This concern spans all the essays gathered here. In the spirit of the New Left, they continue to assert the primacy of class analysis while also dislodging mechanical or deterministic understandings of class struggle. Articles such as Hal Draper's "The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels" and Monty Johnstone's "Marx and Engels and the Concept of the Party" argue that they conceived of class struggle as a dynamic process, emphasizing a *mass* movement for self-emancipation initiated from below. Revolutionary consciousness and political organization needed to emerge organically, as pedagogical effects of concerted struggles through which the working class learned that it had the power to change social institutions. As Harold Wolpe wrote in "Some Problems Concerning Revolutionary Consciousness," institutions once seen as natural and immutable would then be subject to the "de-reification of the institutional structure" in people's consciousnesses. One of the tasks of theory was thus to clarify under what conditions social structures could generate new forms of political agency and prompt further changes in class consciousness.

Among the distinctive features of the volume is that it captures the beginning of the contemporary turn to Gramsci. Translations of Gramsci into English began appearing

in the late 1950s, issuing a revival of his thought among the Anglophone New Left over the next two decades.² John Merrington's "Theory and Practice in Gramsci's Marxism" reads as fresh today as it did in 1968, while Wolpe's contribution claimed him to be the thinker who most clearly emphasized the dialectical ties between political leadership and the masses, and between base and superstructure. Likewise, Alasdair Davidson's "Gramsci and Lenin 1917-1922" notes a convergence between the two figures, insofar as both were concerned with articulating a "philosophy of praxis" that linked the revolutionary party and workers councils as complementary forms of political organization.

At the same time, the authors represented in this volume were largely critical of contemporary communist parties, in both the West and the Soviet bloc, for their vanguardist and insular political practices. All recognize that Marx and Engels understood the mass party to be the main vehicle for the transmission of socialist ideas to the working classes. However, as Johnstone pointed out, it was to be "a *moment* in the development of the proletariat"—one that would set the stage for its own disappearance or self-abolition. As if to illustrate the opposite outcome, Miliband's piece "Lenin's *The State and Revolution*" reflects on both the persistence of the state apparatuses and the unresolved place of the party in that text, seeing them as ambiguities that haunted communism over the remainder of the twentieth century. Also notable here is the interview that Lucio Magri's and Rossanda's *Il Manifesto* conducted with Jean-Paul Sartre in 1970, which highlights the necessary dialectic between mass and party: The key political problem was of how to prevent the party from ossifying into an institution opposed to collective movements, and instead to keep it open and receptive to them.

This matter is also taken up in the individual contributions by Rossanda and Magri, informed by the authors' own experiences in the Italian Communist Party, from which

they were expelled in 1969. Like Merrington, Rossanda favored the approaches of Luxemburg and Gramsci, suggesting that the class-party relationship and revolutionary praxis hinged on the “careful analysis of the different class contradictions in advanced societies” and the concrete historical situation. Meanwhile, Magri’s “The May Revolution and the Events in the West” reflects on the lessons of the student revolt—both that it revealed the limits of the capitalist system’s mechanisms of integration, *and* that, nevertheless, revolution in the West “*cannot* be achieved with the theoretical and organizational means that the working-class movement has at its disposal today.” For Magri, as for a number of the authors included here, the new course lay in the formation of an anti-capitalist “politicosocial bloc” based on mass struggles that began with immediate demands and progressed to more revolutionary challenges.

Along with Magri, Andre Gorz’s “Reform and Revolution” most explicitly grapples with the question of socialist strategy in the contemporary context. For both authors, the revolutionary path entailed struggles for reforms that undercut, rather than reproduced, the existing political order, thereby creating the basis for escalating, sharper antagonisms. As a strategy of transition, Gorz’s “non-reformist reforms” were phases in a protracted struggle that, by exposing the inability of the capitalist system to meet the escalating set of demands, prepared the terrain for a more decisive rupture with capitalist relations of production. Such a transition was envisioned as a relatively expedited and continuous period of uncertainty, mobilization, and contestation that, nevertheless, was more strategically promising than either social democratic or communist alternatives. As in the other essays, here too Gorz echoed the need for existing communist parties to productively draw on the popular energies emerging through the various anti-capitalist, feminist, ecological, and anti-racist movements of the late 1960s.

Reading this volume in 2020 is a somewhat curious experience in light of both the long period of neoliberal hegemony that soon followed these essays’ publication and the growing enthusiasm about socialism in the United States today. The essays analyze a different conjuncture—one that was dominated by the question of how revolutionary movements in the Global North could overcome both the accommodation of social democracy to postwar capitalist society and the ossification of Marxism-Leninism into the ideology of state socialism. Today, as the left is undergoing a process of recomposition, we are dealing with the question of what this vision of democratic socialism can mean in the wake of neoliberal capitalism, the decay of representative institutions in the capitalist state, the ecological crisis, and now the COVID-19 global pandemic.

It is here that we may begin to extrapolate some lessons for today’s left—ones that, in the tradition of the *Register*, avoid both dogmatism and accommodation. In the United States, “non-reformist reforms” have become an influential general strategic position of the rising Democratic Socialists of America.³ Alongside this, the writings of Luxemburg, Kautsky, Gramsci, Miliband, and Poulantzas have served as the basis for a new round of debates about the relationship between social class, the state, party politics, and political strategy.

Two selections included in *Class, Party, Revolution*, from the *Register*’s 2017 volume, “Rethinking Revolution,” begin to address this new constellation of forces. In “Class, Party, and the Challenge of State Transformation,” Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin note how the “marked turn on the left from protest to politics has consequently come to define the new conjuncture, as opposition to capitalist globalization shifted from the streets to the state theaters of neoliberal practice.” Yet it is a fact that the left—and which left?—is still drastically far from the seat of power. Recent experiences, from the disappointment

of Syriza to the defeat of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour in the December 2019 elections, have only magnified the degree of difficulty for initiating any kind of transitional program to socialism. Had Bernie Sanders defied the odds and entered November 2020 as the Democratic Party's nominee, he would have faced a wildly uncertain election. Moreover, had he won, his ambitious political program would undoubtedly encounter substantial opposition from both parties and the other parts of the state.

This question of state power ties together most of the articles, as the volume speaks to the problems that any left government looking to initiate a transition to socialism will encounter. A mass working-class party is still the necessary starting point for a socialist movement that hopes to withstand the vagaries of the electoral cycle, the pressure from the state apparatuses, and the structural advantages of organized capital. Tracing a line from Marx and Engels to Lenin, August Nimtz's 2017 piece "Marx and Engels on the Revolutionary Party" defends the classical model of the revolutionary party as based upon dual power, independent electoral action, and an armed proletariat. But as the other essays gathered here anticipate, this party will have to differ in important ways from the legacy of previous Marxist-Leninist party forms. While in the past, democratic centralism led these parties to isolate themselves from the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, whatever party form emerges from the current set of forces must be more dynamic, flexible, and open to both strategic alliances and a plurality of positions on the left. As Panitch and Gindin suggest, the socialist party must help coalesce the new patterns of class formation

by bridging working-class communities currently sequestered by identity-based antagonisms and by providing the institutions where social movements can assume a political shape. But if the strategy of non-reformist or structural reforms is to become more than theoretical speculation, it will depend on how effectively the socialist movement can balance between advancing struggles inside the capitalist state via a party and mobilizing the broader ecology of left social movements outside of the state's boundaries.

As Merrington notes in his essay on Gramsci, Marxism as a theory is at its finest when it is adapted to specific conjunctures, where "new insights produce new theoretical solutions ... coming to grips with reality, revealing its contradictions and directing action toward revolutionary socialist goals." The essays featured in this volume suggest that there is no shortage of theoretical tools to draw upon—and for that, they are a valuable resource. Situated in their own time, they serve as a mirror image of the problems facing us today, including the specific form that a newer left will take. The task is to critically read and actualize these insights from the standpoint of the present, with all of its own contradictions, challenges, and possibilities.

NOTES

1. Letter from Ralph Miliband to E.P. Thompson, 1963. Quoted in Madeleine Davis, "Rethinking Class: The Lineage of the Socialist Register," *Socialist Register* (50, 2014), 298.
2. Joseph Buttigieg, "Gramsci in English," *International Gramsci Journal* (vol. 3, no. 1, 2018).
3. For example, Joseph M. Schwartz and Bhaskar Sunkara, "What Should Socialists Do?" *Jacobin* (2017), jacobinmag.com/2017/08/socialist-left-democratic-socialists-america-dsa.

The Farm Equipment Workers

A History of Radical Labor

JAMES YOUNG

SELDOM DOES AN AUTHOR DESERVE the praises heaped upon her book by the writers of promotional blurbs. Toni Gilpin and her *Long Deep Grudge* is the exception. With a light hand and the humor and drama of a novelist, the author tells the stories of generations of workers generally downplayed if not entirely ignored by historians and other communicators who favor the apparent “winners” in a society in which elite domination is assumed. In our historical moment of widespread discontent, Gilpin’s combination of balanced historiography, incisive analysis, and a touch of memoir produces a page-turner that shows, among other things, that history matters and that working people should learn their own history.

Gilpin, a member of Democratic Socialists of America, academic professional, and union activist, makes no bones about where she stands. She reveals from the outset her leftist family origins—her father’s Communist Party affiliation and lifetime com-

mitment to union activism—and her own leftist, pro-labor sympathies throughout her adulthood. But as a rigorous historian, Gilpin nonetheless provides an acutely accurate account of the farm equipment industry—especially the International Harvester Corporation (Harvester)—and the workers and activists who produced its profits.

Crucial to the author’s analysis is a deep respect for the power of collective memory and the need to preserve it against the hegemony of the dominant forces that would erase from history the victories and the defeats of working people in order to persuade ordinary folks that “there is no alternative” (and never was) to the present system and its elites. Like her mentor David Montgomery and others, she recognizes the long history of workers’ efforts to resist the control and degradation of labor by employers’ sociopathic pursuit of ever-greater profit at the expense of those who create it. Collective memory shares the story with class identity and struggles within the agricultural equipment industry in the Midwest and in Kentucky. Gilpin explains how memory and class identity merged to create an ideology among leaders and members of a small but militant labor union, the United Farm Equipment Workers of America, that emerged in the 1930s in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), labor’s most dynamic coalition of the day.

*The Long Deep Grudge:
A Story of Big Capital,
Radical Labor, and Class War
in the American Heartland*

TONI GILPIN
Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020.

JAMES YOUNG is a long-time member of Democratic Socialists of America, professor of history emeritus at Edinboro University, retired Pennsylvania Social Services Union staff member, and author of *Union Power: United Electrical Workers in Erie, Pennsylvania* (Monthly Review Press, 2017) and numerous historical and literary articles. He is treasurer of the Pennsylvania Labor History Society and a member of the National Writers Union.

But the author also anchors that success in the defining events of 1885-1886 in Chicago and their reverberation for several generations across time. After the clash over wage cuts between the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company's president, Cyrus McCormick II, and the mostly Irish iron molders who labored in the foundry at the company's McCormick Works, several other events followed. The inclusive organizing tactics of Myles McPadden of the National Union of Iron Molders gained the support of workers throughout the plant, mostly Germans, and routed an armed Pinkerton contingent, winning the strike. A determined but astute Cyrus II rescinded the pay cut, and all strike-breaking scabs were fired. Then the boss turned to retaliation: He soon installed automatic molding machinery and later got rid of McPadden. But labor was on the march in Chicago. Enter the anarchists.

European radicalism melded with heartland ideals of freedom and equality and spawned the anarchists' "Chicago Idea," which held that radicalized labor unions could spearhead social and economic change, by violent actions if necessary. Soon, August Spies and Albert Parsons stood out amid would-be anarchist leaders, as an ever-more-militant movement arose in favor of establishing the workday as eight hours in length and the Knights of Labor expanded quickly as it promoted a general strike in support of that goal, come May 1, 1886. Gilpin states that at least 30,000 Chicagoans struck on that May Day, testifying to Chicago's volatility, since no more than 200,000 turned out nationwide. The setting soon became volcanic.

A three-month lockout of workers led to a violent confrontation outside the McCormick Works in which police killed one man and wounded others. A protest rally called by the anarchists met that evening at Haymarket, near downtown, but was dispersing as a contingent of armed police approached the group and ordered them to do what they were already doing. As the police closed in

upon the remnants, a bomb was thrown that landed among the officers; seven of them were killed by the bomb and by their panicked fellows. A wave of anti-immigrant and anti-radical vitriol burst over Chicago and

Crucial to the author's analysis is a deep respect for the power of collective memory.

much of the rest of the country, led by the commercial press, and a demand for revenge arose among the city's "better circles." In addition to the subsequent legal lynching of Albert Parsons, August Spies, and two others—none of whom was accused of throwing the bomb—the reactionary elements moved to suppress all dissenters. Renowned author and *Atlantic Monthly* editor William Dean Howells lamented that "this free republic has killed four people for their opinions." In the following months and years employers, including Cyrus McCormick II, were to renege on their promises to enact the eight-hour day at their work sites and then suppress, lock out, and otherwise stifle working people.

This history helps us understand Chicago workers' ongoing memories of a long tradition of repression, terror, and fraud by employers. Gilpin's "ghosts of Haymarket" continued to inform the worker base in its future struggles. The McCormicks and their fellow employers suffered from their own specters in the early twentieth century. Louis Brandeis's conversion of Woodrow Wilson to a union-friendly posture, government intrusions into the economy during the Great War, the Russian Revolution, and a renewed militancy of American workers produced great discomfort. Cyrus II himself lost a plant outside of Moscow.

Alarmed, corporate leaders created,

in the wake of deep social disturbances of 1918-1921, the Employee Representation Committee, which appeared to the gullible to give workers a meaningful voice in the management of the enterprise. Workers at

“No strike” did not mean
no struggle. The Greatest
Generation were no pushovers
on the home front.

Harvester soon grasped the hoax. Later, the Great Depression showed that those who had claimed credit for the “permanent prosperity” of the 1920s could not escape blame for the collapse in the 1930s. Unions began to regain supporters. Secret meetings of Harvester’s Works Council members soon developed a de facto affiliation with the Communist-led Trade Union Unity League.

The left-led uprisings in Toledo, San Francisco, the textile South, and Minneapolis sparked enough concern among the elite that the next year produced the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), the Social Security Act (including unemployment insurance), and growing support for unions. Harold Fowler McCormick, Cyrus’s son and successor, resisted these historic grains. But the radical core of workers at Harvester invoked the memory again of 1886, and this time they prevailed.

Gilpin dedicates most of her attention to the Farm Equipment Workers Organizing Committee (FE) after their successes of 1938. Gilpin cites the dozens of contractual work stoppages—but not official strikes—each year at Harvester plants despite labor’s “no strike” pledge during World War II. Not surprisingly, most stoppages occurred over piece-rate manipulations by management. “No strike” did not mean no struggle. The

Greatest Generation were no pushovers on the home front.

The war was barely over when the United Auto Workers (UAW) began a practice that would badly weaken American labor. As corporations emerged from the war with unprecedented power and wealth, the UAW raided the FE in November 1945 and inaugurated intra-CIO cannibalism. As organized workers stood at the threshold of great power, the CIO began to splinter along political lines and made deadly rivalries a way of life. The U.S. labor movement still suffers from this split.

Gilpin relates and documents thoroughly the assaults upon the FE. Blows from the corporate right were expected, but from the progressive UAW? Yes, but this first venture fell flat, as FE received 63 percent of the vote at the McCormick Works. The future did not look good, however, with the mighty UAW as an adversary. Yet, the FE decided in 1947 to contest the organizing of Harvester’s new plant in Louisville, opposing both the UAW and the AFL. Again, the tiny FE—never reaching 100,000 members—defeated the giants with a relentless person-to-person campaign by volunteers who encountered workers at the plant, at home, and at church with a straight-up anti-racist message. Then the Taft-Hartley Act, a union-hostile amendment to the NLRA, hit labor hard; the most bruising blow was Section 9h.

Section 9h held that no member of the Communist or Nazi party, or any organization advocating the forceful overthrow of the government, could serve as an officer in an American labor union and that all union officials had to take an oath that they were not members of such groups. Of course labor generally condemned the Taft-Hartley Act, which CIO president Phil Murray labeled “a slave labor act,” and counseled noncompliance; but AFL unions—except the United Mine Workers and the Typographical Union—complied, and CIO unions soon began to adhere to the law. After the FE lost a big Caterpillar local to the UAW (which had

complied) because noncooperating unions had no standing at the Labor Board, the leaders signed the oath after several resigned their positions, a step that Gilpin implies was taken a little late.

Gilpin does not describe all 16 UAW raids against the FE, but she explains the reasoning of the FE leadership as they faced “The Shrinking Realm of the Possible” in 1948-1955. In 1948 the FE became the first union to endorse the Progressive Party candidacy of Henry Wallace for president, and it opposed the Marshall Plan. The FE leaders then sought strength in numbers and affiliated with the United Electrical Workers (UE), another Communist-led union, but

Gilpin notes that the relationship remained uneasy, and the UE itself suffered heavy attacks from the UAW and the Steel Workers and AFL unions. After 1949 the CIO would fund a new International Union of Electrical Workers to destroy the UE. The writing was on the wall. The leaders discussed alternatives, and in 1955 they affiliated with their nemesis, the UAW.

Readers of Toni Gilpin’s *The Long Deep Grudge* will learn more than they’ve counted on and will enjoy the lesson very much—even the footnotes. Her account of a radical, democratic union of the past contains much that counts as a useable history.

Analyzing the *Communist Manifesto*

PHIL GASPER

ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-TWO years after its original publication, the *Communist Manifesto* never seems to go out of style for very long. As the late Marshall Berman once put it,

Whenever there’s trouble, anywhere in the world, the book becomes an item; when things quiet down, the book drops out of sight; when there’s trouble again, the people who forgot remember. When fascist-type regimes seize power, it’s

always on the list of books to burn. When people dream of resistance—even if they’re not Communists—it provides music for their dreams.¹

The Adventures of the *Communist Manifesto*

HAL DRAPER
Haymarket Books, 2020, xiv
+ 352 pp.

With the world facing pandemic, economic crisis, growing inequality, political polarization, and rising international tensions, there is certainly no shortage of troubles, so it may have been the right time for Haymarket Books to republish Hal Draper’s *The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto*, which includes several versions of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ classic text along with detailed commentary by Draper.

Draper was an active revolutionary socialist in the United States from the 1930s until

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his death in 1990. He was a prolific writer (a frequent contributor to *New Politics* in the 1960s and a member of its editorial board), and his multivolume work, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, is still arguably the best study of Marx's political ideas. Draper was a scholar but never a narrow academic—he wrote for socialist activists who want a deeper understanding of their political tradition precisely

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so they can respond more effectively to the world's many troubles. This is definitely the spirit that lies behind *The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto*.

Full disclosure: I am also the editor of an annotated edition of the *Communist Manifesto* published by Haymarket Books.² However, the two editions are not really in competition. Mine was intended for students and young activists new to both Marxism and the *Manifesto*. Draper's *Adventures*, on the other hand, is intended for readers who may already be familiar with the *Manifesto* but who are interested in taking a deeper dive. It might be particularly helpful for someone who is going to teach a class or lead a study group on the *Manifesto* or Marxist theory.

Adventures was first published by the Center for Socialist History in 1994, based on an earlier Draper publication—*The Annotated Communist Manifesto*—and a completed but unpublished manuscript that makes up Part I of the present work. The book consists of three parts in total. First, an extensive history of the *Manifesto* and its various translations, starting with Marx and Engels' involvement with the

Communist League from 1847, and ending with a survey of English translations produced after 1888. Second, no less than four versions of the text: (i) the original German published in 1848; (ii) the first English translation, produced by Helen MacFarlane in 1850; (iii) the "Authorized English Translation" (AET) produced in 1888 (five years after Marx's death) by Samuel Moore and extensively reworked by Engels; and (iv) Draper's own translation (a "New English Version," NEV) of the text. Third, Draper's detailed paragraph-by-paragraph annotations.

With respect to the texts of the *Manifesto*, the MacFarlane version (which renders the pamphlet's famous opening sentence as "A frightful hobgoblin stalks throughout Europe") is largely a historical curiosity. The main interest is comparing the AET with Draper's NEV. As Draper points out, the 1888 translation was based on a draft by Moore that Engels then substantially revised. Engels' intention was to make the *Manifesto* more readable and intelligible for an English-speaking audience, and in this he was largely successful. Draper's new translation is intended to cast light on Engels' choices and changes. As he puts it, "The considerations that Engels had in mind as he worked hurriedly on the translation should not *now* continue weighing on all those who come to the *Manifesto* to inquire into its views. It is necessary to provide a way of getting behind the AET" (106-7).

In a few places, however, Draper also points out that the AET is confusing, misleading, or simply mistaken. As an example of the latter, Draper discovered that an entire sentence was accidentally omitted from the section on "German or True Socialism" in Part III (paragraph 154, p. 173). Another example is a frequently quoted sentence from Part I, in which Marx and Engels credit the bourgeoisie and the economic changes it initiated with rescuing (in the AET's words) "a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life" (paragraph 28, p. 123). Draper points

out in his notes that this is a mistranslation:

The German word *Idiotismus* did not, and does not, mean “idiocy” (*Idiotie*); it usually means “idiom,” like its French cognate *idiotisme*. But here it means neither. In the nineteenth century, German still retained the original Greek meaning of forms based on the word *idiotes*: a private person, withdrawn from public (communal) concerns, *apolitical* in the original sense of isolation from the larger community. ... What the rural population had to be saved from, then, was the *privatized apartness* of a life-style isolated from the larger society: the classic *stasis* of peasant life. (220)

In the NEV, Draper translates this as “the privatized isolation of rural life.”

Even more valuable are Draper’s interpretive comments on the text. In the final sentence of Part I, Marx and Engels declare that the bourgeoisie’s “fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (141). Draper points out, however, that at the beginning of Part I, the authors explicitly say that class struggle may end “in the common ruin of the contending classes” (113). He comments,

Above all, this passage shows how mythical is the view that Marx believed in some sort of metaphysical “inevitability of socialism,” according to which socialist victory is as fatefully predestined as, say, the salvation of Calvinistic saints. ... On the contrary, society is faced with the alternatives later tagged “socialism or barbarism”—either a revolution that remakes society or the collapse of the old order to a lower level. ... The Manifesto makes clear that the fate of society will be decided as usual by social struggle, not by metaphysics. (210)

But what then of the claim of inevitability at the end of Part I? In the German text, the word used is *unvermeidlich*,

which often, as in English, conveys nothing more than high hope and confidence in a hortatory context. ... In practice the *unvermeidlich* is counterposed to the

accidental, in order to stress that a phenomenon obeys definite laws and is the outcome of causes that can be examined; it implies a scientific attitude to causation, not a metaphysical one. (243)

Draper’s notes contain numerous other valuable insights, including his refutation of the myth that Marx and Engels believed that the middle classes (balanced between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) would vanish and his commentary on passages where Marx and Engels seem to make incorrect predictions, such as the end of the family (153) or the disappearance of “[n]ational divisions and antagonisms between peoples” (157).

But this new edition would have benefited from some better proofreading. On two title pages at the front, the book is named as “*The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto*.” Worse, on page 163, the ninth point in the program that Marx and Engels propose at the end of Part II for the “most advanced countries” following a workers’ revolution is missing from the AET translation. (This is the call for “Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country.” In Draper’s translation, this is rendered as a call for “the gradual elimination of the antithesis of town and country,” which seems like a more realistic goal.) No doubt these errors will be corrected in subsequent printings.

Despite these minor blemishes, Draper’s translation and his perceptive and erudite commentaries make this a book that everyone with a serious interest in Marx’s thought will want to have in their collection.

NOTES

1. “Unchained Melody,” *Nation*, May 11, 1998, 11. Reprinted in *Adventures in Marxism* (New York: Verso, 2001).
2. *The Communist Manifesto: A Road Map to History’s Most Important Political Document* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005).

Dark Satanic Mills

ERIC BLAIR

IT IS EASY TO FORGET THE FACTORY, especially for those of us in the “post-industrial” Global North. Few of us work in them—fewer than 10 percent in the United States. In our metropolitan conglomerations, the largest and most iconic workplaces are often conduits of consumption, such as warehouses and big-box stores; or bastions of business services, such as finance and information technology; or care suppliers, such as hospitals and schools. Factories rarely dominate the skylines of our cities and towns the way they once did. Given that five million of them disappeared between 2000 and 2016, we now think of factory jobs nostalgically, as good middle-class jobs that are never coming back.

Yet, as Joshua Freeman reminds us, factories remain essential to our lives. Virtually all our possessions come from factories: the furniture we sit and sleep on; the cars, buses, and trains we ride; the phones with which we communicate; the lamps that give us light; even the sheetrock that forms the walls of our homes. Factories have not disappeared. They have just moved. Worldwide, manufacturing is as large as it has ever been in terms of output and employment. And the biggest factories in history, measured by employment, are cur-

rently in operation.

Freeman tells the story of the factory—and primarily the giant factory—since John and Thomas Lombe built the first silk mill in Derby, England, three hundred years ago.

Each chapter explores a phase and/or location of factory development: England’s eighteenth-century “dark satanic mills,” New England’s “utopian” textile towns, the promise and peril of Promethean steel-making, the romance of

Fordism, crash Soviet industrialization, Cold War mass production on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and the “hidden” behemoths of China and Vietnam.

As Freeman sees it, the factory is an essential foundation of modernity, in all its contradictions and its manifestations. It is a source of “miraculous productive power” and it has a “long history of exploitation.” It contributed to the overthrow of old agrarian orders, and it established new forms of industrial authoritarianism. It helped create the working class and it buttressed the bourgeoisie (or the “socialist” state). It inspired beautiful and celebratory modern art, and it provoked justified critiques of its monstrous deformities.

In telling the stories of large factories, Freeman deftly weaves together social, economic, labor, political, and cultural history. Thus, factories are not only buildings in which people work and products are made. They are economic engines that sustain life,

Behemoth: A History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World

JOSHUA FREEMAN
New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018

ERIC BLAIR is a labor researcher and organizer and long-time student of U.S. labor history.

social and cultural institutions that shape how people interact and see themselves, and political organizations that mold workers into citizens. Most crucially, they are sites of intense contestation in all these realms.

Retelling 300 years of world history through the lens of the factory has its costs and benefits. By bringing together historical developments from different places and times, *Behemoth* makes some fascinating comparisons, uncovering continuities and discontinuities that improve our understanding of factories no matter where or when. At the same time, hopscotching around the globe through three centuries means that Freeman can only outline answers to period- and location-specific questions. Thankfully, for most of those questions, Freeman's stories, and his endnotes, offer good starting points to delve deeper.

Several themes course throughout *Behemoth*. One of those is size. Why do capitalists (and state bureaucracies) build such large factories and hire so many workers? There are multiple answers to that question, depending on such variables as the technology available, the structure of the market for the commodity produced, the relations between capital and labor, and the interests of the state.

The Ford River Rouge automobile complex was enormous in large part because it brought together in one place virtually all the activities—and worker skills—needed to produce an automobile, including the production of steel from iron and coal, the transformation of rubber into tires, the manufacture of glass, the fabrication of parts from those and other basic materials, and the final assembly of the car. In addition to economies of scale—spreading more production over a fixed set of plant assets—with control over each aspect of production, Ford and its workers could develop specializations and capture efficiencies at every point in the process. At its height of employment in 1929, the Rouge employed 102,811 workers, the most ever at one factory in U.S. history.

By contrast, Foxconn City in Shenzhen, China, had more than 300,000 workers in the mid-2010s, producing products such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops for companies such as Apple, HP, and Dell. But unlike the Rouge, Foxconn produced few parts. Rather, it was mostly a final assembler in a global supply chain. It had short, simple, and labor-intensive production processes, using several dozen to a little over 100 unskilled workers to assemble each product. The complexity, and much of the value, was not at Foxconn; it was in the supply chain.

So, if the technical requirements of production did not involve more than six score workers, why did Foxconn employ hundreds of thousands of them? Just one reason: The customers demanded it. Apple, HP, Dell, and other “peak” corporations needed a single producer that could provide the volume their market dominance required. To meet the demand, Foxconn simply replicated its assembly process hundreds, even thousands, of times, with tens of thousands of workers doing virtually the same activities. Not coincidentally, as Chinese workers in large manufacturing centers such as Shenzhen and Dongguan began to protest their wages and working conditions, Foxconn and other manufacturers started to shift production to new facilities in the interior of China, or to Vietnam, where the price of labor was lower and the practice

Factories have not disappeared.
They have just moved.

of collective action less prevalent.

The experience of factory work constitutes another theme Freeman explores. Foxconn and other Chinese manufacturers exploit cheap, plentiful labor, and, much like the New England textile mills of the early

nineteenth century, that labor comes from the countryside. Whereas the mills hired mostly young women and some men from nearby family farms and housed them in local boarding houses, Chinese manufacturers hire young migrant women and men from the distant countryside and put them up in their own massive dormitories. Similarly, just as New England mill workers sometimes returned to their farms and sometimes embraced the delights of city life, Chinese workers sometimes return home to marriage and family and sometimes set down roots in rapidly expanding Chinese urban centers. This pattern of converting preindustrial populations into working classes has been a feature inherent in giant factories across time, space, and political economy.

Likewise, class conflict was and is endemic to giant factories. Freeman recounts the Luddite protests against early British mills, strikes in New England textile factories, the Homestead and 1919 steel strikes, and the unionization of U.S. basic industry in the 1930s and 1940s. In Freeman's telling, class struggle plays a more central role in the development of factory relations in capitalist countries than in "socialist" ones. For example, in describing the crash industrialization of the Stalinist First Five-Year Plan, Freeman notes the use of forced labor but not the strikes, slowdowns, and demonstrations, as described by historians such as Jeffrey Rossman or Donald Filtzer, that also occurred during the period.*

Exactly why workplace struggle shaped up differently in Soviet tractor factories, British textile mills, Vietnamese shoe factories, or American steel plants is a question Freeman

only hints at. We learn, for example, about the "common democratic vision" driving the strike of English-speaking white men in the Amalgamated Association of Iron

Class conflict was endemic to giant factories.

and Steel Workers at Homestead in 1892. In comparison, the massive recent strikes of Vietnamese and Chinese workers come across as spontaneous, focused solely on bread-and-butter issues, without a larger vision of workplace power and democracy. Neither story is complete, and herein lies a drawback of such a sweeping history focused on a method for the organization of production rather than its social relations: It cannot capture the complexity, diversity, and historical specificity of the development of class consciousness to allow useful comparisons for historians and activists. But it does provide some hints.

Freeman uses different categories of analysis in different times and places. For example, state planning was no less important in Britain, New England, or Detroit for the development of factories than in Magnitogorsk, Nowa Huta, or Dongguan. Yet, Freeman stresses the state-level political contests that shaped "socialist" factories far more than capitalist ones. He delves deeply into the cultural movements that shaped or were shaped by the construction, operation, and interpretation of particular factories but not others. He stresses the relationship between factory and home life in New England textile mills, factory and city in Stalingrad, and factory and market in Shenzhen. Certainly, context matters, and the abundance with which Freeman provides it produces great insight into individual factories. The most interesting insights, however, come when Freeman transcends the context

*Jeffrey J. Rossman, *Worker Resistance Under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor* (Harvard, 2005); Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (M.E. Sharpe, 1986), which Freeman does cite.

and carries the analysis across time and space, as in the comparisons of Foxconn's operations with Ford's or New England textile workers with Shenzhen electronics workers. With more theoretical consistency, there might have been more such insights.

Modernity is the one category Freeman consistently parades across time and space, but with few analytical results. As he admits, it is "a slippery term," and, in *Behemoth*, it ends up meaning little more than the new and the now. Freeman does describe the contradictions of modernity—its horrors as well as its delights—especially as manifest in the giant factory. But if factories—and their cultural centrality—helped to make the modern world, indeed exemplified modernity itself, their absence must tell us something, too. Do we live in a post-modern world? Freeman doesn't say.

Behemoth reviews the contemporaneous debates that accompanied the emergence of factories in different geographies and periods, and how those debates evolved over time. Time and again, new factories were celebrated for their innovative and transformative productive capacities: the efficiency of textile mills in Britain, the Promethean power of iron and steel mills in the United States, and the alleged vanquishing of scarcity embodied in Soviet factories. In almost every era, artists and writers from Anthony Trollope to Charles Dickens to Diego Rivera commemorated factories in paintings, poems, novels, photographs, and documentary films, and factories provided, at least for a time, an aesthetic that seeped into industrial, residential, and commercial designs of all types.

In some cases, ruling classes, and even workers, celebrated the new factories not just for the consumptive bounty they produced but for the workers and communities they created. Owners of early U.S. textile mills spoke paternalistically about the opportunities they offered women, who lived in well-run boardinghouses, joined churches, attended lectures, and enrolled in evening schools. One of first

steelworkers organizations called itself the Sons of Vulcan and portrayed its members as the masculine, skilled, and powerful bearers of progress and civilization.

Similarly, early Soviet leaders, including Lenin and Trotsky, pushed, over objections from Left Communists and then the Workers' Opposition, to adopt scientific management and Taylorism as means to transform peasants into the workers needed for rapid industrialization. Soviet leaders also built factory cities with worker housing, canteens, schools, recreation rooms, libraries, theaters, and clubs, all used to further inculcate peasants to modern "socialist" life. Likewise, for several decades after World War II, factories on both sides of the Iron Curtain delivered extraordinary improvements in pay, benefits, and security, providing the material basis to incorporate large portions of the working class into mainstream political culture, albeit with highly consequential racial and ethnic exceptions.

Eventually, and sometimes quickly, the admiration for factories faded, particularly as workers' struggles emerged. British textile mills enjoyed no honeymoon, as the squalid conditions were evident from the start. The textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, lost their allure after several decades when competition increased, paternalism faded, the workforce changed from farm women to immigrant families, and strikes became more frequent. Artists of all types continued to celebrate the transformative power of factories through the turn of the twentieth century in monuments like the Eiffel Tower or the many exhibitions celebrating modern machinery and factory techniques. Yet, for critics such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Joseph Stella, and Lincoln Steffens, iron and steel plants were just as dark and satanic as the first British textile factories two hundred years earlier. Likewise, just three years after Diego Rivera celebrated Ford's River Rouge in the mural *Detroit Industry* on the walls of the city's Institute of Arts, Charlie Chaplin

produced *Modern Times*, a scathing critique of the dangerous, soul-deadening monotony of mass production and the exploitative system in which it was embedded.

In the Soviet Bloc, according to Freeman, working-class disillusionment with the factory came later and took a different form, so different that the factory had little to do with it. Sztálinváros, the Hungarian showcase steel-making city named after the Soviet premier, was a center of revolutionary agitation in 1956. Steelworkers left the factories to join the barricades in defense of the city against the Soviet Army, “a form of nationalist expression the planners of Sztálinváros had not anticipated.” After the suppression of the revolution, the new Communist leadership wooed steelworkers with wages and social benefits, and “a local socialist patriotism developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a sense of shared class experience and pride.”

The story in Nowa Huta (“New Mill”), Poland’s far larger and more successful version of Sztálinváros, was different, yet similar. Freeman calls Nowa Huta “arguably the last Stalinist utopia.” The mill, begun in 1950, grew in stages over decades, eventually encompassing five hundred buildings, but it is the city around the mill that draws Freeman’s attention. Characterized by a “distinct urbanism” and a human scale, the city had largely self-sufficient neighborhoods built around apartment buildings with stores, health centers, and libraries. Cinemas, restaurants, and public institutions were within walking distance. “The social organization in effect constituted a more fully realized, if less radical, embrace of communal life along the lines of the earlier worker housing in Gorky.”

The conflict in Nowa Huta in its first decades was cultural, between former peasants and the Communist authorities struggling to shape them into law-abiding and docile workers. The problems were rowdiness, alcoholism, brawling, sexual assault, and venereal disease. With economic development, these problems receded, but another cultural challenge

emerged: Catholicism. Nowa Huta workers demanded a church, defended public installations of religious crosses, and built networks of mobilization to press for both.

Economic struggle finally emerged in the 1970s, mostly in response to price hikes, still

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drawing on the networks built to promote Catholicism. A price increase in July 1980 led to an explosion of strikes, and workers in Nowa Huta won concessions from management, leading 90 percent of them to leave their official union and join Solidarity, founded recently in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk. The declaration of martial law at the end of 1981 led to near-constant and mostly clandestine struggle, with Nowa Huta workers linking up with the largest industrial workplaces in the country to form a network of organizations.

Bringing together thousands of workers, the steel mill facilitated Solidarity’s organizing, but was not itself a site of protest until 1988, when, in response to yet another price increase, workers, their families, sympathetic priests, and outside Solidarity leaders occupied the complex. After three weeks, soldiers ousted the protestors. Nonetheless, the occupation sparked a strike at the Lenin Shipyard, which, a year later, led to open elections, triumph for Solidarity, and the end of Communist rule in Poland. As Freeman describes, it was a Pyrrhic victory, since the political struggle did not transform social relations in the plants, which, due to years of underinvestment, were unprepared to

withstand the rigors of capitalist competition.

Though Chinese Communists briefly tried to replicate the all-encompassing experience and triumphalism of Soviet factories and suffered many of the same setbacks, few celebrate the giant factories of post-Deng China the way authorities and acolytes celebrated the wonders of Magnitogorsk or the Rouge. Instead, Chinese leaders view Foxconn City and factories like it as a stage through which the country must go to reach modernity.

Surveying their 300-year history, Freeman concludes, “Giant factories have a natural life cycle”: explosive growth with intense exploitation of previously nonindustrial workers; incremental improvement or stagnation due to the constraints of fixed capital and competition from newer, more technologically advanced rivals; rising worker protest and wages; and the need to modernize, start over elsewhere, or shut down. That the largest factories are now in China and popping up in Vietnam illustrates just how often factories must “start over elsewhere.”

Freeman also concludes that the factory has played the same role with only minor differences no matter in which political economy it was embedded. “Yet, as this study shows, to portray the giant factory as strictly a capitalist institution requires eliding much of its history, including some of the largest factories ever built. The giant factory was central to both capitalist and socialist development, not only economically but socially, culturally, and politically as well. . . . The giant factory, rather than a feature of capitalism, turns out to be a feature of modernity, in all its variations.”

In one sense, this conclusion lessens the explanatory power of the factory. Its ubiquity renders it banal, irrelevant to explaining the success of Solidarity or the failure of the Homestead strike, and inconsequential in

defining strategies for democratizing the economy. In another sense, the factory’s existence across political economies—its hierarchical organization of production, its exploitation of people and the planet, and its politically incorporating role—says something profound about the class nature of both capitalist and “socialist” societies. And about the need to transform them.

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Surrogacy, Exploitation, and Commodification

An exchange between Sara Lee and Alexandra Holmstrom-Smith

SARA LEE

IN HER REVIEW OF SOPHIE LEWIS' much-debated book *Full Surrogacy Now* (*New Politics*, Winter 2020), Alex Holmstrom-Smith suggests that while commercial surrogacy should be decriminalised, contracts for commercial surrogacy should not be enforced. Many make a similar suggestion with regard to sex work—that sex workers should “be allowed to sell sex, but customers should not be allowed to buy sex.” But by framing the issue in terms of whether or not commercial surrogacy contracts should be enforced, one ends up viewing commercial surrogacy through the lens of the legislator rather than through the eyes of the would-be commercial surrogate. If we consider the commercial surrogate to be the protagonist—and as socialists, we do consider the worker to be the protagonist of struggle—then there is no clear-cut answer to the question of whether commercial surrogacy arrangements should be enforced. The answer is simply “it depends.”

Should a commercial surrogate wish to back out of an arrangement and keep the child they have gestated, then commercial surrogates and socialists should fight for the surrogate's right to keep the child and to not be forcibly separated from them. But in the reverse situation, if it is the commissioning parents who renege on the agreement, then we should defend the right of the commercial

surrogate to be compensated, to not be forced to raise a child that they did not intend to have, and to be paid child support if they choose to do so. These rights are sites of struggle for commercial surrogates as workers—sites of struggle that are obscured when the issue is circumscribed to merely be about whether or not commercial surrogacy should be enforced.

Socialist-feminists bring three important ideas to the debate on commercial surrogacy. First, that one should not “exceptionalize” surrogacy just because it involves the biological process of gestation, just as one should not treat the exploitation of sex workers as morally any different from the exploitation of other workers. Often, such moral distinctions stem from the imposition of exceptional standards on women's bodies or the generalization of what women “feel” when they sell their labor in a particular way.

Second, pregnancy and childbirth is indeed work that reproduces capitalist relations of production, primarily by producing new workers. The fact that commercial surrogates are paid should not detract from the fact that having and raising children in general is work. It is work that is primarily performed by women, usually without any remuneration. It is because women shoulder the burden of performing such labour that their pregnancy or motherhood often results in their discrimination in the workplace.

Third, and most importantly, while some

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surrogates—like some sex workers—enjoy their work and perhaps see it as a means of sexual expression, other commercial surrogates are forced into this line of work by material circumstances. What socialists bring to the debate is the acknowledgement that this problem is a result of capitalism and cannot be resolved under current relations of production. The material circumstances that compel someone to become a surrogate against their will cannot be resolved by banning or not enforcing commercial surrogacy arrangements. This is a problem resolved only under socialism, and we can only get to socialism through the collective struggle of workers, including commercial surrogates.

Holmstrom-Smith rightly points out that “the left doesn’t advocate for cities to invite Uber to town just because we believe that Uber drivers are workers.” The strongest argument she makes for not enforcing commercial surrogacy contracts is that, in contrast to sex work, there is no existent black market for commercial surrogacy. So why should socialists campaign for the setting up of a new legal market for commercial surrogates? While it is true that a lack of a legal market does not necessarily drive commercial surrogacy underground, it does drive commercial surrogacy abroad. Impoverished women of color in the developing world often serve as commercial surrogates for wealthy foreign couples. The most well-known example of this is Baby Gammy, a child born to a commercial surrogate in Thailand. The commercial surrogate was left to raise him when the commissioning couple from Australia discovered that he had Down syndrome.

In order for there not to be a legal or black market for commercial surrogates in

one part of the world, there needs to be commercial surrogates in another part of the world—commercial surrogates who, by virtue of their race and gender, bear the brunt of reproductive labor under capitalism. The point is not that the left should campaign for

What socialists bring to the debate is the acknowledgement that this problem is a result of capitalism and cannot be resolved under current relations of production.

the establishment of a new market for commercial surrogates. Rather, the point is that one cannot oppose the establishment of such a market on the mere basis that these markets exist elsewhere. Socialists, being concerned with the international working class as a whole, must have recourse to a wider view.

In her review, Holmstrom-Smith argues that when the state forcibly takes away a child from a commercial surrogate, it is reflective of a broader policy to take children away from working-class people of color in the United States. She highlights in particular the taking away of indigenous children from their families and of black children from their mothers by Child Protective Services. But while the left must fight for the commercial surrogate who wishes to keep their child, it must equally defend the commercial surrogate who has no such intention.

Alexandra Holmstrom-Smith Replies:

I APPRECIATE SARA LEE'S REJOINDER to my review of Sophie Lewis' *Full Surrogacy Now* because it helps to clarify several points about how the left should think about commercial surrogacy. While I appreciate Lee's concern for the complexity of commercial surrogates' needs, I think her perspective echoes what I would call a narrow form of "feminist workerism" that is also present in Lewis' book. In the era of climate change, robots, and "post-work" politics, socialists cannot focus exclusively on the shop floor but also must engage with questions about what kinds of jobs are important and necessary for creating the kind of world we want. Furthermore, I think the defense of the commercial surrogate's right *to be a commercial surrogate* leads inevitably toward a libertarian politics that undermines workers' rights. Finally, I think Lee's perspective misses important opportunities for practical reforms within capitalism that fall short of revolution.

Lee suggests that the left can take a case-by-case approach toward whether surrogacy contracts should be enforced, depending on what the surrogate wants. This might be a plausible politics for rallying behind individual cases, but it doesn't provide any guidance for what our position is on what the law should be. And despite our focus on worker struggles, I think most on the left believe we should also take positions on state policies. For example, from 1992 up until this year, New York had a statute that directed courts not to enforce surrogacy contracts. As socialists, are we happy that this statute was repealed or not?

In my review of Lewis' book, I focused on

defending surrogates from contract enforcement when the surrogate seeks to renege by keeping the baby. Lawyers refer to what's called an "illusory contract," in which only one party is actually required to satisfy contractual arrangements. It is an arrangement in which one party has the right to back out and the other does not. In the case of surrogacy, this means the surrogate has the right to keep the baby, but the "client" doesn't have the right to not pay her. Illusory contracts are unenforceable, because they violate the market idea of a bargained-for exchange. If the only legal possibilities are for surrogacy contracts to be enforced always or never, the left should choose never. As seriously as we take the harm of a worker getting stiffed on her wages, the prospect of losing a child that one loves seems infinitely worse. Furthermore, I think there are ways that we might frame worker demands for things like child support that wouldn't depend on contract enforcement.

Earlier this year, New York State Senator Liz Krueger introduced a bill that attempted to have it both ways: legalize commercial surrogacy but give the surrogates a way to back out of the contract and keep the baby.¹ (The surrogate would still have had to return any money received above medical expenses.) Governor Cuomo managed to push through his much less worker-friendly bill, so we will never know how this would have worked in practice. Surrogates might still lose custody simply because the courts are so biased against working-class mothers, especially working-class mothers of color. But I think this prospect does raise very interesting questions for socialist feminists. If the awful prospect of the state taking away someone's child is off the table, are there still socialist-feminist reasons to oppose commercial surrogacy? This gets us into a more abstract discussion about labor, commodification, and economic policy.

Lee suggests that socialist feminists

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have taken the position that “one should not ‘exceptionalize’ surrogacy just because it involves the biological process of gestation, just as one should not treat the exploitation of sex workers as morally any different from the exploitation of other workers.” First, I think it’s important to note that many socialist feminists do *not* take the position that there is nothing exceptional about the labor of surrogacy or sex work. Theorists including Angela Davis, Carole Pateman, Nancy Holmstrom, and many others have suggested that some forms of bodily labor are *different*, either in kind or degree, from other forms of labor under capitalism. (This claim of course does not support criminalizing such workers.) As a particularly relevant example, the Marxist-feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver has argued that commercial surrogates face a *double estrangement* of their labor as compared to other workers under capitalism. She writes, “Unlike other workers, she is not an appendage of a machine. She is the machine. Her body becomes the machinery of production over which the contractor has ultimate control.”²

I think it is often useful to draw out the similarities between different types of labor as this can expand solidarities and break down stereotypes and stigma. But I don’t think it’s useful to flatten all distinctions. Work in different contexts is simply *different* in many ways, which in turn can lead to different subjectivities and different strengths and weaknesses for organizing. Much of the field of left-wing labor sociology is dedicated to analyzing such differences—how is service work, or digital work, different from working in factories, and what does this mean for workers and the labor movement?

Even further, a narrow focus on the shop floor does not allow us to think about the broader social issue of commodification. Climate change has most clearly demonstrated the need to think beyond the demands of the factory floor. Even though we care about displaced workers in extractive industries, we still think the fossil fuel industry must

be shut down and those workers given new “green” jobs. Because of the bigger issues at stake, we must think about how economic policy can meet societal needs. Our society needs more teachers and more nurses, so we should demand that jobs be created in those fields. From this perspective, what is a leftist argument for commercial surrogacy? The surrogacy industry has always relied upon and promoted a culturally white, heteronormative, patriarchal, Neo-Eugenicist, genetically defined concept of family that is inimical to the inclusive, caring society that socialist feminism seeks to create.

Lee also suggests that “The material circumstances that compel someone to become a surrogate against their will cannot be resolved by banning or not enforcing commercial surrogacy arrangements. This is a problem resolved only under socialism, and we can only get to socialism through the collective struggle of workers, including commercial surrogates.” Here I think Lee’s argument veers toward a kind of libertarianism. Short of overthrowing capitalism, social-welfare and economic policies can go a long way to increase people’s substantive options to either not work at all, or to work in meaningful, interesting, safe, and healthy jobs. In some cases, this does in fact mean foreclosing people’s options to self-exploit. For socialists this should be seen as an expansion of freedom rather than a denial of freedom, as libertarians see it. For example, having a legal minimum for wages means limiting freedom of contract—you can’t decide to work for less than minimum wage, and we are all better off for it.

However, it’s certainly true that under the current conditions of global capitalism, some workers are inevitably going to end up doing work that falls very far short of the goal of meaningful, interesting, safe, and healthy work. The question then becomes how to relate that present reality with our imagined future goal of eliminating such labor. Margaret Jane Radin calls this the “double bind,” in which a short-term anti-commodification

policy like prohibiting sex work has the effect of harming working-class people who are trying to survive, since they now have fewer options to make money.³ As Lee emphasizes, I think the major distinction between surrogacy and sex work in this regard is that surrogacy does not seem to thrive in a black market, at least not in the Global North context. Thus instead of facing criminalization, as with sex work, the harm that would-be surrogates in places like the United States would face if surrogacy were banned is simply the foreclosing of that particular avenue for making needed money under capitalism.

I think the way to address this question is through a multifaceted platform of demands that encompasses improving conditions for workers, expanding the social safety net outside of work, and limiting new forms of commodification. Demands for universal basic income and/or direct support for parents would allow the social reproductive labor of pregnancy and childrearing to be compensated without being commodified. Where workers are already doing a certain kind of commodified work—including commercial surrogacy—socialists should support their organizing for better wages and working conditions. Where something is not commodified, we should oppose it becoming commodified. And where there is a serious possibility of eliminating a certain industry *that we agree is not good for the world*, we shouldn't oppose eliminating that industry *per se* but rather should fight for better terms for the workers whose jobs would be lost. If we don't, we will end up supporting the libertarian, not socialist, conception of a worker's individual economic rights overriding what is best for society. These individualist framings of worker rights lend themselves to anti-union politics such as right to work.

In practice, the multifaceted platform that I have sketched has already been embraced by socialist groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America. We support better wages and working conditions

for workers, while also expanding the social safety net outside of work and pushing to decommodify certain sectors of the economy, like health insurance and utilities. In the same way that New York City activists opposed the construction of Amazon's new headquarters despite its promise of (bad) jobs, and in the same way that activists oppose Airbnb despite its offering some working-class people an extra source of income, we can oppose any expansion of commercial surrogacy. It's a new form of commodification that won't offer good jobs and instead exacerbates existing inequalities. Lee suggests that taking such a position in a Global North state depends upon surrogacy being available abroad. However, capitalists' intent to evade regulations is a reason that they go abroad to do *all kinds* of unethical, exploitative things. This fact has never prompted the left to call for an end to protective regulations in the Global North. Instead, solidarity requires working with workers in the Global South to improve their working conditions until similar regulations can be effectively implemented there (or until the revolution). Rather than considering the demand for children produced through surrogacy as an insatiable, unstoppable global impulse, forced on workers in other countries too, we should regard it as something that must be contested wherever it raises its head. It is also worth noting that for many rich would-be parents around the world, the United States *is* the place "abroad" to seek commercial surrogates.

In some instances, an incomplete decommodification may be the best that we can achieve short of a revolution. Lee seems to suggest that my anti-commodification view somehow lends itself toward the Nordic model of criminalizing the buying, but not selling, of sex. However, as I emphasized in my review, the options are not simply to criminalize or to fully commodify. Instead, I think we should look mainly to civil laws that can constrain capitalist industry. With regards to sex work, my perspective is that

socialists should be concerned about the ways that a highly commodified model of sex-work legalization in places like Germany has created a new capitalist class of brothel owners who have expanded power vis-a-vis workers and the state. Socialists should be trying to develop models of regulation that expand worker power while limiting commodification and employer power. It's inexplicable to me why Sophie Lewis specifically denies any such possibility. In *Full Surrogacy Now*, she writes that freedom "cannot simply be legislated ... by decreeing, for instance, that all trade in a particular sector must be cooperatively run."⁴ For highly intimate forms of labor that we cannot or choose not to eliminate, that certainly sounds like a great socialist demand to me!

Surrogacy is not a simple issue, but I hope this discussion has helped illustrate some of the principles at stake and how they may be addressed. Any discussion about commercial surrogacy that doesn't deal squarely with commodification will always fall short.

NOTES

1. Senate Bill 7717, www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2019/s7717.
2. Kelly Oliver, "Marxism and Surrogacy," *Hypatia*, Vol. 4 No. 3 (Autumn 1989), 105, www.academia.edu/4022161/Marxism_and_Surrogacy.
3. Margaret Jane Radin, "Market-Inalienability," 100 Harv. L. Rev. (1987), 1849, 1915; *Contested Commodities: The Trouble with Trade in Sex, Children, Body Parts and Other Things* (Harvard University Press, 1996).
4. Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now* (Verso 2019), Chapter 2.

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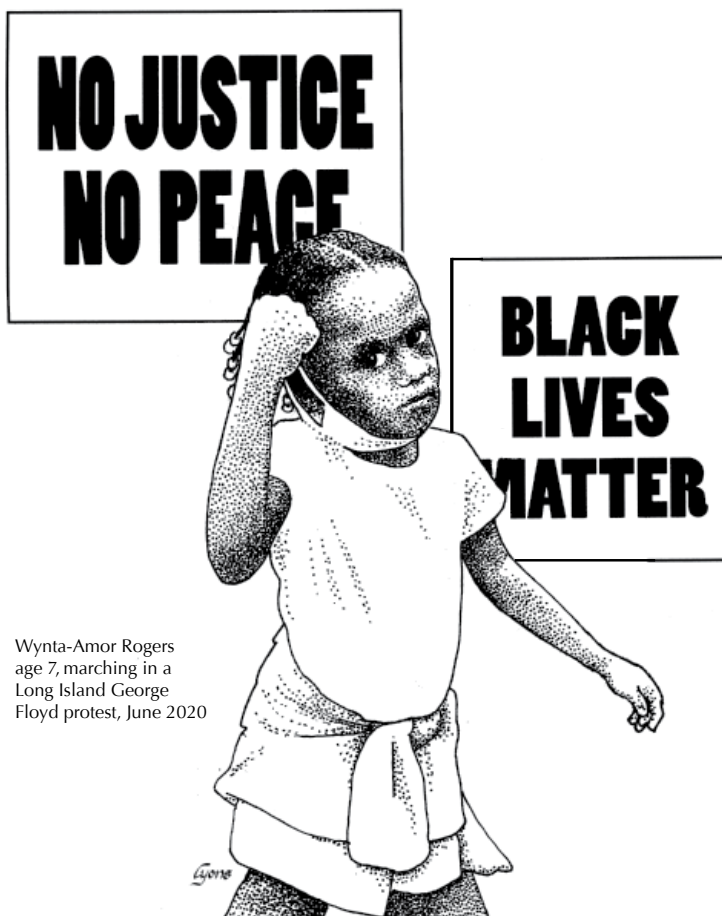
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