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New Politics

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From the Editors

As we go to press, the hearings of the U.S. House Select Committee on the January 6 attack have revealed the seriousness and the scope of the conspiracy to prevent the winner of the 2020 election, Joseph Biden, from becoming president and keep Donald J. Trump in power. While the planning and execution of the attempted coup were clumsy, January 6 and the related events represented the first such attempt to nullify an election, overthrow a duly elected president, and install an illegitimate autocrat. The hearings have made several things clear: the transformation of the Republican Party—the leadership of which orchestrated the attempted coup—into a far-right party, the continued growth of armed far right groups and outright fascist militias, and the growing threat of political violence. The investigations may also chip away at Trump's supporters: six in ten Americans say Trump should be charged with crimes.

At the same time, and in line with these developments, the Supreme Court, now dominated six to three by right-wingers, has overturned Roe v. Wade, ending national abortion rights; eliminated restrictions of some gun laws; curtailed the EPA's ability to regulate emissions and ruled that if states provide public funds to private schools, then they must also provide them for private religious schools. Last year the Court delivered a ruling weakening voting rights. SCOTUS is on its own parallel path to an authoritarian state.

In this issue of *New Politics* attorney Elizabeth Rapaport discusses the end of Roe, Dan Davison and Ewa Pospieszyńska ask what comes next, and Dawn Marie Paley looks at the feminist movement in Mexico.

William I. Robinson and Salvador Rangel argue that the capitalist global system is undergoing profound crises, but that emancipatory forces face significant challenges. As it did a century ago, fascism once again contends with the left for the allegiance of the discontented, as Martin Oppenheimer discusses in his "Will the Real Fascists Please Stand Up?" And Nicole Fabricant looks at the economic, health, and environmental impact of fracking in Appalachia, a region in which discontent runs deep.

South of the border, progressives in Latin America have gained ground at the ballot box, and social movements continue to push against austerity, high fuel prices, state violence and extractivism. A recently ended Indigenous-led uprising in Ecuador serves as a reminder of the power of grassroots mobilization in the face of reactionary governments.

In Colombia, where protests a year ago brought on brutal repression, Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez, running from the left, won in the second round in June 2022, a defeat for conservative forces that have for so long ruled the country. Electoral gains were also made in Honduras where social democrat Xiomara Castro took office in January, as did leftist Gabriel Boric in Chile in March. In Bolivia Luis Arce won the presidency after the political crisis in 2019. Even so, much of the hemisphere, from Brazil to Guatemala, remains under the thumb of the conservative, Christian, and militarist right.

The left has already raised concerns about some of these progressive governments, specifically about AMLO's militarism in Mexico

and Boric in Chile. The latter has reinstated a state of emergency used to suppress Mapuche organizing, something he pledged during his campaign that he would not do. Though some optimism is warranted, in Colombia, as elsewhere, hope for meaningful change remains intimately tied to the ability of social movements to avoid cooptation and capture by politicians.

We have for four months been focused on Ukraine, fighting to defend itself from the Russian invasion launched by Vladimir Putin. Unfortunately, some on the left either openly support Russia or are pressing for Ukraine's surrender. Some argue that NATO caused the war. While we are well aware of the danger represented by military alliances such as NATO, it is not the culprit in this case. *New Politics* supports Ukraine's right to defend itself and to get arms to do so wherever it can. Our journal has been collaborating with *Commons*, the independent Ukrainian progressive publication and with Social Movement (SR), the Ukrainian socialist organization.

In this issue, Andrei of Sotsialnyi Rukh offers his reflections as a Ukrainian socialist on the war; Tom Dale asks why some on the left don't stand with Ukraine; Pietro Maestri writes about the impact on the Italian left of Russia's war against Ukraine; and Khury Petersen-Smith discusses the issue of sanctions.

Two articles – by Michael Karadjis and Peter Ranis -- hone in on one of the key questions on the left today: is China socialist and, if not, what is it?

As always, we are happy to feature writing about writing, new and old. Ali Shehzad Zaidi discusses the work of Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz with unpublished English-language translations by Daud Kamal, while Martha Sonnenberg examines the dialectical imagination of Victor Serge's novels.

In review essays, Llanon Davis offers a critical take on Graber and Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything* and Dan Fischer takes up two books offering solutions to the environmental crisis. Hank Kennedy reviews Paul S. Hirsch's *Pulp Empire: A Secret History of Comic Book Imperialism*, the story of comics in World War II and the Cold War. Ravi Malhotra discusses Renton's *Against the Law: Why Justice Requires Fewer Laws and a Smaller State*, which puts law in the context of labor and environmental issues, and Frieda Afary takes up a collection of interviews with Iranian women political prisoners.

We are sad to report that Michael Hirsch, our long-time comrade on the *New Politics* editorial board, died on December 16, 2021. We offer remembrances by Mark Hirsch and Jason Schulman.

Finally, in the face of powerful rightward currents in American politics, we are inspired to see an uptick in labor and social movements. Workers have begun to organize, creating unions at 150 Starbucks cafes, at a huge Amazon warehouse in New York, and at Apple stores. This rise in labor organizing, accompanied by protests and walkouts—strikes have doubled—represents a sea change in what has been for decades a largely stagnant labor movement. And, hundreds of thousands have been marching to defend abortion rights and regulate firearms.

Happy reading, and we'll see you on the picket lines.

The End of *Roe v. Wade*

Elizabeth Rapaport

Editors' note: This article was originally titled "The Leaked Dobbs *Draft: Trial Run for the End of* Roe v. Wade*" and was written before the Supreme Court decision in* Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization *was issued on June 24, 2022. We publish that original piece here followed by a postscript written by the author updating the analysis after the final opinion was handed down.*

In constitutional law parlance, a decision is said to be "infirm" if it is inconsistent with the views of the current majority on the Supreme Court. *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision legalizing abortion, is today not just infirm, but on life support. The Court is expected to hand down a decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* this summer that will at best leave the constitutional right to abortion diminished and may well overturn *Roe* altogether. That much is apparent to anyone who can count. We now have six conservative Catholic justices on the Supreme Court who think *Roe* was wrongly decided.[1] Of these only Chief Justice Roberts can be counted on to give great weight to the damage that the Court could sustain to its institutional health by reversing *Roe*. Overturning *Roe* will not be well received by a sizeable majority of Americans.[2]

Thanks to leaks emanating from the Supreme Court, we have some information about the progress of the *Dobbs* case. These leaks are rare breaches of the Court's normally opaque deliberative processes. We know that five justices voted to overturn *Roe* this winter after oral argument in December 2021; that Justice Alito was tasked with drafting an opinion for the majority; and that his initial draft was circulated in February. As of the most recent leak on May 11, we know that Alito has not revised his draft, that no other justice had as yet circulated a draft, and that the five votes to overturn hold steady. We also have the full text of the Alito draft, confirmed as genuine by the Supreme Court. Barring further leaks, we will not know more until the decision is handed down.

Developments may yet alter the apparent trajectory of *Dobbs*. Chief Justice Roberts could write a more moderate opinion, peel off a vote, and set constitutional abortion rights on a more gradual path to oblivion. The most obvious tack such an opinion could take would be to bless the Mississippi fifteen-week ban law challenged by the Jackson clinic in the *Dobbs* case. The Court could then leave the question of how much more destruction it will allow to *Roe* for another day. However, the justices have largely vaulted past consideration of the law that bans abortion after fifteen weeks of gestation in favor of debating the demise of *Roe* altogether. Alito could moderate his maximalist opinion to hold a majority if any of the other four votes to overturn prove restive. Or the leaked draft could become the majority opinion substantially unchanged.

Justice Alito excoriates *Roe v. Wade* for purporting to find a right to abortion in the

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Constitution in flagrant violation of what he deems proper methods of constitutional interpretation. We can all agree that the word "abortion" is not in the text of the Constitution. Alito recognizes, as he must, that there are so-called unenumerated constitutional rights—that is, rights not mentioned expressly in the Constitution.[3] He then elevates the approach preferred by some conservatives to the status of the established methodology for determining whether an unenumerated right is protected by the Constitution. Viewed through his methodological lens, *Roe* is "egregiously wrong." Alarmingly, Alito's approach sweeps away not only the constitutional foundation for the right to abortion but also for the entire edifice of sexual autonomy and family life rights that the Supreme Court built out since the 1960s. These include the right to conduct a sex life free from government intrusion, the right to use contraceptives, whether married or single, straight or gay. They include the rights to marry and form families, straight or gay. These rights were understood in prior Supreme Court cases as essential to full membership in a secular and liberal society. If the Alito draft becomes law these rights will all be "infirm." We will see below that Alito insists his opinion does not implicate these precedents; but people who are attached to these rights will not be consoled by his insistence.

Roe v. Wade held that the right to abortion is part and parcel of the "liberty" protected by the Fourteenth Amendment's due-process clause. That clause states that no state shall "deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law." If we examine Alito's approach to decommissioning abortion as a constitutional right, it will be readily apparent that a whole suite of sex, gender, and family rights is left without a home in the Constitution. Those rights, like the right to abortion, are justified as constitutional rights primarily because they are necessary to enjoy the liberty integral to self-realization and participation in civil society and the polity.

Alito's argument against *Roe* starts with the declaration that an unenumerated right deserving of constitutional protection must be "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition." He proceeds to imbue the inquiry with the jurisprudential theory of originalism, an attractive approach to his fellow conservative justices and a doctrinal commitment for some of them. The originalist inquiry that will settle the question then is whether abortion was lawful in the states in 1868 when the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified. Alito devotes a great swath of his opinion to answering this question in the negative. The draft includes a thirty-page appendix cataloging the abortions laws of the states in the union in 1868 arrayed to support his conclusion that the majority of states did not allow abortion at any stage of a pregnancy.

The eccentric legal history on display in the draft is certain to come under heavy fire from legal historians. Against standard legal history, Alito insists that common law criminalized abortion at every stage of pregnancy. Alito disputes that the common law distinguished between pregnancies that have and have not reached the stage of "quickening"—that is, when the fetus can be felt to move. Quickening occurs in the second trimester of pregnancy. Common law did not criminalize pre-quickening abortion.

By 1868 most but not all states had statutes governing abortion, although some still relied on common law. Contrary to the novel history promoted in the draft, many states that had statutes simply codified the common law rule that allowed abortion until quickening. A majority of states did not criminalize pre-quickening abortions.[4] Those that did were testimony to the growing power of the medical profession to wrest the terrain of obstetrics from midwives, who had earlier presided over both childbirth and abortion. Alito does not comment on the fact that in the nineteenth century women could neither vote nor prevent the ascendency of

a medical profession with scant respect for women's autonomy.

Legal historians may quibble about how many state abortion statutes preserved the common law quickening distinction in 1868. We can, however, be confident that sexual privacy for married and single people, straight and gay, is not "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition." If this is really the accepted touchstone for determining whether a right is protected by the Constitution, then repudiating the reasoning in these precedents would be the constitutional law equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel. There may be five or even six votes on the Supreme Court for ancestor worship today. But from the first case to the last in the line of cases constitutionalizing a secular sexual regime, from *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965 (right of married people to use contraceptives) to *Obergefell v. Hodges* (gay marriage) in 2015, the majorities in Supreme Court cases did not employ this historical methodology to determine whether these *un*enumerated rights deserved constitutional protection. From *Griswold* to *Obergefell* the method Alito treats as accepted by the Court was used by dissenters unsuccessfully resisting the constitutional protection of sexual freedom and equality.

This historical pedigree method was used by the Supreme Court majorities to decide whether the *enumerated* rights spelled out in the first eight amendments to the federal Constitution applied only in federal cases or must also be "incorporated" into state law. The method, in variations debated by the justices, was used in the mid-twentieth century to incorporate *enumerated* provisions of the Bill of Rights "against the states" and "through" the Fourteenth Amendment's due-process clause. Incorporation meant states are required to accord rights such as freedom of speech or the right to a speedy and public trial at least the same scope and level of protection in their courts as was provided by the corresponding federal right. Gradually, over decades, almost all the provisions of the federal Bill of Rights were incorporated against the states. Unsurprisingly, there was a wealth of evidence to be found of shared practices with respect to the subject matter of the Bill of Rights—protection of religious and political dissent, protection from intrusive government surveillance, and protection from being railroaded in the courts. This evidence was supplied by state laws, state constitutions, and the less ancient reaches of the common law tradition.

Consulting tradition, much less the freezing of tradition in 1868 when the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, was not, nor could it be, a method for modernizing our antique Constitution on matters of sex and gender. There the inquiry took the form of conceptual analysis of liberty and commonsensical acknowledgment of social change. For example, when the question is posed, "Can women participate fully in society without the ability to control their reproductive capacities?" the twentieth- or twenty-first-century answer must be no. Or when the question is, "Can gay people be denied the right to marry because of common law traditions or biblical anathema?" the answer must again be no in a secular society. This is the route taken by several generations of Court majorities, including by some conservative justices of a less doctrinaire stripe, to remove the legal disabilities labored under by women and gay people.[5]

Supporters and opponents of *Roe* should concede that distinguishing between the proper use of judicial power and judicial overreach is as difficult as any question in constitutional law. In his draft Alito does not engage this question so much as declare victory for his team. If he holds five votes, he has indeed won the victory.

Justice Alito has an answer to the objection that he yanks the Constitution out from under the sexual autonomy and marital freedom cases grounded in liberty. His answer is that only abortion is sui generis—unique—in that "many" believe the rights of unborn children hang in the balance. His implication is that *stare decisis*—precedent—is a more potent

protection absent this clash between the lives of the unborn and women's autonomy. We shall see. Red state legislatures will be lobbing laws derogating from these rights at the Supreme Court. They will be asking the justices to cut back these precedents in deference to religious sensibilities. A Republican Congress cowed by demagogues may also tempt the Supreme Court to revise constitutional protections in the direction of their members' conservative proclivities and beliefs.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the draft opinion is the short shrift Alito gives to the objection that women have relied upon *Roe* for several generations. In *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, decided only twenty years after *Roe*, the Republican-appointed authors of the controlling opinion held this reliance to be the chief reason to preserve the right to abortion. Justices O'Connor, Kennedy, and Souter wrote, "The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives."[6] Alito crosses the line into dark comedy or fatuousness when he blandly cites the views of abortion foes that women have made so much progress in the past half century that they don't need the right to abortion to sustain or make more gains as on a par with opposing views that the right to abortion is critical for "modern" women. Legislators will have the difficult task of evaluating the evidence pro and con. Of course legislators may also determine that protecting fetal life at every stage is more weighty than any interests of women.

Justice Alito issues a clarion call for democracy and against an overweening Supreme Court:

> It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's representatives. "The permissibility of abortion, and the limitations upon it, are to be resolved like most important questions in our democracy by citizens trying to persuade one another and then voting." … That is what the Constitution and the rule of law demand.[7]

Many supporters of *Roe* share Justice Alito's enthusiasm for democracy. But "democracy" is at a low ebb in the United States, and indications are that the tide is still receding. The litany of anti-democratic forces and practices at the state and federal levels is well known to this readership. The Supreme Court has exacerbated this decline during its now decades-long rightward course, including approval of corporate money sloshing through our political institutions and its tolerance for voter suppression and gerrymandering. Democrats (small "d") face a Hobson's choice between rule by five or six conservative justices and rule by undemocratic state and federal governments. Whether *Roe* is hobbled or overturned, we can anticipate more oppressive legislation in Red states, abetted by anti-reproductive freedom measures enacted by a rightward-moving Congress. Women will suffer harm and endure hardship. There will be popular resistance to the abrupt rollback of reproductive rights and anticipated assaults on constitutional protections for the secular family. Popular resistance may birth some democracy.

POSTSCRIPT

After this article was written, on June 24, the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Dobbs*, overturning *Roe v. Wade*. There were no significant changes to the majority opinion leaked in May. Justice Alito held four votes, and so *Roe* fell 5-4. The hard right is ascendant; the liberal eclipse is complete.

Chief Justice Roberts proposed "a more measured course," preserving an anemic version of *Roe*. He cast a concurring sixth vote only in upholding Mississippi's fifteen-week ban, but did not vote with the majority to overturn *Roe*. The only possible way for *Roe* to have survived the lineup on this Court would have been to attract another conservative to his position. No justice joined him.

Roberts offered a clear and elegant solution to the problem presented in *Dobbs* as he saw it. That problem was to hold his conservative brothers and sister in check so that their zeal to use the power of the majority to put their imprint on the Constitution did not discredit the Court. Roberts sought to avoid rendering an inflammatory decision in this supremely controversial case. Zeal could damage the legitimacy of the institution of which he is the chief steward and eventually its ability to service capital in cases unlikely to command attention of the kind that influences popular politics. His solution was to dispense with the viability rule in *Roe* and *Casey* but retain a constitutional right to abortion. States would be allowed to ban abortion prior to viability. *Dobbs* would set that cutoff at fifteen weeks, a few weeks into the second trimester but before viability. This would give women a "reasonable opportunity to choose." Abortion opponents would be handed a win. But since the "vast majority" of abortions occur in the first trimester, public anxiety about the issue of abortion and its political salience would be allayed. Roberts counseled that the Court refuse to take any further cases seeking deeper cutbacks to *Roe* for several years to further settle the country down and take pressure off the Court. The other five conservative justices rejected this politically astute compromise in favor of exerting the fullness of their power.

Justice Thomas wrote a concurrence certain to roil the waters that Roberts wished to calm. He calls for the Court to follow *Dobbs* "at the earliest opportunity" with cases overturning precedents recognizing rights to sexual and marital freedom. Thomas like the dissenters does not abide Alito's fulsome assurances that *Griswold* or *Obergefell* are left secure in the wake of *Dobbs*. Thomas explained that, yes, the issues of the constitutional protection of the right to use contraceptives or gay marriage are not before the Court in *Dobbs;* but the grounds for that protection are blown away in *Dobbs*: Like abortion they were not "deeply rooted in this Nation's history

and tradition" in 1868 and therefore cannot be imported into the Constitution via the Fourteenth Amendment's liberty clause. The dissent is in full agreement as to the logic and implications of *Dobbs*:

> Either the majority does not really believe in its own reasoning. Or if it does, all rights that have no history stretching back to the mid-19th century are insecure. Either the mass of the majority's opinion is hypocrisy, or additional constitutional rights are under threat. It is one or the other.

Justice Kavanaugh also wrote a concurrence. He seems to want to claim his role as the "median justice," the essential fifth vote in close cases, and to tip his hand that as the median justice he will keep the Court from the path that Justice Thomas would like to take. He affirms that *Dobbs* does not mean that sexual and marital freedom are "threatened." He likewise gestures toward his likely stance on some of the issues involving interstate travel to obtain abortion care by affirming his support for the constitutional right to travel across state lines. We shall see. Kavanaugh's concurrence is an exercise in happy talk. He envisions a future in which no abortion cases he will deem "difficult" will come before the Court now that *Dobbs* has made the Constitu-

tion "neutral" on the issue of abortion. This in a country, half free, with fifty state jurisdictions with incommensurate law.

The dissenters in *Dobbs* tells us what we already know but is never mentioned by the majority: People will continue to have and to seek abortions, 20–25 percent of women have abortions, and poor women will bear the brunt under *Dobbs* just as they have done under the *Roe* regime. The dissent's takedown of the majority opinion is cogent as jurisprudence, but they lost. *Roe* and then *Casey* were compromised in half the country by dozens of state laws enacted over decades and an acquiescent Supreme Court. The federal courts were never going to deliver as manna a comprehensive, funded reproductive health system. The recourse is to organize at the local and state level, building a mass movement capable of protecting sexual and reproductive freedom and demanding universal reproductive health care that this wealthy society now withholds. The victors may regret the end of *Roe v. Wade*.

NOTES

1. Justice Sotomayor was also raised and educated a Catholic, but like many other Catholic jurists, notably Justices Brennan and Kennedy, her views on constitutional law are not bound to either Catholicism or those of the Federalist Society. Justice Gorsuch was raised a Catholic but attends an Episcopal church.

2. An NBC poll conducted after the draft opinion leaked found that 63 percent of Americans believe abortion should always be legal or legal in most cases. See Mark Murray, "Support for Abortion Rights Hits New High as Midterm Outlook Is Grim for Democrats," NBC News, May 15, 2022, www.nbcnews.com/politics/2022-election/support-abortion-rights-hits-new-high-midterm-outlook-stays-mostly-unc-rcna28869. A PBS/NPR/Marist poll conducted after the *Dobbs* case leaked found 64 percent of Americans are opposed to overruling *Roe v. Wade*. See Laura Santhanam, "Majority of Americans Don't Want Roe Overturned," PBS NewsHour, May 19, 2022, www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/majority-of-americans-dont-want-roe-overturned.

3. The Ninth Amendment explicitly states that there are unenumerated rights: "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."

4. For a recent review of the discussion among historians about nineteenth-century abortion law, see Aaron Tang, "The Originalist Case for an Abortion Middle Ground," SSRN (September 13, 2021), https://ssrn.com/abstract=3921358.

5. Miscegenation laws were also struck down in this era, on grounds that they violated equal protection but in part also because they infringed the liberty of the races to intermarry.

6. The passage in *Casey* continues:

> For two decades of economic and social developments, people have organized intimate relationships and made choices that define their views of themselves and their places in society, in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail. The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives. (Citation omitted) The Constitution serves human values, and while the effect of reliance on *Roe* cannot be exactly measured, neither can the certain cost of overruling *Roe* for people who have ordered their thinking and living around that case be dismissed. (*Planned Parenthood of Southeast Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 at 857.)

7. The internal quotation is from Justice Scalia's dissent in *Casey*.

Beyond Roe

Strategic Lessons in the Fight for Abortion Rights

Dan Davison and Ewa Pospieszyńska

On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*[1] voted 5-4 to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 judgment that nationally legalized abortion in the United States

By a 7-2 majority in *Roe*, SCOTUS found that the U.S. Constitution provides an implied right to privacy "broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether to terminate her pregnancy."[2] Initially, SCOTUS adopted a framework based on trimesters of pregnancy, but abandoned this in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) in favor of a framework based on fetal viability and an "undue burden" standard of review. Following *Casey*, abortion restrictions were unconstitutional if they were enacted for "the purpose or effect of placing a substantial obstacle in the path of a woman seeking an abortion of a nonviable fetus." [3]

The George W. Bush-appointed Justice Samuel Alito wrote the majority opinion in *Dobbs*, a draft of which had been leaked on May 2, 2022.[4] *Dobbs* concerned the constitutionality of Mississippi's Gestational Age Act of 2018, which prohibits abortion after the first 15 weeks of pregnancy except in medical emergencies or in cases of severe fetus abnormality. Finding that "*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start," the Court held that "[t]he Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision." [5] As such, the Mississippi law was upheld, and swift moves to implement an abortion ban have already been made in the 13 states with "trigger laws" designed to come into effect upon the removal of the federal right to abortion.[6]

The ruling has sparked protests around the world and reignited long-running debates about the political nature and power of SCOTUS. The Court currently has a majority of six Republican-appointed Justices to three Democrat-appointed ones, and the anti-abortion cause has become central to the American right in the decades following *Roe*.

The ruling is a wake-up call for those who assumed that abortion rights in the United States were secure. On May 11, 2022, an attempt to codify the right to abortion into federal law was narrowly defeated in the Senate amid strong Republican opposition.[7]

As such, this is a good opportunity to examine why the political struggle over abortion in the United States reached this point. It is also worth considering what strategic lessons the left might learn by comparing the experience of the American movement for abortion rights with those of other coun-

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tries, Poland and Argentina being two major, recent examples.

Legalism and the "Fly-Paper Court"

A major shortcoming of the mainstream pro-choice movement has been its legalism. That is, it has tended to see the establishment and protection of abortion rights primarily in terms of legal action, with a focus on winning and defending favorable judicial precedents. This stems from a broader mythologization of the role of the courts, especially SCOTUS, in bringing about progressive social change. In Jenny Brown's words, "[b]ased on the wrong impression that abortion rights originated with the courts, the primary response to antiabortion politics has been litigation".[8]

It is understandable why this mythologization of courts is especially strong in the United States. In many ways, the U.S. legal-political system is peculiar among bourgeois democracies. Institutionally, it is extremely fragmented. Each of the 50 states has its own legislature, executive, judiciary, and body of law in addition to federal law. The federal courts of appeal are divided into 11 multi-state circuits. The federal Congress is bicameral, and one can easily have situations where one of the two main parties holds the Presidency while the other holds the Congress. This fragmentation of political power creates major inefficiencies. Additionally, partisan gerrymandering[9] and voter suppression[10] are common practices.

Considering this, one can see why so many Americans come to view strategic litigation as a means of fighting for one's interests when the legislature is inaccessible or refuses to act. This is especially true of what political scientists term "discrete insular minorities"; that is, groups who are permanently in the minority. Indeed, the combination of strategic litigation and strong judicial review power is sometimes praised as reflecting a particular conception of representative democracy; specifically, the view that courts can represent minority interests where the other branches of government do not.

This standpoint is often linked to James Madison's remarks in *Federalist No. 10* (1787) about the "mischief of factions"; that is, groups united and motivated by a common interest or passion that runs counter to the rights of others or to the community interest.[11] One possible "solution" to this "mischief" would be to set up institutions such that an interest group can be represented in one branch of government if it is shut out of the others. Therefore, it is easy to hold up *Roe* as proof of how courts can produce major social reforms that are favorable to women's rights and can represent women's interests in the face of inertia or hostility elsewhere in the political system.

In his book *The Hollow Hope*, first published in 1991, the political scientist Gerald N. Rosenberg provides a controversial but detailed challenge to the view of courts as powerful engines of social change.[12] In Rosenberg's view, when considered together, the doctrinal, institutional, and cultural constraints upon courts make it almost impossible to generate significant social reforms via litigation.

In respect of *Roe*, Rosenberg finds that SCOTUS was unusually able to overcome its structural barriers because, at the time, there was sufficient legal precedent to justify the change and large sections of both the political and professional elite either supported or were indifferent to abortion reform.[13] Additionally, the opening of abortion clinics when hospitals refused to carry out abortions meant there was a means of implementing the Court's judgment.[14] The victory of *Roe* therefore had little to do with the Court's own power as a vehicle of social change. Nor does Rosenberg find evidence to support the intuitive view that *Roe* served as a catalyst for change by, e.g., publicizing the issue of abortion or spurring the other governmental institutions into protecting and enlarging abortion rights.[15] Indeed, the executive and

congressional action that followed *Roe* was aimed at *undermining* those rights.

Major shifts in public opinion, abortion, and women's rights were certainly taking place when *Roe* was decided, but these were already in progress by that point in history and the available data does not suggest an increased rate of support for abortion in the years immediately following *Roe*.[16] In Katha Pollitt's words, "to the Supreme Court—and to the public, a majority of which supported liberalization—the ruling ratified and expanded social changes that were already under way," making a common but illegal and sometimes extremely dangerous operation legal and safe.[17]

As Leslie J. Reagan observes in her in-depth historical study of abortion in the United States, "[t]he transformation of law that began in the mid-1960s and culminated in *Roe*…grew out of women's long-standing demand for abortion and ability to communicate, first to individual doctors in private conferences and then to society as a whole in public arenas, their need for abortion."[18] Between, on the one hand, a lively, widespread feminist movement spearheading major social shifts and, on the other hand, changing views on abortion among elites, it is unsurprising that, rather than producing social change in its own right, SCOTUS was playing catch-up.

As Rosenberg puts it, "courts act as 'flypaper' for social reformers", luring them to waste time and resources on litigation instead of substantive political battles.[19] Even major case victories are "often more symbolic than real", thereby "providing only an illusion of change." [20]

Reliance on the courts weakened pro-choice forces. In at least some parts of the movement, political organization and momentum dissipated in the wake of *Roe*, with multiple state-level groups disbanding. In the words of Janet Beal, an activist in the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL): "Everyone assumed that when the Supreme Court made its decision in 1973…we'd got what we wanted and the battle was over. The movement afterwards lost steam."[21]

In 1976, the Hyde Amendment passed, which banned Medicaid and other federal funding for most abortions. Before it came into effect in 1980, an estimated 300,000 abortions per year were performed with federal funds. While exceptions to the Hyde Amendment were made afterwards, these only covered abortions necessary to save the mother's life or where the pregnancy arose from rape or incest. This left millions of women with the formal right to abortion but no practical access. Perhaps surprisingly, one factor in the Hyde Amendment's success was *pro-choice* legislators making a strategic gamble to pass it in the hopes that the resulting piece of legislation would be so conservative that SCOTUS would have "no choice" but to overturn it.[22] In other words, misplaced reliance on the judiciary directly contributed to one of the U.S. anti-abortion movement's first and most long-lasting victories.

> By narrowing its political horizons, the pro-choice mainstream found itself taking a largely reactive rather than proactive stance.

Admittedly, one must be cautious when claiming that the abortion rights movement simply demobilized in the immediate aftermath of *Roe*. As Suzanne Staggenborg shows in detail, despite some decline in local group involvement between 1973 and 1976, the movement remained active overall, laying the organizational groundwork for its expansions in the late 1970s and early 1980s in response to the countermovement's victories.[23] In the post-Hyde period, pro-choice groups like NARAL and the National Organization for

Women (NOW) increasingly turned their attention towards Congress and the electoral arena in general, but still worked to develop constituencies of politically active women. NARAL based its "Impact 80" strategy on that of the anti-abortion movement, with a network of local political units to match the "pro-life committees" that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities called for in parishes and political districts across the country. In contrast to these more mainstream pro-choice organizations, feminist groups initiated direct action tactics, continuing the women's liberationist tradition of consciousness-raising. In response to the blockades of clinics by the anti-abortionist organization Operation Rescue, groups like Women Organized for Reproductive Rights (WORC) and its offshoot the Emergency Clinic Defense Coalition organized counterdemonstrations.

Nevertheless, two related points are worth stressing. Firstly, as the mainstream pro-choice organizations were drawn into party politics and institutionalized lobbying, their demands narrowed to the single issue of defending legal abortion. This was due in part to a sense that, with the countermovement's gains in Congress and the courts, they could not "afford the luxury" of being multi-issue.[24] This contrasts with the more radical and grassroots organizations' efforts to integrate legal abortion into a wider set of related concerns like "reproductive rights," "women's health," or (later) "reproductive justice." By narrowing its political horizons, the pro-choice mainstream found itself taking a largely reactive rather than proactive stance. It valorized *Roe* despite the ruling's tremendous inadequacies from the perspective of reproductive freedom. The 2014 ballot measure on Tennessee Amendment 1 aptly illustrates this narrow, defensive approach. The amendment specified that nothing in the state's constitution prevents the legislature from banning abortion, even in cases of rape or incest, or "when necessary to save the life of the mother."[25] The pro-choice side lost the vote by 47 percent to 53 percent. One of the campaign's major weaknesses was its failure to talk in a direct and political way about abortion and its significance for women's freedom. As Brown observes, this demonstrates how "legalistic arguments have affected our movement's thinking and strategy." [26]

Secondly, the mainstream pro-choice movement shifted approach after *Casey* in 1992. National organizations increasingly focused on federal policy and defending legal access to abortion in the federal courts, while neglecting local chapters and affiliate groups in the states. In contrast, the anti-abortion movement used incremental restrictions at the state level to chip away at abortion access. As Amy Littlefield puts it, "[t]he national movement's strategy of relying on the courts as a firewall meant that advocates were often playing Whack-a-Mole against the growing onslaught of anti-abortion laws coming out of the states."[27] While the Republicans unwaveringly focused on limiting abortion, the Democrats failed to take up abortion rights as a central political cause, let alone legislate on it. In 2017, Nancy Pelosi claimed that abortion was "kind of fading as an issue." [28] A recent Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll found that only 13 percent of Democrats saw abortion rights as a high priority.[29]

In short, the movement was left acting defensively with a neglected political base in the states and with *Roe* and subsequent precedents as the only guarantee of legal abortion at the federal level. Now *Dobbs* has starkly demonstrated just how precarious that guarantee was.

Lessons from Poland

If that was what went wrong with the abortion rights movement in the United States, then what might we learn by comparison with the successes and setbacks of recent, high-profile abortion rights movements elsewhere

in the world?

In 2020, Poland saw some of its largest protests since 1989. These were sparked by a Constitutional Court judgment on October 22, 2020, which further restricted an already narrow abortion law. Under the Family Planning, Human Embryo Protection and Conditions of Permissibility of Abortion Act, adopted on January 7, 1993, abortion was allowed only where the pregnancy posed a threat to the mother's health or life; where there was a high probability of severe and irreversible impairment of the fetus, including incurable life-threatening disease; or where there was a justified suspicion that the pregnancy was the result of a prohibited act (typically rape or incest). The 1993 Act was enacted in the context of Poland's transition from nominal "communism." This involved a so-called "Compromise" between Catholic Church representatives and the coalition government of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People's Party. This left Poland with some of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe.

After coming to power in 2005 and forming a coalition in 2006, the national-conservative Catholic party Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, "PiS") attempted to ban abortion entirely. In 2007, a group of deputies pushed for a constitutional amendment for the "protection of life from conception." This failed, but PiS renewed its efforts when it returned to power in 2015. In September 2016, the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish Parliament) deliberated the Stop Abortion (*Stop Aborcji*) Bill, which aimed to eliminate all the exceptions to the abortion ban and make anyone who participates in "the death of a conceived child" criminally liable, including the mother. At the same time, the Sejm rejected a competing bill introduced by the committee of the legislative initiative "Save the Women", which provided for unlimited abortion until the end of the 12th week of pregnancy. Women took to the streets across Poland to protest this. Since the protesters wore black and used black umbrellas as a sign of mourning, this wave of demonstrations became known as the Black Protest (*Czarny Protest*).

This marked the birth of the All-Poland Women's Strike (*Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*) organization, which began to build its social media influence and bring together activists from all over Poland, including smaller towns. The bill was stopped, but PiS quickly returned with the tactic of pushing a total abortion ban through the Constitutional Tribunal, which has been the center of a major controversy since 2015 because of how five of its 15 judges were appointed.[30] The October 2020 judgment struck down the most popular exception to the abortion ban, namely fetal abnormalities, finding that it discriminates against the unborn based on their state of health and violates the right to life of every human being protected under Article 38 of the Polish Constitution.

At this point, Women's Strike already had over 400,000 Facebook followers and was reaching that threshold on Instagram. The organization used its existing profile to build on the new impetus, creating widely shared events and providing sound systems and other necessary equipment for the demonstrations. Experienced Women's Strike figures from 2016 like Marta Lempart and Klementyna Suchanow became spokespeople for the movement. Lempart traveled around Poland and supported organizers in different cities. The wider public quickly came to identify Women's Strike with the mobilizing efforts, but other organizations such as Abortion Dream Team/Abortion Without Borders also gained visibility. The latter group provided abortion pills and helped those who were over 12 weeks pregnant travel abroad for abortions. Demonstrators placed the group's phone number in various visible locations across Poland, in some cases writing it on church walls. The media would feature the protesters and the organizations they supported, which helped build their visibility and spark debate

on a scale not seen before. Despite all this, the judgment was officially implemented as law on January 27, 2021. The protests began to wither away and many local Women's Strike groups disappeared with them.

Although the Polish political, cultural, and institutional context is quite distinct from that of the United States, we can see important similarities with the American experience. Both involved a politically partisan court restricting reproductive freedoms, thereby upholding a form of Christian nationalist ideology. There are certainly differences. As James Risen and Judy L. Thomas detail, the initial impetus of the modern American anti-abortion movement began with street-level protest groups operating outside the organizational structures of the mainstream churches (led first by radical Catholics like John O'Keefe in the early 1970s, then by militant evangelicals like Randall Terry) before expanding its base to form the backbone of the American religious right.[31] In contrast, the Polish Catholic Church vigorously backed the 1993 "Compromise" and subsequent restrictions from the outset. Nevertheless, over the years the situations have only grown more similar. Polish anti-abortionist groups enjoy close links with and learn tactics from their American counterparts. For example, they take images of fully developed babies and place them on propaganda materials as purported images of fetuses. Like the American evangelical lobby, the Polish Catholic right exerts political influence through churches. For example, since the Polish Parliament is required to consider bills with at least 100,000 supporting signatures collected in person, one group — led by the prominent anti-abortion activist Kaja Godek — ran stalls outside churches all over Poland to collect more than 830,000 signatures for the Life and Family Foundation's Stop Abortion (*Zatrzymaj Aborcje*) Bill in 2017.[32]

Arguably, the Polish abortion rights movement's greatest defects were organizational. Women's Strike had no membership system nor any means of politically deciding its program and bringing that program into effect as legislation. Lempart took the role of leader without any democratic process. Indeed, she has actively prevented the movement from forming anything resembling a democratic structure, associating such organizational forms with discredited political parties. In a 2020 interview, Lempart said she saw the organization's role as that of a "helpdesk" and staunchly opposed the party system, arguing that the political arena is rigged.[33] Instead, Women's Strike was registered as a charity that, in Lempart's words, "finances activities of the grassroot organizers," "has an auxiliary role," and tries "to support people who undertake various activities in almost 600 towns."[34]

This "helpdesk" conception of the organization posed a serious problem because there were very real political differences both within and around Women's Strike as to what the movement's demands should be. Like in the U.S. context, there was tremendous pressure to keep the campaign single-issue. For example, Women's Strike was accused of hindering the movement's chances of winning by wanting to change the whole political system, fighting for climate justice and other causes alongside legal abortion. Had Women's Strike possessed democratic structures, it could have addressed and resolved internal disagreements in an openly political manner, then made efforts to win the public round to its decided program. This alone might not have been enough to prevent the protests' general loss of momentum after the judgment's implementation. Nevertheless, it would have helped the organization maintain an infrastructure that could nationally connect and sustain its core political base in the local groups. This would have better positioned Women's Strike to intervene effectively in the political arena when a major opening presents itself. Instead, the current movement has only brief protests when news breaks that someone has died after being denied an abortion. For many months after the protest wave of 2020-2021, the only

noticeable sustained activity towards legislative change was the collection of signatures to hear a proposed bill.

To summarize, in certain respects the Polish struggle for abortion rights provides an inspiring contrast to the American movement's lapse into legalism. It shows how one can bring in wide layers of previously politically inactive people and lead them to question traditionally authoritative institutions and worldviews. However, the movement has largely failed to translate street-level protests into legislative gains, partly because of its organizational shortcomings.

Lessons from Argentina

As such, it is worth considering an abortion rights struggle that has achieved more concrete successes. In 2020, when Poland was protesting the Constitutional Tribunal's judgment, Argentinians were celebrating their Congress enacting a law that permitted abortion up to the 14th week of pregnancy.[35] This was groundbreaking for a region that has some of the world's most restrictive termination laws. Importantly, this success was made possible by a long-term campaign that united different strands of the feminist movement.

The key organization in this struggle was the National Campaign for Legal, Safe and Free Abortion. The campaign launched in 2005 and focused its mobilization on women's rights more generally. In 15 years, the national campaign grew from around 70 involved organizations to over 700. One key strategy was linking the issue of abortion with that of class. The organizations canvassed poor neighborhoods, broadening their reach by involving trade unions and especially women workers.

Campaigners used the slogan "Sex education for choice, contraception to prevent abortion, legal abortion to prevent death."[36] It aimed to show how poor standards of reproductive health and rights leave women with a broader range of major burdens. Inspired by the LGBT movement's successes in 2010, campaigners emphasized equality of access when canvassing more middle-class neighborhoods, convincing richer women that it was unfair for them to be able to have underground abortions while denying that option to poorer women. The emphasis on legal abortions preventing deaths also shifted the focus from the fetus to the mother.[37] In comparison to both the United States and Polish campaigns, the Argentinians successfully resisted the pressure to keep the campaign single-issue and ensured that their demands were not watered down.

The movement grew and turned into Marea Verde (Green Tide), whose now-famous headscarf symbol has been proudly worn across the country. This increased recognizability brought a perception of authority. By making itself constantly visible in public spaces, the movement was better placed to win the ideological battle with the anti-abortion side, which was associated with the color blue. Before the 2020 enactment, there were eight attempts to push legislation for legal abortion through the National Congress. In 2018, the movement almost succeeded by pushing the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy Bill through the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber) for the first time. While the Senate ultimately defeated the bill, it significantly fueled hopes for change and shifted the movement's focus towards the 2019 Presidential election. This is not to suggest that the campaign narrowed its political objectives. Rather, it was a part of a broader strategy to gain parliamentary leverage that the movement had spent years pursuing systematically. In 2020, the newly elected center-left President Alberto Fernández fulfilled his promise of supporting abortion legalization and the historic vote passed on December 30.

Importantly, unlike the mainstream pro-choice movement in the United States since *Casey*, this victory has not caused the movement's leadership to abandon the ideological struggle over abortion.[38] Many widespread, damaging beliefs about abortion persist and doctors still try to scare women away from

having abortions, especially in rural areas where both Catholic and evangelical churches hold considerable power. While we cannot say for certain how well the Argentinian movement will respond to the conservative backlash, it has laid valuable political groundwork in advance.

Towards a Truly Political Movement

The United States, Polish, and Argentinian abortion rights movements met similar challenges, but differ in the extent of their success. While each movement operates in a different context, together they suggest the following strategic lessons to avoid the legalism that has inhibited the American movement.

To begin with, the organizational question matters. Without a strong (preferably membership-based) organization with democratic structures to decide its program, the movement will struggle to make effective political interventions, let alone challenge society's existing authority, and the movement's base will be unable to steer its direction. If we are serious about empowering women to take control of their lives and about extending democracy beyond its bourgeois-democratic limits, then this democratic empowerment must begin within the organizations we use as vehicles for change.

Having a strong and democratic organization would make it easier to present the right to abortion as something that still needs to be fought for, place the demand high on the left's political agenda, and situate the demand within a broader set of related concerns. This would avoid the narrowing of political horizons that occurred as the mainstream pro-choice movement in the United States became drawn into conventional lobbying practices and reliance on the federal courts.

This brings us to the issue of ideological struggle. Firstly, we must break out of the parameters of debate that the anti-abortion movement has set. In these parameters, even pro-choice advocates have come to frame abortion as a tragic necessity. Instead of adopting this "yes, it's unfortunate, but…" framing or allowing ourselves to be drawn into debates over when life begins, we should make sustained arguments that positively explain why being able to have abortions contributes to the specific kind of personal and political freedom we want women to possess.

Secondly, we must grasp the ideological role of religion in the anti-abortion movement. It is understandable why one might react to the overturning of *Roe* by saying it is "not really" about religion, pointing to the right's apparent hypocrisies or inconsistencies when it comes to their religious commitments, and using these to suggest that they are simply "using" religion as a cynical cover for other motivations. Nevertheless, this obscures how, for the religious right themselves, it *is* about religion. Christian nationalists act as they do because they sincerely believe that souls are real, that fetuses possess them, that legal abortion is therefore licensed mass murder, and that they must take up this fight as part of an eternal battle of good versus evil. In other words, if we are to comprehend and effectively combat our opponents, we must take seriously how ideologies shape their worldview in a way that motivates and (in their eyes) legitimates their actions. Likewise, we must respond to their efforts to impose their religious beliefs on everyone else via national law and public policy by openly fighting for secular principles of government, including the separation of church and state.

The movement should actively campaign for full legislative protection of abortion rights. To help avoid narrowing our political horizons and becoming trapped within the anti-abortion movement's parameters of debate, this campaigning should include firm arguments against imposing a time limit on abortion and for ensuring equal, practical access to abortion. As socialist feminists, we believe that this should form part of a broader case for universal healthcare and that unions should confidently take up reproductive

freedom as a workers' issue.

Lastly, international solidarity and cooperation are essential. Already there are feminist networks like Red Compañera, through which groups in fifteen Latin American countries coordinate with each other. Such cross-border coordination becomes even more important considering the U.S. anti-abortion movement's efforts to support its counterparts elsewhere around the globe. We do, however, stress that the organizational question remains pertinent. In other words, it is not only about creating international connections between feminist groups, but also about creating structures that enable democratic decision-making at both the national and international levels.

In these manners, supporters of abortion rights in the United States can break out of the legalistic straitjacket and build a vibrant, determined, and truly political movement that goes beyond *Roe*.

NOTES

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3. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 877 (1992).

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23. Suzanne Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 57.

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International Women's Day in Mexico

An Expansive, Revolutionary Horizon Rises from a Sea of Violence

Dawn Marie Paley

Women, trans, and nonbinary people in Mexico and farther south have chosen March 8, International Women's Day, as a day to make their daily struggles and organizing legible, to take the streets and be visible.

Ongoing organizing led by women—focused on the reproduction of life, locating the disappeared, pushing state and private institutions to respect existing commitments to human rights, ending state and macho violence, and defending their territory and communities against capitalist encroachment—tends to be made invisible or portrayed as behind-the-scenes work that plays a supporting role in struggles led by men.

Taking the streets on March 8 directly challenges that: we move onto terrain that the patriarchy can ignore but that it cannot completely unsee. But more importantly, March 8 is a day when we see each other.

Mexico City's 2022 march was the country's largest International Women's Day event—city officials estimated a turnout of over 75,000.[1] Significant marches took place in urban areas throughout the country, especially in cities along the northern border, including Tijuana, Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo, and Reynosa, to Monterrey in Nuevo León, where demonstrators pushed in and later burned the door of the state congress.

In Puebla, the protest filled city block after city block. In Tlaxcala, riot police intervened, arresting three. In Guanajuato, currently among the most violent states in Mexico, March 8 marches took place in the state's five largest cities. In Mérida, Yucatán, women defaced statues associated with colonialism and genocide. In Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, women lit torches as night fell.

Common across all the marches were purple flags and bandannas, and messaging against state, macho, and capitalist violence. Every once in a while, a green scarf would appear, recalling the ongoing struggle for safe, legal, and free abortion.[2]

The rapid rise of the feminist movement in Mexico has led to attempts to divide and demobilize feminists, and channel the movement toward political ends supporting the status quo.

This year, officials and supporters of the government in Mexico City promoted pro-police feminism, which they underscored by deploying and applauding a police force made up mostly of women to contain the march. Though a minority of women participated in pro-police actions on March 8, a discourse separating good feminists from bad feminists has taken root, promoted at least in part by the federal government and the government

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of Mexico City.

There have also been concerted efforts to dissuade trans-inclusive feminists from taking the streets by encouraging violent anti-transgender collectives operating with protection by police. The links between government officials and anti-trans women's organizations are most visible in Mexico State, but there is reason to believe similar patterns exist elsewhere.

Violence against transgender people threatens the integrity and safety of transwomen in particular, as well as their participation in public life. The murder of trans activist Ximena Garcia and the stabbing of Natalia Lane in Mexico City in January are but two examples of reactionary violence against transwomen.[3] Last year, at least eighty-one people were killed in Mexico because of their gender or sexual identity, half of whom were transwomen.[4]

As of May 19, 2022, fifty Mexican organizations have signed on to the Declaration on Women's Sex-Based Rights, far more than from any other Latin American country.[5] Groups that have signed this declaration are widely considered to be anti-trans, and do not consider transwomen to be women. Signatories from Mexico include Las Brujas del Mar and the Women's Committee of the Party for Democratic Revolution (PRD).

Attacks and threats against transgender people by high-profile trans-exclusionary radical feminists have become a central concern among feminist organizers in Mexico.

This essay will explore the theoretical underpinnings of the feminist uprising in Latin America before moving on to a report-back from March 8 in Mexico City. It will then proceed to examine how pro-police feminism, as well as TERF activism, have been encouraged by governments, and end with a reflection on how women are pushing back.

"Feminism Is Revolution"

The movement led by women across Latin America on March 8 reveals not only a collective refusal of multiple violences but also a desire for social transformation.

The revolutionary character of women, trans , and nonbinary folks' coming together to reject patriarchy may not be immediately apparent, due in part to the assumption that the end point of this struggle is demanding the state or the courts enshrine reforms, equality, or rights.

"Feminism isn't a project of women's rights, it's a project of social transformation," writes Bolivian feminist and activist María Galindo.[6] Galindo's writing and her political praxis make clear that freedom for women and dissidents won't be delivered by political parties. It will be won through struggle, and that struggle is ongoing.

Year in, year out, feminist activists work within and outside of state, educational, and corporate institutions to push them to guarantee existing commitments to human rights. These include the rights of non-status migrants; rights of victims of violence and their kin; rights of workers; and collective rights to territory, housing, clean air and water, free accessible health care (including reproductive health), and free, secular public education.

These activities require the deployment of strategies of self-defense, territorial defense, and collective defense, which often play out vis-à-vis institutions founded in colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. These activities can be understood as being constitute a practical horizon of feminist organizing and organizing by Indigenous women.[7]

Our coming together by the thousands on March 8, however, reveals a much deeper

desire to *change it all.* The emancipatory horizon of feminist struggles in Latin America is expansive and revolutionary. Acknowledging the practical horizon of women's organizing, but not confusing it with the emancipatory horizon that has been opened, helps avoid capture via reformist countermeasures.

"Feminism as we are practicing it now is revolution," writes Mexican sociologist and activist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar. She continues:

> We are putting time in dispute. We are putting space in dispute. These are the two axes of our material dispute with the world, which we are working to undo so that we can remake it. … When we have time for ourselves [as women, nonbinary, and trans people] we can produce meaning. … [This meaning] is a common sense of dissidence that reinforces our willingness to continue to appropriate time and (re)build the world.[8]

Feminist organizing throughout Latin America has been on the upswing since 2015, when women in Argentina began holding massive demonstrations that would later be recast as *women's strikes* beginning on March 8, 2017.

The women's strike meant taking to the streets and abstaining from paid work, as well as from often unpaid labor caring for elders, babies, children, youth, partners, colleagues, and comrades wherever possible.

"[The strike] not only seeks the recognition of invisible labor. It is also a wager on its refusal," according to writer Verónica Gago. "In the combination of the two, the very radicalization of what we are going to name as work is at stake."[9]

Organizing in Mexico began to take off a few years later and has since ballooned, with violence against women and transwomen as a central concern.

March 8, 2022, in Mexico City

Tens of thousands of women, trans, and nonbinary folks marched from dozens of points in central Mexico City, as well from meeting points in other cities in the periphery of the metropolitan area.

The march was far too big to be able to see its beginning or its end, and most of the marchers were organized into contingents, the majority dressed in purple, visible as they held together with rope around the edges of their groups so as not to lose anyone. In previous years, women had been kettled when arriving to and leaving the march.

As we marched, women all in black climbed up on and graffitied statues of men along the sides of Reforma Avenue while the crowd called and cheered. Others spray-painted windows. Every bus shelter we passed was papered with posters featuring the faces of men accused of abuse. Here and there, men stood to the side and watched. The only policing I saw from within the march was of women asking men to stop filming marchers.

We walked and sang together. "The oppressive state is a macho rapist!" "The police don't look after me, my friends do!" "Rapist dick, in the blender!" We stopped and jumped and yelled: "She who doesn't jump is a macho!"

The hundreds of contingents present in Mexico City on March 8 represent ongoing organizing processes in their schools and places of work, as part of affinity groups or feminist organizations. Most were made up of women holding homemade signs, purple cardboard rectangles and squares with handwritten messages:

"We are the teachers of the girls you will never touch." "If I don't come home, hug my son." "I'm not violent, Putin is violent." "Goodbye, little leftist macho!" "It wasn't sex, it was rape." "We're marching for those who are no longer with us."

Pre-march messaging on the part of organizers involved dressing comfortably for a long walk, staying hydrated, and making sure no one left the march alone (the same way we do when our friends leave a gathering on any other day of the year, and we check on them

to make sure they got home OK).

Independent Contingents, Freedom to Act

Only a handful of groups had signs or T-shirts denoting affiliation with political parties or other large organizations. Among them were women members of Morena, the political party of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

On March 31, one of two transgender women legislators elected on Morena's slate left the party after her trans colleague was misgendered by a right-wing legislator from the National Action Party (PAN). Upon leaving the party, María Clemente Garcia said she felt vulnerable and unsupported by her colleagues in Morena.[10]

A Pan y Rosas contingent was also visible in the march. Pan y Rosas is a Trotskyist socialist-feminist organization connected to the Socialist Workers Movement, with organizations in fourteen countries and numerous states in Mexico. Pan y Rosas in Mexico City has hemorrhaged members following leadership's protection of a male professor accused of sexually abusing a female student at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in 2017.[11]

The overwhelming mood in Mexico City on March 8 was a desire for change and a rejection of the violence experienced at home, in workplaces and at school, and in public transportation and on the street.

There was little police presence until we made it to Balderas Street, which marks the exit from the huge Reforma Avenue into the much narrower streets of downtown, which is where we first encountered lines of women police officers deployed by the government of Mexico City.

We squeezed into narrower streets and reached the Alameda Central Park. Some performed *batucada* drums and danced, others pushed bicycles. The mood became increasingly tense as we got closer to Moneda Street, which would have taken us directly to the Zócalo, Mexico City's central plaza. It was blocked.

A massive crowd-control operation involving kilometers of temporary walls forced everyone into an even narrower passage, before opening again onto Soledad Street. At the north end of the bottleneck, hundreds more women officers congregated and, from there forward, lined the street to the Zócalo. Male police supervisors with walkie-talkies stood monitoring the march behind the all-women police lines.

We finally arrived at the Zócalo around 6:00 p.m., with thousands and thousands of women in front of and behind us, just as tear gas began to waft toward us. Turning back, we navigated through the march, as many kept advancing, determined to make it to the Zócalo, fumes and all.

As night fell, marchers continued to hang around downtown, with their friends, their signs, and their purple handkerchiefs. The city deployed a small army of cleaners, spraying paint thinner, furiously rubbing and scraping, seeking to erase the passage of the march from whatever part of the city's walls and monuments that were exposed.

It was a rapid response from city officials that brought to mind another slogan peppered throughout the march: "I wish they cared for me as much as they care for the monuments."

Purple Washing and Militarization

In the lead-up to March 8 this year, supporters of López Obrador and his likely successor, Mexico City mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, initiated discussion about the importance of nonviolence, highlighting the role of women police officers as custodians of peace.

"In addition, and I think it's important to say this here, the use of violence isn't feminist, you can't use violence to advance a cause; violence is, in essence, macho," said Sheinbaum on March 8, 2022. "You cannot condemn war and violence in other places and

celebrate it here; the demand for the rights of women and the eradication of violence against us will always be legitimate, but peaceful protests and proposals will always be the best path forward."[12]

Sheinbaum went on to suggest that groups wishing to return Mexico City to elite control had attempted to appropriate women's struggles. For his part, López Obrador has accused feminists of being middle-class conservatives opposed to his "fourth transformation" on more than one occasion.[13]

Although AMLO made overtures to anti-war voters during his election campaign, to date his presidency has been one in which the military has been granted increased power and resources.[14] Soldiers have been deployed on patrol in record numbers since he took office, and the National Guard is fully under military control (recent reporting shows it is likely to stay that way despite promises it would eventually be under civilian leadership).[15]

The deepening militarization of Mexico is alarming for various reasons, one of which is its effect on the lives and safety of women. In a 2016 study carried out by the Mexican government, nearly one hundred thousand women reported that they had their rights violated by soldiers.[16] Some of these violations are extremely serious: soldiers and marines have been accused of disappearing, torturing, violating, and murdering women.

Women are also leading searches for the over one hundred thousand people who are disappeared in Mexico, most of them since 2006. And it is women who shoulder the heaviest burden in guaranteeing housing, education, and food security for the hundreds of thousands of Mexican families that have lost a caregiver due to violence connected to the so-called war on drugs.

Police violence, and in particular sexual violence, against women and girls in Mexico is also a constant. Perhaps the most well-known case is that of Atenco, Mexico State, where nearly 2,500 state and municipal police killed two men and arrested 217 people defending their right to sell flowers outside of a market in 2006. Police sexually tortured the 47 women among the detained.[17] Less than two dozen police were tried and all were released shortly after.

Observers were shocked when marines were deployed to protect Mexico City's Zócalo on March 8, which they did alongside thousands of women police officers. "Long live Mexico City's women police officers!" said Mayor Sheinbaum days before the march.[18] Supporters of López Obrador's "fourth transformation" convened a specifically pacifist contingent in Mexico City, to which women were invited to bring flowers.

> For all the efforts to divide women, trans, nonbinary, and queer people in Mexico, a heterogeneous feminist movement is steadily gaining ground across the country.

During the march, participants in this contingent gave their flowers to lady cops, and one woman officer marched, fist raised, with the crowds. The media—even independent media—locked in on the narrative that women officers are women first and police second and jubilantly celebrated gestures of conciliation from marchers toward police.[19]

These actions not only reinforce the age-old dichotomy between good and bad protestors; they also purple wash the role of state forces in violence against women, trans, and nonbinary people in Mexico. Much of this violence flows from state security forces and is maintained by the federal- and state-level justice systems.

We've seen the hyper-focus on unruly women play out before, and we've also seen

how it has been effectively contested by a critical mass of feminists. The women who threw glitter at Mexico City's secretary of citizen security and painted graffiti in August 2019 to protest the rape of a teenage girl by four police officers received more attention and scrutiny in the press than the officers themselves.

The response on social media was to say *fuimos todas*—we all did it, we all spray-painted, we all threw the glitter, it was all of us. All of us are angry, we are outraged, we cannot accept violence and the impunity that inevitably follows.

This year, feminists close to the government worked to dismantle the spirit of *fuimos todas* by distancing themselves from women who engage in property damage and antagonizing police officers. Their message is that they are the proper, pacifist feminists; and the suggestion is that women who participate in acts of vandalism are deserving of sanctions from the same authorities that violate women in multiple ways on a regular basis.

But from the streets of Mexico City on March 8, the pacifist, pro-police contingent was one among hundreds, their flowers to cops contrasted with masked demonstrators spray-painting the police shields, buttressed by thousands of marchers.

The Specter of Reactionary Feminism

The word on everybody's lips on March 8 was violence. From the signs to the chants, it was clear that violence in Mexico, which ratcheted up following the election of Felipe Calderón of the PAN party in 2006, has become the number one issue women are rallying against.

In addition to over one hundred thousand people disappeared, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in the so-called war on drugs since 2006. The deployment of state forces and the corresponding paramilitary presence that drive the war have also fueled an increase in attacks and killings of women and transgender people.

As elsewhere, anti-trans violence in Mexico doesn't just originate with male aggressors. Over the past years, attacks and threats against transgender people by high-profile trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) have become a central concern among grassroots organizers.

TERFs believe being born with a uterus is the exclusive marker of belonging to the category "woman." They have shown a predisposition to use violence to enforce the gender binary that is at the center of their political identity.

Not only does TERF activism in Mexico put the lives and the well-being of trans people at risk, but it also threatens to drive a wedge into the vibrant, growing movement for liberation sweeping the region. Nowhere is this truer than in Mexico State, a bastion of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) on the outskirts of the national capital.

This year, in Toluca, capital of Mexico State, many thousands turned up for a trans-inclusive march on March 8. But in a much smaller action in González Arratia plaza, a trans flag was burned, and women belonging to a group called La Resistencia Radical Edo-Méx encouraged children to hit at a piñata made to look like a trans flag.

"The struggle of radical feminists is no longer against the patriarchy, now it's against trans women," wrote Ever Aceves a few days later.[20]

In order to understand the penetration of TERFs in Mexico State I spoke with Daniela, who has been accompanying women seeking abortion in Mexico State for the past five years.[21] She talked about the "boom" in Mexican feminism in 2018 and 2019 and about how she experienced the euphoria of mass-movement feminist organizing while she was a student at the UNAM.

Daniela told me anti-rape protests in the city of Ecatepec in 2018 were the spark that set off feminist organizing in Mexico State. Previously, she said, they would have

twenty or thirty people at feminist marches, but the protests that convened after August 18, 2018, began to draw hundreds. During a march in September of that year, separatist feminists arrived and tried to force men to leave the march.

By March 8, 2019, separatists began directing their anger toward transgender marchers and trans-inclusive feminists. Daniela now sees these events as early warning signs of rising TERF influence.

When we spoke at the start of this year, Daniela had stopped participating in feminist activities because of threats she and her comrades had received from TERFs. "I'm sure that the group that specifically works in Toluca are shock troops that are sustained by the state," she said. "Sometimes I get scared saying that, because it's a very serious accusation, but we have a lot of proof that has led us to that conclusion."

Organizations led by TERFs began to boycott events and shred agreements in feminist assembly processes. On March 8, 2020, a transwoman was assaulted by a TERF while they marched in Toluca. After that, feminist marches in Toluca became increasingly violent.

"We have no problem with iconoclasm, we have no issue with broken glass, but these were things, like, the beatings of women … attacks on trans women … anti-trans graffiti on the street and directly on the house of a trans activist," said Daniela.

In 2021, after mounting pressure from trans activists, Mexico State began to discuss the Agnes Law, which among other things allows for changes to gender on official documents. On March 8, 2021, a TERF group set a picket to protest the proposed law.[22] Trans activists also set up a protest camp, which they later shut down after they were threatened with physical violence.

Media reports and witness testimonies indicate that TERF groups, even those who carry out acts of violence and vandalism so often condemned by authorities, have been allowed free rein in Mexico State. After members of Radical Roots attempted to burn the doors of congress following the approval of the Agnes Law, they retreated back to their tents in the main square.[23] On other occasions, police have stood back and watched as groups like the Indómitas Radicales destroyed property.

Activists like Daniela have since been able to establish that there are strong links between TERF organizations in Mexico State and the ruling PRI government. "When we [trans-inclusive feminists] would march, there was always a heavy police presence," she told me via phone. "As we were being attacked by police, they [trans-exclusionary feminists] were free to act, and the police didn't do anything."

> The mood in Mexico City on March 8 was of a desire for change and a rejection of the violence experienced in all aspects of daily life.

On March 8 last year, trans-inclusive feminists were heavily gassed and beaten by police in Toluca, while the Indómitas Radicales engaged in property destruction completely untouched. And during protests to pressure Mexico State's congress to pass abortion legislation in August of 2021, marchers were dispersed using water cannons and tear gas.[24]

The role of the Mexico State government in cultivating TERF groups goes beyond turning a blind eye to their activities. In 2021, Mexico State's Women's Secretariat held monthly workshops with the Feministas Indómitas Radicales and the Satanic Feminists, both TERF groups (the Satanic Feminists have since rebranded as the Catho-

lic Feminists), and participated in at least one public Zoom call with a high-profile anti-transgender activist.[25]

"I've received very direct threats, telling me that I will be beaten up unless I learn to respect my biological sisters," said Daniela, noting she was doxxed for promoting trans-inclusive feminism. "I had to leave for a week, because the threats became very serious, and I know I'm not the only one."

In the lead-up to March 8 this year, Daniela was debating whether or not to join the march in Toluca, saying the harassment and threats she's faced have led her to fear the marches she once found so powerful.

But when we talked following the march, she told me she had indeed decided to go out into the streets on International Women's Day, together with over ten thousand women, for a historic march in Toluca. Together with thousands of others, she helped make sure the march was trans-inclusive and that TERF organizations didn't gain new terrain (but they still strung up their hateful piñata).

The issue of TERF groups in Mexico isn't limited to Mexico State. But Mexico State is where the protection of TERF organizations by those in power is clearest.

Fighting Against All Violences

In the weeks following March 8, I met with feminists from Pan y Rosas in Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora state. They told a similar story: TERF organizers had been the first to convene on March 8, and trans-inclusive feminists had considered abandoning the symbolic date so as not to be associated with trans-exclusionary feminists. Finally, however, they issued a separate, inclusive callout and convened a march with a distinct starting point.

TERF groups in their city, they said, attract many, especially younger women. "But their feminism is white, it's classist, and it's [based in rape culture]," said Lucia, who is a social worker in Hermosillo.

On March 8, she said, there was a massive turnout of trans-inclusive marchers, which buoyed the spirits of organizers in the northern city. But, they said, "the violence isn't stopping, it's getting worse." Just a few months earlier, gunmen opened fire and threw grenades during a feminist march in the Sonoran city of Guaymas, killing three.[26]

"This is a really hard context to organize in," said María José, one of the organizers I interviewed in Sonora. "It's really hard."

Like elsewhere in Mexico, Sonora is experiencing militarization and paramilitarization related to the so-called war on drugs, which closely maps with control of strategic territories including border areas and mineral- and water-rich lands.[27]

Though March 8 is by far the largest feminist demonstration in Mexico, women, trans, and nonbinary people also gather to march and protest on other symbolic dates.[28]

Protests and celebrations are also held in response to victories, as on April 8, 2022, when Jalisco state approved gay marriage, or May 18, 2022, when Guerrero state legalized abortion to twelve weeks. Rolling marches and vigils are organized in response to tragedies, like the disappearance and murder of Debanhi Escobar in Nuevo León in April.[29]

For all the efforts to divide women, trans, nonbinary, and queer people and to prevent them from taking to the streets—in a climate of often extreme violence—a heterogeneous feminist movement is steadily gaining ground throughout Mexico.

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The War on Ukraine

An Interview with a Ukrainian Socialist

New Politics put the following questions to Andrei, a member of the Ukrainian socialist organization *Sotsialnyi Rukh* (Social Movement).

NP: What is your assessment of the current military situation?

A: Russia has conceded defeat in its attempted blitzkrieg, or "general battle," and has moved on to a war of attrition. Putin believes that, over time, support for Ukraine will weaken, pressure from sanctions will become less and less, and Ukraine will not be able to stand alone against Russia. As we can see, he does have reasons to think so. Putin considers the complete obedience of the Russian population to be his strategic advantage over the West, which, unlike the populations of Western countries, will not criticize him because of high inflation or economic problems.

For its part, the Ukrainian side is trying to buy the time necessary to obtain heavier weaponry and to form reserve military units from among the mobilized. Tactically, this is turning into a slow exchange of territory for time—the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) is retreating without taking more casualties than the Russian side, periodically launching local counterattacks to improve its position. The main problem now is that the stocks of Soviet-type weapons and ammunition in Western countries are limited, and the introduction of heavy weapons of NATO standards requires time. For example, the immediate task of the AFU is a full transition to NATO standard artillery (as stocks of shells for Soviet artillery are running out). Under normal circumstances, this could take six to twelve months, but now it needs to be done in two to three months. Roughly the same will have to be done with tanks, air defense systems, and, most importantly, aviation.

Russia has not changed its goals of destroying Ukrainian statehood, but it has changed its methods. The future of the war cannot be clearly predicted now—war in general is an unpredictable thing. However, it is already clear that it will be a long and bloody confrontation for a year or more.

NP: Do you believe that the Ukrainian government is making the decisions regarding whether to fight on, or do you think this is being determined from outside? (A report in the Ukrainian press,[1] seemed to suggest that Boris Johnson was decisive in scuttling negotiations.)

A: Two questions arise. First, what could Boris Johnson use to exert such pressure? It is clear that Ukraine could be forced to make concessions by refusing to provide further aid. But what could be used to coerce the Ukrainian authorities to escalate the fighting is not clear. Second, how could such an escalation be sold to local elites and the population if they did not want it? We are actually seeing the opposite, namely that Zelensky's position is quite moderate and is a compromise between polar positions in Ukrainian society.

Zelensky has officially stated[2] that some Western countries have pressed Ukraine to make concessions to avoid a continuation of the war. In this situation, clearly, the pro-Ukrainian position of such an influential country as the UK could have influenced the Ukrainian leadership, but rather in the sense

that it gave hope that Ukraine would receive support and not be left on its own. Because, of course, everyone in Ukraine understands that without serious external support, Ukraine cannot win the long war of attrition with Russia.

NP: Are the Ukrainian people in a position to assess whether to fight on and what concessions, if any, to make, given that the Ukrainian government doesn't release casualty figures, making it very difficult to accurately judge the situation?

A: There is much confusion about what is meant by Ukrainian concessions. If we are talking about the territory occupied by Russia after February 24, then military losses will have little effect on the population's perception of whether to concede these territories. This is simply because Ukrainians have seen what the Russians did in Bucha and Mariupol and understand that any option other than the return of these territories will result in far greater casualties than continuing the war. Already Ukraine has lost far more civilian than military personnel, according to officials—and it is not clear how this can change, given that the Russians are not changing their attitude toward civilians.

The situation with the territories seized before February 24—Crimea and ORDLO (the occupied districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions)—is completely different. There are different opinions about these territories. Some believe they should be recovered by military force, some believe there should not be an effort to recover them militarily, but neither should they be recognized as Russian territory, and perhaps there is a small minority ready to recognize them as Russian territory. The compromise point of view, promoted by the authorities at the moment, is that Ukraine continues to consider these territories its own, but with a commitment not to try to recover them militarily. Zelensky keeps insisting that the return of ORDLO and Crimea by military means is not possible and not worth the possible military losses—a position that has not changed since the war began. However, talk of this in any case can only come after the expulsion of Russian troops to the borders that existed before February 24, which is still a long, long time away. And Putin has never suggested anything of the sort.

NP: What is your view of the remarks[3] of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: "Negotiations need to begin in the next two months before it creates upheavals and tensions that will not be easily overcome. Ideally, the dividing line should be a return to the status quo ante. Pursuing the war beyond that point would not be about the freedom of Ukraine, but a new war against Russia itself."

A: This is the answer to all Western leftists trying to pit US imperialism against Russian imperialism. Kissinger sees Putin as "his man." The architect of "Operation Condor"[4] is certainly close to Putin's goals of "denazification"—the elimination of activists dissatisfied with the actions of the imperialist state. Like Putin, he is used to a world divided into spheres of influence among the big states. These "great powers" can do whatever they want within their sphere of influence: carry out genocide, violate human rights, and so on. Sometimes these spheres are redistributed as a result of negotiations or wars. But for Kissinger and Putin, the wars should never directly pit one major power against the other.

Putin is uncomfortable with the very fact that the West is trying to promote values that claim to be universal—for him, it is a violation of his sovereignty. By "sovereignty," he means the ability to kill undesirable people in his sphere of influence.

We must say openly that there are universal values for all people on the planet. If they are violated anywhere in the world, the world is obliged to intervene, regardless of other powers' "zones of interest" or "spheres of influence."

The content of these values can and should be discussed and revised on equal footing, any country can offer its vision, but no

one can isolate itself from this discussion under the guise of its sovereignty. Tyrants who kill their own citizens will sooner or later start to kill their neighbors. Sovereignty does not and cannot have clear permanent borders. We all live in one whole world, on the same planet. Isolationism is a failed idea used by tyrants so no one will stop them from committing crimes. Trump, Putin, Kissinger, the monarchs of the Arab world, the Chinese Communist Party, radical Islamists: they all oppose the idea of universal values in one way or another.

Illustration for Sotsialniy Rukh, Katya Gritseva, 2021, digital art, Kharkiv

This was not always the case. In the 2000s, for example, Putin tried to create his value system combining Western consumption and Soviet paternalism. However, the pro-Western protests in Moscow in 2011 and the victory of the pro-Western revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine showed the complete failure of this system of values in open competition with Western values (this does not mean that Western values in the form of liberal democracy are ideal). It was only after this that Putin turned to pure violence.

The United Nations has a key role to play in the development of universal world values. The UN should get rid of the system of permanent members of the Council and start playing the role of a platform for an ongoing discussion about the future of the world—what it should be and how to get there.

Isolationist revanchism is a very serious threat to the world. We need to resist it both by repelling the external threat in the case of our country and by fighting politicians who offer us compromise with dictators based on the idea that "what they do at home is none of our business."

NP: What has the impact of the war been on various left forces: socialists, the labor movement, anarchists, the women's movement? Is the right being strengthened or weakened? What do you see as the trends the longer the war continues?

A: The position of all political forces changed in a highly contradictory way. On the one hand, the war, having become an existential threat, united all political forces, all population groups, and all social classes. The first month was a kind of rebirth of the nation, when all the old disputes and disagreements (linguistic, regional, class, cultural, political) could easily be resolved for a more important and understandable purpose. (Maybe that's what communism would look like!) The few political actors who tried to start scoring political points from the war were condemned even by their supporters.

However, the withdrawal of Russian tanks from Kyiv made a big difference. The actual existential threat has been replaced by a potential threat, making it easy to ignore. Civic unity began to crack. Businesses began to look for ways to shift the costs of the war onto workers and consumers, the security forces looked for ways to increase their power, the population asked questions about why the authorities were not preparing for war, political parties began to blame each other for Ukraine's problems, and language and

culture wars returned. All the stereotypes and prejudices have also returned. Feminist acquaintances, for example, report that they cannot rent an office simply because they say they represent a feminist organization. You could say that we are going back to the way we used to live. However, this is compounded by: a) martial law, which drastically reduces the scope for criticism of the authorities; b) mass impoverishment of people; and c) the loss through emigration of a huge amount of the population.

Therefore, the situation is very contradictory. On the one hand, there is a very strong public mobilization and solidarity which dramatically increases people's civic participation. This also helps leftist organizations (even in our organization many inactive members became active at the beginning of the war). The mass participation of a variety of people in the army—including vulnerable groups (LGBT, ethnic minorities, Roma, left-wing activists)—will make it difficult for right-wing groups in the future to frame the image of the defender of Ukraine as necessarily a right-wing white man. In general, the main enemy of the left—political apathy and the desire to be out of politics for the majority of the population—looks largely defeated. It's hard to be out of politics when that politics means rockets fired into your flat and tanks rumbling down your street. Also, the complete break with the ideology of the former Soviet Union means that Ukraine faces the need for rapid integration into the European Union, which also plays into the hands of the left as the EU is on average far more progressive than Ukraine and we can campaign for progressive policies by arguing that we need to be like Europe. Moreover, the far-right in Ukraine has always been mostly anti-European, seeing Europe as a haven for LGBT, socialists, and feminists.

However, all this does not paint an unequivocally good prospect for the left. The Ukrainian government is neoliberal, and the war has only made this worse. Amazingly, while all European countries respond to even modest economic crises with leftist measures—expansionary fiscal policies, class redistribution to level out disparities, a drive for full employment at the expense of inflation, etc.—Ukraine's crisis has been met with even greater neo-liberalism and fiscal conservatism. This has led to mass impoverishment, which has led to an increase in crime, and the Interior Ministry has responded by legalizing firearms. Both are hitting leftists hard: impoverishment knocks people out of activism, and mass possession of guns leads to the risk of both increasing right-wing violence and police brutality (which are often the same because of the affiliation of right-wing street activists with security forces). Martial law—the prohibition of protests and strikes, the consolidation of the media—makes it extremely difficult to fight this. In many ways, we are forced to actively use our Western connections to at least influence the actions of our government.

When it comes to the long-term prospects of the left, the fate of the left in Ukraine is closely linked to the fate of this war. If Ukraine ends up losing—loses more territory or sovereignty, suffers huge irreparable economic losses without adequate compensation, loses the prospect of European integration—there is a high risk of a rise in right-wing sentiment. Without a clear perspective, various extremist ideologies can easily spread in society, which will of course be based on hatred of both Russia, which stole our country, and the Western world that abandoned Ukraine to its fate. The situation in Chechnya (Republic of Ichkeria) can be given as an example. Before the first Chechen war, it was a fairly secular country, but it became a center of attraction for radical Islamism after the Khasavyurt agreements deprived it of the chance to become an independent state. Such radical, extremist ideas are often the consequence of an inability to defend oneself by other more reasonable and realistic means.

On the other hand, if Ukraine does not

lose (although we can hardly call this a victory), and maintains those things necessary for decent social progress, the left will have very good prospects. European integration will require society to move in a more progressive direction. It will be difficult for the right to frame itself as those who "won the war" because participation in the army was very massive and relatively inclusive. We will see large numbers of people gaining experience in self-organization by volunteering and helping the army. These social skills are not going anywhere. The demand for progressive social change in society and less influence of money on politics in Ukrainian society is very strong—in fact in his discourse Zelensky has constantly flirted with these themes, although of course, his politics have little to do with his words. The country will also face the question of reindustrialization and the development of science and education—issues that have long been dear to the left and promoted by the left in Ukraine—which in the future will also be essential for the building of a strong defense sector.

Certainly, there is no guarantee that in post-war construction the left will necessarily be able to win public support. The same European integration can be implemented by borrowing all the worst from the EU, but not by accepting the good there. All this will be subject to political struggle—but the trend as a whole will contribute to the growth of left-wing sentiment and the success of left-wing organizations.

NP: Do you worry that if the West provides more and more powerful weapons to Ukraine, this will cause a cycle of escalating violence that will end up destroying Ukraine?

A: "Escalation" has become the most important word in the current international debate on this war. Again, as with the word "concessions," there is a very dangerous ambiguity that needs to be discussed.

The first issue is "escalation in Ukraine." Except for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), the Russian Federation has used all kinds of weapons, including within populated areas: heavy bombs, heavy flamethrowers, missiles (including hypersonic ones), cluster incendiary munitions, and so on. Russia has no heavier weapons to use in Ukraine. Also, Russia has already committed every possible war crime—in effect carrying out genocide on invaded territories. There are no types of targets that Russia has not already attacked. At the moment it has two escalatory tools left: mobilization and WMDs.

The first is impossible because of the nature of the Russian regime, which is based on the passivity of the people and the basic contract "no one owes anyone anything—the state does not owe the population and the population does not owe the state." Breaking this contract would most likely lead to the death of the regime. Many had expected a mobilization on May 9, but this didn't happen.

The use of WMDs also does not look like a real threat at the moment. Neither Western intelligence nor most military analysts believe that such options are actually being considered. WMDs will not give Putin anything militarily, but it will very much change the world's attitude towards the war—a military intervention by NATO countries in such a situation is quite possible. Putin tries to look like a madman, but he is not. His actions are quite logical for a tyrant trying to retain power, but they are based on incorrect information about the world (Putin gets this only from reports of his subordinates who try to tell only the facts that are pleasing to him). Escalation in Ukraine is impossible because the Russian army is already fighting at its maximum capacity without any restrictions.

The other and much more real problem is escalation by Russia outside of Ukraine. No, of course Russia will never attack NATO, but there are many forms of hybrid aggression that it certainly uses: trade war (cutting off gas in winter, for example), creating a food crisis or stopping humanitarian aid in Syria, large-

scale cyber attacks on critical infrastructure, political assassinations and terrorist attacks (as with the Czech arms depots), selling heavy weapons to various terrorist groups. Of course, it seems insignificant compared to what is happening now in Ukraine, but it is a big problem for Western politicians. Such actions will trigger a backlash—and in the current very heated situation it could trigger an escalation spiral with unpredictable results. Western politicians are afraid to take the first step in this confrontation, so their policies remain reactive.

There is nothing wrong with this attempt to protect their countries from any possible costs of this war. However, there is no need to cover up concern for themselves with the guise of concern for Ukraine. Western society needs to take a sober view of the dangers posed by Russia, and first and foremost develop defense mechanisms. And a second important point to remember is that inaction can also affect Russia's ability to use hybrid attacks against Western countries. It was inaction and the lack of a clear strategy, with the hope of "what if it doesn't work," that led us to this war.

NP: What are your objectives for the short term and for the longer term?

A: The first important thing to understand is that this war could be a very long one, much longer than many people currently think. It will not be uniform in intensity, but it will not be over completely for a long time.

The short-term goals in these circumstances are what is needed right now in the process of war. The long-term goal is some kind of transition to a post-war world, the configuration of which is almost impossible to predict right now.

The main short-term goal is of course to help Ukraine win the war. Primarily for this purpose, we work with our foreign friends from various progressive organizations around the world. We try to make sure that the topic of Ukraine does not disappear from the public discourse and try to promote the interests of Ukraine. We do this first of all by countering the myths created around Ukraine and the war by Russian propaganda and various stereotypes. We support what our state is promoting in terms of arms supplies, sanctions, and confiscation of Russian assets.

We also try to talk about the types of support that our government is not talking about. The most important is the cancellation of the Ukrainian international debt. It is important not only to ease the financial situation in Ukraine but also politically. The debt has long been a way of stifling Ukraine's development, a way of keeping it on the periphery of Europe. This has benefited international financial institutions and Ukrainian elites alike, but not the people of Ukraine. The time has come to end it.

Our goals within Ukraine are primarily humanitarian. We are a small organization and can't help everyone, so we focus on helping affiliated organizations, often trade unions and various workers and activist organizations.

Although we believe that war is not the time to score political points, we also have to campaign politically. This is because some politicians have decided that war and martial law are a good way of pushing through unpopular bills. The latest egregious example is Bill 5371 that essentially destroys the rights of employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (which are seventy-three percent of employers). It is contrary to both EU and ILO (International Labor Organization) standards and was postponed until after the war due to public outcry. We are trying by all available means to prevent this bill from being enacted. We also help workers who have suffered from unscrupulous employers during the war, with advice, legal aid, and publicity about their issues. Unfortunately, the unity of Ukrainian society began to crumble precisely with the desire of business owners to pass their costs onto workers.

For the longer term, we see a place for

a postwar Ukraine in Europe, with a strong self-sufficient economy, a strong army, a just social order, and massive civic participation. For this we need a political force that will unite progressive grassroots organizations—it could be a political party or another form of political organization. This force will have to work actively within Ukraine and abroad. Our fate is inextricably linked to Europe. We want European integration, but we want European integration with European trade unions, labor movements, and grassroots initiatives. We do not want European integration with European business lobbyists and reactionary movements. Europe is now at a crossroads; for years the wealth of the central countries has been ensured by shifting costs to the periphery. The war is one consequence of the transfer of security costs to eastern Europe. The complete failure of this approach can no longer be ignored. Fair and equitable integration of Ukraine into the EU may set a precedent for a redistribution of power within the EU, and possibly closer integration and equalization of living standards between the different countries of Europe.

Another important topic will be framing the origins and causes of this war in public discourse. It is important because we need not only to end this war but also to learn from it and eliminate its causes. Even now there is a political struggle over that. For right-wingers, Russia is practically a revival of Communism and the Soviet Union. But we see that the Russian Federation is the leader in terms of inequality and the anti-leader in terms of civic engagement. It's a corporate dictatorship where people are governed by the libertarian principle of "do whatever you want, as long as you don't touch my private life." By suppressing public confrontation within the country, Putin has externalized the class conflict, sending the poorest to fight imaginary foreign enemies so that they will not confront their real enemies, the wealthy elite within the country.

We have to show that inequality and unresolved class conflicts are as dangerous to world security as tyranny. It is not something that is an internal affair of countries. Inequality and related violations of people's rights should become as much a cause for various kinds of international restrictions as tyranny.

Our era has been called "globalization without values." Capitalists have easily invested in the businesses of tyrants and slave masters without thinking about the ethics and sustainability of such investments. We should not discard globalization—creating borders is what the right-wingers want. But we must build our global cooperation on the requirements of sustainability and respect for all human rights—civil, social, cultural, and so on. The attempt to "take shortcuts" and go down the route of cutting costs at the expense of people must be seen as a threat to the stability and sustainability of development. People must come before profits. And this is exactly how Russia's attack on Ukraine poses the question: Europe and the world have to choose literally between the lives of Ukrainians and the economic costs of the confrontation with Russia. I hope the world can make the right choice.

NOTES

1. Roman Romaniuk, "Possibility of talks between Zelenskyy and Putin came to a halt after Johnson's visit – UP sources," *Ukrainska Pravda*, May 5, 2022, https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/05/5/7344206/.

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3. "Kissinger: These are the main geopolitical challenges facing the world right now," May 23, 2022, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/kissinger-these-are-the-main-geopolitical-challenges-facing-the-world-right-now/.

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Lenin, Ukraine, and the Amnesia of the "Anti-war Left"

Tom Dale

The most prominent institutions of the anglophone left—including *Jacobin* and Democratic Socialists of America—have deliberately set themselves against the provision of the assistance which Ukraine needs to defend itself. Leading intellectuals, such as Noam Chomsky, have joined them. Much of the remainder have temporized, choosing neutrality or vagueness in a situation of injustice.

This failure is far from universal, and a vocal minority on the left has placed itself firmly amongst Ukraine's strongest supporters. Nonetheless, the failure is broad, deep, and serious.

Getting to the root of this failure is no simple matter. The left lacks a unified theory of geopolitics, capitalism, war, and movement strategy to act as a reference point for its internal discussion. It lacks even a range of contending, explicitly articulated theoretical perspectives drawn from within its own ranks, and consistent with its broader world view, that clearly describe the lines of debate.

What it has instead is a mess of half-examined folk-theories, sentiments, and habits of argument. These have been drawn impressionistically from recent history, borrowed selectively from philosophically incompatible traditions—such as realism—or half-excavated from the bedrock of the left's own past.

A full account of the left's failure would require coming to grips with all of these, and is beyond the scope of this article. But one of these roots deserves special attention: Vladimir Lenin's writing on imperialism and war during the throes of World War I, and the socialist strategy that accompanied it.

It should be clear then, that Lenin's view was not that the wars of imperial states were to be opposed as a matter of eternal principle.

It deserves attention because it is the implicit backdrop to a great many socialist responses to contemporary war, but also because it is almost universally misunderstood, ripped from the historical context on which it was expressly made dependent, and rendered a misleading anachronism.

Regardless of the several mistakes within Lenin's argument, it is nonetheless more sophisticated than the folk version which is today promoted by the current that sometimes calls itself "the anti-war left." This current sometimes like to dub their opponents—

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who may advocate military action in certain delimited situations, such as Ukraine—the "pro-war left."

The irony is that Vladimir Lenin, a feted opponent of imperialism, would quite probably find himself swept up in this rhetorical dragnet today.

Lenin on Imperialism and War during World War I

The folk version of the socialist response to war which has come down to us today from the years 1914—1918 holds that socialists always oppose all war by their own imperial states, whether against non-imperial states (e.g. colonial wars), or against other imperialist states, i.e. in all circumstances. This policy—opposition to imperialist war—is sometimes said not to be merely one amongst many socialist positions; but the very thing which distinguishes socialists (in the tradition of Lenin, Karl Liebknecht and Eugene V. Debs) from liberals (in the tradition of the Mensheviks and German SDP majority).

Lenin grounded his understanding of the wars of his time in an account of its global political economy. He called that period, from some time in the late 19th Century to WWI, "imperialism", but he acknowledged that term wasn't strictly accurate. Imperialism had been around for centuries. It would be more accurate to call the period in which he lived and wrote "high colonialism": during which the whole earth's surface had been substantially divided up between the imperial states, and a few non-colonial states.

This, Lenin said, derived from the deepening tendency of capitalism toward monopoly, and toward the power of financial monopolies over industrial monopolies. This process rendered the big banks something like the general bearers of the capitalist interest, and imperial nation states the agents of those interests. Because industry needs both raw materials and markets, and increasing quantities of either can only be secured by force abroad, states were compelled to seek ever-greater colonial expansion. Because the geographic limits of the earth had left so few weak polities unsubordinated, there was only one mechanism by which empires could seek further aggrandizement of their monopolies: seizure of territory—colonial or metropolitan—from other colonial powers. Thus, the stage was set for inter-imperial war; not a systemic aberration, but an outgrowth of the basic character of capitalism in its era of high colonialism.

Insofar as it relates to monopoly and finance, Lenin's argument is open to question. But the thesis that the era of high colonialism contained within its basic logic—whatever its origins—the motive force which drove the imperial powers into World War I is now widely accepted; taught in schools, and a feature of mainstream histories.

It is worth quoting Lenin at some length, because the views he expressed are so

Katya Gritseva, 2022, digital art, Lviv

contradictory to the folk understanding of them. He was clear that it was not possible to extrapolate from conclusions applicable to one era of imperialism to another. As he wrote in *Imperialism* (1916):

> Colonial policy and imperialism existed before the latest stage of capitalism, and even before capitalism. Rome, founded on slavery, pursued a colonial policy and practiced imperialism. But "general" disquisitions on imperialism, which ignore, or put into the background, the fundamental difference between socio-economic formations, inevitably turn into the most vapid banality or bragging, like the comparison: "Greater Rome and Greater Britain." Even the capitalist colonial policy of *previous* stages of capitalism is essentially different from the colonial policy of finance capital. (Chapter 6)

In *Socialism and War* (1915), too, Lenin emphasized that his conclusions were specifically founded in the period of high colonialism, and indeed needed to be nuanced from war to war:

> … we deem it necessary historically (from the standpoint of Marx's dialectical materialism) to study each war separately. In history there have been numerous wars which, in spite of all the horrors, atrocities, distress and suffering that inevitably accompany all wars, were progressive, i.e., benefited the development of mankind by helping to destroy the exceptionally harmful and reactionary institutions (for example, autocracy or serfdom), the most barbarous despotisms in Europe (Turkish and Russian). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the historically specific features of precisely the present war. (Chapter 1)

He continued:

> … from 1789 to 1871, one of the types of wars were wars of a bourgeois-progressive, national-liberating character. In other words, the chief content and historical significance of these wars were the overthrow of absolutism and feudalism, the undermining of these institutions, the overthrow of alien oppression. Therefore, those were progressive wars . . .

Amongst these wars were those that Marx—another "pro-war socialist", to adopt the contemporary usage—enthusiastically supported, including the Union's war against the Confederacy[1], and Poland's wars to resist Tsarist domination[2].

This did not mean Lenin was naïve about the political character of these wars, which were profoundly mixed. Nonetheless, he discerned their fundamental historical meaning, both from amidst their malign political effects, and the mass slaughter they produced:

> For example, the revolutionary wars waged by France contained an element of plunder and conquest of alien territory by the French, but this does not in the least alter the fundamental historical significance of these wars, which destroyed and shattered feudalism and absolutism in the whole of old, serf-ridden Europe. In the Franco-Prussian war, Germany plundered France, but this does not alter the fundamental historical significance of this war, which liberated tens of millions of German people from feudal disintegration and from the oppression of two despots, the Russian tsar and Napoleon III.

(In this latter case, Lenin notes that Marx had approved of a vote against war credits in Germany, even at the outset of the war, on grounds of the need for an independent working-class policy. As noted above, however, in the cases of the U.S. Civil War and Poland, Marx advocated practical support, rather than abstention. The variations of circumstance from war to war are innumerable; so are the appropriate responses.)

It should be clear then, that Lenin's view was not that the wars of imperial states were to be opposed as a matter of eternal principle. On the contrary the wars of imperialist states may, under certain circumstances, be progressive—but those circumstances did not include his own time, in which the conditions

of high colonialism rendered that impossible. To understand his logic, turn to his discussion of the invasion of Belgium by Germany, which triggered the entry of Britain into WWI.

Symbolic image of the industrial city of Mariupol, destroyed by bombs, Katya Gritseva, 2022, mixed media, Lviv

> Let us suppose that all the states interested in the observation of international treaties declared war on Germany with the demand for the liberation and indemnification of Belgium. In such a case, the sympathies of Socialists would, of course, be on the side of Germany's enemies. But the whole point is that the "triple (and quadruple) entente" is waging war *not* over Belgium . . .

Rather, he says, each power sought to use the opportunity of the war to conquer new territories from the other powers; including on the edges of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. Thus "it is *impossible* to help Belgium *without* helping to strangle Austria or Turkey, etc." Why was this impossible, in his view? Precisely because of the political economy of high colonialism, which embedded the drive for territorial expansion deep in the heart of global geopolitics. The idea was not merely that imperial powers happened to be hypocritical, for this was always true, but that high colonialism made it *structurally inevitable* that national liberation through war in one theatre would *dynamically produce,* through an expanding military conflagration, national oppression in another.

Consequently, he argued, it was not possible to extrapolate from socialist policy in relation to the wars of the early-mid 19th century to socialist policy in WWI. The same principle is true of extrapolation between Lenin's day and ours, in which the structural conditions of high colonialism no longer hold. Whatever we say about war, to be worthwhile it must be grounded in a specific account of the conditions of our time.

If we consider the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is self-evident that the conditions which determined Lenin's attitude to Belgium no longer exist. Colonial blocs are no longer the organizing basis of world capitalism; there is no general imperative toward territorial expansion, and there is no sense in which Western support for Ukraine carries with it any dynamic necessity for national oppression elsewhere.

The conditions relevant to the formation of socialist policy must also include the historic position of the socialist movement. The "revolutionary defeatism" of Lenin and the official Second International congresses—a policy of working to overthrow one's own government, with military defeat as a necessary corollary—was wholly contingent on the

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

revolutionary ferment of its time.

Again, stressing the historical contingency of his position, he wrote that in that earlier era:

> there was *no* modern imperialism, *no* ripe objective conditions for Socialism, and *no* mass Socialist parties *in any* of the belligerent countries, i.e., none of the conditions from which the Basle Manifesto deduced the tactics of "proletarian revolution" *in connection* with a war between the great powers.

Indeed, in *The Defeat of One's Own Government in the Imperialist War* (1915), Lenin seems scarcely at all concerned with war policy from either a humanitarian or geopolitical aspect. He is almost entirely absorbed with that policy as a tool to facilitate the domestic empowerment of the Bolsheviks. The same sentiment appears in *Imperialism*, where Lenin wrote that were a revolution springing from war impossible, the defeatist position would not apply.

Even in WWI, the universal wisdom of the defeatist position was doubtable. It most clearly applied to the aggressor powers. But it is less obvious that it made sense for socialists in the other countries of Europe. In Russia, defeatism helped bring the Bolsheviks to power, but the subordination of their political project to the Kaiser was then only averted by those of their erstwhile allies who continued to fight in the West.

The era of high-colonialism ended; not, as Lenin hoped, in socialism, but in fresh cycles of capitalist consolidation. Ultimately, it took a second imperial world war to break apart the European empires that were the organizing structure of the colonial era.

World War II itself provided further evidence that Lenin's policy was not even universal within the era of high colonialism. For all its imperial hypocrisies, the fundamental historic significance of WWII was the defeat of Nazism in Europe and the destruction of the Japanese empire in Asia. The official Communists of that time abandoned their initial opposition to the Allied war effort on direct orders from Moscow. But there has been scarcely any attempt to theorize that decision since, and to ask more general questions about what it means for socialist approaches to war and world order. The episode is recounted[3] without comment in a 2019 *Jacobin* issue titled *War is a Racket* (Summer 2019). Merely a racket then, too? Or was something more at stake?

The lack of a nuanced framework in which to understand war leads to more contemporary elisions. Left-leaning outlets worldwide lent their support to Rojava, the predominantly Kurdish enclave in northern

Syria formed in the midst of revolution. The very same *Jacobin* special issue sympathetically interviewed a US activist who volunteered there. Yet it is self-evident that Rojava was only born by the grace of U.S. military power, and was drastically weakened when that was substantially withdrawn. This tension is not discussed, not acknowledged: celebration of Rojava abstracted from its material preconditions lies down beside unconditional condemnations of those very same preconditions under the slogan "endless war". There is no attempt at a resolution.

Instead, certain of Lenin's conclusions have been kept on life support, quite contrary to the intentions of their progenitor.

Contrast with the Left Today

Lenin misunderstood much about his own time. His thought should not be the foundation stone for our own today—whether in this or any other matter.

But returning to Lenin as theorist does two worthwhile things. First, it firmly dispels the idea that the contemporary mainstream left's attitudes to war rests on a foundation of classical theory—or any theory at all: just a few disembodied conclusions, expressly dependent on the conditions of a time long past.

Second, it reminds us what a materialist method in the analysis of war and the world system looks like. Every one of Lenin's claims was historically located, contingent and specific, grounded in an account of the global political economy of his time, and an awareness that every war is different.

Lenin, like Clausewitz, understood war not as an aberration arriving *deus ex machina* on a world stage with an essentially peaceful character, but as a continuation of politics by other means. He understood that the politics that war continues differs from time to time and place to place; varying both by the overarching conditions of the world system, and from war to war. He made understanding the politics which each war continued the lynchpin of his analysis. He accepted that military violence was, in certain circumstances, the indispensable motive force of progress, and not only in the hands of cadres fighting directly for socialism.

By contrast, the approach of today's mainstream left distills a mixture of horrified pacifism, banal moralism, and flatly false assertions about the left's own political history. "Opposing war has always been at the heart of socialist internationalism," Ben Burgis claims.[4] David Broder writes[5] that socialists should return to what he says is a "core principle": "an unrelenting rejection of the use of military force". Lenin's life and writing gives the lie to these notions, as do Marx's (and Trotsky's).

Moving beyond this would involve reckoning with the particular conditions of war in our time, including *inter alia* the predominance of civil wars over international wars, the resultant rarity of wars of total mobilization and the commonality of atrocities, nuclear weapons, the probably-terminal absence of a revolutionary conjuncture, the non-dependence of contemporary capitalism on systems of exclusive territorial control, etc.

The broad response to the Ukraine war, as to the war in Syria, has been marked not only by wrong conclusions, but a wholesale lack of curiosity and materialism.

The broad response to the Ukraine war, as to the war in Syria, has been marked not only by wrong conclusions, but a wholesale lack of curiosity and materialism. The mainstream left has produced not one worthwhile analysis of the military balance, nor the dynamics of nuclear crisis, nor of the

contemporary relationships between global political economy and war. These are made the subject of throwaway assertions, rarely even whole sentences. There have been, instead, analyses of discourse, majoring in the questions of hypocrisy and moral "standing": reed thin, and almost entirely irrelevant to the clash now taking place in the flatlands of eastern Ukraine.

The politics which that clash continues should attract support to the Ukrainian side from the left everywhere. It pits a flawed democracy against a personal autocracy; a social system with the potential for evolution against one hard-cased by a police state; and national self-determination against colonial annexation and cultural annihilation. Whatever one thinks, strategically, of Ukraine's manner of handling its relations with the West and Russia, these are the matters at stake, and the primary ground on which the question of military support should be decided.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Civil War in the United States* (International Publishers, 1937). https://libcom.org/article/civil-war-united-states-karl-marx-and-friedrich-engels

2. John Ganz, "Ben Burgis's Bad History: *Jacobin*'s anti-Jacobins," April 15, 2022. https://johnganz.substack.com/p/ben-burgiss-bad-history

3. David Broder, "Breaking the Chains of Command," *Jacobin,* August 27, 2019. https://jacobin.com/2019/08/breaking-the-chains-of-command

4. "No, Left-Wing Opponents of War Aren't Isolationists," *Jacobin*, April 14, 2022. https://jacobin.com/2022/04/antiwar-internationalists-isolationists-eugene-debs-russia-ukraine

5. "Stop Pretending the Left Is on Putin's Side," *Jacobin,* February 24, 2022. https://jacobin.com/2022/02/the-left-vladimir-putin-russia-war-ukraine

The Italian Left and the War in Ukraine

Piero Maestri

April 25—Liberation Day, the anniversary of the Partisans' entry into Milan in 1945 and the fall of Fascism—is the most soul-stirring holiday for Italian leftists and anti-fascists. The main parade is held in Milan. Organized by ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia-National Association of Partisans of Italy) and the Permanent Antifascist Committee, it brings together anti-fascist parties, confederal trade unions, and local institutions.

Following on the heels of widespread condemnation of the president of the ANPI,[1] this year's event attracted close attention and high expectations. At the same time, a controversy about the character of the Italian Resistance of 1943-1945 and its "radical difference" from the Ukrainian resistance, considered only as a military action of a rather right-wing government, had been strong for weeks.

About 70,000 people arrived in the square, and it is interesting to describe the parade of banners: ANPI and Partisans, along with signs commemorating concentration camps; mayors and representatives of institutions; center-left parties; the Ukrainian community, against Putin's war; a small group from the Radical Party with four NATO flags; pacifist associations with rainbow flags against the war and the sending of weapons; the Palestinian youth with their flags; the various parties of the more-or-less Communist or post-Communist left, against the war and NATO; Stalinist "anti-fascist" Donbass groups (with the colors of the St. George's cross); anarchists; and No Vax and No Green Pass banners—a confusion that nevertheless represents the state of actions and relations in the peace movement and the left.

Let Us Then Take a Step Back

The anti-war demonstrations in Italy began immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24. In fact, attempts to take to the streets had been made even earlier by some sectors of the pacifist and anti-capitalist movements warning of the risk of open conflict in the area.

The two major initiatives of the peace movement against the war so far have been those on February 26 in Milan and March 5 in Rome.

In the first event, the leading organizations called for demonstrations because "the crisis in Ukraine, the tensions between Russia and NATO, risk creating a military escalation; it is important to support peace initiatives against the proliferation of weapons, a sector that has never seen a crisis even in the harshest moments of the pandemic. We call on everyone for dialogue and not for weapons to prevail."

Some 20,000 people arrived in Milan's Cathedral Square, including one to two thousand Ukrainians who, however, remained on the sides of the square with their flags and

Piero Maestri *is an international solidarity activist.*

slogans, without being invited to speak from the small stage of the organizers, while the various groups that had signed the appeal paraded.

On March 5, a cease-fire demonstration was called in Rome with an appeal that read, "We must stop the war in Ukraine. We must stop all wars in the world. We condemn the aggression and war unleashed by Russia in Ukraine. We want a ceasefire; we demand the withdrawal of troops. We need UN action that with authority and legitimacy leads the negotiations between the parties. We call for a policy of disarmament and active neutrality. From Italy and Europe must come political and negotiating solutions."

A position widespread in feminist circles considers what is taking place to be a clash between two equally nefarious ideas of "homeland," a reactionary masculine concept.

The appeal was signed by the Network for Peace and Disarmament (retepacedisarmo.org), an organization that brings together the largest labor union federations, CGIL-CISL, UIL; large associations such as ACLI (Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani, Christian Italian Workers Associations), ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana, Italian Cultural Recreational Association); and so on—basically, the historical, social, and cultural fabric of the Italian left and the peace movement.

These events and others that are organized by these networks, in their diversity, all have some obvious similarities in their demands:

- A firm NO to sending arms to Ukraine.
- The rejection of NATO enlargement and rearmament (increased military spending).
- Calling on the Italian government and the European Union to take all kinds of diplomatic initiatives to bring about an end to the conflict.

How can these positions—definitely a majority within the anti-war demonstrations throughout the West—be explained, in contrast to what the Eastern European leftists, and the anti-war movement in Russia itself, are repeatedly demanding?

There are obviously different explanations, and it is good to avoid any generalization or trivialization. First, it should be pointed out that for the vast majority of the people and groups who took to the streets, it is not a form of neo-campism, or worse, red-brownism, whereby Putin's war would somehow be considered a just reaction to U.S. and NATO policies. These positions exist, but they are in a minority and in some cases extremely marginal—although sometimes there are overlaps (as we will see later).

I think several explanations can be given, which sometimes overlap and sometimes are separate from each other:

- The fear of escalation that could lead to a world conflict, perhaps even a nuclear one. This is a sincere fear and one that looks at the belligerent statements of the contending and allied states, seeing the risk of their not wanting to find ways out in order to negotiate;
- A sincere concern that the continuation of the war will cause more disaster and mourning in the Ukrainian population itself, generally regarded as "victims," forced to endure bombardment for which not only Putin is responsible but also the Ukrainian government itself, which forces the male population to stay and fight, often against the wishes of the men involved and their families;
- A lack of understanding of the policies of Putin and his circle in Russia, not because of a failure to recognize their autocratic

and repressive aspects, but because Russian policy is regarded as a reaction to that of the U.S. and NATO. In this sense the war did not begin on February 24, 2022, but as early as 1989-1990, as NATO not only did not disband but even expanded to include several former Warsaw Pact countries;

• A similar limitation, perhaps even more pregnant with consequences, with respect to the history of Ukraine. Ukrainian President Zelensky is put on the same level as the Russian president in terms of arrogance and testosterone—but more importantly, the existence of a neo-Nazi and/or nationalist right wing is exaggerated as if these were determinants in Ukrainian politics. And of course, Euromaidan is read as a coup and the subsequent war in Donbass as the responsibility of Ukrainian governments that "killed 14,000 civilians in eight years."[2]

• The current war is interpreted as a clash between opposing nationalisms (and/or imperialisms), with similar responsibilities for creating a situation of open warfare. Within this explanation can be found positions from a feminist standpoint that see a clash between opposing patriarchal and *machista* logics.

All in all, such positions were somewhat predictable and maintain their own coherence for most of the actors present. Particularly noteworthy are those of nonviolent pacifism, Catholic and non-Catholic, which considers any armed response as taking part in the conflict and making it even more dangerous and dramatic. Hence the idea that sending weapons means not only participating in the ongoing war but worsening its effects on people and politicians.

A position that is also widespread in feminist circles considers what is taking place to be a clash between two equally nefarious ideas of "homeland" (*patria* in Italian), a reactionary masculine concept. This position holds that it is important not to side with any of the conflicting parties but with those who choose to evade, fleeing and deserting, as well as with the victims.

On a more directly political level, all parties or organized groups on the left, outside the Democratic Party and the confederal and grassroots trade unions, share most of the positions described above. Even those with a consistent "no weapons" position try to participate in the mobilizations of the peace movement, which, however, they do not directly organize, much less lead.

It may be of some interest to point out two particular positions in this area. On the one hand, Rifondazione Comunista has always been opposed to wars and against NATO, and today they emphasize opposition to increased military spending and to NATO with "Neither with Putin nor with NATO" banners. Rifondazione is led by a political secretary who, as an MP in 2007-2008, voted in favor of a state budget proposed by the Romano Prodi government, of which Rifondazione was a part, that increased military spending. Inconsistency? More like pragmatism, whereby it is different to be in government than in opposition. Today Rifondazione is an almost irrelevant party with no weight in national political dynamics, so that it can take radical positions without having to be accountable to government allies (which it no longer has).

In any case, Rifondazione—which holds the U.S. government and NATO primarily responsible for the current situation—condemns Russian actions, unlike the plethora of parties that invoke the Communist name, which are more or less aligned with Putin's strategy as a necessary response to U.S. and NATO imperialism and the Ukrainian puppet government conniving with neo-Nazis. It is also true that Rifondazione, like the Party of Italian Communists, participated in the conferences of world Communist parties along with the Chinese and Russian CPs.

On the other hand, the position of the organization Potere al Popolo (Power to the People), which was formed by some of those who left Rifondazione along with other political and social groups, and the union

Unione Sindacale di Base (USB)—which are linked organizationally and directed politically by the organization Rete dei Comunisti (which produces the electronic magazine , contropiano.org)—should be noted. USB played a leading role in the port workers' protest against sending weapons to Ukraine, trying to block the loading of them, an anti-militarist practice already used in other conflicts where NATO was a direct player in a war of aggression.

USB is part of the World Trade Union Federation (www.wftucentral.org) and has participated in several meetings with it in Damascus, including at the invitation of President Assad. This detail is not secondary. Even in the case of the Syrian conflict, USB sided decisively with Assad (and thus with Russia) in the face of an uprising supposedly desired and financed by U.S. imperialism, which was alleged to have also invented and financed ISIS, like Al Qaeda before; this also explains the USB's coldness toward the experience of Rojava and the YPG, which at one stage of the conflict leaned on the U.S. to fight ISIS.

There is no shortage of anarchist and radical-left political and social groups that support the legitimacy of Ukrainian resistance, including armed resistance, and that in recent months have come into contact with the Ukrainian and Eastern European lefts, especially through trade union delegations and caravans (such as the one on May 1) and with the European Committee for Solidarity with Ukraine. Likewise, the participation of various social-political networks in the (www.transnational-strike.info/events), launched by the Transnational Social Strike, should be noted.

Common to these groups is a stark condemnation of Russian aggression and a willingness to build networks that include Ukrainian and Eastern anarchists and anti-liberal leftists. Virtually no group directly supports the sending of weapons because they all see this choice by the Italian government as a harbinger of a policy of rearmament and increased military spending at the expense of social spending.

In some cases, there were initiatives that did not directly name this issue, supporting Ukrainian resistance without directly criticizing the sending of arms, though not calling for it. These positions are widespread in the movement as a whole but have failed to emerge in recent months on the level of street mobilization (in Rome there was no political demonstration in front of the Russian embassy—only a testimony by Amnesty International—and a few dozen people could be found in Milan in front of the consulate).

Lastly, it is worth noting the demonstrations against the Russian invasion promoted by government parties, collateral organizations, or local governments in support of the Italian government's own decision to protest Putin and give direct support to Ukraine (in one of these there was a video link with the Ukrainian president).

Government-promoted demonstrations were also attended by Ukrainian communities while they were deserted by the anti-war movement and leftists—evidently uncomfortable with demonstrating with political opponents who are pursuing a deeply liberalist "emergency" executive and supporting sectors of capital on public services, labor, and so on.

One element that needs to be emphasized about these two months of war is the belligerent and polarized climate that has been created, mainly by journalism, both print and television. Thus, we see journalism increasingly taking on the character of propaganda in the name of a "necessary" national unity that mocks pacifism and unquestioningly sides with the positions of the government—and Western allies.

Particularly embarrassing are television "talk show" programs that make it impossible seriously and calmly to advocate radically anti-war positions or support the Ukrainian resistance while not supporting NATO. These shows invite embarrassing characters who play the part of war opponents with

ambiguous or unspeakable positions. The mainstream reaction is to call for some form of censorship of positions that are not aligned with the government.

Getting out of this polarization is extremely difficult while staying within that medium and "theater of politics" logic. That same logic seems to overflow into social media, particularly within Facebook, where prejudiced positions are fought without any possibility of dialogue—a tendency into which even intellectually capable people fall, circulating "information" of dubious provenance and really thinking that they are contributing to the idea of the "complexity" of the current conflict and thus to the impossibility of taking sides "except with peace."

There is no shortage of anarchist and radical-left political and social groups that support the legitimacy of Ukrainian resistance, including armed resistance.

Looking at this lively but rather confused reality from a more personal point of view, that of an anti-war activism that has always sought to have internationalist solidarity at its center, the profound limitation of analysis and consequent action of the Italian peace movement and leftists as a whole (meaning here only the anti-liberal and anarchist ones) definitely leaps to the eye.

This limitation is precisely represented by the inability of the left and peace movement, in the face of Russia's war of aggression, to combine no-to-war and anti-militarism with internationalist solidarity and empathy with the actors in Ukraine. This is a limitation that was already evident in their response to the revolutions in the Arab world and particularly in Syria.

As we wrote as recently as two years ago (*Jacobin Italia*, January 17, 2020),

> The other element that comes back overwhelmingly today is the inability of the movement as a whole to understand the momentous novelty represented by revolutionary attempts in the Arab region (and beyond) and the ambiguous and dramatic entanglements between the various global and regional powers that are doing everything possible to bury those attempts, first with internal military repression, and then war deployed against civilian populations. A blindness, either willful or shamelessly accepted, that has turned its back on any experience that could not be cataloged within the false alternative of "regimes versus jihadism"—with the significant exception of the Kurdish movement.
>
> As has also been the case in the past, it has been delegated to NGOs and international cooperation to intervene to alleviate the pain of war, to materially and psychologically support the victims of conflicts—almost never posing the political question of the relationship with the concrete subjects who experience those conflicts.

The same thing is happening in Ukraine today. One does not see and often does not want to see the anti-liberal and anarchist actors that in the face of Russian aggression have decided to resist, both with arms and without, maintaining their critical autonomy from the Zelensky government, which they oppose even in this war phase when it takes anti-liberal measures particularly against the rights of women workers.

An exponent of Italian feminism gave a very interesting interview, definitely of high quality intellectually, politically, and morally, on the subject of "what to do?" at this stage. She advocated support for Russian dissident(s) "and also those in Ukraine *if there are any*" (italics ours). This is a glaring example of the inability to sustain a confrontational

debate with the Ukrainian left and social movements that support armed resistance and call for sending arms from NATO countries.

This limitation is accompanied by calling into question of the right to self-determination, looked upon with suspicion because it is a harbinger of nationalism and identitarianism. And in this way, legitimate Ukrainian aspirations to build their own democracy, their own future, are being erased.

And in this way, legitimate Ukrainian aspirations to build their own democracy, their own future, are being erased.

Even if one disagrees with NATO and Europe sending weapons, one must still recognize the legitimacy of Ukraine's demand for them and confront its reasons. And one must recognize and meet with Ukrainians.

This practice of encounter has been and still is the focus of several delegations and caravans that have left for Ukraine in recent months, with political goals along with humanitarian ones. In these years we have learned how necessary is a mutualist as well as a conflictualist politics and practice. Mutualism means first a direct relationship with Ukrainian women and men who have fled their country or are already present in Italy as activists and workers (who in recent weeks have also demonstrated with dignity and firmness their desire for peace, justice, and freedom for Ukraine) and with people in Russia who do not want this war—to try together with them to demilitarize our consciences and our relations, and with them to figure out what support we can give here and in their countries. This means crossing that line and becoming a megaphone for the Ukrainian, Russian, and Eastern radical lefts, which are too often ignored or looked down upon.

It is now clear that this war, like those waged by Western imperialism, is the result of a political and social crisis of a capitalist system that has chosen the path of financial and speculative profit and the interconnected path of increased exploitation at the planetary level—to which are added the authoritarian and expansionist tendencies evident today in Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

This exploitation and these authoritarian policies can only be maintained through a gradual hollowing out of democratic participation and the rights of women and men. To be able to do this, the military instrument, both internal and external to states, is not secondary, hence repression and war—war against peoples.

To strive for a world without war and military repression is to stand with the oppressed in their fight for liberation and to strongly and passionately support the dynamics that arise around the world for this liberation. And even in this crisis, building peace means building social justice—alongside other anti-liberal, anarchist, and anti-authoritarian social and political forces who also need our active, passionate, and committed support.

NOTES

1. On April 4, the ANPI published a statement on the Bucha crimes that read, "The ANPI strongly condemns the Bucha massacre, looking forward to a UN-led international commission of inquiry made up of representatives of neutral countries to ascertain what really happened, why it happened, and who are the perpetrators. This terrible affair confirms the urgency of putting an end to the horror of war and the bellicose fury that grows every day." The statement was judged ambiguous and rather "equidistant," more so coming from an association that invokes the values of anti-fascism and resistance (including armed resistance) to Nazi-fascism. From there arose a noisy and very media-driven campaign of attack on the president of the ANPI.

2. Michael Karadjis, "On the fantastic tale that 'the Ukrainian army killed 14,000 ethnic Russians in Donbas between 2014 and 2022'," June 16, 2022, https://mkaradjis.com/2022/06/16/on-the-fantastic-tale-that-the-ukrainian-army-killed-14000-ethnic-russians-in-donbas-between-2014-and-2022/.

Ukraine, Sanctions, and the Refugee Crisis

An interview with Khury Petersen-Smith

Khury Petersen-Smith (KPS) is the Michael Ratner Middle East Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. He researches U.S. empire, borders, and migration. Phil Gasper (PG) spoke with Khury on behalf of the *New Politics* editorial board on April, 12, 2022.

PG: Great to talk with you, though not in the greatest of times looking at the global scene. I thought we'd start with Ukraine because that's dominating the headlines at the moment. You've written some interesting pieces about what is going on, the background and so on. In one of them you argue against binary thinking by the left in terms of the war in Ukraine.[1] *Can you explain what that means and what you think the right framework to understand what is happening should be?*

KPS: Absolutely. I think we have this problem where the nation-state is the only political container that we're able to think in terms of. And that is true in general and it's true of the left. I mean, the nation-state is powerful and so there's this gravitational pull to align with one state or another, particularly when states pose themselves as rivals. And so, when it comes to binary thinking, it's painfully the case with the situation in Ukraine. Russia has one story of what's happening—that this is about a response to Western aggression. Then the United States and NATO have another story, which is that they're intervening on behalf of Ukraine in defense of Western values, which are universal values, and Russia is attacking those things.

On the left, there's been this pull on both sides. I'll locate myself in this conversation in the U.S., though it's not limited to the U.S. people who want to stand against U.S. empire say—well there's a pull to say—well, I guess in rejecting the U.S. line, I have to accept or excuse or apologize for or downplay what Moscow's doing. Then on the flip side, there are people on the left who would, in other circumstances, be critical of U.S. power, but in light of Russian aggression, they say, well, I guess the U.S. is actually doing the right thing. And not only doing the right thing, but their story makes sense—this is an attack on Western values, this is an attack on international law.

The truth is, I would argue, that both of these states are part of a world system in which they abuse the rights of people for the pursuit of power on the world stage. And, actually, one of the difficult things about the Ukraine crisis is that there's this 24-hour conversation about it that in many ways is very important, but it's informed by a memory of, like, six weeks. If you just take a step back and look at how the U.S. and Russia have exercised power on the world stage, both have done horrendous things. And there have been plenty of times when they've joined each other in doing horrendous things. Russia and the U.S. actually collaborated after the 9-11 attacks in the early days of the War on Terror. The U.S. and Russia famously collaborated during World War II—they were on the same side, and they were on opposing sides, and

they got together again. So, this notion that there's this binary world where Russia and the U.S. represent entirely polar opposite points of view and behaviors is just false. And I think that an internationalist orientation is one that begins, first and foremost, with a solidarity with ordinary people and people resisting oppression, and that is always skeptical of state power as a starting point, particularly for the world's most powerful states.

PG: Can you say a little bit more about the background to the current crisis, the current war? You mentioned what both sides say. How much of that is correct? Is it a case where both are correct when they're criticizing each other?

KPS: That's a good question. After the end of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, that was one moment in which the U.S. was the world's sole superpower, it wielded tremendous power on the world stage. Then there was another moment, after the September 11th attacks and the beginning of the War on Terror, where it became clear that there was this kind of trajectory toward the development of multiple world powers and a set of questions about who would be the most powerful states in the world and how they would rule. For seven decades, the U.S. was able to not only wield power directly, but craft all of these institutions of global governance with the U.S. at the head of the table—craft all of these laws, these rules of commerce, and essentially play an enormous role in structuring the world economically and politically and socially. And so, there was a question about, in the 21st century, will that still be the model? And if so, which states will preside over it?

I went back to the national security strategy document of the Bush administration in 2002, because I remembered that document spoke to the emergence of what Washington called potential peer competitors—potential rivals to U.S. power. I remember in that document a mention of China and of Russia. Upon rereading it, what was fascinating was, I had forgotten that India is in there as well. And so, Washington actually identified three potential challenges to U.S. power, Russia, China, and India. What was also striking were the glowing words for Russia. It was about how Russia is on its path to democratization after the end of the Cold War, that there was growing cooperation between the U.S. and Russia. And so, the U.S. welcomes a rise of Russia if it can proceed along this path. So that's an interesting kind of background to where we're at today. And I think two things worth noting have transpired. One is that the U.S., in an effort to really secure its position as the world's number one superpower, made a massive gamble called the War on Terror, in which they invaded several countries in a row, launched military operations across whole regions of the world in an effort to project U.S. power in the few places where it didn't yet dominate, and make sure that the U.S. reigned supreme. The War on Terror has been a catastrophe for humanity. The U.S. state also really lost the gamble. The U.S. is not more powerful twenty years later, the U.S. is relatively lower in power.

Russia, meanwhile, has been projecting power in its own way. In particular, around the same time, 1999-2000, Russia was carrying out a massive war in Chechnya that was atrocious and horrendous, which was about Russia re-establishing its power in the region. You could put its operations in Georgia [in 2008] in that same category. And then, very significantly, Russia intervened in a massive way in the Syrian civil war. The Middle East has historically been considered for a century by the world's powers as the most strategic place in the world. The U.S. was hoping to dominate the Middle East with its War on Terror and it was actually set back. And Russia was able to step in, and I think that's what its intervention in Syria was about.

So, I actually see that as the path to bring us to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I mean, there's a conversation about Russia's historic attachment to Ukraine, and Putin has a kind of ethnic nationalist vision, and there's truth

in that. But this is about Russia establishing itself as having the right to call the shots in the region, first in this sort of post-Soviet region, the region that it dominated under the Soviet Union, then increasingly in the Middle East, and now in Europe. That's Putin's gamble—Russia should be a political player in Europe (it's already an economic player). And I think that's what this war is about in so many ways. The frame that this is about an attack on Western values and universal values—I don't think that that holds up as an explanation of what's going on.

PG: So, there's big power politics behind this and their shifting relative strengths, because China is in the background of this—of the conflict in Ukraine—as well. I think you're right, the U.S. gambled in the early part of this century, and while it's still the biggest military and economic power, part of its gamble was to try and maintain total hegemony, and that clearly is not the world that we're living in today. So, in many ways, it's less stable and more dangerous than, certainly, 25 years ago. Part of the background, as well, has been the expansion of NATO in the post-Soviet era, and you've written about that too.[2] So, could you bring that into the story?

KPS: Well, there's a couple of things to say. NATO which is a military alliance whose pretext was collective self-defense of North Atlantic nations in the Cold War. Well, the Cold War ended, and NATO not only remains but has expanded. So, the pretext is false. I mean, the idea that it's a defensive alliance is false. It is a military alliance for projecting Western power in a way that's led by the United States. There's a sort of formal NATO alliance. It also has these other projects that involve countries beyond Europe and North America. So, it's really a kind of U.S.-led western military alliance with global reach.

That said, there has been a question in Washington of the utility of NATO. This alliance, which was part of the architecture for the kind of post-World War II Pax

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Americana, U.S., empire—is this still useful to us? I think that that question is bound up in a set of questions about the utility of these multinational formations in general, militarily, politically, and economically. Is the UN still useful to us? Are these trade deals still useful to us?

The greatest expression of that kind of questioning in Washington was the Trump presidency. There was a section of the U.S. elite that said, let's try something different. Yeah, we're still number one. Our profits are pretty good, but they're not as good as they once were. We still have a lot of power, but don't have the relative power that we once had. And we may not be able to secure this forever. So, maybe we should try something new. And Trump said, I'll try something new. Forget about NATO. I'm going to thumb my nose at NATO. I'm going to go to NATO convenings and mock people in NATO. I'm going to confront NATO states for not doing their fair share. The U.S. has shouldered the burden for too long and it has hurt U.S. power. And that is a pretty central piece of the Trump narrative—that the U.S. playing this role, not solely for itself, but structuring the whole world around U.S. power and therefore taking responsibility for that world order, is no longer serving us. And actually,

other countries have taken advantage of our generosity. And therefore, maybe we should leave this alliance. So, that was a debate in Washington.

Of course, others, particularly in the Democratic Party, and its main stewards of U.S. empire—Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, Madeleine Albright—are dedicated to NATO. So, there was a bit of a debate. Well, the debate is over. I think with the war in Ukraine there is a level of unity in Washington on the outlook of U.S. empire, unseen in a long time. And I think that there is unity behind NATO as, yes, this does remain a useful vehicle for us to maintain the kind of world order that we want.

PG: And the shift is visible in Europe as well, because now it looks very likely that NATO is going to expand further—Finland, possibly Sweden, joining it. And there's definitely been a shift towards more belligerence. Germany is now on board for doubling its military budget. At the same time, the U.S. military budget is being jacked up even further. You could see NATO expansion in the post-Soviet era as a real provocation to Russia. But Putin's response, by invading Ukraine, has actually brought about what he claimed that he didn't want to see, which is a further expansion of NATO. I have to say that before the war started, I didn't think Putin was foolish enough to actually invade. I thought his strategy was to build up on the border and exacerbate the differences that existed within NATO. And it was very clear that there were some pretty sharp differences between the UK and the U.S. on one side, and Germany and perhaps France on the other side. And those have now, at least for the time being, disappeared. There's now unity between the European and the U.S. ruling classes. And it looks like it has created an even more dangerous situation than existed prior to that.

KPS: I think you're absolutely right. I mean, I also didn't expect the invasion because, like I said, I thought that the goal has been Putin being a political player in Europe. And just by amassing troops at the border, he achieved his goal. He got meetings with Macron He got a meeting with Biden. He established himself as a player. And so, my thinking was Putin got what he wanted. Why would he go for more? But he too made a gamble. And I think it's a gamble where, again, the people paying the massive price are the people of Ukraine, but at the moment, Russia is not winning the gamble. The war is not going the way they thought.

But the other thing is there has been a polarization, a further polarization, a kind of geopolitical polarization that has done exactly what you said. It's consolidated the Western powers in a kind of alliance. This is another part of the binary geopolitical frame that's really built into the whole thing. And I think, just on the final word on the question of NATO, there were these questions in Washington about is this the vehicle to achieve our goals. I think there have been questions throughout Europe about any number of [similar issues]. Is the European Union the vehicle? The UK leaves—they say we're thinking this is not the vehicle, we need some other arrangement. What we've seen just in a matter of weeks is that a number of long-term goals that these states have all had, have been able to be achieved in the context of this crisis. It has settled the question for them.

The U.S. wanted a bigger military budget. They've been making the case particularly using China as the kind of justification. But they got it with Russia. Germany, which has historically had these limits on the amount of military spending and how it spends, that's over. They've crossed a line. Denmark, same thing. I think there's a real kind of dark celebration, actually, in the Capitol in Washington, in Ottawa and Berlin and Brussels, because in the context of this war, they've been able to achieve these long-term goals of advancing power.

PG: So, the big picture is that we have to keep all of this in mind. This is a competition between a

whole number of powers, which sometimes come into alliance with each other, and sometimes have greater antagonisms. But the central dynamic is the growing conflict between the U.S., Russia and China, and how that plays out.

For the time being, it looks like the U.S. doesn't want to get directly militarily involved [in Ukraine]. Far too risky. We are talking about the U.S. and Russia still being by far the two biggest nuclear powers. We don't know that that line is not going to be crossed, because it's often not through direct intention, but just through the accident of the tensions which build up. But for the time being, the U.S. response has been sanctions on Russia. You've written about that too.[3] *And I wonder if you can talk a little bit about sanctions because you've criticized the sanctions which the U.S. and European countries have put in place on Russia. And I'd also like you to talk a little bit about this in the context of other kinds of sanctions. Because while many on the left have criticized the sanctions on Russia, many of us also have been supporters of the boycott, divestment, sanctions movement to pressure Israel. Some people have thought that there is a contradiction here or a tension of some kind. Can you talk about the sanctions in that context too?*

KPS: Absolutely. First, just a word about why the U.S. is not yet engaging directly militarily. And I think what you said is true, the risk is enormous. The other thing is that the U.S. is achieving its political goals without having to do that. I mean, it's like Washington at the moment has all the benefits that it reaps from a war without actually having to send troops into combat. I mean, you've got a wartime president whose approval ratings has went up. You've got this huge ideological boost—the idea that the U.S. is a force for good in the world, that its allies are a force for good. They've got their bigger military budget. So, they've already won, and they don't need, from their perspective, to take the risk of combat.

Now sanctions. The U.S. has used sanctions for many years as one tool in its arsenal to advance U.S. power, whether we're talking about the U.S. sanctions on Iraq in the nineties, the U.S. sanctions on Cuba, which have existed for several decades, the sanctions on Iran, on Venezuela, on North Korea. So, Washington frames sanctions—and unfortunately a lot of people accept this frame—as an alternative to war. We're not going to invade, we'll just use sanctions. But the truth is the impact of sanctions has historically been as devastating as military operations. In Iraq and at the moment in Iran, the impact of U.S. sanctions is absolutely catastrophic, especially in these past couple of years with the COVID pandemic.

So, there's the impact of sanctions. But then the other thing is that far from being an alternative to war, the U.S. has actually used sanctions with military operations. And so, the sanctions on Iraq—it's like the U.S. invades Iraq in 1991, it imposes sanctions in the nineties, and invades again in 2003, bombing intermittently over the course of the sanctions-regime, through the no-fly zone that the U.S. maintained. So, it's not sanctions *or* war, it's sanctions *and* war. That's one reason why we should just be skeptical.

The other thing is the impact has entirely predictably been on the most vulnerable people of Russia. When the Ruble crashed, those are the people who suffered—ordinary people, especially the most vulnerable of the ordinary people, poor people, people with disabilities, people with illnesses, who are now struggling to access medicines and things like that. There are reasons to oppose sanctions in the moment because of their impact on Russian people, which is totally unfair. It's impacting people who are not responsible for this war.

The other thing that I'm very concerned about, though, is that the U.S. is using this to re-legitimize sanctions in general. So, people who have been questioning the U.S. sanctions on Iran, and who maybe would oppose U.S. sanctions in other contexts, have said, well, in the case of Russia, maybe it's okay. With that new boost of legitimacy, the U.S. will

deploy its sanctions apparatus against other countries too. It won't stop with Russia. I'm just concerned about the kind of legitimizing of U.S. power in general. At the moment, the main face is sanctions, as well as the sale of weapons.

Now, on the question of Israel, it's interesting because if we ask people "What do you mean by sanctions?", different people will say different things. It's an incredibly broad category. All it means is that there should be accepted norms, and ways of doing things, and rules that apply to global political life. And that if a country deviates from or violates those, sanctions are a kind of response. They're a punishment. The kind of sanctions that we talk about when we talk about sanctioning Israel, which is in violation of international law, and there are all sorts of other violations that it commits—it behaves in ways that violate what should be acceptable in a global society—for the most part, particularly for those of us located in the United States, we're talking about stopping the cooperation of U.S. institutions with the Israeli administration of apartheid, particularly the sale of weapons. Usually when you ask people, "What do you mean when you say sanctions against Israel?", it means stop the U.S. military aid. That is a different measure than the kind of sanctions being used against Russia.

When we're talking about sanctions against Israel, or when I'm talking about sanctions against Israel, I'm not talking about making ordinary Israelis suffer, like wrecking the Israeli economy. But also, the U.S. has a very different relationship with Israel than it does with Russia. So, if the U.S. was selling Russia weapons, I would support ending that. That's not the situation, but that is the situation with Israel. And so those are the sanctions that we support.

PG: So, there are sanctions and sanctions. In general, sanction just means some kind of punitive response—something that recognizes the violation which has taken place and tries to correct it. I want to talk to you also about the refugee aspect of the current crisis, because this is a topic you've written about extensively. And it brings out some of the huge hypocrisy. You talked about the U.S. using this as an opportunity to present itself as a force for good in the world. But if you look at the refugee crises around the world, Ukraine is not the worst. There's a massive refugee crisis in Syria, of course, and Yemen, where the U.S. continues to support the Saudi war on Yemen—a huge humanitarian crisis there, including several million displaced people. There's, of course, the refugee crisis on the U.S. southern border, or the so-called crisis—but clearly there's an issue about how refugees are treated. Can you put all of that into context for us? Both the ways in which the U.S. has approached this from a very hypocritical position, but also what the response should be to growing refugee issues around the world.

KPS: Absolutely. This is important. The first thing that has to be said is, of course, Ukrainians have the right of freedom of movement and the right to refuge, the right to be relocated to countries where they'll be safe and where they can start new lives for the moment. They have that right because everybody has that right—all displaced people have that right. And one of the things we're seeing, of course, [is that] millions of people have been displaced within Ukraine and from Ukraine by the Russian invasion. Among the people displaced is quite a significant number of Africans, who've been studying in Ukraine or otherwise living in Ukraine, who are in no less a desperate situation than Ukrainian nationals, and you could argue in more of a desperate situation actually, because they have more complicated legal status, [and are] more vulnerable. And we've seen, on one hand, Ukrainians received by neighboring countries and Africans facing discrimination at the hands of officials in those neighboring countries, as well as Ukrainian officials. That is an injustice in and of itself. But it's also a window onto the global situation of displacement and refugees, which is one in which tens of

millions of people are displaced beyond their home countries and there is stratification in terms of how they're received, the rights they have, the lives that they are expected to be able to live. And that is a racist stratification.

You named a number of situations. One that it's important to put on the table is the refugee situation of Palestinians. It's significant not only because all refugee populations are significant, and not only because it's a large population of refugees—it has been the largest number of refugees in the world—but also because Israel and its allies have made Palestinians the test case of permanent refugeehood, which is actually a feature of this world. There's this expectation that Israel has normalized, that Palestinians will never be able to return to their homes. Not only Palestinians today, but generations of Palestinians will be refugees. Israel has pioneered that. The U.S. has helped cement that notion and it has been embraced by states around the world.

There are refugee camps in Africa where there is a quiet expectation that people will spend their entire lives in, for example the Dadaab camp in Kenya. There are Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who live in camps and there's an expectation, or there's a quiet understanding, that they will never be accepted or embraced by a country and given rights to live in that country freely. So, that's the kind of global situation of displacement. It is a situation in which the U.S., and many of these powerful states that are today saying we stand with Ukraine, we welcome refugees—these states, like the U.S., Britain, France, are directly responsible for actually producing these refugee populations.

And on one hand we have in this tragic situation an opportunity to entirely transform the ways that refugees are treated. For a number of reasons, good and bad, the Ukraine crisis has revealed to many people, particularly Americans, but people around the world, the realities of war and displacement in ways that were not visible before to a lot of Americans. I wish they had been visible when we're talking about Syrians and Palestinians and Iraqis. They're visible in a new way now. And it's a good thing that there's a growing awareness and more solidarity and empathy. That's great. The question is, how do we expand our solidarity and empathy to embrace all of the people who face displacement? That's the opportunity.

Unfortunately, at the moment we're seeing the opposite happen by the states of the world. We can start with the neighboring states, like Poland and Hungary. Poland immediately before the Russian invasion of Ukraine was in the news for months because it was barring refugees coming across the border from Belarus. They deployed Polish police to the border, they were putting up fences, and were forcing people, primarily from the Middle East, to wander in the forest and die, freeze to death, starve. And they maintain that regime to this day. Polish activists, who've taken great risks to help these migrants, face nine years in prison on the border with Belarus. And the same state, Poland, on the border with Ukraine is welcoming refugees. So, they've got a differentiated response. Hungary is the same way. Viktor Orbán recently won re-election. A centerpiece of his campaign and his rule has been xenophobic racism, building a fence on Hungary's border. And yet he's said, we welcome Ukrainian refugees. So, there's this kind of racist, differentiated response to refugees.

Israel has said we'll take in Ukrainian refugees, we'll take the Jewish ones. They're taking some non-Jewish refugees, who are treated quite differently from the Jewish ones. All the while they continue to displace Palestinians into refugeehood. They have a fence on the southern Israeli border directed at Africans, as well as detention centers for Africans. So, that is the response of the world, largely.

And then of course, the United States is playing its part too. And actually, at the moment Ukrainians are arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. At that border, the U.S.

has carried out hundreds of thousands of expulsions of asylum seekers and refugees under something called Title 42, which is this anachronistic public health statute that Stephen Miller and the Trump administration dusted off and said, oh, there's a pandemic, we can use this to bar refugees and asylum seekers from entering the country on the basis of public health. That is obviously cynical given how the Trump administration denied the existence of a pandemic for so long. So, it's totally cynical. Biden has maintained it. For two years now, a central demand of migrant justice activists and supporters of refugee rights has been to end Title 42. The U.S. is maintaining it, and yet in the past few weeks has been treating Ukrainian refugees, and some Russian refugees as well, as exceptions to Title 42. So, somehow Haitians, Central Americans, Mexicans, these people all constitute a threat to public health, but Ukrainians don't. At the moment, the U.S. is actually working with the Mexican government to create a separate track for Ukrainians to seek refugee status in the U.S. They're housed in different locations in Tijuana upon arrival. And they're able to bypass the tens of thousands of other people, overwhelmingly people of color, who are waiting at the border to get in. This is disgusting. It is a kind of revelation of the longstanding white supremacy in U.S. border policy.[4]

It also has to be said that with all of the kind of racist hierarchy and treatment of these different groups of refugees, the U.S. response to the Ukraine crisis is woefully inadequate. The U.S. has said we'll take in a hundred thousand refugees. There are millions of Ukrainians displaced. So, I think that it's such a painful illustration of the function of racism, which is on one hand to target and brutalize people of color and black migrants in particular—I mean, this is coming months after Biden summarily deported 12,000 Haitians from the Del Rio crossing in Texas, which totally violates international law. So, on one hand these are the greatest victims of border policy. At the same time, racism lowers the floor for the treatment and the respect of the humanity of all people. It's not the case that the U.S. is stepping up to the challenge with Ukrainian refugees and leaving others behind. It is kind of reinscribing its racism [but] the whole U.S. refugee system is severely out of step and such an injustice given the level of displacement in the world today. There are some 32 million people who the UN counts as refugees and the U.S. arbitrary cap for refugees is 125,000. It's pathetic. So, the challenge is for us to entirely transform the whole refugee system, obviously with anti-racism at the center of that transformation. And that is about really speaking to the need that exists for displaced people in the world.

NOTES

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The Global Revolt and Its Discontents

William I. Robinson and Salvador Rangel

The Bolshevik leader, Vladimir Lenin, famously described the symptoms of what he called a revolutionary situation: 1) when there is a crisis in the prevailing system and it is impossible for the ruling classes to rule in the old way; 2) when the want and suffering of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual, and; 3) when as a consequence the masses increase their historical action. These symptoms are clearly upon us as the crisis of global capitalism deepens. This crisis is an economic, or structural, one of overaccumulation and chronic stagnation. But it is also a political crisis, one of state legitimacy and capitalist hegemony.[1] The Ukraine conflict is not a cause but a consequence of this crisis. Here we want to take a more historical and global perspective, moving beyond the "noise" of current headlines.

Capitalist states face spiraling crises of legitimacy after decades of hardship and social decay wrought by neoliberalism, aggravated by these states' inability to manage the coronavirus health emergency, and the economic collapse it triggered. Global inequalities had already reached unprecedented levels prior to the outbreak. The extent of polarization of wealth and power, of deprivation and misery among the world's poor majority, already defied belief prior to the outbreak. In 2018, just seventeen global financial conglomerates collectively managed $41.1 trillion dollars, more than half the GDP of the entire planet. That same year, the richest 1 percent of humanity led by 36 million millionaires and 2,400 billionaires controlled more than half of the world's wealth while the bottom 80 percent – nearly six billion people – had to make do with just 5 percent of this wealth.[2]

The global revolt has been underway for some years now. In the months prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic a "global spring" of mass struggles broke out all around the world.[3] However, the 2019 spring was but a peak moment in popular insurgencies that spread in the wake of the 2008 Great Depression; a veritable tsunami of mass rebellion not seen since at least 1968. After the initial worldwide wave in the years immediately following, the protests ebbed and flowed but did not die down, with a fresh wave breaking out in 2017. In the two years leading up to the pandemic more than 100 major anti-government protests swept the world, in rich and poor countries alike, toppling some thirty governments or leaders and sparking an escalation of state violence against protesters.[4] These protests involved students, workers, and often migrant workers, farmers, indigenous communities, anti-racists, prisoners and activists against mass incarceration, democracy and anti-corruption activists, those struggling for autonomy or independence, anti-austerity campaigners, environmental advocates, and so on.

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From Chile to Lebanon, Iraq to India, France to the United States, Haiti to Nigeria, and South Africa to Colombia, mass struggles appeared in many instances to be acquiring a radical anti-capitalist character before the pandemic lockdown pushed protesters off the streets in early 2020. But the lull was momentary. Within weeks of the lockdown protesters were out in force again despite the quarantine and the dangers of public congregation.[5] Whether mass mobilization from below effects a fundamental change in the system of global capitalism cannot be predicted beforehand. What *is* clear is that mass popular struggles against the depredations of global capitalism are now conjoined with those around the fallout from the pandemic and escalating international political and military tensions. Capitalist crises are times of rapid social change precisely because they generate intense social and class conflict from below and from above.

> Lenin famously described the symptoms of what he called a revolutionary situation. These symptoms are clearly upon us as the crisis of global capitalism deepens.

Will the global revolt develop into a struggle to overthrow the capitalist system once and for all? Masses of people engaged in revolt are, for the most part, struggling not in pursuit of a larger political agenda of transformation, much less one that is guided by a theoretical understanding of global capitalism, but to resolve their most pressing problems of survival. The urgent challenge for emancipatory struggles in our view is how to translate mass revolt into a project that can challenge the power of global capital. Lenin was clear that the jump from a "revolutionary situation" to a revolutionary process requires other conditions not yet present, including a widespread belief that system change is attainable and worth fighting for, having a revolutionary ideology and program, and also organizations capable of leading the struggle. For this to take place, the mass movements and organic intellectuals who identify with them must resolve a number of weaknesses and limitations that threaten to undermine the potential for revolt. In what follows, we discuss four of these quandaries. Far from being mutually exclusive, they are interwoven and should best be seen as forming a larger unity in relation to the global class struggle. In particular, we will take the case of the Black Lives Matter-led mass anti-racist protests of 2020 in the United States as illustrative of these quandaries.

Disjuncture and Fragmentation

First, there is an evident disjuncture between the proliferation of mass movements and popular uprisings around the world and an organized, and socialist-oriented left, that could serve as a rudder to help steer these struggles into a larger transformative project. The institutional and party left has steadily lost power and influence in recent decades, in part due to its own internal weaknesses, and in part due to the centrifugal forces of capitalist globalization itself, insofar as it disaggregates and atomizes the exploited classes and their social and political spaces. The existing fragmentation and sectarianism that all too often pervades the left debilitates popular struggles at a time of planetary crisis. If the left is going to be in a position to intervene effectively in the upheavals that are upon us, it must undertake the task of criticism and must urgently renovate a revolutionary project and a plan for refounding the state. At the same time as the socialist left is so weak, global union membership has steadily declined, notwithstanding the current uptick

in unionization drives in the United States and elsewhere, so that even as working people everywhere rise up the majority of workers remain largely unorganized.

To effectively fight back against global capitalism as the ultimate cause of the problems they seek to address, disjointed movements must find ways to come together into a larger emancipatory project, and develop a strategy to push such a project forward. This requires political organizations capable of articulating such a project in a double sense: articulate as in link together, and as in give voice to it. To take the case of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) led civic uprising in the United States that again took off in spring and summer 2020, millions of mostly young people yearning for radical change risked life and limb to participate. We took part in the protests in the greater Los Angeles area. The energy and commitment of the protesters was overwhelming. Yet the protests showed a very low level of political development, with an organized left that could give it a more coherent anti-capitalist direction virtually nowhere to be seen and the politics of these courageous youth lacking clarity, cohesion, and direction.

The BLM movement became easy-and for middle-class elements among it, willing-prey for cooptation by the powers that be, as we discuss below. In the absence of a larger critique of the capitalist state the movement died down as repression, cooptation, and fatigue took their toll. Without political organizations and a program-without the unity of the spontaneous with organization-movements and mass actions over specific demands cannot be sustained and cannot mount a challenge to the system itself. "Neglecting, or worse still despising, so-called 'spontaneous' movements, i.e., failing to give them a conscious leadership or to raise them to a higher plane by inserting them into politics, may often have extremely serious consequences," noted Italian communist Antonio Gramsci. "It is almost always the case that a spontaneous movement of the subaltern classes is accompanied by a reactionary movement of the right-wing of the dominant class, for concomitant reasons." Indeed, to the extent that the left is unable to provide leadership around a transformative project the far-right is gaining ground rapidly.

The Straight-Jacket of the Nation-State

Second, economic globalization takes place within a nation-state-based system of political authority; transnational state apparatuses are unable to exercise any real political authority over the global system.[6] This gives transnational capital enormous structural power over individual nation-states and the global economy. The impossibility of socialism in one country, already evident in the twentieth century, has been made all the clearer in this age of capitalist globalization. This is not to say that struggles at the nation-state level are futile. Since mass struggles unfold at the level of each nation-state, the only state power the masses can seize is that of the nation-state. As many have noted, however, these struggles must be part of a more expansive transnational counter-hegemonic project, including trade unionism, social movements, and political organizations that put forth a transnational and transformative project. Emancipatory struggles in the age of global capitalism thus must be simultaneously national and transnational. They must identify and prioritize the class antagonisms within and across countries and regions.

The national state is the point of condensation for tensions and contradictions in the social order and the political economy. This situation presents the left and popular forces with another set of challenges. Popular struggles that target the state run the risk of dissolving class-based demands into more abstract demands for democratization of the state. This often involves mere representation in public institutions along with an end to corruption. (To be sure, of course, demands

for democratization and accountability are in the interest of the working class and the oppressed. It is when calls for citizen rights replace class demands that challenges from below set themselves up for cooptation.) Radical mobilizations too often become channeled into the state's institutional processes, coopted into an agenda of liberal reform that does little to challenge the social order. In these circumstances the class identity of movements of the working and popular classes become abstract designations, such as "people" or "citizens," because under capitalism citizens enjoy political equality even as they experience explicit economic inequality. The paradox of the capitalist system under formally democratic arrangements is just that: political equality before the state and socioeconomic dictatorship in the economy. Yet masses of people are able to see the state more easily than they see capital, as the state becomes the point of condensation for social and economic grievances, and at a time when the capitalist state has a radically diminished capacity to meet the demands from below in the face of crisis.

The case of the 2020 anti-racist uprising in United States is illustrative of the dilemma. The movement targeted the police as the source of violence afflicting Black and poor people and consequently called for its defunding. This is understandable; after all, it was the police who carried out the extra-judicial execution of George Floyd. It is the police who come into direct contact with those dispossessed and marginalized and who are responsible for controlling them. However, the police are only the visible frontline of the capitalist state. They are a coercive instrument to control surplus labor, the poor, and the working class, disproportionately drawn in the United States from racially oppressed groups. Capitalists and elites whose wealth and power are protected by the police do not go into the streets to confront poor Black people and workers; they command quietly from corporate boardrooms, foundations, and government offices. We cannot do away with police violence and mass incarceration without doing away with surplus labor; that is, doing away with the system that relegates tens of millions in the United States (and several billion worldwide) to the margins as surplus humanity.

The Dead End of Identitarianism

The two quandaries discussed so far form a unity. Mass movements generated by the very contradictions and deprivations of the capitalist system target the state as it becomes the point of condensation for social and economic grievances. The absence of radical political organizations and an organized left makes it difficult for these movements to move from a struggle for democratization and redistributional demands to a larger attack on capitalist relations of production. But there is more at work here. Why is the potentially catalytic language of class so absent? The two previous quandaries cannot be separated from the third: the influence, and perhaps even the hegemony, over mass struggles of identitarian paradigms that, rather than enhance, have eclipsed the language of class and critiques of capital.[7] These paradigms did not develop in a vacuum. They emerged in the late twentieth century out of the collapse of the old Soviet bloc, the defeat of the left, the demise of Third World nationalist and revolutionary projects, and accompanying repression of radical working-class and popular struggles. The triumph of neoliberalism found its philosophical alter-ego in a post-modernism that undermined ideas of broad solidarity, working class struggle, and socialist projects.[8]

A key part of the story here in our view is the betrayal of the intellectuals, for no struggle of the oppressed can be without its organic intellectuals and the battles to come are as much theoretical and ideological as they are political. Many intellectuals who previously identified with anti-capitalist movements and emancipatory projects withdrew into an

identitarian politics of reform and inclusion, a set of political and cultural practices, radical only in language, that are at best liberal and that end up shoring up the hegemony of capital. It was the mass struggles of the 1960s and 1970s themselves that helped representatives from the oppressed groups to join the ranks of the professional strata and elite. In academia, it opened up space for a new intellectual petty-bourgeoisie whose class aspirations became expressed in post-modern narratives and identitarian politics, while in the larger society it found resonance among aspiring middle-class and professional/managerial elements that sprung from the mass movements.

As these narratives became hegemonic in the academy and bled into broader society, they shaped the common sense understanding of racial, gender, and other forms of oppression. Identitarian politics should not be confused with struggles against particular forms of exploitation and oppression that different groups face. Ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual oppression are not tangential but constitutive of capitalism. There can be no general emancipation without liberation from these forms of oppression. But just as critically, all the particular forms of oppression are grounded in the larger social order of global capitalism that perpetually regenerates them. In these narratives, Marxism and class analysis were increasingly deemed "Eurocentric/Western ideology" and by extension, any universalist emancipatory project was rejected. In its place was a universe of particulars and the celebration of "differences" and fragmentation (into essencialized identities and single-issue social movements) so that there is no underlying principle of human social existence, no collective subject capable of social transformation, indeed no emancipatory project that could unite a majority of humanity. Any understanding of exploitation requires the tools of Marxist political economy, yet this approach was maligned as "class reductionism" so that any underlying structural causes of oppression could not be identified.

The most identitarian politics can aspire to is symbolic vindication, diversity (often meaning diversity in the ruling bloc), and equitable inclusion and representation within global capitalism. It is no wonder that alongside the economic restructuring of capitalist globalization since the 1980s, the emerging Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC)[9] responded at the cultural level to the popular and revolutionary uprisings of the 1960s and the 1970s by embracing "diversity" and "multiculturalism" as a strategy to channel the struggle for social justice and anti-capitalist transformation into non-threatening demands for inclusion if not outright cooptation, and in this way to reconstruct capitalist hegemony. The ruling classes managed to accommodate what contentious politics flowed from the identitarian paradigm, neutering through cooptation the demands for social justice and anti-capitalist transformation. Dominant groups would now welcome representation in the institutions of capital and power while continuing to suppress (violently, if necessary) struggles to challenge capitalist imperatives.

> Capitalist states face spiraling crises of legitimacy after decades of social decay wrought by neoliberalism, aggravated by inability to manage covid, and the economic collapse it triggered.

To return to the matter of the 2020 anti-racism protests in the United States, the Black proletariat that launched the rebellion had to be contained.[10] There was a felicitous meeting of aspiring professional/managerial

and middle-class elements from below with the ruling groups from above around the new "racial justice" agenda. The dominant groups now funded and championed the conception of racism put forth by a new "anti-racist" politics as bias, personal aggression, racial

The Black Lives Matter uprising in 2020 became easy prey for cooptation. In the absence of a larger critique of the capitalist state the movement died down.

disproportionality in the distribution of rewards and penalties, and a lack of inclusion and representation.[11] Opposition to racism as personal injury and "micro-aggression" eclipsed any critique of the macro-aggressions of capitalism and the link between class exploitation and racial, gender, and other forms of oppression.[12] Devoid of any critique of capitalist exploitation that linked race to class, the 2020 anti-racist uprising was swiftly coopted from above and from within. The protesters focused on disproportionate police violence against racially oppressed communities and called for defunding police departments. Yet racist police are an extension of the capitalist state. They exist to defend property from the propertyless and dispossessed who in the United States come disproportionately from racially oppressed communities. In the big picture, the solution is not to reform law enforcement since this means enforcing a legal system that under capitalism is intended to protect the rich from the poor and dispossessed through criminalization.

Beyond the demand for police reform (and in the absence of an organized left that could channel discontent towards a sustained challenge of the capitalist system), young people in the streets came to center their participation on little else than eradicating the *symbols* of racism and oppression. They upturned statues and monuments of historical figures and cultural icons associated with the history of racism. Upturning monuments is an act of symbolic or discursive justice that by itself is not a fundamental threat to the system, so long as these acts can be isolated from demands for more fundamental social and economic transformation, which is why they were quickly embraced by many political and corporate elites. Changing the names of military bases that are often named after racist historical figures as the protesters demanded may have been satisfying in terms of symbolic justice. Yet it did not change the fact that these bases housed military forces that exist to intervene around the world on behalf of capital and empire, and that Black people are overrepresented in the military because they are overrepresented in the ranks of surplus labor and enjoy the least opportunity for satisfying employment in the civilian economy.

The powers that be embraced the language of struggle against "systemic racism" as the phrase became emptied of any real substance. Political and economic elites touted their commitment to "racial justice." CEOs of major global banks and corporations whose policies perpetuate racial inequality "took the knee" and declared their "solidarity" with aggrieved communities, as did Democratic and Republican Party stalwarts, as they attempted to commodify and convert "Black Lives Matter" into a corporate logo.[13] "Racial justice" now became big business. In the wake of the mass uprising state, corporate, and foundation donors and rich individuals committed a mind-boggling $10 billion to BLM-related causes.[14] The campaign from above and from within aimed to marginalize the radical anti-capitalist impulse and to promote Black capitalism and professional development, to channel the uprising away from working-class struggle and into lobbying, electoral demands, professional development, and inclusion.[15] This is a textbook case of Gramsci's concept

of passive revolution: efforts by dominant groups to bring about mild change from above in order to defuse mobilization from below for more far-reaching transformation. Integral to this strategy is the cooptation of leadership from below and the integration of that leadership into the dominant project.[16] Passive revolution comes into play whenever the hegemony of the bourgeoisie begins to disintegrate and a period of organic crisis develops.

The Threat of Fascism and Global Police State

The fourth quandary that mass struggles from below face is the threat presented by far-right strongmen and authoritarian projects that, animated by the ongoing crisis, compete for support among the popular and working classes. There has been a rapid political polarization in global society since the 2008 global crisis between an insurgent far-right and an insurgent left. Yet the far-right has proven more effective in mobilizing disaffected populations and has made significant political and institutional inroads. There is a paradox here in need of explanation. Many of the fascist-leaning leaders, such as Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte or Indian prime minister Narendra Modi, enjoyed high approval ratings at the same time as they pushed forward policies that hurt workers and the poor and unleashed repression against opposition forces.[17] Charismatic fascists such as former U.S. president Donald Trump and Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro garnered genuine mass support. This paradox reflects, in part, the polarization between the left and the far-right.

But there is a larger story at play. The key to authoritarian and neo-fascist appeal is the promise to avert or reverse downward mobility and social decay; to restore some sense of stability and security in the face of escalating capitalist crisis. As popular discontent has spread, far-right and neo-fascist mobilizations play a critical role in the effort by dominant groups to channel mass discontent away from a critique of global capitalism and towards support for the TCC agenda dressed in populist rhetoric. Fascism seeks to rescue capitalism from its organic crisis, that is, to violently restore capital accumulation, establish new forms of state legitimacy and suppress threats from below unencumbered by democratic constraints. As with its twentieth century predecessor, the project hinges on the psychosocial mechanism of displacing mass fear and anxiety towards scapegoated communities and often contrived external enemies. Its discursive and ideological repertoire involves extreme nationalism and the promise of national regeneration, xenophobia, doctrines of race/culture supremacy, alongside violent racist or ethnic mobilizations, martial masculinity, millennialism, militarization of civic and political life, and the normalization, even glorification, of war, social violence, and domination.[18]

The appeal to fascism offers people from the dominant racial, ethnic, religious, or national group an imaginary solution to real preoccupations; even though its a false one. In this age of globalized capitalism there is little possibility to provide real solutions, so that the "wages of fascism" appear to be entirely psychological. The destabilization of those sectors of the working classes that had previously enjoyed some stability, and the precarious condition that a majority of workers now share, is a powerful structural shift that exercises a newfound centripetal pull on working class unity, cutting across racial, ethnic, and national divisions. However, the centrifugal forces militating against that unity are numerous, including racist and national chauvinist manipulation from above, the relative absence of a socialist left that could provide an alternative, and liberal identitarian politics that eschews the language of class and a critique of capitalism.

The United States provides a case study in these contradictory dynamics. The condi-

tions of unemployment, the dismantling of the social safety net, deteriorating living standards, and social decay generate anger and despair that that have helped fuel fascist politics. These politics express in distorted form this despair and contempt, and touch a raw nerve among significant numbers of white workers by acknowledging and validating their economic and social anxieties. While the Democratic Party cast itself during the Trump years as the defender of democracy against fascism, the Democrats have in fact played a major role in bringing about the conditions for fascism. They have done this through three decades of neoliberalism at home and wars abroad, along with an opportunistic embrace of identity and representational politics. It is telling that in the areas abandoned by capitalist investment, especially the agricultural breadbaskets and the deindustrialized rust belt of the Midwest, many counties switched from Obama in the 2012 presidential elections to Trump in 2016. Yet neither does the identitarian left offer anything to white sectors of the working class. To the contrary, these workers are written off as racists that are simply lashing out to defend their "white privilege" or, in the now infamous words of the 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, as "baskets of deplorables."

The identitarian left encourages these working class sectors to identify only with their white identity, rather than with their interest as workers, and thus end up stoking white nationalism, thus making them more susceptible to fascist appeals. The problem here is not a struggle against racism, for that must be front and center of any emancipatory project. Rather, it is the separation of race from class, the substitution of working-class politics for one based on essentialized identities, in which everyone belongs to one or another identity group in which all members are assumed to share the same interests. Yet the only chance that popular resistance forces have to beat back the threat of fascism is to put forward an alternative interpretation of the crisis based on working-class politics that can win over the would-be social bases of fascism.

Conclusion: Seizing the Crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the crisis of capitalist rule more that anyone could have predicted. This generates enormous political tensions that must be managed by ruling groups in the face of societal disintegration and political collapse in many countries. It animates geopolitical conflict as states seek to externalize social and political tensions and accelerates the breakdown of the post-WWII international order, increasing the danger of international military conflagration. The Russian invasion of the Ukraine has paved the way for a more sweeping militarization of what was already a global war economy. Geopolitical tensions and international conflicts are tragic for those caught up in them. But they also legitimate expanding military and security budgets and open up new opportunities for capitalist profit making through war, political strife, and repression. Almost overnight following the Russian invasion, the U.S., EU and other governments around the world allocated billions of dollars in additional military spending and sent streams of military hardware and private military contractors into Ukraine.[19] The Russian invasion has provided the ruling groups, especially those of the core Western states but also from those countries whose governments have not condemned Russia, to ratchet up the global police state, waging permanent low-intensity warfare to disarticulate popular insurgency from below.[20]

The TCC and its state agents are acutely aware the humanity is now entering a state of de facto civil war. "The convergence of more information and more people with fewer state resources will constrain governments' efforts to address rampant poverty, violence, and pollution, and create a breeding ground

for dissatisfaction among increasingly aware, yet still disempowered populations," stated a 2019 U.S. Army report. "A global populace that is increasingly attuned and sensitive to disparities in economic resources and the diffusion of social influence will lead to further challenges to the status quo and lead to system rattling events." These "system rattling events," include "the Arab Spring, the Color Revolutions of Eastern Europe, the Greek monetary crisis, BREXIT, and the mass migrations to Europe from the Middle East and North Africa."[21]

We are clearly before the type of revolutionary situation described by Lenin, in which the prevailing system is in crisis, the suffering of the oppressed has grown more acute, and the masses are stepping up their historic action. As the crisis deepens, the poor and dispossessed will continue to rise up in countless struggles. But in the absence of a clear program that targets the system, or a left that could help channel uprisings against the underlying causes of distress and deprivation, we are likely to see desperation erupt into racial, ethnic, religious, and other forms of aggression, as well as increasing social violence among the oppressed themselves. Fueled by the anomie and nihilism of global capitalist culture and a gangster capitalism from above, people whose very existence is at risk will develop survival strategies that put them in a position to be criminalized by a capitalist state.

On the other hand, it is during moments of crisis that working-class agency can be most effective in bringing about structural change. Crises are key conjunctures when significant structural-and in rare historic moments, systemic-change becomes possible. Short of revolution, the popular classes must struggle now to prevent the ruling groups from turning the crisis into an opportunity for them to resuscitate and deepen the neoliberal order and reconstruct their hegemony once the dust from the pandemic settles. Despite our sobering discussion on the challenges that emancipatory projects face, the crisis of ruling class hegemony opens up enormous prospects for a viable counter-hegemonic project. The struggle from below is to push for something along the lines of a global Green New Deal as an interim program alongside an accumulation of forces for more radical system change.[22]

A Green New Deal, a call first put out in the United States, proposes combining sweeping green policies, including an end to fossil fuels, with a social welfare and pro-worker economy that would include mass employment opportunities in green energy and other technologies. A global Green New Deal may help lift the world out of economic depression as it simultaneously addresses the climate emergency and generates favorable conditions for an accumulation of counter-hegemonic forces. But a global Green New Deal is not enough. As ecological collapse continues, the corporate and political elite have already set about to appropriate the very concept in order to legitimate the oxymoron of "green capitalism" and the dangerous illusion that capitalism can be made ecofriendly and "sustainable."[23] If humanity is to survive, global capitalism must ultimately be overthrown and replaced by ecosocialism.

> To the extent that the left is unable to provide leadership around a transformative project the far-right gains.

Capitalist crises may originate at the deepest level as a structural contradiction, but they are played out in the terrain of politics, culture, and ideology. A counter-hegemony depends in part on how the crisis is understood and interpreted by masses of people. This in turn depends, in significant part, on a *systemic* critique of global capitalism and

on organic intellectuals, in the Gramscian sense: intellectuals who attach themselves to and serve the emancipatory struggles of the popular classes, and who are committed to putting forth a critique of capitalism as part of the larger effort to overcome the quandaries we have discussed.

NOTES

1. There is a significant literature on the crisis of global capitalism from multiple perspectives. For our approach, see, inter-alia, William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); *The Global Police State* (London: Pluto, 2020).

2. Oxfam (London), *Wealth: Having it all and Wanting More*, on line report accessed on 4 March 2018 at the Oxfam website, http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/wealth-having-it-all-and-wanting-more-338125.

3. We would not normally cite *Wikipedia* but one entry has perhaps the most comprehensive list of major protests in the twenty-first century with links to original or other sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_protests_in_the_21st_century

4. "Global Protest Tracker, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, according to January 2020 data, accessed on 19 January 2020 at https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/protest-tracker. The tracker is interactive and regularly updated. Below we will compare this data with the 2020 year-end update.

5. Chris Zappone, "Wave of Strikes Ripples Across U.S. as Crisis Bites," *The Age*, September 30, 2020, accessed on January 8, 2021 at

https://www.theage.com.au/world/north-americ. Aaron Gordon, Lauren Gurley, Edward Ongweso Jr, and Jordan Pearson, "Coronavirus Is a Labor Crisis, and a General Strike May be Next," *Vice*, 2 April 2020, accessed on 3 April 2020 at https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/z3b9ny/coronavirus-general-strike?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=curated_vice_daily_1023202

a/wave-of-1000-strikes-ripples-across-the-us-as-crisis-bites-20200929-p5606t.html.

6. For discussion, see William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter two, "Notes on the Transnational State."

7. There is a substantial literature on this matter. For a summary see, inter-alia, the critique in William I. Robinson, "Marx After Post-Narratives: A Critical Reading of Ronaldo Munck's Critical Reading of Marx," *Global Discourse*, 7(4), 2017.

8. Postmodernism and the identitarian paradigm may have originated in the West and in particular in the United States. However, the scholarly agenda set by universities and think tanks in the former First World is funded and shaped by foundations tied to transnational capital. Research agendas originating in the United States often become hegemonic globally, framing the university curriculum in the former Third World. See inter-alia: Michael Barker, *Under the Mask of Philanthropy* (Leicester, Hextall Press. 2017); William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

9. On the TCC, see William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

10. See, inter-alia, Oscar Fabian Soto and Clint Terrell, "Can the Panthers Still Save Us? Street Actions, Non-Profit Factions and the Non-Violent Movement Against State Violence," *St. Anthony's International Review*, 16(2), June 2021.

11. The is a large and growing literature critical of the identitarian paradigm, the "diversity" agenda, and the "antiracist" politics that flow from them, way to vast to list here. Among them are works by political scientists Adolph Reed, Jr, and Cedric Johnson. For Reed, see inter-alia: "The Splendors and Miseries of the Anti-Racist 'Left'," *Nonsite*, 6 November 2016. For Johnson, see "The Triumph of Black Lives Matter and Neoliberal Redemption," *Nonsite*, June 9, 2020; "The Panthers Can't Save Us Now," *Catalyst*, 1(1), 2017. See also Touré F. Reed, *Toward Freedom: The Case Against Race Reductionism* (London: Verso, 2020). See also: William I. Robinson, "Marx After Post-Narratives: A Critical Reading of Ronaldo Munck's Critical Reading of Marx," *Global Discourse*, 7(4), 2017; Walter Benn Michaels and Adolph Reed, Jr., "The Trouble with Disparity," *Nonsite*, September 10, 2020; Barbara Foley,"Intersectionality: A Marxist Critique," *Black Agenda Report*, November 14, 2018.

12. Azfar Shafi and Ilyas Nagdee, "Recovering Antiracism: Reflections on Collectivity and Solidarity in Antiracist Organizing," *Transnational Institute*, October 2020, pp. 8, accessed on January 17, 2021 at https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/antiracism online.pdf

13. See, for instance, Robert Reich, "Trump Stokes Division with Racism and Rage-and the American Oligarchy Purrs," *The Guardian*, June 14, 2020, accessed on January 16, 2021 at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/14/

donald-trump-racism-american-oligarchy

14. "Black Lives Matter: The George Floyd Effect," *The Economist*, 12 December 2020, pp. 29.

15. See sources above and also Shafi and Nagdee, "Recovering Antiracism." Cedric Johnson does not mince his words (and we concur with him): "Black Lives Matter sentiment is essentially a militant expression of racial liberalism," cited in Johnson, "The Triumph of Black Lives Matter and Neoliberal Redemption," *Nonsite*, June 9, 2020. In what was a fracturing of the BLM movement, at least ten local BLM chapters broke with the umbrella Black Lives Matter Global Network (BLMGN) in 2020 and 2021, denouncing its bureaucratic middle-class leadership. Calling themselves the BLM10, they denounced in a February 2021 statement that the Global Network "is a top-down dogmatic organization that promotes certain chapters that choose to align with their direction and sequester the ones that don't….in doing this, they received substantial donations and funding….[working] to undermine a grassroots movement by capitalizing on unpaid labor, suppressing any internal attempt at democracy, commodifying Black death, and profiting from the same pain and suffering inflicted on Black communities. The BLM name is now being used to sell products, acquire book deals, T.V. deals, and speaking engagements. We are opposed to the movement to substitute Black capitalism for white capitalism." The statement went on to denounce the close relationship between the BLMGN and the Democratic Party. See "'To Ally with the Democratic Party is to Ally Against Ourselves': BLM Inland Empire Breaks with BLM Global Network," published in Left Voice, 4 February 2021, accessed on 6 February 2021 at https://www.leftvoice.org/blm-inland-empire-breaks-with-black-lives-matter-global-network?fbclid=IwAR02mFxXAcGK7TNaVfB4GlJGr0aXD9nykbB9T_K-o0XVHsQMzDmmKQEGJNw

16. Among other places, Gramsci developed the notions of passive revolution and *transformismo*, and discussed fraud and corruption, in his various writings on Italian history. There is no one section in his *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1972) but see in particular pp. 52-120.

17. For the Philippines, see "Philippines' Duterte Scores Record High Rating, Despite Virus Crisis," *Reuters*, 5 October 2020, accessed on 23 January 2021 at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-duterte/philippines-duterte-scores-record-high-rating-despite-virus-crisis-idUSKBN26Q0YK. For India, see "PM Modi's High Approval Rating Among World Leaders Matter of Pride for Indians: JP Nadda," *Business Today*, January 2, 2021, accessed on January 23, 2021 at https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/pm-modi-high-approval-rating-among-world-leaders-matter-of-pride-for-indians-jp-nadda/story/426778.html

18. For discussion on these matters, see inter-alia, William I. Robinson: "Global Capitalist Crisis and Twenty-First Century Fascism: Beyond the Trump Hype," *Science and Society*, 83(2), 2019, 481-509; *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*, Op. Cit.

19. See William I. Robinson, "Global Capitalism Has Become Dependent on War-Making to Sustain Itself," *Truthout*, April 24, 2022, accessed on 6 May 2022 at https://truthout.org/articles/global-capitalism-has-become-dependent-on-war-making-to-sustain-itself/

20. See William I. Robinson, *The Global Police State* (London: Pluto, 2020); in press, *Global Civil War: Capitalism Post-Pandemic* (Oakland: PM Press).

21. United States Army, "The Operational Environment and the Changing Character of Future Warfare," October 7, 2019, accessed on January 23, 2021 at https://adminpubs.tradoc.army.mil/pamphlets/TP525-92.pdf

22. See Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin, *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (London: Verso, 2020).

23. See Max Ajl, A People's Green New Deal (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

Will the Real Fascists Please Stand Up?

Martin Oppenheimer

On an early morning in September 1919, a group of some four-hundred armed Italian irregulars gathered on a hillside outside Fiume (now Rijeka in Croatia). Some wore black shirts and came as members of organized *fasci*[1] bands. Others wore motley military uniforms. Gabrielle D'Annunzio, a sometime poet, novelist, and air force veteran, with a dashing up-turned mustache and one false eye, strode up. He was dressed in a garish uniform of his own design, with a plumage-laden hat. An assistant called the men to order. D'Annunzio made some brief remarks, read a poem, and then exclaimed, "We shall now proceed to create a fascist society."[2] With that, he saluted with his right arm straight forward. He then drew his sword, pointed towards the center of the city, and commanded "Avanti!" D'Annunzio's men marched into the city unopposed. Italian army units and most of the civilian population cheered. The Allied military command occupying the city in advance of the planned turnover to the newly minted Yugoslavia, withdrew. D'Annunzio's little army occupied the *municipio*: the independent Regency of Carnaro was declared.

The D'Annunzio cadre quickly moved to create a government. His comrades included Alceste De Ambris, who had written the Fascist Manifesto for Mussolini's pre-party formation, the *Fasci die Combattimento*, the previous June. The Fascists' program was rolled out in the form of the *Carta del Carnaro* in September 1920, co-authored by De Ambris and D'Annunzio. Their new government Charter created a bicameral legislature, composed of ten "corporations" representing various economic groups (industrial and agricultural workers, technicians, teachers and students, civil servants, lawyers and doctors, and, important to note, some owners). This "New State" would be "the authentic expression of a unified, homogeneous community of producers," with the charismatic D'Annunzio as its authoritarian leader.[3] This was as unadulterated a fascist regime as one is likely to encounter, but it had almost nothing in common with Hitler's Nazi movement, which was barely visible as yet.

A popular view is that fascism implies a dictatorial single-party state, led by a demagogue, who promises to fundamentally transform society. It is believed to oppose the multi-party system and be hostile to critical views, liberalism, the left, and independent trade unions; it supports the use of violence against opponents and flies the flag of extreme nationalism. Like all populists it attacks traditional oligarchs. There have been many movements that incorporate some or all of these elements, but their transformative views are usually limited to glorification of "the people" and promises to make the nation great again and rid the country of immoral elements (including "unproductive" people from street layabouts to finance capitalists). In fascism, there is a lot of rhetoric about

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spiritual, sometimes religious, renewal. The problem is that fascism has become a kind of sponge word, absorbing movements and leaders as diverse as Hitler, Argentina's Perón, Cuba's Batista, Chile's Pinochet, and today's favorite of the international right, Viktor Orbán. In the United States, former Presidents as far apart as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Donald Trump have been called the "F" word on occasion. Scholars have spent lifetimes studying fascism. Historian Roger Griffin underlines the importance to fascism of a "coherent ideology (and) political strategy of the sort needed for structural change" which is, in his view, beyond Trump's capacity. "In a way, to call Trump a fascist is an insult to fascism."[4] Almost needless to say, this is not a unanimous opinion.

Fascism was originally the twisted offspring of Italian socialism, syndicalism,[5] and nationalism all fused together by the Great War. In other Latin countries "corporatism" played a major role, as did "integralism," the idea that Catholicism should be integral to state policy. We might consider corporatism the "right-wing" of fascism, with "national syndicalism" the "left."

The socialists' and syndicalists' political expression was the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI), founded in 1892. It had several wings: reformist or what we would call social-democratic; Marxian, or revolutionary; and syndicalist. These wings would struggle for control of the PSI for decades. The syndicalists and the Marxists saw themselves as revolutionary, seeking the transformation of society rather than reform. The leaders of these factions were serious intellectuals whose debates about theory and strategy are reminiscent of similar ideological struggles going on at that same historical moment among Russian revolutionaries. The PSI social-democratic majority supported "bourgeois" governments in the early 1900s, as well as other parties' reform programs. In 1907 most syndicalists dropped out, seeing the PSI as hopeless.

After the Italian government seized Libya from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, against the half-hearted opposition of the PSI leadership and much of the population, the revolutionary faction seized the Party's reins and installed Benito Mussolini as editor of the Party publication, *Avanti*. "Mussolini seemed the bright young face of the Socialist Party, and some [syndicalists] thought he might be the leader who could revitalize Italian socialism."[6] This was not to be. Visible preparations for a new war were apparent and the now radicalized PSI was strongly opposed. The syndicalists were split but many saw war as an instrument that would remove feudal obstacles to a proletarian revolution. They thought a German victory would compromise the prospects for all of European socialism. Mussolini joined this "revolutionary interventionist" movement. In October 1914, pro-war syndicalists decided to form a revolutionary *fascio* for intervention. A month later, Mussolini came out for intervention in *Avanti* and was promptly fired from his post as editor and expelled from the Socialist Party. Italy joined the war in the following May and Mussolini was soon conscripted and in uniform.

Italy was on the winning side in the Great War, but it didn't feel that way. There was the memory of the Caporetto military disaster in October-November 1917.[7] The demobilization of 3.5 million soldiers led to a dramatic increase in unemployment. The economy was in ruins. There were food riots, land occupations, general strikes, even an army mutiny. At the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 Italy's claim to Fiume was rejected. Nationalist elements were incensed at this betrayal and geared up for trouble. The government coalition was shaky. This was the scene leading up to the D'Annunzio episode. That ended when the Navy ousted D'Annunzio and his legion. After Mussolini took power, he gave D'Annunzio a fancy title and a castle on Lake Garda, and that was that.

The syndicalists who favored intervention would be responsible for the more populist elements of Mussolini's agenda.

Their program: nation, patriotism, and anti-oligarchism. It was Mussolini who "coined the term *fascismo* to describe the mood of the little band of nationalist ex-soldiers and pro-war syndicalist revolutionaries that he was gathering around himself."[8] Mussolini had his own publication, *Il Popolo d'Italia,* which published, on June 6, 1919, *Il Manifesto dei Fasci di Combattimento,* (the Manifesto of the Fascist Combat Units). Soon, allied s*quadristi* (action squads) were attacking leftists, especially unions' headquarters, with brutal force. These fascists were able physically to oust several municipal governments held by Socialist and other parties.

On Nov. 7, 1921 the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) was founded. Then came Mussolini's "March on Rome" on Oct. 28, 1922. Mussolini entered Rome by sleeping car on Oct. 30 and met with King Victor Emmanuel III. Faced with using a dubiously loyal army to disperse the Blackshirts who had managed to infiltrate into Rome, plus a real threat of a "Red" uprising, the King and his conservative allies decided to appoint Mussolini Prime Minister. It was only after his appointment that the Blackshirts were allowed a token "march" into Rome.

The PNF was a mélange of hard-core fascists with syndicalist histories, opportunist business elements, and some professionals who saw fascism as the road to modernization. Mussolini, caught between the provincial *squadristi* and the reality that he had to share power with several conservative parties, moved decisively to the right. Historian Alexander De Grand says "The first measures of the Mussolini government were designed to please industry."[9]

What was Mussolini after? One goal had been achieved. Mussolini's Blackshirts had effectively eliminated (in most unpleasant ways) leftist parties and unions, or simply driven them underground. But perhaps equally important, he shared the agenda of a professional and technical stratum of the Party, to modernize what was a backward country so that Italy could take its place in the firmament of advanced countries. Thus, the well-worn apologias, "he made the trains run on time," and "he drained the Pontine Marshes." His imperialist adventures in Africa were part of that ambition.

After the first goal had been achieved, the national syndicalists' role was reduced to cheer-leading. Yet Italian fascism, syndicalism, and its twin corporatism, would have a large impact on the fascisms of Iberia and Latin America. In the 1919 *Manifesto,* Mussolini advocated a planning structure that is a clear departure from conventional capitalist parliamentary rule: a national council of experts for the different sectors of the economy that included workers' participation and making labor unions (syndicates) equal to industry executives and civil servants. This would be fleshed out in the PNF Program in 1921. Mussolini declared Italy to be a "full-blown corporative state" in 1926. This was a lie, because in 1923 Mussolini had already dropped any serious moves in the direction of PNF's orthodox corporatism, much less syndicalism. D'Annunzio's version of fascism was history.

Just as the world's attention was focused on the growth of Nazism and the rise of Il Duce, a military coup overthrew Spain's parliament. The new regime, installed in 1923, was headed by General Miguel Primo de Rivera, "who was probably the first to replace parliamentarianism with a unicameral system based on corporatism."[10] Because of the strength of the landed aristocracy and a reactionary Church, he was unable to deal with rapidly developing economic troubles. In the face of widespread dissatisfaction, he resigned in 1930. Numerous political parties had appeared and significant elections were held. In the April, 1931 municipal elections, republican parties (from anti-monarchist to Socialist and Communist) scored major victories, and the Bourbon King, Alfonso XIII, chose exile. Parliament declared Spain to be a republic the day he left the country: April 14, 1931.

Spanish national syndicalists were of little significance at this point. Under the leadership of Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, this bunch of petty-bourgeois intellectuals had no base among peasants or industrial workers, but then neither had the forerunners of Italian fascism. Ledesma, as editor of a short-lived paper advocating both nationalism and collectivism, had gathered about him a clique that founded, in October 1931, the *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista*. They became known as *JONistas*. At the same time some of the forces of the traditional monarchist right were organizing armed units. By the end of 1933 a group of younger Army officers had determined that the only way to avoid the chaos of republicanism was to overthrow the government and restore "order." Most of the Spanish bourgeoisie, however, simply wanted "a guarantee against any future agitation by the lower classes…, and an assurance that the political revolution of 1931 would not become an economic revolution in 1933 or 1934."[11]

It was at this juncture that José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the former dictator and a friend of Ledesma, jumped into the fray. He ran for election to the Cortes, initially to defend his father's dubious legacy. He lost, but in socialist Madrid he didn't do badly. He believed in radical reform by authoritarian rule, which separated him from rightist groups. On March 16, 1933, shortly after Hitler became German Chancellor, a paper called *El Fascio,* edited by Ledesma, appeared. One of the essays was contributed by José Antonio. In a letter to a monarchist paper that had critiqued *El Fascio*, he took a clearly national syndicalist line: "If anything truly deserves to be called a workers' state, it is the fascist state. Therefore, in the fascist state… the workers' syndicates are directly elevated to the dignity of organs of the state."[12] The republican government, in a state of anxiety following the Nazi takeover, banned the paper immediately.

New elections were called in October, 1933. José Antonio and his coterie decided to establish their own party, the *Falange Española* (Phalanx, from the Roman military formation). Antonio's launching speech, long and flowing with grandiose rhetoric about national unity, sacrifice, destiny, and eternal values, lacked any specifics, indeed it made the argument that programs were unimportant: the poetry of national feeling was more important, a theme that had historically been part of the fascist appeal especially to young students.[13] There was nothing about syndicates. Although the Falange was viewed as fascist, few members had any idea of what that might mean. By contrast, the *JONistas* had actually set up syndicates among some students and taxi drivers. They also organized combat units for street battles. A year later, in October, 1934, the two fascist groups merged into the *Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista*, (*F.E. de las J.O.N.S.* for short), using as their emblem the yoke and crossed arrows, designed by Ledesma, that would be incorporated into the emblem of the Spanish regime until the death of the Franco dictatorship in 1975. Ledesma soon developed a twenty-seven-point program that made clear a commitment to a totalitarian nationalist syndicalism. In point nine of the program, Ledesma declared that Spain, in the economic realm, would be organized through a system of top-down syndicates, and in point ten he repudiated the capitalist system as dehumanizing and immiserating. Antonio was elected National Chief.

One can readily see how fascism would attract segments of the population fed up with disorder and suffering from economic insecurity.

The 1934 election had brought a right-center coalition to power. Although the coalition seemed confident of continuing in power, the February 1936 elections turned the tables. A new Popular Front, including republican parties, Socialists, Communists, and anarcho-syndicalists, was elected. Despite a relatively "safe," or non-revolutionary coalition government, there were calls by the right-wing press to overthrow it. Conspiracies against the Republic began to come together. In June, General Emilio Mola became the effective leader of the plot, but most of his colleagues were still indecisive, seeking only to push the Republic back further in a traditionalist direction. The Falange wanted nothing to do with such a perspective. But it was growing in numbers and was active in street fighting in nearly every major city.

The Popular Front government reacted by outlawing the Falange, forcing it underground. Its leaders, including Antonio, were jailed. By June the Falange had lost some seventy men. Strikes and shootings continued; the situation becoming more frightening by the hour. On July 12, a leftist government guard who had fired on and shot some Falangists was murdered by military gunmen. The following night a leading figure of the right was assassinated in revenge. "This lit the fuse," as historian Stanley Payne tells us.[14]

The uprising against the Popular Front government began on July 17, 1936, in Morocco. Soon civil war enveloped the entire country. The German government decided that General Franco would be their man, and in August sent the first installment of aircraft to assist the rebellion. The Italians quickly jumped in. The rest is very tragic history.

What of the Falange? On November 13, 1936, Antonio was arraigned before a Republican People's Court. The charge was helping to prepare for the revolt. His brother and sister were also put on trial. He was sentenced to death and shot on November 20, with four other political prisoners. His one-time comrade, Ramiro Ledesma, had been executed on October 29. It was hardly the end of the *FE de las JONS*, however. José Antonio's execution turned him into a martyr. He would remain a rallying point for Franco's regime for many years, even as his ideas were discarded. The Falange militias, meanwhile, maintained some independence from the Army as the civil war continued. Many of its members hoped to influence Franco's policies after the Republic was defeated. But Franco had other ideas. In mid-December, he decreed that all militias were to be unified under Army discipline. In April 1937, Franco declared a hodge-podge Falangist coalition, which called itself the *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista*. A number of the real national syndicalists, the "left" of the Falange, dissented from this "betrayal" and were arrested, but eventually sent to the front or otherwise side-lined. One fled the country and headed for Italy.

Franco's military Junta needed to retain and expand public support for the rebellion and for the new regime after the defeat of the Republic. This was the job of the merged party. In 1940, both employers and workers were integrated into twenty seven "syndicates," organized by economic sector. This structure was controlled by the Falangists. Yet, "Despite the fascist rhetoric accompanying the corporatist system…the party's influence was to diminish" and the syndicates were restructured "with employers and workers being represented in separate sections."[15] Under the new dictatorship they had little to say. So much for corporatism, much less syndicalism.

Neighboring Portugal experienced a somewhat parallel set of developments up to a point. On October 5, 1910, the parliament declared Portugal a Republic and the King, Manuel II, was exiled. In the following decade prime ministers came and went almost every six months. By the mid-1920s, it had become evident that the parliament, representing the various sectors of Portugal's ruling circles, was as incapable of dealing with basic economic problems as any of the other pre-"fascist" gov-

ernments. On May 28, 1925, the government was overthrown by a military coup supported by rightist officers. Three years later, the Junta appointed one Dr. Antonio de Oliviera Salazar to the office of finance minister, where he would balance the country's budget and try to cope with the problems of the Depression. In July 1932 they installed him as Prime Minister. This distinctly non-charismatic dictator proceeded to create a "permanent new system of institutionalized moderate authoritarianism."[16] In his *Estado Novo* there would be, following the Italian model, only one party, the *União Nacional*. There was a legislature with half directly elected from slates selected by the Party and the other half a chamber based on corporative principles but with only consultative powers. Consultative power by corporatist entities became the pattern throughout much of the "fascist" world and, in Portugal as elsewhere, this generated protests by national syndicalists.

Fascism in Portugal, in the form of the *Movimento Nacional-sindicalista* (MNS), with its Blue Shirt militia, had an even shorter life than the Spanish Falange. The MNS, like the Italian PNF, was also a hybrid. There were those bent on restoring the Monarchy, then a group of nationalists whose goal was to reconquer Portugal's "lost" empire, plus serious corporatists with Falangist and Italian Fascist sympathies, who greeted each other with the fascist salute. These factions were anti-oligarchy and anti-capitalist. It was rumored that Salazar called them "national communists." They were all united in their disdain for parliamentary chaos. The MNS was dissolved by Salazar on July 29, 1934, and went underground. Following a failed coup in September 1935, its leaders were exiled. Once again, corporatism was watered down and syndicalism suppressed, as was anything hinting of opposition to the regime. Portugal would not become a republic again until 1974.

Moving to the New World, we encounter Getúlio Vargas, who ruled Brazil as dictator from 1937 to 1945 and again from 1950 to 1954. Vargas was the civilian leader of Brazil's shaky 1930 revolution against a parliamentary regime dominated by large-scale landowners. His goal was to "destroy the political oligarchs and to establish representation by class rather than through the old system of individual representation." In 1934, a constitutional assembly approved a new constitution incorporating some of the basic ideas of corporatism. The Vargas-led government faced not only the usual economic crises but also two movements at opposite ends of the political spectrum: the fascists of the AIB (Brazilian Integralist Action) with its green shirt militia, and a Communist-supported coalition. The AIB was "The closest thing to an indigenous mass fascist party in Latin America" according to Robert Paxton.[17] Following a failed Communist insurrection in November 1935, Vargas declared a "state of siege." After several extensions, Parliament called for it to end. Under the law Vargas could not be re-elected. Inventing a communist conspiracy, he decreed the *Estado Novo* dictatorship on November 10, 1937. All parties were banned but the AIB, which had supported the coup. But soon it saw that the new political structure would not promote its radical syndicalist goals, leading it to attack the Presidential Palace in May 1938. The coup failed and the AIB was forced underground.

Vargas created a National Economic Council in which workers and employers were to be equally represented. Independent unions were replaced by state-controlled industry-wide syndicates. Modeled after Italian and Portuguese fascism, Vargas set up an Information and Propaganda Department that included a censorship apparatus. During May Day celebrations, Vargas celebrated the new official unions and posed as a champion of the working class. In 1940 his populism took the form of decreeing a minimum wage and a year later labor courts. He allowed union elections and tolerated some strikes. As the Allies began to turn the tide of the European war, Vargas repressed what was left

of Brazil's fascists and became the only Latin American leader to declare war on the Axis, even sending troops. He was rewarded with 70 percent of all U.S. aid to Latin America in the war years.

Vargas presided over rapid industrialization supported by foreign investments. By 1940 foreign capital accounted for half of Brazil's stock holdings. Nevertheless, Vargas' continuing populist message, including threats to expropriate foreign entities, disturbed not only investors but also the U.S. government. Ambassador Adolph A. Berle Jr.[18] wanted to end the *Estado Novo* dictatorship and return Brazil to a parliamentary democracy. On October 29, 1945, Vargas was ousted by a military Junta. The Junta set up a parliamentary system and in the subsequent election, General Eurico Dutra, the Junta's leader, was somehow elected President. He served until 1951. The United States was now in the midst of the Cold War and anti-Communist hysteria. Brazil dutifully severed relations with the Soviet Union, outlawed the Communist Party and purged leftists from unions. U.S. investments tripled by 1951.[19]

Vargas was not finished, however. In a surprising comeback, he won the 1950 elections under the banner of the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB). His government established a national bank, a state oil company, Petrobas, and began moves to expropriate large estates and promote an agrarian reform program. This was too much. On August 24, 1954, the military told Vargas to resign or be deposed. Vargas, seventy-two, shot himself instead. The PTB nevertheless won the election in 1955, albeit under the military's supervision. In 1961, João Goulart was elected president under the PTB's banner. He was the biggest threat to business interests so far. In a by now familiar pattern throughout Latin America, CIA advice and money poured in to support forces opposed to Goulart.[20] The Kennedy-Johnson administration's intention was to overthrow not only the Cuban revolution, but all leftist and reform regimes in the hemisphere. The generals indeed organized a coup (supported by the U.S. Ambassador) which took over the government on April 1, 1964. Goulart fled into exile. The new regime, operating with the charade of two front parties, began a reign of terror, including "death squads" to destroy all opposition, especially on the left. Once again syndicalism lost out. It was the end of democracy in Brazil for twenty-one years.

True fascism, by the austere definition used in this essay, involves programs advocating a restructuring of societies along corporatist or syndicalist lines. This means, first of all, the abolition of parliamentary structures in which squabbling political parties contest for the votes of individual citizens. In the interwar period, many European multi-party parliaments were headed by unstable coalition governments that were unable to enact coherent policies dealing with urgent issues, unemployment in particular. Instead of this chaos, under fascism, political and economic participation would be based on individuals' functional positions in the economy. This would take the form of membership in syndicates (or unions) or "corporations." Under the leadership (and supervision) of a single party, theoretically representing the entire national community regardless of class (but not always regardless of race), these units would be coordinated by the state. The state would decree policies reflecting the interests of the national community rather than particular interest groups. Fascist programs would severely limit the property rights of large capital by, among other measures, imposing some version of state supervised codetermination, corporatism in the flesh. One can readily see how fascism would attract segments of the population fed up with disorder and suffering from economic insecurity. The charismatic leader, the disciplined ranks of uniformed men that were the public face of fascism, and the plan for a New Society, all could provide confidence that chaos could be overcome, security restored, and one could have pride in

the national community once more.

In every case these fascisms were co-opted, pushed aside, even purged (physically) by sectors of the existing power structures who feared this extremism almost as much as Communism. Yet over the years these movements have been overlooked or treated as unimportant asides. They warrant a closer look because their programs were seen by supporters as a radical alternative to the left that could and did recruit from the working class and capture votes.

Today's organized left, certainly in the United States, appears stuck in or near the Democratic Party, hustling to elect progressives, but also active in what is termed "street socialism," working locally on the grubby reforms of day-to-day politics. Both strategies are the building blocks of gradual social change in a social-democratic direction. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But what is missing is our own transformative vision, one that might capture the imagination and allegiance of the tired, the indifferent, the "Doomers," and those who are enamored of the false patriotism and narrow identities promoted on the Right. All power to the imagination!

NOTES

1. *Fasci,* the plural of *Fascio*, comes from sheaf, as in a sheaf of wheat, binding an ax; it was used ceremonially in Roman times. It is the Italian fascist emblem. *Fascio* is translated variously as legion, unit, band.

2. The term Fascism was not yet widely used, so it's not clear that he actually used it. It was not in the *Carta*, which used the term Syndicalist. But the *Carta* is, strictly speaking, Corporatist because it includes employers.

3. David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (University of North Carolina, 1979), 180.

4. In "Debate: Donald Trump and Fascism Studies," *Fascism. Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 10:1 (June 2021), 14. But equally eminent historian Robert Paxton has written that his objection to calling Trump a fascist was removed on Jan. 6, 2022.

5. Syndicalism is related to libertarian tendencies within the socialist movement. It opposes parliamentary systems in favor of representation by workers in their roles as producers, sometimes in the form of trade unions (syndicates). It is anti-capitalist.

6. Roberts, 98.

7. This "see-saw campaign," from October 24 to November 19, 1917, involved a counter-attack by Austro-Hungarian troops after an Italian incursion. German troops were then sent to assist. The campaign ended with massive Italian casualties and Germany and Austria-Hungary occupying Italian territory.

8. Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Transaction Publishers, orig. 1933).

9. Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism* (University of Nebraska, 1989), 47.

10. Antonio Costa Pinta, "Corporatism and Dictatorship in Portugal and Spain," in *The Corporatist Wave: The Global Diffusion of Corporatism and Authoritarianism* (Draft). ResearchGate, Nov. 2015, 496-497.

11. Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford University Press, 1961), 22.

12. Payne, 32

13. Payne quotes extensively from the speech (38-41).

14. Payne, 115.

15. Costa Pinta, 501.

16. Payne, 49.

17. Paxton, 192.

18. Prior to his ambassadorship, Berle served as Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, from 1938-1944. He is probably best known for Berle and Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (Transaction Publishers, 1933). Berle was a well-known leader of the post-war camp of liberal anti-communists.

19. James D. Cockcroft, *Latin America, History, Politics and the U.S. Policy* (Nelson Hall, 1989, 2d ed.), 638.

20. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (South End Press, 1979), 50ff; Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism* (South End Press, 1988), 182.

Plastic Prosperity

From Coal to Petrochemicals in "Frackalachia"

Nicole Fabricant

In the mid-2000s, a new industry came to Appalachian Pennsylvania, a region where the coal and steel sectors once reigned supreme. Energy companies had figured out a way to extract gas from beneath the soil, using a drilling technique called fracking to tap the vast reserves of the Marcellus Shale.[1]

But in the decade and a half since then, gas has become a far riskier investment. Even before the spread of Covid-19, global demand for the fuel was decreasing. In 2020, as the pandemic brought many industries to a grinding halt, the industry fell further into disarray. Analysts began speculating that fossil fuel demand had already reached its peak,[2] while others argued that gas from the Marcellus Shale, specifically, may never again prove profitable.[3] Yet industry heads have a scheme to turn things around and solidify gas demand for decades to come.

In June 2016, the energy giant Shell announced plans to build a multibillion-dollar ethane cracker plant—part of a much larger petrochemical hub that will connect Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania—in Pennsylvania's Beaver County. The facility, which is set to open in fall 2022, will focus on turning ethane, a by-product of fracked gas, into plastic pellets.

Shell's plant comes as part of a larger plan to transform the region sometimes known as "Frackalachia" into a plastics and petrochemical hub.[4] The scheme will outfit the area with hundreds of miles of pipelines and freight rails, storage facilities, and refineries, all in order to produce millions of tons of plastic each year.

This is a plan B for the fossil fuel industry. "The expanding petrochemical and plastics manufacturing sectors can sop up excess gas supplies, propping up the faltering fracking industry and creating a mutually profitable and polluting partnership," wrote researchers from an environmental nonprofit organization.[5] The authors estimated that broader petrochemical hub and plastics industries could invest $35.8 billion in central Appalachia's emerging petrochemical and plastics manufacturing facilities and a large underground gas storage facility.

The proposed storage complex may be a get-rich-quick scam, but it is also a pollution and socioeconomic nightmare. This hub would make the Appalachian basin the largest concentration of plastics and chemical manufacturing outside the highly polluted Gulf Coast, commonly referred to as "Cancer Alley."[6]

The demand for this massive petrochemical plant is partly driven by plastic's popularity and, relatedly, potentially high profit margins. A senior campaigner and researcher with Center for International Environmental Law, Dustin White, said,

Plastics are supposed to reduce the

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> weight of cars; therefore, you can meet better emission standards, but that's a myth because cars are actually getting heavier.[7] Another [big sell for plastics] is … plastics keep your food safer. … Like your food is wrapped in plastic, [and] if we don't use plastics you will not be protected as a consumer. Your food is wrapped in plastic to protect it in the shipping supply line ... so that they can take longer to get it out to the stores.[8]

This article lays out the political economy of fracking for natural gas: that is, why the Marcellus Shale region became a region for fracking and some of the socioeconomic, environmental, and public health concerns of fracking. The environmental public health concerns tied to fracking should be a warning sign against the expansion of this petrochemical hub. The article then examines what this expansion means in the midst of a never-ending public health pandemic, climate chaos, and a fragile ecosystem. Unless we also halt the use of fossil fuels for all purposes, the industry will always find new markets. We must immediately eliminate subsidies to oil, gas, and coal, nationalize fossil fuels, and try the executives of fossil fuel industries for crimes against humanity.

Selling an Image of Prosperity: From Permanent to Plastic Jobs

When the fracking boom first came to Appalachia, the industry promised to bring desperately needed jobs. A 2010 study from the fossil fuel lobby group American Petroleum Institute projected that the sector would bring more than 211,000 jobs to Pennsylvania and an additional 43,000 to West Virginia.[9]

This expected prosperity didn't pan out. A 2021 report from the nonprofit Ohio River Valley Institute revealed that while fracked gas led to a 60 percent growth in economic output in Appalachia from 2008 to 2019, some 90 percent of the wealth created from shale gas extraction left local communities.[10] Jobs in the region increased by just 1.6 percent, which is more than eight percentage points below the national average.[11] Today, the fossil fuel industry is once again promising to improve economic prospects for fracked counties in Appalachia. As retired pediatrician and president of Physicians for Social Responsibility in Pennsylvania Ned Ketyer stated, "There is no industry in the world that is as wealthy and powerful as the oil and gas industry."[12]

In a region still reeling from the loss of jobs from manufacturing and steel, this petrochemical hub promises big things when it comes to economic development. The petrochemical hub is being sold by the oil and gas industry as a "silver bullet" to provide jobs and employ more than 5,000 people. When completed, the facility will be fed by pipelines stretching hundreds of miles across Appalachia. It will have its own rail system with 3,300 freight cars and will produce more than a million tons of plastics.

Lois Bower-Bjornson (a southwestern Pennsylvania field organizer with Clean Air Council) stated, "The cracker plant in Pittsburgh will create between four hundred and six hundred jobs. And the number keeps dropping, and everyone's coming up from Louisiana. They're not jobs for locals. No, no. There'll be very few local jobs." [13]

Millions of Americans live next door to drill rigs, and that opens the door to a range of potential environmental health problems. However, the problems are not quite visible to the eye. Earthworks representative and field advocate Leann Leiter talked about how hard it is to "fix a problem that you cannot see. Air pollution is invisible." Earthworks partners with communities to make visible air pollution that is normally invisible.[14] They have set up optical gas imaging in order to see the emissions and track the health consequences.[15]

The Plastic Prosperity of Natural Gas

Amity and Prosperity is an investigative

journalistic book published in 2018 in which author Eliza Griswold details the social, political, environmental, and public health horrors of the natural gas industry through the story of one family in the Marcellus Shale region. Griswold tells the story of Stacey Haney, a nurse and single mom, and how her hopes for big money fade quickly in the face of contaminated water and air, torn-up roads, an immobile son, lawsuits, and stints of homelessness. Once a beautiful farmhouse surrounded by animals on a pristine landscape, Stacey's home now seems like a living hell surrounded by red and white drill rigs dotted along the hillsides and huge semitrucks that run up and down the small country roads. Her children fall mysteriously ill, and her animals all become afflicted. The family goes deep into debt to try to keep their farmhouse, which eventually is robbed as it sits idle, and hooligans strip every metal from the abandoned home to sell on the black market.

In *Amity and Prosperity*, "The scrap metal market worked as much as it did all over the world; when the price of metal spiked, people hauled whatever scrap they had in their yard to sell it. A glance at the junkyard in the town could tell you where the metal market stood."[16] Stacey and her family lost a good part of their lives waging a never-ending battle against the oil and gas industry, which turned into Stacey losing faith in the political system, from local political leaders all the way up to the Obama administration.[17]

This tale is a warning to all of us about the human costs of the nonstop quest to preserve American energy. The tale also warns us of the sociopolitical consequences of fracking for natural gas, where extraction fragments community relationships. These processes create distrust among neighbors and friends, demobilize residents, and turn private property ownership into co-ownership with private corporations. And eventually, in the last stage of fracking, one will witness a toxic soup of contaminated water, air, lands, animals, and livelihoods.

We cannot live off scarred landscapes and soils filled with toxins. Will we eat the oil? Will we simply accept contaminated air, water, and soils? This should be not just a wake-up call to southwest Pennsylvania but also to all of us who utilize and depend upon nonrenewable resources for gas in our homes, who depend upon Appalachian headwaters for the water we drink, and who eat any kind of plants or animals that might come from this region.

As Lois Bower-Bjornson said while I and a group of Towson University students took a Frackland tour of Greene and Washington Counties with her in October 2021, "We are your supplier, but you are our junkie … stop buying our gas!"[18] May this forewarn what is to come: the last leg of the fossil fuel marathon to extract as much profit as possible, at the expense of us all.

Bower-Bjornson encapsulates the personal horrors of the fracking industry and the ways in which it has wreaked havoc upon lands, waterways, and bodies. While this article will turn toward my concerns about building a massive petrochemical hub outside Pittsburgh that will connect to West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky, we should look first at what fracking for natural gas has done to some of these regions in southwest Pennsylvania. Let's trace back.

The Public Health Horrors of Fracking

Fracking is a relatively new invention and has only been used as a means of extracting natural gas for the last fifteen years. It is sold as more efficient and productive for the natural gas industry. The Marcellus Shale location was key because of its proximity to gas supplies, creating shorter and more reliable supply chains. For fifteen years, we have seen the devastation that natural gas has created for southwest Pennsylvania. But for shale gas to meet its potential, millions of

Americans will have to live with drill rigs in or near their own neighborhoods, and that opens the door to a range of potential environmental health problems: pipelines and wellheads can explode, the process produces toxic air emissions, and fracking generates liquid wastes that can contaminate surface and drinking water supplies.[19]

In Washington County, Pennsylvania, at a site we visited in October 2021 southwest of Pittsburgh, fracking well pads sit alongside neighborhoods. One, called a super-frack pad because of its dozens of wellheads, sits in a valley next to the former coal community of Marianna. Four counties in southwestern Pennsylvania have been afflicted by a rash of rare cancers, including twenty-seven cases of Ewing sarcoma over ten years in a population of about 750,000. This rare bone cancer occurs in both children and adults. Ned Ketyer said, "Ewing sarcoma is a nightmare for the families that are given that diagnosis, and certainly for the patients and also for the physicians that diagnose it. It starts very quietly, but by the time the diagnosis is made it has deepened and spread."[20]

Janice Blancock, a resident of Washington County, spoke of her high-school-aged son who fell ill with lower-spine Ewing sarcoma. Blancock described the only thing that would take away his pain was doing massive surgery. They did the surgery and he was released, but there was a long road ahead of them. Then her son underwent chemotherapy and radiation.[21]

> In our church, there was a young fellow for years at mass every weekend. I didn't realize at the time we were praying for a boy with Ewing sarcoma. I met a mom at the children's hospital who had lost her son to Ewing sarcoma and lived a mile up the road. It wasn't until his friend and classmate were diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma—something is very wrong here with this picture. We are all in this close-knit community, and it is such a rare cancer. [We asked ourselves] what the heck is going on? Washington County, Greene, and Fayette County had twenty-eight cases of Ewing sarcoma in the past year. There are toxic chemicals in our water—it's in our soil and it's in the air we breathe.[22]

We met Danny Russel on our Frackland tour—a longtime resident and homeowner who lives close to the Lusk compressor station in Washington County. Lois Bower-Bjornson said Russell is disturbed by around-the-clock noise pollution and described how a drilling pad built just hundreds of feet from his home has polluted waterways where his animals drink the water. "Something needs to be done about this," said Russell. "This is our area, we work hard, we are hard workers and I don't feel that we have to live with this. This is one of many that's going to happen here. We need to delay this and talk about it and get it right."[23]

> This is plan B for the fossil fuel industry. "Plastics can sop up excess gas, prop up fracking and create a profitable and polluting partnership."

His dog's neck was covered in massive tumors he suspects are related to the gas compressor station close to his house. He stated that "we are considered the guinea pigs … we don't know what they are doing here." He warned us all that when that "cracker plant gets going [in 2022] they are going to build sixteen more wells and mega pads (forty-four projected). It is like the great oil boom of the 1930s, and we will be their sacrifice zone.[24]

We heard about noise pollution from compressor stations, homes that shook like an earthquake, bright lights from flaring, and so many stories of a lack of transparency from oil and gas companies. We also heard about the

lack of regulation and blatant neglect from the Department of Environmental Protection, from losing files such as important water testing records to failing to return phone calls. The stories constitute a dystopian hell of government working in lockstep with oil and gas companies, including ways in which the industry wrapped its tentacles around every facet of community life in Greene and Washington Counties, by sponsoring county fairs, camps for the children, and even fishing and recreation trips. This may be the greatest irony of all, since the companies contributed to the pollution of the waterways, and their mere presence makes everyday breathing and living a challenge.

The extraction of oil and gas, particularly the use of hydraulic fracturing for natural gas, releases an array of toxic substances into the air and water, often in significant volumes. Over 170 fracking chemicals that are used to produce the main feedstocks for plastic have known human health impacts, including cancer, neurotoxicity, reproductive and developmental toxicity, impairment of the immune system, and more.

Transforming fossil fuels into plastics will create other carcinogenic and highly toxic substances to be released into the air. Already well-documented effects of exposure to these substances include impairment of the nervous system, reproductive and developmental problems, cancer, leukemia, and genetic impacts like low birth weight. Industry workers and communities neighboring refining facilities are at greatest risk and face both chronic and acute exposures due to uncontrolled releases during emergencies.[25]

Beyond public health concerns tied to soil, air, and waterways, the 2019 *Plastic & Health: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet* report from the Center for International Environmental Law also found that the plastics life cycle—all the way from the extraction of gas to the manufacturing of plastic to the disposal of plastic—is set to become a major driver of climate change. Pittsburgh mayor Bill Peduto challenged President Trump on climate change and said Pittsburgh would adhere to the Paris Climate Agreement even if Trump pulled out, as he eventually did.[26] Peduto spoke out about it in 2019. The expected 2.25 million tons of carbon dioxide a year from the Shell plant will more or less undo all reductions in carbon dioxide that Pittsburgh (which is twenty-five miles away) is planning to achieve by 2030, according to an Inside Climate News interview with Grant Ervin, chief resilience officer of Pittsburgh.[27]

Climate Catastrophe and Fossil Fuels

This story is tragic and alarming. Yet this should be more than a wake-up call to the American public. It should mobilize all of us to action. We must immediately divest from our dependence upon fossil fuels. We must get our governments to immediately stop subsidizing these industries. Bankrupting the fossil fuel industry seems like the only hope for fully embracing renewables. Dustin White argues, "We need to stop giving fossil fuel companies so many subsidies and start putting that money toward research that goes [toward understanding and combating these industries]. We should be putting subsidies into the reusable or renewable type sector."[28]

Climate activist and director of the Climate and Community Project Johanna Bozuwa and Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, assistant professor of philosophy at Georgetown University, argue in a recent *Guardian* article that

> oil and gas companies are a political structure: they possess private, authoritarian dominion over the pace and volume of oil and gas production, and thus of important determinants of global emissions. These emissions and their consequences do not respect any sort of public/private distinction, nor borders, nor the rights to clean air or clean water.[29]

As Bozuwa and Táíwò point out, public ownership might be our only shot.

Journalist Kate Aronoff has argued that we should try fossil fuel executives at an international body similar to The Hague: "It isn't hyperbole to say that fossil-fuel executives are mass murderers. We should put them on trial for crimes against humanity." She continues:

> More immediately, a push to try fossil-fuel executives for crimes against humanity could channel some much-needed populist rage at the climate's 1 percent, and render them persona non grata in respectable society—let alone Congress or the UN, where they today enjoy broad access. Making people like Exxon CEO Darren Woods or Shell CEO Ben van Beurden well known and widely reviled would put names and faces to a problem too often discussed in the abstract. The climate fight has clear villains. It's long past time to name and shame them.[30]

As we try these fossil fuel executives at a Hague-like structure, we must immediately nationalize the fossil fuel industry. Then, and only then, can we simultaneously move to convincing the American public of the dangers of plastics. "Addressing plastic pollution will require adapting and adopting legal frameworks to ensure better transparency regarding the presence of petro-chemical substances in all products and processes, as well as increased independent research to fill existing and future knowledge gaps."[31] Beyond this, we will also need to begin state by state with plastic bans or even plastic taxes so that folks begin scaling back on the use of plastics.

But this is not enough. Plastics are woven into every facet of our globalized economic system and food chains. Dustin White mentions,

> I like to think of it as I used to refer to [oil and gas] as a hydra or something. You know, it has all these heads moving at once and seems like every time you take off one, two more begin to take shape. … The production, use, and disposal of plastic are interwoven around the world in supply chains that cross and recross borders, continents, and oceans.

A piecemeal approach will not address the scale of this problem. We need a wholly new global political and economic system that is not tied to disposable culture but encourages reuse facilities, curbside composting, and reusable items and that supports localized agriculture and other economies of scale and ways to bring food to home.

When asked about solutions for the region of West Virginia and Pennsylvania, White said "There is no silver bullet." He talks about how important it is for the American public to understand plastics from cradle to grave:

> And [in terms of alternatives] … bio plastics. You know, people think that that's a really good alternative move to plant-based plastics, things like that. They still have to use chemicals, right? So it's still toxic, right? It's really a false narrative. You know, recycling is pretty much a myth, right? So it's really a trick because, I mean, anything you think about doing, wind and solar, then you have to think about where the lithium is being mined. … Just as oil and gas obeys no state boundaries, our resistance must be global. So it really does make the resistance much broader. So thinking about different forms of protest and of action.[32]

May this be a wake-up call to all Americans. If now is not the time, then when? Our fossil fuel addiction will mark the end of humanity. We must not just transition as quickly as possible; we must also hold executives accountable and begin to radically rethink our socioeconomic structures at local, state, and federal levels before it is too late. Shouldn't it be way overdue for the public to demand that we bankrupt the fossil fuel industry once and for all and turn toward community-owned and controlled sustainable alternatives?

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Is China Socialist Because It Reduced Poverty?

Michael Karadjis

Amid China's emergence as a major economic power and an increasingly tense U.S.-China rivalry, the debate over whether China is now a full-fledged capitalist state, some kind of socialist state, or something in-between has become a major issue within the global left, with important theoretical and political implications. Opinions, unsurprisingly, vary on this question, given the difficulty of establishing clear criteria on what constitutes a socialist or non-capitalist state.

In this essay, I engage with and critique the argument that China's momentous social and economic achievements can be adequately explained by viewing it is a partially socialist or non-capitalist country. I do so by challenging the key assumptions underlying this argument both on empirical and theoretical grounds, and placing China in historical and comparative perspectives to better understand both its real achievements and many shortfalls.

The Economic Success and Poverty Reduction Argument

Headlines in recent years that report China's achievement in lifting hundreds of millions out of extreme poverty seem to serve as evidence that China has a different, superior economic system. A relatively sophisticated argument along this line was recently advanced by Marxist economist Michael Roberts:

> If China were just another capitalist economy, how do we explain its phenomenal success in economic growth, taking 850m Chinese off the poverty line?; and avoiding any economic slumps that the major capitalist economies have suffered on a regular basis?[1]

While the current Evergrande crisis calls into question the idea that China can avoid capitalist crisis,[2] Roberts is correct that it has largely done so for decades. But the implication that China must be socialist because capitalism simply cannot deliver massive economic growth and poverty reduction is a reversal of materialist method.

To be fair to Roberts, his view is less crude than this. However, the conclusions he thinks we need to draw are highly exaggerated:

> If it has achieved this with a population of 1.4bn and yet it is capitalist, then it suggests that there can be *a new stage in capitalist expansion* based on some state-form of capitalism that is *way more successful than previous capitalisms* and certainly more than its peers in India, Brazil, Russia, Indonesia or South Africa. China would then be *a refutation of Marxist crisis theory and a justification for capitalism.*[3]

There is a kind of "clutching at straws" hopefulness about many leftist pro-China arguments: given few good stories about social-

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ism in today's world, at least we can have one fifth of the world ruled by a kind of socialism, whatever its faults, with more economic and social dynamism than Western-led capitalism.

If China is capitalist, and if it is this capitalism that has produced these levels of economic growth and poverty reduction, then we should acknowledge that fact and use it to inform our analysis of the dynamics of global capitalism. However, this can be done without needing to draw Roberts' wildly exaggerated conclusions. There are better ways to understand China's impressive achievements than arguing they prove that it is socialist, a view which mirrors the pro-capitalist response that China's achievements stem from adopting the "market economy."

It is questionable how unique China's achievements actually are, particularly when one takes a hard look at World Bank-led concepts of economic growth and poverty reduction, combined with the tendency to ignore inequality. This does not mean China's achievements are either unimportant or not highly impressive. They are. However, since many capitalist countries in the Global South have also achieved massive economic growth and poverty reduction, some dissection of these concepts, and of some of the claims about China's uniqueness, aids a more nuanced understanding.

Problematizing Poverty Reduction

"Economic growth" and "poverty reduction" have been the twin ideological slogans of the World Bank for decades. Many leftist critics of IMF-World Bank programs in the Global South criticize the monomaniacal focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, for their disregard of how this wealth is distributed, whether or not it leads to human development, how it is created, and its environmental impacts. Yet when China does it, some 10 percent per year for decades, it becomes a plus.

Despite this lopsided obsession with growth at all costs, growth is not necessarily bad, and poorer countries in particular need growth to at least reach a certain level of industry and technology; socialism cannot be based on sharing underdevelopment. And despite the World Bank obsession with growth, its programs have often led to slow or even negative growth in many parts of the developing world. China's sustained growth for decades remains unique—even if it is not all good—something few capitalist developing countries have achieved, and its uniqueness must be explained.

But it is problematic to argue that being highly successful at what capitalism and its global agencies push for is evidence of non-capitalism. Doesn't this growth include pumping record amounts of coal into the atmosphere, helping destroy the planet and workers' lungs? Doesn't it include the proceeds from the super-exploitation of workers in massive numbers of sweatshops? This is without even touching the vexed question of the internal colony of Xinjiang and its exploitation by global capital in collaboration with the forced assimilation policy of the regime. All of this is part of China's "growth."

Pointing out that poverty reduction is a key World Bank ideological slogan, alongside economic growth, does not make it a bad thing. China is among the group of countries that has been by far the most successful in the Global South. Let us look at the raw data.

Between 1981 and 2008, China lifted 622 million people out of extreme poverty of under $1.25 a day. However, the global *net reduction* in $1.25 a day poverty was only 606 million, meaning that if we omit China from the calculations, there was a net increase in extreme poverty of 56 million. Even this does not tell the full story because a great many of those escaping $1.25 poverty remained in under $2-a-day poverty. So, while over the 1981-2008 period China lifted 577 million people above $2-a-day poverty, the global net reduction was only 68 million—meaning that leaving out the China figures here results

in a net increase in global $2 poverty of 509 million people![4]

We need to be careful, however. China accounts for one-fifth of the world's population, so its figures overwhelm; these "net" increases in poverty when omitting China do not mean that only China experienced poverty reduction. Many countries experienced significant poverty reduction, others little or none, and some went into reverse. The countries that have experienced rapid poverty reduction include[5]:

Country	Around 1990 $1.90/day %	2018 $1.90/day %	Around 1990 $3.20/day %	2018 $3.20/day %
China	66.3	0.3	90	2.9
Vietnam	61.3	1.9	84.7	6.8
Indonesia	54.9	3.6	85.4	21.5
India	49.1	8.7	82.7	41.4
Botswana	33.3	14.5	54.3	36.5
Brazil	21.5	4.4	38.3	9.1
Thailand	19.3	0	35.9	0.5
Mexico	7.9	1.7	21.1	6.5
Iran	6.7	0.5	20.9	3.5
Malaysia	1.6	0	11.7	0.3

It is clear that China's poverty reduction stands out, especially when compared to other large populous countries like India and Indonesia, which, despite massive poverty reduction, still show very high levels of poverty—India contains about one third of the world's extreme poor within its borders.[6]

Vietnam's achievement is even more impressive than China's. While the scale of poverty reduction is similar, Vietnam in 1990 underwent full-scale systemic collapse, following decades of war and blockade and the collapse of its East bloc subsidy-based trading partners, whereas China had already experienced a decade of high economic growth. Given that Vietnam also boasts a China-style "market economy with a socialist orientation," this tends to back up claims about China and socialism.

At the same time, however, the table shows that income poverty reduction, often on a large scale, does take place under capitalism. Some of these figures seem hardly believable, for example the zero figures in Malaysia and Thailand, given what we know about the realities; likewise, Mexico's appear unrealistic given well-documented harsh realities. Nevertheless, these discrepancies point to the fact that measuring *income* poverty cannot tell us everything.

This official "poverty reduction" is based on the World Bank's income poverty lines ($1.90-a-day for extreme poverty, $3.20-a-day for moderate poverty), the emphasis on which obscures the massive inequality that have risen everywhere, including China.

These lines were only recently updated from $1.25 and $2-a-day where they had remained almost unchanged since the World Bank adopted its $1-a-day line in 1985, based on the then national poverty lines in thirty-three of the least developed countries,[7] indicating the absurdity of applying them to the entire South for decades. Earning over $1.90 or $3.20-a-day tells us little about what needs to be spent on housing, health, education, power, and other necessities.

According to Prof. Peter Edwards, an "ethical poverty line," based on the income required to raise a country's average life expectancy to seventy should be set at $7.40-a-day.[8]

Even the World Bank has come to see that its measures are absurdly low and has added a $5.50-a-day category for comparison.

Based on $5.50-a-day, in India, Botswana, and Indonesia, the numbers living under this figure in 2018 were a very high 77 percent, 59 percent, and 53 percent respectively; for China, Mexico, Vietnam, and Brazil, a middling 17 percent, 23 percent, 23 percent, and 20 percent respectively; in Thailand and Malaysia, a low 7 percent and 3 percent.[9]

While this gives us a more realistic picture of poverty, it is unclear what it tells us about China. It certainly shows that China (and Vietnam) have done far better than India and Indonesia; but it is unclear what being on a par with highly unequal capitalist states like Brazil and Mexico tells us, or why capitalist Malaysia and Thailand are far out in front.

As with economic growth, leftists have constantly criticized official "poverty reduction," yet when China excels in these measures, the criticisms are forgotten by pro-China leftists. Certainly, the fact that China has been phenomenally successful by global standards on the World Bank's own measures is an important contrast to most of the capitalist South. Guarded celebration is understandable, but it is hardly evidence of non-capitalism.

To be fair, China's success against poverty is not only about income poverty. According to the World Bank, only 3.9 percent of China's population are living in "multidimensional poverty," a measure covering ten health, education and living standard indicators, an excellent figure.[10]

However, looking around the world again at the social indicators of some of the more successful countries reveals surprises if we assume the entire capitalist Global South has not changed in half a century[11] (see table below).

Of course, many other capitalist countries in the Global South have much lower indicators, so China is in the league of the better off. However, we are still left with the reality that a range of capitalist countries outside the imperialist core boast relatively high social indicators, making this an insufficient reason to claim China could not possibly be a capitalist country.

In fact, even many of the poorer countries not listed here have seen steady progress over time on life expectancy, infant mortality and literacy rates under late imperialism. Virtually every country in the world has seen a sharp fall in infant and child mortality since 1990.[12] For the Least Developed Countries as a whole, child mortality (i.e., the number of children who die before their fifth birthday) has dropped from an average of 174.3 in 1990 to 62.7 today.[13] This is still very high, but

Country	Multi-Dimensional Poverty	Life Expectancy (years)	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live births)	Adult Literacy Rate (%)	Expected Years of Schooling
South Korea	-	83	2.7	98	16.5
Chile	-	80.2	6.2	96.4	16.4
Thailand	0.8	77.2	7.8	93.8	15
China	3.9	76.9	7.4	96.8	14
Argentina	-	76.7	8.8	99	17.7
Iran	-	76.7	12.4	85.5	14.8
Malaysia	-	76.2	6.7	94.9	13.7
Brazil	3.8	75.9	12.8	93.2	15.4
Mexico	6.6	75	11	95.4	14.8
Indonesia	3.6	71.7	21.1	95.7	13.6

dramatic progress is undeniable.

Does this mean "capitalism" is responsible for this? The neo-liberal world order? Hardly. Overwhelmingly, this has resulted from UN-led programs, i.e., global state intervention. Above all, mass childhood vaccination campaigns have dramatically cut infant and child mortality. This is easy for capitalism: it can continue hideously exploiting hundreds of millions in the South, but help fund this extremely cheap and effective campaign and demonstrate progress. In turn, reductions in infant and child mortality raise average life expectancy.

Indeed, 45 percent of child deaths have historically been caused by infectious diseases, so "the success of vaccination campaigns and antibiotic availability has done a great deal to reduce mortality." For example, the number of measles cases "has shrunk by 86 percent since 1990." WHO estimates that measles vaccination "prevented 21.1 million deaths across Africa" from 2000 to 2017.[14]

We also need to take into account simple capitalist "development" involving industrialization and urbanization. In 1960, two-thirds of the world lived in rural areas; following the cross-over point about a decade ago, the world's urban population is now 20 percent higher than the rural. Nearly all the increase has been in developing countries. While living conditions are often cramped and unsanitary and the industries are sweatshops where workers work in Victorian conditions, just living in urban areas means easier access to health clinics, schools, clean water, and so on, compared to the spartan situation in rural areas in the Global South.

Against Chinese Exceptionalism

The fact that capitalist countries have made significant achievements challenges the dogma that capitalism can *only* create absolute poverty and underdevelopment. Of course, it is widely understood that capitalism created the sharpest economic growth in history following the industrial revolution, and that the working classes in the West were later lifted out of the Dickensian stage of poverty. However, Western Marxists concluded that imperialism had decided who would and would not prosper in its world-system about one century ago.

Capitalism creates winners and losers, so the "developing world" of mostly former colonies would remain the super-exploited quarry for hegemonic Western capitalism, denied development under capitalism. There is much truth in this as a general contention; the map of highly developed versus poor and "developing" countries has barely changed over the last century. However, to see it as an iron rule defies materialism and implies that the law of uneven development under capitalism has ceased to apply.

While China's economic growth is significant, countless other countries in the Global South have experienced long periods of high economic growth; the depiction of the South as three continents of chronic underdevelopment is extraordinarily outdated. This imaginary stems from a left-binary view of the world as composed of the imperialist countries of developed capitalism, and the rest of the world, the underdeveloped capitalist countries that the former exploit and keep poor and backward.

This picture only remains valid in the most simplistic and general sense, and ignores the fundamental Marxist law of uneven development of capitalism. Lenin's assertion in 1920 that the world is now divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations[15] is mistakenly understood to mean that these oppressed nations remain forever underdeveloped under imperialist rule, and that the countries at top and bottom never change, whereas in reality he continually stressed the opposite.

For example, in *Imperialism*, Lenin writes that "the export of capital influences and greatly accelerates the development of capitalism in those countries to which it is

exported," indeed "capitalism is growing with the greatest rapidity in the colonies and in overseas countries," and "is growing far more rapidly than before." However, under imperialism this growth is "becoming more and more uneven," to the point that some powerful imperialist countries, such as Britain, go into decline, while entirely new ones, such as Japan, arise. Lenin gave data showing that "the development of railways has been most rapid in the colonies and in the independent (and semi-independent) states of Asia and America."[16] Of course, these railways served the colonial master rather than the colony, but it would be absurd to deny that this constituted "economic growth."

While this uneven growth had brought about relatively little change by the 1960s, when the dependency theorists could claim, with some empirical support, that imperialism was actively "underdeveloping" the neo-colonial world, change in the fortunes of different developing countries has been far more dramatic in the half-century since.

From this perspective, China has been the biggest "winner" in this uneven and combined development of world capitalism. But let's consider some other experiences of rapid economic growth over the last few decades[17]:

We can exclude South Korea (and Taiwan), due to the gigantic level of U.S. support throughout the Cold War, as well as Singapore. These advantages cannot tell us everything, however; for example, the extremely high level of state regulation of the economy, and significant state-owned enterprises, in South Korea and Taiwan, mirrors the heavily state-led form of capitalism in China.

The others on this list have had both periods of extremely rapid growth and periods of slower growth; those chosen have achieved either close to 5 percent (or greater) growth during any one of these periods, or overall.

We can make a number of observations. First, none of these countries come near China in terms of either the sheer level or consistency of growth over so many decades; China's growth has been outstanding. Second, this short list is about it—almost no other country in the South meets the criteria of this list, an indictment of the "winners and losers" character of global capitalism. Third, however, we do need to recognize that significant periods of high economic growth are a feature of this uneven development of capitalism. It is problematic to argue that China's greater level and consistency of doing what capitalism aims to do is evidence of non-capitalism.

Average Annual Growth Percent

Country	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2018	**1960-2018**
China	4.29	7.72	9.27	9.92	6.89	**6.58**
Vietnam	-	-	5.85	6.06	6.22	**6.04**
S. Korea	5.41	7.48	5.21	3.75	3.43	**5.05**
Singapore	7.42	5.24	4.18	3.38	2.65	**4.97**
Botswana	10.9	7.4	2.53	2.51	2.8	**5.27**
Thailand	4.21	5.96	3.29	3.91	2.86	**4.24**
Myanmar	2.24	-0.68	5.79	11.05	6.1	**4.09**
Malaysia	5.23	3.17	4.45	2.61	3.31	**3.85**
India	0.64	3.26	3.58	5.85	5.56	**3.24**
Indonesia	4.78	3.33	2.3	3.8	4.15	**3.2**
Chile	1.19	1.27	4.76	3.11	2.1	**2.5**
Bangladesh	-1.45	1.29	2.46	4.05	5.55	**2.04**
Brazil	5.89	-0.43	0.95	2.49	-0.29	**2.04**

Now, let us turn to the impacts of growth, principally "poverty reduction," held up as a major achievement of the Chinese system.

Deepening Inequality

If China were a socialist country, how do we explain its phenomenal success in producing 698 billionaires,[18] second in the world after the 724 the United States boasts? (In fact, according to China's Hurun Report, China already had 598 billionaires in 2016, surpassing the United States' 535;[19] and the 2021 report claims 1,185 Chinese billionaires, the first country to pass 1,000.[20]) If it has achieved this and yet it is socialist, China would then be a refutation of Marxist theory, because it means socialism creates billionaires among paupers.

Unlike capitalism, socialism is not a current reality, but a vision we strive for, of a system which abolishes capitalists. Marx did not call on workers in the *Communist Manifesto* to struggle to remain exploited, make their exploiters richer, and create record numbers of capitalists.[21] By contrast, there is no iron law that says capitalism cannot create economic growth and reduce income poverty. It did this, after all, in the imperialist West.

In other words, the Chinese social formation, whatever one calls it, has both produced 698 (or 1,185) billionaire capitalists and lifted 850 million people above the income poverty line.

If China is neither capitalist nor socialist, then what is it? One argument is that China is *not yet* socialist, and the "elements of capitalism" in China are the compromises it must make on the road to future socialism; to co-exist in a capitalist world. As a country rising out of underdevelopment, the productive forces are not yet at a level to create socialism; there remains a role for market mechanisms and elements of capitalism within a semi-socialist system to boost the productive forces. Hence, progress towards socialism requires a significant period analogous to the Soviet "New Economic Policy" (NEP) introduced by Lenin in 1921.

If that is the argument, I agree completely. Yes, China needed some kind of NEP when it embarked on market reform in 1978 (especially following decades of Maoist bureaucratic adventurist economic policy); and Vietnam needed it even more when it did likewise in 1986, in conditions more similar to the USSR in 1921 than to China. Nevertheless, there is an inevitable question of where the line is drawn.

There will be disagreements about where we draw this line and declare "at this point the NEP has gone over to outright capitalism." However, we must be able to assess direction in the meantime: has China been taking anti-capitalist steps within this framework, empowering workers, reducing inequality and so on? What makes it a "socialist-oriented" mixed-market economy? Or has the capitalist class grown stronger? Is producing the second largest number of billionaires in the world a feature of a socialist-oriented NEP, or a product of the relentless march of capitalism, of the NEP going in the wrong direction?

Presumably, a socialist-oriented NEP would aim to see reduced levels of inequality compared to "normal" capitalism. China's Gini inequality score at 38.5 is relatively high, better than the United States (41.1) and much better than Brazil, South Africa, Philippines, Columbia, and Mexico; but higher than famously unequal countries like Russia, Indonesia, Thailand, and India (all 35-37) and much higher than anywhere in Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia, and the like.[22]

Gini cannot tell us everything though. In fact, one key reason that it is often higher in rapidly developing countries is that it measures the sharp differences between urban areas, where the development is taking place, and rural areas, which gets left behind. While the starkness of this urban-rural gap, caused by capitalism's lopsided allocation of resources to where profit can be made, is a bad thing, the gap itself is not all bad; to some extent a gap demonstrates that industrialization and

urbanization are actually taking place.

There has been some decline in inequality in China over the last decade. The Gini score of 38.5 is down from 43.7 in 2010 (after having risen from 32.2 in 1990). Before we go celebrating a victory for socialism, however, we should note that Mexico's score fell to 45.4 in 2018 from 50.1 in 2005 (and 53.6 in 1996), and that of Thailand as of 2019 is down to 34.9 from 42.5 in 2004 (and 47.9 in 1992). India's, by contrast, has risen from 31.7 to 35.7 since the 1990s, but is still below China's.[23] It is therefore difficult to place too much significance on relatively small declines in Gini.

According to *The Economist*, this alleged decline in inequality is not apparent to many Chinese. The reason, quoting scholars Martin Ravallion and Shaohua Chen, is that "the decline in Chinese inequality since 2008 does not reflect softer divisions within cities" but "results instead from a narrower gap between urban and rural China."[24]

Thus, while the decline in Chinese inequality in the last decade may have some positive aspects, on the whole it reflects a shift from the inevitable inequality of the "modernization process" to the straight-out inequality of capitalism, between worker and capitalist "within cities."

According to the China-based Hurun Report, "the net worth of the 153 members of China's Parliament and its advisory body that it deems 'super rich' amounts to $650 billion," which is "up by nearly a third from a year ago."[25] Indeed, the list of people with wealth of $310 million and over grew by 520 (22 percent) to 2,918, triple a decade ago, and 100 times more than 20 years ago, while their wealth rose 24 percent to $5.3 trillion, six times that of a decade ago.[26] In 2018, "China added 210 billionaires—about four a week—40 percent more than the United States."[27] This tells us more about real capitalist inequality than a slight decline in the Gini index.

Therefore, the Chinese social formation has produced a level of inequality similar to many highly unequal capitalist countries, the largest or second largest number of billionaires, and an explosive growth of the capitalist class. This looks a lot like capitalism. So let's now examine the claims and realities of economic growth and poverty reduction.

The Reality of Capitalist Exploitation

Playing up poverty reduction while ignoring increased inequality, whether in China by hopeful leftists or by World Bank influenced development agencies elsewhere, essentially equates to being apologists for capitalism.

Quite simply, it is not that difficult for monetary incomes to show improvement under capitalism; and it is incredibly difficult to really establish what people can buy with these rising wages. It tells little about the atrocious conditions hundreds of millions of the "non-poor" live and work in. Sweatshop wages may be just over the income poverty line, and their children may survive childhood due to mass vaccination. The living conditions of these "non-poor," however, are like night-and-day when compared to the gigantic middle-class in China,[28] not to mention the multi-million strong capitalist class, whose wealth is rising at a much faster rate than poverty incomes as demonstrated by rising inequality indicators. They live in entirely different worlds: decent social indicators do not indicate socialism.

Ignoring China's gigantic "floating population" of semi-rural, semi-urban migrant workers, estimated to number some 285 million people[29] or one-fifth of China's 1.4 billion population, demonstrates this graphically. It is on the backs of these poor rural workers who have little or no security and migrate to the cities to work as laborers in the informal sector or as factory workers in sweatshops, that China's "miracle" has been built.

Their lives remain fundamentally insecure; the household registration (*hukou*) system assigns them to their hometown for

whatever social and welfare rights they are entitled to, meaning that many work for years or decades without even the minimum of social protection and access to health care and education that other workers get.[30] According to China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, in 2017 "only 22 percent of migrant workers had a basic pension or medical insurance, 27 percent had work-related injury insurance, and just 17 percent had unemployment insurance," while only 14.3 percent had joined trade unions. On average, migrant workers in cities work eleven hours-a-day.[31] Their permanent insecurity was highlighted in 2017, when the government began uprooting tens of thousands of migrant workers from their homes on the outskirts of Beijing, destroying their "illegal" shanties with little notice.[32]

While the *hukou* system may have played an organizing role when China was still largely agricultural and the health and education infrastructure was being developed in the 1950s and 1960s, maintaining it decades into the market economy and following massive urbanisation simply makes the migrant workforce highly exploitable by Chinese capital, with little bargaining power, resulting in a kind of social apartheid.

There are some 100 million children of the migrant labor workforce, one third of whom live with their parents and hence suffer the lack of social security enshrined in the *hukou* system, with the other two-thirds remaining in the villages, suffering from greatly reduced quality of and access to educational and health facilities that characterize rural China, but without one or both parents.[33] Some 27 percent of rural children suffer from anemia and other health problems.[34] While China has expanded various kinds of medical insurance schemes in recent years, they are incomplete, patchy, often include some kind of payment, and do not cover the full cost. Only 22 percent of migrant workers had employee medical insurance in 2017, and cost of treatment can be prohibitive.[35] Meanwhile, the National Bureau of Statistics of China reported in 2016 that only 48.6 percent of toilets in rural areas were sanitary.[36]

Most rural children who graduate middle-school do not proceed to high school, while 90 percent of urban children do, and the school drop-out rate is 24 percent, compared to only 2 percent in urban China[37] (only in 2005 did China again make primary and junior high tuition free as it had been before "market reform," but still not high school[38]). A 2007 survey showed that middle-school drop-outs were the major source of child labor.[39] While the strong health and education network had been an inheritance of the 1949-1980 "socialist" period, between 2001 and 2009 300,000 village primary and middle schools were closed down, and "students were forced to either go to boarding schools or endure long, arduous journeys every day to attend school in the nearest town."[40] As of 2010, some 10 million primary school students, and half the rural secondary school students, were attending boarding schools far from home.[41]

> While China's economic growth is significant, countless other countries in the Global South have experienced long periods of high economic growth

Yet by migrating all over China for insecure, exploiting work and leaving behind children, migrant workers often earn enough to rise above the World Bank poverty lines. While not irrelevant in a developing country, these facts need to be taken into account when all focus is on reduction of "poverty" at the expense of inequality.

Despite all this, China's gains remain impressive for a developing country rising out of poverty by global standards; we cannot

judge by Global North standards, as the inheritance of colonialism remains a dominant factor in world development. And this means that China, alongside a number of other developing countries, has either been doing something different, or has been on the lucky side of uneven global capitalist development, or both. And it is a useful point to make when apologists for capitalism point only at China's positives while managing to ignore the horrific health, educational, and social situation in most of the capitalist Global South, under governments carrying out neo-liberal advice from Western governments and financial institutions.

However, a system that relies on this highly exploited, informal, and insecure migrant workforce of one fifth of the population, and that leaves rural areas behind, with high costs for health care, while billionaires sprout like mushrooms, is called capitalism, not socialism.

This is not only about China; rather, this is a general point about the economic growth, "poverty reduction," and even rising social indicators in many parts of the South.

For example, Thailand's impressive poverty, health, and education indicators do not show us the significant role played by sex work over decades in that country's "development" strategy; sex work produces income. While estimates vary greatly, in 1999, "a study by a Thai university estimated the sex sector at around $25 billion, or 12% of the country's gross domestic product."[42] While this has declined, it underlines how significant its role was from the Vietnam War era. While extreme poverty was 0.03 percent in 2017, this is based on an income equivalent to 26 baht/person per day, "which is inconceivable for many Thais to be sufficient for an acceptable life."[43] Using $5.50-a-day (75.7 baht), the poverty rate rises to 8 percent. Likewise, Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, reported that even highly successful Malaysia's zero poverty level was the result of massive undercounting and did not represent that country's reality.[44]

The Fallacy of State Ownership

We need to ask, What are the socialist elements of the mixed-market economy in today's China? It is clear enough what the capitalist elements are: the multimillion strong, rapidly growing, Chinese national capitalist class, a great many of whom are members of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC).[45] This fact, and the nexus between economic and political power, militates against the idea that the "Communist" name of the ruling party ensures some socialist element in the country's direction.

For Roberts, he does not need to claim capitalism can be enormously successful, thereby refuting Marxism because, "fortunately, we can put China's success down to its dominant state sector for investment and planning, not to capitalist production for profit and the market."

This is a valid argument; the state-owned economic sector is enormous and prominent—though whether or not it is "dominant" is debateable—and is an important instrument through which the state regulates the economy.

What, however, makes a state-owned economic sector socialist? After all, since Roberts rejects the idea that "some state-form of capitalism" can make these achievements, he is distinguishing between prominent state enterprises under capitalism, and state enterprises leading a mixed economy marching towards socialism.

Some forms of socialism require control of the state, the economy, and its surpluses by the working-class and greater community. The workers and community do not democratically control the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in China. They are run by the CPC regime, which regularly carries out police repression against striking workers and other forms of popular protest,[46] complicating

claims of "socialism."

Others call this a form of "state-capitalism" (which may well be superior to private capitalism, to the extent that such a thing exists). While the state can use SOEs for state and social goals—as do capitalist governments elsewhere to a lesser extent—these SOEs also strive to make profit in the market. What kind of anti-social activities do they engage in to make this profit? What kinds of market-driven salaries do its CEOs boast? To what extent do these trends effectively "privatize" the SOEs from within, both at a legal and an illegal level?

China is not the only country that has had a dominant state sector for a prolonged period. Despite neoliberal myths, the state has always played a prominent role in the development of capitalism. And in many post-colonial states in the Global South, from the 1950s onwards, there have been varying degrees of state regulation and intervention, and also state ownership of large parts of the economy, in capitalist countries.

Whether such prominent "state sectors" in market economies are a feature of non-capitalism or "socialism" are issues that can be debated. However, leftists extolling China's state sector as evidence of socialism tend not to see the same in the dominant state sectors in Ataturk's Turkey, Nasser's Egypt, Ne Win's Burma, the PRI regime in Mexico, Brazil from the 1960s (including under the military dictatorship), the mullah regime in Iran, or countless other examples. In most cases, the primarily "modernizing" role of these state sectors gave way over time to a role as breeding ground for the new capitalist class, a reasonable description of what has been happening in China.[47]

Taiwan offers a particular challenge, given its image as the capitalist alternative to "socialist" China: SOEs dominated its economy for decades, as late as 1986 controlling some 60 percent of economic assets.[48] That is, state enterprises dominated during virtually its entire transition from poverty to Global North status.

This question of the state sector and "socialistic" elements connects to a further question: is it correct to see the entire post-1978 period as much the same? We need a position on when "NEP-reform" within non-capitalism became capitalism, because this relates to the question of whether most of China's heralded progress occurred before or after capitalism. Arguing that capitalist restoration took place around the mid-1990s, it will be shown that most of China's achievements took place before full-scale capitalism, which therefore eliminates labeling China today "socialist," even for those who believe that these achievements are impossible under capitalism.

In fact, many of China's achievements go back to before market reform began in 1978, to the "bureaucratic state-socialist" decades,[49] which are often written off as a period of stagnation. While the negatives of this period—particularly the catastrophic adventurist campaigns of the Mao regime—are also huge, the achievements can be attributed to the depth of the Chinese Revolution that culminated in 1949; the fact that capitalist China today was built on the inheritance of this immense social revolutionary process better explains its ongoing social achievements than imagining Chinese capitalism remains somehow socialist.

The Forgotten Poverty Reduction and Economic Growth Before Market Reforms

There is a more fundamental problem with the "China lifted 850 million people out of poverty since 1980" discourse. According to economist Martin Ravallion, in 1980, some 90 percent of China's population lived in absolute poverty of under $1.90-a-day.[50] The claim that China lifted 850 million out of poverty since 1980 is based on accepting that 30 years after the Chinese Revolution, 90 percent of the population still lived in

absolute poverty, a higher proportion than in most countries in the Global South today. The Revolution, apparently, achieved little.

How true is this?

Before the onset of Deng's market reforms of 1978-81, while people were, generally speaking, poor, they did not pay for housing, health care, education, and social security, and prices of goods, including agricultural inputs for the peasantry, were highly subsidized. Cash incomes were less of a useful indicator of their quality of life. Can we compare its "poverty" to capitalist countries of the South based purely on income?

> Despite neoliberal myths, the state has always played a prominent role in the development of capitalism.

In one sense, the market reforms—including the introduction of small fees for health and education—began by making Chinese workers and peasants poorer, and those low incomes now began to mean something. However, because the agricultural reforms did boost the productivity of the small peasants who now had more control over the product of their labor, they made up much of the difference. Moreover, significant subsidies remained throughout the system, health and education costs remained low, much of the protective infrastructure of the socialist period remained and allowed these early market reforms to prosper within that protective shell.

Therefore, even after this limited "reform" began it still seems problematic to compare Chinese workers or peasants on low monetary incomes to millions on similar incomes around the capitalist world. Yet, by accepting the claim that China has lifted more people out of poverty than the rest of the world combined since 1980, we are accepting the unlikely idea that 30 years of the Chinese Revolution and bureaucratic "state-socialism" bequeathed a country with the greatest number of poor in the world.

In fact, China's human development indicators in 1980 further militate against the idea that 90 percent of Chinese lived in extreme poverty by Global South standards. Life expectancy stood at 66, adult literacy at 65 percent (79 percent male), primary school enrolment at 93 percent and infant mortality at 44 per thousand live births. These were outstanding figures for the South at the time; consider, for example, that life expectancy in India today is only 69.

This raises the question of when these social advances, so crucial to understanding poverty, began; which in turn points to further questions: when did China's economic takeoff begin? When did most of the post-1980 poverty reduction take place? And related to all this: when did China's NEP turn to capitalism? The answers lead to a more nuanced analysis than either that which says China's achievements are due to capitalism, or alternatively that its achievements mean it must be socialist.

Life expectancy in China today is a healthy 77, high by South standards. But most of the rise took place before "reform": it rose from 43 in 1950 to 68 by 1980,[51] i.e., it grew during the "socialist" period, "one of the most rapid sustained increases in documented global history."[52] It took only 50 years for China to raise its life expectancy from 40 years to 70 years, in comparison to a century in Western countries, almost all of it before 1980.[53] In the 40 years since "reform" began, it has risen only an extra 9 years.

Similarly, the infant mortality rate fell from 195 in 1950 to 55 in 1980;[54] since then it has dropped to 6.8, an impressively low level, but three quarters of this reduction took place before reform. In fact, China's 1980 figure of 55 is rather common throughout the South today (and lower than in many countries).

The literacy rate has surged from 65 percent in 1980 to 97 percent today,[55] certainly impressive; while 65 percent is not as high as other 1980 indicators (having been set back by the Maoists' "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" chaos of the 1960s), nevertheless, as literacy stood at some 20 percent in 1949, the majority of the rise again took place before "reform." Net primary school enrolment today stands at 99 percent, but was already 93 percent in 1980,[56] far higher than almost anywhere in the South, having risen from a mere 20 percent in 1950[57]: 90 percent of the rise took place pre-reform.

In other words, the bulk of China's impressive gains in social indicators took place as a result of the 1949 Revolution during the "socialist" period before the onset on "market reform" (and despite catastrophic Maoist campaigns). The more modest subsequent gains over the last 40 years have been built on that established base.

It is ironic that those arguing that the billionaire-producing regime is "socialist" because of the amount of human progress it presides over can only really make this argument if they ignore the fact that most of the human development gains were made before 1980 under state-socialism.

While most would understand that at least some social progress took place before 1980, it is almost a given that economic take-off only began after "market reforms," previous to which China was "stagnant." However, a closer look reveals a less marked demarcation. The standard view imagines there was nothing between the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GCPR) disaster and growth following market reforms, managing to omit the entire 1970s.

China's average annual GDP per capita growth rate in the 1970s was 4.29 percent,[58] which, while well below growth rates in the 1980s and beyond, was already high by world standards.

According to professors Ben Kerkvliet and Mark Selden,

> The gains may be traced back a decade to the 1970 North China Conference, which initiated a process of "conservative modernization" associated with Zhou Enlai. This led to accelerated rural industrialization and state investment in irrigation, and a comprehensive green revolution package that was implemented under collective auspices.[59]

In sharp contrast to Vietnam when it began its market reforms, facing systemic collapse, China "had a rate of accumulation as a share of total output of around 33-35 percent in 1978-79, compared with Vietnam's 12-13 percent ... the Chinese economy was already generating large investible surpluses before the transition started."[60]

Some China experts, such as Susan Shirk, claim "it was by no means obvious that market reforms were the only solution. Economic performance and living standards could have been improved by upgrading the technical capacity of Chinese planning, raising agricultural prices and improving material incentives."[61]

We then come to the question of when the greatest post-reform gains were made. World Bank data,[62] shows the numbers living under $1.25-a-day between 1981 and 2011 dropped from 850 million to 150 million people, some 700 million people over 30 years. But more than one third of this drop, of some 250 million people, occurred in just the first 5 years, between 1981 and 1986. It took another 25 years for another 450 million to escape extreme poverty.

Indeed, the rise in agricultural incomes and productivity peaked between 1978 and 1984; per capita rural incomes rose two-and-a-half times within those six years, after which incomes and productivity levelled off or rose much more gradually.[63]

The point here is that the reforms of the 1978-84 period were very mild; other than those who already classified Maoist China as "state-capitalist," no-one suggests that China was plunged into capitalism at this stage.

The initial reforms consisted of better state purchasing prices for peasant produce, allowing peasants to sell their above state-quota produce on the market, and the beginnings of de-collectivization, making the household the primary unit. According to Kerkvliet and Selden, "in most areas, decollectivization and a return to family farming were not widely implemented until 1982-83, suggesting that the prior gains in agricultural productivity and rural incomes were the product of a complex package of which household farming was only one component."[64]

This was largely tampering with the state-socialist model. As Joseph Fewsmith explains, when China's state price for compulsory deliveries in this period is combined with the higher price the state paid for above-quota produce (to compete with the market), the overall state price was higher than the market price. Thus the success of early Chinese reforms involved a six-fold rise in state subsidies to peasants from 1978 to 1984, indeed, "while agricultural subsidies had only been 4.5 percent of state revenues in 1978, they were a whopping 20 percent of state revenues in 1984."[65] Hardly the capitalist free market!

So, following this 1978-84 mild NEP stage, we can broadly divide China's "market reform" into two further stages:

- From around 1984-85 foreign companies were invited into joint ventures with state companies, but only in Special Economic Zones; SOEs elsewhere gained more autonomy to partially operate on the market; and private capital was allowed to set up small enterprises. Therefore, the structure of the economy did not change fundamentally; while we should not underestimate the impacts the rising market economy had in practice, it would be a bold statement to declare China "capitalist" in the 1980s.

- The establishment of the stock exchange in 1991 heralds the third stage, followed by the rapid conversion ("equitization") of thousands of small and medium SOEs into share companies, open to private investors while keeping a "controlling" state share (which may be less than 50 percent). In 1997, massive "equitization" or sale of large and strategic SOEs began, and tens of millions of workers were retrenched. Size restrictions were removed on private enterprises and the national capitalist class began growing at a dizzying speed. Only at this stage can we begin talking of the restoration of capitalism in China.

This final stage relates to the above discussion on the nature of the dominant state enterprises; regardless of one's answer before equitization, how does a significant state share within a shareholding company still equal a socialist state enterprise?

To conclude, not only had the bulk of the increases in social indicators taken place before *any* market reform, but even record post-reform poverty reduction made its biggest gains in the first half of the 1980s, under the least radical economic changes, still within a bureaucratic state-socialist framework. Since the mid-1990s, capitalism has led to even higher economic growth, but the rate of poverty reduction and improvement of social indicators tended to slow down.

Therefore, regardless of what we call the system in 1949-78, or from 1978 to the 1990s, since the bulk of China's poverty reduction and social achievements took place before anyone would argue China became capitalist, then why the pressure to label the post-1990s China "socialist" to account for advances largely made before that era?

Capitalism with Revolutionary Inheritance

While I have argued against exaggerated views regarding China's economic growth, poverty reduction, and social indicators, they are nevertheless highly significant and do somewhat stand out. And though I have shown that vast social gains were made before the advent of capitalism in the 1990s, and even before the market reforms in 1978,

major economic and social achievements have continued to be made since the 1990s.

One may argue, therefore, that if not socialist, China's capitalism is not a "normal" capitalism. However, few countries have "normal" capitalism, a system that takes different forms.

Today's capitalist China arose on top of the mighty social revolution of 1949, in which millions upon millions of peasants overthrew the ancient regime and shattered the centuries-old ruling classes. China's (and Vietnam's) impressive achievements are better understood as partially due to the inheritance of such dynamic revolutions, rather than trying to argue that a country with the largest number of capitalists in the world, with very high levels of inequality, and where workers struggles are confronted by state repression, is somehow socialist.

A major aspect of the Chinese Revolution was the thoroughness of land distribution to hundreds of millions of peasants. Much can be said about the tremendous and often irrational violence as brutalized peasants turned the tables after centuries of oppression and decades of catastrophic war; even more can be said of the grossly opportunist manipulation of small-peasant grievance by the Maoist cadres, where absurd classifications led to violent politically-directed "class struggle" *within* the peasantry; real revolutions are raw and messy, especially following decades of war. Regardless, the end result was one of the most radical land distributions in history, something that has only rarely occurred in modernizing capitalist countries, ironically, key exceptions being South Korea and Taiwan.

The thoroughness of land reform has been a key factor in development success, or lack thereof, in the Global South, hence it is unsurprising that these two capitalist countries have been the most successful, and that China made great strides following the Revolution. The subsequent adventurist form of collectivization led both to great gains and massive setbacks, but whatever the balance sheet, the break-up of these collectives after 1978 returned land to the peasants on the basis of these earlier radical land reforms and this was a powerhouse of subsequent growth and poverty reduction.

The gigantic gains before 1980 also reflect the huge expansion of the basic health and education infrastructure (e.g., primary schools, communal health clinics) in villages all over China from the 1950s onwards,[66] and this state socialist-era infrastructure was bequeathed to the "reform" era in China, providing a solid basis for further development.

> If China were a socialist country, how do we explain its phenomenal success in producing 698 billionaires?

Development theorist Amartya Sen discussed this in relation to preparedness for market reform:

> While pre-reform China was deeply skeptical of markets, it was not skeptical of basic education and widely shared health care. When China turned to marketization in 1979, it already had a highly literate people, especially the young, with good schooling facilities across the bulk of the country. … In contrast, India had a half-illiterate adult population when it turned to marketization in 1991, and the situation is not much improved today. The health conditions in China were also much better than in India because of the social commitment of the pre-reform regime to health care as well as education. Oddly enough, that commitment, while totally unrelated to its helpful role in market-oriented economic growth, created social opportunities that could be brought into dynamic use after the country moved toward marketization. The social backwardness of India, with

> its elitist concentration on higher education and massive negligence of school education and its substantial neglect of basic health care, left that country poorly prepared for a widely shared economic expansion.[67]

While our focus here is not on "preparedness for the market economy," Sen's points are relevant, because these socialist-era gains did not just mean that China could "do market economy better" than India, but also that it could do it with far more social cushioning and less "market" impact on social indicators.

On a slightly different note, Jake Warner, writing in *Dissent*, makes the point that

> … the developmental achievements of the Revolution—levels of literacy, education, health, industry, and infrastructure highly unusual for such a poor country—combined with the Mao era's extreme urban—rural inequality, perfectly positioned China to dominate low-wage exports starting in the 1990s. Incomes in the former Soviet bloc, though ravaged by shock therapy, were still too high to be competitive with the enormous numbers of impoverished rural migrants in China, while most other poor countries could not match China on the quality of infrastructure or the capacity of the state to suppress workers' demands.[68]

The point here is less flattering from a socialist point of view. The fact that the developmental achievements made China infrastructurally more attractive to foreign investors chasing "low-wage exports" is not what pro-China Western socialists want to write about; China is a "winner" within the uneven development of global capitalism.

Attributing much of China's success to the Chinese Revolution and the state-socialist period, should not be read as romanticizing this era and its Maoist leadership. Massive bureaucratic-led projects like the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution unleased enormous disaster on China; it was not these deeds that led to development success, it was despite them, highlighting how dynamic the underlying process of social revolution was.

Rather than a strange "socialism," the secret to China's success has been a peculiarly dynamic cocktail of three key elements: the inheritance of the Chinese Revolution and the gains of the state-socialist era; the particular way China was able to leverage its advantages within the uneven development of world capitalism; and the significant role for state-owned enterprises in the state's regulation of its economy, which however effective remains capitalist.

None of these elements are evidence of socialism. Being clear about this point is not only important for understanding the nature of the Chinese system and capitalism, but also for envisioning what kind of future the global left would like to build.

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China: Making the World Safe for Capitalism

Peter Ranis

Since the accession to power of Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), China has demonstrated how to augment its domestic political state centralization while dramatically escalating its clout throughout the global economy. Since November 2021, the putative Chinese "president for life" has presented a seductive persona that has made China an increasingly self-confident nation state that, by way of its economic prowess, can bargain its way through the world's corridors of power.

What makes China a far better model than the United States for capitalist development worldwide is its insistence that capital must conform to the ideological and political demands of the government. This aligns more clearly with the development dictates of the growing number of neo-populist, authoritarian third-world states, many of them, ironically, allies of Washington.

At a November 2021 closed meeting of the CCP, top party officials made it clear that Xi now stands along with Mao and Deng Xiaoping as one of China's historical giants. The Stalinesque cult of personality has arrived, and no doubt Xi will be re-elected for a third time as party chair, with no one in the wings. In 2018, Xi eliminated the two-term limit on being chair of the CCP. Xi has behind him the powerful Communist Party, a true political and economic elite made up of 95 million members, less than 7 percent of China's population. A single woman sits on its centralized 25-member Politburo.

As Marx predicted of European economic domination in the nineteenth century, it is now China that is promoting capitalism abroad as the preferred mode of economic development in the global South and is outcompeting the postindustrial West. As England once immiserated its textile workers—men, women and children—in the industrial mills of London and Manchester,[1] so China exploits its own workers with its 996 regime of labor exploitation (working hours of 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week) at $1.50 an hour (600 million Chinese live on $154 per month). And China super-exploits African workers, with local governmental support, as human commodities in the China-controlled coal, oil, natural gas, iron ore, cobalt, bauxite, nickel, lithium, and uranium mines. Internationally, Chinese state capital has the deep pockets and ability to invest instantaneously to monopolize key minerals in the new race for electric car production, namely cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo.[2]

Domestically the CCP enjoys a nepotistic relationship with corporate capital, with

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state interventions when capital exceeds its financial redoubts and threatens to convulse the national economy. It maintains its fiscal controls, avoiding extremes in supply and demands. In fact, most large companies must share extensive information about their operations with the government. And all but the smallest enterprises must contain Communist Party cadre cells on their boards as watchdogs. The collusion between China's big capital and the state is demonstrated by their interlocking directorates. Companies with large government investment offer their directors advantages for joining the Chinese Politburo. A favored Chinese gigantic firm, the principal real estate builder Evergrande, a huge contributor to China's economy, has recently come close to bankruptcy by overbuilding and overinvesting in uncompleted housing across the country. Part of its monopolistic overreach stemmed from its expansion in areas with which it had no experience, namely electric automobiles, pig farming, bottled water, and professional sports.[3]

Chinese state capitalism departs from traditional capitalism in its awareness that to produce and reproduce its system, it needs to rein in capitalist excesses to continue to make it acceptable as the global economic system. The Chinese government has shown that capitalism cannot be left solely in the hands of the capitalist class, as the state can at any time swoop in to sanction mega-corporations with heavy fines at least and imprisonment at worst. Nor can capitalist interests determine the essential infrastructure, military, and land-ownership decisions, which remain the prerogatives of the state.

Nevertheless, just because capital doesn't control state policies does not at all diminish the fact of the essentially capitalist nature of the economy. In fact, in income distribution China is on a par with the United States, with the bottom 50 percent earning 15 percent of total national income as compared to the United States, in which the bottom 50 percent earn 12 percent.[4] China has more billionaires than any other country in the world, and most higher-ups in the CCP have gone into successful capitalist enterprises, making state-enterprise collusion more pronounced than anywhere else worldwide. Frankly, one could call China a neoliberal capitalist economy with Chinese characteristics.

In this regard, China is also well aware that when the country's economy sneezes, the rest of the world's capitalist economies catch cold. As its interlinkages with world capital deepen, it must make adjustments so that its special approach to legitimizing capitalism presents a model of responsible capitalism. The Chinese state makes clear that its giant firms respond responsibly to its obligations to foreign creditors. The government often steps in to rescue its giant corporations whose default would endanger China's image as a reliable capitalist partner. As we saw in October 2021, the potential of its giant Evergrande real estate firm to default sent shivers throughout the world's bondholders and financial markets.

In fact, global, and particularly U.S., capital is enmeshed with China's state-driven market economy and its growth potential and sees no disadvantages for the U.S. investor class in strengthening its ties to China. Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan, Citigroup, Bridgewater, BlackRock, and other large firms are leading a corporate acknowledgement of the importance of China's capital growth for the U.S. economy, despite China being the United States' leading global competitor—a clear sign of the predominance of financial capital interests wedded to state political priorities. In China, with its different form of capitalism, the government may at any time interfere with foreign capital or the financial status of the local Chinese investor class if its economic social priorities change. Domestically, we have seen China crack down on several powerful tech companies, such as Alibaba (e-commerce), Tencent (internet), and Didi (ride sharing). It is also clear that the Chinese government, if need be, will use its

antitrust regulatory powers in ways that keep its capitalism competitive. In this regard, the Chinese government manages with aplomb to balance the needs of foreign and domestic capital and the CCP so as to serve Chinese societal priorities. For example, in August 2021, China launched a policy of "common prosperity," encouraging high-income individuals and businesses to "give back more to society," though it made clear this was not some form of extreme egalitarianism!

Internationally, China's Belt and Road Initiative has been promoted with focused energy under Xi since 2017. It is without doubt the most powerful international capitalist engine yet conceived by any industrial nation. It far surpasses the West's colonial and neocolonial third-world penetration by multiple factors. It constitutes what can only be described as an imperial extension of a Greater China sphere of influence. It is a network of Chinese investments in infrastructure, deepwater ports, and railway connections within Asia and extending to Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America.

China's state-promoted capitalism wisely thinks in long-run terms, developing credit lines as it forges domestic state and capitalist "comprador" coalitions. The Belt and Road Initiative now covers 68 countries, with 65 percent of the world's population and 40 percent of global gross domestic product.[5] Its intentions are to create credit dependency while giving China monopoly access to scarce mineral and raw material resources as well as a generous supply of cheap human labor. At the same time, it provides China with limitless demands for its industrial and technological exports.

To defend its unique domestic and foreign state-capitalist formation, the CCP has gone to greater lengths than any previous capitalist country to define the limits of permissible opposition. Contemporary China has increasingly diminished the role of civil society and ended politics as an arena of contestation. Its use of labor and the diminishment of worker rights and worker autonomy are a far cry from its socialist rhetoric. There is only a single Chinese state-sponsored trade union confederation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Worker protests may occasionally occur, but they lack the legitimacy of formally recognized strikes.

From its repression of the democratic and civil rights of Hong Kong, to its Uighur "re-education camps" and its defense of the military regime of Myanmar, calling the coup "a major cabinet reshuffle," China demonstrates its total indifference to an ethical conception of human rights. It is estimated that more than one million Uighurs are confined in camps in an attempt to ethnically cleanse a Muslim minority. The Han Chinese have gone so far as to establish a sterilization program that caused the number of Uighur births in the last several years to plummet, while the Han Chinese are urged to have three children after years of a one- or two-child policy.[6] Uighurs are obligated to work in cotton and tomato fields for subminimum wages, and their children are sent to be indoctrinated in boarding schools. Even overseas, Uighurs are being surveilled and targeted. Many have no idea whether their families and friends are interned or even whether they are dead or alive.

Domestically, human rights in China are clearly subordinated to the oligarchic and plutocratic power structure of the CCP. Allegations of sexual predation by Communist leaders are immediately removed from the government-controlled Internet. While in the West sexual harassment and coercion against women are increasingly not tolerated and are investigated, in China harassment runs rampant and often the female accuser is put on the defensive. In fact, the CCP has intervened to rein in public protests over women's rights. A notorious case in point is the disappearance in November 2021 of Peng Shuai, a Chinese professional tennis star, after she accused a former politburo member of sexual harassment.[7] Her reappearance at the Beijing Olympics in February did not

convince the world of her wellbeing. The case also demonstrates, once again, China's effort to control adverse news by surveillance, negation, and threats of economic reprisal against individuals and companies that seek to mention human rights abuses.

In addition, there is significant gender bias rampant in China, including in its universities. For example, there are male-female quotas in various fields of study. In many technical programs, women must score significantly higher than men to be accepted. In 86 academic majors at 18 prestigious universities, gender-based admissions requirements exist.[8]

The case of Hong Kong, a formerly democratic region combined with an autonomous democratic capitalist system, was seen as a gigantic threat by the mainland CCP. In Hong Kong, with the infamous National Security Law of June 2020, China has shown how dangerous it is to a free society. The law targeted terrorism, subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign forces. The language is so broad that it has snuffed out the autonomy of Hong Kong's legislative and judicial powers. Beyond political suppression, in June 2021 one of the city's major daily newspapers, the *Apple Daily*, was forced to close when the government froze its bank accounts and its editors were arrested under the National Security Law.

The degree to which China has snuffed out freedom in every arena of Hong Kong's civil society is devastating and sorrowful. It is a sad illustration of how an autocratic political system confronts and emaciates civil liberties and representative democracy step by step. In July 2021, a protestor was sentenced to nine years in prison for terrorism and inciting secession when he accidentally crashed his motorcycle into police officers.[9] In November 2021, an activist was sentenced to prison for simply shouting a pro-independence slogan. People are now charged simply for their speech and signs, without accompanying physical actions. Dozens of leading activists have been convicted of illegal assembly. Most onerous is that the jailed democracy protestors have now been remanded to Hong Kong's highest court, after months of detention. It is now possible that these prisoners will be charged with "conspiracy to subversion," a crime that carries a maximum punishment of life in prison.[10]

Even abstract and modern art have been victimized. A major Hong Kong art exhibit, M+, opened in November 2021 as one of the most imposing collections in the world, has been subject to governmental veto of controversial photos and paintings. In November 2021, a 93-year-old public broadcaster, Radio Television Hong Kong, was severely muzzled, now reduced to resembling mainland China's monitored Chinese Central Television. News, drama, and public-interest shows have been summarily abrogated, and two major university student unions, two of Hong Kong's last vestiges of independent presentations and discussions of culture and information, have been disbanded.[11]

The ultimate degradation was that school children's classes had to contain lessons on how to love China, and kindergarten children needed to learn the list of offenses against the security law, while secondary schools had to implement "patriotic education" that would be included even in subjects like geography and biology! By the fall of 2021, the political interventions in all spheres of societal life had resulted in a mass exodus of Hong Kong people who were able to leave. The population decline of 89,000 in a city of 7.5 million, or 1.2 percent, was the highest in Hong Kong's recorded history.[12]

Taiwan sees its own autonomy under threat as it observes what has happened in one brief year to Hong Kong. As Xi said in October 2021, "Nobody should underestimate the staunch determination, firm will, and powerful ability of the Chinese people to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity." Taiwan, however, also legitimately known as the "Republic of China," initiated its rights as a sovereign nation more than 70

years ago, following the Chinese civil war, since which time it has not been ruled from Beijing.

China continues to see Taiwan as a breakaway province despite Taiwan's historical development as an authentic, highly evolved, democratic capitalist country with a history of populist-based reforms.

The military harassment of Taiwan goes on almost weekly, as China's armed forces and naval capabilities, in terms of number of cruisers and land-based ballistic and cruise missiles, have already surpassed those of the United States. And China has promised they would have 1,000 nuclear warheads within ten years. China continues to probe Taiwan's sovereign airspace to determine its defenses should China take the dangerous step of invading. China continues to send ships and conduct aircraft drills near Taiwan and islands claimed by Japan.[13] China's increasing assertiveness has impacted European countries as well as the United States, which are concerned not only about China's South China Sea policy but increasingly its Hong Kong repression and its human rights violations against the Uighurs.

The alliance of Japan, Australia, and India with the United States cannot be dismissed as simply encircling China but rather as responding to a fear of its growing and visible economic, political, and military power in Southeast Asia. China's increasingly aggressive foreign policy stance is exemplified by its retaliation against Australia in April 2021. At that time, the Australian foreign minister called for an independent commission to investigate the origins of the Coronavirus epidemic. China immediately slashed its imports of Australian beef, barley, wine, and coal. This type of immediate reprisal within the global economy is a unique form of national capitalist bullying at the very least.[14]

Sectors of the radical left in the United States, while correctly criticizing multiple authoritarian governments around the world, remain silent on China. As sectors of the democratic left criticize China, it is not Sino-phobia but a recognition that the Han Chinese treatment of the Uighur Muslim minority is simply a form of terror capitalism that amounts to internal colonialism. The "war on terror," as applied to the Uighurs, is bogus and should be compared to the historical territorial pacification of U.S. indigenous peoples and Western European colonial exploitation in Africa and Asia. Moreover, there has been, especially since Xi's accession to power, a Greater Han claim of sovereignty over non-Han peoples of Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Taiwan. It literally constitutes a Han empire.

The U.S. radical left's criticism of China-bashing and its claims of "Yellow Peril" sentiments running amok are often smokescreens for the severe ethnic cleansing of the Xinjiang Uighurs and the human-rights violations in Hong Kong. Thousands of Chinese college students and graduate students flock to the United States to pursue studies in open classrooms on Marxism, worker unionization, and class struggle, subjects that are severely restricted in Chinese universities, which focus instead on mandated literature and the Communist doctrinal catechism. Questioning students are often profiled and ousted from their academic careers.[15]

The Chinese surveillance state, applying the contemporary explosion of available technology, has become the preeminent controlled society on the planet and can only be compared to, and far surpasses, the historical iterations of Stalinism and Nazism.

Environmentally, China's state capitalism has not compromised in response to the imminent danger of the globe's warming apocalypse. China, as the world's foremost factory, produces a third of all manufactured goods. This drives its energy needs for producing the steel and cement needed for the construction of apartment towers, subways, bullet trains, and other large infrastructure projects. Xi, before the UN General Assembly in 2021, pledged to stop building coal-burning power

plants overseas as part of its global and massive Belt and Road Initiative. Those already under construction will no doubt be built. However, domestically, China is constructing the world's largest fleet of coal-fired power plants. Each year China burns more coal than the rest of the world combined. In 2020, China built more than three times more new coal power capacity than all other countries in the world combined, one large coal plant per week! China will see another substantial increase in coal production and consumption in 2022. And in terms of carbon emissions, China has not agreed to the goal of arresting the world's warming trend to 1.5 degrees Celsius. China is responsible for 31 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, which are 5.4 percent above its 2019 levels due to its surge in coal production.[16]

The following exchange reveals the degree to which the CCP is willing to ensure and expand its form of state capitalism. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Li met with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in China on July 26, 2021. The meeting was an attempt to achieve a stable relationship between the two countries. Wang Li made clear that China required that Washington understand and accept the following conditions. First, that the United States refrain from challenging the Chinese system of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." Second, the United States must not obstruct or even interrupt China's development process and should remove all unilateral sanctions, high tariffs, long-arm jurisdiction, and technology blockades. Third, the United States must not infringe upon China's state sovereignty or damage China's territorial integrity, especially with regard to Tibet, Hong Kong, and the Uighurs in Xinjiang. Wang Li further said the issues regarding these territories have never been about "human rights" or "democracy" but about its national sovereignty being compromised. Moreover, the United States must acknowledge that Taiwan is part of China and that Beijing has every right to use force to prevent efforts by the Taiwanese to seek full independence from the mainland, without U.S. interference.[17]

In September 2021, before the critical Glasgow Climate Conference, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in his conversation with U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry, made the exact same demands of Washington before China would commit to an agreement on climate change. Kerry had said that it was important to put aside other areas of disagreement and mutual concerns in the face of the dangers of the warming planet. It was clear that these demands were made to resist accepting responsibility for China's gigantic expansion of coal-powered generating plants.[18]

The close collusion between the Chinese state and its capitalist class reminds one of Marx's view that "the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."[19] Somewhat paraphrasing Lenin's Soviet dictum, "China represents the CCP and electrification."[20] Or more recently, China suggests a hyper-modern version of C. Wright Mills' "The Power Elite,"' made up of powerful capital, the state, and the military cohorts.[21] The alliance between Chinese capital and the state has kept the working class obedient and productive as capital extracts surplus value to reinvest in further production in the economy. The U.S. approach to giant industry and banks as "too big to fail" is even more appropriate for the Chinese-governing CCP, but with built-in safeguards that its capitalists don't run amok. The Chinese political economy is in many ways truly capitalism with Chinese characteristics. What seems clear is that it sits between vibrant venture capitalism and an interventionist Communist Party dominance. It is this balanced public policy that makes China such a formidable global state capitalist system.

In that system, the working class is seen in reductionist terms whose essence denies the values of autonomy and freedom. The

Chinese working class seems far removed from having even a minimum influence over the means of production. It is seen as a productivist agent, and worker control as the societal end is invisible. Socialization of production at times available among Western and Southern countries' experiments with worker cooperatives (for instance in Spain, Italy, Quebec-Canada, Britain, the United States, France, Argentina, or Venezuela) and worker involvement in corporate decision-making (for instance in Nordic countries and Germany) are curiously absent in a country claiming to be communist. China's diminishment of countervailing ideologies, movements, and spirited civil dialogue cannot, by all accounts, be considered a humane socialist society.

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The Revolutionary Spirit

Ali Shehzad Zaidi

No one quite personifies the revolutionary spirit of twentieth century Pakistan as the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984). According to N. M. Rashed, Faiz stands at the juncture of romanticism and realism, having redirected the subject of the *ghazal* (a love poem consisting of rhymed couplets) from the solitary romantic lover to suffering humanity (8). Faiz was incarcerated by the government of Pakistan on spurious charges of treason and spent years in solitary confinement, which only lifted his poetry to greater heights, earning him world-wide fame. His verses, cherished by millions, continue to be sung in films and on stage.

Faiz learned Arabic during his religious education in childhood. His father, who died while Faiz was a university student, had served as the ambassador of Afghanistan in London. Persian was spoken in his family, giving Faiz an early start in that language. Faiz completed a master's degree in English and another in Arabic during the 1930s. This rich confluence of languages enabled him to synthesize seemingly disparate worlds, reconciling socialism with Islam, and traditional diction with modern awareness, as Faiz observes in an interview:

> To me the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary fall in their proper places in the larger composite tradition of literature. The great advantage- or miracle- of the *ghazal* form, for example, is that you can use it to render traditional themes in traditional diction and still be in tune with contemporary reality. The traditional struggle between the mystic and the sermonizing priest is also a contemporary humanistic struggle between authority and the ordinary man ("A Conversation with Faiz" 1981, lix).

As a university student in the early thirties, Faiz discovered the great Russian novelists. After completing his studies, he became a college lecturer in Amritsar, where he read the Communist Manifesto and became inspired by the socialist experiment underway in the Soviet Union, as can be seen in "On the Anniversary of the October Revolution":

> The night flapped its wings
> like a stricken bird
> Dawn's first ray flashed
> from one horizon to the other.
> All the doors were opened
> on this day.
> The seven skies
> shone like polished mirrors.
> Dungeons were smashed.
> Citadels razed to dust.
> Every vestige of the corrupt past
> was wiped out.
> Such was the resolve
> that chains of slavery melted like wax.
> Vision was restored to the blind.
> The dead were resurrected.
> Men learnt to breathe again.
> A new age was born
> on this day.

Beginning in the late thirties, Faiz was associated with the Progressive Writers Movement, which deeply shaped intellectual

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thought in the Indian subcontinent. The following decade, he became an ardent trade unionist. From 1947 to 1951, he served on the Punjab Labour Advisory Committee and in 1951 he became the Vice-President of the left-leaning Pakistan Trade Union Federation, then one of the two major trade union federations in Pakistan. In "The Icy Flames of Dawn," Faiz highlights the power of people acting in unison:

I am
the multitude –
the vengeance of tigers.
Freedom is the marrow
in my bones.
My heart
is the hermitage of saints.
The sea rages in my blood.
I am the hammer.
I am the nail.
I am the one they crucify
from generation to generation.
Take courage from me –
take hope.
I am the multitude –
invincible!

The poem abounds in passionate imagery with several contrasting metaphors. The heart of the multitude, as still as a hermitage, resembles the eye of a hurricane, with the sea of blood raging about. Paradoxically, the multitude is both the crucified and the crucifier. These suggestive images, expressed in spare language, make this poem take flight.

Within a decade after independence, Pakistan had become a client state of the United States. Those who cherished the preservation of cultural memory, those who believed in an open and tolerant society, were targeted for persecution and imprisonment. Even under ostensibly civilian governments, the military called the shots. In 1951, Faiz, then editor of the *Pakistan Times*, was accused of treason and forced to spend four years in solitary confinement in what was known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. While he was in jail, in 1954, the Communist Party of Pakistan was banned. Although not a party member, Faiz was nonetheless close to its leadership.

After his sentence was commuted in 1955, Faiz went into exile in London. In 1958, General Ayub Khan seized power in a coup and began to consolidate his control through the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. While in exile, Faiz experimented with different literary forms, including writing the screenplay for a film called *The Day Shall Dawn* (1958), which was promptly banned by the newly installed military regime. Although it was scripted in Urdu, the film featured the struggle of Bengali fishermen in East Pakistan. When the film premiered in London, the military government ordered the High Commission for Pakistan in London not to attend the screening, but the diplomats did so anyway. The neorealist film—rare in Pakistan—won a Golden Award at the first Moscow International Film Festival, in August 1959.

Faiz met the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet at the first Afro-Asian Writers Conference, which took place in Tashkent in 1958. Faiz translated some of Hikmet's poems into Urdu, including "For Vera," among many poems that Hikmet dedicated to his wife, Vera Tulyakova:

A voice said
Come
Stay
Smile
Die.

I Came
Stayed
Smiled
And died.

Like Hikmet, Faiz will be remembered as a poet of both revolution and love.

Faiz won the Lenin Peace Prize in 1962, placing him in the company of such renowned writers as Jorge Amado, Bertolt Brecht, Rafael Alberti, Miguel Angel Asturias, and

Pablo Neruda. In his acceptance speech, Faiz said, "All can visualize that peace is reflected in the wheat field, in poplar trees, in the bride's veil, in the laughing hands of children, in the poet's pen, in the artist's brush" ("I Am Convinced" 1984, 17). In his eloquent plea for peace, Faiz observed that the wars between impoverished nations were being fomented to serve the interests of imperial powers.

Faiz's poetry summons the deepest spiritual longings and traditions of his people. Although in Pakistan he was accused, rather unsurprisingly, of being an atheist on account of his Marxist beliefs, Faiz was nonetheless deeply religious. The Scottish poet and playwright Howard Purdie, who met Faiz during a visit to Pakistan in 1983, recalls that Faiz said to him: "Love and religion are inseparable. Why should we isolate humanity, love and beauty from Islam? In Sufi poetry, all is love-poetry: love at its highest is inter-linked with religion" (4). In "Prayer," Faiz writes,

> Let us lift our hands in supplication
> We who have forgotten the ritual of prayer
> We who have abjured all idols, all gods
> And remember only the poignancy of love.

The four translations published here have not been collected in any volume of Faiz translations. They are among the seventy two Faiz poems that Daud Kamal (1935-1987) translated during the nineteen eighties, many of which were published in three posthumous volumes after Kamal's death. In a letter to Faiz dated February 8, 1983, Kamal wrote, "You have given me a meaning, a direction and, above all, the strength to bear the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'" ("Letter to Faiz" 1983).

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The Imaginative Dialectic in the Novels of Victor Serge

Martha Sonnenberg

I have agitated in seven countries
I have written twenty books
I own nothing. Behind us
A revolution gone astray
And so many massacres
As to inspire a certain dizziness,
Yet I have more confidence
In the future than ever before.[1]

These eight lines capture the life's journey of Victor Serge, his struggles, his writing, the interactions of revolutionary victory and defeat ("a certain dizziness"), and his enduring optimism. Most socialists are aware of Serge from his nonfiction reporting and as the Bolshevik revolutionary and Left Oppositionist who likely coined the term "totalitarianism" in describing the transformation of the 1917 Russian Revolution into its opposite, the Stalinist counter-revolution.[2] But appreciating Serge solely for his nonfiction limits the scope of what he has to offer. Peter Sedgwick, one of Serge's translators, attributed the emphasis on Serge's nonfiction to "impersonal political thinking."[3] This sentiment was held as well by Trotsky, who considered Serge's artistic writing overly psychological and "insufficiently political."[4,5] Serge acknowledged the difference between political writing and artistic writing:

> Political intelligence, based though it is in the revolutionary's case upon deep idealism, demands a scientific and pragmatic armour, and subordinates itself to the pursuit of strictly defined social ends. The artist, on the contrary, is always delving for his raw material in the subconscious, in the pre-conscious, in intuition, in a lyrical inner life which is rather hard to define.[6]

When Serge's novels are read, they are often subject to a kind of reductionism that ascribes value only to their depiction of political issues and events. Thus, the polarization of politics and art is maintained, and the political left, stuck in its "pragmatic armour," is deprived of the richness and insights that Serge's art provides, a way of understanding how human beings respond and relate to each other before, during, and after a revolution. Serge's imagination allows us to appreciate revolutionary contradictions at a level of complexity that logic alone cannot reach. C.L.R. James was one of the few Marxist thinkers who appreciated the importance of "imaginative structures" as a way in which human beings mediate thought and activity, giving cultural phenomena political meaning.[7]

Victor Serge integrated art and politics in his novels. He wrote seven novels which can be divided into the two groups originally conceptualized by Richard Greeman as Serge's "witness novels."[8] The first group, written while Serge was still in Russia, includes *Men in Prison* [1930], *Birth of Our Power* [1931],

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and *Conquered City* [1932], and entail the contradictions and ambivalences within revolutionary victory. This "cycle of revolution" is followed by a second group, the "cycle of resistance," written when Serge was in exile. It includes *Midnight in the Century* [1939], *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* [1942], *Unforgiving Years* (1945), and *The Long Dusk* [1946]. Serge explores the contradictions inherent in resistance to Stalinism in these books. Richard Greeman, translator of most of Serge's novels, points out that the two cycles together address the contradictory nature of defeat in victory (the seeds of authoritarianism in Bolshevism) and victory in defeat (the resistance of Oppositionists to Stalinist persecution).[9,10]

Overview of Serge's Novels

Serge delves deeply into the psyches of his characters, into their relationships with their circumstances. He does so in a manner which reveals *how* consciousness develops from both internal and external contradictions over time, and how self-activity occurs on an individual, social, and political level. In all his novels, Serge portrays his characters as multi-dimensional, giving them sometimes both contradictory and conflicting thoughts and feelings. He develops agency in his characters; they are never depicted as wholly passive victims of their circumstances, but always as actors in their own history.

Taken together, Serge's novels show a progression of consciousness in men and women who were committed Bolsheviks, who became Oppositionists, and who were then persecuted by the Stalinist regime. This examination of individual and collective consciousness becomes even more meaningful as many of Serge's characters reappear in several novels, allowing the reader to observe changes in a character's consciousness over time.

The Dialectic and Victor Serge

The word "dialectic" has become ubiquitous in political writing, often with the unfortunate assumption readers know what it means. I use the Marxist-Hegelian interpretation of the dialectic, one of human movement, self-activity, and overcoming previous limitations of an individual's or group's essential human being.[11] This is a version of the dialectic through which we can understand the process of changing consciousness; of how people see their circumstances as "impossible," and the ways in which they begin to supersede that impossibility. This dialectic presupposes that people's ideas, and their social groups, have internal contradictions, or negativity, which can lead to a change in consciousness and activity that negates this negativity.[12] This is part of the "mediation" Hegel speaks of in reference to the transition of something confronting its limit and becoming something else.[13]

What are the connections between Serge and the dialectic? In re-reading Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, I was struck by his very first sentence:

> Even before I emerged from childhood, I seem to have experienced, deeply at heart, that paradoxical feeling which was to dominate me all through the first part of my life: *that of living in a world without any possible escape, in which there was nothing for it but to fight for an impossible escape.*[14]

This sentence provides the lens through which we can view Serge's life and work, and captures that essential aspect of the Marxist dialectic, the creative principle of transcendent self-movement beyond limits.

In Marx's interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic, alienated labor was the limit, the negation of the worker's full human being. Because Marx saw human beings as creative beings, he saw them as capable of superseding, or negating, that alienation, as subjective agents of their own history, in what Raya Dunayevskaya called "the process of becoming."[15] This relationship between circumstances which negated human essence and the struggle for transcendence of those circumstances was the Hegelian double nega-

tive, the "the negation of the negation."[16] The dialectic meant, as Marx paraphrased Hegel, "in the midst of degradation, a revolt against degradation."[17] If Hegel's dialectic remained at the level of thought, and Marx's dialectic described the contradictions of classes, then Victor Serge takes the dialectic to an even deeper individual and social level, as he portrays his characters confronting the crises of their lives.[18] It is in these novels that Serge explores the various ways people "in the midst of degradation" revolt against that degradation. He explores how people move from revolutionary enthusiasm to early amorphous doubts about the revolution (early negation), to more specific doubts, and finally to a need to transcend their circumstances and take actions (negation of the negation) which allows hope for the future.

Serge developed the concept of a revolutionary writer's "double duty,"[19] an acknowledgment that the revolution contains contradictions within itself. "Double duty" meant the duty to defend the revolution against its external enemies, but also against the internal forces of destruction carried within the revolution and *within the people who made it*, of counter-revolution—bureaucratization, authoritarianism, repression, and dogma. Over the course of Serge's novels, his characters struggle with this "double duty." They struggle with themselves and among themselves, in maintaining their faith in socialism and the ideals of 1917, while confronting the realities of Stalinism.

Serge's Concept of the Novel

Serge thought a great deal about the meaning of the novel. He wrote at a time when most Russian writers were increasingly constrained by Stalinism, when "socialist realism" of the proletarian novel was the only approved genre. He had respect and empathy for his fellow writers as he witnessed "the smothering of their creative freedom…with their humiliations and their suicides."[20,21]

Serge did not believe that the concept of a proletarian novel had meaning and would not have meaning until enough time had passed for a mature socialist society to develop its own culture. He was interested, however, in finding "a new road for the novel." He wanted to show human beings "as they really live, dismantling their inner workings and penetrating deep into their souls."[22] He wanted to avoid a single protagonist, without obliterating the individual uniqueness of his characters, by looking at individuals in their interrelations as a group. This approach came from his concept of the relationship between the individual and the social group. Each person's personality, he wrote, "contains many possible destinies…through countless roots, affinities and communications…it is mingled with other human existences."[23] The writer's role was to "liberate the confused forces one feels fermenting within oneself and by which the individual dives into the collective subconscious…writing thus becomes a search of polypersonality, a way of living several destinies, or penetrating the Other."[24] In this regard, Serge's theories resemble those of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), the Russian philosopher and literary critic who coined the term "heteroglossia," describing existence of several voices, and differing viewpoints interacting with each other in a novel. As they interact, these differing voices create still newer and different meanings. For Bakhtin, the novel "as a genre is dialogic, developing, self-critical, in process, inconclusive, containing a diversity of social speech types and individual voices interpenetrating each other."[25] It is worth noting that the origin of the word "dialectic" comes from the Greek 'dialektike,' meaning discourse between two or more people, or even within a single person, holding different points of view.

The important role of differing voices in Serge's novels presents a complex challenge to his translators, who must be able to capture the tonal and emotional variations among the characters, as well as colloquial differences,

and the changes in meaning that words may have between languages and over time. It is to our great benefit that all of Serge's translators, particularly Richard Greeman, Peter Sedgwick, Ian Birchall, Mitchell Abidor, and Willard R. Trask, fulfill what Walter Benjamin called "the task of the translator": "The unfathomable, the mysterious, the poetic something that a translator can reproduce only if he is also a poet."[26] The nuances of meaning and language in these translations that enable us to savor Serge's art, is in great part due to the poetic skill of his translators.

Conquered City

I will focus primarily on three of Serge's novels, *Conquered City*,[27] *Midnight in the Century,*[28] and *The Case of Comrade Tulayev,*[29] encompassing a time frame roughly from 1919-1936 in Russia.

Conquered City takes place in an embattled Petrograd during the Civil War, in 1919, beginning with a panoramic view of the city. The opening scenes place Red Petrograd in winter, covered in white snow and frozen rivers: "This white, silent, weightless shroud stretched out to infinity in time and space." We get a visceral image of what the book is about, as the newly created revolution, the Red city, is at risk of succumbing to the Whites, weakened further by cold, hunger, epidemics, and popular discontent.

We meet Comrade Ryzhik, whom we will follow through this and the next two novels. Rhyzik joined the revolution in 1914; by 1919 he has become a bureaucratic official, giving and receiving orders. He sleeps where he works, in an abandoned palace, along with other functionaries, where "mattresses were laid out on the floor of the great reception rooms, transforming them into dormitories." Here Serge uses one of his frequent literary tactics, that of metaphor. By juxtaposing palaces and dormitories, Serge contrasts Tsarist reality with a revolutionary one, as reflected in people's lives, showing the symbolic and subjective reality beneath the surface appearance of objective facts.[30]

Rhyzhik is carrying out orders to arrest people from a list transmitted by the early Cheka, or secret police. At the same time, he begins to have "murky second thoughts … stirring under his brow, in those dark corners where we tirelessly, pitilessly repress a strange multitude of desires, dreams, suspicions." He reads a newspaper announcement of the execution of "counter-revolutionaries, spies, and criminals" and sees the name of one of his old friends. "Names take strange shapes on the list, coming to life, then bizarrely dying before our eyes … And the man reading these names thinks of himself; a double within him, who would never admit his own existence, substitutes his name for these names … his life for these extinct lives." In *Conquered City,* we see in Ryzhik and others, nascent forms of doubt about aspects of the revolution. The characters in *Conquered City* feel ambivalence, the beginnings of negation of their previous revolutionary enthusiasm and activity, and we begin to understand how the Hegelian dialectic of continuing negations occurs.

Ryzhik's early uneasiness will eventually give way to more specific criticisms, leading him to join what will become the Left Opposition. That opposition will be the negation of Stalinism's ability to fully eliminate all dissent. This novel, as with all of Serge's novels, shows that the "revolt against degradation" is not instantaneous, but is a process that develops over time, and may be different for various characters. By the end of the novel Rhyzik, feeling suffocated by what he sees, tells himself the three magic words, "It is necessary." He is not yet ready for the second negation, for action against what will become Stalinism.

Although *Conquered City* takes place in 1919, Serge wrote the book in 1931, after he had joined the Opposition and was expelled from the Communist Party (CP). His own political transformation, from anarchist to Bolshevik to Oppositionist, and his historical hindsight, enabled him to articulate his

characters' early ambivalence about the Red Terror. In 1919, however, when he himself was in Petrograd, and new to Bolshevism, he, like his characters in *Conquered City*, was not entirely willing to look beyond his own revolutionary zeal.

In *Revolution in Danger*, a collection of essays written between 1919 and 1921, he anticipated the character of Rhyzhik when he wrote, "it is important to stress that the measures enforced by the revolution, terrible as some of them may be, have been made necessary by the audacity, perseverance, and unscrupulousness of its enemies"[31]

By 1921, Serge was already expressing embryonic forms of negation of his earlier zeal. While he supported the revolution against the Tsarist regime, he also recognized the growing apparatus of coercion paving the way for Stalinism. Yet even with this comprehension, he still defended the state against the Kronstadt sailors. In the years following, Serge continued outwardly to support the Bolshevik government and its policies, even as his inner sentiments opposing the counter-revolution grew stronger.

In the early twenties, becoming an agent for the Comintern in Germany, Serge promoted the Party line. However, in private discussions with confidants, Serge articulated more developed criticisms of the abuses of Bolshevik power.[32] The ambivalences, or contradictions, expressed by Serge indicate his evolving consciousness, and demonstrate the psychological processes necessary for dialectic transformation.[33]

Midnight in the Century

Between 1926 and 1928, Serge was expelled from the CP, arrested, and imprisoned. His political consciousness continued to progress during this period. He officially joined the Opposition in 1926, and by 1933 he was deported to Orenburg, a bleak town on the border of Russia and Kazakhstan. There he joined the political, social, and spiritual interactions among fellow deportees, as they struggled to preserve their revolutionary ideals in the midst of severe persecution. It is this context of the GULAG,[34] that *Midnight in the Century* explores.

Serge begins the novel with Mikhail Ivanovich Kostrov, a lecturer on "Historical Materialism," who is arrested for opposing forced collectivization and for leaving unanswered a question about his relationship to the Opposition. He is moved from prison to prison, finally ending up with a group of exiled Oppositionists in the fictional Siberian town of Chernoe, the name meaning "black town," conveying the darkness, the "midnight," of the setting. The group members differ among themselves, from the Bolshevik Ryzhik to the young worker, Rodion. These characters have moved from their early revolutionary enthusiasm, through their embryonic ambivalences about destructive elements in the revolution, to a definitive Opposition to Stalinism. In *Midnight*, the characters face the degradation of exile and isolation. Despite the repressive nature of their circumstances, they revolt in various ways. First they develop ways of communicating with each other; they interact and debate how to maintain the idealism of the 1917 revolution. Through a network of deported Oppositionists, they connect with other exiles throughout Russia. Messages are written on thin slips of paper the size of postage stamps with "microscopic calligraphy" that can only be read with a magnifying glass. Some of these messages are copies or summaries of the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, others are discussions, "letters, which were words, thoughts, truths for the Revolution." The messages are carried by "miracles of ingenuity," through toilet pipes, hidden in book bindings, in holes in walls, from window to window. The messages enable the exiles to feel a part of a community of Oppositionists, and this sense of community is itself a negation of their imposed isolation. The regime cannot eliminate their communication and sees "imperfect isolators in which thought has still

not been extinguished…the heresy shines out again over the whole USSR."

The characters also communicate and maintain their humanity and inspiration through their appreciation of the natural world, a strong theme of life and hope in all of Serge's novels. They are heartened by the coming of Spring and the breakup of ice on the Chernaya river. They stare at the stars, which "shine with a supernatural brilliance which heightens your taste for life." Ryzhik is enthusiastic, "The springtime, comrades! It's magnificent!" He recalls spring on the Yenisey River, where "you see the birds arriving… They're coming with great flapping wings and the light is climbing, the stones have a luminous polish, there are flowers…nothing happens to you, of course, but everything is possible." "Everything is possible" expresses a frame of mind negating hopelessness. When another comrade ridicules Ryzhik's lyricism, perhaps recalling Trotsky's criticism of Serge, Ryzhik replies, "Go to hell. I would never have seen the amazing flowers of the North." His joy negates the power of Stalinism over his psyche.

It is the young Rodion, a proletarian youth, who best represents resiliency and hope for the future. He had been a truck driver and was arrested for questioning the inequality of wages. He is constantly thinking and reading. When an older comrade asks, pessimistically, "What's to be done if it is midnight in the century?" Rodion replies with realistic optimism, "Midnight's where we have to live then." Facing reality, he simultaneously accepts his circumstances and revolts against them. He berates his friends, "What are we doing in these prisons?" He wants to escape; he sees the futility of hanging on to the old conception of the Party. "The only way we can appeal against the sick Party…is by appealing to the healthy Party…But where is it? And what if we were outside the Party…It's no longer true; something has been lost forever. Lenin will never rise again in his mausoleum." Rodion sees his comrades hampered by their attachment to the past. He sees the unchanging conception of the Party weighing his comrades down, limiting their options.[35] He quotes Hegel as best he can, "History is something we make, we are historical too, like all the poor devils…Another revolution. We will make one, and in a very different way."

In the end, the last chapter, ironically titled "The Beginning," Rodion does escape, guided by the stars, and feels a "lucidity as if he had opened new eyes of flesh...with which to see reality." He sees all the contradictions in his comrades, and in the revolution, "...the tortured earth of the Revolution…its clouded water, its clear waters...its deadly waters, its invigorating waters…its countless living prisoners, its countless executed ones in graves, its masses…and all the seeds germinating in its womb." *Midnight,* which has throughout contrasted the lightness and darkness of its characters and their notions of the Revolution and counter-revolution, ends on this strong note of hope.

The Case of Comrade Tulayev

Midnight of the Century takes place in and around 1930, marked by the arrests and deportations of the old Bolsheviks and Oppositionists. In 1934, Sergei Kirov, a Party bureaucrat, was assassinated by a young Communist. Stalin and the Politbureau interpreted this act as a threat to their regime and saw an opportunity to escalate the persecution of Trotskyists and Oppositionists, as well as any Party members who questioned the Party line. Thus began the era of "show trials" and the bloody purges of the Great Terror. This is the setting for *The Case of Comrade Tulayev.*

Tulayev explores the responses of several characters caught in the Terror following the impulsive shooting of the fictional Comrade Tulayev by a young Communist, Kostia. Kostia, angered by the recent suicide of a fellow worker, and the execution of men caught stealing food for their starving families, holds the bureaucrat Tulayev responsible

for these events. Though Kostia's action sets the stage for the novel, he does not reappear until its end.

The novel begins, like C*onquered City* and *Midnight*, in the dead of Russian winter. Here, Serge describes snowstorms sweeping over the country, "before which packs of wolves fled here and there." The storms, and the erratic wolves, provide the emotional terrain of the Terror that follows the assassination. The novel's characters appear, some recurring from previous books, others new, old Bolsheviks and Trotskyists and some who had been loyal Stalinists, all now caught in the web of Terror, all accused of Tulayev's murder. We experience their different histories and fates as they face more than "mere" exile; now they face certain execution. There are five major characters in the book; three are sentenced to death. Their varied responses to this new degradation, and their interactions with each other, convey the dialectical interaction between consciousness and politics which is the heart of this novel.

In his review of *Tulayev*, Christopher Hitchens[36] noted a feature of the book as "chiarscurro," a term usually associated with the visual arts, describing the contrast of light and dark, light and shadow. It was Rembrandt who first used this technique to give his paintings life rather than flatness. In *Tulayev*, as in all of Serge's novels, one can appreciate the literary application of this technique as he develops his characters, each of whom has depth, and experiences contrasts of lightness and darkness. Interestingly, through his use of literary chiarscurro, Serge achieves what Marx felt was a necessary aspect of political fiction:

> Nothing is more desirable than that the people who stood at the head of the revolutionary party, either before the revolution, in secret societies, or in the press, or later in official positions, *be finally depicted in strong Rembrandtian colors, in all their living qualities.*[37]

The first three characters are initially disciplined Party members. Maxime Andreyevich Erchov is High Commissar for Interior Defense, listing thousands of names destined for arrest and execution. But when ordered to arrest an academic, his old friend Rublev, he finally balks. He says to his higher up, "There is not a shadow of a connection between all this and the Tulayev case…you're trying to set a trap for me." Erchov is arrested for questioning the order. Later, in prison, he is torn between his loyalty to the revolution and his realization of its corruption. Ultimately, he capitulates, confessing to non-existent crimes.

The Case of Comrade Tulayev demonstrates, with great lyricism and poetry, the many ways people chose to "revolt against degradation," and maintain their humanity

Comrade Arteyem Arteyemvich Makeyev rises from peasant origins to become Regional Secretary of a rural outpost, loyally repressing all dissent in his region. Yet he begins to see the failures of forced collectivization imposed on the peasants. When he is ordered to begin a new purge of resistant peasants, he refuses, then immediately tries to rescind his refusal. Nevertheless, he is arrested and signs a confession that he was part of the plot to murder Tulayev. His signature on the confession reveals his contradictory emotions: "The M was still strong, the other letters looked crushed."

The academic historian, Kiril Kirilovich Rublev, has no doubt about the corruption of the revolution. Rublev, too, capitulates, but asks his interrogator to take his statement to the Central Committee: "That I have lived my whole life only for the Party. Sick and degraded though it may be…That if I must perish, crushed by my party, I consent…But

that I warn the villains who are killing us that they are killing the Party."

What is interesting about these three capitulating characters, torn between their Party loyalty and their recognition of the Stalinist counter-revolution, is the compassion and empathy with which Serge portrays them. He is neither judgmental nor condescending to these capitulators, never reducing them to caricatures. They have autonomy, as he allows a character's "internal life to follow its own course. It isn't me, though there is some of me in him; that is, I understand him."[38] He understood, but disagreed with, the principles of those who capitulated in life and in fiction, "Better to err with the Party than to be right against it."[39]

Two characters resist in different ways. Ivan Kondratiev begins as a Party agent working internationally. While in Barcelona, he becomes aware of the obstructive role that the Communists are playing in the Spanish Civil War, with their vicious attacks on Trotskyists and anarchists. He is shaken by the executions of a comrade who merely spoke with Trotskyists and intervenes to prevent the murder of another Trotskyist. Returning to Moscow, Kondratiev is ordered to give a morale boosting speech to students. He goes off script, telling them: "we are covered with crimes and errors…the old Party members of my generation have all perished…They had roused the world…all in the service of truth…I have not come in the name of the CC of our great Party…I ask you to look at reality, be it baffling or base, with the courage of your youth." Kondratiev is spared execution only by his long friendship with "the Chief," the Stalin character in the novel, and is sent off to work in Siberia.

Comrade Ryzhik surfaces again in *Tulayev*, resistant to the end. When the regime feels the need to further bolster its case against the "perpetrators" of Tulayev's murder, they demand "a genuine Trotskyist," whose confession will seal their case. That Trotskyist is Ryzhik, who is transferred to Moscow for trial. Ryzhik, now old and exhausted, feels he has no strength for further struggle. On the sleigh carrying him to Moscow, however, he becomes fascinated by the night's stars, and feels "that convulsions raged beneath their apparent immobility." He thinks about the significance of his death and dreams of dying. He begins to see the power he can exert beneath the "apparent immobility" of his death: "it was as simple as the end of night; and all lights, the brightness of the stars, the brightness of the sun, the brightness of Northern Lights, the more remote brightness of love, continued to pour down upon the world, nothing was really lost." He wonders, "What use would anyone have for the last cry of the last Oppositionist, crushed under the machine like a rabbit under a tank?"[40] Ryzhik decides to stop eating, and his suicide confounds the regime's attempt to use him: "It was an act of will which restored him to complete self-control." News of his impending death brings panic to all levels of the regime, finally reaching the Chief: "Ryzhik dying?" says the Chief, in the low voice of his repressed anger, "I order him saved!" In true dialectical manner, Ryzhik brings power to his powerlessness.

The final chapter of the novel returns to young Kostia, now working on a collective farm devastated by multiple purges and famine, with no fodder for livestock, and no seed to plant. They lack even transportation to get seed from the next township. These peasants, too, supersede their oppressive circumstances. They agree to walk to the neighboring town and bring the seeds and provisions back to town, carrying sixty loads of seeds on their backs by relieving one another. This spontaneous act of self-activity inspires Kostia with hope for the future, "the authentic magic of this night in which there is no miracle; from the waiting earth; from all the confused power that lies within us." Kostia has moved from his early individual and impulsive anger to an appreciation of the potential of "all the confused power" that he sees in spontaneous collective action.

The *Case of Comrade Tulayev* demonstrates, often with great lyricism and poetry, the many ways in which people chose to "revolt against degradation," and maintain their humanity. They did this even if it meant only a decision to deny the regime another confession or another death, or when it was manifest in the ability to find moments of joy and hope in repressive circumstances. Serge's novels, both the cycle of victory and of defeat, are testament to his own revolutionary resilience and his abiding confidence in the future referred to in the opening lines of this article.[41]

The Illumination of Serge's Dialectical Imagination

Although we can find analogies to events in Victor Serge's life in these novels, it would be a mistake to see them only as *roman a clef*, fictionalized presentations of Victor Serge and other well-known Bolsheviks. Serge's characters have a more universal and mythic purpose in reaching into the hearts of us all. Serge was conscious of the impact of his art on future generations. While the first sentence of *Memoirs* revealed his dialectical approach to life, the last sentence expressed his hope for all his writing: "May the passion, the experience and even the faults of my fighting generation have some small power to illumine the way forward." By bringing his characters to life with their "Rembrandtian colors," with all their contradictions,

> victories, and defeats, Serge gives us the opportunity to consider how *we* approach our own circumstances. When we find the current situation overwhelming, with attacks on working people, people of color, women, with the global rise of the extreme right, and with the threat of environmental catastrophe and nuclear conflagration, Serge's novels encourage us to confront reality, "be it baffling or base," and avoid demoralization by finding ways, not only to resist, but to creatively transform our circumstances.

Serge's characters encourage us ask questions about the nature of the socialism we espouse, how we best achieve it, and about what happens the day after the revolution. As Rodion does in *Midnight*, perhaps we too need to examine our attachment to past definitions of socialism, along with the cultural remnants of Bolshevism, Leninism, and Trotskyism, or even to concepts such as vanguard, leader, and party, so we can envision a renewed and more humanistic socialism. Erich Fromm, who knew Serge during his years in Mexico, said "I believe indeed that to rescue the humanist tradition of the last decades is of the utmost importance, and that Victor Serge is one of the outstanding personalities representing the socialist aspect of humanism."[42] I would turn this around and say, rather, that Serge represents the humanist aspect of socialism. Serge's confidence in the future of socialism was dependent on the need for socialism to be revitalized and renewed.

Serge's novels encourage us to appreciate and value the importance of psychology and spirituality to a revolutionary movement which strives to restore wholeness to human beings. As Serge's characters "revolt against degradation," they get strength from their connections with each other, even when differences of opinion suffuse those connections. They allow themselves, like Ryzhik, to appreciate the natural world, even in situations appearing to be futile. Serge uses the images of stars and starlight, seeds and germination, to signify the importance of joy and love and hope. "Revolutionaries need to understand and to love," he wrote as early as 1922.[43]

Serge's novels free us from the political one-way relationship with art which asks only how to make art political. Serge's novels present the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between art and politics. His novels suggest that the problem of political activity and art has been wrongly posed; it is not how to bring politics to art, but how to bring an artistic sensibility to politics.

Most important is what Serge contrib-

utes to our sense of identity as socialists and revolutionaries. It is here that his dialectical imagination challenges us most strongly. Serge's novels and his characters illustrate what Marx recognized as the essence of the dialectic, "the self-creation of (humans) as a process."[44] Over the course of Serge's novels, we see the transformation in his characters, through their own creative agency, and we can reflect on our own ability to change, our own agency, and that of those around us. Victor Serge also inspires us to make philosophic leaps in our concepts of politics and political activity. As Grace Lee Boggs articulated, socialists, "In order to change/transform the world… must change/transform themselves."[45] Victor Serge inspires us to see the dialectic working within ourselves, to allow our own self-movement, and to have the audacity to create new visions of socialist transformation, and see new possibilities for radical change in circumstances that seem unchangeable.

NOTES

1. Christopher Z. Hobson, "Victor Serge 1890-1947," *Prairie Schooner*, (Vol 62, No 1), (University of Nebraska Press, 1984). The lines are taken from Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941.*

2. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941*, Translated by Peter Sedgwick, (Oxford University Press, 1963) 132.

3. Peter Sedgwick, "Victor Serge and Socialism," *International Socialism*, (Autumn, 1963).

4. Letter from Trotsky to Serge, referenced in Susan Weissman, *Victor Serge: The Course is Set on Hope*, (Verso, 2001), 230, fn 159, 313.

5. The contrast between artistic and political writing is discussed in Kunal Chattopadhyay's insightful article, "Different Forms of Truth: Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky on the Fate of the Russian Revolution," in *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, (Vol 44).

6. Memoirs, 265.

7. Kenneth Surin, "Programmatic Notes on the Culture of Politics of C.L.R. James", *The C.L.R. James Journal*, (Vol. 2, No 11, Winter, 1991), 9.

8. Richard Greeman, "Victor Serge and the Novel of Revolution," in www.marxists.de/culture/greeman/sergenovel/htm, originally published in *Socialism* (Brussels, July-October 1991), 226-227.

9. As a writer who paid attention to words, Serge saw the signs of authoritarianism in the language that Bolsheviks used, pointing to the domineering, intolerant, and intransigent tone of much of Bolshevik speech, what he called "the Bolshevik polemicist verve." See unpublished manuscript, a response to Trotsky's "Their Morals and Ours," translated by Richard Greeman, https://www.marxists.org/archive/Serge/1940/trotsky-morals.

10. Greeman, "Victor Serge and the Novel of Revolution."

11. My concept of the dialectic comes from multiple sources: Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution*, (Delta, 1973); Raya Dunayevskya, *Marxism and Freedom*, (Pluto Press, 1958); Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Power of Negativity,* edited by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, (London, Lexington Books), 2002; Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution,* (Beacon Press, 1941); Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1998); *Karl Marx Early Writings,* translated and edited by T.B. Bottomore, (McGraw-Hill, 1963); *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy,* translated by T.B. Bottomore, edited by Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, (McGraw-Hill, 1956); Kevin B. Anderson, *Dialectics of Revolution, (*Ottawa, Daraja Press, 2020).

12. *Anderson,* 13-14.

13. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, quoted in *The Power of Negativity*, 241.

14. *Memoirs*, 1. Emphasis is mine.

15. Dunayevskaya*, Philosophy and Revolution*, 7.

16. "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic," Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, 3rd manuscript, in K*arl Marx Early Writings*, 202.

17. Karl Marx, *The Holy Family*, (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956). 51

18. See Bill Marshall's discourse on this topic in *Victor Serge: The Uses of Dissent*, (Berg French Studies, New York Oxford, 1992), and in his article, "The Meaning of History: Representation and Dialectic in Victor Serge," *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, (Vol. XXIV, April 1998). Marshall's interpretation of the dialectic differs somewhat from mine.

19. The concept of "double duty" originally appeared in Serge's book, *Literature and Revolution* (1932), but is also mentioned in *Victor* Serge, *Notebooks 1936-1947*, translated by Mitchell Abidor and Richard Greeman, (New York Review Books, 2012), 124.

20. Serge*, Memoirs*, 265.

21. Stalinist restriction of art was replicated in

the American Communist literary world of the 1930s. Michael Gold, then editor of *New Masses,* set out three criteria for the artist: a) The artist should be proletarian, b) the content "must have a social theme or it is merely confectionary, and c) as few words as possible. We are not interested in the verbal acrobat—this is only another form of bourgeois idleness." *New Masses,* (Sept 1930), 4-5. By 1931, the *New Masses* followed the demands of the 1930 Kharkov Conference of Writers, that writers and artists "openly…adopt the political line of the Communist Party." *New Masses*, (Feb., 1931).

22. *Memoirs*, 262-263.

23. *Notebooks*, 399.

24. *Notebooks*, 398.

25. Gary Kim, "Mikhail Bakhtin: The Philosopher of Human Communication," *University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology, in Totem*, (Vol 12, No 1, 2004). The connection to Bakhtin is also brought out in Bill Marshall, "Viewpoints and Voices: Serge and Koestler on the Great Terror," *Journal of European Studies*, (xvi, 1986).

26. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations*, (New York, Schocken Books, 1969) 69-82.

27. Victor Serge, *Conquered City*, Translated by Richard Greeman, *New York Review of Books*, (1975).

28. Victor Serge, *Midnight in the Century*, Translated by Richard Greeman, *New York Review Books*, (1981).

29. Victor Serge, *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*, Translated by Willard R. Trask, *New York Review of Books,* (2004).

30. Richard Greeman discussed the use of symbolism and metaphor in, "The Laws are Burning: Literature and Revolutionary Realism in Victor Serge," *Yale French Studies*, (No. 39, 1967),146-159. Referenced in Susan Weissman,116.

31. *Revolution in Danger, Writings from Russia 1919-1921,* translated by Ian Birchall, (Haymarket Books, 1997), 33.

32. Ian Birchall, Introduction to *Revolution in Danger*, 9.

33. For a more one-dimensional view of Victor Serge, which does not address the evolution of Serge's consciousness and politics, see Ernie Haberkern, "The Politics of Victor Serge," in *Against the Current,* (No.142, October 2009).

34. GULAG is the Russian acronym for the vast expanse of deportation camps to which dissidents and Oppositionists were sent.

35. Rodion's sentiments recall Karl Marx, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," *in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works,* Vol I, (Foreign Language Publishing House, 1962) 247-249.

36. Christopher Hitchens, "Pictures from an Inquisition," *The Atlantic,* (Dec. 2002).

37. Karl Marx, in a book review, quoted in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Literature and Art, Selections from their Writings*, (International Publishers, 1947), 40.

38. Serge, *Notebooks*, 400.

39. Serge, *Notebooks,* 442.

40. The image of slaughtered rabbits recalls Serge's recounting of Trotsky's ultimatum to the Kronstadt sailors: "Surrender or you will be shot down like rabbits!" in *Memoirs,*129.

41. The perspective of Serge's novels, and especially *Tulayev*, contrasts sharply with the perspective of Koestler in *Darkness at Noon,* which evoked a fatalistic sense, equating Stalinism with Marxism. Koestler's book enjoyed much more popularity than Serge's, as Koestler allied himself with the anti-communism of the 1950's, typified in his essay in *The God That Failed*. For an in-depth discussion of the contrasts between Serge and Koestler, see Bill Marshall, "Viewpoints and Voices: Serge and Koestler on the Great Terror," in *Journal of European Studies,* (xvi, 1986). George Orwell, though an anti-Stalinist rather than an anti-communist, also presented bleak and pessimistic viewpoints in *Nineteen Eight-Four* and *Animal Farm*.

42. In Richard Greeman, "A Neglected Marxist Classic: Victor Serge," in Academia. Com, https://www.academia.edu/3689079/remarx.

43. Quoted in Weissman, 68, in fn. 75, 291, *Clarte*, "*Les Ecrivains Russe et la Revolutions,*"1922.

44. Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic," in *Karl Marx, Early Writings,* "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, 202.

45. Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change*, 76.

A New Human History?

LLANON DAVIS

THE LATE ANTHROPOLOGIST AND anarchist David Graeber and archaeologist David Wengrow seek to synthesize archaeological evidence that has accumulated over the last 30 years, to present a new narrative on the history of human society. *The Dawn of Everything* presents a challenge to established conceptions about the nature of prehistoric humans and their societies and dominant theories about the development of human societies and the emergence of inequality and states. Graeber and Wengrow are critical of traditional approaches to the history of humanity as a linear development from primitivism to civilization. They critique what they consider to be prevailing myths and raise some interesting points. However, their analysis is flawed by serious weaknesses in their theoretical framework and approach to the question of what drives human behavior and social change; this in turn creates problems with their interpretations of the archaeological evidence, which is used to qualify their version of human history.

The Dawn of Everything:
A New History of Humanity
DAVID GRAEBER AND
DAVID WENGROW
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021. 701 pages. $35.00

They begin with the premise that the foundations of all prevailing theories about the evolution of human society are based on two alternative streams of thought about human nature. One is the idea advanced by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*: that humans are inherently selfish creatures whose original state of nature involved living in tiny bands, in a constant state of war with everyone fighting everybody. Life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." Therefore, the formation of hierarchical society with repressive mechanisms—top down governments, courts, bureaucracies and police—was necessary to bring about civilization through the repression of our baser instincts. All humans, according to the Hobbesian view, are better off living under rigid class societies, because they enforce law and order, without which we would naturally descend back into violent anarchy. Echoes of that dystopian view of humanity can certainly be heard in many reactionary arguments that are regurgitated by unimaginative right-wingers today.

The second stream of thought is attributed to Jean Jaques Rousseau: all humans once lived as hunter-gatherers in a prolonged state of childlike innocence. Their tiny bands were inherently egalitarian due to their size. Then came an agricultural revolution, the rise of cities, leading to civilization and the state. As these societies became more complex with the introduction of writing, science, and philosophy, they ushered in all the negative aspects: bureaucracies, patriarchy, armies, mass executions, and so on. Humanity, thinking that it was pursuing a new freedom, "rushed headlong into its chains." Graeber and Wengrow

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point out that the essay in which Rousseau presented this model—*Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Mankind*—was actually a hypothetical exercise about the origins of inequality for a literary competition. His essay was not based on archaeological evidence or thorough knowledge of pre-class societies. Yet many social theorists subsequently drew from Rousseau's essay and so the myth of innocent, inherently egalitarian hunter-gatherers unwittingly shackling themselves to the trap of complex hierarchy became established. Subsequent archaeologists also took the concepts expressed by Rousseau as a framework for formulating their own theories about prehistory.

All subsequent theories about the origins of inequality, which point to the transition from hunter-gatherers to Neolithic settlements, the rise of agriculture and metropolises, are thus heaped in by Graeber and Wengrow, as inheritors of Rousseau's legacy. Graeber and Wengrow characterize all such approaches, often unfairly, as modern versions of the Old Testament origin story of Adam and Eve: originally innocents in the Garden of Eden, before they were corrupted by the forbidden fruit. Here we see in early on, one of the recurring problems with Graeber and Wengrow's approach. Any social theory about the history of humanity that presents a model involving phases of development, is dismissed by Graeber and Wengrow as just another variation of the origin myth, without any serious engagement.

Graeber and Wengrow believe that these models of human history have their roots in a conservative backlash in eighteenth century Europe against critiques of European civilization that gained ground with the Enlightenment. Graeber and Wengrow attribute these critiques of European society not to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, but to critiques from indigenous peoples of North America. They bring particular attention to the critiques and commentary of Kandiaronk, leader of the Huron-Wendat tribe.

Their discussion of the perceptive reactions of Native Americans to the brutality and insanity they saw in the absolutist hierarchical society of Europeans, is interesting; although they are based on the writings of French philosophers, which does raise questions whose narrative they really were. It does seem that Native American' critiques of European society and the contributions this made to the debates of the Enlightenment, deserve more recognition than they receive in most histories of the period. However, Graeber and Wengrow take their argument to the level of suggesting that the indigenous critique of Kandiaronk and his ilk were responsible for the Enlightenment. They assert that before the eighteenth century, Europeans did not even consider that equality was possible. Some ancient forms of folk egalitarianism existed in Mediaeval Europe, but were limited to traditional carnivals, such as May Day and Christmas. Some educated Europeans were aware of notions of equality in classical literature, but it was only in the eighteenth century that European intellectuals suddenly formed

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Graeber and Wengrow tend to make bold claims and sweeping generalizations, based on such limited and often selective evidence.

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the assumption that people once existed in a state of egalitarianism. The only explanation for Graeber and Wengrow lies in the contact with Native American cultures. In turn, the ruling establishment reacted, forming ideas to discredit the indigenous cultures as primitive and raise civilization as the highest stage of humanity. It is a very long bow to draw—and one that buckles under the strain of historical facts about the class struggles in Europe

before and during that time.

There were major political upheavals in Europe, driven by internal contradictions in the unstable system of feudalism. The English Civil War of 1642-51, driven by the clash between the emerging bourgeois mode and the old feudal order, saw the execution of a king and formation of a republic. Within it were the more radical elements, including the Levellers calling for suffrage and the Diggers struggling for agrarian socialism. Preceding the English revolution was the great Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The existence of America and its peoples were yet to be discovered by Europeans when John Ball declared:

> When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came in by the unjust oppression of naughty men. For if God would have had any bondmen from the beginning, He would have appointed who should be bond, and who free. And therefore I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty.[1]

Graeber and Wengrow neglect any discussion or acknowledgement of that history.

Problems with their interpretation of the archaeological evidence start to emerge in Chapter 3, where Graeber and Wengrow begin their argument that class inequality did not originate in surplus-producing agricultural societies, but was in fact present much earlier. They refer to Paleolithic burial sites that appear extravagant from the grave goods. There is a tendency among archaeologists to draw assumptions, describing such sites as 'princely' burials. Graeber and Wengrow criticize these tendencies, pointing out physical peculiarities in many of the individuals buried and discussing the ways in which various societies in Africa revered individuals that exhibited physical or mental peculiarities that made them different—dwarfism for example, or characteristics seen in modern society as autism. In the examples they discuss, such individuals were seen as gifted by the gods and given a special religious place in their society. They were not positions of power. Yet they still go on to discuss the occurrence of many lavish burials as mounting evidence of class domination emerging in the Paleolithic. These are all isolated burials of individuals or small groups, often in striking poses and adorned with exotic ornaments. In a few cases, children were found buried in this fashion. Graeber and Wengrow are quick to believe that such child burials must imply inherited status. We cannot draw too much from the isolated occurrences of these sites given their provenance of roughly 50,000 to 15,000 years BCE. The discovery of any Paleolithic human remains are rare and almost always accidental. Nor does a lavish burial of a Paleolithic human necessarily mean inherited wealth or power. There are many other alternative explanations.

Consider the Inca practice of child sacrifice—an example Graeber and Wengrow do not consider, despite their discussion of Inca society later in the book. The children selected, often peasants, were richly clothed, groomed and fed. They were heavily drugged with alcohol and coca leaves (substances reserved for the elite) before being left high up in the mountains in rich clothing with precious metals as offerings.[2] The clothing and objects they were effectively buried with were in no sense a reflection of inherited wealth and status.

The other key example from recent archaeology that Graeber and Wengrow refer to as evidence for complex hierarchical societies before the emergence of farming and agriculture, are the discoveries of monumental architecture in Eurasia. The most notable is the site Göbekli Tepe in modern day Turkey. Twenty megalithic enclosures were built c.9000 years BCE and modified over subsequent centuries. The monumental structure is large and impressive and does indeed indicate

a level of sophistication and complex coordination. However, the ability of the inhabitants to carry out this level of coordination does not by itself provide evidence for class hierarchies. Graeber and Wengrow assume that it does and rely on this assumption to wage an argument for turning theories about class inequality arising from large surplus-producing agricultural societies on their head. It is quite astonishing, considering how much effort they expend arguing that humans were clearly capable of organizing themselves in complex agricultural settlements without class hierarchies or the need to form states. None of these examples actually indicate the formation of class inequality in pre-farming hunter-gatherer cultures. That they reveal the complexity and sophistication of these prehistoric communities is certainly true and bringing these findings to light adds more depth and understanding of the past.

Graeber and Wengrow tend to make bold claims and sweeping generalizations, based on such limited and often selective evidence. They assert there is mounting archaeological evidence that the Neolithic Revolution "simply never happened." That is an oversimplification. What the archaeology suggests is that the transition from hunter-gathering to a reliance on agriculture was a long and uneven process—much longer and more complicated than previously thought. In areas around the fertile crescent, evidence is emerging that early communities were initially only employing small-scale, less energy intensive forms of crop cultivation, which supplemented their primary hunter-gatherer diet. There are indications that early Neolithic societies, such as in Britain, adopted agriculture only to abandon it and return to farming livestock. However, it is an oversimplification to draw from these new insights that there was no Neolithic Revolution at all.

There are some good points that Graeber and Wengrow raise. There are tendencies among scholars towards mechanically determinist formulations. There are Neolithic sites that are suggestive of communities existing for a period without class inequality. There is also some evidence that the people in these societies did not always accept class subjugation and may have overthrown their rulers in some cases. Graeber and Wengrow cite examples from the Indus Valley, where sites, such as Harappa for a period appeared to have no palaces or obvious signs of power. From this, they conclude that people were perfectly capable of living in complex societies with surplus from agricultural production, without the need for ruling elites and state bureaucrats. It is a compelling argument, although it still leaves open the question as to why all these cities subsequently ended up being ruled by oppressive minorities. Nor does it counter the theory that the ability to produce surplus that resulted in these agricultural communities was what created the material basis for the emergence of class divisions and exploitation.

What lies at the heart of the problems and weaknesses in *The Dawn of Everything*, is the world view and theoretical framework that informs Graeber and Wengrow's analysis and the resulting weaknesses in their broader narrative of human history. The central problem is they reject the centrality of material conditions in determining human consciousness, social organization and social change. Instead, they emphasize self-conscious ideas, and above all free choice, as the determining factor in the forms of social organization in these prehistoric societies. They are so determined to reject any concession that the inhabitants of these societies may have been constrained and influenced by material forces outside their control, that they take their model of social organization consciously formed out of free thought to the extreme.

Their commitment to finding explanations rooted in freedom of choice leads them into some odd formulations to explain social organization, economic and political activity—through theories about play, experimentation, religious practices and figures rising to prominence, ball games in central America

turning into political struggles, and schismogenesis—societies choosing one form of social organization or even economies as a deliberate attempt to distinguish their identity from a neighboring culture. Evidence suggests that early Neolithic societies in the Fertile Crescent initially used low energy forms of agriculture, based on tidal movements and other forms, to supplement the hunting and foraging that continued to form their primary food source. In Central America, there were societies that grew crops on a small scale , whilst inhabiting settlements on a seasonal basis—which Graeber and Wengrow liken more to horticultural gardens—before returning to hunting and gathering during other parts of the year. From these examples, Graeber and Wengrow speculate that prehistoric peoples were engaging in "play farming." The concept is then extended to social and political organization: communities engaging in carnivals with "play kings" and play executions, which somehow became very real and entrenched. In parts of North America, apparently, a number of cultures played around with the idea of kings until they consciously decided it was a bad idea and turned to other forms of social organization. Why a social group would start playing games with ceremonial kings for a short period when they had no prior experience of them is not clear; nor why they transformed from play to reality. Others alternated between small authoritarian groups and larger egalitarian settlements according to the seasons. Somehow European and Asian communities "got stuck" in the rigid class structures. To explain why, Graeber and Wengrow turn to concepts about social care and domination in the family as the causation for the entrenchment of rigid social structures.

In pursuing their theories, Graeber and Wengrow discuss the Native American societies in northern California and the Pacific Northwest Coast—two neighboring culture areas with almost diametrically opposed societies. The Northwest Coast was populated by groups, whose economies centered primarily on intense fishing of salmon and other anadromous fish. The first bulk harvesting through constructed fish trapping weirs is thought to have been around 1850 BCE. Archaeological evidence from the same period also shows the first signs of warfare, with defensive fortifications, along with expanding trade networks. Cemeteries also show signs of wealth disparity. The fish were processed and preserved by smoking, creating a surplus store. While the society consisted of small groups, they featured hierarchies, with "aristocratic title holders" at the top. The Northwest Coast peoples were notorious for displays of excess, especially *potlatch* festivals. These were feasts, usually held by aristocrats, designed to display grandeur and overwhelm their rivals with gallons of fish oil, berries and fatty greasy fish. They were ceremonies of gluttony and indulgence—"grease feasts." Sometimes they culminated in sacrificial killing of slaves. Slavery was also a feature of the Northwest Coast societies.

In contrast, the foraging societies in northern California upheld ethics of self-denial, hard work, individual autonomy and moderation in eating. They had no inherited ranks or titles. Their diet centered on acorns and pine nuts. They displayed none of the features characteristic of their Northwest Coast neighbors, despite linguistic and archaeological evidence for extensive movement of people and goods. Most theorists attempting to explain the marked difference between these two societies focus on economic factors, organizational imperatives or cultural meanings. Graeber and Wengrow prefer to take a lead from Maus and raise a fourth possibility: that the societies were self-determined, built and reproduced in reference to each other. They are right to dismiss approaches which are more obviously mechanical—particularly optimal foraging theory: predictive modelling originally developed for studying non-human species, which has been applied to humans. It explains behavior purely in terms of economic

rationality, seeking to identify resource-gathering strategies for obtaining maximum return in calories versus output in labor—that is, cost benefit calculations. The theory cannot explain the indigenous Californians' reliance on pine nuts and acorns, as there is no obvious reason for it as an optimal strategy, given the environment was so bounteous in other resources. The region is therefore seen as an ecological puzzle.

They then turn to a popular theory by "ecological determinists" to explain the Californian diet as a product of food security. Fish need to be immediately processed for preservation and storage, which requires lots of energy and labor. Therefore, while highly nutritious, investing in large stores of smoked fish as a primary food source creates fragility in the face of raiding. Nuts and acorns on the other hand avoid such risk. There is less temptation for raiders to steal them. Harvesting them is simple and leisurely, plus they can be stored without processing. However, Graeber and Wengrow point out that the principle aim of raiding by the Northwest Coast fishing communities was to capture slaves, not stockpile food.

Instead, Graeber and Wengrow argue that these neighboring cultures formed their economies and traditions through conscious self-determination: they each formed through schismogenesis—each not seeking to distinguish themselves from the other. Slavery became commonplace on the Northwest Coast because an ambitious aristocracy, which viewed menial work, such as gutting and smoking fish beneath them, could not induce its subjects—who preferred to devote hours to producing art—to become a dependable workforce. As a result, they turned to capturing slaves to do the hard work. In the "shatter zone"—the area bridging northwest California and the Pacific Northwest Coast—none of the tribes practices chattel slavery. Rather, groups such as the Yurok maintained customs designed to prevent captive status from battles becoming permanent. The victors of a battle, for example, had to pay compensation for each life taken, thus removing any incentive for raiding. They also maintained Californian ethics of hard work for its own sake and sobriety. The Northwest Coast-style values that they rejected were embodied in the form of a clown at their festivals. Therefore, as Northwest Coast tribes, such as the Kwatiutl, took to slave capturing raids, the violence spread until the people of the Californian shatter zone felt obliged to create institutions to insulate themselves from it; which in turn ramified through every aspect of life. As such, Graeber and Wengrow argue, the two cultures defined themselves against each other, forming their societies through a process of schismogenesis.

Their commitment to finding explanations rooted in freedom of choice leads them into some odd formulations to explain social organization, economic and political activity.

It is another way in which they attempt to find ways of presenting the case for prehistoric communities self-consciously forming their own social organizations completely out of free will. They point to other regions and periods of history in which communities were organized in ways that were the epitome of their neighbors to broaden their theory of schismogenesis. This is not particularly convincing and a bit bizarre. It becomes even less convincing when they apply it to the ancient Greeks as another example. The differences between Athens and Sparta, according to Graeber and Wengrow, was another result of schismogenesis. The Athenians maintained democracy, because they were determined not to be like those awful Spartans with their oligarchy and vice versa. The theory only

works if you think about Athens and Sparta as an abstraction without any knowledge of the historical processes that led to the different political systems in those city states.

Other problematic formulations appear in their analysis of the Northwest Coast societies and their use of slavery. They assure us that these are not Neolithic, but hunter-gatherer societies. They are contemptuous of efforts to define these groups as incipient farmers or examples of emerging complexity, stating (rather simplistically) that this is just another updated way of saying the people were "rushing headlong for their chains." Yet the fish trapping weirs they refer to can be seen as an early form of fish farming, albeit not one based on domestication. They were also producing a surplus of smoked fish and forming stratified social layers. Material conditions that may have been critical in the social evolution of these groups are even apparent in Graeber and Wengrow's own description of the society. Yet they ignore these glaring features in their quest to emphasize free will and self-determination. Consequently, they wind up focusing on domestic relations as the basis for political organization. Domination, they assert, begins at home. While slavery arises from war, it also exists as a domestic institution. They conclude that the most brutal forms of exploitation originate in the most intimate of social relations; as perversions of nurture, love and caring. The Northwest Coast society did not have an overarching government, but was rather made up of an endless succession of great wooden houses, tiny courts centered on a title-holding family with commoners attached to them along with their personal slaves. The Kwakiutl rank system referred to divisions within households. From this Graeber and Wengrow conclude that domination first appears on the most intimate domestic level, labelling it "inequality from below." They go on to assert that egalitarian politics then emerge to prevent these oppressive relations extending from domestic to the public sphere. They inadvertently provide a clincher for why this is a bizarre theory by projecting it onto ancient Greece: "These are the kind of dynamics that culminated in phenomena like ancient Athenian democracy. But their roots probably extend much further back in time, to well before the advent of farming and agricultural societies."[3] Contrary to Graeber and Wengrow's ahistorical comment, Athenian democracy was not the culmination of attempts to keep domestic domination out of the public sphere. It was the culmination of a revolution and a relentless struggle between the active citizenry and propertied classes.[4]

> The most valuable contribution of The Dawn of Everything is the array of archaeological studies in different regions from recent decades, which it draws together.

It is in this section, that Graeber and Wengrow paradoxically write, "Perhaps Marx put it best: we make our own history, but not under conditions of our own choosing." And yet the actual meaning of that sentence (and the analysis that comprised its context) seems to be completely lost on them, as they make no effort to apply it to their own analysis, which is in fact a rejection, among other things, of historical materialism. Graeber and Wengrow claim that we cannot really know how much difference human agency really makes in history. That is true to a limited extent. It is not true however, that "precisely where one wishes to set the dial between freedom and determinism is largely a matter of taste."[5] But it is not just a matter of taste. Understanding the dynamics of history and social change is central to understanding how to struggle to forge a better world. It is also a false dichotomy to present a choice between

"freedom" and "determinism."

Similar problems arise in their discussion of states. Bizarrely they discount Marxist theory on the question with barely any mention of it and no serious engagement beyond a few passing swipes. It is particularly problematic, considering how influential Marxism has been in these debates and on the work of numerous influential archaeologists. V. Gordon Childe, an influential archaeologist of the twentieth century is the most well-known. He also barely gets a mention. In fact the only three allusions to Childe are on pp. 8-9, when they mention the title of his book, *Man Makes Himself*, stating that they wish to invoke the spirit of that phrase (without any discussion of the content of his work), p.25 in which they acknowledge that Childe invented the terms Neolithic Revolution and Urban Revolution—but say nothing of his analysis, and p.171, where they indicate that Childe used the (then dominant) notion of "culture areas" to analyze patterns in Neolithic villages across central Europe with regional clusters. Had Graeber and Wengrow attempted any serious discussion of Childe's work, they probably would have had to acknowledge that one of his key insights was that the history of humanity has not involved a *linear progression*. There are periods of progression and regression.

The most substantial reference to Marxism is within a paragraph: "Marxists … suggested that states make their first appearance in history to protect the power of an emerging ruling class. As soon as one group of people living routinely off the labor of another, the argument ran, they will necessarily create an apparatus of rule, officially to protect their property rights, in reality to preserve their advantage (a line of thinking very much in the tradition of Rousseau). This definition brought Babylon, Athens and medieval England back into the fold, *but also introduced new conceptual problems, such as how to define exploitation*. And it is unpalatable to liberals, ruling out any possibility that the state could ever become a benevolent institution." What conceptual problems do Graeber and Wengrow have for defining class exploitation that renders Marxism worth no more engagement than a passing reference? They do not specify; nor do they offer any argument to support their dismissive claim.

They subsequently lump the Marxist definition of the state in the same basket as an array of other opposing theories, none of which they engage with: "almost all these 'classic' theoretical formulations of the last century started off from exactly this assumption: that any large and complex society necessarily required a state. The real bone of contention was, why? Was it for good practical reasons? Or was it because any such society would necessarily produce a material surplus, and if there was … like, for instance, all that smoked fish on the Pacific Northwest Coast—then there would also, necessarily, be people who managed to grab hold of a disproportionate share."[6] It is impossible to judge the other theories in this regard based on Graeber and Wengrow's characterization, given that they do not actually engage with any of them, but it is not an accurate reading of Marxist theory about the rise of class exploitation or the formation of states. States are oppressive institutions of rule that emerged as a result of the internal contradictions of class societies. They arose out of conflict between opposing classes to enforce the repression of one class by another. Graeber and Wengrow seem unable to grapple with this problem. The problem with their conceptual framework is also reflected by the fact that throughout the book, they avoid employing a clear notion of class when discussing social inequality in these societies, preferring vague terms like "complex hierarchy."

Graeber and Wengrow partly evade articulating a clear definition of states, as well as other conventionally discussed terms related to class societies, by arguing that assigning categories and labels is imposing our modern preconceptions upon people who

lived under a completely different set of values. However, analyzing and understanding what was happening in past societies requires clear definitions of various forms of social and political structure. The result in terms of the state, is that their discussion of whether certain communities lived under one becomes a bit vague and confused. Regimes such as the Inca empire, are discussed by Graeber and Wengrow as lacking a "classic state." In fact, they conclude that Egypt was one of only two civilizations in the ancient world that actually functioned under a state. Even then, they extend their theories about playfulness and caring relationships to an attempt to explain the formation of a state in ancient Egypt. The use of beer as a ration for the laborers building the pyramids is supposed to be an example of care in a patriarchal family being extended to the king's subjects to invoke "mass conviviality." Thus the Egyptian state, rather than arising out of class struggle, was an accidental product of play and care: "Perhaps this is what a state actually is: a combination of exceptional violence and the creation of a complex social machine, all ostensibly devoted to acts of care and devotion."[7] They would have done better by examining the reality of the oppressive nature of the Egyptian dynasties, as reflected by the fact that far from being built in a spirit of mass conviviality, the pyramids were the site of the first recorded strike.[8]

The most valuable contribution of *The Dawn of Everything* is the array of archaeological studies in different regions from recent decades, which it draws together. There is value in their arguments against taking a mechanical view of history as a linear process of inevitable progression, although this is not as new or ground breaking a point as they make out. However, there are many problems with their analysis of the archaeological and anthropological evidence. Despite the book's bold claim of presenting a new history of humanity, much of their discussion is ahistorical. Most societies are discussed as though viewed as a static entity, with no attempt to analyze changes in a region over time to identify key patterns indicating historical processes. Their resulting model of how human societies developed is not a useful one for understanding the historical emergence of class inequality or of oppressive states. Nor does it identify the driving forces of social and political change. In their quest to challenge any notion that human societies arose out of phases of technological and economic development and resulting social organization, they present a confused picture of humanity forming different social structures, religions and economic strategies completely out of conscious choices, playful experimentation and free will—until at some unknown period for unexplained reasons, we got stuck in our current predicament of rigid class inequality. As a result, the book fails to explain why societies formed under oppressive elites and class exploitation or the conflicts and contradictions associated with it.

NOTES

1. https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices/voices_reading_revolt.shtml.

2. Rebecca Morelle, "Inca mummies: Child sacrifice victims fed drugs and alcohol," BBC World Service (https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-23496345).

3. Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, p. 209.

4. Ste. Croix, G.E.M. de, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1981.

5. Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, p. 206.

6. Ibid, p. 361.

7. Ibid, p.408.

8. Mark, J. J. (2017, July 04). The First Labor Strike in History. World History Encyclopedia. Retrieved from https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1089/the-first-labor-strike-in-history/.

Eco-Utopia from Below

DAN FISCHER

AT A TIME WHEN MUCH CLIMATE literature emphasizes inadequate "deals" with capitalism or catastrophe-prone nuclear and geoengineering technologies, it's refreshing to read two uncompromising proposals for ecological revolution. Despite coming from different political traditions, anarchist and Marxist, they reach overlapping conclusions regarding the necessity to reject elites' false solutions, reduce global production, support participatory planning, and establish healthier relations with nonhuman beings. With solutions at hand, and the dead-ends increasingly obvious, the ways forward appear to be getting clearer.

The Solutions Are Already Here: Ecological Revolt from Below
PETER GELDERLOOS
London: Pluto Press, 2022

Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change and Pandemics
TROY VETTESE AND DREW PENDERGRASS
London: Verso Books, 2022

Solutions Abound

First, Peter Gelderloos's *The Solutions Are Already Here: Ecological Revolt from Below*, is a cartography of movements resisting extraction, growing local food, and restoring ecosystems. Compared to the ecocidal ruling class and its spurious opposition among the mainstream left, autonomous uprisings can be remarkably effective using a minimum of resources. Based on extensive research and interviews, Gelderloos demonstrates that this web of struggle "represents the best hope for our planet" (146), should it further scale up and coordinate efforts.

He discusses, for example, Mexico's town of Cherán where *P'uerépecha* residents militantly rose up in 2011 and kicked out loggers, drug cartels, police, and politicians. Ever since, they have self-governed using horizontal methods of popular assembly and communal mediation (127). Volunteer patrols, accountable to popular councils, confiscate chainsaws from unauthorized loggers and monitor that farmers follow the ban on growing water-intensive avocado trees for commercial purposes. The town has implemented one of Mexico's most advanced recycling programs, and with help from an impressive tree nursery, they've reforested over half of the previously deforested area.[1]

Gelderloos discusses how various communities grow their own food. We read of Brazil's *Teia dos Povos* network which has reclaimed large territories and grown enough food to live on. Its farmers are generally either practicing or transitioning to agroecology (110). Also in Brazil, *Tupi-Guaraní* communities, with support from anarchists in *Cultive*

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Resistência, are recovering and restoring land that's been damaged by mining. They meet daily needs with their own harvests, including sweet potatoes, cassava, and fruit (116). *The Solutions Are Already Here* describes sizable urban farming and gardening projects

Compared to the ecocidal ruling class and its spurious opposition among the mainstream left, autonomous uprisings can be remarkably effective using a minimum of resources.

established by horizontally run communes, including the Canary Islands' *La Esperanza*, South Africa's *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, and Mississippi's Cooperation Jackson (134, 141, 144).

Like the radical ecological movement itself, the book's strongest suit regards blockades of extractive projects. Gelderloos interviews an anarchist involved in the Dayak tribes' struggles against oil palm plantations. Blocking roads and seizing heavy equipment, the Dayak have halted land clearing, at least for now, in the Lamandau Regency, on the island of Kalimantan (Borneo), Indonesia (91). When covering more well-known blockades, such as France's ZAD, Gelderloos criticizes how reformist elements defanged the movement shortly after it successfully stopped a planned airport (93-102).

Had it been a longer book, *Solutions* likely would have discussed other contemporary eco-societies, such as Sri Lanka's *Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement*, Mexico's Zapatistas, Syria's Democratic Confederalists, and Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, in addition to countless other localities maintaining Indigenous and traditional practices of sustainability. It also might have argued for the importance of global cooperation through bottom-up federations like *La Via Campesina*, Global Ecovillage Network, and the International Workers' Association.[2]

Gelderloos does not dwell much on the technological aspects of solutions, but the relatively low-tech future he envisions could easily be powered with small-scale renewables. He imagines decentralized production of wind turbines and tin-based perovskite solar cells, land transportation by electric-powered trains and buses, and ocean transportation by expropriated sailboats and yachts. His apparent support for bioenergy is less convincing (177, 188). Not only does all bioenergy emit toxins and carbon dioxide, but Gelderloos's proposed burning of agricultural residue is even dirtier than burning trees.[3] He also seems to support spreading biochar in fields, an understudied practice that risks emitting airborne particulate matter and negatively impacting plant growth.[4]

Gelderloos calls, in short, for "the networking of thousands of empowered territories" that can survive, outlast, and replace the dying capitalist system (199). However ambitious this sounds, it beats waiting for improbable salvation from CEOs and presidents.

From Nowhere to Everywhere

Then, there's *Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change and Pandemics,* by Troy Vettese and Drew Pendergrass, proposing a global production decrease alongside a participatory shift toward renewable energy and plant-based diets. Mitigating much stress on the Earth, this plan would enable a return to far safer levels of biodiversity and atmospheric carbon dioxide.

The authors envision these transformations being achieved by a "Half Earth socialist" coalition of environmentalists, Indigenous peoples, scientists, vegans, and feminists, among others. Getting these groups to work

smoothly together will require a degree of compromise, with Marxists abandoning their tradition's productivism, and vegans "temper[ing] their attacks on Indigenous hunting" (16), for instance. They're careful to repudiate conservation's colonialist legacy, and call for nature preserves to be "under Indigenous leadership wherever possible" (74). Their vision aligns much more with community-based versions of conservation than with the fortress-conservation model of human-free parks.

The term "Half-Earth," made famous by E.O. Wilson, refers to a proposal for turning half of the planet into protected areas. Vettese and Pendergrass trace the idea back to the journal *Wild Earth,* in the early 1990s, but I've encountered a 1977 proposal by Mulford Sibley that, "Approximately one half of the surface of the earth is reserved for wilderness areas."[5] Abolishing animal agriculture would, by itself, be sufficient to raise the world's protected areas from 15 percent of habitable land to over 50 percent (11, 77). Such a trajectory, Vetesse and Pendergrass explain, would have multiple benefits including protecting biodiversity, sequestering atmospheric carbon, and drastically reducing the rate of zoonotic illness. Although critics call Half Earth an overreach, I actually think that protecting 75 percent, the amount needed to cover every terrestrial plant species and to secure ocean populations, comes closer to what's needed.[6]

> If we horizontalists don't provide convincing theories of stateless planning, I worry that we'll lose ground to eco-Leninists.

Vettese and Pendergrass give a courageous critique of the anthropocentrism of their Marxist roots. They lament that Marx "mocked those who 'childishly wonder at the cuckoo laying eggs in another bird's nest," that Trotsky "hunted ducks," that Stalin "killed his pet parrot with his bare hands' (32-3). This is not even to mention Mao's famine-inducing campaign to exterminate the sparrow.7

Far from sharing Marx and Engels's hostility to utopian socialism, the authors identify as utopians in the tradition of William Morris, Otto Neurath, and Ursula Le Guin. They even name one of their chapters after Morris's 1890 utopian novel *News from Nowhere*. Following the best of this tradition, they are quite serious about the details of implementing communism on Earth, creating a world where utopia is everyplace rather than no-place.

In this vein, Vettese and Pendergrass devote many pages to the mechanics of economic planning. Half-Earth socialism, they explain, would fuse linear programming with cybernetics, building on Stafford Beer's viable systems model. They celebrate this model's emphasis on local participation and compare it favorably in contrast to "top-down authoritarian" forms of planning (119-120). Although Beer spearheaded Chile's short-lived Project Cybersyn under Salvador Allende's government, the principles can be applied in stateless contexts. There's no reason why the system's five components–implementation, coordination, self-organization, intelligence, and ethos–couldn't be achieved through entirely horizontal networks of assemblies, councils, and working groups.[8]

Question of the State

Appealing to Verso Books's mainly Marxist audience, Vettese and Pendergrass sometimes exhibit a strange infatuation with central planning, going so far as to speak nostalgically of the Soviet Union's Gosplan. I find these parts the least convincing, particularly in light of Gelderloos's devastating critique of the state.

As Gelderloos argues, states throughout history have demonstrated ecocidal patterns in order to maintain control over their populations. First, Gelderloos refers to James Scott's work on states imposing monocultural agriculture and forestry. Homogenous crops are easier to surveil and tax, and they keep populations relatively immobile. Second, he notes that states tend to impose dependence by seizing the commons from communities with the most stakes in and knowledge of local conditions. This often takes the form of deliberate environmental destruction, an act of "catching the fish by draining the pond," such as when the U.S. government exterminated bison to take away a food source for Great Plains peoples. Even land grabs in the name of conservation have an ecologically destructive effect in the longer term, since states are far worse caretakers than commons-based communities directly invested in protecting their surroundings (19-20, 28).

Self-proclaimed socialist states, too, have a highly ecocidal record. The Soviet Union, aside from allowing the world's worst nuclear power meltdown, plundered the countryside and implemented highly-polluting forms of industrialization. Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales encouraged extractivist policies detrimental to Indigenous peoples and ecosystems. China is the world's top carbon polluter.

Even Cuba's post-1988 ecological transition, praised by both books, should be credited to popular society rather than to Havana's government. During this period, Cubans rapidly started organic and urban gardens, replaced car commutes with biking, and returned about a third of farmland to wilderness (Vettese and Pendergrass, 83). It was the horizontally-structured *campesino-a-campesino* movement, not central planning, that spread sustainable agroecological techniques, boosting both per-hectare and per-hour yields.[9] Gelderloos reports that Cuba's transition "was decentralized in nature, and some who lived through that moment tell me the main thing the government did was to get out of the way and allow communities to self-organize" (135-6).

Still, as much as I share Gelderloos's belief in making ourselves ungovernable, I do think our movements could use considerable practice in *self*-governance. It's understandable that he rejects the desirability of a unified global plan (168), such as that of Vettese and Pendergrass, and considers heterogeneity and decentralization to be assets for movements. However, I can't help but feel he's understating the necessity for coordination and structure. While there's plenty of discussion of cooperatives and communes, there's little talk about how they'd confederate and achieve bioregional, continental, or even worldwide goals. It's worrying that Gelderloos doesn't seem to hold out hope for preventing a cataclysmic 2 degree Celsius temperature rise above pre-industrial levels (182), enough to lock in the "Hothouse Earth" trajectory leading to much higher temperatures.[10]

If we're going to prevent such scenarios, a great deal of bottom-up planning and cooperation will be required. Syndicalism and social ecology barely appear in the book, but these theories provide detailed alternatives to statecraft. If we horizontalists don't provide convincing theories of stateless planning, I worry that we'll lose ground to eco-Leninists.

Liberatory Pathways

Both books happen to end with fictional portrayals of a post-capitalist world a few decades in the future. Gelderloos's scenario is set in Catalan territories and Vettese and Pendergrass's in Massachusetts. There are some differences, with fictional Catalan areas retaining small-scale livestock husbandry and fictional Massachusetts maintaining elected representatives. But both scenarios could easily coexist in the same future. Both depict a world that's moved in the direction of what vegan-anarchists call "Total Liberation," meaning the full liberation of humans, animals, and the Earth.

Animal liberation is currently a hard sell for some leftists who aren't ready to give up meat. But it seems that empowering workers, so that no one is desperate enough to accept slaughterhouse work, would drastically reduce animal consumption globally and especially in the world's richer areas. The words of Upton Sinclair seem prophetic here: "eventually those who want to eat meat will have to do their own killing and how long do you think the custom would survive then?"[11] While Gelderloos does support a limited degree of non-commodified animal consumption, his proposals overall would move society in the same direction as Half-Earth Socialism's veganism. In Gelderloos's imagined future, "industrial meat production was shut down with all haste" (179). And he goes perhaps even further than Vettese and Pendergrass in rejecting Western ideas of "human superiority" and supporting such groups as the Animal Liberation Front (58).

It's interesting that my own proposal, the Total Liberation Pathway, reaches many of the same conclusions as these books, even though I drafted and submitted it well before I'd read either one. Relying on climate models and scientific literature, I found that an eco-anarchistic world could meet everyone's vital needs while allowing 82 percent of the Earth's habitable land to be rewilded.[12] Vettese and Pendergrass reach the strikingly similar conclusion that in an ecosocialist society with fully-renewable power sources, "a whopping 81 percent of land can be left to nature (thus preserving 95 percent of all species according to [E.O.] Wilson's formula)" (110). I found that population growth doesn't significantly impede ecological goals, increasing global land use by only a couple percentage points. Likewise, Vettese and Pendergrass conclude, "That Half-Earth socialism could provide a good life for our abundant species and still protect the environment makes clear that the Malthusian fear of 'overpopulation' is dangerously exaggerated" (108). I also estimated that the work week could be substantially reduced, to the point where needs could be met without work being compulsory. Likewise, Gelderloos envisions a relatively low-tech future in which production is turned into voluntary craft. In his scenario, factories run only a couple days a week, there's far less transport of food, electric usage is a quarter of today's, and global shipping has decreased to just 2 percent of prior levels (174-189).

If activists widely read and discussed both books, they'd develop sharper visions and strategies for ecological revolution.

I'm excited to play the free computer game that will soon be released on the Half-Earth Socialism website.[13] I found when designing the Total Liberation Pathway that playing around with climate models, despite their limits, can be a fun endeavor in addition to being a useful component of envisioning a sustainable future. This task is far too important to be left only to the scientists and policymakers. Even more important, though, is researching and supporting the myriad groups Gelderloos discusses. It's admirable that he has decided to donate all author proceeds to Indigenous struggles in Indonesia and Brazil.

Both books, coming from different political origins, envision a world that's moved considerably closer to sustainability. If activists widely read and discussed both books, they'd develop sharper visions and strategies for ecological revolution. This development would provide a rare bit of good news regarding the prospects for the future of humanity and the Earth.

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Comic Books as Propaganda

HANK KENNEDY

PULP EMPIRE: A Secret History of Comic Book Imperialism by Paul S. Hirsch is a unique contribution to the sadly underappreciated field of comics studies. Comics are a singular art form in themselves and have had a profound cultural impact as well as providing the basis for countless successful television and film adaptations. Hirsch's analysis is a welcome one, although the book can be divided into two distinct contributions. The author is strongest when he deals with the government's direct attempts to influence public opinion through comics either through the Writers' War Board (WWB) of World War II or the creation of propaganda comics during the early Cold War. However, the book finds itself on shakier ground when it comes to more well-known aspects of comic history.

Pulp Empire: A Secret History of Comic Book Imperialism
PAUL S. HIRSCH
University of Chicago Press, 2021. 344 pages

First, the story of the Writers' War Board and its attempts to use comics to foster support for World War II is a corrective to the idea that all anti-fascist comic stories sprung from truly felt patriotic expression on the part of the comics' creators. While characters like Captain America certainly did spring from the deep feelings of their creators, the government also had a hand in shaping later stories and narratives. Ominously, to fight fascism the Board promoted racial and ethnic hatred of both the Japanese and Germans. Writers were specifically told not to include "good" Germans or Japanese. Instead, all were depicted as supporters of fascism. Hirsch depicts an interesting dichotomy in that the WWB also wanted racially tolerant depictions of Black Americans, which led to unprecedented heroic appearances of Black soldiers and aviators, even if they played a secondary role to white characters.

There is an irony when the propaganda comics of the early Cold War are discussed. The CIA circulated a comic in Guatemala giving instructions on how to assassinate politicians—it is a comic book that is an instruction manual for how to commit a crime. This comic book enterprise was a method of destabilizing the country in advance of CIA Operation PBSUCCESS, which brought down the left-leaning Arbenz government and replaced him with a ruler more amicable to American business interests. At this same point in history, police unions, churches, and politicians in the United States were pointing to American crime titles like *Crime Does Not Pay* as guiding readers to become criminals. These groups should have blamed Langley rather than comic-book publisher Lev Gleason.

There is another historical irony in the government's use of Commercial Press for Cold War propaganda. Commercial first achieved fame for a comic issued to boost Harry Truman's 1948 re-election campaign.

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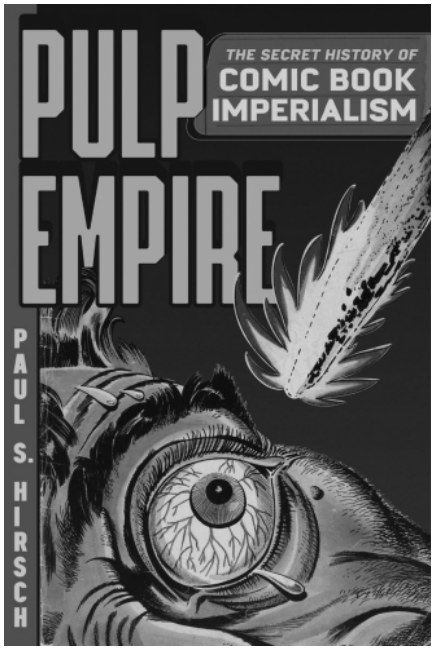
Later the company was engaged to help several segregationist Dixiecrats. At the same time that Commercial was helping defend racial segregation at home, the State Department engaged the company to win anti-Communist support in nonwhite countries like Korea and Vietnam with its title *The Free World Speaks.*

The most serious of Hirch's missteps when it comes to the history of comics occurs with the treatment of psychiatrist Dr. Frederic Wertham. Wertham is a well-known pop cultural boogeyman for his anti-comics advocacy in the fifties, both in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* and in Senate testimony. I have entered comic book stores that have large posters dedicated to Wertham and the damage he did to the industry. Hirsch recasts Wertham as a more noble character, stressing his dedication to progressive causes like integration as well as his opposition to the racist caricatures of Black people and other nonwhite racial groups that often appeared in comics. But while Wertham was against racial prejudice he had no problem in engaging in homophobic prejudice to smear the comics. He infamously cited Batman and Robin as "a wish dream of two homosexuals living together." Second, when Wertham testified before the Senate he cited the EC Comics story "The Whipping" as an example of racism in comics. In actuality, "The Whipping" carried an anti-racist message which Wertham either misread or ignored to make his point that all comics were harmful. In fact, many EC stories carried progressive messages and the company even got a recommendation from the Black newspaper *The Chicago Defender* for "Judgment Day," a science-fiction allegory decrying segregation.

The treatment of Marvel Comics near the end of the book paints the company's stories with too broad a brush as supporting the establishment. While it is true that Iron Man was born out of the war against Communism in Vietnam and several Marvel characters fought Communist opponents



throughout the sixties, two of the company's most popular characters stood well outside the establishment. Spider-Man faced opposition from both the press, who considered him a super-powered menace, and the police, who regularly accused him of the crimes he attempted to prevent. Likewise, the Hulk regularly clashed with the army both as the Hulk and in his civilian identity, Bruce Banner, who the hawkish soldiers consider to be a milquetoast egghead. It is no coincidence that these two characters were cited as favorites by student radicals in a 1965 Esquire poll that ranked Spider-Man and the Hulk alongside Bob Dylan and Che Guevara.

Hirsch deserves praise for this exploration of comics history and cultural studies. All comic book fans and anyone interested in Cold War history should read this book. But keep in mind that the author sometimes uses a sledgehammer when a scalpel would have served him better.

Against the Law

RAVI MALHOTRA

THE PERILS AND POSSIBILITIES OF LAW as a tool for social transformation have been debated by legal scholars and advocates for social justice for many years. Entire forests have been consumed to print the debates amongst proponents of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and their interlocutors. Into the fray comes David Renton's new book, *Against the Law: Why Justice Requires Fewer Laws and a Smaller State*.

Review of Against the Law: Why Justice Requires Fewer Laws and a Smaller State
DAVID RENTON
London: Repeater Books, 2022. 260 pp., £10.99.

A British political activist and barrister, Renton is the author of many political books, including biographies of Trotsky and C.L.R. James. He is also no stranger to grassroots movement organizing. These biographical facts situate Renton's skeptical position and explain his passion for change from below. As disclosed in the brash title, the argument of Renton's book is that political activists should not rely on legal advocacy, be it public interest litigation or the advocacy of new legislation, as the central focus of their work. It also serves as a radical history of contemporary British politics in the last few decades.

The book consists of three parts of equal length, plus an introduction and conclusion. Focused overwhelmingly on the British state and legal system, the book begins with a discussion of the relationship between neoliberalism and the massive expansion of laws and regulations that has occurred in recent years. A second part details his analysis of populism. The final section is devoted to his program of *dejuridification* or moving away from the use of law. Throughout, Renton adopts a breezy style that is more popular than academic, making it more understandable to the non-specialist reader.

Renton begins by arguing that the expansion of laws and regulations undermines the potential of liberating social movements in several ways. First, laws may be used to repress social movements such as labor organizing. Renton documents how the rise of neoliberalism was accompanied by the implementation of laws that made it more difficult for workers to strike, such as requiring a mandatory strike vote. He capably recounts the role of intellectuals like Hayek and Friedman in helping change public discourse to center the values of the market. Second, instead of focusing on political organizing, an engagement with law channels working-class grievances into a long, drawn-out grievance process before an administrative tribunal, which is highly bureaucratic. I would add that it requires flattening the rich lived experience of workers into technical legal language that is alien to workers and often also fails to fully capture the complexity of their complaints. Third, there has been a growing emphasis on indi-

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vidual rather than collective rights. Renton usefully traces this history, noting how it fits the values of neoliberalism. The growth of law related to civil liberties may be contrasted with the failure to expand socio-economic rights. While Renton mostly confines himself to British examples, one can readily identify this trend in many Western democracies. For instance, the willingness to expand the right to assisted suicide in a growing number of countries but not the social benefits and attendant services required for people with disabilities to lead full lives is a prime example.

The second chapter highlights two examples that indicate the problems with relying on the use of law to promote social transformation: rent control law and employment law. Renton is at his best when he documents how neoliberal reforms, such as savage cuts to legal aid programs in Britain, undermined the ability of tenants to enforce their rights. Despite the articulation of a right for the middle class to purchase their own homes, the reality on the ground was one of adversity for tenants who could no longer recover money damages through the legal aid process in most circumstances. These technical changes have a dramatic impact on working-class lives and are often invisible because the right remains intact but in practice cannot be enforced. Similarly, Renton documents how the rise of disputes at Employment Tribunals, often with exorbitant fees for making claims of discrimination, accompanied a sharp decline in strikes as workplace grievances were directed into legal channels. Karl Klare famously analyzed how judicial interpretations of the Wagner Act deradicalized workers struggles in Depression Era America and Renton's commentary illustrates this process in play in Britain. While these issues are prevalent throughout Western democracies, Renton occasionally highlights particular measures that seem rooted in specifically British problems. The failure of the British government to not address what Americans refer to as intersectional discrimination, for instance, has not been matched in, for example, Canadian human rights law which at least accepts the doctrine, whatever the flaws of the underfunded Canadian system may be.

The third chapter highlights problems relating to big data and the adoption of online courts. Renton correctly identifies the dangers of privacy violations when large corporations have access to personal data. He provides examples of how a construction industry body, the Consulting Association, often provided employers inaccurate information on construction workers and their propensity to engage in strike activity in exchange for fees. Surveillance capitalism needs to be reigned in and Renton's hard hitting approach is insightful and informative. Nevertheless, I think that at times the presentation is too one-sided. Technology also has the potential to make courts more accessible to people with disabilities and those who must travel long distances.

Renton then provides an illustration of right-wing dejuridification through an account of the Brexit process in Britain. He shows how conservative parties and organizations articulated populist anger against distant bureaucracies in Belgium that were overregulating a beleaguered populace to lobby for change. He offers a detailed analysis of a legal challenge to the British government's decision to trigger the departure of Britain from the European Union without a Parliamentary vote. Yet the British government's focus on curbing immigration detention appeals and environmental regulations suggests a selective approach designed to strengthen the executive branch, undermining democracy. Weaving into this analysis are short accounts of Max Weber and Carl Schmitt. While this selective treatment only scratches the surface of the many scholars (for instance, famously Harvard Law professor Duncan Kennedy) who have engaged in issues relating to the limitations of law as a tool for social transformation, Renton's style is always crisp and accessible. Renton rejects a conservative vision

of populism and instead advocates a left-wing program of dejuridification.

Against Law or Strategic Litigation?

The final section of the book provides an account of Marx's critique of the ideology of law and outlines the limitations of environmental law to address climate change. Renton identifies law's role as mediating inherently antagonistic class interests in the state. While interesting, the discussion of Marx, like Renton's occasional references to international law, seems out of place in the book and too brief to make a substantive contribution. With respect to environmental law, Renton is undoubtedly on strong ground as bad actors often delay enforcement while pollution and the extinction of threatened animal and plant species continue unabated. In crafting his own vision, Renton suggests that advocates focus on building mass movements rather than on strategic litigation. There is certainly much truth to this perspective. At the same time, cause lawyering in the United States and Canada has resulted in tangible victories on the ground in many areas. Recent class action litigation in Ottawa, Canada, against far-right trucker protestors, for instance, has succeeded when police abandoned the community to anti-vaccine mandate extremists. Socialists should keep an open mind and consider when cause lawyering may effectively assist and not hinder grassroots activism. In arguing for a simplification of the law, Renton's analysis rings true. A universal set of rights accorded to all workers, full-time and part-time, unionized or not, would go a long way toward building solidarity. Packing an abundance of information in a short volume, Renton has written an original and insightful book.

White Torture

FRIEDA AFARY

NARGES MOHAMMADI IS AN IRANIAN feminist human rights activist and vice president of the Defenders of Human Rights Center headed by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. She is currently imprisoned and has been imprisoned several times since 2000 for her activities in defense of women's rights, human rights, and children's rights and her opposition to the death penalty.

White Torture: Dialogues with Twelve Women Political Prisoners
NARGES MOHAMMADI
Sweden: Baran Press, 2020

The collection under review consists of a moving account of her prison experiences as well as her interviews with 12 other women political prisoners in Iran. It was published in 2020 while she was in prison. Since then, she has published a second volume as well. This review will focus on the first volume only.

Iran has an official prison population of 189,000 of which hundreds are political

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prisoners, who have protested poverty, discrimination, militarism, and authoritarianism. Many are members of oppressed national and religious minorities such as Kurds, Arabs, and Baha'is. Iran has the world's highest rate of executions after China.

In October 2020, after contracting COVID-19, following eight and a half years in prison, Mohammadi was released, only to be re-incarcerated this past November for speaking out against the death penalty, and in solidarity with those killed by the state during and after the 2019 popular uprising. Prior to her latest arrest and imprisonment, she had also organized a women's picket line against Taliban misogyny outside the Afghan consulate in Tehran. She is currently serving a sentence of thirty months and eighty lashes on charges of "endangering national security."

The title of her book, *White Torture,* refers to the torture that solitary confinement inflicts on prisoners. Both Mohammadi's account of her own imprisonment and her interviews with other women political prisoners, powerfully demonstrate the long-lasting physical and psychological effects of solitary confinement and the ways in which women prisoners have sought to resist this form of torture.

Mohammadi writes that solitary confinement

> is not just a place and a physical-geographical location but the application of various precise mental, psychological, and human factors which give a particular meaning to the cell and guarantee its [harmful] effects. For instance the lifeless and brusque voice of the prison guard, the presence of dead roaches on the dusty tile floors, dirty and opaque curtains, eye masks for the prisoners, oversized slippers, uncovered feet, oversized and low quality clothing, small outlets called windows covered by perforated metal sheets, sitting and facing the wall for lengthy periods of time during interrogations, not facing humans face to face, hearing loud and violent noises whose distance it is difficult to surmise, seeing the indifference of doctors to the prisoners' physical conditions, the loud banging voice of closing cell doors, having to wear an eye mask even inside the control unit and in the hallway on the way to the bathroom. . . .

Mohammadi and the women prisoners she interviews also describe other forms of torture, such as being subjected to questions about their sex lives, being falsely told that a loved one is ill or has been arrested or has died, being given addictive sedatives and unknown drugs, being forced to wait for hours to have access to a toilet, suffering intense cold in Winter and intense heat in Summer, not getting out for fresh air or seeing the sun for long periods of time, thereby losing a sense of time and place, and being denied all sorts of basic necessities.

Under these circumstances, prisoners become completely dependent on their interrogators for any improvements. Some prisoners are forced to "confess" on camera to fabricated charges in scenes set up to give the impression that they have been living in comfort in prison and eating elaborate meals.

Mahvash Shahriari, a teacher and leader of the persecuted Baha'i religious minority, was imprisoned from 2007 to 2017 for helping to organize an institute of higher education for discriminated-against Baha'i youth. She describes the particular harm of solitary confinement, which "disables our senses and takes away our mental balance." Nevertheless, Shahriari has "contradictory feelings" about prison, which on the one hand, caused a "sense of loneliness and separation" from family, but also offered "the joy of finding valuable friends in prison and gaining unique experiences which could not have been possible without all this pain."

Hengameh Shahidi, a women's rights activist imprisoned for her participation in the reformist Green Movement, addresses the sexual harassment and violence that women experience at the hands of their interrogators

and the ways in which prison cameras, especially in bathrooms and showers, are a form of psychological torture.

Shahidi says that access to books saved her from losing her mental balance and gave her something to look forward to. But most of the political prisoners interviewed by Mohammadi experienced prolonged periods of solitary confinement without access to any books or newspapers. Fatemeh Mohammadi, imprisoned for having converted to Christianity, relates how in solitary confinement and without access to any reading materials "one felt that time was not moving forward." Sadigheh Moradi and others note that poetry etched on walls by former prisoners was their only reading material.

Mohammadi and most of the women she interviewed share another experience. They are mothers who have been painfully separated from their children and often denied even phone calls or visits with them. Sadigheh Moradi wonders why her eight-year-old daughter could not lift her head to face her during their first visit. Later, her daughter told her that she was trying to hide her tears from her. Mohammadi herself was arrested when her toddler daughter had just had surgery and cried out for her mother not to leave her. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, an Iranian-British reporter for Reuters who was visiting her mother in 2016 and arrested with her infant daughter at the Iranian airport, was separated from her child who had to be cared for by her parents. She was released last year after six years of imprisonment but faced new fabricated charges and was not allowed to leave the country, until she was finally released in March 2022 after the British government made a deal with Iranian authorities.

Two Sufi women activists imprisoned for their religious beliefs speak about the unbearable conditions of the notorious Gharchak women's prison on the outskirts of Tehran, where the drinking water is salty and filthy and the stench of raw sewage is constant.

Such are the conditions of Iranian women prisoners. Mohammadi's powerful book, however, shows not only the daily torture and the repression but also the resistance and the contemplation.

Although Iran and the United States are different in many ways, the issues of mass incarceration, solitary confinement, and the mental, physical, and sexual abuse of prisoners are common in both countries. We need solidarity between women prisoners and abolitionists in the United States and those in Iran.

Michael Murray Hirsch

June 29, 1945 – December 16, 2021

Mark Hirsch

Michael Hirsch, a veteran labor activist, journalist, raconteur, and devotee of Karl and Groucho Marx, passed away on December 16, 2021, after a valiant multi-year struggle against cancer, myasthenia gravis, and other medical issues. He fought the good fight 'til he could fight no more.

Michael was born on Manhattan's Lower East Side, the son of Joseph Hirsch, a ship's carpenter and long-time member of the National Maritime Union, and Belle Patel Hirsch, a former member of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. As a child, Michael played in his maternal grandfather's shoe repair shop on Broome Street, using a small hammer to drive tiny nails into hunks of scrap leather. His lifelong commitment to social justice may well have taken root there. As the 19th century abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson observed, "radicalism went with the smell of leather."

When Michael was eight, the family moved to Washington Heights, a few miles, but a world away, from the Lower East Side. He attended P.S. 187 and graduated from George Washington High School, in 1963. By that time, Michael stood well over six feet

tall, towered over his parents, and cut a dashing figure in khaki pants, penny loafers, and white socks! He was a serious "hoops player," with a great head-fake and killer jump shot. Alas, posting-up was not his strong suit.

Michael began to gravitate toward social and political activism in high school – passions that would sustain him for the rest of his life. Over the years, he was involved in numerous protest movements and organizations, including the early Students for a Democratic Society, the antiwar movement of the 1960s and '70s, the International Socialists, Ed Sadlowski's campaign for leadership of the United Steelworkers of America, the Democratic Socialists of America, the Left Labor Project, and New Jewish Agenda.

A talented wordsmith, Michael was a staff writer for the United Federation of Teachers, a freelance writer for *The Indy-*

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pendent, a contributor to *The Village Voice*, *Democratic Left*, *Labor Notes*, and *New Labor Forum*, and a cultural moderator for Portside. He was a longtime editorial board member of *New Politics* and *Radical America*.

Michael's devotion to political activism was mated to an enduring commitment to the life of the mind. After earning a B.A. from Long Island University, in 1967, he received an M.A. from the New School for Social Research, pursued graduate studies in sociology at the University of Chicago, and completed an M.A. in journalism from New York University. A voracious reader, he acquired a formidable and wide-ranging collection of books that occupied pretty much every surface in the family's Manhattan apartment.

Michael loved the music of John Prine, Sandi Denny, John Coltrane, Johnnie Hartmann, the Grateful Dead, and the Rolling Stones. When he first heard The Doors in 1967, he was floored, asserting that "they were better than the Beatles." But left politics was his mainstay, the center of his intellectual universe. He loved to regale friends and family with stories of sectarian squabbles and factional infighting, and he thought long and hard about the problems and prospects of empowering America's working people.

Alternately charming and exasperating, funny and disputatious, Michael was a big man with a big personality who largely charted his own course and had only two main regrets in his life: That he never finished his Ph.D. and that he passed up the opportunity to see John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman in concert!

Goodbye, Big Red Mike

Memories of Michael Hirsch

Jason Schulman

Michael Hirsch was my best friend. I lost him on December 16, 2021, almost a year after I'd lost another socialist mentor, Leo Panitch. It was a punch to the gut, and I still feel it.

Mike and I first met in 2000 at the Socialist Scholars Conference (precursor to the Left Forum) in New York. At the time I was fairly new to the left, and New York City, and the NYC left. Mike was one of the first people I'd ever met in person with a long labor background who'd been both a rank-and-file dissident (in the United Steelworkers) and a staff member (as a writer for the United Federation of Teachers newspaper). We got along quite well. I was already *a New Politics* (NP) subscriber and he encouraged me to write for the journal. I did. By 2004 he invited me onto the editorial board. I joined. I remained there for the next 16 years.

I can't claim that NP editorial meetings were always a blast — such isn't true, I'm sure, for any publication — but I'm glad I stayed on

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as long as I did and I'm proud of my NP work. For my part, I asked Mike to join Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which he did, after many years of being an unaffiliated socialist (he'd left the International Socialists in the 1980s). Mainly, I wanted Mike by my side in disputes within DSA, as 95 percent of the time we weren't just on the same page, but finishing each other's sentences. Broadly speaking, we both identified with the tradition represented most eloquently in print by the writings of Hal Draper, though some in the NP milieu thought we'd drifted too far into "social democratic" territory. On the other hand, some in DSA thought we were both too rigidly or orthodoxly Marxist. (You can't please everyone…)

Mike somehow ended up in DSA national leadership for a while right after I'd "retired" from it. I'm glad he continued to play an active role in NYC DSA for as long as he could, in both the Labor branch and the Lower Manhattan branch, where he engaged in excellent political education work. He also became a moderator for the Internet-based news service *Portside*, where he worked with people whose political histories were in the Communist Party USA or the 1970s New Communist Movement, whose political views significantly differed from his own, and yet he generally managed to keep his cool — or so I gather.

Mike was a great writer. I learned a lot from him, both politically and in terms of his writing style, which I've subconsciously imitated for years. (Example: He said of the late economist John Kenneth Galbraith that he "was a decent man who titillated Cambridge's sherry-drinking set by calling himself a socialist. But the closest he ever came to understanding working-class self-activity was watching his plumber snake a drain.") I was very happy when he agreed to write a chapter for my book *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Legacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). It's my favorite chapter. A typical passage:

"Marxism is not a divining rod or a Ouija board. Projecting possible futures is what makes for horseracing, not science. Still, I'll bet on the prole horses. And why not? Pascal's wager on the existence of a god is based on a cost-benefit analysis. Why not the same wager by capitalism's critics?"

I always enjoyed Mike's demonstrations of his vast knowledge of NYC history — at times it seemed like he knew the lineage of every building. He was also a comics fan dating back to the 1960s, of both superhero comics and underground/art comics, so that was another bond for us, as was our common heritage as secular Jews — something hardly uncommon on the NYC left. There was likewise a large overlap in our musical tastes, and I have fond memories of going with him to see Richard Thompson and Sonny Rollins. I never let him live down the fact that he'd had the chance to see John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, *and* the Velvet Underground, and he blew all of those chances! A shame! A *shanda*!

Despite his admittedly deserved reputation for being cantankerous, if you got to know him it was clear that Mike was a warm, generous guy. Given the sectarian "edge" that still permeates so much of the far left, I wish we had more socialists like him. Put simply, the left would be a much better place if there were more militant, radically democratic intellectuals and class fighters like Michael Hirsch.

I miss him intensely and always will.

Shireen Abu Akleh, *Palestinian-American journalist covering the Mideast conflict for more than 25 years. Abu Akleh was the voice of Palestinian suffering, a household name across the Arab world. She was shot dead by an Israeli military raid in the West Bank while standing with a group of reporters, wearing a press jacket.*

"I'll never forget the amount of destruction or the feeling that death was so close to us. We would barely see our homes, we would carry our cameras and move across the military checkpoints and uneven roads. We would spend our nights in hospitals or with people we did not know and despite the dangers, we were adamant to continue our work. That was in the year 2002 when the West Bank witnessed an invasion not witnessed since the occupation in 1967.

In the difficult moments I overcame my fear because I chose journalism to be close to people. Maybe it's not easy for me to change reality, but I was at least able to bring their voice to the world. I am Shireen Abu Akleh."

Shireen Abu Akleh's *murder was one of a growing number around the world, including three in Mexico and one in Chile. "Reporters working on the ground are our best hope for accurate information about the world around us. Their work is a lifeline in a climate of disinformation."*

— Dawn Marie Paley, journalist based in Mexico

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