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a journal of socialist thought

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From the Editors

THE INAUGURATION OF DONALD TRUMP as the president of the United States opens what we fear will be one of the darkest and most dangerous periods in American history since the founding of this journal in 1961. As many have already commented, Trump's cabinet of right-wing Republicans, billionaires and bankers, and generals resembles a military junta more than it does a civilian government. We face an administration that will be more repressive; that will attack labor and reproductive rights, social welfare programs, and immigrants; and that threatens to lay waste to the environment. We join in solidarity with many others on the left, in the labor and social movements, and in our society at large in pledging to resist Trump, the Republican Party, and the reactionary, racist, sexist, and homophobic forces that they have conjured up. We support the sanctuary cities and campuses, the many Muslim, black, and Latino organizations, the women's and LGBT groups, and all the many others who have pledged to resist Trump.

Going to press so soon after the election, we can only offer some preliminary comments in this issue. Several of our editorial board members provide their analysis of the new political situation and define their position at greater length in a position statement that follows, while editorial board member Barry Fingers adds some further analysis. We of course expect to take up the meaning and the response to Trump

in much more detail in issues to come.

While we are planning our resistance to the Trump presidency, it happens that this year is the one hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, one of the landmarks of the socialist movement. Thomas Harrison provides an overview in his article "Glorious Harbinger of a New Society': The Bolshevik Revolution," while Dan La Botz contributes "This Changed Everything—Twice: Russia, Revolution, and Counter-Revolution." Saeed Rahnema offers an assessment of V.I. Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* a century later, and Stephen R. Shalom critically examines some current left thinking on Russia. In addition, two of our book reviews deal with the Russian Revolution. Herman Benson considers the debates of the 1930s about the nature of the Soviet state and Dan La Botz looks at Samir Amin's campist anti-imperialism.

In this issue we also feature a number of other journalistic and analytical articles. Katarzyna Bielińska-Kowalewska writes about the major social movement in Poland to protect abortion rights. Marisela Trevin and Juan Cruz Ferre discuss the emergence of a revolutionary left in Argentina, and Stefanie Prezioso provides us with an interpretation of the Italian referendum that led to the downfall of Matteo Renzi.

Closer to home, Nancy Romer provides reportage on an important contemporary movement in her "Solidarity Report from Standing

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Rock.” Peter Kolozi and James Freeman discuss the continuing significance of what they call Martin Luther King’s most radical book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*. Martin Oppenheimer takes us back in American radical history to look at the “Rise and Fall of the Muckrakers.” And Bryant William Sculos replies to an article by Michael Thompson on the rise of the servant society.

The issue also offers a review by Aaron Amaral, “Reflections on Opportunity Lost: Greece and the Syriza Experience,” and Kyle Stanton’s review of Jeff Halper’s book on *Israel, the Palestinians, and Global Pacification*. And as always, we have our “Words and Pictures,” this time featuring an excerpt from Seth Tobocman’s

graphic book about Leonard Weinglass.

With Trump and his gang in power, the worst American government since Warren Harding, we need *New Politics: A Journal of Socialist Thought* more than ever. We thank all of you who responded to our recent fund-raising appeal for making it possible for us to continue to bring you an analysis of American and world politics from our standpoint: socialism from below. You stand there. And we stand with you. Now more than ever.

SAULO COLÓN
NANCY HOLMSTROM
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Trump Takes Office, Resistance Takes to the Streets

SAULO COLÓN, BARRY FINGER, THOMAS HARRISON, MICHAEL HIRSCH,
NANCY HOLMSTROM, DAN LA BOTZ, JOANNE LANDY, AND JASON SCHULMAN

DONALD TRUMP TAKES OFFICE on January 20, setting up the most right-wing, racist government in modern American history, but he will not go unchallenged. That challenge is already in motion. Within days of the election, hundreds of thousands took to the streets nationwide, and governments in dozens of cities, including Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Washington DC, pledged to continue offering sanctuary to immigrants—key targets for the right. Trump's cabinet choices and the reaction to them suggest that we are in for four years of tumultuous political and social battles. We do not shrink from these battles.

We are also sobered by the prospects.

With Trump in the White House and in position to stack the Supreme Court with a renewed reactionary majority, and with the hard-right Republican Party dominating both houses of Congress, along with state affiliates holding the whip hand for 30 governorships and 27 state legislatures, the right will be more formidable than at any time since the Gilded Age.

Immigrants, Blacks, and Latinos know that they will be targets of the new administration, and a large part of the population has ample reason to fear this menace to American democratic rights. There is a widespread foreboding,

even among many Republicans, that this new political configuration could jeopardize the international economy, wreak havoc on the global political situation, and escalate climate change and hence the destruction of the global environment.

A Staff and Cabinet from Hell

Trump's victory brings a group of far-right politicians into the White House and puts actual fascists just a step away. His selection of Stephen K. Bannon, the maximum if camera-averse leader of the "alt-right" movement and, until he joined the Trump campaign, boss of the toxic media venue *Breitbart News*, to be his chief strategist/*consigliere* is a frightening augury that puts a white nationalist notorious for his Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-feminism a few steps from the Oval Office.

Trump's first cabinet appointment was also a signal of malign things to come when he named the notorious racist Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions as attorney general. This is the same Sessions that Ronald Reagan nominated in 1986 to a federal judgeship. Sessions' white-supremacist views were so evident that even Senate Republicans joined in voting down his nomination.

Today even conservative Republicans are worried by Trump's choices. John Weaver, an advisor to conservative leaders Senator John McCain of Arizona and Governor John Kasich of Ohio, told the media, "The racist, fascist extreme right is represented footsteps from the Oval Office. Be very vigilant, America."

SAULO COLÓN, BARRY FINGER, THOMAS HARRISON, MICHAEL HIRSCH, NANCY HOLMSTROM, DAN LA BOTZ, JOANNE LANDY, and JASON SCHULMAN are on the editorial board of *New Politics*.

A White Nationalist Program

Trump, who ran on a nationalist economic platform and a nativist, racist social program, has listed his grim goals for his first hundred days. Among his pre-election pledges:

- Immediately deporting two to three million undocumented immigrants and erecting a wall between the United States and Mexico, allegedly at Mexico's expense.
- Suspending immigration from regions where terrorist groups are based, which means slamming the door on Middle Eastern and Muslim people, including people fleeing war zones.
- Further militarizing the country's police and building more privately owned prisons, measures that will fall heaviest on African American and Latino communities, whose members are disproportionately arrested, convicted, and imprisoned.
- Nominating at least one new conservative justice for the U.S. Supreme Court, creating a right-wing majority that could end the federal right to abortion.
- Slashing already low taxes for corporations and wealthy individuals.
- Ending environmental restrictions on coal, gas, and oil companies and curtailing other anti-climate-change programs, as well as allowing the Keystone Pipeline XL to go ahead.
- Labeling China, the United States' second-largest trading partner and holder of more than a trillion dollars in U.S. debt, as a currency manipulator.
- Initiating a trillion-dollar 10-year program to build what will be privately operated infrastructure such as highways, bridges, and tunnels, while providing no targeted spending on mass transit.
- Abolishing the intrinsically inadequate Affordable Care Act, Obama's federally coordinated private health care plan, and replacing it with a new and undoubtedly inferior competitive private health care plan.

Then there are Trump's foreign policy plans:

- Placing the United States on a permanent war footing by making the fight not only against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but also supposed new and threatening targets worldwide as well as domestically.
- Legitimizing and abetting Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's territorial encroachments and foreign interventions under the guise of improving U.S.-Russian relations. (Only a new, democratic, and non-imperialist foreign policy—which is not on offer by either party—could politically challenge Russia's own imperialism.)
- Massively renovating and strengthening the United States' offensive military capabilities at the expense of domestic programs.

Obama Offers an Olive Branch but Protest Erupts in the Streets

President Barack Obama, to the disappointment of many and the surprise of just a few, has urged Americans to give Trump a chance. But hundreds of thousands in cities across the country are refusing to do so and have come out chanting, "Not My President!" Hillary Clinton's supporters, backers of Bernie Sanders, and political independents; high school and college students, immigrants, and Black Americans are joining this inchoate if promising protest movement. In many of the demonstrations marchers carried signs against racism, Islamophobia, and misogyny. Women and LGBT people have been in the forefront of many protests. We believe resistance will continue to grow.

Take for example Sanctuary Cities, where mayors nationwide promise to continue the practice of offering sanctuary to immigrants while declining to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

To his credit, Democratic New York Mayor Bill de Blasio pledged, "We are not going to sacrifice a half million people who live among us, who are part of our community. We are not going to tear families apart."

Even the former Obama chief of staff cum leg-breaker and current Chicago Mayor Rahm

Emanuel, notorious for waging war against public-sector unions and dubbed by the Chicago Teachers Union and others as “Mayor 1%,” said, “To all those who are, after Tuesday’s election, very nervous and filled with anxiety, you are safe in Chicago, you are secure in Chicago, and you are supported in Chicago. Chicago will always be a sanctuary city.” During his campaign Trump warned that if he were president, “Cities that refuse to cooperate with federal authorities will not receive taxpayer dollars,” promising a political battle in one more arena. Students and professors are also pressing colleges and universities to adopt sanctuary policies.

Several important Democratic Party leaders have sworn to resist Trump, among them Harry Reid, the party’s outgoing Senate minority leader, liberal icon Senator Elizabeth Warren, and, of course, Bernie Sanders, who ran for the Democratic Party presidential nomination as a “democratic socialist” calling for a “political revolution.”

Warren told the media, “You can either lie down, you can whimper, you can curl up in a ball, you can decide to move to Canada, or you can stand your ground and fight back, and that’s what it’s about.”

Yes, the Democrats can be expected to oppose certain noxious Trump-inspired legislation and executive orders, but they are unlikely to lead a militant fight against Trump unless heavily forced. After all, they have mostly aided and abetted, rather than resisted, the Republicans, having gradually adopted conservative shibboleths for some 40 years as they came to share the same neoliberal ideology and commitment to austerity. President Bill Clinton was responsible for—and Hillary Clinton supported—some of the worst legislation on social welfare and on crime and justice, policies that fell hardest on Black and Latino communities, while doing precious little for displaced workers in Rust Belt areas and elsewhere.

No wonder, then, that Hillary Clinton lost an election to a clown princeling and notorious

real estate grifter. In debates, she barely echoed her own party platform, which, as strong as it was in some parts—on paper at least—served mainly as a sop to supporters of Bernie Sanders, who many believed caved too soon and for too little. Once installed as the party nominee, Clinton gave no hope to voters that she could really do much except save them from the looming Trump. She was the plodding Brand X candidate and champion of the status quo, while he posed as the rallying campaigner for social and economic change. Not enough voters recognized that Trump’s brand of change, combining nativism, sexism, a drunken warrior sensibility, and a pro-business bias, would come at their expense. It’s small comfort to know that Clinton won the popular vote and outperformed President Obama’s 2012 results in four states, one of which was Texas; it was in the swing states that decided the election that Clinton did significantly worse than Obama.

Going Forward, Not Backward

Resistance is not only about defending minorities who are being targeted. That’s absolutely essential and urgent. But peeling working-class whites away from Trump also requires offering a radical economic program that addresses their absolutely legitimate grievances and insecurities; for example, not a measly \$15 minimum wage, but a federal guarantee of a job at a “middle-class” wage. It means raising the issues of a mandatory guaranteed income, job training on demand, Social Security that is offered at an earlier age and is fully converted into a national pension plan, paid family leave, and high-quality day care for the children of working parents. It means guaranteeing that workers will not suffer job losses or economic insecurity because of trade agreements. Such a radical economic program is precisely what the corporate-dominated Democratic Party will never accept. And that’s why a strategy of trying to win sections of the white working class away from Trumpism by relying on the Democrats will fail.

While the broad left tends to look toward reforming the Democratic Party, particularly through elections at local and state levels, we warn that neoliberal Democrats cannot be trusted, except to fail in leading sustained resistance to Trump and the right. The all-important question is how to build an independent political force, ideally an independent political party, out of the resistance movements that are now

arising. But for now, we resist.

What forms that resistance will take to be effective can't be easily charted, even if we know that what's past is prologue. But ongoing struggles give us not just hope but also direction. Sectoral fights against degrading the environment, plant closings, evictions, police brutality, anti-LGBT violence, school privatization, and so on, will continue—just as the right's efforts to destroy those movements will escalate. And in these struggles, ordinary people can become fighters in their communities and come to recognize not only the humanity in others but the commonality of interests in seemingly disparate causes.

Politicians and media pundits are telling us that we should give Trump a chance. We say no, what is needed is mass struggle, which history has repeatedly shown can arise in unpredictable and surprising ways, even when it seems unlikely.

Sarah Jaffe, in her new book, *Necessary Trouble: Americans in Revolt* (Nation Books, 2016), charts dozens of modern battles that appear disparate but become “intersectional,” in which alliances are more than tactical, they are integral to a common struggle against plutocracy, a challenge to the capitalist system itself. Barbarism, as Rosa Luxemburg knew, was as likely an outcome of any final conflict with capital as was socialism, but there are sound reasons to believe that socialism can come even to the imperial center itself. That is urgently needed, but not inevitable. If twenty-first-century Marxists have learned anything it is that socialism is neither inevitable nor foreclosed and that humans make their own history. But socialism must win out if humankind is to survive.

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

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The Rust Belt in Revolt

BARRY FINGER

THIS YEAR'S ELECTIONS ARE the culmination of the long-standing economic and cultural grievances of America's industrial workers, a subclass largely composed of white men from the Rust Belt whose factories have been asset-stripped and sent abroad and whose unions or small businesses, pensions, and prospects have been decimated. They are not the poorest of the poor—not even the poorest of the white poor. They are not from places where the economic conditions are the worst, but they are from places where uncertainty about the future of industrial jobs is most acute.

They are people who occupy a particular stratum within the economy. They draw their incomes from fashioning material commodities—from moving earth, by construction, through mining, and in manufacture—in contrast to the vast majority of workers now employed in the service sector, both private and public.

This was not, therefore, a revolt led by the white working class rank and file as it is currently composed, the many who never fully shared the benefits of life in the skilled trades and the once ascendant key industries of an economic power that had dominated the world by virtue of its industrial prowess. It was rather a revolt significantly fueled by those who had already acquired a quasi-leadership platform over the broad working class by virtue of the social weight that industrial employment had historically accorded them. For in their prime, it was industrial unions above all that had often fought for broad programs of social remediation

and who spoke for the unorganized and unrepresented, albeit within the confines of an existing social order that they also jealously defended.

This election was a revolt headed, in part, by those who had acquired a modest stake in middle-class life and now find that life, and the institutions that made that life possible, disappearing. It is composed of white working men whose fortunes have fallen, afflicted by wage stagnation and an ever-widening social disparity in income and wealth that has consigned them to the wrong side of the divide. They prided and deluded themselves that they and they alone had reliably done society's heavy lifting and were, in turn, entitled to certain expectations. Above all, they had the expectation of a well-run and stable social order, an order in which they would continue to enjoy a place of respect and authority with a rising standard of living, which could be passed down to their children, and a dignified retirement.

They had, above all, placed their confidence in the ruling class, who had historically indulged this self-estimation but then abandoned industrial workers in an increasingly globalizing economy. This sense of free-fall has been massively reinforced by a shift in equality's center of gravity owing to greater racial and gender inclusiveness, with which it coincided. That abandonment has become a crucial factor in the increasingly polarized and caustic political conflict, a conflict that can be resolved in a progressive or reactionary direction, as the middle ground is quickly narrowing.

Rust Belt workers, or at least a strategic section, asserted themselves. But they did not

BARRY FINGER is on the editorial board of *New Politics*.

assert themselves in a vacuum. Nowhere in the developed capitalist world has the left acquired traction. Our manifold debacles need not be rehearsed. Suffice it to say that the left has not provided an oppositional center of gravity that could capture this white working class disenchantment, engage with it, and transform that anxiety and outrage into a force for progressive change.

Few who urgently needed to extract actionable concessions from the system voted for the Greens. There are, of course, good reasons to cast a protest vote, to declare “no confidence” in capitalist parties, to put a place marker on a vision of liberation that may yet be. For many of us, the Greens unfurled the flag of independent political action and kept it aloft. But this is not the arena where concessions are realized absent a massive movement surge from below. Third parties don’t have to win elections to extract concessions, but they do need to attain a critical mass. And that mass, after a multiplicity of promising starts, has, unfortunately, failed to yet materialize and sustain itself.

When poor people and rank-and-file workers vote in the American system, they face a version of the “prisoner’s dilemma.” The best outcome relies on a very high degree of class and social solidarity. But if people fear that ranks will be broken, they build that anticipation into their calculation and opt for the least bad option. If poor people en masse had made the calculation that voting Green would get them closer to a \$15 minimum wage or free college tuition, surely they would have voted on that basis. They understand that voting for the Democratic Party is a crapshoot and that the DP offers only the faint possibility of some piecemeal concessions. That, after all, is how the DP traditionally has kept its coalition intact.

But there was no evidence for a mass upsurge of working people breaking towards the Greens. And were it not for the Electoral College standing in the way of the popular vote, these Democratic voters might have made the

correct calculation on the basis of their immediate short-term needs. To make this calculation in this way and to nevertheless vote Green, in defiance of that assessment, would have been a boutique option for many, if not most, hard-pressed people. This conclusion is frustrating and self-fulfilling. But it is not illogical.

The liberal wing of the American ruling class contributed to that calculation, having neutralized the Sanders insurgency and effectively corralled this discontent into the Trump alt-right pigsty, where, they thought, it could be contained. Clinton had something to offer Walmart and fast-food workers: a raise in the minimum wage, paid sick leave, subsidized child care, a modified Obama plan. She could offer a path to citizenship to the dreamers and subsidized public tuition. But having tried and failed to derail voter suppression throughout the South—and even in Wisconsin—and having manifestly failed to offer a grand, inclusive program of economic reconstruction to restore the white working class and sweep up the multiethnic poor and hard hit into a co-equal prosperity, Clinton could not counterbalance the appeal of the far right.

How could the party of fiscal prudence, the party that took great pride in “balancing the budget,” the party of free-trade enthusiasts, the party of neoliberalism, austerity, and diminished expectations, offer a compelling vision of a different future?

Clinton was perceived, and correctly so, as being the agent of global financial and corporate interests—a very specific Democratic “basket of deplorables”—that had inflicted this protracted social setback on white industrial workers.

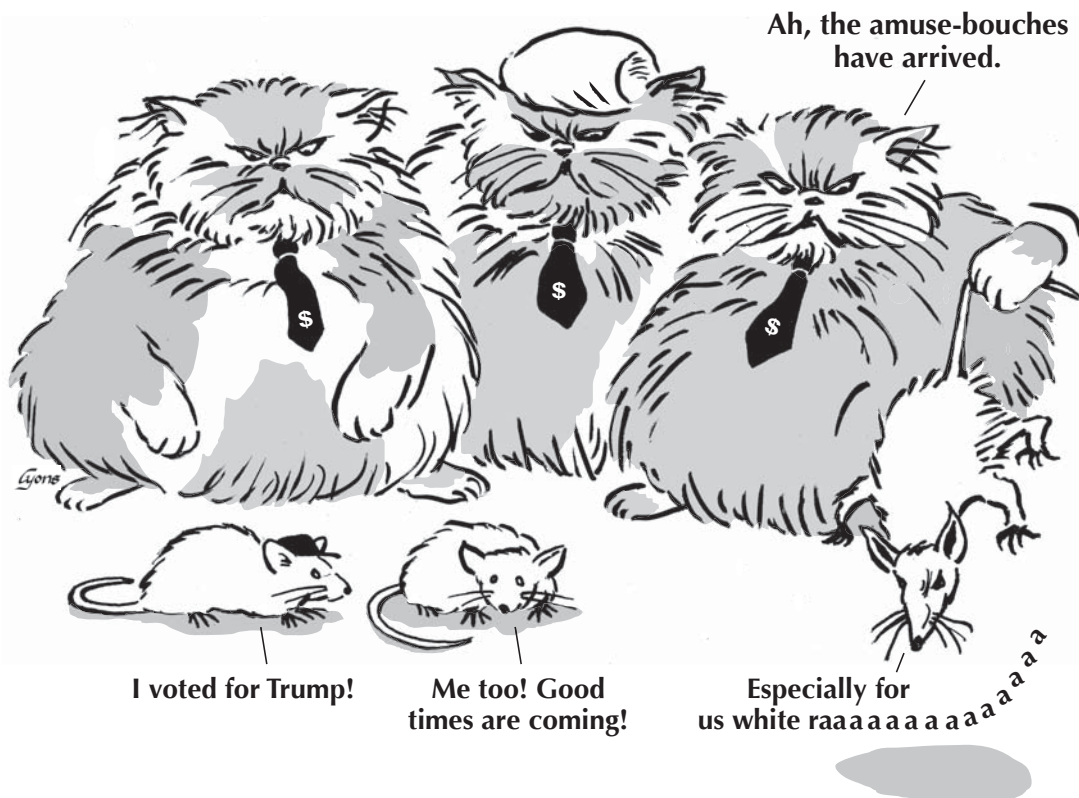
She created the dilemma that came back to bite us all. She offered the Rust Belt a choice: Fight racism, misogyny, and xenophobia by standing with the Democratic coalition that offered them nothing; or stand with Trump’s white nationalists in opposition to social stagnation and decline.

This is an authoritarian moment and it is

bleeding into advanced economies throughout the world, giving license and encouragement to a new, informal neofascist international. It was all but announced here by the open action of the deep state in the form of the FBI's bomb-shell intervention on behalf of Trump barely two weeks before the election. And make no mistake about it: Neofascists, unlike traditional reactionaries and conservatives, are unencumbered by economic orthodoxies and can run an economy. They, like the far left, fully understand that capitalism is not self-correcting and place no faith in markets. They fully appreciate the need for massive doses of state intervention and are fully prepared to blow the deficit sky-high. And it will work, just as it has in the past. That is, it will work as long as the Trump nationalist coalition can thwart attempts by the Republican establishment to pay for this massive stimulus

through offsets defunding social welfare programs that benefit Trump's base.

That is why, contrary to Paul Krugman's first instincts, the stock market, after an initial futures selloff, began to boom. Massive tax cuts, a protective wall of tariffs (seen less as a prescription than as a bargaining chip to renegotiate more favorable trade agreements), relaxation and elimination of environmental and Wall Street regulations, huge public works in the forms of infrastructural renovation, the promise of a border wall, and the spend-up on military hardware all herald and shape the state-led investment boom to come. Caterpillar and Martin Marietta stock prices soared. So did those of Big Pharma, soon free to price gouge without fear of criminal investigation. Raytheon, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics, and Lockheed Martin had field days. Private prison corpora-



Power lunch at Chez Trump

tions are licking their chops at the prospect of the FBI, ICE, and police being let loose on immigrant communities and communities of color. Student loan services and lenders, no longer facing government competition, got a new lease on life. Even too-big-to-fail banks' stocks rose with the prospect of Dodd-Frank being repealed. Increasing after-tax incomes will stimulate working-class demand and, in the hands of the wealthy, drive up share prices.

Paradoxically, gun manufacturers saw a drop in stock prices. Speculators shorted gun stocks presumably because the threat of gun regulation has been removed, thereby eliminating the perceived urgency on the part of gun enthusiasts to stockpile arms in anticipation of that threat.

The Trump insurrection, assisted by this heartland revolt, effectively defeated the two political parties, the Republicans no less than the Democrats. It appealed to white workers equally on the basis of anxiety over economic decline but also on the basis of prejudice, the loss of class status, and the promise of a return to class collaboration—a new deal, if you can pardon that usage, with a responsive nativist-oriented ruling class. It promised, in other words, rule by like-thinking CEOs who can be relied upon to restore prosperity within the confines of a retro 1950s-like social order that erases the gains of women—right down to basic bodily autonomy—and minorities. In that regard, Trump will refashion the civil service, the permanent government bureaucracy, on a purely political basis, essentially ending the primary path of upward mobility for minorities who cannot be relied upon to pass a political litmus test. If proof is needed, see how a tea-party Republican such as Scott Walker could decimate the civil service in Wisconsin, and then tweak that example to fit Trump's outsized predilections. The ever-malignant Newt Gingrich has already floated that prospect.

The nominal Republican Party has been effectively transformed into a white nationalist party and if it succeeds in raising Rust Belt

white incomes and economic security on that basis, while checking the aspirations of Blacks, Hispanics, and women, it will have legitimized and institutionalized that transformation.

The Democratic Party has not merely lost, it has discredited itself. It is an empty vessel, unable to defend the living standards of the multi-ethnic American working class. It is a party of split loyalties, in which workers, women, and minorities are played against one another while the common interests of all take a back seat to corporate priorities. And the corporate priorities they take a back seat to are precisely those global, financial, and tech sectors that are decimating living standards and feeding the nationalist revolt.

Socialists need to take our case for independent politics into the mass organizations that we inhabit, to argue that the movements together already constitute an incipient party fully capable of financing a political apparatus free of corporate influence and of fielding a willing and qualified host of candidates on that basis. The path to independent politics resides in the first instance in breaking apart the Democratic Party, now in shambles, and moving out decisive sections of its base. Trump is well on his way to having destroyed the two-party system as we have known it. His victory has given us the latitude, and a raised platform, to amplify our case that the DP cannot and will not serve as an effective bulwark against reaction. We need an opposite pole of attraction—a movement for a new party—that arises organically from the experienced cleavages and contradictions of society.

Trump has started the political realignment in this country. Social movements, labor being central, can stay loyal to the Democrats and cave, or they can find their way to political independence and make a credible appeal to Trump-voting workers to jump ship on the basis of class solidarity and build a society directly centered on our common needs.

“Glorious Harbinger of a New Society”

The Bolshevik Revolution

THOMAS HARRISON

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO the most democratic revolution in history took place. Led by the Bolshevik Party, the Russian working class, allied with the peasantry and organized into mass democratic institutions—the soviets—took power. The only precedent for it was the Paris Commune of 1871, in which the working people of Paris seized control of their city but were able to hold onto it for only two-and-a-half months. After the Commune fell, Karl Marx wrote that it “will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society.” The workers’ democracy created by the Bolshevik Revolution did not survive either, although it took a few years, not months, to bring about its complete demise. For a short time, however, Soviet Russia proved that socialism was a real possibility, not merely a beautiful dream. It offered to the world an inspiring glimpse of the human potential for reorganizing social life according to principles of freedom, dignity, and equality.

Rosa Luxemburg had her criticisms of the Bolsheviks, but she wrote,

It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world: They are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutten, “I have dared!”¹

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The “February” Revolution

By the end of 1916, more than two years into World War I, it was clear that the tsarist autocracy was dragging Russia down to disaster. Russian war casualties were far greater than those of any other country involved. Most of the commanding officers were incompetent. There were serious shortages of weapons and supplies. Transportation was breaking down, and, with the onset of another bitter Russian winter, the cities were running out of food and fuel. Meanwhile, corruption was rampant: Manufacturers made millions selling shoddy goods to the army. The court and the aristocracy indulged themselves to the full; the jewels and ball gowns displayed for the 1916-1917 season were the most lavish and expensive in years. All this was noted with bitterness by the common people. The patriotic mood of 1914 had evaporated, and the tsar, the government, and the nobility were now loathed by almost everyone.

Against the advice of his ministers, the tsar had taken personal command of the army, leaving the capital, Petrograd (the new name for St. Petersburg, which sounded too German), in the hands of the unstable Tsarina Alexandra and her adviser, a bizarre “holy man” named Grigori Rasputin, whose drunken debaucheries and sexual escapades with ladies of the court were by now an open secret. Despite Rasputin’s notoriety, Alexandra would not hear anything against her “Friend,” as she referred to him in letters to her husband. Instead, she believed he had literally been sent by God to guide her and the imperial family.²

All this was too much even for the court,

some of whose members decided that the only way to save the autocracy was to get rid of Rasputin. Prince Felix Yussupov, an extremely wealthy young nobleman who was married to a Romanov, arranged with a few others to lure Rasputin one cold December night to a “party” in his palace, where the advisor would be assassinated. While his fellow conspirators waited upstairs, the prince entertained his victim in a

Although workers’ democracy did not survive, for a short time Soviet Russia proved that socialism was a real possibility, not merely a beautiful dream.

basement room. First the guest was fed small cakes, each one of which contained enough poison to kill several men instantly. These had no visible effect. Then Rasputin asked for wine, which had also been laced with poison. To Yussupov’s amazement, Rasputin quaffed the deadly beverage with satisfaction. The prince’s victim then begged him to play the guitar and sing gypsy songs, so for two-and-a-half hours, Yussupov strummed and warbled while waiting for the poison to take effect. Finally, the prince pulled out a revolver and shot the holy man. Rasputin fell, but then moments later jumped to his feet and grabbed Yussupov by the throat. The prince managed to break free and run upstairs, with Rasputin following him on all fours, howling. There he was shot several more times. Fleeing outdoors, he finally collapsed in the snow, where the assassins then clubbed him over and over again. Still breathing, Rasputin was wrapped in a curtain and pushed through a hole in the ice over a nearby river.

The imperial family was devastated by the death of their friend, but the news prompted general rejoicing in the streets of Petrograd. By now, however, nothing could be done to save the Romanovs. And when the time came, the autocracy proved rather easier to kill than Rasputin.

During January and February 1917 deep anger simmered just below the surface in Petrograd and occasionally burst out in protest. There were some strikes. Women waiting in long lines outside bakeries rioted when bread supplies ran out. March 8 was International Women’s Day, a date commemorated by the Socialist International every year. The socialist groups in Petrograd—Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs)³—planned to pass out leaflets, make speeches, and hold a demonstration or two, nothing more. But things got out of hand. Women textile workers decided to go on strike. Leaving their plants and marching past the bigger factories where the men worked, they yelled “Bread for the Workers,” “Come Out,” and “Stop Work,” and they threw snowballs through the factory windows. The men joined them, and by the next day 400,000 workers were on strike in Petrograd. Now the crowds were yelling “Down with the Autocracy” and “Down with the War.” The “February Revolution” had begun.⁴

The government responded to the strikes and demonstrations as it had always done—with bullets, sabers, and thick leather whips called *knouts*. But soon the unthinkable began to occur: Cossacks⁵ and soldiers refused to fire on the people. Many of them mingled openly with the workers, sometimes helping to kill or disarm the police, who then quickly went into hiding. Red flags were hoisted everywhere. Government officials were put under arrest. When the tsar tried to return from the front, railway workers refused to operate the trains.

The autocracy had been overthrown, but what would replace it? On March 11, some members of the Duma⁶ created a Russian Provisional—that is, temporary—Government,



a cabinet of ministers consisting of twenty of its most prominent members. Most belonged to the Cadets (Constitutional Democrats), the party of middle-class liberalism. Consequently, although the prime minister was a nobleman, Prince Georgi Lvov, and the Provisional Government included one socialist, the SR Alexander Kerensky, the Cadet leader Paul Miliukov was its dominant figure. Miliukov at first hoped to reorganize the government as a constitutional monarchy, but he soon realized the people wanted nothing more to do with tsars. So at the Provisional Government's behest, Nicholas II, along with his son Alexis, abdicated the throne on March 15 in favor of his brother, the Grand Duke Michael, who in turn abdicated the next day. After 304 years, the Romanov dynasty was no more.

But could the Provisional Government command the support of Russia's people? The Duma, after all, from which it came, had been elected by an extremely undemocratic voting system; it represented landlords, business owners, and professionals, but not workers and peasants. Moreover, nobody had actually elected Miliukov, Lvov, and the 18 others to be a government, provisional or otherwise; they were really self-appointed. So even though the Provisional Government only claimed the right to rule Russia until such time as the people could elect a Constituent Assembly to draw up

a new constitution, its power was shaky from the beginning.

This was true especially because a parallel power had emerged alongside the Provisional Government—the Petrograd Soviet.⁷ As soon as the revolution began, workers in the factories and soldiers and sailors stationed in the capital started electing 2,500 delegates to a new body, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. It was ultra-democratic, a kind of parliament of the working class, whose members were paid workers' wages and could be recalled and replaced at any time by those who had elected them. The Petrograd Soviet met in one of the imperial palaces, and later in the auditorium of the Smolny Institute, a former school for aristocratic girls that had been abandoned by its students and faculty after the fall of the tsar. Meetings of the Soviet were a scene of constant debate, noisy and intense; people streamed in and out; reports arrived from different parts of the city or from the battle front; anyone could get up and speak, to the cheers or heckling of the audience. Meanwhile smaller discussions continued in the halls or in the cafeteria over cigarettes and endless glasses of tea (Russians are passionate tea drinkers). The Soviet, not the Provisional Government, was the real center of the revolution.

The February Revolution had been spontaneous—that is, no one had planned or organized it. But as soon as it began, the lead was taken by workers and intellectuals who had long been involved in underground revolutionary work and belonged to the various socialist parties. When elections to the Soviet were held in the factories and military garrisons, it was these men and women who put themselves forward as candidates. When the Petrograd Soviet met for the first time on March 12, it elected an Executive Committee, all of whose members were well-known socialist leaders. The majority of the Executive Committee was held by the Mensheviks, led by Nikolai Chkheidze and Irakli Tseretelli, and the SRs, led by Vic-

tor Chernov; the Bolsheviks had only a small minority of committee members. Many of the most prominent socialists, however, were not even in Russia: Vladimir Lenin, the Bolshevik, and Julius Martov, the Menshevik, were still in exile in Switzerland, and Leon Trotsky, who belonged to neither faction, was living in the Bronx when the February Revolution broke out. All, needless to say, were frantic to get back to Russia as soon as possible.

Dual Power

The coexistence of these two centers of authority, which came to be known as dual power, was a constant source of tension and confusion. The Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet acted in many ways like a government, and not just of Petrograd itself. It took responsibility for running the city, overseeing the delivery of food supplies, arresting the remaining tsarist police, and organizing the Red Guards to keep order. The Red Guards consisted of armed workers; each factory was expected to put one out of every ten employees into the Guards. The Soviet started a newspaper, *Izvestia*, which became the city's, and the country's, main source of information, especially since the other papers were often on strike. Moreover, other soviets quickly sprang up in almost every city and town in Russia, and even in many peasant villages. There were soldiers' soviets throughout the army and sailors' soviets at the naval bases and onboard the battleships. All looked to the Petrograd Soviet for guidance.

But the Menshevik and SR leaders did not want the Soviet to be the government of Russia. The soviets represented the working class and a large portion of the peasantry—the millions of young peasants who had been drafted into the army. Almost all Russian socialists, including most of the Bolsheviks who were currently in the capital, believed their country was still too economically backward for a socialist government, which is what direct rule by the soviets would mean. For one thing, the working class,

the potential agent of a socialist revolution, was only a small proportion of the population, 80 percent of which was composed of peasants. To the Mensheviks and SRs, the February Revolution was Russia's long-anticipated *bourgeois* revolution: The bourgeoisie, represented by the Provisional Government, had taken power, and it deserved the workers' support. The job of the soviets, they believed, was to monitor the actions of the Provisional Government and put constant pressure on it to be more democratic; then, once the war was over, the Constituent Assembly would be elected and the socialist parties could start operating as a strong political opposition, much as the massive Social-Democratic Party (SPD) did in Germany. Eventually, after the bourgeoisie had industrialized Russia's economy, it would be time for the now-majority working class, with the socialists at their head, to take power. This was the standard, accepted Marxist theory of the stages Russia needed to go through in order to reach socialism, and for the time being there were few, even among the Bolsheviks, who questioned it.

A Menshevik, Nikolai Sukhanov, summarized his party's perspective: "The government that was to take the place of tsarism must be exclusively bourgeois. ... This was the solution to be aimed at. Otherwise the overturn would fail and the revolution perish."⁸

Despite the fact that it was the workers of Petrograd who had overthrown the autocracy, the Mensheviks and SRs adhered rigidly to this position. Sukhanov described a delegation of Soviet leaders who met with Miliukov and informed him that "the Soviet ... would leave the formation of a provisional government to the bourgeois groups":

Miliukov had taken very accurate bearings. He understood that without an accord from the Soviet no government could either arise or remain in existence. He understood that it was entirely within the power of the Executive Committee [of the Soviet] to give authority to a bourgeois regime or withhold it. He saw where the real strength lay. ... And as for the

“minimal” nature of our demands [complete freedom of speech, organization, etc.] and the general attitude taken by the Executive Committee ... Miliukov had not expected such “moderation” and “good sense.” ... He didn’t even think of concealing his satisfaction and pleasant surprise.⁹

Nevertheless, the Soviet and the Provisional Government occasionally acted at cross purposes. For example, most of the government ministers hoped to allow the imperial family to slip out of the country and go into exile, probably in Britain. But the Soviet insisted the tsar, tsarina, and their five children be placed under house arrest, where they could not be involved in any counter-revolutionary plots. The war soon became an area of major disagreements, but at first the socialists were willing to support the Provisional Government’s policy of keeping Russia in the conflict. Most of the Mensheviks and SRs, and all of the Bolsheviks, had opposed the war when the tsar was on the throne, but now they reasoned that Russian armies were fighting to defend the Revolution. Still, the Provisional Government thought the way to conduct the war was to make the army more disciplined, while the Soviet believed that making the army more democratic was the only way to inspire greater effort from the soldiers. Thus, on March 14, the Petrograd Soviet issued “Order Number One” to the troops: Military units were to be run by elected committees, and officers could issue commands only in battle. The fact that the Soviet believed it was entitled to give orders to the army without consulting the Provisional Government showed that it would occasionally act as a rival, not just a watchdog.

Despite these tensions, the first couple of months after the February Revolution were a time of unity and heady optimism. The autocracy had been overthrown almost without bloodshed. Russia had become, virtually overnight, perhaps the freest country in the world. There was complete freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion. Everyone seemed to

be involved in politics, and people read books, newspapers, and pamphlets voraciously. There was universal suffrage, including women. Equal rights were given to all Russia’s ethnic minorities, including Jews.

Still, as Vladimir Stankevich, an SR, recalled in his *Memoirs*, the true feelings of the upper classes were anything but optimistic:

Officially they celebrated, eulogized the revolution, cried “Hurrah!” to the fighters for freedom, adorned themselves with red ribbons,

Initially almost all socialists
believed Russia was too
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would mean.

and marched under red banners. ... Everyone said “we,” “our revolution,” “our victory,” and “our freedom.” But in their hearts, in their tête-à-têtes, they were horrified, trembled, felt themselves prisoners of a hostile elemental force that was traveling an unknown road. Unforgettable is the figure of Rodzianko [wealthy landowner, president of the Duma], that portly lord and imposing personage, when, preserving a majestic dignity but with an expression of deep suffering despair frozen on his pale face, he made his way through a crowd of disheveled soldiers in the corridor of the Taurida Palace [first meeting place of both the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government]. ... They say that the representatives of the Progressive Bloc [the Cadets and their allies] in their own homes wept with impotent despair.¹⁰

This “hostile, elemental force” was an awakening working class and peasantry. John Reed, an American journalist reporting on the Revolution, wrote,

[G]reat Russia was in labor, bearing a new world. The servants one used to treat like animals and pay next to nothing, were getting independent. ... The waiters and hotel servants were organized and refused tips. ...

All Russia was learning to read, and *reading*—politics, economics, history—because the people wanted to *know*. In every city, in most towns, along the front, each political faction had its newspaper—sometimes several. Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets were distributed by thousands of organizations, and poured into the armies, the villages, the factories, the streets. The thirst for education, so long thwarted, burst with the Revolution into a frenzy of expression. ... Russia absorbed reading matter like hot sand drinks water, insatiable. ...

Lenin predicted that Europe as a whole was on the brink of revolution; the Russian Revolution would be a sort of prelude to the main act.

Then the Talk ... Lectures, debates, speeches ... Meetings in the trenches at the front, in village squares, factories. ... What a marvelous sight to see the Putilov factory [the largest in Petrograd] pour out its 40,000 to listen to Social Democrats, Socialist Revolutionaries, Anarchists, anybody, whatever they had to say, as long as they would talk! ... In railway trains, street cars, always the spurting up of impromptu debate, everywhere. ...

We came down to the front, ... where gaunt and bootless men sickened in the mud of desperate trenches; and when they saw us they started up, with their pinched faces and the flesh showing blue through their torn clothing, demanding eagerly, "Did you bring anything to *read*?"¹¹

All this freedom and politicization en-

couraged people to demand things that the Provisional Government was not willing to grant. Many ethnic minorities wanted more than equal rights—they wanted to secede from Russia and form their own independent countries. Peasants wanted the thing they had long dreamed of—land—and they began simply to take it. Throughout the country, peasants started to seize property belonging to the nobility. Workers wanted at least some say in how their factories were run, and many could see no reason why capitalists should retain control of the factories at all. And the vast majority of the Russian people were sick to death of the war.

But the Provisional Government was made up of men who believed in the sanctity of private property. They promised that the peasants would get more land eventually, once the Constituent Assembly was elected, but they strongly opposed peasant seizures. (This made no sense to the peasants; nobody had waited for a Constituent Assembly to overthrow the tsar, so why should they have to wait to take the land?) And while the Provisional Government did change the laws to allow workers complete freedom to form unions and conduct strikes, they supported the capitalists, who had no intention of sharing control of their plants with the workers, much less surrendering ownership.

As for the questions of the war and the rights of the subject nationalities, the members of the Provisional Government were ardent Russian nationalists and, in fact, imperialists. Far from being willing to tolerate the separation of non-Russian parts of the empire, they dreamed of conquering new territories as a result of the war. The Allies had made secret treaties with the tsar promising Russian control over Istanbul and other parts of the Ottoman Empire such as Armenia, as well as pieces of Austria-Hungary; as far as the Provisional Government was concerned, these treaties were still valid—despite the Soviet's insistence that Russia renounce conquests and redefine the war effort as purely defensive. Poland had declared

its independence, and the Provisional Government recognized it, but this was mainly because it had no choice: Poland was then under German occupation. On the other hand, Finland, Ukraine, and Russia's Baltic provinces—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—also sought independence, which the Provisional Government was determined to resist.

The war, however, was an extremely delicate subject for the Provisional Government. Anti-war feeling was very strong among the masses, and the Soviet reflected this mood. So, to avoid damaging relations with the Soviet, the Provisional Government publicly proclaimed “that the aim of free Russia is not domination of other nations, or seizure of their national possessions, or forcible occupation of foreign territories, but the establishment of a stable peace on the basis of the self-determination of peoples. The Russian people do not intend to increase its world power at the expense of other nations.”

But this statement did not actually reflect the Provisional Government's plans.

“Peace, Land, and Bread”

On April 16, Lenin arrived in Petrograd. Stuck in Switzerland when the Revolution broke out, he had desperately looked for a way to get home. But with Europe at war, and hundreds of miles of German and Austro-Hungarian territory between Switzerland and Russia, it seemed hopeless. Then, Lenin received a strange offer: The German government would transport him and his fellow exiles in a special train across Germany to the Baltic Sea; from there they could make their way via Sweden to Russia. Why was the kaiser's government willing to help a notorious revolutionary? General Erich Ludendorff, who, along with Paul von Hindenburg, had become a *de facto* military dictator, hoped that Lenin, as an outspoken anti-war socialist, would undermine Russia's war effort and thus help Germany. Lenin realized this, and he worried that if he accepted, it might look like he was nothing but a German agent.

But he hesitated for only a moment. Instead of being used by Ludendorff, Lenin figured, it would be the other way around; his plan, once he had returned to Russia, was nothing less than to lead a second, socialist, revolution there; and once the workers had taken power in Russia, he felt confident that the German working class would be inspired to follow suit. In the end, Ludendorff and all he represented would come crashing down. So Lenin, his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, and several hundred Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (Martov took a later train) got on board and headed for the Revolution.

Lenin's arrival at Petrograd's Finland train station on the night of April 16 was a remarkable moment. The Menshevik Chkhcheidze, chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, was on hand to greet him in the station's main waiting room. In the name of the Soviet Executive Committee, Chkhcheidze gave a short speech welcoming Lenin but also emphasizing the need for unity and for continuing the war against Germany now that it was supposedly aimed only at defending Russia's new democracy. During the Menshevik leader's speech, Lenin seemed to pay



no attention, staring at the ceiling and fidgeting with a big bouquet of flowers someone had given him. As soon as Chkheidze had finished, he turned to the crowd of ordinary people who had also assembled at the station and, ignoring the delegation from the Executive Committee, addressed them:

Dear comrades, soldiers, sailors, and workers! I am happy to greet in your persons the victorious Russian Revolution, and greet you as the vanguard of the worldwide proletarian army. ... The hour is not far distant when at the call of our comrade, Karl Liebknecht [leading German anti-war socialist], the peoples will turn their arms against their own capitalist exploiters. ... The worldwide socialist revolution has already dawned. ... Germany is seething. ... Any day now the whole of European capitalism may crash. The Russian Revolution accomplished by you has prepared the way and opened a new epoch. Long live the worldwide socialist revolution!¹²

Walking out of the station, Lenin tried to get into an automobile, but the crowd lifted him onto an armored car and demanded he give another speech. There, illuminated by a searchlight that happened to be mounted nearby, he denounced the Menshevik and SR leaders of the Soviet as tools of the bourgeoisie and proclaimed, "We don't need a parliamentary republic, we don't need bourgeois democracy, we don't need any government except the soviets of workers', soldiers', and farm-laborers' deputies!"

When Lenin met with the Bolshevik organization in Petrograd, he presented his "April Theses," which astounded them almost as much as they had the Mensheviks. Essentially, Lenin disagreed with virtually all Russian socialists on the nature of the Revolution of 1917. The workers and soldiers had overthrown tsarism, but because of the misleadership of the Mensheviks and SRs, they had allowed the bourgeoisie to take power through the Provisional Government. This was a mistake, Lenin insisted; the dual power must be ended, the Provisional Government overthrown and replaced with a

government of the soviets. The war remained an imperialist conflict, and Russia's participation in it should be opposed.

What Lenin was now arguing, in fact, was that the Russian Revolution could be transformed almost immediately into a socialist revolution. This was the theory that Trotsky had advanced back in 1906. (Trotsky was at that moment, with great difficulty, making his way from the United States to Russia.) To the standard objection made by other socialists (and at first by many of his own Bolsheviks) that Russia was too underdeveloped for socialism, Lenin, as we have seen, predicted that Europe as a whole was on the brink of revolution and only needed the Russian working class to take power in order to ignite socialist upheavals in Germany, Austria, France, Italy, and elsewhere. The Russian Revolution would be a sort of prelude to the main act: Once the European working class had taken power, socialism would become a global reality.

Lenin had to argue relentlessly to persuade the other Bolsheviks, but eventually they accepted his theses. Now their slogan became "All Power to the Soviets!" As Lenin noted, however, this could not be achieved overnight. For now, the Mensheviks and SRs were still in control of the soviets, and they refused to take power. The Bolsheviks' job was patiently and persistently to argue with the workers and soldiers who had elected these more moderate socialists, to persuade them that the Mensheviks and SRs were wrong and the Bolsheviks right. As soon as the Bolsheviks won majority support in the soviets, it would be time to depose the Provisional Government. The support of the peasants in the villages was also essential; therefore, the Bolsheviks must endorse the peasants' demand for land and offer an immediate solution to the war, which was consuming their sons, brothers, and husbands. By doing this the Bolsheviks would drive a wedge between the peasants and the Provisional Government, which insisted that the war must continue and kept telling the peas-

ants to wait for the Constituent Assembly to give them land. So another appealing Bolshevik slogan was “Peace, Land, and Bread!”

On the war there now were three distinct positions: The Provisional Government wanted Russia to fight on to a complete victory for the Allies; the moderate socialist leaders of the Petrograd Soviet also wanted Russian troops to keep fighting, but simultaneously they called on both the Allies and Central Powers to negotiate an end to the war on the basis of “no annexations [conquests] and no indemnities”; the Bolsheviks called for socialist revolution in all the warring countries, encouraged Russian soldiers on the eastern front to fraternize with German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers, and insisted that Russia extricate itself from the conflict as soon as possible.

On the land issue, the differences were also clear. The Cadets regarded the peasant seizures as intolerable attacks on private property. They promised that the issue would be resolved once the Constituent Assembly met, but they hoped elections to the Assembly could be postponed until the war ended, which might take several more years. The moderate socialists were sympathetic to the peasants, but because they were afraid of antagonizing the bourgeoisie and the Provisional Government, they also opposed the seizures. The Bolsheviks, however, encouraged the peasants to go ahead and take the landlords’ estates for themselves.

In his memoirs, written in exile years later, Chernov, the leader of the SRs, regretfully recalled government-ordered attacks on peasants:

That was stark madness. There was no better means of demoralizing the army than to send it, with 90 percent of it peasants, to crush the movement of millions of its brethren. In Samara province the soldiers’ wives raised rebellion: “Let us go and mow the grain of the gentry; why are our husbands suffering for the third year?” The gentry brought a detachment of soldiers from Hvalynsk. But when the soldiers, who were peasants themselves, saw the peasants mowing the rich grain, they tried

their hand at mowing; they were tired of their rifles. The peasants fed the soldiers, talked to them, and then set to work all the harder.

In Tambov province a military detachment came at the summons of Prince Vyazensky. It was greeted by a roar from the crowds: “What are you doing, coming to defend the prince, coming to beat your own fathers? Throw the devils into the river!” The commander took into his head to fire into the air. He was struck by a stone and ordered the troops to disperse the mob, but the soldiers did not stir. The officer spurred his horse and escaped from

Russia had broken out of the alliance system and was offering peace to a war-weary Europe.

the enraged peasants by fording the river. His detachment scattered and let the crowd surround the prince, who was arrested. ... At a nearby station he was lynched by a detachment of Siberian troops on their way to the front.¹³

In 1917, however, the SRs and Mensheviks, or least their leaders, believed the masses were naive and politically immature. Workers, soldiers, and peasants were impatient with the pace of change, but they had to be restrained, the moderate socialists believed, if the alliance with the bourgeoisie was to be maintained. They regarded Lenin and the Bolsheviks as dangerous and irresponsible demagogues who were cynically fanning the flames of discontent simply in order to acquire power.

Mounting Crises

In May a crisis occurred when the public learned that Miliukov, the foreign minister, had sent a note to the governments of the Allies reassuring them that Russia would not back out of its previous commitment to help defeat the Central Powers. Essentially, Miliukov was telling the Al-

lies not to take the soviets' call for a negotiated peace, or the Provisional Government's own earlier statements renouncing conquests, too seriously. The goal remained total victory over the enemy and division of the spoils thereafter.

Lenin was sure the German working class would bring down the Kaiser and annul the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk — which is exactly what happened.

The news of "Miliukov's Note" unleashed a storm of outrage. Demonstrators took to the streets shouting "Down with Miliukov!" and "Down with the Imperialist Policy!" Some protestors carried banners calling for the overthrow of the Provisional Government itself, but most were not yet willing to go as far as the Bolsheviks. Instead, the Executive Committee of the Soviet worked out a compromise: The Provisional Government was reorganized, with the resignation of Miliukov and four other liberal ministers and the inclusion of five new socialist members from the Soviet. Kerensky, formerly the only socialist in the government, was given the important position of minister of war. The Provisional Government was now a coalition, with ten "capitalist" and six socialist ministers.

When Chkheidze, Tseretelli, Chernov, and the other new socialist ministers asked the Soviet to approve the coalition, a familiar but long-absent face was in the auditorium of the Smolny Institute. Leon Trotsky, the hero of 1905, had just arrived in Petrograd, with his wife, Natalia Sedova, and two sons, after a five-week journey across the ocean from New York. En route he and his family had been taken off their ship when it docked in Halifax, Nova Scotia. There British officials threw Trotsky into a camp for German prisoners of war, mostly

sailors removed from U-boats. Immediately, he began distributing anti-war literature and making speeches in favor of revolution. When the British finally released Trotsky, the German prisoners gathered at the gate to send him off with a chorus of the *Internationale*.

Now the members of the Executive Committee asked Trotsky what he thought of the coalition. He replied by first observing that the Revolution "had opened a new epoch ... of struggle, no longer of nation against nation, but of the suffering and oppressed classes against their rulers." This remark annoyed the socialist ministers, who were committed to continuing the war and, indeed, believed that their participation in the Provisional Government would now guarantee its nonimperialist character. Trotsky then went on to denounce the coalition and demand instead that "our next move will be to transfer the whole power into the hands of the soviets." Clearly, Trotsky was taking his stand with Lenin, and shortly thereafter he joined the Bolshevik Party.

Bolshevik ideas were rapidly catching on, but so far mainly in Petrograd; Lenin's influence was not very widespread in the provinces as yet. This was shown by the results of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which met in Petrograd on June 16. The congress included representatives from 350 soviets throughout Russia, and it elected an All-Russian Executive Committee to be a national leadership for all the soviets. Of the delegates, 285 were SRs, 245 were Mensheviks, and only 105 were Bolsheviks. The new All-Russian Executive Committee, consequently, was dominated by Mensheviks and SRs, just like the Petrograd Executive Committee.

Now that the coalition had redefined the Russian war effort as strictly defensive, the Provisional Government decided it was time to launch a major military offensive to drive German and Austro-Hungarian troops out of Russian territory. Kerensky, the minister of war, and the other ministers, socialists and liberals alike, believed that Russian soldiers would now

be willing to fight, but they were mistaken. After a few victories in late June, the offensive collapsed. Entire army units simply refused to go on fighting.

The defeat of the June offensive further undermined the credibility of the Provisional Government and increased the appeal of the Bolsheviks' peace program. On July 16, a rebellion broke out in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks had called for a peaceful protest demonstration against the war, but the masses of angry workers, soldiers, and sailors who turned out on the streets of the capital, many with weapons, wanted to go much further: They called for the overthrow of the Provisional Government. For four days there were violent street clashes between the demonstrators and some units of the army that remained loyal to the government. The Bolsheviks were in a quandary. On the one hand, they believed an uprising at that time was premature; Bolsheviks did not yet have majority support in most soviets outside Petrograd, and a seizure of power in the capital alone would be isolated and eventually defeated. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks did not want to separate themselves from the masses when they were being shot down. So Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders participated in the July Days, as they came to be known, while simultaneously attempting to restrain the rebels as much as possible.

The July Days were, nonetheless, a big setback for the Bolsheviks. The demonstrations were crushed, and thousands of workers and soldiers felt demoralized and defeated. Many Russians accepted the Mensheviks' version of events:

The armed action of several regiments, led by unscrupulous agitators of the Bolshevik Party, and in some cases simply by adventurers, attracted into the streets, also, a section of the workers. All demanded, in a threatening manner, the overthrow of the Provisional Government and the transfer of all power to the control of the Soviets. ...

The Taurida Palace, where the Central Executive Committees of the [soviets] were in session, was besieged with bayonets and machine guns. Violence was done to individual members of the committees, and even to Comrade Chernov.¹⁴

Groups of soldiers, joined by notorious spies and agents provocateurs, drove about the streets in stolen automobiles and fired upon citizens with rifles and machine guns.

As a result, there were scores of killed, hundreds of wounded, enormous losses through the strike, looted stores and residences, more bitterness against the workers by the petty bourgeoisie, and an alarming consolidation of counter-revolutionary forces. ...

The Leninites [Bolsheviks] promised the masses an early peace and bread, and the masses followed them. Today, disillusioned with the Leninites, these masses may turn their wrath on all the socialists, and begin to listen to those who will ... whisper all kinds of promises in their ears.

The Provisional Government accused the Bolsheviks of treason and denounced the party's leaders as German agents. Trotsky was thrown into prison, and Lenin was forced to shave off his beard, don a disguise, and go into hiding in nearby Finland.

The Kornilov Affair

The July Days led to another reshuffling of the Provisional Government. More liberals resigned, more socialists joined the cabinet, and Kerensky replaced Lvov as prime minister. The Cadets, the middle class, landlords, and army officers were losing confidence in the Provisional Government, which they believed was incapable of controlling the masses. To them, the Soviet especially was a continuing source of disruption, and they began to feel that it should be disbanded. Landlords could no longer tolerate the growing wave of peasant land seizures, which the Provisional Government and the Soviet leaders opposed but were unable to prevent. Factory owners chafed at the assertiveness of their

workers. Army officers had lost all control over their troops. Cadet politicians were besieged by anxious inquiries from Allied ambassadors, who feared Russia might soon pull out of the war.

The Congress of Trade and Industry, the main organization of Russian business, declared, "The Government, during the past months, has permitted the poisoning of the Russian people and the Russian army and the disruption of all discipline, thereby following the Soviets . . . who must bear the responsibility for the disgrace and humiliation of Russia and the Russian army."

The propertied classes looked for leadership to General Lavr Kornilov, the commander of Russia's armed forces. At the same time, Kerensky, whose domineering personality had enabled him to become a sort of boss of the Provisional Government, may have begun to dream of setting himself up as a dictator, also without the soviets.

In August a plot was hatched to crush the Petrograd Soviet. To this day the "Affair" remains shrouded in mystery, but it seems that at first Kornilov and Kerensky worked with each other; their plan was to bring dependable troops from the front to the capital and seize control. As Kornilov began to move on Petrograd, however, Kerensky suddenly turned against him and called on the people to "save the Revolution." On September 9, with Kornilov's soldiers only a few miles away, the people of Petrograd mobilized to defend their city and the soviets. The Bolsheviks were released from jail to help, and in fact they soon took charge of the whole effort. Arms were distributed, and trenches dug on the city's outskirts. Bolshevik agitators slipped into Kornilov's camp and pleaded with his soldiers not to fight against the Revolution. The result was a complete debacle for Kornilov. Before he could reach Petrograd, his forces simply melted away.

The Bolsheviks emerged from the Kornilov Affair with even greater prestige than they had enjoyed before the July Days. Kerensky, on the other hand, was now almost completely isolated. Mistrusted by the workers and soldiers, who

suspected the truth about his secret dealings with Kornilov, he was also despised by the propertied classes for his lack of resolve.

The Affair convinced the masses that the Provisional Government was an empty shell, riddled with traitors to the Revolution, and that only the Soviet was capable of defending their interests. The Bolshevik slogan, "All Power to the Soviets!" was now widely embraced. Even some members of the other socialist parties started having second thoughts about their theory that the Russian Revolution could not go beyond the limits of bourgeois rule. Martov and a minority of the Mensheviks began to think that the soviets ought to take power, though most of his fellow Menshevik leaders—Chkheidze, Tseretelli, and the rest—still firmly rejected this idea. The Socialist Revolutionaries split completely. Many of the younger, more radical leaders supported peasant land seizures, opposed the war, and agreed with the Bolsheviks on soviet power. They formed their own faction, the Left SRs, while the older leaders, chief among them Victor Chernov, became known as the Right SRs.

The "October" Revolution

Early in September, new elections to the Petrograd Soviet were held in the city's factories and army barracks. The result, announced on September 13, was a majority for the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks and SRs on the Executive Committee were replaced by Bolsheviks, and Trotsky became the chairman of the Soviet. A week later the same thing happened in Moscow, and after that in city after city and throughout the army and navy. But the All-Russian Executive Committee, elected back in June with a Menshevik-SR majority, was still in place.

Lenin, who had emerged from hiding, now urged his party to prepare for the overthrow of the Provisional Government. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets would have to meet soon, and when it did, since the Bolsheviks now controlled almost all the local soviets, they

expected to win a majority on the All-Russian Executive Committee too. Lenin believed that the moment for socialist revolution had arrived, and he worried that the Bolsheviks might let it pass without acting decisively. He felt sure that the workers would actively participate in an uprising, the peasants would support it, and the Provisional Government was powerless to prevent it. Above all, he believed, revolution was now possible in Europe; it needed only a signal from Russia. "The crisis has matured," Lenin insisted. "The whole future of the Russian Revolution is at stake. ... The whole future of the international workers' revolution for socialism is at stake."

Even so, two prominent Bolshevik leaders, Lev Kamenev and Grigori Zinoviev, opposed Lenin, warning that the masses would not support an insurrection; instead, they argued, the Bolsheviks should press for elections to the Constituent Assembly, which would then legally replace the Provisional Government. Lenin replied that Kamenev and Zinoviev had simply lost their nerve; if the Bolsheviks waited for the election and convening of the Constituent Assembly, which would take months, it might be too late. Trotsky supported Lenin, and it took all their efforts finally to persuade a majority of the Bolshevik Party to accept the necessity of insurrection.

Working feverishly, the Bolsheviks turned the Petrograd Soviet into the organizing center for the insurrection. The Smolny Institute was a beehive of activity, night and day; machine guns trundled down the halls as frightened Mensheviks and SRs peeked out of doorways. Trotsky personally headed the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee, which made all the preparations for the overthrow of the Provisional Government, now scheduled to coincide with the opening of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets on November 7.

In the evening of November 6, armed detachments of Red Guards began to seize all government offices and communication centers

in Petrograd: bridges, train stations, postal and telegraph offices. Revolutionary sailors from the nearby Kronstadt naval base moved the battleship *Aurora* to within firing range of the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government met. Later that night, a crowd of Red Guards, soldiers, and sailors attacked the Winter Palace, which was guarded only by some students from a military school and a battalion of middle-class soldiers. After the *Aurora* fired a few blank shells, the palace's defenders fled. Up the grand staircases the attackers ran until they reached the room where the Provisional Government sat glumly around a table. Bursting in, the leader, a small man in a floppy hat and pince-nez eyeglasses named Antonov-Ovseyenko, leaped up on the table and announced that the ministers were under arrest. The time was 2:10 in the morning of November 7.¹⁵ Kerensky had earlier slipped out and escaped in a car provided by the American embassy. The insurrection had won, and no one had been killed.

In the Smolny, the Congress of Soviets had begun to assemble on the previous evening. Out of 650 delegates from all over Russia, 390 were Bolsheviks and another 100 or so were Left SRs. There were only 80 Mensheviks altogether, and half of them belonged to Martov's faction. When a straw poll was taken, 505 voted for transferring the government to the soviets. A new election was held for the Executive Committee; the Bolsheviks proposed that it be composed of 14 Bolsheviks, 7 SRs, and 3 Mensheviks; the Right SRs, whose comrades were under siege in the Winter Palace, refused to participate, but seven Left SRs agreed to do so. The Mensheviks could not decide. Finally, the news arrived that the Winter Palace had fallen and the Provisional Government was under arrest. At this point, the Right SRs and half the Mensheviks denounced the insurrection as illegal and walked out of the Congress, to the jeers of the other delegates. Martov was torn between his sympathy for a Soviet takeover and his personal ties to the other Menshevik

leaders; finally he decided to join his friends outside the hall.

Trotsky writes,

One after another the representatives of the Right [the SR and Menshevik leaders] mount the tribune [go up to the podium]. ... These socialists and democrats, having made a compromise by hook and crook with the imperialist bourgeoisie, flatly refuse to compromise with the people in revolt. ... In the name of the Right Menshevik faction, Khinchuk ... reads a declaration: "The military conspiracy of the Bolsheviks ... will plunge the country into civil dissension, demolish the Constituent Assembly, threaten us with a military catastrophe, and lead to the triumph of the counter-revolution." The sole way out: "open negotiations with the Provisional Government." ... Having learned nothing, these people propose to the Congress to cross off the insurrection and return to Kerensky. Through the uproar, bellowing, and even hissing, the words of the representative of the Right SRs are hardly distinguishable. The declaration of his party announces "the impossibility of work in collaboration" with the Bolsheviks, and declares the very Congress of Soviets ... to be without authority.¹⁶

"What has taken place," says Trotsky, is an insurrection, not a conspiracy. An insurrection of the popular masses needs no justification. ... Our insurrection has conquered, and now you propose to us: Renounce your victory; make a compromise. With whom? I ask: With whom ought we to make a compromise? With that pitiful handful who just went out? ... There is no longer anybody in Russia who is for them. Are the millions of workers and peasants represented in this Congress, whom they are ready now as always to turn over ... to the tender mercies of the bourgeoisie, are they to enter a compromise with these men? No, a compromise is no good here. To those who have gone out, and to all who make like proposals, we must say, "You are pitiful, isolated individuals; you are bankrupts; your role is played out. Go where you belong from now on—into the rubbish-can of history."¹⁷

At 6:00 a.m. the exhausted delegates adjourned. That evening the Congress reconvened



to decide three questions: ending the war, giving land to the peasants, and establishing a soviet government. Lenin gave a short speech and, after a tremendous ovation, declared simply, "We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order." The Congress then approved a resolution on the war that proposed to all the countries involved an immediate armistice (cease-fire) followed by negotiations for a "just, democratic peace," with no annexations or indemnities. The resolution went on to repudiate the secret treaties with the Allies, including all plans for the conquest of territory, and to promise that the treaties would be published for all the world to see the true imperialist nature of the war. It concluded by calling on workers in all the belligerent countries to overthrow capitalism as the only way to guarantee peace.¹⁸ A thrill ran through the hall as the delegates voted on the resolution; at that moment the *international* impact of what they were doing became apparent. Russia had broken out of the alliance system and was offering peace to a war-weary Europe; it was possible to believe a worldwide revolution might be in the offing.

Trotsky describes the moment:

The delegates were voting this time not for a resolution, not for a proclamation, but for a governmental act of immeasurable significance.

Listen, nations! The revolution offers you peace. It will be accused of violating treaties,

but of this it is proud. To break up the leagues of bloody predation is the greatest historic service. The Bolsheviks have dared to do it. They alone have dared. Pride surges up of its own accord. Eyes shine. All are on their feet. No one is smoking now. It seems as though no one breathes. ... "Suddenly, by common impulse," the story will soon be told by John Reed, observer and participant, chronicler and poet of the insurrection, "we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the *Internationale*. A grizzled old soldier was sobbing like a child. Alexandra Kollontai rapidly winked the tears back. The immense sound rolled through the halls, burst windows and doors and soared into the quiet sky." Did it go altogether into the sky? Did it not go also to the autumn trenches, that hatchwork upon unhappy, crucified Europe, to her devastated cities and villages, to her mothers and wives in mourning? "Arise ye prisoners of starvation! Arise ye wretched of the earth!" The words of the song ... fused with the decree of the government, and hence resounded with the force of a direct act. Everyone felt greater and more important in that hour. The heart of the revolution enlarged to the width of the whole world.¹⁹

The decree on land declared, "The landlords' property in the land is annulled immediately and without any indemnity [payment] whatsoever"; all land was to be nationalized but "the right to use the land is accorded to all citizens ... desiring to cultivate it with their own labor"; local soviets were to make sure that the landlords' estates were divided fairly among the peasants according to need. As for the new government, the Congress elected a seven-member Council of People's Commissars (it was felt that the title "minister" sounded too bourgeois), all Bolsheviks, with Lenin as chairman and Trotsky as commissar of foreign affairs. The Bolsheviks had wanted to share power with the Left SRs, but this group refused because it was still trying to mediate between the Soviet and its former comrades, the Right SRs, who were continuing their boycott. A few weeks later, however, the Left SRs gave up, and three of their leaders

joined the Council.

The Constituent Assembly

The Right SRs and the Mensheviks now saw the upcoming elections to the Constituent Assembly as their chance to reverse the Soviet takeover. Late in November the elections were held, and on January 18, 1918, the Constituent Assembly gathered in Petrograd. Out of 707 delegates, there were 370 Right SRs, 40 Left SRs, 175 Bolsheviks, 15 Mensheviks, 17 Cadets, and about 80 belonging to smaller parties. The Right SRs were in control, and Victor Chernov was elected chairman of the Assembly. The Constituent Assembly immediately proclaimed itself the legitimate government of Russia.

But did it actually represent the people? The results *seemed* to indicate that the Right SRs, not the Bolsheviks, were supported by the majority of Russians—a reflection of the fact that more than 80 percent of the population was made up of peasants, who would naturally tend to vote for a party that stood in the tradition of populism and peasant revolution. But this was misleading. Russians voted for party lists, not individual candidates; in other words, a peasant, say, who wanted to vote for the SRs would vote for a whole list of candidates that the party's leadership had previously prepared. The problem was, the SR list was drawn up by the more conservative leaders *before* the party split into Right SRs and Left SRs. Only in a few districts did the Left SRs manage to put out separate lists, hence the 40 Left SRs who did get elected. Elsewhere, however, peasants had no alternative but to vote for the official list of a party that was now actually two parties (obviously, peasants could vote for any party they wanted, and many voted for the Bolsheviks, but most stuck with the party they knew: the SRs). But since the Right SRs had opposed land seizures and supported the continuation of the war—positions that were deeply unpopular among the peasantry—it is doubtful they still represented their constituents by the fall of

1917, whereas it is fairly certain that the Left SRs more accurately reflected the peasant mood at that point. And in fact, in those few districts in which the Left SRs ran separately, they beat the Right SRs by overwhelming margins.²⁰

The Bolsheviks not only regarded the Constituent Assembly as unrepresentative, but also as a superfluous and potentially counter-revolutionary body. Superfluous because the soviets were already functioning as a popular and a more democratic government, with closer ties to the workers and peasants. Potentially counter-revolutionary, because it was clear that some of the moderate socialists hoped to use it as a base for overthrowing the Soviet government, with violence if necessary. So, a day after the Constituent Assembly convened, Bolshevik soldiers came into the meeting hall and told the delegates to go home.

An indication of how little popular support there was for the Assembly is that its dispersal occasioned no mass protests and in fact was barely noticed in Russia. Outside Russia, however, the news was taken as proof that the Bolsheviks planned to establish a dictatorship.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

The Bolsheviks' peace program proved difficult to implement. The Allies ignored Russia's appeal for an armistice and negotiations. Germany agreed to a temporary cease-fire in December 1917, and negotiation began in the border town of Brest-Litovsk. But the German negotiators made harsh demands: In return for peace, Russia must surrender vast amounts of territory and natural resources. These terms were catastrophic. Trotsky, the Bolsheviks' chief negotiator, stalled for time and meanwhile appealed over the heads of the kaiser's officials to the German working class, calling on them to support the Russian Revolution and pressure their government to back down.

These appeals had an impact: In January 1918, 500,000 German metal workers went on strike in solidarity with the Bolsheviks.

The strikes spread, and soon a million German workers had walked off their jobs to protest their government's aggression against Soviet Russia. But the strike movement was crushed, and Russia had either to accept or reject Germany's ultimatum. Rejection meant the war would go on. The Left SRs, as well as some Bolsheviks, argued for fighting, but Lenin replied that this was impossible; the Russian army had already "voted with its feet"—that is, millions of soldiers were simply walking away from the front, going home. Finally, on March 3, 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed. Germany occupied Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, but its most important acquisition was Ukraine, which contained some of the country's richest farmland as well as most of its iron and coal and much of its industry. Russia was also required to pay a huge indemnity.

Lenin argued that the treaty was only a temporary setback. He was sure the German working class would recover from its defeat in January and, in a short time, bring down the kaiser and annul the treaty—which is exactly what happened eight months later. In the meantime, however, the effects were devastating. Without grain and coal from Ukraine, factories had to shut down from lack of fuel, and food shortages began to approach the level of famine. Nearly half the factory workers in Petrograd were forced to leave the city and forage for food in the countryside. The political repercussions were also ominous. The Left SRs left the government in protest over the treaty, leaving the Bolsheviks to govern alone. This was not what Lenin and the Bolsheviks had intended or foreseen.

State and Revolution

While hiding out after the July Days, Lenin wrote a long essay, "The State and Revolution," in which he discussed the Marxist theory of the state and speculated about what kind of government Russia would have after the soviets took power. He declared that most government jobs could be "performed by every literate person"

and that official positions “can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of ‘official grandeur.’” In the future workers’ state, Lenin insisted, all officials will be “elected and subject to recall *at any time*, their salaries reduced to the level of ordinary workmen’s wages.” Every worker and peasant will participate in governing; there will be no special group of rulers. Lenin wrote, “The *mass* of the population will rise to taking an *independent* part, not only in voting and elections, *but also in the everyday administration of the State*,” that is, “every cook will govern.”

In the first place, however, when the working class succeeded in taking over, Lenin was sure that the rich and powerful would never surrender without a fight. So, he declared, soviet power would mean that “simultaneously with an immense expansion of democracy, which *for the first time* becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the moneybags, the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. ... Their resistance must be crushed by force” *if* they attempted to mount armed resistance or conduct economic sabotage against the workers’ state, as Lenin predicted.

The Bolsheviks did not start with the idea of suppressing other parties or even of disfranchising the old elite. Lenin repeatedly insisted that depriving the former ruling class of the right to vote and of civil liberties was not a principle of Bolshevism nor need it be necessary in revolutions abroad. It was the inability of the capitalists and landowners to reconcile themselves to the rule of workers and peasants that drove them into open rebellion. Capitalists sabotaged their own plants, fled the cities, and, with the aristocracy and tsarist army officers, launched a counter-revolutionary civil war to overturn Soviet power. Tragically, this counter-revolution was soon joined by most of the leadership of the Mensheviks and SRs as well. Even the Left SRs eventually went into open,

armed rebellion after Brest-Litovsk.

The Marxist term “dictatorship of the proletariat” had never meant rule by one person or a small oligarchy—dictatorship in the modern sense. It meant essentially that the majority of the people—the proletariat, or in Russia, the proletariat and peasantry—would have to *impose* their rule, “dictatorially,” on those they had overthrown—the capitalists and other members of the privileged minority. If they did not ruthlessly suppress all attempts at counter-revolution, then capitalism would be restored and the revolution would be drowned in blood, as the Paris Commune had been in 1871. For the vast majority, however, it was assumed that the widest possible democracy and the maximum freedom would prevail.

The soviet state that was born on November 7, 1917, came the closest of any state in history to abolishing the distinction between rulers and ruled. The soviets combined representative and direct democracy in a new form that might be called delegate democracy, in which governance was exercised not by distant “representatives,” but by delegates closely tied to small units of electors and immediately recallable if they violated their mandates. Power flowed from the bottom up in a pyramidal structure of workplace, district, city, and national soviets. Moreover, electors, meeting in frequent assemblies, were organized as workers in their workplaces, a natural locus for discussion and debate with a tendency to generate a sense of solidarity and common purpose, not as atomized “voters” inhabiting given geographical units with little or no communication among themselves, almost never assembling to discuss their political choices but instead trooping to the polls every few years to choose among representatives of the ruling class (or, just as frequently in our country, abstaining as a result of disinterest, alienation, or ignorance).

Lenin and the other Bolsheviks took it for granted that Russia would be governed by the workers through the soviets, and that within

the soviets there would always be free and open debates, frequent elections, and a multitude of political parties besides their own. Tragically, however, none of these expectations were to be realized.

For six months or so after November 7, the soviet state functioned more or less as Lenin had envisioned. But less than a year after the October Revolution, Soviet Russia had become an authoritarian one-party state. How and why this happened will be the subject of a subsequent article.

NOTES

1. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor, 1961), 80. The reference is to Ulrich von Hutten, German poet and scholar, who led the Protestant Knights' Revolt of 1522, which inspired the great German Peasants' War of 1524–1526.
2. Rasputin's influence stemmed from his role as a "faith healer." The tsar and tsarina's son, Alexander, was afflicted with hemophilia, and Rasputin was apparently able to stop the boy's bleeding with hypnosis.
3. In 1903 two factions emerged within Russia's newly formed Marxist organization, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP): the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. In 1912 they became separate parties. Initially, they differed over how the RSDLP should be constituted. The Bolsheviks insisted on stringent requirements for membership (Lenin said he wanted a party of "professional [not amateurish] revolutionaries," members with a high degree of political sophistication and revolutionary expertise), while the Mensheviks favored a looser organization. Soon there were other political differences. The defeat of the 1905 Revolution was blamed by the Bolsheviks on the betrayal of middle-class liberals, while the Mensheviks argued that the workers, by being too militant, had scared the liberals into making their peace with the autocracy. The SRs were a non-Marxist socialist party rooted in the nineteenth-century Russian Populist, or Narodnik, movement. The Narodniks had advocated peasant revolution and waged a campaign of assassination against tsarist officials. But by 1917 they had become more moderate and committed to supporting Russia's liberals, much like the Mensheviks.
4. Since Russia was still using the Old Style dating system, Feb. 23 was the day the Revolution began according to the Russian calendar. So, even though Russia adopted the New Style calendar a year later, the overthrow of the autocracy has always been known as the February Revolution.
5. Cossacks were a special force of fierce horsemen used by the tsars to suppress riots, strikes, and revolts.
6. The Duma was a virtually powerless parliament created by the tsar in response to the Revolution of 1905.
7. "Soviet" is the Russian word for "council." Soviets had sprung up during the 1905 Revolution, but were suppressed with the revolution's defeat.
8. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: A Personal Record* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 6–7. Along with Trotsky's *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Sukhanov's book is a vivid and invaluable first-hand narrative, albeit with a very different interpretation.
9. Sukhanov, 124.
10. Quoted in Tony Cliff, *Lenin*, vol. 2 (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 90.
11. John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (Penguin, 1960), 14–15.
12. Quoted in Sukhanov, 273.
13. Quoted in Cliff, 214.
14. Chernov, when he came out to speak to the crowd, was accosted by a group of sailors, one of whom yelled at him, "Take power, you son of a bitch!" Trotsky then appeared and persuaded the sailors to let him go.
15. Old Style, Oct. 25—hence the name, October Revolution.
16. Leon Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution: The Overthrow of Tzarism and the Triumph of the Soviets* (Doubleday and Co., 1959), 443–444.
17. Trotsky, 446.
18. Back in March the Menshevik and SR leaders of the Soviet had passed a similar resolution, but its call for revolution was aimed at the Central Powers only. In November, having overthrown capitalism in Russia, the Bolsheviks thought they were in a stronger position to ask workers in other countries to do the same.
19. Trotsky, 462.
20. Oliver Radkey, author of the definitive work in English on the Constituent Assembly elections, *Russia Goes to the Polls* (Harvard University Press, 1950), published evidence in a 1987 addendum that indicated the SRs had won a plurality, not a majority, and that peasant support for the program of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs was actually much broader than the voting indicated. Prior to the election, the leaders of the Right SRs manipulated the ballots to make sure that the Lefts would be substantially under-represented. It was also significant that peasants who lived near cities, garrisons, and railroads, and were therefore more likely to understand what the Bolsheviks and Left SRs stood for, voted for those two parties by large margins.

This Changed Everything—Twice

Russia, Revolution, and Counter-revolution

DAN LA BOTZ

I
DURING THE TUMULTUOUS YEARS that followed the horrors of World War I, especially in the period of 1917 to the early 1920s, the Russian working class became an inspiration to workers around the world. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 did several things that represented a watershed for the socialist movement. First, of course, for the first time in world history working people—the proletariat and the peasantry—overthrew the old order of monarchical, aristocratic, and capitalist government in Russia, took power themselves, and founded a new revolutionary regime aimed at establishing socialism. With the exception of the tragically short-lived Paris Commune of 1871, lasting just seventy days, a successful workers' revolution had never happened before, and never in an entire nation.

Second, the revolution established an entirely new model of government based on the soviets, or councils of workers, soldiers, sailors, and peasants that had grown out of strikes, land seizures, desertions, and mutinies. Thrown up in struggle to coordinate militant action, the soviets became a kind of government, an alternative to the parliament during a brief period of dual power, and then—after the Bolsheviks dispersed the parliament—the soviets became the government. The common people now

held power. All of the left parties believed in principle in a multiparty workers' democracy, and in the first year the Soviet government had a multiparty leadership, made up of the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, the Maximalists, and even anarchists, all of them arguing within the soviets for their various programs and strategies.

Third, the revolution was led by a new sort of political party, the Bolsheviks, a party that strove to combine internal democracy with centralization and discipline. The Bolshevik Party played a key role at every stage of the revolution, above all in the defense of Petrograd, in the calls for "Land, Peace, and Bread" and "All Power to the Soviets," and, not least, in the organization of the insurrection that overthrew the February Revolution's capitalist government and thrust power into the hands of the soviets. The Bolshevik Party, later called the Communist Party, was, during the 1917-1921 period, a quite democratic organization with open discussion and debate, tendencies and factions.¹ The two outstanding leaders of the party in this period, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, were each sometimes in a minority, even a minority of one, and at other times they were divided against each other, as the Bolsheviks wrestled with the issues of withdrawing Soviet Russia from World War I, foreign intervention, the counter-revolutionary White Armies, and the civil war, as well as with many other life-and-death issues.

Fourth and finally, within a year the Russian Revolutionaries—who had witnessed the betrayal of socialist ideals by the leaders of the

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Second (Socialist) International and then that organization's collapse at the outbreak of World War I, created a new Communist International to coordinate revolutionary socialist struggle around the world. The Communist Party of Soviet Russia became deeply involved in negotiations with the Socialist parties in Europe

Though they only vaguely understood what had happened there, for millions of working people around the globe, to say "Russia" was to say revolution, socialism, and freedom.

as well as in discussions with anarchists and syndicalists. The Communist International became particularly involved in developments in Germany, which was seen at the time as the only possible salvation of the revolution in Russia since no one imagined that socialism could be created in an economically backward nation such as Russia. As Lenin said more than once, "Without Germany we are lost."

These four developments—the event of the Russian Revolution itself, the workers' soviets as the government, the Bolshevik Party leadership, and the Communist International as a party of world revolution—represented a dramatic break with the socialist movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and raised the possibility of a spreading revolutionary movement that might transform the entire world. From 1918 to the 1920s, hundreds of thousands of European workers, and many in other parts of the world, wanted to become Bolsheviks, and millions wanted to create soviets, though as Victor Serge wrote of that period, almost no one outside of Russia had any idea what either "Bolshevik" or "soviet" meant. Still, though they

only vaguely understood what had happened there, for millions of working people around the globe, to say "Russia" was to say revolution, socialism, and freedom.

II

Yet within a decade the revolution had been overthrown by a bureaucratic counter-revolution, a process far more violent than the October revolution itself. And within two decades a section of the former revolutionaries led by Joseph Stalin had, through this counter-revolutionary process, created an altogether new society, dominated by a new bureaucratic ruling class—a ruling class as oppressive and exploitive as any that had come before—a class not only taking power in Russia, but also with ambitions of empire abroad.

Like the Russian Revolution of October 1917, the counter-revolution that began in the mid-1920s and definitively ended in the late 1930s also provided an alternative to the earlier socialist movement's models and theories, as well as to those of the early soviet period. First, Joseph Stalin and his collaborators established the model of one-party rule as a principle, something initially undreamed of by the Russian revolutionaries of 1917. While one-party rule had emerged earlier, it was Stalin who made it an ideal, arguing that Communist Party rule was by definition working-class rule. This was moreover a top-down, vertical party, without factions, without debate, where commands came down from on high to functionaries below and then to the workers in their factories and peasants on their farms. The soviets, which had ceased to function during the "War Communism" period, were by the mid-1920s effectively run by the Communist Party.

Second, the party fused with the state to take command of the means of production that had been nationalized earlier, while at the same time bureaucratic control and planning came to substitute for the idea of *democratic* socialization and planning of industry and agriculture. This

bureaucratic collectivism was a novel and, at the time, a unique regime. With the one-party state in control of politics, the economy, and society, the Soviet Union became totalitarian, controlling every organization and forbidding any activities that it did not control. Communist planning, a forced march to modernization, proved to be a horror. The state's forced collectivization of agriculture from 1928 to 1940 would take the lives of as many as six million peasants in Ukraine and Russia, while the First Five-Year Plan of 1928-1932 and the plans that followed would recapitulate the savage exploitation of the working class that had taken place earlier in Western Europe during the industrial revolution.

Third, under Stalin, the idea of revolutionary internationalism and the belief that other European revolutions were necessary to save the Russian Revolution were replaced by the notion of "socialism in one country." During Soviet Russia's first years, Lenin once said that the Bolsheviks would have gladly sacrificed the Russian Revolution to achieve a German revolution. Further, because of its high level of economic development, a German workers' state would give Russia's workers' state a far better chance of survival. For Stalin it was just the reverse: Other revolutions in China, Germany, and Spain were sacrificed in the interest of preserving the Soviet Union. Consequently, the Communist International, dominated by the Russian Communist Party, ceased to be a center of the revolutionary workers' movement and became instead an agent of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. The test of all politics ceased to be what was good for the international movement and became instead what was good for the rulers of the Soviet Union.

III

Despite this dramatic turn in the revolution between the mid-1920s and the 1930s, the Soviet Union and the Communist International continued to exert an enormous influence on

the working class worldwide that had been so inspired by October 1917. The Russian Communist Party had the authority to influence revolutionary movements around the globe. Stalin's first major test of foreign policy, the revolutionary situation in China from 1925 to 1927, proved to be a disaster after he insisted that the Chinese Communists remain within the Kuo-Min-Tang, the bourgeois nationalist party of Chiang Kai-shek, rather than forming their own party. Chiang and the KMT used the Communists until they became a threat and then turned on them and virtually annihilated the Communists in Shanghai in 1927.

Only the most knowledgeable socialists had followed Chinese developments, and because of the reputation of October 1917, the Communist International still commanded the allegiance of millions of workers in Europe. In the period 1928-1935, Stalin, as the effective leader of the Communist International, put forward the new theory of "social fascism"—that is, the Social Democrats were in essence the same as the fascists, a position that prevented joint action by German Communists and Social Democrats, thus contributing to the rise and ultimate victory of the Nazis. These developments in both China and Germany represented a sharp break with the early Communist International's advocacy of the "united front"—the joint action of working-class parties against the far right combined with open criticism of class-collaborationist Social Democratic policies. Once Adolf Hitler came to power, Social Democrats and Communists went together to concentration camps and to the grave.

After the shock of Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, in mid-1935 Stalin's Communist International changed course and adopted the "popular front," meaning unity not only with Social Democrats but also with capitalist parties, even conservative ones. This too was a break with early Communist International policy that had called for the complete independence of working-class parties. This new

policy was largely responsible for the defeat of a revolutionary movement in Spain during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. The Communist International and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) worked to defend the Republic—in fact the Communists who were providing military assistance practically came to control the Spanish government—while at the same time Communists worked against revolutionary anarchists and socialists in the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM). Stalin's secret police, the KGB, worked with the PCE and the Communist International brigades to assassinate anarchists and POUM leaders such as Andrés Nin. With the revolutionary movement crushed, General Francisco Franco and his fascist Falange won the civil war and proceeded to annihilate the Communists and what was left of the anarchist and revolutionary socialist left.

Stalin negotiated with England and France, knowing full well that they had no desire to make an alliance with Communist Russia. Stalin did so only as a strategy to pressure Hitler into making a deal with the Soviet Union, a deal that would give Stalin more territory and a buffer on the west. The Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939 was followed by the division of Poland, with Germany invading from the west and the Soviet Union from the east. Later in 1939 the Soviet Union also invaded Finland, taking 11 percent of its territory. The bureaucratic rulers of the Soviet Union, born into an imperialist world, having become Russian nationalists, and driven by their own ambitions, now also became imperialists themselves.

The Soviet alliance with Nazi Germany represented only a brief interlude. In June of 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. Stalin then brought the Soviet Union to join the Allied powers—the United States, Great Britain, Free France, and nationalist China—in the war against the Axis: Germany, Italy, and Japan. Once again, now allied with the world's greatest imperial powers, the Communist International called upon its member parties to

support democracy and restrain revolutionary labor movements or colonial rebellions that might jeopardize its alliance with the empires.

Despite those developments, official Communism, still living on the legacy of 1917, continued to hold authority among millions. Some argued that the Soviet Union's remarkable, if incredibly costly, victory—at least 25 million lives lost—in the struggle to defend itself against Nazi Germany in World War II proved the superiority of the Russian Communists' "socialist" organization and ideology. Then too there was the Soviet Union's liberation of Eastern Europe from the Nazis, a liberation, however, that quickly led to Soviet domination and the imposition of Communist governments from the Baltic to Bulgaria and from Ukraine to East Germany.²

Whatever else it might be, Stalinist Communism appeared to be a winner, spreading across the globe from Germany to China by 1949. The United States ended World War II by dropping atomic bombs on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in August of 1945, but the Soviet Union succeeded in producing its own atom bomb in 1949. Then the Soviets launched the Sputnik satellite in 1957, suggesting that Communist Russia might also be the world's greatest industrial, scientific, and potentially military power. All of this, Communists argued, was because of the Russian Revolution of 1917 that continued to live on in the Soviet Union's "socialist" society.

Those living in the Communist world knew better. In the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe a distinct political, economic, and social system emerged, one that privileged the Communist elite, generated inequality, and suppressed dissent. Repressive at its core, it was necessarily a system of fear and lies. In the mature bureaucratic collectivist system, the Communist Party, through its control of the state, also controlled the means of production, and so Communist bureaucrats elaborated the country's economic plans.

Yet planning in a totalitarian society generated tremendous economic contradictions. The directors of industrial sectors and the managers of factories and farms were afraid of producing honest reports for fear of losing their jobs or even their lives. Their false reports to their superiors inevitably distorted all attempts at rational planning. To compensate for the discrepancy between the plan and actual potential, and to meet the bureaucracy's latest Five-Year Plan demands, the directors stockpiled surpluses of raw materials and machines so as to be prepared to fulfill unrealistic quotas. At the same time these Communist captains of industry and factory bosses competed with each other for these materials through struggles in the bureaucracy and in the black market, just as they competed to hire away from each other the most skilled managers, technicians, and workers. Remarkably, by prodigious, wasteful, and environmentally disastrous industrial production, the Soviet economic planners and directors managed to raise the standard of living of the working class and peasantry, though consumer goods remained far inferior to those in capitalist Europe and the United States.

The undeniable legacy of the revolution that remained in the totalitarian society was a safety net of guaranteed jobs, virtually free housing, simple clothing, basic food, free health care, and a meritocratic education system. Productivity and income remained low. As the joke went, "We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us." Through the mass production of shoddy goods, through rationing, and long waits in queues, basic human needs were met, if unequally, in a society without democracy or freedom of expression.

While the Soviet system shared with capitalism the evils of class rule and privilege, oppression and exploitation, economic problems and environmental catastrophes, it operated through altogether different mechanisms. With enormous territory, vast natural resources, one of the world's largest populations, and a cohesive

ruling class bent on keeping and expanding its power, the Soviet Union became—as already demonstrated in World War II in Finland, the Baltic, and Poland, and confirmed following the war in Eastern Europe—one of the world's great imperialist powers. For a generation, during the Cold War years of 1945 to 1960, the United States dominated the capitalist world, the Soviet Union dominated the Communist world, and both fought to influence and if possible to draw into their respective spheres the nations of the Third World.

The question of Communism had already become somewhat more complicated by 1948–1949 when Josip Broz Tito's Communist Yugoslavia broke with Stalin, followed by the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s. Bureaucratic collectivism became definitively divided into hostile camps, with China eventually joining in alliance with the United States.

Still, outside of the Soviet Union, many remained believers in the Communist system of the Soviet Union, a system that Russians themselves now cynically endured. Even as the purges and then murders of tens of thousands of revolutionary socialists and the deaths of millions of peasants during the forced collectivization of Soviet agriculture became common knowledge (for some as early as the 1930s and for many certainly by the 1950s), some—dogmatic, deceived, or in denial—continued to proclaim the Soviet Union was a workers' state. Others, especially in the 1950s in the Third World—what today we would call the developing nations—saw in the Soviet Union a model for rapid modernization. Yet others, engaged in revolutionary nationalist or socialist movements, whatever they thought of the Soviet Union, turned to the Russian Communists for diplomatic, economic, and military support.

Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 revealed Joseph Stalin's crimes. That speech was followed in October and November by the Hungarian

Revolution against Soviet power—a workers' revolution against the Communist state and the Soviet Union. Finally, many who had previously supported the Soviet Union began to break from Communism. When the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia and suppressed the Prague Spring in 1968, there was another mass exodus from Communist parties around the world.

IV

What took them so long? From the early 1920s through the 1950s many had already asked what had gone wrong. Others continued to ask that question until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The answers, of course, varied. Some argued that one or another specific moment or development in the process—Lenin's call for a party of "professional revolutionaries" in 1903, the dispersal of the Duma in 1917, the establishment of one-party rule, the suppression of the Kronstadt Rebellion of 1921, Stalin's victory in the struggle to succeed Lenin between 1924 and 1927, or Stalin's consolidation of power between 1927 and 1937—had led to the failure of a revolutionary workers' movement that might otherwise have been successful. These debates preoccupied revolutionary socialists for decades and still do.

The most popular argument, however, was the belief that Soviet Communism was proof that, given human nature, socialism was an impossibility. This view of humankind's inherent and utter inability to establish a democratic, egalitarian, and libertarian social order that could provide a good life for all became the stuff of textbooks, newspaper editorials, and TV and radio discussions around the world. Pundits, professors, and politicians argued that revolution always leads to terror, then "Thermidor," and finally dictatorship. It was human nature. Capitalism alone worked; nothing else was possible.

Human nature arguments, so much easier than having to wrestle with historical specificity, seduced with their simplicity. The counter-

revolution that swept away the Russian Revolution and its all-too-brief experience of workers' democracy was a terrible tragedy. But the even greater tragedy was that consequently virtually all of the revolutionary European proletariat of the generations of 1900-1945 perished in Hitler's and Stalin's purges and death camps, or in World War II and the Holocaust. Consequently, by the 1950s the significance of the original workers' revolution of 1917—a revolution from below—was largely erased from the collective memory of the working class in both Eastern and Western Europe and throughout the world.

V

How do we who today consider ourselves to be revolutionary socialists in the "socialism from below" tradition explain what happened to the great socialist experiment? The most common explanation usually given by those in the Trotskyist tradition—and there is much truth in it—is that objective conditions brought about the transformation of soviet democracy into Stalinist totalitarianism: the backwardness of Russia, the violence and destruction of the civil war, the invasion by 16 foreign nations (including the United States, by the way), and the famine of 1921-1922 that took as many as five million lives.

Then too, those objective conditions included the social imbalance: the small number of workers and the enormous number of peasants whose desire for land overrode for them all other considerations. The Bolshevik Party's worker-members went off by the thousands to fight and in many cases to die in the new Red Army, while others were dispersed over Russia's enormous territory to become civilian administrators of far-flung provinces and cities or of mines and factories. At the same time that the new Communist soviet government was fighting the White Armies in the civil war, other left groups rebelled against the Bolsheviks: Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and anarchists all took up arms. Throughout all

of this upheaval, production declined and the working class shrank as workers left the cities to go back to the villages where there might be food. The wonder is that in such conditions the workers' revolution in some fashion survived into the 1920s.

Still, the objective situation, as important as it is, does not adequately explain what happened, because even within the limitations of those objective conditions there remained latitude for different choices by the Bolshevik Party leaders, by other parties, by the soviets, and by "ordinary" workers and peasants themselves. Turning around the clauses in Marx's famous quote from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, on the basis of the historical conditions in which they find themselves, men and women still make their own decisions. Some on the far left argue that every decision made by Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership was correct, at least until Lenin's death in 1924, but in fact they were not flawless, and some decisions they made, whatever their intentions, contributed to the development of Stalinism—which is *not* to say that Bolshevism was destined to lead to Stalinism.

The absolutely necessary policy of War Communism—subordinating everything to winning the war against the White Armies through requisitioning, rationing, and widespread nationalization of property—replaced soviet democracy with a Bolshevik-led militarization of the entire society. After the foreign invasion of Russia, in order to win the civil war, "red terror" became essential to defend the revolution. The problem was that both the machinery and the mentality of the terror lived on after the civil war was won. The Bolshevik Party took command of the soviets, eliminating the other parties—one of a series of decisions and practices that contributed to bringing about the end of multiparty democracy and of the internal democracy of the Bolshevik Party itself beginning in 1918.

The February Revolution of 1917 had abolished the death penalty, and the October

Revolution had confirmed that policy, but in less than a year the death penalty was revived. The re-establishment of the death penalty in 1918, with the execution of Fanny Kaplan after her attempt on the life of Lenin, was one of the early serious errors. The state could now kill the criminally accused, though Communist Party members would not be killed until 1934. The unlimited power of the Cheka, the secret police, from the time of its establishment in December 1917, was another serious error. The Cheka, created by an order of Lenin, had the power to arrest, to try in secret and without defense, to pass judgment, and to execute people as it saw fit. As Victor Serge writes, a "revolutionary tribunal functioning in the light of day" would have attained "the same efficiency with far less abuse and depravity."³

At the same time, with the economy in decline and industry decaying, the working class shrinking, and its most dedicated activists going off to either fight the war or administer government, the soviets ceased to have their earlier lively character and became "no more than an auxiliary organ of the Party." Mere shells, the soviets had by 1919 ceased to take initiative or to manage anything. The Bolshevik Party itself was transformed as careerists flooded the party and corrupt elements came over to the winning side. "Within the Party the remedy to this evil had to be, in fact was, the discreet dictatorship of the old, honest, and incorruptible members, in other words the Old Guard," writes Serge.⁴

By 1919 Lenin, making a virtue of necessity, was arguing that the dictatorship of the party was the dictatorship of the working class. The Bolshevik Party went on to ban factions in 1921, as within the party appointment from above replaced election from below, and debate and discussion began to be suppressed. These developments contributed to the dangerous tendency toward displacement from the soviets to the party and within the party from the bottom toward the top.

The continuing civil war and the privations

experienced by the population understandably led to rebellions against the Soviet state. The most important rebellion of peasants protesting requisitioning took place in Tambov in 1920–1921, but there were a number of others as well. The sailors at the Kronstadt naval base revolted in March 1921, calling for new elections to the soviets, freedom of the press and free speech, and the right of peasants to make use of their own land. Their rebellion was at its roots a rebellion against the regime of War Communism, both its economic privations and lack of democracy.

While the Kronstadt sailors took a few Communists prisoner, they harmed no one and the rebellion did not immediately pose a threat to the Soviet government. Yet the Bolsheviks lied to the workers, telling them the Kronstadt was in the hands of the White Armies. Lenin sent the Bolshevik Mikhail Kalinin to deal with the rebellion. When negotiations failed to resolve the situation, the Bolsheviks attacked Kronstadt, leading to thousands of deaths with as many as 10,000 Red Army soldiers and an unknown number of rebels killed in the battle, as well as an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 rebels executed afterwards.

The unnecessarily violent suppression of this revolt represented one of the great mistakes of the Soviet government's early years.⁵ Interestingly, Serge, who deeply sympathized with the Kronstadt rebels, decided nonetheless to continue to support the Bolsheviks. He wrote, "If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the *émigrés*, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian."⁶

Lenin convinced the Bolshevik Party of the necessity of a New Economic Policy (NEP). While the state continued to control finance and the great industries, small-scale capitalist production and commerce were permitted in the city and the countryside. Nikolai Bukharin became a principal advocate after Lenin's death

of continuing to expand the NEP program. While the economy revived, some Bolsheviks now worried about the NEP men (capitalists), the *kulaks* (wealthy peasants), and overwhelming bureaucracy. The fear of the restoration of capitalism in Russia led Trotsky and others to see the principal danger on the pro-capitalist right, while minimizing the threat of the coalescing of the caste of bureaucrats gradually taking command of the Soviet state.

While there are other Bolshevik errors we might consider, those we have discussed demonstrate the way in which objective circumstances in combination with misguided political decisions gradually established the basis for a transition from workers' democracy to bureaucratic collectivism. Already by 1919 there was little democracy in the soviets or in the Communist Party, and by March 1921 there was virtually none. By the early 1920s the workers' state had become, said Lenin, "a workers' state with bureaucratic deformations."

With Lenin's death, a succession struggle broke out among various shifting factions and individual leaders of the Communist Party, most prominent among them Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Trotsky, and Stalin. While Stalin moved toward the consolidation of his control over the party and the state, ironically no one understood at the time what was happening. The Bolsheviks had always feared a capitalist revolution that would re-establish private property, but Stalin went beyond defending to expanding state property. Consequently, his opponents on the left utterly miscalculated, often supporting Stalin against what they saw as the more dangerous positions of Bukharin on the right. By 1927, Stalin had taken control of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Communist International. Within a few years, working class strikes, protests from the soviets, and opposition within the Communist Party had been crushed. Stalin's secret police rounded up, imprisoned, and eventually killed most of the Old Bolsheviks and hundreds of

thousands of others. By 1940 Stalin's counter-revolution was complete.

Leon Trotsky, the most famous socialist opponent of Stalin, had refused to join with the Workers' Opposition or other Bolshevik oppositions that arose between 1919 and 1921. He declined to take his criticism of Stalin outside of the party to the Russian working people, believing that outside of the Bolsheviks there was no hope. By 1923, however, Trotsky established the Left Opposition, a faction within the Bolsheviks, and in 1924 he published *The New Course*, arguing that it was necessary to reform the party by democratizing it. His was perhaps a reasonable point of view in 1924, when there was hope that democracy might be revived in the party, though it is not clear that in itself this would have led then to the re-establishment of soviet power, that is, the power of workers over Soviet society. And certainly by 1927, when democracy was dead in the soviets, the trade unions, and the party, Trotsky's view no longer made any sense at all.

The working class had changed as a new generation of peasants had come into the cities

to take industrial jobs. The Communist Party had also changed. After Lenin's death in 1924, the "Lenin levy" brought 240,000 workers with little or no political experience into the Communist Party, increasing its membership by 50 percent. As Trotsky, Gregory Zinoviev, and Lev Kamenev discovered when their United or Joint Opposition attempted in 1928 to take their reform program into the factories and to the new working class and new Communists, this was not the revolutionary working class of just a decade before. The Communists and other workers shouted them down.

Workers' democracy had ended earlier, but unquestionably by the late 1920s workers no longer had any influence over the government and by extension no control over the economy. Socialism in such circumstances did not and could not exist. Yet Trotsky, then in exile, continued, despite the suppression of workers' democracy, to call for the "defense of the Soviet Union," arguing mistakenly that workers' consciousness of the earlier experience of the October Revolution and the nationalization of the means of production meant that Russia



"Long Live the Revolution!"

Red Guards in a commandeered vehicle. Early Bolshevik poster

"I went back to Petrograd riding on the front seat of an auto truck, driven by a workman and filled with Red Guards. We had no kerosene, so our lights were not burning. The road was crowded with the proletarian army going home, and new reserves pouring out to take their places. ...

Across the horizon spread the glittering lights of the capital, immeasurably more splendid by night than by day like a dike of jewels heaped on the barren plain.

The old workman who drove held the wheel in one hand, while with the other he swept the far-gleaming capital in an exultant gesture.

'Mine!' he cried, his face all alight. 'All mine now! My Petrograd!'"

—John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook The World*

could be still reformed or needed only a political, not a social, revolution. Trotsky lost sight of the intrinsic necessity of the practice of democracy to the existence of a workers' state.

Trotsky found few supporters and virtually no allies in Europe, dominated as the working class was by Social Democracy and the Communist International. He rejected the idea of a broad, non-Communist left alliance in defense of socialist democracy, opting instead to try to build a revolutionary international. His Fourth International, a new alliance of Marxist organizations with no mass parties among them, was stillborn. His fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the Communist bureaucracy led him, in the late 1920s and 1930s, to a series of deeply contradictory positions on the nature of the Soviet Union. He continued to argue that the Soviet Union, because its property remained nationalized, had to be defended as a "workers' state," albeit "degenerated." Various Trotskyists broke with him on this issue, arguing as we have here that bureaucratic Communism represented a new form of class society and imperialism as well.⁷ And on the eve of World War II he made erroneous predictions: workers' revolutions in Europe and the fall of the Soviet bureaucracy by the war's end.

After Trotsky's assassination in August 1940 and then the end of the war, the Fourth International added to his mistaken analysis of the Soviet Union even more erroneous and pernicious notions, particularly the idea that the Eastern European countries conquered by the Soviet Union were somehow "proletarian" though born "bureaucratically deformed." Workers' revolutions, according to Trotsky's orthodox followers, apparently were no longer necessary to bring about workers' states.

The Russian Revolution's democratic period continues to inspire us, even though it is clear that the disastrous conditions of the civil war, War Communism, and the excesses of the terror worked to extinguish democracy and led to a series of decisions that set the revolution on

a course toward bureaucratic counter-revolution. The principal lesson we take from these experiences of revolution and counter-revolution is the centrality of democracy to the establishment, defense, and construction of socialism.

Afterword

The analysis developed in this article comes from the tradition of a number of people who mostly were part of the Trotskyist movement, most important among them Max Shachtman. Though he later moved to the right, that in no way vitiates the analysis he made when he was still a revolutionary. This was, broadly speaking, the view of the founders of *New Politics*, who came out of that tradition. Other political activists and intellectuals in a number of countries have, over the years, come to similar views of the nature of bureaucratic Communism and of the centrality of democracy to the revolutionary process and to the construction of a new society.

NOTES

1. See, on the Bolshevik Party's internal life: Marcel Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin* (London: Merlin Press, 1975) and Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (W. W. Norton, 1978).
2. Under Communist Party leadership, Albania and Yugoslavia carried out genuine national revolutions, creating bureaucratic Communist states. Czechoslovakia's complicated "revolution" involved an alliance between the Social Democrats and the Communists, workers' strikes, and the nearby presence of the Red Army.
3. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. by Peter Sedgwick (Writers and Readers, 1984), 81.
4. Serge, *Memoirs*, 119.
5. Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky, *La lutte contre le stalinisme: textes 1936-1939, présentés par Michel Dreyfus* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), Serge, "Kronstadt," 177-181.
6. Serge, *Memoirs*, 128-29.
7. Among them: Max Shachtman, *The Bureaucratic Revolution: The Rise of the Stalinist State* (The Donald Press, 1962); Ante Ciliga, *The Russian Enigma* (London: Ink Links, 1979); Ernest Haberkern and Arthur Lipow, eds., *Neither Capitalism nor Socialism: Theories of Bureaucratic Collectivism* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996).

On the Centennial of Lenin's Imperialism Thesis Neoliberal Imperialism, The Latest Stage of Capitalism

SAEED RAHNEMA

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, in exile in Zurich during the spring of 1916, Lenin started writing one of his most important and influential works, his pamphlet on imperialism. What is the relevance of this work today?

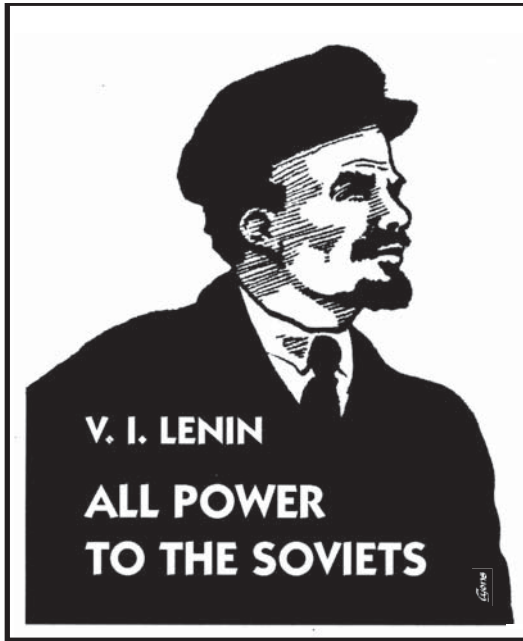
I will argue that, although the nature of imperialism has not changed, its structures, functions, and other specifications are very different from the imperialism of Lenin's time. Confronting this invisible and omnipresent goliath is far more complicated than challenging the colonial imperialism of the previous century. Lenin's imperialism pamphlet is a valuable historical document that, as he himself wrote in the introduction, was a composite picture of the world capitalist system at the beginning of the twentieth century. But it cannot be a blueprint for current-day anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist activists.

The first edition of Lenin's pamphlet was

published in April 1917 in Petrograd, after the February Revolution, under the title *Imperialism, the Latest Stage of Capitalism (A Popular Framework)*. In 1920, the term "latest stage" was replaced by the "highest stage" in the German and French editions, which reflected Lenin's more decisive view of the perceived forthcoming end of capitalism.

As Lenin noted, in writing this pamphlet he was influenced by John A. Hobson, an English liberal economist, and Rudolf Hilferding, a prominent Marxist theoretician. Most of the main concepts and ideas were based on the works of these two men, as well as on Nicolai Bukharin's *Imperialism and the World Economy*, for which Lenin had written an introduction. The title was also inspired by the subtitle of Hilferding's *Finance Capital: Studying the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*. Hobson had argued that as monopolies expand, their share of profit and savings grows, leading to over-saving and under-consumption and to the need for capital export, foreign investment, and imperialist expansion. Hilferding had argued that the period of monopoly capitalism was characterized by the fusion of industrial and bank capital into what he called "finance capital," which greatly enhanced the power of the banks and monopolies. Bukharin had expanded the theory to the global level and had theorized the internationalization of capitalist production. In that period also, Rosa Luxemburg had written *The Accumulation of Capital*, focusing on, among other things, the question of the realization of

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surplus value and the need to expand to other areas dominated by pre-capitalist formations. Lenin, however, did not directly rely on any aspect of her theory.

While drawing on the concepts developed by these theorists, Lenin obviously reached his own quite different conclusions. Hobson believed that imperialism was not inevitable and saw it as being separate from capitalism. Lenin, however, believed that imperialism was an inevitable outcome of a capitalist system. Hilferding held that since imperialism and monopolies severely exploit and weaken the working class and the general population as a whole, they will rise against it. Lenin, on the other hand, observing that the working classes of imperialist countries supported imperialist wars rather than fight against them, argued that the “superprofits” that capital exporters gained from exploiting workers in foreign lands were subsequently used to “bribe” their homeland workers, thus the rise of the “labor aristocracy.” Whether this explanation was correct or not is beside the point here.

Lenin took greatest issue, however, with Karl Kautsky’s idea of “ultra-imperialism,” the perceived cartel-like collaboration among imperialists, and the possibility of peaceful capitalism. Lenin also rejected Kautsky’s notion of the possibility of further stages in the development of capitalism and was adamant that this “highest stage” reflected the end of the “parasitic,” “decaying,” and “overripe” capitalism that heralded “the eve of socialist revolution.”

Lenin summarized his theory of imperialism as having five basic features: 1) the concentration of production and capital leads to the creation of monopolies; 2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital creates finance capital; 3) the export of capital, as distinguished from the export of commodities, becomes very significant; 4) international monopolist capitalist associations divide the world among themselves; and 5) the territorial division of the world among the biggest capitalist powers is complete. In Lenin’s words, this was “a composite picture of the world capitalist system and its international relations at the beginning of the twentieth century.”¹ The question is whether, to what extent, and in what forms these five features are valid and relevant to the world capitalist system at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

At its most general level, Lenin’s emphasis on the direct linkage between imperialism and capitalism is undeniable, now more than ever. At the time of Lenin, much of the world was still operating within pre-capitalist formations. Today almost every part of the world is dominated by capitalist systems. Capitalism, contrary to Lenin’s expectations, however, continues to expand extensively and intensively. So does imperialism, which, despite claims by theorists like Hardt and Negri,² is far from dead and continues its vigorous and aggressive global dominance, though—as will be discussed below—in much different forms and with different structures as compared to Lenin’s time.

1. Concentration of Production and Capital

For Lenin, concentration of production and the rise of monopolies were the most important features of capitalism. The trend has continued ever since. If, for example, in 1907 there were 586 firms in Germany with more than one thousand workers, today's giant corporations employ hundreds of thousands of workers and employees. Walmart, the largest global corporation by revenues, has 2.2 million employees in different parts of the world and is linked to a large network of manufacturing and service corporations. Industrial corporations like IBM, Toyota, General Electric, Nestle, and Pepsi Cola each have more than three hundred thousand employees. Lenin rightly pointed out that in large firms, the concentration of production is much greater than the concentration of workers. This is even truer today because of the much higher level of technology use in the production processes. Aside from employment size, the annual revenues of each of the twenty largest corporations are larger than the GDP of more than 160 countries.

Concentration of production and capital, along with centralization, has continued in different forms. There are growing numbers of mergers and acquisitions, along with growing barriers to entry for new firms, and thus less and less competition. In the United States, for example, a recent report³ points to the phenomenon of declining competition in most branches of industry. As industrial concentration intensifies, the largest firms' share of revenue increases. Returns on invested capital have also become more and more concentrated within the largest firms. The report notes that "the 90th percentile [publicly traded, nonfinancial] firm sees returns on investments in capital that are more than five times the median. This ratio was closer to two just a quarter of a century ago." The same report also points to the decline in the number of new firms each year.

What makes today's oligopolies different from the time of Lenin is not just their size and the rate of concentration, but their types and structures. The monopolies of Lenin's time, particularly in Germany, were combines, syndicates, and cartels. The cartels determined production level, prices, and the territory of operation. Today there is almost no legal cartel except OPEC. Today's oligopolies are primarily multinational corporations that are engaged in tough oligopolistic competition around the globe. Lenin saw competition among monopolies, but his focus was on the cartels, which no longer exist today. There is also a new genre of giant global corporations, the likes of Google, Ebay, Facebook, Uber, Airbnb, and others, which have a totally different character and structure. More on this in item four below.

2. The Merger of Bank and Industrial Capital to Create Finance Capital

Lenin discussed the concentration of banking, the emergence of large banks, and the process through which they grew from "modest middlemen" into powerful monopolies. He noted that scattered capitalists were transformed into

If advanced industrial countries cannot absorb the surplus capital of their own capitalists, how can they attract the surplus capital of other advanced countries?

a "single collective capitalist," creating their own "concerns" and "holdings." Referring to Hilferding's argument, Lenin described how industrial capital becomes dependent on bank capital and how the merger of the two creates "finance capital."

In terms of size, the same trend has continued, leading to today's gigantic banks. The top

twenty banks in the world each have assets of more than one-and-a-half trillion dollars. The GDP of only four countries, the United States, China, Japan, and Germany, is larger than the assets of the largest bank, ICBC. The assets of each of the two largest private banks, HSBC and JPMorgan Chase, are over two-and-a-half trillion dollars. The “deposit market share of the top ten banks increased from about 20 percent in 1980 to almost 50 percent in 2010.”⁴

Before the full dominance of neoliberal polices, banks were regulated in most capitalist countries. Current banking deregulation, along with the mushrooming of offshore banking, has made the control of finance capital by any single government almost impossible. It is worth mentioning that although these banks were the main culprits in the 2008 crisis, when some of the biggest were facing bankruptcy the U.S. government came to their rescue, fearing they were “too big to fail.”

Aside from size, the working of today’s banking and finance capital is very different from the time of Lenin. In the past, finance capital operated mainly in relation to industrial and commercial capital; today it has little to do with industry and commerce. Investment banks mainly deal with either short-term money markets, or primary and secondary capital markets, using all sorts of financial instruments, or derivatives. They are involved in nonstop trade in securities, bonds, and currency exchange. Lenin, based on an assessment by a German publication of the time, believed that the importance of the stock exchange would decline. But stock exchanges of today are immensely important in almost all capitalist countries. Aside from continuous electronic trading, the stock exchanges of London, New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong provide almost uninterrupted trade and dealings. In addition to banks, all sorts of financial institutions, insurance companies, pension funds, hedge funds, and different wealth management companies and investment advisors are involved in the management of trillions

of dollars of securities. In order to provide for part of their expenditures, governments also collect inactive savings by selling bonds. Of course, since almost all of these transactions are done through banks, they also benefit enormously. Many industrial oligopolies, like the auto industry, have established their own financial institutions and directly finance the sale of their products. That is to say, finance capital is less and less reliant on industry, and its functions are very different from what Hilferding and Lenin had envisaged.

The international monetary system has also gone through many transformations in the past century. During Lenin’s time, the life of the Classical Gold Standard and the centrality of the British Sterling were coming to an end, and with World War I, dismantled altogether. Subsequently, the world witnessed multi-blocs such as the Sterling Bloc, the Dollar Bloc, and the Gold Bloc. After World War II, the Bretton Woods system made the U.S. dollar dominant. Finally, since the 1970s we have witnessed the system (or non-system) of floating rates.

3. The Export of Capital as Distinguished from the Export of Commodities

Lenin stated that the export of goods was typical of free-competition capitalism while monopoly capitalism was characterized by the export of capital. He pointed to an international division of labor through which England, as “workshop of the world,” became the main supplier of manufactured goods to all countries, followed by the other “capitalistically developed countries.” Lenin stated that in these rich countries, with their monopolistic position and rapid accumulation of capital, an enormous “surplus of capital” was formed that could not be profitably invested locally and had to be “exported” abroad to “the backward countries.” He argued that if capitalism wanted to raise the standard of living of its own “half-starved and poverty-stricken” masses, there would be no surplus capital.

The situation in today's capitalism is very different. Since this is a more problematic aspect of Lenin's theory, I deal with it in more detail. The old international division of labor that Lenin was referring to has drastically changed. In the new international division of labor, the less-developed countries are no more just providers of raw materials and markets for industrial products manufactured in the advanced capitalist countries. Most of today's global manufacturing takes place outside of the advanced industrial countries. Now it is China that is indeed the "workshop of the world."

Multinational corporations (MNCs) invest outside their national boundaries for a variety of reasons. Aside from capturing markets, the foreign direct investments (FDI) by MNCs aim at, among other goals, gaining access to sources of raw materials, utilizing cheaper and unorganized labor, using cheaper infrastructure, benefiting from lower taxation, and avoiding environmental regulations. By establishing subsidiaries that act as "local" firms in the host countries, MNCs avoid tariff barriers. In order to maximize their profits and minimize their costs of production, through licensing agreements they scatter the production process across clusters of subsidiaries and associated companies in different parts of the world. The FDI that at the time of Lenin were primarily engaged in the primary sector are today highly diversified. In an earlier study of mine, of MNCs in third world countries, particularly in my homeland Iran, I adopted the following typology: 1) Export-oriented FDI in the primary sector (raw materials); 2) Domestic-oriented FDI in manufacturing; 3) Export-oriented FDI in manufacturing; and 4) FDI in the tertiary sector (services).⁵

Obviously the motives behind each of these types of FDI are different and cannot simply be linked to the lack of opportunity for "profitable" investment in the first world. Even much of the foreign investment at the time of Lenin was related to the need to access the sources of raw materials for industrial production in the home

country, and not because of "surplus capital." In terms of investment in manufacturing, also, the local home market of industrial societies, despite all inequalities, has a much higher demand structure. This is particularly true after Fordism and mass production and mass consumption. Today's societies in advanced capitalist countries have much higher living standards than the rest of the world and are no longer the "half-starved and poverty-stricken" societies that Lenin was referring to. Production location also has something to do with the product life cycle. A new product (such as a TV or personal computer) is first consumed in the home market. At the next stage the product is exported to foreign markets with the highest demand structure. Later, investment for producing the product is made in countries that have a higher supply structure. At the final stage, the original home country becomes the importer of that product. This process has nothing to do with surplus capital and the need for its export, but is related to the logic of capital in search of higher profits and reducing variable and constant capitals.

Looking at present patterns of foreign investment, several important points need to

Annual revenues of each of the twenty largest corporations are larger than the GDP of more than 160 countries.

be taken into consideration. First, the largest volume of FDI is invested in more-advanced industrial societies, that is, countries that themselves have "surplus capital." In terms of FDI inflow, the United States was the largest recipient of foreign capital in 2013.⁶ Of the total of \$1.2 trillion FDI in 2014, \$499 billion was invested in advanced industrial countries. The question would be, if these countries cannot absorb the

surplus capital of their own capitalists, how can they attract the surplus capital of the capitalists of other advanced countries?

Another point is that the lowest level of FDI inflow is to the least-developed countries, even though they have an abundance of cheap and unorganized labor and raw materials. For example, the total FDI inflow to the whole African continent in 2014 was \$54 billion (compared to \$2 trillion worldwide). This by no means questions the significance of cheap labor, but points to the fact that there are different determinant factors in FDI, including but not limited to labor cost.

Moreover, today the developing countries (former colonies and semi-colonies) are themselves the main exporters of capital. More capital flows from Asian developing countries than from any other region. The figure for the region in 2014 was \$432 billion, compared to the North American outflow of \$390 billion and \$316 billion from Europe. This is partly related to huge surpluses from smaller oil-rich countries and the rise of the so-called emerging economies.

Also, it is notable that unlike in the past, most foreign investments are no longer in the primary sector for the extraction of raw materials or even in manufacturing. They are concentrated rather in the service sector. In 2012, of the total foreign investments in the world, 63 percent was in the service sector, more than twice the amount invested in industry. The share of foreign investment in raw materials, which was the main motive in Lenin's time, constituted only about 10 percent.

An interesting point in Lenin's analysis of the export of capital is the way he saw its impact on the capitalist development of the recipient developing countries. Unlike dependency theories that saw foreign capital only as an obstacle to national development—and many such theorists directly or indirectly associated themselves with a Leninist analysis—Lenin, following Marx, pointed to the developmen-

talist role of foreign capital: "The export of capital influences and greatly accelerates the development of capitalism in those countries to which it is exported." Noteworthy also is the way Lenin, a hundred years ago, saw the impact of capital export on the advanced industrial and capital-exporting countries. He implicitly refers to what many today have theorized as the "deindustrialization" of the advanced industrial countries. Thus, "while therefore the export of capital may tend to a certain extent to arrest development in the capital-exporting countries, it can only do so by expanding and deepening the further development of capitalism throughout the world."⁷

In sum, in today's global capitalism, the "home market" for big capital is the world market. Capital moves from one location to another to maximize profits and minimize costs, and globalization has, in a sense, made notions like "export of capital" and "surplus capital" irrelevant. It should also be noted that a sizable part of the "surplus" adds to the wealth of the capitalists and to the consumption by them of the "articles of luxury" discussed by Marx in Volume II of *Capital*. The articles of luxury of today's big capitalists include billion-dollar yachts or jumbo jets with swimming pools!

4. The Sharing of the World Among Monopolist Capitalist Associations

Lenin explains how monopolist associations, cartels, syndicates, and trusts first divided the home market among themselves, and with the creation of the "world Market," the "international cartels" divided the world into their "spheres of influence." Lenin saw it as a "new stage of world concentration of capital and production" and of the development of "supermonopolies." He gave the example of the electrical industry and how in 1907 the German and American trusts, AEG (in English, General Electricity Company) and GEC (General Electric Company), concluded an agreement to divide the world market; AEG got, among

others, Germany, Austria, Russia, and Holland, and GEC got the U.S. and Canadian markets.

This feature, however, no longer exists in today's capitalism. As mentioned earlier, there are no legal cartels, and laws in most capitalist countries, such as the anti-trust laws, forbid any open agreement among monopolies in terms of price fixing, level of production, or other arrangements. Despite the growing dominance of neoliberal policies and efforts to relax these rules, they are still in effect. Such agreements among oligopolies do not exist at the international level either. In all branches

Today's large corporations not only have not divided the world into spheres of influence, but they don't even have monopolies over their own national markets.

of industry, from oil, auto, and computers to communication, corporations are in tough oligopolistic competition with each other. Mergers and acquisitions or hostile takeovers take place even among the largest giant corporations. In the oil industry, for example, of the five major American oil companies that were once part of the notorious "seven sisters," only two remain. In 1985, Gulf Oil merged with SoCal (Chevron), and in 1998 the two giants, Exxon and Mobil Oil, merged into one and for a while formed the largest oil company in the world. In 2011, after a hundred years of existence, Texaco became part of Chevron, and its distribution units were sold to Royal-Dutch Shell. It is interesting that ExxonMobil, with annual revenues of \$265 billion, is now just the fifth largest oil company, and the top four oil companies are state-owned and belong to developing countries (one to Saudi Arabia and three to China).

The other point that makes today's large corporations different from the time of Lenin is that not only have they not divided the world into spheres of influence, but they don't even have monopolies over their own national markets. The best example is the U.S. auto industry. This industry once had hundreds of producers that eventually were reduced to the Big Three: GM, Ford, and Chrysler. These three held 100 percent of their national market and in the 1950s, controlled three-quarters of the global automobile market. Beginning in the 1980s European and Japanese car companies that were exporting to the U.S. market began direct investment and production in the United States. According to a 2007 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce, nine foreign car companies were producing automobiles in 15 different plants in the U.S., investing \$66 billion and employing 63,000 workers. In 1986, the three American automakers had over 95 percent of the U.S. market, but in 2006 this figure had dropped to 63 percent.⁸ The American companies that were in tough competition with Japanese automakers started to invest in those companies: Ford bought shares in Mazda, Chrysler in Mitsubishi, and GM in Suzuki. During the 2008 crisis, both GM and Chrysler declared bankruptcy but were saved by the U.S. government. Chrysler was bought by Daimler-Benz, but after disagreements between the two, was sold to a financial management company and then to Fiat.

The two companies that Lenin referred to, AEG and GEC, are now multinational corporations with much more diversified products, competing at the global level, and with no formal agreement between them. The American GEC's products range from home appliances to oil and gas, aeronautics, transportation, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and financial services, and among other regions of the world operates in Germany. The German AEG, despite several changes in ownership and a number of mergers with other German companies using the origi-

nal brand name, is active throughout the world, including in the U.S. and Canadian markets.

Continuous technological, organizational, and marketing innovations maintain the dominant position of monopolies in the global market. Based on the workings of the cartels of his time, Lenin believed that the “motive cause for technical, and consequently, of all other progress disappears to a certain extent,” and he stated that monopolies “deliberately retard . . . technical

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progress.” Today, we see the reverse of this trend and witness the brutal competition among oligopolies to stay in the market. The best example is in the electronics and telecommunication industries. The Canadian company Research in Motion, the innovator and producer of the first smartphone, Blackberry, which once had 100 percent of the global market, quickly lost its position to other competitors like Apple, Nokia, and Samsung, and may well face bankruptcy.

Through continued concentration and capital mobility at the global level, oligopolies now control networks of clusters of smaller companies scattered around the globe, adding to their monopolistic status. To attract these corporations to invest, both “home” and “host” governments offer all sorts of concessions to them, including lower taxes and “labor-union-free” environments. Confronting the powerful corporations of today is far more difficult and complicated than taking on their dinosaur predecessors, the cartels.

5. Division of the World Among the Biggest Capitalist Powers

Referring to the colonial competition of his time, Lenin pointed to the “final partitioning of the globe.” He referred to the division of Asia, Africa, and Latin America among colonial and imperial powers of the day and how “the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has completed the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet.” Surprisingly, however, he made no reference to one of the most significant theaters of confrontation among powers, that of the Ottoman Empire. It is obvious that he could not know of the notorious Sykes-Picot agreement that eventually divided the Ottoman Empire between Britain and France, including areas they had already promised to Arabs and Zionists. This was secretly signed in Petrograd exactly at the same time that Lenin was writing his imperialism piece. However, as soon as the Bolsheviks came to power and learned of the agreement, they disclosed it.

Today’s imperial control is very different. There is no direct colonial control, and as “independent” countries, former colonies are no longer just the monopolistic territory of their original imperial powers. All sorts of capital from different parts of the world are active and competing in these economies. Lenin explained that in the era of imperialism we don’t have just two types of countries, colonizers and colonies, and that there are many countries that despite formal independence are under “financial” and “diplomatic” dominance and are “semi-colonies.” Today’s financial and diplomatic dominance has taken very different and indirect forms.

A major feature of the imperialism of the twenty-first century is the existence of a super-imperialist, the United States, on the one hand, and inter-imperialist collaborations on the other. The United States, which benefited most from and suffered the least harm in World War II, emerged as the world’s imperialist leader. Although at the time of Lenin, Britain was more

powerful than other imperial nations (in the period of the so-called Pax Britannica), Britain's status then was by no means similar to today's U.S. hegemony. According to data from the International Monetary Fund, the GDP of the United States is two times larger than the combined GDPs of three imperial powers, Germany, Britain, and France. Its military budget is larger than the combined military budgets of the next ten largest military powers, including Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. It has the largest number of major multinational corporations, has the widest network of satellites and other information and intelligence technologies, and has alliances with military powers like Israel and with rich, reactionary Arab states like Saudi Arabia and Sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf. Despite all the setbacks in the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria; the economic crisis; and the emergence of China as the second largest world economy, U.S. imperialism is still the most powerful, and the period of "Pax Americana" is not yet close to its end.

The European imperialist powers, despite their historical rivalries (and with the exception of the recent parting of the UK), are united in the European Union and NATO and generally keep in line with the policies of U.S. imperialism. Their peaceful cooperation is by no means "a truce between wars" as Lenin expected. It should be noted, however, that this inter-imperialist collaboration does not confirm Kautsky's "ultra-imperialism" thesis. Although Kautsky's prediction of inter-imperialist cooperation, and his seeing more "stages" in the development of capitalism, are noteworthy, his notion was based on cartel-like territorial divisions of the world that no longer exist. Despite their rivalries, all these imperialist powers are in agreement on maintaining and expanding the dominance of capital, and their wars are not with each other but against others. The G7 is the clear example of inter-imperialist collaboration.

If in the past the capitalist states established repressive economic and ideological apparatuses

of the state at the national level in order to maintain and expand the dominance of capital, now, in the absence of a global state and in line with the unity of imperialist powers, globalized capital has established these apparatuses at the global level. International economic institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, along with multinational banks and corporations, and in line with the national and the regional economic institutions of the imperialist powers such as the European Central Bank, the U.S. Treasury, Deutsche Bundesbank, and the Bank of England, form the economic apparatuses of global capital. NATO, and defense treaties like the Rio Pact and ANZUS (the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty), form the repressive apparatuses. Neoliberalism along with mainstream media of the imperialist countries and their allies form the ideological apparatuses of control of organized global capital.

In sum, although the fundamental nature of imperialism remains unchanged, it is nevertheless in many respects very different from the imperialism of a century ago. Accordingly, while Lenin's imperialism pamphlet is historically valuable it cannot serve as a guide for our struggles today. Confronting global capitalism and moving toward a superior socio-economic system will need other theories and practices. Developing these is our greatest priority.⁹

NOTES

1. All references to Lenin's work are from "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," in V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works in One Volume* (International Publishers, 1980).
2. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000).
3. Council of Economic Advisors, "Benefits of Competition and Indicators of Market Power," April 2016, 5, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/page/files/20160414_cea_competition_issue_brief.pdf.
4. Hardt and Negri, 4.
5. Saeed Rahnema, "Multinationals and Iranian Industry; 1957-1979," *Journal of Developing Areas* (vol. 24, No. 3, April 1990), 294-295. The titles of this typology are from Lazlo Lang, "On the Location Determinants of

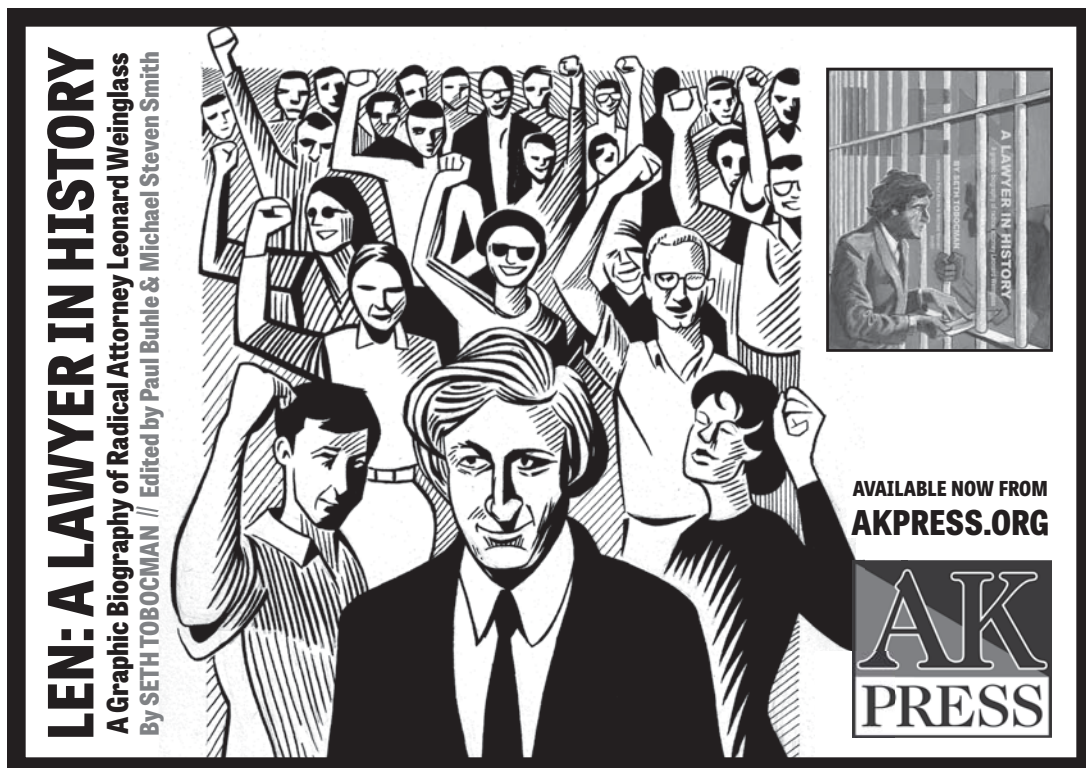
Foreign Direct Investment in Developing Countries,” paper presented at the second round table of RCCDC, Ljubljana and Institute for World Economy, Budapest, October 1985. Compared to other typologies of FDI, this is still very valid.

6. All data of this section are from UNCTAD, *World Investment Report; Reforming International Investment Governance* (2015).

7. V. I. Lenin, “Imperialism,” 214.

8. U.S. Department of Commerce, “Foreign-based Companies Investing in the U.S. Auto Industry,” 2007.

9. I have tried to discuss some of these in my conversations with twelve prominent theorists and political activists from different parts of the world in my upcoming edited book, *Transition from Capitalism: Marxist Perspectives* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).



Russia and the Left

STEPHEN R. SHALOM

WHAT EXPLAINS THE ENTHUSIASM in certain quarters of the left for Vladimir Putin and Russia? Why do some cheer on Russian bombing in Syria, dismissing out of hand the evidence from Physicians for Human Rights, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch¹ that the bombing criminally targets hospitals? Why do some try to justify Russia's takeover of Crimea or its blatant intervention in Ukraine?

Apologetics for Moscow, of course, has a long and ignoble history on the left. There is no excuse for this betrayal of left values, but we can at least understand some of the reasons that people held these wrongheaded views.

In the past, many Americans who were committed to progressive causes—especially civil rights and labor rights—joined the Communist Party because it was an organization actively and powerfully engaged in these struggles. They were aware that CP membership required following the Soviet line on foreign policy questions, but many joined despite this, not because of it. Now, in fact, even their contribution to the civil rights and labor movements was compromised to some degree by their allegiance to a hierarchical party that was subservient to Moscow's foreign policy. (How many honest radicals became alienated from the left because of the CP defense of the Moscow Trials or the Hitler-Stalin Pact? How much harm was done

to the left by the CP supporting the trial and conviction of Trotskyists under the Smith Act in World War II?) Still, we can understand why many CPers believed that their participation was furthering the cause of social justice at home, and, hence, why they gave the Soviet Union a pass.

Another reason for leftists to be soft on the Soviet Union was that internationally it was generally on the side of the great anti-colonial struggles of the day. Its economic and military aid and its diplomatic support helped many third world nations break from Western colonial or neocolonial rule. Now, this was never as consistent or as selfless as Moscow's acolytes suggested. Soviet opposition to the Eritrean liberation struggle, for example, was horrendous, and as early as 1921 the new Soviet state sold out communist militants in Turkey in order to maintain its relationship with Mustafa Kemal. Moreover, national liberation that was supported with Stasi agents setting up a security apparatus was hardly very liberating. Likewise, Soviet support to the Republic during the Spanish Civil War was such that even if Franco had been defeated, Spanish democracy was unlikely to survive. In addition, it should be noted that great powers often tried to weaken their rivals' colonial empire without at all being progressive—think of the German Kaiser's aid to Irish rebels. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Soviet Union played an important role in hastening the end of colonialism, and so we can understand why many leftists were enamored of it. Soviet prestige was also enhanced by its role in the defeat of Nazi Germany (though this

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followed its pact with Nazi Germany).

A third reason that some leftists wrongly but understandably championed the Soviet Union is that the country was committed, rhetorically at least, to socialism. Principled socialists differ in their assessment of when the Soviet Union became a repressive state—I would date it from the crushing of the Workers' Opposition and Kronstadt—but there is no doubt that by the mid-1920s there was no democracy in the Soviet Union and, because there can be no socialism without democracy, nor was there socialism. Beyond their rhetorical socialism, members of the Soviet bloc proclaimed their allegiance to social justice, and to some extent this was not just words. Because social justice, like socialism, has to include democratic rights, the Soviet Union and other members of its camp were crucially deficient in social justice. But they did tend to have greater social and economic egalitarianism and more-developed social welfare policies than many Western states. These accomplishments had the unfortunate effect of erroneously suggesting that we face a trade-off: We can have either economic justice or democracy, but not both. It is true that a resident of Brazil's favelas might choose Cuba's health care over her own country's formal democracy. But Costa Rica, no paragon of socialist enlightenment, offers both democracy and a life expectancy equal to that of Cuba's. Still, to many leftists the fact that the "communist" countries, led by the Soviet Union, declared themselves to be pursuing socialism made it easier to overlook their misdeeds.

The question is, why do many leftists today close their eyes to Russian crimes given that each one of these lame but understandable reasons for Soviet apologetics no longer applies?

Where the Soviet Union generally backed parties around the world and in the United States that were on the left, at the moment Moscow seems to be much more supportive of far-right parties than of left ones.² In the United States, Putin's backing of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton was clear, whether or not it is

confirmed that Russia hacked emails with the intention of helping the Republican candidate. So left apologists for Putin are not turning a blind eye to the crimes of a regime that is at least promoting the U.S. civil rights movement. No, their blind eye is to the crimes of a regime that favors the candidate who will preside over one of the most right-wing governments in U.S. history.

Where the Soviet Union generally stood against colonialism, in this post-colonial age Putin's Russia is now one of the leading powers seeking to acquire or hold on to territory by force: Chechnya, South Ossetia, Eastern Ukraine, Crimea (the latter annexation condemned by a vote of 100-11 in the UN General Assembly, with 58 abstentions).

Some leftists like to claim that Russia, Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah constitute an "axis of resistance" that has heroically been challenging U.S. and Israeli imperialism. This account ignores the fact that in the 1970s, Hafez al-Assad intervened in Lebanon against Palestinians and the Lebanese left, and more recently Bashar al-Assad partnered with Washington in torturing prisoners.³ Today, hundreds of Palestinians languish in Bashar's torture chambers.⁴ If this is an axis of resistance, we might consider adding the European far-right parties that have been supporting Assad.⁵ Indeed, given that Moscow has been a substantial purchaser of Israeli military drones⁶ and a leading supplier of its oil and has coordinated its bombing in Syria with Israel,⁷ perhaps Israel too should be considered a member of the axis of resistance. After all, Israel did absent itself from the UN resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea.⁸

And where the Soviet Union could boast some progressive social policies, these are things of the past. Putin has explicitly adopted a right-wing ideology, drawing on émigré and even fascist philosophers.⁹ Putin's party, United Russia, with three-quarters of the seats in the Duma, has officially adopted "Russian Conservatism" as its position. As *RT*, the Russian-government-

sponsored news outlet, reported,

Having called themselves “conservatives,” the members of United Russia “have simply determined their place” as a right-wing party, political scientist Dmitry Travin said. That means that they are “politicians who defend values of the market economy based on national traditions,” Rosbalt news agency quoted him as saying.

At the same time, they “are not staunch defenders of freedom as liberals,” and they are not “followers of egalitarianism as social democrats,” he said.¹⁰

In terms of Islamophobia and anti-LGBT repression, Russia makes the United States look like paradise. Male life expectancy in Russia is six years less than in Brazil and a decade less than in Mexico; Russia’s spending on education as a share of GDP is 80 percent that of Mexico and less than three-quarters that of Brazil.¹¹ In terms of the size of the public sector, Russian government spending as a percent of GDP is smaller than that of Japan, Greece, the UK, or Spain (and its military spending is a far greater share of its overall government spending than any of these countries’).¹² Neither in practice nor in inspiration nor even in rhetoric does current-day Russia reflect left values.

So why, then, the left enthusiasm for Russia?

For some, no doubt, it’s simply nostalgia. The U.S. Peace Council, a slavish Moscow tool during the Cold War, fondly recalls the Soviet alliance with the Baathist regime in Syria under Hafez al-Assad, and so perhaps it’s a simple move to glorify Russian support today for the successor to the Assad dynasty (and thus the Peace Council’s awful propaganda trip to Damascus and subsequent participation in Syrian-government-sponsored propaganda events¹³).

But wistful longing for the glory days of the Soviet Union doesn’t explain most left attachment to Russia. Instead it’s the pernicious doctrine of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” that unfortunately has permeated large

sectors of the left.

A civilian airliner is shot down over the Russian-backed break-away zone of Ukraine, the United States (among others) accuses the Russians of being responsible, and the automatic, reflexive response from some is that this was either a Western false flag operation (an intelligence concoction) or at minimum a tragedy for which the United States and its allies bear primary responsibility. That Russian propaganda on the matter was so easily refuted merely confirmed for some how devilish the false flag operation really was.¹⁴

An aid convoy is bombed in Syria. Washington accuses Russia or Syria of being responsible. Given that Assad had a clear policy of forcing Aleppo to “surrender or starve,”¹⁵ Washington’s accusation was certainly plausible, and further evidence left little doubt as to Russian/Syrian responsibility.¹⁶ But to some on the left, the fact that the U.S. government said it made it false.

Now it is true that any time two imperial states contest for power each is going to try to push a one-sided, jingoistic narrative of the differences between them. Skepticism about the claims of one’s own government is certainly warranted. During the Soviet period, in the United States the official line tried to portray Moscow as wholly responsible for the onset of the Cold War and as being in the wrong, the aggressor, in every single international dispute. It was and remains important to contest this dominant view. That doesn’t mean, though, that we should have dismissed the tendentious U.S. narrative only to adopt the equally tendentious Soviet counter-narrative—dismissing as Western propaganda such things as the gulag or the secret clauses in the Hitler-Stalin pact or the Katyn massacre or Soviet aggression in Hungary in 1956 or in Afghanistan in 1979-1988. It was entirely possible—and right—to reject both the U.S. and the Soviet propaganda lines. The forerunner of the current Campaign for Peace and Democracy (www.cpdweb.org), the

Campaign for Peace and Democracy East and West, famously got Western Central America activists to sign on to a statement condemning Soviet policy in Eastern Europe and got East European dissidents to sign on to a statement condemning U.S. policy in Nicaragua and El Salvador. It's this sort of rejection of both sides and their lies that ought to be key to any left politics.

If Russian hacking interfered in the U.S. election, it is not enough to point out Washington's sordid record of interfering in foreign elections. The left condemns U.S. interference in foreign elections, and we ought to condemn Russian interference as well (and not just in the United States). While some of the attacks on Russian hacking by the Hillary Clinton camp ("Ronald Reagan would be rolling over in his grave"¹⁷) do indeed smack of McCarthyism, there's nothing wrong with the left denouncing Russian crimes. And all the U.S. crimes in the world don't justify Russian crimes. Nor should U.S. crimes lead us to withhold our criticisms of the crimes of Moscow, any more than Russian crimes would lead us to withhold our criticisms of the crimes of Washington in Iraq, Honduras, and elsewhere.

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#czarnyprotest

The Black Protest for Abortion Rights in Poland

KATARZYNA BIELIŃSKA-KOWALEWSKA

IN POLAND THE LAW ON ABORTION is one of the most restrictive in the European Union, sex education does not exist, and contraception is both expensive and hard to obtain because a medical prescription is often needed.

According to a 1993 law, abortion is allowed only in three cases: when pregnancy is a threat to a woman's life or health; when there is a high possibility of severe malformation or illness of a fetus, confirmed by a prenatal exam; or when a pregnancy is the result of a crime (rape, incest, or pedophilia).¹ In other cases it is criminalized. A doctor or anyone else who helps a woman to perform an abortion, including a partner, a family member, or a friend, may be punished with three years of imprisonment. A woman who has aborted is not prosecuted. For more than 20 years this very restrictive law has been called a compromise by conservative, liberal, and social-democratic politicians.

In practice, even in these three cases of technically allowable abortion, it is almost unavailable. A recent study, conducted by the feminist organization Federation for Women and Family Planning, found that due to a lack of official ministerial guidelines and the chilling effects of the law, hospitals either do not have any procedures for abortion (the majority) or they have procedures that are unnecessarily complicated. Moreover, some hospitals told the Federation that, contrary to their financial reports, they do

not do abortions. The “conscience clause,” that is, the right to refuse to perform abortion because of religious beliefs, is often invoked.²

Due to these circumstances, the abortion underground is thriving. According to the estimates of the Federation for Women and Family Planning, in Poland 80,000 to 100,000 abortions are performed per year,³ with only some hundreds of these done legally.

There are underground clinics that provide abortions, which are often performed by the same doctors who in public hospitals cite the “conscience clause” in refusing to perform the procedure legally.⁴ Abortion pills are obtained from Women on Waves, an international organization that provides pills in countries where abortions are illegal; or they are obtained on the black market, though in the latter case women run the risk of receiving fake or adulterated pills. Women also take some legal medicines that in high doses can induce abortion, such as Cytotec, which is meant for peptic ulcers. Abortion migration is flourishing: Poles travel to Great Britain, Germany, Holland, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Some clinics abroad have even developed special facilities for Polish patients, organizing trips and hotels for women seeking abortions.⁵ There is a sharp social division between those women who have access to the information and resources to obtain safe abortions despite the restrictive law and those women who don't have access to such resources and therefore use the most dangerous home methods, making them victims of the “*compromise*.”⁶

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The Left and Abortion

In 1993 a mass movement against an anti-abortion law was crushed when a 1.7 million-signature appeal for a referendum on abortion was rejected by Parliament. Neoliberal social democracy was not helpful: The “post-Communist” Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), which held power from 2001–2005, worked to obtain parliamentary support for introducing neoliberal reforms and sending Polish troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, and it also openly accepted the restrictive abortion law.⁷

Feminist and left organizations have struggled for women’s rights but they have not succeeded in mobilizing the masses. In March 2016, for example, a traditional *Manifa*—an annual feminist demonstration held in Warsaw for 17 years—was organized under the slogan “Abortion in Defense of Life” and gathered no more than a thousand participants.

Moreover, some left circles tried to tone down the demand for the right to abortion, or even tried to eliminate it from their discourse, out of adherence to conservative views or to a belief that only well-educated and affluent women from big cities supported abortion rights.

Another example of left ambivalence about abortion arose during the electoral campaign⁸ conducted by the *Partia Razem* (*Together Party*), a left party formed in 2015 and now one of the leaders of the Black Protest. Two women activists interviewed by a right-wing web site about their program for poor women spoke about social support for women and families but did not say a word about reproductive rights.⁹ Although the electoral program of *Razem* had points on sex education, the funding of contraception, and in vitro fertilization, it did not mention abortion. In the party’s programmatic declaration there is a section on abortion, but it is formulated in a very indirect manner, presenting abortion not as a right but as involving a question of worldview; opposition to existing law is expressed, but the

open demand for legalization is not.¹⁰

The Ordo Iuris Bill

In spring 2016, ultraconservative groups launched a citizens’ legislative committee called *Stop Aborcji* (*Stop Abortion*) and started collecting signatures in support of a total ban on abortion. According to the project, which was led by Ordo Iuris, a conservative Christian legal group opposing abortion, all those involved in an abortion, from the woman who has the abortion to all those helping her, would face five years of imprisonment. In the case of unintentional abortion they would face a penalty of three years of imprisonment.¹¹ The ban would lead to the criminalization of miscarriage, subjecting miscarriages to a prosecutor’s investigations,¹² and would make it impossible to provide safe early termination of ectopic pregnancies. Termination of a pregnancy would be decriminalized only in situations of direct threat to women’s lives, and prenatal investigations of fetal health would be blocked or hindered.¹³ A gynecologist, Professor Romuald Dąbski, saw the bill as the end to prenatal diagnostics and therapy: “It will be a ban on touching a baby [fetus] with a needle because I could be liable for three years for that.”¹⁴ He also commented, “When the law is changed, I’ll not be allowed to do laparoscopy to a patient with ectopic pregnancy in order to prevent that threat to life because it will not be an action occurring in a life-threatening state. It is absurd!”¹⁵

The bill banning abortion was supported by the Catholic Church and the politicians of the conservative ruling party Law and Justice (PiS), including Prime Minister Beata Szydło, who said that she personally supported a total ban on abortion.¹⁶ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference issued a communication calling for support for the bill, claiming that “on the question of the protection of life of the unborn, one should not stop at the present compromise” and appealed for “full legal protection of life of the unborn.”¹⁷ On April 3, 2016, the communication was read

in churches across the country during Sunday services.

Reactions: Protests and the Save the Women Bill

This fundamentalist offensive provoked intense social reactions: On April 3, 2016, in big cities all over Poland, demonstrations against the project were held. They were organized by *Razem*, and they spontaneously attracted many people. In Warsaw several thousand protesters gathered in front of the Parliament. A Facebook group, *Dziewuchy dziewczuchom* (Girls for Girls), was launched on April 1 and gained 100,000 fans in ten days.¹⁸

On May 12, a citizens' legislative committee called *Save the Women* (*Ratujmy kobiety*) was launched and began collecting signatures for a bill liberalizing the existing law. The leader of the committee was Barbara Nowacka, a young social-democratic activist. The bill was modeled on laws adopted by the majority of EU states. It would legalize abortion until the twelfth week of pregnancy; if a pregnancy was the result of a crime, the term would be prolonged to 18 weeks, and if a fetus was severely malformed or sick, to 24 weeks. Another aim of the bill was to introduce sex education and make contraception available: Contraception would be subsidized by the state and free for the poor, and it would also be made available for people under 18 without requiring the permission of a parent.¹⁹

The *Save the Women* initiative collected 215,000 signatures and *Stop Abortion*, around 450,000. In Poland, a citizens' legislative initiative needs 100,000 signatures to advance; both bills were successful and reached the Parliament.

In September, when the Parliament was soon to debate the bills, the political atmosphere became heated. "Black Protest" arose as a hashtag and slogan. At the beginning, it seemed to be just another "clicktivist" practice that would produce no effect beyond an additional way of posting selfies to social media, this time with those posting dressed in black. However, on

September 22, when the parliamentary debate on both bills was held, a few thousand people gathered outside the Parliament building under this slogan, along with protesters gathered in two different demonstrations, organized respectively by *Save the Women* and *Razem*.

On September 23 the ultraconservative *Ordo Iuris* bill advanced to the second reading stage, while the *Save the Women* bill was rejected—this despite PiS's having declared that it never would reject a citizens' bill in the first reading, a practice that the public generally perceives as a manifestation of arrogance of power.

The Right to Abortion Is Not an Idea of Spoiled Elites

A telephone survey of a representative sample of 1,001 respondents, conducted by IPSOS for *Oko.press* just after the parliamentary voting, revealed that support for liberalization had significantly increased, going from 25 percent of respondents in September 2015, to 29 percent in April 2016, and then to 37 percent in September 2016. Concerning liberalization in the September survey, 39 percent of women respondents and 35 percent of male respondents said they supported the right to abortion for socio-economic reasons. Moreover, the survey data smashed the myth that the demand for abortion rights comes largely from privileged, affluent, well-educated women from big cities. The idea of liberalizing existing law was supported by 39 percent of respondents with elementary and junior high school education, 43 percent of respondents with basic vocational education, 37 percent of respondents with a high school education, and only 27 percent of respondents with university degrees. Fully 64 percent of those with university degrees supported the existing law. This could be explained by the fact that the abortion underground and migration are much more available to more educated women because of their higher incomes.²⁰

Another one of the numerous demonstrations of the Committee for the Defense of

Democracy (KOD) was planned for September 24. KOD is a multiclass movement, defending democratic rights and freedoms, that emerged from the opposition to authoritarian moves of the PiS government in December 2015. Because of KOD, Poland has become an arena of anti-governmental protests whose intensity has had no parallel over the preceding 20 years. KOD demonstrations regularly turn out tens of thousands of protesters.

An appeal for a Black Protest at the KOD march was issued. The “Black Bloc” was formed by around 200 people but many other participants at the KOD demonstration also dressed in black. Although it is hard to judge how many of them wore black for political reasons (it was cold, and black, warm clothes are very popular in Poland), women dressed in black led the crowd in chanting slogans against tightening the law on abortion.

The KOD leader, Mateusz Kijowski, spoke on the vote against the *Save the Women* project in its first reading: “Yesterday the parliamentary majority showed deep contempt for hundreds of thousands of Poles. They did not allow debate on the bill on human rights, which was signed by more than 200,000 Polish women and men.” He read a letter from Agnieszka Holland, a film director, who wrote, “Today the PiS government wants to deprive women of freedom and equality. They want to take away from women the right and freedom to decide about their own lives, to take away their dignity, decreeing that a woman’s life is worth less than the life of an embryo.”²¹

Black Monday

On October 1, a demonstration was held in Warsaw; as many as ten thousand people gathered in front of Parliament. It was clear that mobilization was intensifying, but the high point came on Monday, October 3, with the call for a women’s strike.

That day demonstrations were held in 143 cities, towns, and municipalities. The slogans

were typically feminist like “My Body, My Choice”; “I Think, I Feel, I Decide”; “We Have Brains, Not Only Uteruses,” but also “Poland Is a Woman” and directly anti-government like “Beata, Sorry, Your Government Will Be Overthrown by Women”; “Jarosław, Hands Off Women”; and “Abortion of the Government.”

In Warsaw tens of thousands of women gathered in Castle Square in the Old Town. For many participants it was the first demonstration of their lives. Its success was completely unexpected, which was confirmed even by the choice of the place for the mobilization: Castle Square is too small for such a massive gathering. The crowd was so big, the square was so small, the mass pressure so strong, and the situation so risky that people were even told by organizers not to move under the threat of dissolving the demonstration.

One of the women for whom the Black Protest was their first demonstration was Anna Nowak (name changed), a young gynecologist from a village in Western Pomerania. “It was my duty to go to the protest. If this bill was adopted, my patients would have no access to prenatal exams and no choice but to give birth to disabled babies. That often means, for a woman, exclusion from the labor market and a breakdown of a relationship because they are often left by their partners.” Dr. Nowak recalls, “I remember a girl whose fetus was malformed and she was refused legal abortion. The fetus was big and allegedly the pregnancy was too advanced. It was not true—malformed fetuses are often very big. She was forced to continue the pregnancy. In the fortieth week she gave birth to a baby who died after three minutes. I delivered that baby.” Dr. Nowak supports the idea of liberalizing existing law: “Everybody must have a choice.”²²

In the response to the call, some women did not go to work and were replaced by their male colleagues. Some higher officials openly supported the strike. Robert Biedroń, mayor of the city of Słupsk in Western Pomerania and an LGBTQ activist, said before the demonstration

on Monday, “I have received lots of declarations that women will not come to work. There are whole departments [in the Słupsk town hall] that will not come to work. It can paralyze the functioning of the town hall, but I totally understand it. I believe that women have to show what the world will look like when women get pissed off and when they show that they also want to decide on democracy.”²³

At numerous universities it was announced that students who were not in class on October 3 would not be marked absent. Some private entrepreneurs closed their shops or facilities, such as Radosław Olszewski, an owner of a chain of restaurants in Wrocław. He closed all his restaurants, which employ 100 people, 80 of them women.²⁴

Many women came to work dressed in black, such as the majority of female employees in the Indesit factory in Łódź.²⁵ In many workplaces some women limited their duties, with secretaries, for example, not answering their office phones.²⁶

Because of the variety of forms of participation in the Black Protest it is hard to evaluate its scope, but it is clear that it was massive. According to police estimates, around 100,000 people took part in street demonstrations alone. And in the survey conducted just after Black Monday, 67 percent of respondents declared that they supported the Black Protest.²⁷

Success

The effect of the unexpected mass protest was also unexpected: PiS withdrew its support for the fundamentalist project, and on October 6 it was rejected by Parliament. Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the party, whose real role much exceeds his formal position, admitted during the parliamentary debate that it was “a giant misunderstanding,” and “they came to the conclusion” that the *Ordo Iuris* project “is not a proper thing, and its result would be opposite [to the expected one].” He assured the public that PiS was “supporting the idea of protecting

life,” but said it needed a well-considered action, which that project was not²⁸. Beata Szydło, the prime minister, announced new social support to encourage women to bear and raise disabled children. Even the Bishops’ Conference withdrew its active support for the project, declaring that it did not support the idea of punishing women for abortion.²⁹

Aftermath: The Struggle Continues

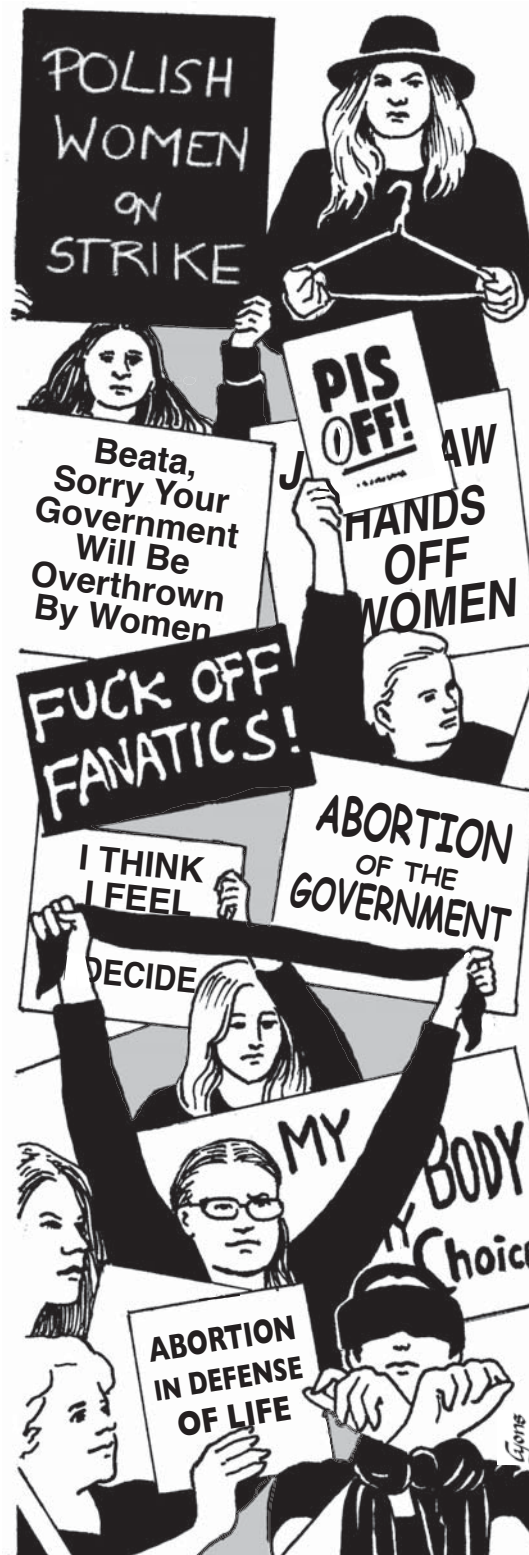
The sudden governmental withdrawal was not necessarily definitive, because the government and the ruling party are also under pressure from disappointed ultraconservatives. The idea of a new bill tightening the existing law, with this one sponsored by the government, has emerged very quickly. Such a new bill would criminalize abortion in the case of fetal malformation or illness, but it is not clear if the government actually intends to proceed with this or whether it is a sort of discursive play to calm down ultraconservatives who accuse PiS of a betrayal. At the moment a new law, *For Life*, has been adopted, which provides around a thousand euros to a woman who decides to continue a pregnancy and give birth when the fetus is malformed or sick. This law is in the spirit of the earlier words of Kaczyński: “We will aspire to assure that even cases of very difficult pregnancies, when a baby is condemned to death or severely malformed, will end up with a delivery to let the baby be baptised, buried, given a name.”³⁰

In October, the first abortion coming-out event by a young female celebrity took place in Poland, with pop singer Natalia Przybysz recording a song about her own abortion. The song is about taking 42 pills of Cytotec, which did not help, and about her trip to Slovakia to get medical attention to end her pregnancy.³¹ She also gave an interview in which she described her story in detail.³² The interview sparked a wave of attacks on her: She was called a “bitch” and a “murderer,” with the tabloid *Super Express* providing the headline, “*She killed the baby to make room for books.*”³³ In the small town of

Nadarzyn, in Mazovia, a protest was organized against a concert by Przybylsz. On the other hand, her openness about her abortion was enthusiastically welcomed by feminists and by left-wing and even some liberal circles. Women immediately organized an online collection of anonymous posts on their own abortion experiences.³⁴ However, the critics of Przybylsz included some participants in the Black Protest who opposed tightening the existing law but supported the status quo “compromise.”

In that context, new protests were organized, especially on October 23 and 24. In numerous cities and towns, actions and demonstrations took place, although they were much smaller than on Black Monday. The division in the movement became more visible not only because the different stands on the pro-choice position became evident, but also because some left-wing circles started to attack KOD, claiming, for instance, that “KOD is appropriating the Black Protest.”³⁵ In Poland, supporters of the old regime as well as followers of Antonio Negri’s theories tended to disavow KOD from the very beginning as a movement in the service of liberal opposition, which aimed “to mask the exploitation,” and in this sense not different from PiS,³⁶ as described by a prominent *Razem* supporter and Negri follower, Professor Jan Sowa.

Małgorzata Tracz, a president of the Greens, which has supported KOD from the very beginning, confirms that many KOD women were engaged in the Black Protest. She also admits that lots of participants in the movement were women who were against the attack on the “compromise” but did not support the liberalization of abortion laws. She says, “The myth of compromise has blocked the possibility of debate. But as a participant and an organizer, I see the change; lots of women are changing their mind in the course of the events. The protests were against tightening the law on abortion, and our job is to stimulate the debate on liberalization. Now it is time for the next step.” She appreciates the abortion coming-out of Natalia



Przybysz and sees a desperate need for further abortion coming-outs. At the same time she is critical about comments like “They did not know where they were and what they took part in,” as some Black Protesters said of those participants who are satisfied with the status quo and who attack Przybysz. Tracz emphasizes that “this is the effect of the myth of compromise, which we have to struggle against.”³⁷

Conclusions

Although it is very tempting to look at the Black Protest through idealistic glasses and see it as a new social movement spontaneously emerging from the grassroots, to understand this phenomenon a more materialist and classically Marxist approach is needed.

During the last year in Poland, after PiS gained power, a political reconfiguration occurred. Poland had many years of social peace, when most radical neoliberal reforms did not result in mobilization against the government, even after a dramatic pension reform in 2012 that increased the age of pension eligibility from 60 years for women and 65 years for men to 67 years for both. In December 2015, though, people suddenly took to the streets because of PiS's attempt to take control of the Constitutional Tribunal, which had not previously been an institution of special popular interest. This movement is KOD, which was at one moment able to organize a demonstration of 100,000 people in Warsaw (which is an extraordinary number for Poland) under pro-democracy slogans. This movement has played an enormous role in the rebirth of the culture of protest. It has become clear that in Poland democratic political demands have much more potential for mobilizing masses than do social demands.

It seems that this mobilizing potential of political demands also played a role in the Black Protest, and that this at least partly explains its success. In a very short time the right to abortion—even when understood very narrowly as a right to terminate pregnancy resulting from rape

or when a fetus is malformed—was raised from a social or even ideological question to the level of one of fundamental rights and civic freedoms. The struggle for the right to abortion was linked to other struggles for democratic freedoms, and the attempt of PiS to tighten the abortion law was understood as another attack on democracy. It is at least somewhat symbolic that one of most visible celebrities who stood against tightening the abortion law was Krystyna Janda, who had played the main role in *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron* by Andrzej Wajda—movies that symbolize the struggle against the suppression of democratic and workers' rights under Stalinism. When Janda posted about the 1975 Women's Strike in Iceland on her Facebook profile, it was broadly interpreted as a call for a women's strike in Poland (although she did not intend this).

All in all, in Poland mass women's protests, which have no precedent, immediately forced the Parliament to give up the idea of tightening the law on abortion. The governing party capitulated publicly in the face of the explosion of mass discontent. The scale and force of the protest astonished everybody. The Black Protest is an important confirmation that the tradition and culture of mass political protest is being reborn in Poland at the moment.

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8. In the Twenty-First century *Razem* has been the first left-wing extra-parliamentary party that managed to achieve 3 percent threshold at the parliamentary election, which provides the state subvention and lets the party enter the political mainstream.

9. “What can feminists who joined the Together Party offer to mothers from families struggling to make ends meet and young women who earn very little working at a checkout counter in a little shop in a small town?”

“K.P.: Women earn less in general. Additionally they have much longer breaks in their professional life, because they usually take care of children. Women more often bear the consequences of the breakdown of marriage and of unwanted pregnancy, and with their children they have to leave their homes because of violence. Finally, it is more difficult for them to find a job just because they can become mothers. The state has to intervene here. Otherwise, women will always be at risk in the labor market.

“The state must provide support. Therefore we want to change the rules of functioning of the Alimentary Fund. Our priority is development of the network of nurseries and kindergartens to make space in free facilities for all children in need. Because of today’s labor market we must provide the facilities that operate in the afternoons and during weekends. We want to introduce — along the pattern of Sweden — a 480-days single parental leave shared equally between parents. Thanks to that, children will get longer care at home and women will have fewer problems with finding a job.” — K. Wołodzko, K. Paprota, M. Zawisza, “*Millera odsyłamy do prokuratora*” – coś nie tak z tym zjednoczeniem lewicy, tinyurl.com/jf33jeu.

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The Rise of the Revolutionary Left in Argentina

MARISELA TREVIN AND JUAN CRUZ FERRE

NIGHT HAD FALLEN ON THE Atlanta Stadium in the city of Buenos Aires on November 19, and as “The Internationale” began to blare from the loudspeakers, more than twenty thousand people at the Trotskyist Left Front rally stood up, their fists held high, to sing the international workers’ anthem with a single voice. Among them were women who had taken part in recent nationwide actions against gender violence under the slogan *#NiUnaMenos*, workers fighting against layoffs and pay cuts or operating recovered factories that are now under workers’ control, and students and teachers from all over the country. The event took place not as a demonstration of support for an electoral campaign or a response to a specific political event, but as a conscious step toward the construction of a revolutionary political alternative.

Just days after the election of Trump in the United States and after the turn of the “pink tide” had brought with it the advance of the right in Latin America, including the “institutional coup” in Brazil and the election of Mauricio Macri in Argentina, this was a massive demonstration of strength by an anti-capitalist force that promotes workers’ power and self-organization. How was this accomplishment possible?

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The Working Class at a Crossroads

After the outbreak of the 2001 economic crisis that led to the downfall of then-President De la Rúa, and in response to widespread protests, Argentina underwent over a decade of post-neoliberal policies under the Kirchners. These policies included an increase in social spending and were aimed at allaying the prevailing social unrest but, nonetheless, failed to provide real, lasting solutions for the working class while billions in taxpayer funds were paid in foreign debt and subsidies to privatized firms run by the government’s cronies.

In late 2015, this cycle was interrupted by national elections that brought to power the right-wing political party, PRO, which had based its campaign on a call for changes that would put a stop to corruption. Today, under the leadership of President Macri, the government serves the interests of domestic and international capital perhaps more blatantly than any other administration in recent history. One of the first policies put in place by the new government this year was a currency devaluation that has led to a brutal rise in inflation which, in turn, has had a severe impact on the standard of living for the poor and working classes. Massive layoffs in the public and private sectors have followed, as well as dramatic hikes in transportation and utility fees. Meanwhile, the government has paid out millions to vulture funds and has started a new foreign debt cycle.

In the face of these policies, not only has the Peronist party (*Frente para la Victoria*), led by Cristina Kirchner, failed to build a strong

opposition to the governing party, it has actually put in place its own austerity policies in the provinces it governs. In Congress, it has supported the most brutal bills put forth by PRO, along with the rest of the rival capitalist parties. In this scenario, the *Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores* (Left and Workers' Front), which promotes working-class independence from an anti-capitalist perspective, has emerged as the only real alternative, in the eyes of an increasing number of workers, to these austerity policies.

The Struggle for an Independent Workers' Movement

Since the 1940s, the bourgeois populist Peronist party has been the strongest political force among workers and unions in Argentina, particularly due to the monopoly it has enjoyed over government resources throughout extensive periods. However, revolutionary socialist politics have gained momentum among large sections of the working class over the past 15 years, despite the renewed strength of the Peronist party during the Kirchner years. Since the crisis in 2001, several factories and workplaces have been taken over, some of which now remain under workers' control, and workers' committees have sprung up to organize democratically and fight against union bureaucracies.

Today, as workers are confronting massive wage cuts and layoffs and there is a growing criminalization of protests, the struggle to recover unions and place them back under the control of the workers has become increasingly urgent. Despite recent attacks waged on the working class, the CGT (General Confederation of Labor—the largest workers' federation in the country), has not called a single strike, while the CTA (Argentine Workers' Central Union) has only organized isolated demonstrations and strikes. This failure of the CTA to mobilize is due to its use of a Kirchnerist policy of opposition to Macri; that policy, in turn, supports a strategy of class conciliation. The Left and Workers' Front has been demanding that the

national leadership of these federations call an active general strike against the government's austerity policies, mobilizing thousands of workers across the country, as part of a progressive action plan aimed at overturning the administration's anti-worker policies.

The fight against the union bureaucracy is a practical way through which members of the Left Front have won the confidence and support of their co-workers in workplaces all over Argentina. Some landmark struggles have transcended factory fences and have become beacons of struggle and resistance, such as the printing company MadyGraf and the ceramic company Zanon, both of which are under workers' control and orient production to meet the needs of the community.

Building a Revolutionary Political Alternative

One of the exceptional characteristics of the Left Front has been its ability to reconcile workers' organizing and struggles with revolutionary politics. The coalition includes three Trotskyist political forces: the PTS (*Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas*, Party of Socialist Workers), PO (*Partido Obrero*, Workers' Party), and IS (*Izquierda Socialista*, Socialist Left). The three organizations are united under a program that emphasizes class independence in an anti-capitalist struggle to build a socialist workers' government. Throughout the course of its history, the Left Front has taken steps toward restoring the link between the revolutionary left and the working class, rejecting center-left alternatives of submission to capitalist parties and keeping its distance from the "nationalist" or "progressive" governments of Latin America, which, despite tensions with imperialist powers, have preserved capitalist property relations.

In recent years, the Left Front has also had growing electoral success, garnering 3.27 percent of the vote in last year's presidential elections (a higher percentage than either Gary Johnson or Jill Stein in this year's U.S.

elections) under the slogan “Capitalism can’t go on!” The coalition also has four seats in the National Congress and dozens of city council representatives.

Myriam Bregman, one of the Left Front’s National Representatives in Congress, was one of the speakers at the massive rally on November 19. She emphasized the significance of the recent emergence of women’s struggles throughout the world, which have included powerful actions carried out by the Argentine women’s movement in the past few weeks, with marches and work stoppages against gender violence under the banner of *#NiUnaMenos* and the massive National Women’s Conference last October. Bregman called for government action to protect women from gender violence, the legalization of abortion, and equal pay for equal work. She expressed the need to strengthen the fight for women’s rights by creating women’s committees in every workplace and organizing massive marches for the Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25 and for the Gay Pride demonstration.

Another speaker at the Atlanta stadium on Saturday was Claudio Dellecarbonara, a leader of the subway workers’ union in Buenos Aires, who stressed the need to fight union bureaucracy and replace it with democratic workers’ committees that are independent of the state. Regarding his role as a workers’ leader, he proclaimed, “I came to speak as a revolutionary socialist leader. Unions cannot be an end in themselves. They must be a means to organize workers to defeat the capitalists and their governments.”

The closing address was given by Nicolás del Caño, former Left Front presidential candidate. He called for the inclusion of other

political forces in the Left Front, based on its revolutionary program, in order to strengthen the coalition as a political alternative. Del Caño also denounced the rise of Trump in the United States and declared, “Our struggle is not only to put an end to national capitalism, but to end imperialism all over the world.”

For a Socialist Solution to the Crisis

Against the backdrop of the current international economic crisis, the traditional parties in different parts of the world have proven unable to provide any real solutions to the problems faced by the working class. The old social democracy in Europe is paying the price of embracing neoliberalism without reservations. Free-market proponents are facing increasing resistance. In Latin America, post-neoliberal governments are now in decline, lacking the necessary resources to sustain the populist policies put in place during the height of the “pink tide.”

Alongside the rise of the far right in the United States and Europe, movements of resistance have taken different forms. Those tied to bourgeois political parties, such as the massive movement behind Sanders in the United States, have revealed their limitations—no real alternative for the working class can come from subordinating the people’s needs to the needs of bourgeois political structures. Reformist parties like Syriza and Podemos in Europe have shown a willingness to compromise their program as a tradeoff for access to power positions in the short run. In this context, the revolutionary left that is gaining traction in Argentina proposes a clear anti-capitalist political program for workers’ power and has shown its purpose of playing the long game in the fight for socialism.

Italy

'Sovereignty Belongs to the People'

STEFANIE PREZIOSO

ON DECEMBER 4, 2016, the Italian electorate was asked to vote on a government-proposed constitutional reform, and the vote dealt the government and Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's plans a ringing blow. The referendum was a political gambit on which the PM bet everything, yet 59.1 percent of voters rejected the reform. Barely an hour after the polls closed, Renzi announced his resignation. An observer unfamiliar with Italian politics may be baffled that what appears to be an arcane constitutional question engendered so much unexpected enthusiasm: With a record turnout, unlike anything in the last two decades, nearly 70 percent of eligible voters (65.5 percent if one counts Italians living abroad) cast their votes, as opposed to 34 percent in a 2001 referendum and 53.8 percent in 2006.¹

Even more fascinating is the international interest in this vote. In an August 12 article, the *Wall Street Journal* drew a picture of Italy as a country with zero economic growth, a debt burden equal to 135 percent of GDP, and youth unemployment high above the Eurozone average, 36.5 percent versus 20.8 percent. It concluded that the Italian referendum was "especially vital—and arguably more impor-

tant than the Brexit vote. ... Success in the referendum on this issue should lead to greater stability for Italian governments which, in turn, should help the introduction of reforms that the Italian economy needs to boost potential growth."² The *New York Times* and the *Financial Times* concurred: "Italy badly needs a more efficient political system that allows for decisive economic reform."³ The mainstream consensus was that, while the constitutional reform was an insufficient cure for one of the weakest economies in Europe, a Yes vote in the referendum was essential for the financial, economic, and political stability of the peninsula.⁴ The U.S. ambassador in Rome, John Philips, echoed a similar sentiment in early September: "All I can say from the American perspective is if it fails, those American companies that are coming to Italy—and Italy ranks right now eighth in investment in EU where it should be third or even second—it will be a big step backward in terms of attracting more foreign investment."⁵ Yet as the likelihood grew of a win for the No vote, the international media—with *The Economist* in the lead—did a U-turn. And so did Brussels, as the polls closed, insisting that it was an "issue for Italians and not the European Union."⁶

What accounts for this interest in an issue that seems to concern only the internal functioning of Italian political institutions? One theory that has gained ground is that the whole matter was due to Renzi's tactical mistake, his decision to personalize the vote by threatening resignation if the referendum failed. But to see things this way requires a good deal of amnesia.

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In fact, the modifications that Renzi loudly promoted were the next step in a long assault on the constitution that started during the Silvio Berlusconi era, an assault whose practical translation in the realm of concrete politics was the dismantling of the Italian welfare state.

The Spirit of Neoliberalism Translated into Law

Indeed, at stake was the 1948 constitution. According to a May 2013 report issued by Wall-Street firm JPMorgan Chase, one of the structural causes of the recurring crises hitting southern European countries is the fact that their constitutions emerged from the fight against fascism and therefore carry the strong imprint of left-wing parties. The report, from a company indicted by the U.S. government for its role in the sub-prime mortgage crisis, goes on to blame these constitutions for “weak executives; weak central states relative to regions; constitutional protection of labor rights; consensus building systems which foster political clientalism; and the right to protest if unwelcome changes are made to the political status quo. The shortcomings of this political legacy have been revealed by the crisis.”⁷

Underneath the talk of the need to make the constitution more “agile” and “flexible,” and above all more compatible with the requirements of a neoliberal Europe, there were real attacks, not only on the letter, but on the spirit of the constitution, which, in the beautiful expression of its spiritual father, Piero Calamandrei, represented “the spirit of the resistance translated into law.” The modifications to the 1948 constitution connected to the new electoral law included reducing the Senate to an ancillary chamber of Parliament, appointed rather than elected by the people, and reducing the number of provinces in order to “contain institutional costs.” The object of these reforms was to strengthen executive power by essentially placing the state’s political institutions in the hands of one political force and its leader. The result would have

been a more centralized power with less room for the political expression of the citizenry, at the very moment when measures of austerity keep raining down on a wounded country. The centralization would serve to insulate the stable continuation of capitalist globalization from popular discontent.

The No victory represents, therefore, a serious setback for the introduction of a form of government that is both authoritarian and anchored in a state of emergency. This victory was the fruit of an extraordinary mobilization of large sectors of Italian society, including

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civil-society movements, social centers, neighborhood associations, all the radical left, the left of the Democratic Party (notably, the left of its parliamentary group), trade unions (although the role of the trade union federation CGIL has been muted), the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI), and others.⁸ The battle waged in the last few months in favor of a No vote was therefore much more than merely an expression of anti-government feelings. Failing to fully understand this can lead to the mistake of accepting the reforms in principle, as if under different circumstances they would be supportable. In fact, those who mobilized against the reforms were defending popular sovereignty and the elementary democratic rights guaranteed by the constitution. To this was added the refrain that the goal should not be to reform the constitution but to insist on its full application.

For, as militant anti-capitalist and historian Antonio Moscato put it, “For many decades now, the constitution is only being applied, at least in parts, when there is a radical movement of contestation from below—from the factories, the schools, the street.” This is notably the case with the protection of workers.⁹

‘I Take Full Responsibility for the Defeat’

Almost six of every ten Italian voters said No, massively rejecting the reform at the heart of Matteo Renzi’s political program and that of the alliance he forged with Silvio Berlusconi as soon as he took office in February 2014. Many blame Renzi for the error of making the referendum his chief political battle and staking his political future on it. And it is true that the campaign for the Yes vote pulled out all the stops, with massive propaganda in the streets, rallies, interviews, and televised debates. Yet few have noted that Italians have rejected not only Matteo Renzi, but also the policies he advocated and implemented in the 1,000 days of his term: the Job Act, which gave companies discretionary power over hiring and dismissing employees; the abolition of Article 18 of the labor code, called by Renzi an “ideological totem” of the 1970s, which forbade abusive dismissal; the wage cuts; the liberalization of labor and the concomitant privatization of public services as well as parts of the national heritage; not to mention the private-sector-friendly school reform.¹⁰

Renzi’s resignation is therefore the logical outcome of the growing disaffection of an Italian population undergoing massive impoverishment. This disaffection already made itself felt in the local administrative elections last June, in which the Democratic Party lost twelve administrative centers. Virginia Raggi and Chiara Appendino, two young women representing the Five Star Movement, won with large margins in Rome and Turin. Doubling down as the Democratic Party was losing steam, Renzi then dismissed those results as “local,” vowed to stay

the course, and announced his intention to remain in office until 2023. Yet the Democratic Party’s political program is increasingly at odds with the daily experience of the overwhelming majority of Italians, especially the popular classes. In Rome, for example, Virginia Raggi won in working-class areas, whereas the Democratic candidate drew his support primarily from affluent neighborhoods.

The No of Revolt

The No vote won throughout Italy, but with the largest margins in the South: 71.2 percent in Sicily, 72.5 percent in Sardinia, 68.4 percent in Campania, and 67.2 percent in Apulia. In the North, the highest No vote (61.8 percent) came in Venice, home to the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) of Matteo Salvini. Only three regions bucked the trend: Renzi’s home region Tuscany voted Yes with 52.4 percent, Emilia-Romagna with 50.3 percent, and Trentino with 57 percent. Unsurprisingly, Italians living abroad have also supported the constitutional reform with 60.24 percent voting Yes.¹¹ As soon as the results came in, journalists noted the strongly political meaning of the vote: Voters wanted to punish the government. But who comprises this “people in revolt,” as the director of the bosses’ newspaper *La Stampa* called the No voters? According to the latest data, among the unemployed, the No vote won with over 70 percent, a significant result in a country with the very high official unemployment rate of 11.6 percent. With a 76-percent No vote, the self-employed also rejected the constitutional reforms. “Self-employed” is a rather vague category that can include shop owners, taxi drivers, farmers, entrepreneurs—many of whom cannot make ends meet today—as well as the large sector of those who “scrape by” outside formal employment. With 66 percent for the No, stay-at-home women are another group that voted massively against the reforms. They are best placed to recognize the effects of the food social gap, the growing gap between the food budgets of the

rich and the poor. (In addition, women in Italy as elsewhere are over-represented among the unemployed.) According to Caterina Pasolini, over the past seven years, Italian families have reduced their spending on food by 12 percent on average, but the drop is nearly 19 percent for working-class families and over 28 percent for the unemployed. There is also regional difference, with a larger drop in the South (16.6 percent).¹² The South is also where the unemployment rate is highest.

The No vote also won among younger people, who tend to be more exposed to the crisis. Over 61 percent in the 18-29 age group and 69 percent in the 30-44 age group rejected the constitutional reform, as well as 58 percent of students. The only age group that supported the reforms is retirees, including those residing outside the country, no doubt deeply influenced by statements made by the European authorities.

A Populist Vote?

The energetic campaign lead by Matteo Renzi and his government in support of a Yes vote had the support of an international effort to frighten voters with forecasts of the disastrous consequences Italy would suffer if the constitutional reforms were rejected. The government warned that a No vote would lead to a general collapse. To further heighten the drama, Renzi scheduled the referendum for December 4, the day of the presidential elections in Austria, where an extreme right-wing candidate appeared likely to win. All through the campaign, the Democratic Party, its leader, the markets, and the EU were incessantly ratcheting up fear. But the voters were not cowed. Some have seen in the vote a new expression of “populism”—by now a catch-all term—and in particular of the rise of the Five Star Movement (M5S), which had endorsed the No vote. In fact, the No had the explicit backing of an overwhelming majority of Italy’s political parties. And the voters followed on both sides of the left-right divide.

Eighty-eight percent of *Lega Nord* and M5S voters voted No. On the left, 68 percent of the voters of *Sinistra Italiana* (SI), *Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà* (SEL), and the radical left voted No. But the No vote also received support from 15 percent of the voters of the Democratic Party. The undecided also played a role, with 60 percent of them eventually falling to the No side. In a sign of the times, and of the end of what Alberto Meloni called “the political culture of the long and peaceful after-the-war,” the rage and the determination of the Italians found expression in this vote well beyond the parties that recommended No. This is no doubt why the political class has come to fear the very idea of a referendum, considering it “an instrument for the dissolution of authority.”¹³

What Is to Be Done ...

Rossana Rossanda, founder of the left-wing journal *Il Manifesto*, who called for rejecting the constitutional reform, admitted that “there is little enthusiasm for voting No because we find ourselves with strange bedfellows.” It is evident that the diverse constellation that supported the No will have trouble seizing the political opportunity created by the fall of the government.

Fortunately, the right is divided. The *Lega Nord*, probably soon to be rechristened *Lega degli Italiani* to better fit the national aspirations of Matteo Salvini’s party, is already pushing against the door to take advantage of the No result. Polls in mid-November gave the party 10 percent support among voters, which is five less than projections from June 2015, but the victory of the No vote may give *Lega Nord* electoral wings. Silvio Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia*, another party that sided with the No, is likely to receive about 12 percent of the votes.

But the key party set to advance in the next elections is M5S, which has become the standard-bearer of the opposition to Matteo Renzi. M5S spans a very broad spectrum of the Italian public, drawing voters from right, left, and center. Previously seen as the party of the

young, the movement has recently increased its support among voters in the 35–55 age group. By winning the municipal elections in Rome and Turin, the party has proven itself—at least according to its leader Beppe Grillo—“capable of governing.”¹⁴ Grillo has missed few opportunities to reassure the political and economic people who count, with statements such as, “If M5S wins the elections, nothing will happen. ... The markets have nothing to worry about.”

For the Democratic Party, the *Lega Nord*, and *Forza Italia*, M5S is therefore the party to beat. But the Five Star Movement is also an additional impediment to the deeply needed task of recomposing the left-of-the-left in Italy: Witness the appropriation of the central role of the local workers’ struggles by M5S during the last No assembly in Turin.

How can the left-of-the-left benefit from the No victory? This is the heart of the problem. No doubt the first order of the day is to hear the popular demand and call for the dissolution of Parliament and a quick return to the polls. But no less important is to take the measure of the vote and not fall for the media echo chamber. The constitutional question has not been forgotten during the debates. The opposition to the government also extends to the modifications in the legal framework of the Italian constitution. Contrary to Beppe Grillo’s assertion, voters have voted not only from the “gut,” but also from the head. It is impossible to deny the fact that the vote of December 4 was also the expression of a political will oriented to the future. And this political will, as says the last communiqué of the small radical left group *Sinistra anticapitalista*, can offer the opportunity for “the renewal of

social mobilization and the struggles at the workplace, in the schools, the universities, in the defense of rights, of the environment, and for a better life and better jobs for the greatest number.”

Translated by Gabriel Ash.

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14. beppegrillo.it

Solidarity Report from Standing Rock

NANCY ROMER

Editors' note: The struggle at Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) was one of the major political mobilizations of 2016, combining the demand for Native rights with the call for environmental justice. New Politics asked Nancy Romer to cover these events for us. She was at Standing Rock from November 10–15. Her initial report and her article on the meaning of the victory achieved on December 5—and the struggle that still remains—have been posted on the New Politics website. Here we print two more of her dispatches from the scene, showing some of the day-to-day dynamics of standing with Standing Rock.

IN THIS REPORT I WILL TRY TO GIVE YOU a sense of what it was like to be at Standing Rock. Tonight completes my third day here. The weather has been mostly cold but very sunny. The colors, the sky, but most of all the people are startlingly calm and beautiful. The Standing Rock encampment is defined as a prayer site, a place to contemplate and to appreciate nature, “the creator” (not my words), and each other. The indigenous people here, from just about every tribe in the United States and some from Canada, are so welcoming and warm to outsiders. They repeatedly say how much they

appreciate the presence of non-indigenous folks and how they want to share with us. They are strict on the rules: no violence of any kind; no drugs, alcohol, or guns; respect for indigenous ways; making oneself useful.

The vast encampment contains four or five separate but connected camps, some on the Sioux reservation land, others outside. The largest one is immediately off reservation land, Oceti Sakowin Camp; it is the one in which most of the activities happen. The others are either defined by age—elders or youth—or vary by activity. There is a “Two-Spirit Camp” for gender non-conforming people, a traditional and accepted group in Native culture. We spend most of our time at Oceti, but today I took a long walk and visited two of the other camps just to get a flavor of them. “NO DAPL” stands for “No Dakota Access Pipeline,” and signs with the slogan are everywhere, as is the phrase “water is life.” There is a religious feel to the camps and great respect all around. In many ways this is a very old-style indigenous encampment, and in many ways it feels like a post-revolutionary or post-apocalyptic future. The pace is slow though everyone seems to move with great purpose. People jump in and do the tasks that seem to be needed: cooking, cleaning, helping each other to put up a yurt or a teepee, chopping wood, tending fires, washing dishes, and offering legal, medical, or psychological help. Cell and internet service is miserable and probably interfered with by the constant drones that fly above the camps.

On Friday morning, day two of my trip, I attended a brilliantly presented orientation to the camp. One of the presenters was Maria

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Marasigan, a young woman I know from our shared days in the Brooklyn Food Coalition. It was the best anti-racist training for allies that I have witnessed: It was succinct, not guilt-trippy, and very direct. The three main concepts are: indigenous centered, build a new legacy, and be of use. Presenters shared the Lakota values that prevail in the camp: prayer, respect, compassion, honesty, generosity, humility, and wisdom. For me the most impactful point was respect. They defined that as including slowing down, moving differently with clearer intention and less reactivity. They suggested asking fewer questions and just looking and learning before our hands pop up and we ask to take up space. They clarified a gendered division of behavior and practice, including asking “feminine identified” women to honor traditional norms by wearing skirts during the sacred rituals (including in the cooking tent) and for women “on their moons” to spend time in a tent to be taken care of and rest if they choose. Somehow it seemed okay, actually respectful, not about pollution and ostracism. While I was helping out in the cooking tent—my main area of contribution—an indigenous woman came by with about ten skirts and distributed them to the mostly women in the cooking tent, explaining that cooking is a sacred activity, and we gladly put them on. It served as an extra layer of warmth over my long underwear and jeans. It was not what I expected but it seemed fine to all of us. We just kept chopping away at the veggies.

Later that day I attended a direct-action training that was also quite thorough and clear. Lisa Fithian, an old friend from anti-war movement days, led the training and explained how to behave in an action and how to minimize police violence. Lisa, along with two other strong, smart women, one Black and one Native, laid out a plan to do a mass pray-in in town the next day. My friend and travel companion Smita and I both felt that we couldn’t risk arrest and decided not to join that direct action but to be in support in any way we could. At 8 the next

morning about a hundred cars lined up in convoy formation at the exit of the Oceti Sakowin Camp, each with lots of passengers—including some buses and minivans—and went into Manwan, the nearest town. The indigenous folks formed an inner circle and the non-indigenous formed a circle around them. The indigenous folks prayed, sang, and danced. The tactic was exercising freedom to practice their religion while protesting the Dakota Access Pipe Line. No arrests were made despite massive police and drone presence. One local man tried to run over a water protector, but she jumped aside; the man had a gun but was subdued by the cops. Lots of videos were taken, and the man was taken to the local jail.

On Saturday I finally got a press pass, having been requested by *New Politics* to cover the encampment. That gave me the right to take photos (otherwise not allowed), but with limitations: no photos of people without permission, or of houses or horses, again, without permission from the people with them. I set out to interview people at the various camps and to get a sense of what people were planning to do for the winter. I spoke with Joe, a part Lakota from Colorado who had been raised Catholic and attended Indian residential schools, taken from his parents by the state because it doubted the ability of the Native community to raise their own kids. He said it was brutal. When asked why he was here, he replied, “This is the first time since Little Big Horn that all the tribes are uniting against a common enemy—the black snake—the pipeline that will harm our water, our people. This unity is making us whole.”

At Rosebud camp, just about one-half mile from Oceti, I discovered a group of people building a straw-bale structure that was destined to become a school. Multi, an architect from Southern California, took a break to tell me how they came to create this project with the full collaboration of parents and kids in the camp. Their project grew out of a team of people from Southern California who are builders

and designers and who use earth and straw as materials, creating almost no carbon footprint and providing both strength of structure and extraordinary insulation—very important for the windy and cold winter ahead. Multi told me,

We didn't want to bring the colonialist idea of what was needed and just tell people at the camp. We spent five days gathering ideas from people at the camp as to what they needed. They decided on building a school for the many kids who might stay the winter or come and go over time. The parents and kids helped to design the structure with the builders. All the decision-making was "horizontal," engaging everyone with equal voice, avoiding hierarchy. It will be a one-room school house, with nooks for specific tasks, and will serve K-8th graders.

A teen center is being built nearby. When I visited, there were five women and one man working on the project and they welcomed any help they could get to finish the project before the cold set in. When I asked Multi why she was doing this project she said, "For me this is about coming together as a global culture, a people who have the resources we need for future generations. We are here to protect our futures together. Building a school house is a manifestation of that ancient technology for our future together."

Down the road I met Danielle, who was helping to build a multipurpose center housing a kitchen, dining area, and meeting room. She told me that "this is all about the water and who lives downstream. We are testing a new economic system that requires governance, self-governance from the ground up. The needs must evolve for us to create a system that will fit them." She is particularly excited about engaging people to serve and to be united, to be able to work together with their passions for service, to be happy together in this way. The materials for the building were donated by people from Asheville, North Carolina, and were deeply appreciated. All over the camps one sees evidence of creative problem-solving,

cooperation, and contributions brought from afar. The "donations" building is brimming with winter clothes (for adults and kids), foods of all kinds, and other practical items.

I was particularly interested in the many families that were at the camps, with lots of kids of all ages, including infants. One family from Boulder, Colorado, with 8-year-old Oscar and 11-year-old Audrey, were unpacking their car when I came upon them. Their mother, Susan, said, "We are here to support the protest and to have our kids learn from it. I want my kids to understand that we do what we can to take care of the water and support the indigenous people. To step it up these days we have to hold some ground. This is one of the places we can meet. It would be great if Obama would release the land and kill the pipeline." Amen.

I encountered a father-son pair from Manhattan. Fourteen-year-old Declan Rexer learned about the encampment from a single segment on MSNBC news but couldn't find anything else about it in the corporate media. He was particularly upset by the police attacks on elderly protesters. He then went to alternative and social media and found an enormous amount of information. His interest grew and his father, William Rexer, decided to bring him out to North Dakota to learn for himself. They plan to bring back lots of information for Declan's classmates and to encourage more people to come out to see for themselves. William, a media professional himself, connected with some of the young documentarians at the camp and will provide some material support to them in order to advance their work.

I spoke with Joseph, a Salish man from Montana. I asked him how long he was planning to stay at the camp. He told me, "I've been here from the beginning, and I will stay to the end. All winter if that's what it takes. We have been colonized and divided for five hundred years. This is our time to unite and resist. We must protect our water and our tribes." He thanked me for coming to Standing Rock and

being an ally. He asked me to tell my friends to come out and join the encampment, to be water protectors.

Generosity is evident all over the camp. I particularly love working in the kitchen, a huge army tent with large tables, stoves, and lots of equipment. On each of the two days that I worked in the kitchen there were about a dozen people busily working in happy unison. There was a chief organizer and then four or five people who were in charge of a particular dish, each with one to three assistants. I was an assistant, happy not to have to mastermind anything. The chatter among the workers reminded me of the Park Slope Food Coop squads, where people work together with shared goals. As one man put it, “We come together here with one vision. We are building a new world together.”

While I attend trainings and sacred fire circles, chop veggies, talk with people, drive people around, and walk around the various camps, I am struck by how happy I feel. Sure, this is temporary. Sure, this is not my “real world.” But it is a lovely world, a loving world, a world in which each person is greeted with kindness. Young men and women ride through the camps on horseback, connect to ancient traditions, and bask in the glory of a shared culture of resistance. I do not come from this culture, but I do support their determination, their right to protect their land and water and people, their valiant attempt to build a better world. I am moving slowly and deliberately and thinking about the world we need to build together, but on a much larger scale. Can we decide to be kind to each other, to collaborate, to try to remove ego from our day-to-day practice? I don’t know the answer to these difficult questions. But I do know that when people share a common struggle we can be beautiful. I bask in that beauty at Standing Rock.

MY LAST TWO DAYS AT STANDING ROCK were beautiful. I continued my work in the massive kitchen that served breakfast, lunch,

and dinner to at least five hundred people each day. There are several other kitchens in the various parts of Oceti Sakowin Camp (the big camp) and in the smaller camps as well. Some are extended-family affairs and others, like the one I worked in, are huge. Many people who are camping out have brought their own food or use some of the donations available for cooking.

Most of my non-service time was spent talking with people, checking out some of the encampments and contingents. Labor for Standing Rock was a small but important such contingent. With flags fluttering and union jackets, shirts, and hats, these unionists were determined to represent the many working-class people, in unions and otherwise, who support Standing Rock. Each of the people I spoke with insisted that the AFL-CIO’s opposition to Standing Rock and support for the pipeline was wrong-headed and dangerous. Peter Parks, a retired longshoreman from Portland, Oregon, said, “The union movement needs to come out in support of the climate movement, it needs to see its interests in common with the world’s people, not just seek out a few jobs for union members.”

Kirk Smith from Terre Haute, Indiana, President of Local 1426 of Workers United, whose factory manufactures plastic overwraps for food and beverages, told me,

I wanted to come here on my own, but my international is supporting Standing Rock so I am representing them. I’m a political activist from a small, conservative town, so I came here to be part of this larger movement. It’s scary how large corporations not even from our own country can get our government to declare eminent domain just for corporate profits and not for the benefit of the people. There is a water source right here; the oil will drain into the water.

He told me that he brought all sorts of supplies from Terre Haute and also went into Bismarck, the nearest sizable town, and bought lots of food to donate. I asked for a message to share and he said, “I expect Trump’s government

will have its way with Native Americans as it has for over four hundred years. I hope Obama ends the pipeline now. Greed and power control the world. My union brothers and sisters understand this fight because we are not the elite that benefits.”

Sitting on lawn chairs at the labor camp, chatting with two other Workers United members, Alex Gillis from Madison, Wisconsin, and Roby from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, we laughed together about how windy and sunny it is at the camp. What irony that the energy corporations insist on extracting oil and gas from the ground with enormous climate and health consequences when powerful solar and wind energy are all around us! Alex said, “We in the working class are beaten up every day. If the working class doesn’t stand up and fight we are doomed. We will go back to the system where we will be serfs. I hate the corporate media, really corporate cheerleaders; they make commercials for the system. It’s important for people like us to tell the true story.”

Carlos Genard, Communications Director of Workers United, Chicago Midwest Regional Joint Board, offers the reasons he is here at Standing Rock:

First, I have Native blood, and I am sick of what the corporations do to Native Americans. Second, I have three children, and if I don’t stand up to ensure pure water for my kids, no one else will. I protect the planet for my kids. Third, there is a disconnect between the leadership of the AFL-CIO and its members. Why does the AFL-CIO stand with the corporations instead of the people? We won’t be able to win unless we have solidarity with Native Americans; we must continue to build the movement.

He also told me that as a dark-skinned Latino, “Standing Rock is the only place on earth where I don’t get racism. No one cares about your color or the way you talk or look. I want to bring my kids here to experience this. My kids go to Chicago Public Schools that have a great union. My daughter’s social studies teacher uses

Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* so she’s getting the true story!”

I asked one of the young security guards at the main camp’s welcoming entrance checkpoint for some directions to one of the smaller camps, and he and his comrade insisted on walking me there. They were both in their early twenties and so proud of their roles at the camp. They are both local and are now living at the camp with occasional visits home. Elmer, one of the guards, told me, “I am so proud of my work here. I stand watch at the entrance for over 12 hours a day, and I go around to all the camps, talk with the people, see if there are any problems and if there are ways that security can help.” I tell him that that seems like ideal community policing, something that most law enforcement professionals need to learn about. He tells me that he has found his purpose in the camps. “I used to hang around and not have a clear focus. Now I know I am defending my people, standing together. I have an important job to keep people safe. I couldn’t be happier even though I am so tired.” Our half-hour walk to a nearby camp is filled with personal stories and chatter. These two young, valiant defenders of their people are incredibly open and happy to share with an older white woman from Brooklyn, New York. I am honored.

In the dining tent, during a delicious meal of veggies, beef chili, rice, salad, and fruit, I asked Buffalo Child a few questions. He is a Native elder from Montana and Saskatchewan, mostly Cree and Lakota. I asked him what will happen, what he sees as possible outcomes of the struggle. He sees several different scenarios:

First and most likely, Trump will protect his buddy, Kelsey Lee Warren, CEO of Energy Transfer Partners, as Trump has financial interests in the pipeline. Energy Transfer Partners has been lying and blocking the media since the beginning of the encampment. Second, Trump might push for changing the route of the pipeline, closer to Bismarck, play the hero and then say, “I stopped it and made it go somewhere else.” This might boost his

ego. Third, and the worst-case scenario, is that there will be violence against the water protectors and then Obama's idea that the UN would step in and take over, given the UN's commitment to the rights of indigenous peoples. We tried to do it the peaceful way, but if there is an attack, the people here won't fight but other people will rise up all over the country."

Buffalo Child offered his reason to be at Standing Rock:

I believe in callings, everyone has a calling dictated by conscience and one's belief system. The consciousness of society is now awake and aware. Standing Rock is my calling. This is a historical movement; it's never happened before in the United States. This is a "we" event; this is a natural and spiritual movement. We want all people to join our movement.

On Sunday night, November 13, Angela Vivens, one of the tribal elders and lawyers, addressed the hundreds of people at the Sacred Fire, the gathering place where information and culture are shared. She gave us a bit of historical context and present strategy:

The Sioux have more treaties than any other tribe. Over the last 37 years the UN has supported the rights of indigenous peoples, but the United States and Canada were among the very few nations that refused to sign. They finally signed on in 2010.* We have changed our republic from the name "Lakota" to the name "Dakota," which includes all tribes. We are trying to protect the graves in the burial mounds. We are defending the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868 that acknowledge the 1818 boundaries of the Dakota nation. We have been good Americans, patriots, and veterans. It is now time for us to be good Dakota.

We are owed billions of dollars for stolen land and hydropower. We have reparations due us, called for by the Geneva Conventions. We have no choice but to take back our freedom and land. We have the right to do this according to

the Geneva Conventions.

This is a calm before the storm. We need to drum, we need to pray. We are in that thirty-day waiting period [agreed to by the Army Corps of Engineers]. We expect a five-star general and five hundred vets coming here on December 5 to protect the river. Be strong, take care of each other. This silence tells us the permit has been agreed on in thirty days. This will change. We will distribute copies of the treaty and treaty ID and permits for the non-Indians. We are preparing insurance claims against DAPL. We all fought and struggled for unity, and we have to unite the U.S. and Canada nations. We pre-date the state of North Dakota and South Dakota. They stole our name—Dakota.

We are working with the Sami indigenous people of Norway to pressure DNB and Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global [NG-PFG], to divest from all corporations connected to DAPL. [DNB is an investment house with 2.8 billion Norwegian krone (\$230 million US) in investments advancing the DAPL, and NG-PFG has invested over 10 billion krone (\$833 million US).] The Sami people are outraged that money from Norwegian workers is being used to deny indigenous rights, spoil the water and land, and contribute to climate change. They are working closely with the [Standing Rock Sioux] Red Owl Collective Legal Team to make this happen.

This is a historical event; it's never happened before in the United States. Only fools would close their eyes. This is a national and spiritual movement. Come with an open heart and open eyes. Join us!

On November 15, there were two hundred demonstrations and events across the fifty states of the United States in support of Standing Rock. I attended a vibrant and passionate demonstration at Federal Plaza in Manhattan. There were more than two thousand people supporting the water protectors at Standing Rock, demanding that the Dakota Access Pipeline be scrapped—No DAPL. Some of the demonstra-

*The UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples stipulates "free, prior, and informed consent" before embarking on any development project or other action that would affect the indigenous people's territory.

tors were Native Americans but most of the demonstrators were non-Native climate activists with respect for indigenous rights as well as the rights of Mother Earth.

Perhaps anticipating the nation-wide demonstrations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a statement on November 14 indicating that it needed more analysis and discussion with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe before a required easement could be granted and thus allow construction of the pipeline to take place under the Missouri River. Energy Transfer Partners management was not happy, but the Water Protectors were glad to have even a brief reprieve.

Organizers of the New York demonstration made it clear that DAPL wasn't the only pipeline to be defeated. The New York metropolitan area has its own potential tragedy unfolding with the AIM Spectra Pipeline about to be completed that would go under the Hudson River and be routed 105 feet away from the Indian Point Nuclear Power Station—just 10

miles north of New York City. An exploded pipe in either location would be truly disastrous for us. You can plug into that struggle at www.resistaim.com.

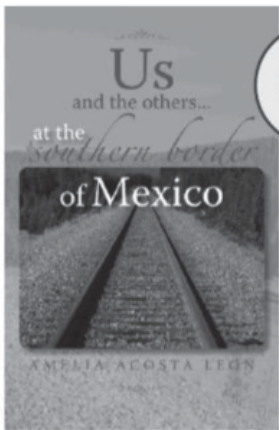
So what does all this mean? To me Standing Rock means one of the pathways to resistance: resistance to Trump, resistance to the unleashed power of capital and the corporations destroying our future. It means challenging the passivity that makes Americans so easy to manipulate. It means ramping up our organizing, not just mobilizing; it means deepening our commitment and contact with our local communities and making common cause with our neighbors and allies. It means taking joy from our comrades and neighbors, our friends and our families who participate in these struggles. It means being part of building a new world because we need one so badly.

Note: Names used here may vary from actual names, or omit last names, with permission and per privacy requests.

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CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE



Woody Guthrie, *Folk singer-songwriter, activist*

"I suppose that Old Man Trump knows just
how much racial hate
He stirred up in that bloodpot of human hearts
When he drew that color line
Here at his Beach Haven family project

Beach Haven ain't my home!
No, I just can't pay this rent!
My money's down the drain,
And my soul is badly bent!
Beach Haven is Trump's Tower
Where no black folks come to roam,
No, no, Old Man Trump!
Old Beach Haven ain't my home!"

—from *Beach Haven Ain't My Home* (aka. 'Old Man Trump')
about Guthrie's landlord, Donald Trump's father

"Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye, Rosalita,
Adios mis amigos, Jesus y Maria;
You won't have your names when you ride the big airplane,
All they will call you will be "deportees"

—from *Plane Wreck at Los Gatos* (also known as 'Deportee')

"I been a thinkin' / How the rich man runs the land.
How he promised / He would help us,
If we put him / Into office
How he turned his promises around.

Big dictators / Speculators/ Senators / And Agitators,
They tell what all they gonna do,
When they get / Into their office,
See what they can / Take off of us,
Take from me and take from you."

—from *Indian Corn Song*

"We went to the judge and I talked with the tenants
We told him we had no hot water in the sink
He spent a half an hour upon his bench there
To tell us what a fine reputation our landlord's got.

But I'm out to get your long green tender
I'm out to get your round town car
I'm out to fight and win a good job and wages
And a six room twin bed flat with a built in bar."

—from *I'm Out to Get*

"If you're a republican or a democrat,
Or a white hood Ku Klux Klan,
No use to ring my doorbell
'Cause I'll never be your man"

—from *Ease My Revolutionary Mind*

"This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York island;
From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.
...

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
By the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway;
Nobody living can ever make me turn back
This land was made for you and me."

—from *This Land is Your Land*

Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community *Fifty Years Later* Remembering Martin Luther King's Last, Most Radical Book

PETER KOLOZI AND JAMES FREEMAN

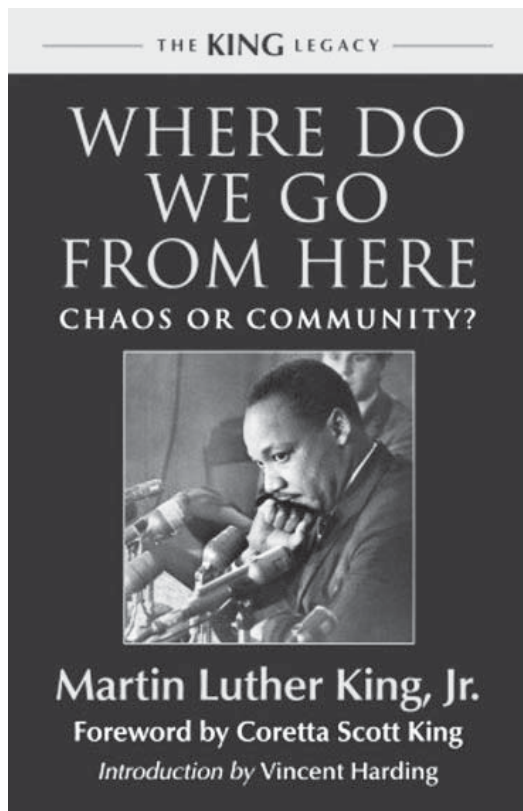
MARKING AN ANNIVERSARY of a book's publication is, appropriately, reserved for books that were widely read when they first appeared many years ago. Books we commemorate with an anniversary are ones that ushered in a new way of thinking and influenced the way society tries to make sense of the world. Martin Luther King Jr.'s last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* did neither of these things.¹ Published in the long, hot summer of 1967, it was politely reviewed but dismissed. Milton R. Konvitz of the *Saturday Review* respectfully wrote that King had moved from slogans to programs "moderate, judicious, constructive," and of "pragmatic tone."² Eliot Fremont-Smith of the *New York Times* wrote that King was "calling for a miracle."³ Martin Duberman of *Book Week* suggested that King had a "tendency to substitute rhetoric for specificity."⁴ The well-known progressive Andrew Kopkind, in the *New York Review of Books*, went so far as to state that "there is something disingenuous about his public voice and about this book," while castigating the civil rights leader a few months before his untimely death as "outstripped by his times, overtaken by the events. ... He is not likely to regain command. Both his philosophy and these techniques of leadership ... are no longer valid."⁵

Marginalized, called a sell-out, rendered ir-

relevant, an elder lost in the youthful spirit of the times, King faced one critic after another who, willing to admit it or not, harbored resentment toward the man who tried to confront W.E.B. DuBois' classic dictum, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line."⁶ One might think America, in the midst of an era of social tumult, would have welcomed this book's analysis of what the project of a progressive social and civil rights movement should be. Instead, *Where Do We Go from Here* landed with a thud. King's last and most radical book deserves better. With the benefit of history, we might consider how anniversaries can also mark a time when what was overlooked is revisited in order to provide us with a lens to view and understand the present.

King's insistence that America reflect upon its recklessly imperialist and mindlessly materialist present was virtually erased from historical memory in the years following his assassination. In short order, the man was transformed into a cultural commodity (and a martyr) so that America's self-congratulation on meaningful but limited progress on civil rights might hasten an end to the nation's troubles at home. King's death and subsequent canonization facilitated the fulfillment of a conscious need for white Americans to project an image of national redemption through little more than "greater understanding," making up for the country's history of slavery, institutional discrimination, and Jim Crow. America "mourned," and that was it. Eager to move on, the American public

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largely dismissed King's later work. Following his 1967 anti-war "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence" speech, parts of which were reprinted in *Where Do We Go from Here*, King was condemned by the media as a traitor and roundly criticized by African Americans and the general public more broadly.⁷ The year 1967 was the lowest point of King's public life. By the end of 1968, following the death of King and Senator Robert Kennedy, Americans were quick to forget King's message, impatient with the status of the civil rights movement, unsure how to put an end to the Vietnam War, and fatigued by the spirit of the times. In the 1968 presidential election, George Wallace received nearly ten million votes and Hubert Humphrey narrowly lost to Richard Nixon, who explicitly campaigned on a racialized law-and-order platform. Something significant had occurred that both altered the course of politics in America and moved King's

message to the dustbin of history.

The year 2017 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Where Do We Go from Here*. The book is perhaps the most radical statement of King's analysis, criticism, and vision for change. Significantly, it links race and class as the twin pillars of the capitalist exploitation that is the generator of poverty, economic inequality, spiritual disenchantment, and racial animosity in America and across the world. As Cornel West correctly states, "The radical King was a democratic socialist who sided with poor and working people in the class struggle taking place in capitalist societies. This class struggle may be invisible or visible, manifest or latent. But it rages on in a fight over resources, power, and space."⁸ King roots racial and class domination in the context of capitalist economic exploitation, explaining the persistence of black and white poverty and the political impotence caused by their mutual racial animosity. King advocated for an "alliance of liberal-labor-civil rights forces," or a cross-racial class coalition, as necessary to implement a program meant to liberate Americans, both black and white, from poverty. Indeed, King wrote, "the Negroes' problem cannot be solved unless the whole of American society takes a new turn toward greater economic justice."⁹ King sees strength in class consciousness, a taboo topic in American public discourse and one that the early civil rights leader assiduously steered clear of. A revisit to the radical King is due; his analysis has been overlooked and has become relevant when one considers the political and economic realignments taking place in America in the last half-century.

This essay will argue that what makes *Where Do We Go from Here* so distinct lies in the fact that King's analysis of global inequality, racism, and poverty is not abstract, moralizing, or merely discursive. King emerges in this text with an historical and materialist critique that links the *raison d'être* of slavery, racism, and white supremacy to elite-class domination for the

purposes of economic control and exploitation of the vast majority of humanity.¹⁰

The book is a rejection of the trajectory of America in the 1960s and a warning about the neoliberal shift taking place in a soon to be deindustrialized economy. *Where Do We Go from Here* is more poignant and urgent today than it was fifty years ago not only because the trends that King described have come to fruition, but because his “beloved community” provides a social philosophy and a political strategy for human liberation as well as a counterweight to the global ideological, economic, and political hegemony of neoliberalism. Whereas the United States and much of the rest of the world has doubled down on capitalism since the 1960s, King urges that we reject this evolution and instead redouble our efforts to create an alternative political, economic, and value system “beyond the traditional capitalism and communism.”¹¹ By 1967 King, at last, embraced the revolutionary within.

This book is a reminder of how we might think about race, class, and poverty, forcing us to peer over the fence to see how the other half lives. Oftentimes, whites minimize or ignore the role of racism and discrimination in black poverty. Just as often, blacks minimize or ignore white poverty because whites are not the victims of racial discrimination. Both blacks and whites in the United States tend to minimize or ignore the role of capitalism and class exploitation. Each group often consciously (or not) embraces a kind of racial animosity as a false salve; not quite healing, but instead inoculating them against something much larger than they may be willing to accept. “In human relations,” writes King, “the truth is hard to come by because most groups are deceived about themselves. Rationalization and the incessant search for scapegoats are the psychological cataracts that blind us to our individual and collective sins.”¹² In the “The Sword that Heals” essay, which appeared in an earlier book, King succinctly puts it, “The underprivileged southern whites saw the color

that separated them from Negroes more clearly than they saw the circumstances that bound them together in mutual interest.”¹³

Where Do We Go from Here: Why Now?

Essentially, this book is not only about the experiences and struggles of blacks. King’s last book states that poverty in the United States and worldwide is not caused solely by racism and discrimination. There are millions of poor whites in the United States—more poor whites than there are poor blacks. To be sure, it is undeniable that the cause of poverty in the United States is in part rooted in racism and discrimination, but as King makes clear, it is also rooted in the capitalist economy and a divisive “I-centered” rather than a “thou-centered” value system. Capitalism is a system that is profit-centered and concerned with private property over the well-being of all people.¹⁴ Every American should read this book to understand, from possibly America’s greatest public intellectual and political/social theorist, that global poverty (as well as imperialism, environmental degradation, and civil war with its impact on human migration) is caused by racism, capitalism, and the policies of our own government. Just a cursory look at the world’s slums and favelas and the hundreds of millions of people who live in squalor, in danger from crime and disease, on the precipice of natural disaster—or perhaps at the millions of people who migrate from their native lands and risk their lives to escape the misery of war, poverty, and crime—will show the raw underbelly and material consequences of neoliberal global capitalism. King argues,

A true revolution in values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. ... It will look across the oceans and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, “This is not just.” It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say, “This is not just.”

The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.¹⁵

This should make us see, as King did, that a deeper analysis of domestic and global poverty needs to focus on both racial oppression and class exploitation worldwide.

Where Do We Go from Here: Beyond Civil Rights

In reading *Where Do We Go from Here* it becomes clear that King's "beloved community" constitutes much more than the essential but limited gains of integration and civil and political rights. Realizing the futility of the narrow agenda set in motion by President Johnson as the Voting and Civil Rights acts were signed into law, King began pressing for more. For King, integration and equality meant a willingness on the part of Congress and the White House to fund economic advancements for African Americans, including affirmative action and government investment in education, housing, and employment programs targeting African American communities. King argues that justice requires affirmative action. "A society that has done something special against the Negro for hundreds of years," writes King, "must now do something special for him, in order to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis."¹⁶ According to King such affirmative, special treatment includes concrete programs such as "having a good job, a good education, a decent house, and a share of power." King writes that the first phase of the civil rights movement had been about gaining equal political and legal rights, for which the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights acts were important steps. However he explicitly states that the provision of these rights was merely a step in the struggle for equality, justice, and democracy rather the culmination. Furthermore, such advancements came at relatively little cost. "The practical cost of change for the nation up to this point has been cheap," writes King.

The limited reforms have been obtained at bargain rates. There are no expenses, and no taxes are required, for Negroes to share lunch counters, libraries, parks, hotels, and other facilities with whites. Even more significant changes involved in voter registration required neither large monetary nor psychological sacrifice. The real cost lies ahead. ... The discount education given Negroes will in the future have to be purchased at full price if quality education is to be realized. Jobs are harder and costlier to create than voting rolls. The eradication of slums housing millions is complex far beyond integrating buses and lunch counters.¹⁷

Affirmative action and targeted socioeconomic programs are important elements of King's program, but they are not comprehensive of his thought. The totality of King's vision was greater than equalizing opportunities among racial groups. The King writings to re-read today consist of going beyond integration into the capitalist system. King's goal was not the mere reduction of socio-economic disparities in wealth, income, employment, or poverty rates between whites and blacks. Such a goal would have equalized poverty rates for poor blacks and poor whites but would have left the fundamental systemic source of exploitation and poverty untouched. Recall the NAACP's strategy to argue in the courts that segregated facilities be abolished in whole as inherently discriminatory, rather than to demand equality within a *Plessy* era of segregated facilities. Nothing short of full inclusion would be sufficient. Mitigating the extent of poverty would have cruelly accepted a society of millions of people devoid of freedom and dignity while still suffering in poverty. Instead, King's notion of the "beloved community" was rooted in the abolition of all poverty, as its cause had both racial and class roots. King understood that the source of blacks' poverty was not solely attributable to the system of segregation and racial discrimination. He believed that the only way to fully abolish black poverty was to make clear that it was bound up with the abolition of

poverty for all groups. This, the late King came to see, was a project that required a challenge to capitalism and a “radical restructuring of the economy.” The struggle had entered a new stage. Questioning and challenging the status of the capitalist democracy called America was the new frontier in King’s nonviolent movement for equality in a nation built on principles he still deeply admired.

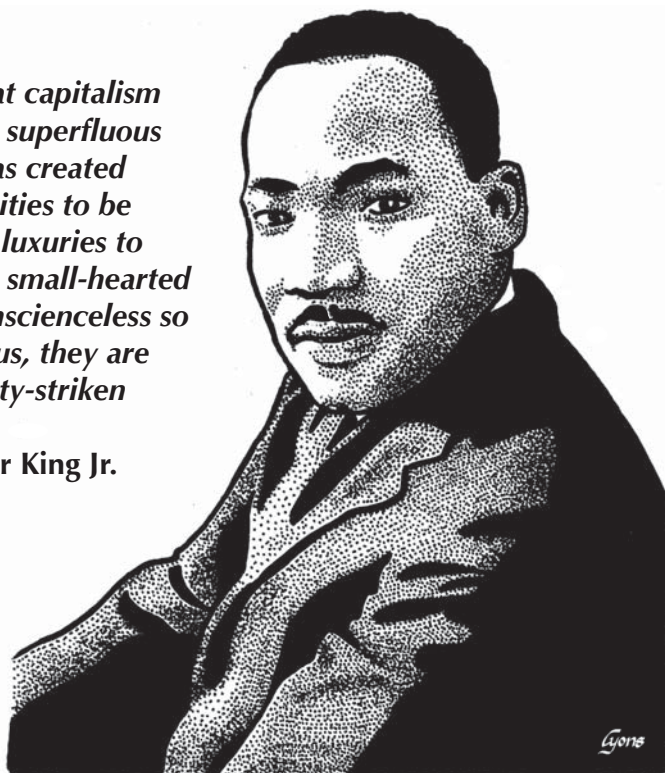
King called for a social and economic rights program not limited solely to African Americans. “Equality with whites,” writes King, “will not solve the problems with either whites or Negroes if it means equality in a world stricken by poverty and in a universe doomed to extinction by war.”¹⁸ Poor people of all colors and ethnicities have “common needs” for a war on poverty that “is no less desperate than the Negroes.”¹⁹ “This proposal,” writes King, “is not a ‘civil rights’ program, in the sense that the term is currently used. The program would benefit all

the poor, including the two-thirds of them who are white.”²⁰ King’s goal for the movement and the “beloved community” is guided by a commitment to economic justice that incorporates and transcends race. “The impact of automation, and other forces,” writes King, “have made the economic question *fundamental* for blacks and whites alike.”²¹ King knew, and implored others to recognize, that the issue was bigger than civil rights for blacks—rather he was making a case for economic rights for all as a validation of civil rights for all.

King argues that blacks have a “double disability.”²² Their condition is the result of racial discrimination and conditions resulting from an economic model that is rooted in economic exploitation and impoverishment. His critiques of automation, displacement, unemployment, and low wages are fundamentally critiques of capitalism.²³ King understood that the drive for profits over people intensifies competition

“We must honestly admit that capitalism has often left a gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty, has created conditions permitting necessities to be taken from the many to give luxuries to the few, and has encouraged small-hearted men to become cold and conscienceless so that, like Dives before Lazarus, they are unmoved by suffering, poverty-stricken humanity.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.



among the poor and working class for affordable housing, quality jobs, and decent education. White supremacy and institutional racism/discrimination ensure that these scarce resources are disproportionately distributed to whites. The distribution of these resources is little more than bread crumbs which, although they make life marginally better for poor whites (in their own eyes, most significantly) vis-a-vis poor blacks, are still inadequate to alter the same kind of material and political poverty experienced by black Americans. King understood that the racism of poor and working class whites is an ideological and economic strategy in the sense that the maintenance of racial discrimination limits competition for scarce resources, be it jobs or housing. As such it causes deep impoverishment among people of color, but it does not dramatically improve the material conditions of poor and working-class whites. Racism intensifies poor whites' exploitation, using the material desperation of people of color for jobs and housing to enable employers and elected officials to keep wages at the poverty level and undermine collective action and labor solidarity. King well understood this fact, writing that the wage discrimination that blacks suffered in the South also "ironically not only deprives the Negro but its presence drives down the wages of the white worker."²⁴ This has been a recurring theme in American labor history where, in the face of demands by workers, employers have used tensions between ethnic and racial groups as tools to beat back demands for improvement in wages and working conditions, to break strikes, and to perpetuate the status quo rule of elites.²⁵ Divide and conquer works in a system of acute poverty and insecurity.

Where Do We Go from Here: Beyond the 'War on Poverty'

Where Do We Go from Here was published two years after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the high point of the civil rights movement. In the two-year span 1965-1967

the United States experienced greater and more intensified social and political instability than previously. The war in Vietnam escalated to the point where a half-million U.S. troops were engaged in the conflict, with increased casualties on both sides. Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty was gradually undermined, politically and economically, by the increasing costs of the war. In northern cities, continued police brutality against people of color, and racial discrimination in employment and housing, resulted in diminished opportunities and quality of life, which led to riots in urban areas across the country, including in Newark, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New Haven. At the same time a structural shift in capitalism was underway. By the mid-1960s corporate investment was shifting not only domestically to the U.S. South but to low-wage foreign markets as well. U.S. firms increased their foreign direct investment as it became more profitable abroad.²⁶ While it may not have been readily apparent at the time, American corporations adopted strategies that would result in stagnant wages and job insecurity. American corporations became more hostile to organized labor, demanding concessions in collective bargaining agreements, moving to non-unionized locations in the South or abroad, investing in labor-saving technology, displacing workers, and driving down wages. These shifts in capital and labor relations in the United States signaled a structural transformation in the postwar capitalist economy. Racial integration occurred at a time when the political economy was undergoing a movement away from industrial full employment, coexistence with organized labor, and a capitalist welfare state. The new environment would be post-industrial, unemployment-tolerant, non-unionized, and neoliberal, facilitating a weaker social contract and a relationship between capital and labor that placed racial animosities at the center of political and social life.²⁷

The focus of King's later work on anti-militarism and the Poor People's Campaign

make clear he was more than a civil rights leader: He was a passionate, articulate critic of capitalism. King perceptively saw the long-term implications of the economic shift that was emerging in the mid-1960s. Just as African Americans and other people of color won the right for access on a nondiscriminatory basis to employment, education, government services, and public places, the economy was changing, as machines were replacing the need for human labor and “good” paying jobs were harder to come by. These trends, already underway in the mid-1960s, were exacerbated over the next several decades, resulting in the contemporary situation of record corporate profits, stagnant wages, economic insecurity, underemployment, and stubbornly persistent levels of poverty.²⁸

Where Do We Go from Here: A Revolution in Values

King implores us to rethink not only the workings of capitalism, but also the ideas that justify it. In particular, capitalist thought is rooted in the ideology of self-preservation and competition between individuals, groups, corporate entities, and nations. However, King has a different view on self-preservation. King suggests that “other preservation” is the first law of self-preservation: “It is the first law of life precisely because we cannot preserve self without being concerned about preserving other selves. The universe is so structured that things go awry if men are not diligent in their cultivation of the other-regarding dimension.”²⁹ Following the ancient Greeks and modern socialist thinkers, King believed that humans are social beings. Humans need other humans to be free in order to fully develop their own individual and human potential. He writes, “I cannot reach fulfillment without ‘thou.’ The self cannot be self without other selves. Self-concern without other-concern is like a tributary that has no outward flow to the ocean. Stagnant, still, and stale, it lacks both life and freshness.”³⁰ King’s educational background was vast and he was not

one to shy away from praise for and reiteration of the thinkers of the Western Canon, including Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Marx (subtly but masterfully), and here, Martin Buber. In Buber’s taxonomy, the I-it was distinct from the I-thou. The former relegates relations, and experience itself, into subject and object in a fixed state of engagement. The I-thou proposes a relationship that treats otherness as a thing in itself—an understanding that people are ends rather than means. King’s use of Buber’s I-thou is an important, although simple, plea for an authentic non-objectified understanding of others that would transcend the racism and capitalist exploitation of labor as the crudest forms of objectification of human beings. Forcefully, and with great clarity, King addresses this objectification, stating,

We must honestly admit that capitalism has often left a gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty, has created conditions permitting necessities to be taken from the many to give luxuries to the few, and has encouraged small-hearted men to become cold and conscienceless so that, like Dives before Lazarus, they are unmoved by suffering, poverty-stricken humanity. The profit motive, when it is the sole basis of an economic system, encourages cutthroat competition and selfish ambition that inspire men to be more I-centered than thou-centered.³¹

In King’s view, poverty in the twentieth century is not the result of scarcity of goods, but rather of a value system in need of radical change. Indeed, King writes,

America is the richest and most powerful nation in the world. ... There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen whether he be a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid, or day laborer. There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum—and *livable*—income for every American family.³²

The source of poverty is in the economic and political distribution of goods. Scarcity in

quality jobs, housing, and education are not for lack of resources. Instead, scarcity is the product of the conscious and willful decision on the part of the wealthy, corporations, and their political allies in government to create the conditions where exploitation and domination of people are easily attained. In King's view it is very much a class project and an expression of power by economic elites to extract, exploit, dominate, and control the labor of the vast majority of the population and the resources of the world. King is explicit about the elite-class nature of historical and contemporary exploitation. He states that slavery is rooted in economic exploitation.³³ He argues that the "birth of slavery is primarily economic, not racial."³⁴ Racism and white supremacy originated among elites using it to justify economic exploitation.³⁵

The change King envisions to meet the "common needs" of the poor is a radical economic program. He calls for a true war on poverty and a "radical reordering of national priorities," not merely a full funding of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.³⁶ King's program calls for either a policy of full employment or a guaranteed income tied to the median income (not some poverty-level minimum).³⁷ King understands that these measures require a reassessment of capitalism and the profit-centered economy. "Now we realize," he writes, "that dislocations in the market operation of our economy and the prevalence of discrimination thrust people into idleness and bind them in constant or frequent unemployment against their will. We also know that no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands it does not eliminate poverty."³⁸ King's economic analysis argues that capitalism's drive to increase profits and reduce costs, including worker dislocations as a result of outsourcing or automation, creates poverty and economic crisis for lack of demand. King insists that the market has no inherent solution for this problem. "We have come to the point where we must make the nonproducer a consumer or we will find ourselves drowning in

a sea of consumer goods."³⁹ King was no Luddite, averse to technological innovation, nor was he a protectionist or a xenophobe aiming to keep foreign products and people from the American market. King argued, "We must create full employment or we must create incomes. People must be made consumers by one method or the other."⁴⁰

King's goal to abolish poverty through a program of redistribution in the form of guaranteed employment or a guaranteed income is not what makes *Where Do We Go from Here* radical. The radicalism of King consists in his insistence that there is a moral contradiction between the objective treatment of humans as means to exploit in a profit-driven capitalist economy and his belief that humans are ends in themselves rooted in the Christian and humanist traditions. King is critical of capitalism's determination of a human being as a means to an end, whose labor exists to generate profit for another. "No worker," writes King, "can maintain his morale or sustain his spirit if in the marketplace his capacities are declared to be worthless to society."⁴¹ King challenges the capitalist valuation of labor as determined solely by what the capitalist market is willing to employ and at what price. Rethinking work, King says that once people have material means through a guaranteed job or income then society must be concerned "that the potential of the individual not be wasted." "New forms of work that enhance the social good," he writes, "will have to be devised for those for whom traditional jobs are not available."⁴² Consistent with his revolution in values against racism, materialism, and imperialism, King argues for a society that conceives of work as an individually fulfilling and socially valuable endeavor. When he discusses the kinds of jobs that must be created, he states they must be those that raise the human spirit and maximize human potential. King approvingly cites nineteenth-century American progressive Henry George's conception that work should exist for the improvement of humankind. "Work,"

quoting George, should be that “which extends knowledge and increases power and enriches literature and elevates thought, . . . not the work of slaves, driven to their task either by the lash of the master or by animal necessities. It is the work of men who perform it for their own sake, and not that they may get more to eat or drink, or wear, or display.”⁴³

Where Do We Go from Here: Tomorrow

Where Do We Go from Here links racism, discrimination, and poverty as a set of social, economic, and value-based decisions about the structure of modern society. King’s goals and programmatic vision are not limited to the borders of the United States. His project is a global one. “Racism,” he writes, “is no mere American phenomenon. Its vicious grasp knows no geographical boundaries. In fact, racism and its perennial ally—economic exploitation—provide the key to understanding most of the international complications of this generation.”⁴⁴ The struggle for economic rights requires the building of a cross-racial, cross-cultural, class coalition that would construct a revolution in values away from racism, materialism, and militarism but also bring about deep structural changes to the worldwide economy. In 1967 King called for a radical reordering of national priorities and a clear departure from a class-based imperialist foreign policy. America, to address domestic and global poverty, could have responded to deindustrialization, automation, and the structural changes in global capitalism with the “Freedom Budget for All Americans,” which King endorsed.⁴⁵ The United States and the West could have crafted and funded such a program to combat global poverty, similar to the efforts to rebuild Europe after World War II. Instead, elites decided that the surplus labor wrought by the neoliberal capitalist project called for widespread incarceration at home and a “planet of slums” abroad.⁴⁶ King’s vision, neglected for over fifty years, can no longer be ignored, having reemerged in the contemporary

political discourse thanks to political movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and the Bernie Sanders “Revolution.” And because of the movement of political, economic, and climate refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and Sri Lanka to nations of the developed world, we are confronted with conditions that will require a sober and critical look at the structure of the international order. King’s writings provide a way to understand the present and outline a path for the future.

In 2017, some may look back across the fifty years since the publication of *Where Do We Go from Here* and see a great deal of progress and hope for a brighter future in America. They will note that today blacks vote at higher rates than whites and that the nation elected and re-elected its first black president. Others will note the poverty, unemployment, and incarceration rates of African Americans. They will call attention to discrimination in the criminal justice system, voter registration, housing, and education as well as differentiation in life expectancy, infant mortality, and a host of public health issues. They will point to the names of unarmed black men and women killed by the police. Perhaps they note the opioid epidemic that is ravaging rural and urban communities. Other observers may point to the 17 million whites and 10 million Hispanics condemned to a life of poverty. As King made clear in his last book, these problems are not just problems of the black community or the inner city. They are not problems rooted and originating solely with race in America. Race is bound with class in America. America has produced a variant of capitalism that has impoverished populations of blacks, whites, and Hispanics; eroded upward social mobility; and pitted groups, whether racial, ethnic, or immigrant/citizen, against one another in a divide-and-conquer strategy that has enriched and empowered the wealthy to the detriment of the rest of the population. As we approach the commemoration of King’s assassination a

half-century ago we ought to pause to revisit *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*, King's most radical text, as a prerequisite for our nation's moment of reflection about King's legacy. His book can help us to understand how we got here and where we might go from here. King's humanism reminds us that "the bell of man's inhumanity to man does not toll for any one man. It tolls for you, for me, for all of us."⁴⁷

NOTES

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17. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 5-6.
18. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 177.
19. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 53.
20. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 174.
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22. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 173.
23. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 170-175, 182, 196, 198-199.
24. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 8.
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26. Intan Suwandi and John Bellamy Foster, "Multinational Corporations and the Globalization of Monopoly Capital: From the 1960s to the Present," *Monthly Review* (July-August 2016), 114-131.
27. By the mid- to late 1960s union membership was already on its downward trajectory from its high point of 35 percent of the workforce in 1954. By 1965 the union membership rate was below 30 percent.
28. For instance, after adjusting for inflation the average hourly wage in 2014 had roughly the same purchasing power as it had in 1979, while most of the wage gains have gone to the top 90th percentile. See Drew Desilver, "For Most Workers, Real Wages Have Barely Budged for Decades," *Pew Research Center* (October 9, 2014), www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/10/09/for-most-workers-real-wages-have-barely-budged-for-decades/; and in 2014, writes the *New York Times*, corporate profits are at their highest level since 1929 and employee compensation at its lowest level in 65 years. See Floyd Norris, "Corporate Profits Grow and Wages Slide," *New York Times* (April 4, 2014), www.nytimes.com/2014/04/05/business/economy/corporate-profits-grow-ever-larger-as-slice-of-economy-as-wages-slide.html; Drew Desilver, "Who's Poor in America? 50 Years into the 'War on Poverty' a Data Portrait," *Pew Research Center* (January 13, 2014), www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/13/whos-poor-in-america-50-years-into-the-war-on-poverty-a-data-portrait/
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The Rise and Fall of the Muckrakers

MARTIN OPPENHEIMER

THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT and the Bernie Sanders campaign spotlighted once again the fact that a fairly small number of very rich people dominate the major economic and political institutions of the country. This was well known and publicly acknowledged as far back as the populist era in post-Civil War days. It was encapsulated in presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan's famous "cross of gold" attack on vested interests at the Democratic Party convention of 1896. The idea was reiterated in President Eisenhower's farewell address on January 1, 1961, when he warned the country of the undue influence of the "military-industrial-congressional complex" (in the original draft of the speech) even as his administration was riddled with Wall Streeters.¹

Long before sociologist C. Wright Mills² paved the way to modern studies of power, a group of writers termed "muckrakers" was hard at work digging up the dirt on our American oligarchy. They did it in various literary forms: journalism, book-length nonfiction, cartoons, novels, even poetry. From just before the Progressive Era (about 1904 to 1920) to the mid-1930s, the muckrakers were a critical force in bringing to public light the evils inherent in plutocratic rule. By the time the muckrakers were through, no literate person could doubt the reality that a vast swamp of corruption stemming from the linkages between business and government was a historical fact. Nor could

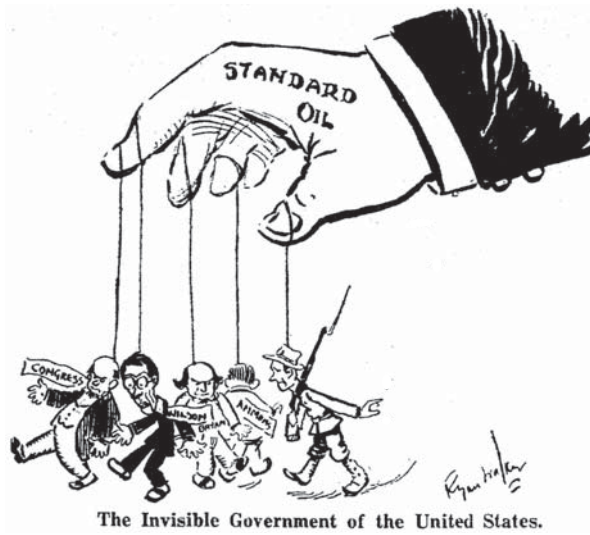
anyone doubt the terrible consequences of this system for human lives in a time of untrammelled corporate greed.

Penny Papers Covering Millionaires

By the 1830s, the gradual development of industry had led to such technological innovations as inexpensive printing, which led to a more literate population. Although the press generally hewed to establishment politics, there were labor and radical newspapers as early as the "Jacksonian" era (Andrew Jackson was elected as a populist in 1828). Cheap "penny papers" began to appear, aimed at a mass audience. Their content often included sensational stories about the (evil) doings of the rich. The *New York Sun* exposed influence-peddling and bribery in the judicial system, and it crusaded against slavery. The *New York Herald* under James Gordon Bennett and the *New York Tribune*, edited by Horace Greeley, both originally penny papers, similarly attacked corruption. Greeley was a fervent abolitionist. Slavery narratives (the most famous was *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* [1845]) were followed by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). This best seller was one of the most important muckraking novels of all time, a half-century before the term became known.

Slavery was the most important issue of the time, but not the only one. The temperance movement got a significant boost when the second best seller of the time, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room and What I Saw There*, by Timothy Shay Arthur, was published two years after the Stowe novel. Today virtually unknown, it is the story

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1914 Appeal to Reason cartoon by Ryan Walker

of a man who is swindled out of his business, turns to drink, and after the accidental death of his daughter, reforms. Later it was turned into several silent films, one of which, renamed as *A Prince of His Race* (1926), was produced by the Colored Players Film Corporation of Philadelphia with an all-Black cast.

In the post-Civil War period, illiteracy continued to decline, down to about 17 percent in 1880, just before massive immigration from Eastern and Southern European countries brought many illiterate country people. There was an insatiable demand for reading material. State laws soon required minimum years of attendance in the gradually improving public school system, at least for whites outside rural areas. New high schools were opening every day. James Aronson reports that “in 1830 there were more newspapers with a greater readership in the United States than anywhere in the world.” This trend continued as the growth of industry was accompanied by the growth of cities. By 1880, “there were 850 daily newspapers in the English language; in 1890 there were 1,967.”⁷³ Exposés were a leading feature of this growth.

Vast social changes during the decades after the Civil War were mirrored in wide-ranging

debates about the meaning of these changes, the problems they caused, and proposed solutions. Social Darwinists, generally pro-imperialist and advocates of laissez-faire capitalism, clashed with those who attacked the ruthlessness of competition and “opposed the growth of military and naval force and the imperial path” that would eventually lead to the Spanish-American War.⁴ Populist farmers “were the first to speak openly of the dangers of plutocracy. ... Out of the suffering of the farmers ... streamed a new and aggressive political consciousness.”⁷⁵ Although much of this protest would eventually lead to only minimal reforms, it also presaged the rise of a mass socialist movement in the early 1900s.

As always in U.S. history, the social ills of the time generated some best-selling utopian books, including Henry George’s runaway *Progress and Poverty* (1879). His solution was the Single Tax, which would tax land, but not the improvements on it, so as to prevent profit arising from any increase in land values due to speculation. “[It] was only one book among many which passionately protested against the encroachment of great aggregates of wealth on the ordinary individual.”⁷⁶ Several utopian communities were founded on George’s principles. He went on to run for mayor of New York City on a Labor ticket, but lost. There was also Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888). “No book since *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had appealed so widely to American idealism,” wrote historian Merle Curti. Within three years, 162 “Nationalist Clubs” advocating his statist model of utopian “socialism” had been organized.⁷⁷ Within ten years the book had sold 500,000 copies.

Attacks on corruption were a constant feature of daily newspapers such as Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *San Francisco Examiner* and *New York Journal*. At the *World*, Elizabeth Cochran, under

the name of Nellie Bly, “got herself committed to a mental asylum in order to write about the squalor and inhuman conditions in [New York City’s] mental health system.”⁸ In the manner of today’s Barbara Ehrenreich, Cochran worked numerous jobs to report on sweatshop conditions. Rheta Childe Dorr, also working a variety of jobs, sent her notes to the magazine *Everybody’s*, which published them in 1908. “My great object,” she wrote later, “was to demonstrate that women were permanent factors in industry, permanent producers of the world’s wealth, and that they must hereafter be considered as independent human beings and citizens.” Her first book, *What Eight Million Women Want* (1910), sold a half-million copies.⁹ Jack London also had a brief undercover career: He lived in the tough East End of London and wrote up what he observed in *The People of the Abyss* (1903). Less well-known is a Princeton graduate, Walter A. Wyckoff, who hit the road and worked his way across the country, holding many jobs. He wrote up what he saw in a series for *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1897, which was published in two volumes as *The Workers* (illustrated, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898). His description of the sweatshop as an economic institution was ground-breaking sociology, a field that barely existed at the time. He went on to become a professor of political economy at Princeton, where Norman Thomas was one of his students. Thomas was, however, unable to convert Wyckoff to the socialist cause.¹⁰

Pulitzer, Hearst, and other newspaper publishers, although contributing to the push for reforms during the Progressive Era, were of course capitalist enterprises themselves, and they did not challenge the fundamental premises of the system responsible for the ills that were being exposed. But there was also the *Appeal to Reason*, founded in 1895. Initially supporting the Farmers’ Alliance and the (populist) People’s Party, it soon moved to Girard, Kansas, and after 1901 became what would be the largest-circulation socialist paper in U.S. history. It played a major

role in the muckraking movement.

Magazines soon competed with newspapers in featuring exposés of the wretched living and working conditions prevalent at the time and scrutinizing the nefarious activities of leading corporations and the political machines to which they were linked. The more notable magazines were the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s Weekly*, *Everybody’s*, the *Arena*, and *Cosmopolitan*. In 1893 *McClure’s Magazine* was founded. It published Jack London, Willa Cather, and Theodore Dreiser among many others. Then, in 1903, it turned to muckraking. Samuel McClure hired Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell, who were soon among the leading muckraking journalists of the era. “Muckraking popularized as nothing else had done the awareness of the power of corporations, their ruthlessness and antisocial practices, their corrupt relations with government,” as Curti put it.¹¹

The Cause and the Industry

The term “muckraking” was apparently coined by President Theodore Roosevelt. *Cosmopolitan* had published a series of articles on corruption in the higher circles of politics (specifically focusing on the U.S. Senate). After he became president following the assassination of William McKinley in 1901, Roosevelt attacked the exposés, which he thought were overly broad. Brasch says Roosevelt was “referring to the ‘man with the muckrake’ in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*” when he told the Washington Gridiron Club that there was too much muckraking going on.¹² Ida Tarbell, the investigator of Standard Oil, claimed in her autobiography that Roosevelt “was afraid that [the muckrakers] were adding to the not inconsiderable revolutionary fever abroad, driving the people into socialism.”¹³ Lincoln Steffens said in his *Autobiography* that he “was not the original muckraker; the prophets of the Old Testament were ahead of me. ... I did not know I was one till President Roosevelt ... pinned it on us.”¹⁴

Steffens, a former Wall Street reporter, had

been sent by *McClure's Magazine* on a multi-city tour during which he described the corruption rampant in the big cities and in several states. His series began in 1902 with "Tweed Days in St. Louis" and went to "Philadelphia, Corrupt and Contented," to "New York: Good Government in Danger," and others.¹⁵ His reportage was turned into a book, *The Shame of the Cities* (1905). "Soon muckraking became a major industry," the literary historian Alfred Kazin noted.¹⁶ Steffens gradually became disillusioned by all the corruption he saw. In his chapter "The Shame of Minneapolis," he shared with his boss Samuel McClure the sentiment that "democracy was a failure and that a good dictator was what was needed."¹⁷ Later he covered the Mexican Revolution and events in the young Soviet Union. On his return, he made the oft-quoted remark, "I have seen the future, and it works." He also admired Mussolini's efficiency in stabilizing, so he thought, the Italian economy in the 1920s.

Upton Sinclair, perhaps the most prolific of the muckrakers, began his career as a writer of "pulp-wood fiction." He wrote a series of historical novels, and then he discovered socialism, which

came to him as more than an intellectual conviction: It came as a magnificent discovery ... [and] also as a stimulus to action in the form of an assignment from the Socialist *Appeal to Reason* to study the Chicago stockyard area. ... Out of his studies there, and also out of the emotions born of his own bitter struggle with poverty, came *The Jungle* (1906), the most powerful novel associated with the muckraking movement, and one of the very few actuated by forthright proletarian sympathies.¹⁸

(It had first appeared as a series in the *Appeal*.) His would not be the only exposé novel of the period, but it was probably the most influential one. Jack London called it "the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of wage slavery." Sinclair thought that following the facts would inevitably lead the muckrakers and their readers to the conclusion that they must revolt against the entire

capitalist system. To his chagrin, "the public appeared more interested in the problem of a corrupted meat supply than in that of the exploited worker."¹⁹ The book contributed to the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act. In his later nonfiction *The Brass Check* (1919), Sinclair viewed the reform as merely cosmetic. He told a colleague, "Not a week passes that I don't get a letter from some of the men ... telling me things are bad as ever." The *New York Herald* sent Ella Reeve Bloor to the stockyards disguised as a Polish woman, and she confirmed what Sinclair's informants said. ("Mother" Bloor would become an active Communist beginning in the 1920s.)

Sinclair, almost alone among the muckrakers, remained true to the cause. In 1906 he founded a utopian community, Helicon Home Colony, in Englewood, New Jersey. It closed a year later. He was the founder of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, which organized student socialist clubs until the mid-1920s. He ran for public office as a Socialist and in 1934, in California, as a Democrat under the rubric "End Poverty in California," which was basically the Socialist Party's platform, but lost after a vicious red-baiting campaign bankrolled by the usual suspects. Sinclair wrote a long list of exposés often barely disguised as fiction. They include *The Brass Check* (1919), which describes the prostitution (hence the brass check²⁰) of the newspaper industry; *King Coal* (1917), a novel about the 1913 Colorado coal strikes, written just after the Ludlow Massacre (a follow up, *The Coal War*, was not published until 1976); *The Profits of Religion* (1918); *The Goose Step* (1923) and *The Goslings* (1924), on education; and *Oil* (1927), a novel in which the Young People's Socialist League actually appears. The film *There Will Be Blood* is very loosely based on it, naturally without Sinclair's politics. He also wrote *Boston* (2 vols., 1928). It is the story of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, told in great detail within the thin veneer of a novel.

While Sinclair's nonfiction aimed at large

targets such as politics, education, religion, and the media, most investigative journalists focused on specific corporations. The Standard Oil Corporation and its founder, John D. Rockefeller, drew muckrakers' attention early on. In 1880 the *Atlantic Monthly* published William Demarest Lloyd's story of the ways Standard Oil came to lead the industry despite mountains of evidence of its crooked ways. His 1894 book-length follow-up, *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, called for government control over monopolies. Next in line to take on Standard Oil was McClure's Ida Tarbell. McClure's spent some \$50,000 on Tarbell's five-year investigation, which resulted in a nineteen-part series beginning in November, 1902. "It was a penetrating series into the nature of power and greed, a series that laid open America's greatest monopoly. ... Every fact Tarbell reported was fully documented."²¹ The series became a book, *The History of Standard Oil* (1905). Rockefeller went full out to attack Tarbell, using a number of magazines and journalists sympathetic to, and/or subsidized by, himself, including *The Nation*! The campaign was coordinated by Ivy L. Lee, who is considered *the* pioneer of the public relations industry. Nevertheless, Standard Oil of New Jersey, as it was called by then, ran afoul of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890, and in May, 1911, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered that it be split up into 34 smaller corporations. This had no effect on Rockefeller's fortunes, since he owned stock in many of them.

Muckraking was by its very nature a marketing feature of the newspapers and magazines of the period. Their writers focused almost entirely on corruption, whether political (such as what is today termed "pay to play") or business (for example, patent medicine quacks).²² Although Sinclair tackled entire social institutions, even he, a socialist, did not attempt a larger-scale dissection of "the system," except in the concluding chapters of *The Jungle* in the form of a lengthy speech by a socialist orator. The muckrakers "generally had no social phi-

losophy. They had little historical curiosity, and the nature of the capitalist state remained as mysterious and inscrutable as Melville's white whale," Alfred Kazin commented.²³ This would contribute to their demise quite soon.

Occasionally the extravagant behavior of one or another of the super-rich was spotlighted, as when the editor of the *Arena* in February 1891 accused the country's 4,000 or so millionaires of being "idlers who eat, drink, dance, and are consumed in a butterfly existence [while surrounded by] the gaunt, hungry, hollow-eyed millions to whom life is an awful curse," or when the *New York World* in 1905 told readers how Equitable Life Insurance executives were "squandering the premiums on personal frivolities, including parties and liquor."²⁴ But there was very little understanding of the broader culture of the upper class and how it reinforced the very corrupt practices the muckrakers deplored. Economist Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) did provide a devastating cultural critique of the habits of the super-rich, but these were not indictable offenses, no one was prosecuted, and no laws against "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure" were passed.

One of the few muckraking works to take on the entire robber-baron class was Gustavus Myers' *History of the Great American Fortunes* (1910, reprinted by Modern Library in 1936). In three volumes covering early land fortunes, colonial times, and contemporary capital, particularly the railroads, he dissected almost every major capitalist enterprise and their leaders at the time, including Henry Clay Frick (steel and railroads), J.P. Morgan (banking), and Cornelius Vanderbilt (railroads). After being turned down by a series of publishers, the volumes came out under the auspices of Charles H. Kerr & Co., the great socialist publisher. Myers was active in the Socialist Party for many years but defected, as did numerous other writers including Upton Sinclair and John Spargo, when the party opposed U.S. entry into World War I. Spargo was

one of the founders of the party in 1901, and had written two exposés, one of child labor (*The Bitter Cry of Children*, 1906), and a parallel work put out by Charles H. Kerr in that same year, *Underfed School Children*.

From Editorializing to Moral Philosophy

The muckraking nonfiction writers were surely important during the Progressive Era's campaigns for reforms, no matter how limited the effects of those reforms may have been. But it was when, with "all the essential optimism of their times, they moved exuberantly from journalism into fiction" that they had their greatest influence.²⁵ It wasn't that the journalists stuck strictly to just the facts; they did plenty of editorializing along the way. But when they moved into fiction, editorializing rose to a new level, that of moral philosophy. In Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the message is one of hope, where people can take destiny in their own hands and change the world. The hero, Jurgis, endures horrifying poverty and a series of catastrophes, but then runs across a socialist lecturer. He "had never been so stirred in his life—it was a miracle that had been wrought in him. . . . He knew that in the mighty upheaval that had taken place in his soul, a new man had been born."²⁶

But for "naturalists" like Theodore Dreiser, the protagonists are the victims of social (and biological) forces beyond their control. The strong rise until their greed leads to disaster, and the poor go by the wayside, unless, by overcoming conventional morality, they edge their way into "decent" society, where they duly become victims of their own folly. In Stephen Crane's *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* (1893), the poor daughter of drunken parents tries desperately to escape her circumstances, but eventually fails, descending into prostitution. In Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), a scandal for its time, Carrie puts aside conventional morality to move in with a man who can provide the better things of life, then marries a richer man who embezzles but

eventually descends into homelessness, while she finds success in the theater but still fails to find happiness. Real soap-opera stuff by today's standards.

The muck that is being raked in these and similar novels is the poverty that destroys families (often via drink), a poverty that leads individuals to desperate measures that cannot prevail over social circumstances. Frank Norris' *The Pit* (1903), or Dreiser's *The Financier* (1912), takes us into another milieu, that of big business and the men whose obsession with acquiring wealth and power leads to their downfall. Some, due to their inner strengths, are able to make a new start. *The Pit* takes us to the trading floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, where the protagonist becomes so obsessed with the wheat market that his attempts to corner it lead to his ruin. He and his faithful wife, however, survive and move west. In *The Financier*, the first of a trilogy, Frank Cowperwood (based on Chicago railroad financier Charles T. Yerkes) is a streetcar magnate in Philadelphia, but soon moves into finance and corrupt politics. He uses city funds to speculate and is caught out when the stock market crashes; he is tried and jailed. He recoups his fortune and vows to go straight, moving with his mistress (now wife) . . . west! For Dreiser, Cowperwood embodied the Social Darwinian drive that is the hunger for power. "In this quest, the strongest win out; the weak are crushed."²⁷ The muck that is being raked by Norris and Dreiser illuminates the corrupt connections between businesses and politicians. *The Financier* is virtually a textbook on how finance worked in the post-Civil War era. "Shorting the market" didn't begin in 2008.

In *An American Tragedy* (1925), perhaps Dreiser's best-known novel (turned into the 1951 Academy Award-winning film, *A Place in the Sun*, with Montgomery Clift, Elizabeth Taylor, and Shelley Winters), the protagonist, Clyde Griffiths, is a weak man. He intends to marry the attractive daughter of a wealthy factory owner but is thwarted by the pregnancy of an earlier girlfriend. On a boat trip with him

she accidentally drowns, but circumstances point to him. He is arrested and eventually executed. Spiller summarizes: He is “a victim of the social and biological forces which operate upon him.”

For the naturalists, only the strong, like Dreiser’s Cowperwood, can survive. In Jack London’s dystopian novel *The Iron Heel* (1907), a man named Ernest Everhard (!), described by his future wife as “a superman, a blond beast such as Nietzsche has described,” leads an uprising against an oligarchic dictatorship.²⁸ Though it is bloodily suppressed, his memory lives on. In the early part of the book there is considerable conversation, in the literary style of the time, about slavery, organized religion, the courts, and other capitalist institutions, with Everhard leading the attack on them all and making a case for an alternative socialist society. But for London, who called himself a revolutionary socialist, the socialist paradise was not for everyone. Kazin quotes London’s letter to a friend: “Socialism is not an ideal system devised for the happiness of all men; it is devised so as to give more strength to these certain kindred favored races so that they may survive and inherit the earth to the extinction of the lesser, weaker races.” No wonder Kazin calls him “a prototype of the violence-worshiping Fascist intellectual if ever there was one in America.”²⁹

Success and Repression

The zenith of the muckraking movement was in 1912. It was also the beginning of its demise. At least in part, like many social movements, it became the victim of its successes: “Laws to clear slums, protect women and children, curb monopolies, supervise insurance companies, free the public lands, save the forests, frustrate corruption, and safeguard the ballot box crowded the statute books.”³⁰ A kind of corruption fatigue apparently set in as the public tired of endless, repetitive exposés. The entry of the U.S. into World War I also diverted attention away from corporate shenanigans. Then the relative prosperity (at least for urban whites) of the

“roaring ‘20s” further marginalized muckraking as a significant component of the media. Corruption, of course, continued all the same. The biggest scandal came in 1921. President Warren Harding’s interior secretary, Albert Fall, took bribes from oil companies in exchange for contracts to process U.S. Navy oil reserves, one of which was at Teapot Dome in Wyoming (hence “the Teapot Dome Scandal”). Harding died in 1923, and his successor, Calvin Coolidge, for a time refused to pursue the matter, but eventually congressional hearings were held. A journalist working for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Paul Y. Anderson, helped in the conviction and imprisonment of Fall and several others. He won a Pulitzer in 1929.

Most of the muckrakers “were reformers only fortuitously and few of them were inspired by ideals or sustained by convictions,”³¹ hence they had no answer to “what next?” unless they were socialists, and during the Woodrow Wilson administration (1913–1921) the socialists would have their own problems. Lacking a framework with which to understand their tenuous hold on the public mind, most of the muckrakers gradually disappeared from the ranks of reform movements. John Spargo, for example, once a crusader on behalf of poverty-stricken children, later opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal anti-poverty reforms.

Meanwhile, the muckrakers’ successes came at a price for their periodicals: They had, in the words of historian Robert Spiller, “frightened the business community, while at the same time they had become dependent on advertising and bank credit. When the advertising was withdrawn ... and the loans called in, as if on a concentrated signal, they had to stop their investigations or go out of business.”³²

This strategy proved decisive. Throughout the muckraker era there had been a constant drumbeat of official and unofficial moves to repress them. As Upton Sinclair also observed,

The industrial autocracy very quickly awakened to the peril of these ‘muck-raking’ maga-

zines and set to work to put out the fire. Some magazines were offered millions, and sold out. Those that refused to sell out had their advertisement trimmed down, their bank-loans called, their stockholders intimidated—until finally, in one way or another, they consented to “be good.”³³

The boycott of the muckraking magazines by bankers and advertisers led to their shakeup when it did not end in their closure. In 1912, for example, *McClure's*, deeply in debt, was sold to a group of financiers. It eventually became a romance magazine, and by 1929 it was gone. The crusading editor at *Collier's* was forced out. Banks refused loans to *Hampton's*, and the owner was forced to sell. *Everybody's* became a “family magazine” and in 1929 was merged with *Romance Magazine*.

In 1909 President Taft, who had been attacked by various muckrakers for virtually giving away federal land in Alaska to corporate interests, maneuvered a large postage increase for periodicals. “The administration’s actions were just another shot of a volley that would kill the muckrakers.”³⁴ At the state level, one example is particularly striking because the press fought back: The Pennsylvania legislature passed an “anti-cartoon bill” in 1903 aimed at a Philadelphia paper, the *North American*, which had attacked the governor and his political machine backers in print and in many cartoons. The law clearly violated the Pennsylvania and U.S. constitutions and was repealed in 1907.

The Great War, which the United States finally entered on April 6, 1917, was the final blow to the movement, though of course muckraking has continued sporadically to this day. The run-up to the war pushed any criticism of industrialists, who were indispensable to the war effort, to one side. At the same time, super-patriotism, including a virulent attack on anything German, sparked a slew of organizations dedicated to “Americanism.” There soon existed an atmosphere of hysteria about foreigners and radicals that makes the anti-communist

mood of the Truman era in the 1940s, as carried forward by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s, look relatively mild (although its victims might not agree). A series of federal and local laws that virtually criminalized any expression of opposition to the war, especially after April, 1917, soon led to restrictions and sometimes the outright suppression of the critical, including the socialist, press. The Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 outlawed virtually any written or spoken word that could be interpreted as “insubordination,” “disloyalty,” obstructing the draft or recruiting efforts, advocating resistance to the government, or even criticizing the Constitution.

The federal government quickly went to work, utilizing the postal authorities as its first line of attack. The *Appeal to Reason*, firmly opposed to the war, changed its tune after its June 10, 1917, issue was held up in the mail; its editor, Fred Warren, was replaced and the *Appeal* lined up in support of the war effort. Postmaster General Burleson authorized the denial of full mailing privileges to whatever publication he thought violated the Espionage Act, so that, for example, the *New York Call* had to pay first-class rates. The same happened to the *Rebel*, organ of the Tenant Farmers Union. Late in 1917 the Post Office stopped delivering even first-class mail to the *Milwaukee Leader*. “By the end of the war nearly every Socialist newspaper and periodical had run afoul of Postmaster General Burleson.”³⁵ The Justice Department also played its role in the attack on the critical media: The editors of the literary left magazine *Masses* were twice tried under the Espionage Act. Both trials, fortunately, resulted in hung juries. Despite criticisms of these violations of established civil liberties, President Wilson supported Burleson. Publications not dependent on capitalist advertising thus suffered losses in readership even when they were not suppressed outright.

The press was not the only institution that suffered from war-time hysteria and the later anti-Bolshevik panic that followed the Soviet

Revolution. Hundreds of members of the IWW, the Socialist Party, and other radical organizations were tried and convicted for anti-war speeches and writings. The best-known case was that of Eugene V. Debs, who was indicted, convicted, and sentenced to ten years for a speech he gave at the Ohio state convention of the Socialist Party in June, 1918. His indictment of the ruling class for the violence it inflicted on the people was deemed sufficiently critical as to constitute a violation of the Espionage Act. The repression, especially of immigrants, that followed in the years immediately after the war is beyond the scope of this essay.

The Great Depression focused attention on the victims of that disaster as well as those responsible for it. Examples of nonfiction include *The House of Morgan* (1930) by Lewis Corey. Corey, an Italian immigrant born as Luigi, later Louis Fraina, had been one of the founders of the Communist Party of America in 1919. Better known were Matthew Josephson and Ferdinand Lundberg. Josephson's 1934 *The Robber Barons: the Great American Capitalists 1861-1901*, covered much the same territory as Gustavus Myers, focusing on the better-known "barons." Lundberg's *Imperial Hearst* (1936) was in the old muckraking tradition of biography, but his *America's Sixty Families* a year later was a macro-level study of the contemporary U.S. ruling class (updated in an 824-page doorstop as *The Rich and the Super-Rich*).³⁶

The Depression also gave birth to "a generation of novelists who had been toughened in alleys, orphanages, logging camps, and mills" and whose gritty writings "of the life of the working class [were] rooted in the memory of their own life in it."³⁷ John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is today probably the best-known of this genre. James T. Farrell (the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy 1932, 1934, 1935) was an active member of the Socialist Workers Party. Michael Gold (*Jews Without Money*, 1930), Richard Wright (*Native Son*, 1940), and numerous others were at some point members of the Communist Party.

Gold, a pen-name, edited *New Masses* for several years. *New Masses* published many important left-leaning writers and some outstanding reportage throughout the 1930s.

The Modern Muck

The term "muckraking" has been displaced, in recent years, by "investigative reporting." There was no shortage of it in the years following World War II, despite the repressive atmosphere during the anti-communist hysteria that began, or perhaps better said, resumed, with the Cold War in 1945. Noteworthy among exposé publications were George Seldes' four-page weekly *In Fact*, which specialized in stories the mainstream media suppressed or ignored. It ran from 1940 to 1950, and was succeeded by *I.F. Stone's Weekly* (1953-1971). Today's version is *Extra!*, the publication of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. *Ramparts* magazine (1960-1975) blew the whistle on U.S. atrocities in Vietnam and the CIA's involvement in various ostensibly independent, leftist anti-communist publications and projects. It was succeeded by other magazines in the muckraking tradition, notably *Mother Jones*, the social-democratic *In These Times*,³⁸ and *Rolling Stone*. *The Progressive* has been on the muckraking scene through the years. It was founded by Senator "Fighting Bob" LaFollette of Wisconsin as *LaFollette's Weekly* in 1909. Then there are the many exposé books, such as Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death* (1963), and Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965).

But it is the documentary film that has perhaps had more of an impact. Edward R. Murrow's *Harvest of Shame* (1960) was one of the first exposés on a major network. It brought attention to migratory farm workers' terrible conditions and helped the drive toward their unionization. That was followed by numerous network "docs" by Morton Silverman, including a follow-up of Murrow's film. *Controlling Interest* (1978), too radical for a network, covered

many aspects of imperialism. The numerous titles produced by Michael Moore are no doubt familiar to readers of this journal. Finally, there are the technological innovations that have produced a Snowden, an Assange, and thousands of others. Hacking has taken muckraking to new heights and not infrequently, lows.

Today we are deluged with stories of scandal and corruption at the top, as well as exposés of immiseration and exploitation at the bottom, in any or as many media as we choose. Yet now as in the past the system does not collapse. The “public” sees, but does not act, except for that sturdy minority of good folks who continue the muckraking tradition. Large numbers of people seem to accept corruption as inevitable. “They are all crooks,” is the refrain, and political apathy is widespread. Is it any wonder that a very large segment of the population has come to believe, with Lincoln Steffens, that it will take a dictator to clean house? If any lesson is to be drawn from the history of the muckrakers, it is that the reforms they achieved have always rested on fragile ground. Today many reforms are in danger of being reversed by the very person elected to do the housecleaning. Raking the muck is clearly insufficient. It must be linked to a movement for fundamental change.

NOTES

1. In 1953, an elected reform government in Guatemala nationalized unused land owned by the United Fruit Company. Virtually every government official was involved with that corporation, from director of the CIA to secretary of state (the Dulles brothers), among others. The U.S. armed an invasion, which overthrew the government and imposed a dictatorship. [Jerry Kloby, *Inequality, Power, and Development* (Humanity Books, 2004), 125-126; Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (South End Press, 1979), 276-279.]
2. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford, 1956).
3. James Aronson, *The Press and the Cold War* (Monthly Review Press, 1970), 12.
4. Robert E. Spiller et al, *Literary History of the United States* v.II (MacMillan Co., 1948), 976-977.
5. Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (Doubleday & Co., 1942), 21.
6. Spiller, 989.
7. Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* 2nd ed. (Harper & Brothers, 1951), 628.
8. Walter M. Brasch, *Forerunners of Revolution: Muckrakers and the American Social Conscience* (University Press of America, 1990), 28.
9. Brasch, 112.
10. *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Sept. 23, 2009.
11. Curti, 621.
12. Brasch, 3.
13. Quoted in Brasch, 98.
14. *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1931), 357.
15. These reports are reproduced as Part III of *The Autobiography*.
16. Kazin, 81.
17. Steffens, 375.
18. Spiller, 996.
19. Spiller, 997.
20. In brothels of the time, the customer purchased a token from the manager and gave it to the sex worker of his choice, who at the end of a shift would cash in the tokens, or “checks.”
21. Brasch, 57.
22. In 1904 *Collier's Weekly* discovered that Lydia Pinkham, whose “tonic” was bought by millions of women, and who answered letters providing “professional advice,” had been dead for 23 years.
23. Kazin, 82.
24. Quoted in Brasch, 15, 77.
25. Kazin, 83.
26. *The Jungle* (Signet Classics ed., 2015), 353.
27. Spiller, 1203.
28. *The Iron Heel* (Grayson Pub. Co. ed., 1948), 6. Reprint of the original ed. of 1907.
29. Kazin, 84-85.
30. Spiller, 1109.
31. Spiller, 1111.
32. Spiller, 1125.
33. *The Brass Check*, 229-230.
34. Brasch, 123.
35. David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America* (Macmillan, 1955), 110.
36. Lyle Stuart, 1968.
37. Kazin, 295.
38. See Christopher Haas, “Muckraking and Troublemaking,” in its 40th Anniversary edition, Nov. 2016.

The Capitalistic Mentality and the Politics of Radical Reform

A (Mostly) Friendly Reply to Michael J. Thompson

BRYANT WILLIAM SCULOS

PERIODIZATION OF THE VARIOUS VERSIONS of capitalism is tough academic work, and what follows is not meant to diminish the importance of those kinds of projects. However, this essay argues that when we focus our energies on the specific adaptations of capitalism we can develop a tendency to miss the forest for the trees. That is, when we focus on what is unique about specific periods of capitalism, we can overlook what has remained constant throughout the various periods of capitalism—what makes capitalism, capitalism. We should instead, I suggest, focus on both the forest *and* the trees in order to develop and take advantage of the specific contradictions and resources produced during a specific period that can be utilized for radical change—radical change aimed at moving us beyond the current system entirely.

In “The Rise of the Servant Society,” Michael J. Thompson’s otherwise impressive and original piece published in the Winter 2016 issue of *New Politics*, he argues that whatever we want to call this most recent period of capitalism, it is one characterized by the

predominance of the servant. By this Thompson means two things: First, “that new forms of labor in advanced post-industrial society, as well as new pressures for consumption, are leading to new forms of service labor that are increasingly directed by and toward the needs of the wealthy. Second, and as a consequence of the new pressures for consumption, a new kind of culture and consciousness is emerging that is increasingly docile in political terms” (27). He then asserts that it is “the legitimacy of the basis of the system” that is unique to the contemporary period (27). Thompson concludes by criticizing the post-work perspective of some recent left scholarship, instead suggesting that a redemocratized conception of labor and wealth is a more realistic response to the peculiarity of the servant society.

Theorizing the Capitalistic Mentality

While I will not argue that Thompson’s claim about the emergence of the servant society and the servant mentality is an inaccurate characterization of the current state of affairs, I do want to show that the servant mentality is actually an evolution of a deeper, more fundamental capitalistic mentality that transcends the various periods of capitalism and is itself rooted in the capitalist mode of production. This mentality—representing the generalizable psycho-social characteristics that correspond to a particular social system, in this case capitalism—has a number of characteristics, including alienation, predominance of the profit-motive and the drive for accumulation, commodity fetishism includ-

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ing the commodification of persons (through labor and otherwise), possessiveness, the pervasive inability to see exploitative wage labor as anything other than freely contracted employment (the identification of exploitation with freedom), the increasing identification of quality with quantity, and the corollary dominance of an instrumentalized rationality at the expense of critical self-reflection and social criticism. Most destructive though is the normalization of hypercompetitiveness (and the resultant castigation of genuine cooperation and solidarity). All of the elements of the capitalistic mentality, of which there are probably others I have not listed here, are tied to the hyperindividualization of the capitalist subject.

These are aspects of capitalist society that mostly were initially theorized by Marx himself in the nineteenth century, mostly in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, but many are maintained up through *Capital: Volume 1*. They were expanded upon by Western Marxists and the Frankfurt School thinkers in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Capitalism has always included these psycho-social elements because they are not only produced by this particular mode of production, but have been exacerbated by the ruling classes to maintain this system. Competitive labor markets and mass production technologies alienate workers from their potentially creative labor and their fellow workers. Workers begin to perceive themselves and their labor (the central component of their species-being or human nature) as commodities to be bought and sold. Humanity is dehumanized through the process of the commodification of life experience. Eventually the goal of “success” becomes identical to accumulating things and wealth, not humane experiences of creativity, spontaneity, and cooperative solidarity.

What is new about the kind of consumption that Thompson describes? Thompson presents little evidence for the idea that things have significantly changed in recent years. As described

in works from Marx to Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) up through the first-generation Frankfurt School, it seems that this pressure for consumption has been present since the early development and spread of capitalism and has increased fairly consistently over the past two centuries. The pressures seem to be qualitatively similar across time, though varying in intensity. Furthermore, what is new about labor being directed by and toward the needs of the wealthy? Thompson tells us what is new about the form, but he doesn’t connect it to what is old about this process. It is this short-shrifting of what has not changed within the period of post-industrial capitalism that causes Thompson to miss the forest for the trees in both his diagnosis of the servant society and, more problematically, the left politics appropriate to countering it.

Thompson argues that the rise of the servant society coincides with a new form of social power founded on the idea of “oligarchic wealth” (29). Oligarchic wealth is a social power “that grants individuals power over the labor of others and the power to control and direct that labor toward their own ends and interests. But it is also a kind of wealth that allows elites to use resources that could otherwise be employed for common goods” (29). He argues that a shift toward a democratic concept of wealth (“democratic wealth”) is the inverse of this emergent oligarchic social power and would deploy resources toward common purposes and projects. Again, I want to ask, how is this oligarchic conception of wealth new? This seems to be the kind of social power that has been present since capitalism became the dominant socioeconomic system of the world. Capitalism has always—perhaps with a few exceptions like the emergence of the social welfare state in the West after World War II—guided labor and resources toward the goals and interests of the wealthy.

Thompson concludes by arguing, “The material agent of social change is therefore not made through the *nature of work*, but through

the *nature of demands*. Without a shattering of the basic alienation that constitutes what I have called here the culture and mentality of the servant society, no viable radical political agency can be restored to working people” (32).

While he is certainly right to emphasize demands as well as the nature of work, it seems theoretically unclear why demands matter *to the exclusion of* the nature of work. Both seem to matter. Additionally, there is a third, broader dimension I would add to these two foundations of a potentially radical consciousness, and that is the nature of how people spend their time when they aren’t working (including “free-time” and the quality and quantity of time spent consuming),¹ which would allow for the wider inclusion of the psychological problems produced by a consumeristic capitalist society. Thompson is simply thinking too small when he situates the potential for radical change in the shattering of the servant society; we need a broader, deeper shattering—a shattering of capitalism itself.

Reclaiming a Truly Radical Realism

Despite my agreement with Thompson’s thesis that it is absolutely crucial to get society to think in terms of democratic wealth instead of individual or private wealth, his narrow focus on the servant society undermines precisely that possibility. Based on the deeper conception of the capitalistic mentality presented above, it is capitalism itself that fundamentally interferes with the capacity of most people for thinking in terms of democratic wealth as opposed to private wealth. This is *not* a particular feature of neoliberalism nor of the servant society, though these problems are certainly becoming more severe in recent years. My argument for this can again be traced back to arguments made by Frankfurt School thinkers, like Erich Fromm, but also more recently in the superb work of the late Ellen Meiksins Wood.² Capitalism is an inherently undemocratic process. This is quite obvious and not something that I think Thompson would necessarily disagree with. What is

undertheorized in his argument, though, is how the undemocratic nature of capitalism produces an undemocratic capitalistic mentality that, until superseded, will undermine the popular emergence of a new way of thinking connected to his idea of democratic wealth.

If I do not see my fellow citizens or residents as inherently worthy of a considerable basic share of the social product to begin with, why would I be able to simply switch from my private conception of wealth to a more democratic one? Such a shift would require a radical change in the heart of humanity, to use an updated version of Fromm’s older phraseology.³ Such a shift on a mass societal scale is not only inconsistent with the servant society, but it is more fundamentally inconsistent with the capitalistic mentality and the capitalist mode of production more broadly.

While Thompson may find the grand theorizing associated with post-work imaginings misguided and unhelpful, he is empirically off-base to eschew them as summarily as he does. These imaginaries are absolutely crucial given the massive increase in automation of recent years (which is only likely to increase into the future). He mentions Uber in his article as a prime example of the servant society, but is Uber really fundamentally different from taxi services, which have existed in various forms for a century? Plus, Google and Uber have both made substantial progress on self-driving vehicles that would make the labor of a driver in any context, including trucking, completely obsolete. Labor is increasingly menial and precarious, largely due to automation. Recent studies have suggested that 40 percent of all jobs are either already susceptible to automation (partial or full) or will be by 2050.⁴ New jobs will be created of course, but even if unemployment were only to increase by half or a quarter of that 40 percent, society will still more rapidly descend into what Rosa Luxemburg would surely recognize as “barbarism”—so long as one’s ability to live an even somewhat comfortable life remains tied to

one's labor, whether industrial, service/servant, or intellectual.⁵

Thompson does not, however, focus his analysis and critique of the servant society through to the foundational traits of capitalism, but instead focuses on the massive inequality it (re)produces and on which this new era of capitalism is based. However, the concept of the capitalistic mentality challenges us to ask what kind of consciousness, culture, or social psychology allowed this (acceptance of) massive inequality to emerge in the first place?

The capitalistic mentality provides a rather clear answer: The same kind of capitalistic thinking that allows for exploitation to become justified and normalized—becoming identified with freedom itself—is the root of the justification and normalization of the massive amounts of inequality and eventually the servant economy itself. If capitalistic societies have largely accepted exploitation, why should we be at all surprised that they would also accept massive amounts of inequality and atomized, app-based servitude?

In order to adequately resist the most pernicious aspects and consequences of the servant society, which should be understood as the manifestation of more fundamental dimensions of capitalism, we must oppose and resist capitalism in toto. This does not require that we abandon reformism, but rather it demands that we radicalize reformism so that it is aimed at these core aspects of capitalist society, not just the most recent manifestations. While pursuing reforms, if they are to have a real chance at success, we must never lose sight of the larger enemy—capitalism itself.

The Crucial Importance of Social Psychology

In fairness to Thompson, I want to reiter-

ate the real value of his piece for *New Politics* last year. Thompson reminds us of the crucial importance of examining the intersection of base and superstructure, where social psychology, and indeed consciousness itself, are (re)produced. Psychology is the mechanism by which capitalism becomes embedded in—and actually creates—who we are as people. Unless we resist both the psychological manifestations of capitalism and its material conditions, including those specific to the current period of capitalism, it is highly unlikely that any reforms that do occur will make substantial progress toward an emancipated, democratic, socialist society. Thompson's essay, and his oeuvre more broadly, should be applauded for taking seriously the importance of consciousness and culture as they relate to the economic system—even if I disagree with the narrowness with which he approaches these concerns in “The Rise of the Servant Society.”

NOTES

1. For an excellent exploration of the pervasiveness of consumption in the twenty-first century and its relation to consciousness, see Jonathan Crary's *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Verso, 2014).
2. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Verso, [1995] 2016).
3. Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (Harper & Row, 1964).
4. See Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015) and Martin Ford's *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future* (Basic Books, 2015).
5. A great discussion of the potential benefits and drawbacks of certain automation trends relevant to radical left politics can be found in Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso, 2015).

Leonard Weinglass on The Patriot Act

SETH TOBOCMAN, INTRODUCTION BY KENT WORCESTER

THE PAGES THAT FOLLOW ARE TAKEN
from Seth

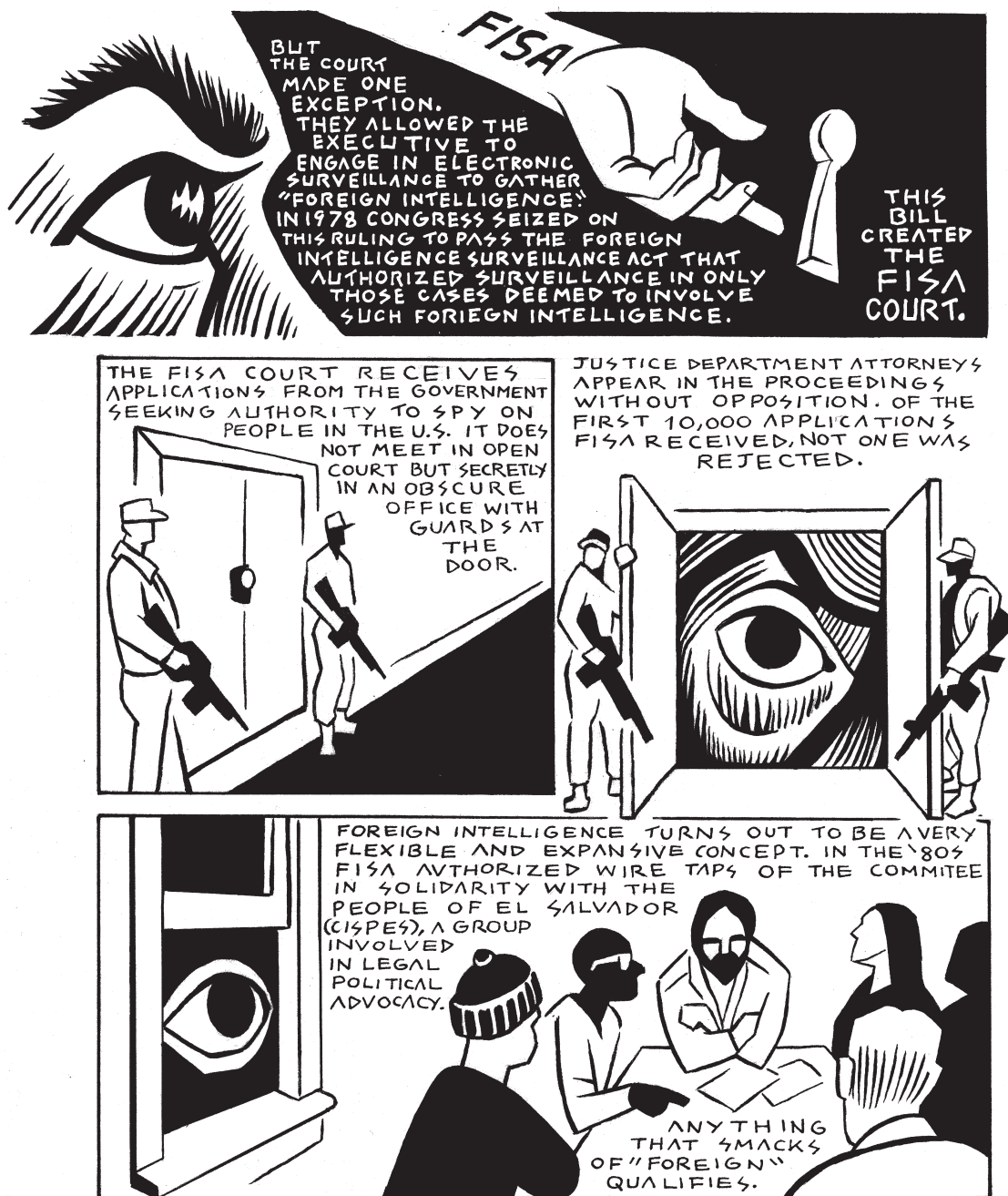
Tobocman's new graphic biography of the radical lawyer Leonard Weinglass, *Len: A Lawyer in History* (AK Press). This particular section is based on a transcript of a talk that Len Weinglass gave at the 2002 Left Forum on the relationship between Nixon-era encroachments on civil liberties and the Patriot Act. The combination of Weinglass's informed critique and Tobocman's striking visuals provides an unusually effective example of political cartooning. As it happens, this is not the first time that *New Politics* has featured artwork by Seth Tobocman:

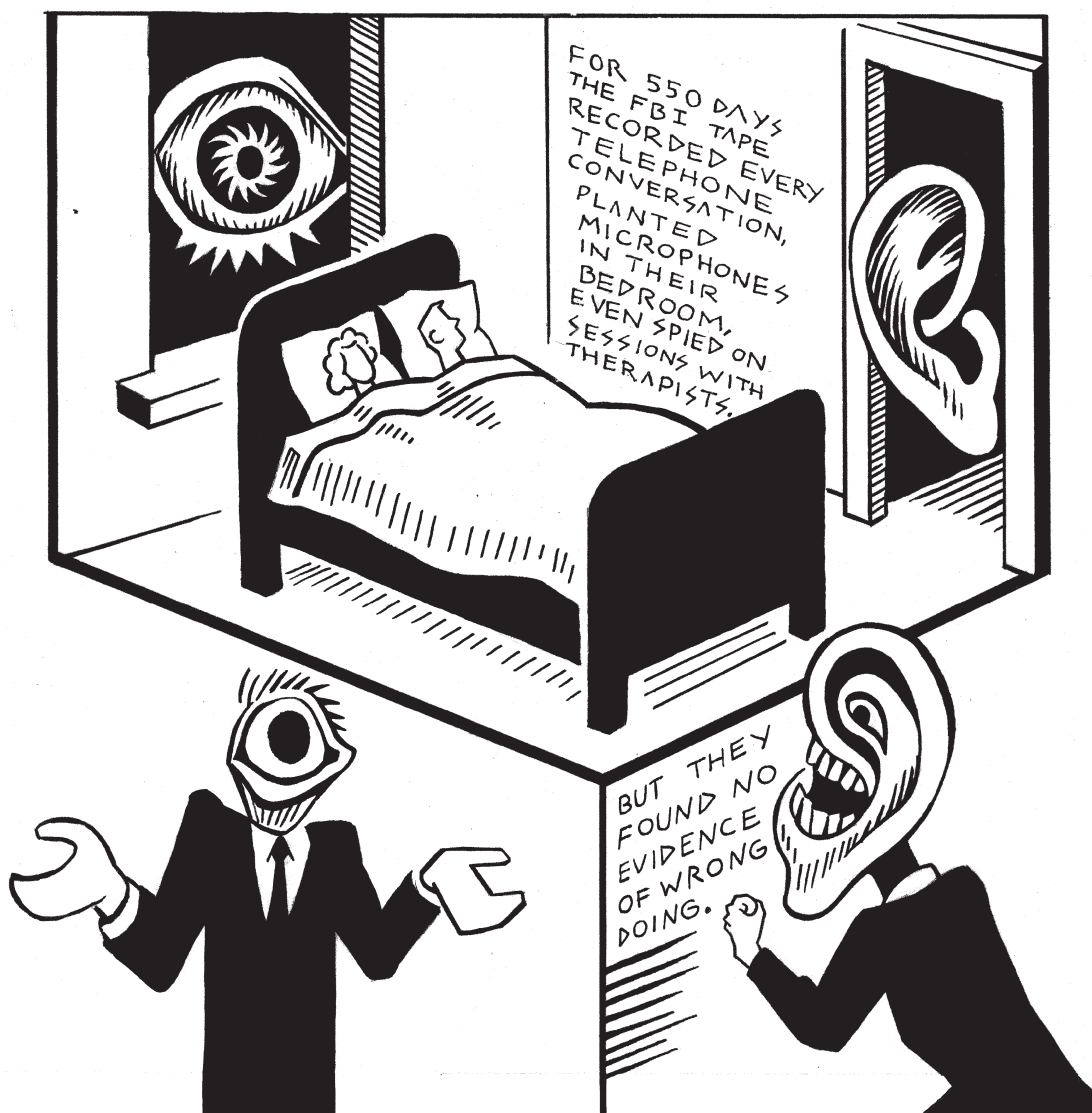
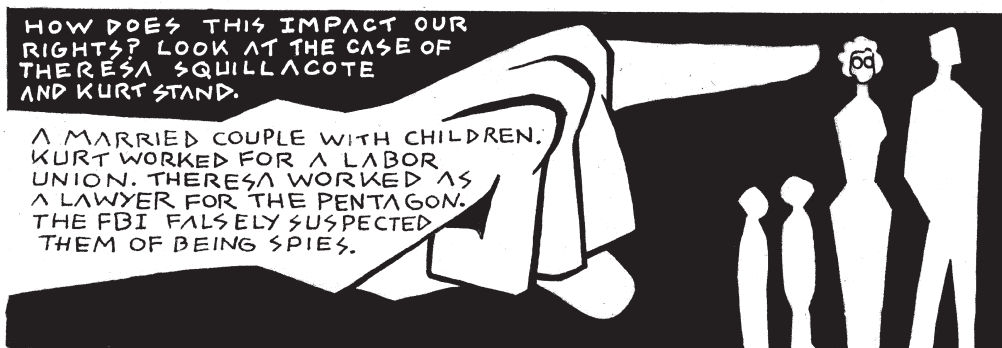


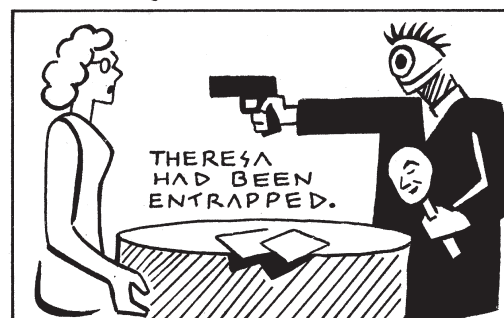
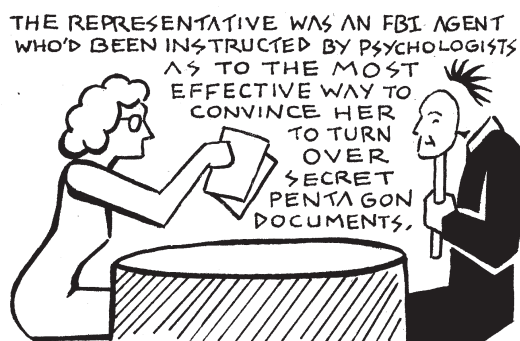
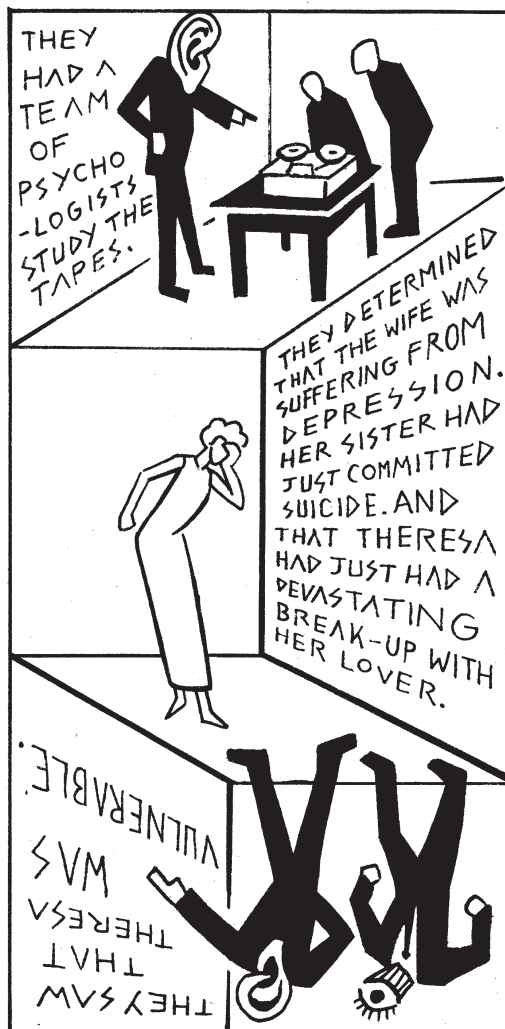
The Winter 2007 issue included six of his pages on the impact of Katrina and neoliberal public policy on the people of New Orleans. In addition to *Len*, Tobocman's books include *Understanding the Crash* (2010), *Disaster and*

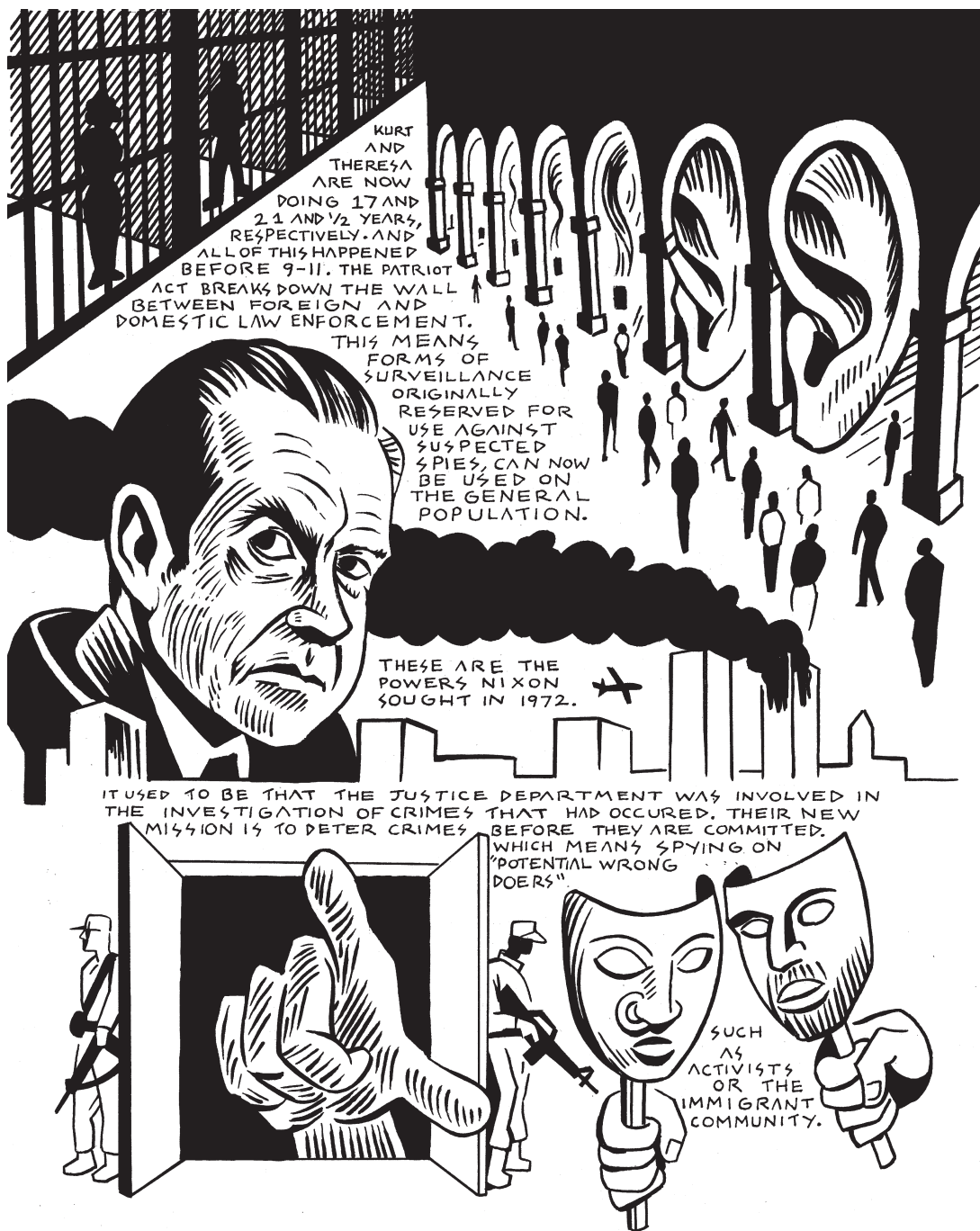
Resistance (2008), and *War in the Neighborhood* (2000), which is about to appear in a new edition. He is also a founding editor and regular contributor to *World War 3 Illustrated*.

KENT WORCESTER











**MOREOVER, THE LOSS OF
BASIC FREEDOMS
TO AN ABUSIVE AND
ENCROACHING
BIG BROTHER.
CANNOT
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BUT
BUILD
THE**





1939: Soviets Invade Poland. Defensist? Imperialist?

HERMAN BENSON

WHEN THE STALIN-HITLER PACT triggered World War II in 1939, and Soviet troops occupied half of Poland and then invaded Finland, the Socialist Workers Party in the United States was plunged into crisis.

Consistent with its longtime policy, a majority of the party called for an “unconditional defense of the Soviet Union” and declared its support of the Red Army in any war with the forces of any capitalist regime. But a big SWP minority faction broke with Trotskyist tradition and denounced the Soviet action as a reprehensible “imperialist” invasion. The dispute, which became increasingly bitter, quickly split the SWP. In the months—and years—that followed, the dispute escalated to raise basic questions of Marxism and of Trotskyism.

HERMAN BENSON, now geriatrically retired, was a member of the SWP during its controversy (in 1939-1940) over the Soviet's role in the war. He left as a founding member of the WP and later was associate editor of its *Labor Action*. In more recent years he was a founder of the *Association for Union Democracy* and its executive director.

The ideological battle of those 75 years ago may be ignored and forgotten here in America. But not in Britain where a small socialist group,

the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), has resurrected it in three massive volumes under the overall title *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*, ably introduced by Sean Matgamna, the series editor. The first volume, which I have not seen, has already appeared in over 600 pages. The concluding, third volume

is still to come. In total, it constitutes some 2,500 pages with detailed indexes and cartoons from the Trotskyist press of the time.

This review is based on the second, 790-page volume, *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*. It reprints the main documents that led up to the split, and much more. You can, for example, read the full text of the 1950 debate between Earl Browder, the defrocked leader of the Communist Party USA, and Max Shachtman, leader of the Workers Party (WP). A 117-page introduction by the editor puts it all in context. (For his editorial convenience, he refers to the defensist majority as the “orthodox” Trotskyists and the dissident minority as “heterodox,” al-

The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism: The Fate of the Russian Revolution, Volume 2

SEAN MATGAMNA, ED.
London, UK: Workers' Liberty, 2015,
790 pp., \$30 paperback

though these labels were not in use at the time.)

The AWL, which sponsors this collection, was a more-or-less “orthodox” Trotskyist group in Britain until it was troubled by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, as we were in 1939–1940 by the invasion of Poland and Finland. To me, having lived through that debate,

Trotsky’s position on the Soviet Union was complex, evolving—and confusing.

it is nostalgia. But to the Alliance, it’s a living, breathing thing with deep lessons for socialists today. The editor’s sympathies are implicit in the time he spent to study and compile this mammoth collection of competing declarations and are explicit in his introductory essay. In 1939, he would have been a heterodox partisan.

I found this book stimulating and fascinating, but I admit to a bias. At the time, back in 1939, I was a 24-year-old recent recruit to the Trotskyist cause, an outspoken heterodox in the SWP, and later a Workers Party zealot. Reading it now stirs stagnant blood. Still, any thoughtful socialist—including those who were not there—should find it absorbing and provoking.

For the Alliance, which revisits this old dispute, it is not intended as an academic revival of a neglected and forgotten episode in socialist history, but as an important guide to understanding current events, a compass to orient a modern generation of social radicals. In particular, a study of those competing views, the Alliance feels, provides “an antidote for the persisting residue of Stalinism” in the labor movement. Readers may feel a certain vague, visceral agreement with that objective even though it is not clearly posed. What “residue” of Stalinism do they reject? A more pointed explanation would be helpful. Here in the United

States, leftists may not be concerned with such a question. In Britain, the Alliance makes a contribution by reviving it.

Reading this book has prompted me to rethink the old ideological battle and to remember where I came from. Insofar as Stalinism was an ideological system that denigrated the idea of democracy *in the labor movement*, yes, a close study of these documents can be an antidote to a residue of Stalinism. But now as I think of it, the chief lesson lies in the broader quintessential role of democracy *in society*. To socialists here the idea might come across like a commonplace. But it was lost in an era when the Leninist left denigrated bourgeois democracy and preached the superiority of a “socialist” democracy—whatever that might be—which would replace it. For me, looking back, the key contribution of the heterodox Trotskyists was to clear the way back to democracy for revolutionary Marxists. Yet they performed this service not explicitly or robustly but by implication.

At the time—the world had just exploded in war—the SWP, with its three thousand members, was the major affiliate of the Fourth International, the organization founded by Leon Trotsky in what ultimately turned out to be a quixotic effort to supplant the official Communist (Third) International. Then exiled in Mexico, Trotsky was more than a mentor to his international and to the SWP. By his writings, his leadership of the Red Army during the civil war, his historic role in the Russian Revolution of 1917, his trenchant analysis—and denunciation—of the Stalinist regime, his unwavering revolutionary will, he dominated the Trotskyist movement intellectually, politically, and even organizationally.

Trotsky’s position on the Soviet Union was complex, evolving—and confusing. Under the Stalin regime, he charged, Soviet Russia had been turned into a virtual slave state for workers, one of the most repressive regimes in history. However, unlike in the surrounding capitalist societies, property in the Soviet Union re-

mained nationalized. Despite Stalin, he argued, nationalized property was the still-remaining achievement of the 1917 workers' revolution and the economic basis for a transition to socialism. As long as property remained nationalized, he insisted, the Soviet Union had to be viewed as a workers' state. But because of the regime's repressive, exploitative, anti-worker policies, it was—he said—a *degenerated* workers' state. Degenerated, that is, from its purer days of 1917.

Because it was an anti-capitalist society, Trotsky was convinced that the Soviet Union was in constant danger of attack by capitalist imperialist powers. That expectation was shared by most radicals of the day: Stalinists, Trotskyists, and moderate socialists. Trotsky's program called for the "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union," not "conditioned," that is, by any demand for internal reform of the regime. In that conception, defense of the Soviet Union against capitalist attack was the defense of its property nationalization. But the outbreak of war shattered unified opinion in the SWP.

By agreement with Hitler, Soviet troops marched into Poland, invaded Finland, and later forcibly annexed three Baltic states. Trotsky and a majority of the SWP leadership would not be moved. Convinced that the Soviet invasions were minor episodes in the regime's defensive maneuvers to protect itself against future inevitable capitalist attack, they persisted in proclaiming the need for unconditional defense. But a substantial minority of the party leadership and membership would not go along. At the time, the dissidents did not challenge the notion of Russia as a degenerated workers' state. Nor did they reject the legitimacy of calling for defense of the Soviet Union if—*if*—it actually came under attack. But, they held—with passion—that reality could not be ignored: The Soviet invasion had to be condemned as a repressive, imperialist act. In the intense internal battle that followed, the differences were deepened, intellectualized, and sharpened. The SWP split, and the minority formed the

Workers Party.

That was 1940.

The editor of this book writes in 2015, "The great Stalinist expansionary wave that ran through the 1940s until it broke in Afghanistan, in Russia's colonial war of the 1980s, was revolutionary against the bourgeoisie but also counter-revolutionary against the working class and against all elements of bourgeois democracy and political liberty, not to speak of socialism." This could be a fairly accurate statement of the position taken by some of the heterodox in the opening stages of the debate in 1939. Later, however, once they rejected the concept of a degenerated workers' state based on nationalized property, they would hardly characterize any Stalinist takeover as "revolutionary." (Aloof scholars, perhaps, in some cold sociological sense, might do so, but without any progressive connotations.)

The SWP debate opened on what seemed like a sharp but limited difference. The majority faction was formally led by James Cannon, SWP leader. But it was Trotsky himself who took on its defense; Max Shachtman led the opposition. Their writings, voluminously reprinted in *The*

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came under attack.

Two Trotskyisms, still make absorbing reading for me. So they will for the specialist in radical history. Non-academic radicals will find much of this intriguing, but some of it is hard going. Here were a few debaters with a few thousand political followers who wrote as though what they said and did could have a noticeable impact on world events. That was an illusion. But for

the publishers of these volumes, a study of these ideological exchanges is still illuminating.

In a forthright denunciation of the Russian military intervention into Poland and Finland as an imperialist invasion, the heterodox rejected any call for defense of the Soviet Union. The orthodox majority reiterated the traditional Trotskyist defensist line unchanged, but in the

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context of a brutal war, its explanation took a serpentine twist: Not willing to justify the invasion itself, the orthodox majority “explained” it as an incidental maneuver in the USSR’s preparation for defense against the inevitable capitalist attack; we might deplore it; nevertheless, the entry of Soviet troops gave “a bureaucratic impulse” to social revolution. Here as in any military conflict with a capitalist power, the orthodox insisted, we call for a defense of the Soviet Union.

The debate quickly escalated and deepened.

After Trotsky was assassinated in August 1940—the heterodox minority had already split away—the SWP endowed Russia’s nationalized property with disembodied, mystical, spiritual powers. The Russian masses’ courageous defense against the Nazis as at Stalingrad, the SWP declared, was inspired by an impassioned dedication to their nationalized property. The myth of that enduring love was punctured decades later when property was denationalized. At its moment of crisis, no one rose in its defense, not the working class, no one; it expired unwept,

unhonored, unsung.

East European states taken over by Russian troops were baptized by the SWP as “deformed” workers’ states, a brand new category. (Never having “degenerated” from any pristine state, they were born as monsters.) A workers’ state imposed by military conquerors! With that creation, the Marxist conception of the self-liberation of the working class evaporated.

Freed from orthodoxy, the Workers Party went on to reject the fundamental premise of the majority’s—and Trotsky’s—position that the persistence of its nationalized property meant the continuation of Russia as a workers’ state, albeit “degenerated.” From the very beginning of the dispute, a rare few were troubled by that idea: James Burnham (who resigned from the WP immediately after its formation) and Joseph Carter (who remained as one of its leaders). But it was Max Shachtman who created the ideological basis for a fundamentally new approach, one that freed the movement from even the last taint of Stalinism; his principal writings on the subject are published in this volume.

Shachtman begins with a description of Russian society that was shared by every Trotskyist tendency, a view he presented graphically in his debate with Earl Browder (full text reprinted in this volume). Russia, he argued, was an oppressive, exploiting society in which the working class was reduced to virtual slavery to the advantage of the ruling bureaucracy. In this, he was in complete agreement with Trotsky who considered the Stalin regime one of the most oppressive in history.

All that was 75 years ago. Not only the Stalin regime, but also its nationalized property are now historical dust. Who except some ossified Stalinist can look back at the tyrannical Russia of those days as any species of workers’ state? How could Trotsky, so brilliant, have clung so long to his theory of a workers’ state (and, with his powerful persuasiveness, convinced so many of us to go along)? The answer, I think, lies in his tragic personal history.

When Trotsky was defeated in Russia and then exiled, it was the culmination of a tense factional battle within the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Strong forces had been on his side. At first, even though expelled from the party, he hoped to see the regime changed by “reform,” which could only mean a peaceful oppositional victory from within the party, more or less in accordance with its established rules. With the victory of Hitler and the collapse of the Third International’s Communist Party in Germany, he abandoned hopes of reform and saw the necessity of “political revolution,” which meant a forcible overthrow of the Stalinist regime while keeping the basic economic structure of the nation, the nationalization of property, intact.

Reform? Revolution? These thoughts were not the armchair speculations of a detached intellectual observer simply commenting on events, but a call for action by an engaged revolutionary. Some fifteen years before, he was still a power in Russia. Reform or revolution are not automatic processes; they require human intervention. Trotsky must have been convinced that there were still substantial forces in and around the party who would rally to a defense of the social property, and he must have envisaged a role for himself in these coming events. I believe that for him the workers’ state theory kept him connected, not isolated, from those who, he imagined, could make that reform or revolution. Not a supporter of the regime, but a kind of patriot of the workers’ state! When the regime crumbled, and no mass movement came to the defense of nationalized property, the social force he anticipated turned out to be a mirage. But at the time, the thought and the hope were not irrational.

Trotsky could conceive of an anti-working-class but degenerated workers’ state because property nationalized by the revolution remained nationalized. But Shachtman and his heterodox followers took off in a new direction.

Workers cannot own productive property

directly, Shachtman argued, but only collectively through the state. When Russian workers are deprived of state power, they are deprived of economic power. Whoever “owns” the state, owns the property. An exploitative, anti-working-class bureaucracy, ruling a dictatorial state, owns the nationalized property.

How then do we know if a state, owning property, is actually a workers’ state? The basic test, Shachtman posited, is how the social product is distributed. By that standard, the Soviet Union could hardly be categorized as a workers’ state because the working class had been reduced to a state of near slavery while a ruling bureaucracy lived in privilege. By that test, he concluded, Russia is a bureaucratic collectivist society in which a bureaucracy is the ruling class.

But while Shachtman’s test was clear enough to tell us that a given state—here the Soviet Union—*is not* a workers’ state, how can it assure us that a state *is* a genuine workers’ state? His test is adequate to reveal the negative, but not the positive. Until that happy day in the far-off future when each contributes according to her ability and receives according to her needs, society will accept, even require, some measure of inequality; and there are bound to be sharp differences of opinion and conflict over what that degree must be. Workers and professionals, blue collar and white collar, government and private, each has their own standard. Whatever the division, some will declare: Unfair! That kind of conflict is inevitable, even desirable, in any democratic society.

How then do we know whether any given government can justifiably be awarded a blue ribbon certifying its quality as a genuine “workers’ state”? What division of the social product equals a workers’ state? Cuba under Castro? Venezuela under Chavez? China under the Communist Party? Brazil under Lula? The United States under a revived New Deal? Today, we are not required to answer that kind of question—is anyone eager to try?—because, in my opinion, the very concept of “workers’ state”

is obsolete.

The debates of 1939-1940 shifted the question from “who owns the property?” to “who owns the state?” Not the form of property but the dominance of the state becomes the key. Here we are in the realm, not of economics and property, but of politics, where democracy is decisive.

In the Soviet Union and in China, productive property was a state monopoly. The ruling regimes in both countries have ended that state monopoly, in Russia drastically, in China partially. It would make no sense for a progressive social/political movement to call for a restoration of state ownership in these nations where it has been abolished when the key aspiration, the crucial demand, the great battle is for democracy. Under a democratic state, socialists would advocate that governmental authority be deployed to assure that productive power, state-owned or private, be operated principally in the interests of society. Democracy, not the form of property holding, is decisive. In a country like Cuba, where the regime clings to state ownership, the right to private entrepreneurship, socially controlled, can be a legitimate democratic demand.

WHEN WORKERS’ SOCIALIST REVOLUTION failed to emerge in the war and postwar periods, the ideological foundation of both the WP and SWP, the two disputants, crumbled, and each disintegrated in its own way. The WP (renamed the Independent Socialist League) dissolved formally into the Socialist Party and disappeared, and its former membership splintered. The SWP persisted as an organization, but according to the editor of this volume, the group drifted increasingly toward Stalinism and away from Trotskyist revolutionary Marxism. Albert Goldman and Felix Morrow, two prominent leaders of the old SWP majority, abandoned the orthodox trenches and left the party; some of their supporters shifted to the WP. In time, the old Trotskyist leaders were expelled from the SWP; works written by

Jim Cannon were dispatched to a dumpster. The SWP continued to live in body but not in soul—no longer Trotskyist, not orthodox, not heterodox. Of the two Trotskyisms as they existed in 1940, nothing remains.

FOR TROTSKY IN 1939, the dispute over the precise nature of the Soviet Union was not essentially a matter of devising a satisfactory textbook label for the regime but of setting the discussion in the wide sweep of history. His words in that connection, partially recorded in this volume, are worth repeating here in a fuller version:

The Second World War ... subjects the proletariat to a new and perhaps decisive test. If this war provokes, as we firmly believe, a proletarian revolution, it must inevitably lead to the overthrow of the bureaucracy in USSR and regeneration of Soviet democracy on a far higher economic and cultural basis than in 1918. ... If, however, it is conceded that the present war will provoke not revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative: the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state, and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime. The inability of the proletariat to take into its hands the leadership of society could actually lead under these conditions to the growth of a new exploiting class from the Bonapartist fascist bureaucracy. This would be, according to all indications, a regime of decline, signaling the eclipse of civilization. ...

An analogous result might occur in the event that the proletariat of advanced capitalist countries, having conquered power, should prove incapable of holding it and surrender it, as in the USSR, to a privileged bureaucracy. Then we would be compelled to acknowledge that the reason for the bureaucratic relapse is rooted not in the backwardness of the country and not in the imperialist environment but in the congenital incapacity of the proletariat to become a ruling class. ...

If the world proletariat should actually prove incapable of fulfilling the mission placed upon

it by the course of development, nothing else would remain except only to recognize that the socialist program based on the internal contradictions of capitalist society ended as a Utopia.

The second imperialist war poses the unsolved task on a higher historical stage. It tests anew not only the stability of the existing regimes, but also the ability of the proletariat to replace them. The results of this test will undoubtedly have a decisive significance for our appraisal of the modern epoch as the epoch of proletarian revolution. If contrary to all the probabilities the October revolution fails during the course of the current war or immediately thereafter to find its continuation in any of the advanced countries; and if, on the contrary, the proletariat is thrown back everywhere and on all fronts—then we shall have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving forces. In that case, it would be a question not of shaping a copybook label on the USSR or the Stalinist gang but of re-evaluating the world historical perspective for the next decades if not centuries. Have we entered the epoch of social revolution, or on the contrary, the epoch of the declining society of totalitarian bureaucracy?

Seventy-five cataclysmic years have roiled by since these alternatives were posed by Trotsky. We have lived long enough to see how it turned out. The victory of socialism proved to be a dream. But barbarism?

Both Trotskyisms in 1939-1940 were convinced that the world was on the cusp of decisive events. By the end of the war, both sides warned, it was socialism or barbarism! They didn't expect barbarism or try to define it. Their warning was really a dramatic means of stressing the urgency of socialism. Nevertheless, in totally unanticipated fashion, today we witness the ominous portents of a kind of barbarism. Vast areas of the planet erupt in murderous religious conflict and senseless civil war and pointless bombing. Millions of people, whole families, wander the earth in search of a place to lie down in safety, desperate for shelter from rain and snow, starv-

ing, dying, drowning. "Barbarism," which once served as an intellectual conception, now reveals the ugly face of reality.

On the other hand, however, in the absence of socialist revolution, capitalism and democracy emerged intact in the major Western powers.

A workers' state imposed by
military conquerors! With that
creation, the Marxist conception
of the self-liberation of the
working class evaporated.

Fascism in Germany, Italy, and then Spain, and military rule in Japan, crumbled, replaced by democracy.

This three-volume series, published by the AWL in more than two thousand provocative pages, brings the old dispute between the two rival Trotskyisms back to life in all its complexity. What stands out for me as I reread this account is the challenge posed by Trotsky himself. That challenge, as I see it, is summarized in those last excerpts from that 1939 essay directed against us heterodox Trotskyists.

The test then, as Trotsky posed it, is two-fold: 1. Has the world proletariat proven "incapable of fulfilling the mission placed upon it"? and 2. Has the socialist program ended as a Utopia?

Has the proletariat failed to fulfill its mission? In answering that question, we must understand that any "mission" was imposed upon the proletariat not by some impersonal inexorable "course of development," but intellectually by the ideological precepts of Marxism. If the working class refuses to dedicate itself to the Marxist ambition, it still pursues its own. Workers' organizations may not have taken

revolutionary power, but they have almost everywhere and always been one of the chief social forces in defense of democracy in society. You may impose on your daughter the mission of becoming the president of the United States, but it is no failure if she “only” becomes a good doctor.

Has the failure of the proletariat to fulfill its “mission,” 165 years after the *Communist Manifesto*, finally proved that the socialist program ended as a Utopia? Again, it was Marxism,

Whoever “owns” the state, owns
the property. An exploitative,
anti-working-class bureaucracy,
ruling a dictatorial state, owns the
nationalized property.

not the march of history, that linked the fate of socialism with proletarian revolution. The crux of Marxism as a political movement was the conviction that capitalist society had created its own gravedigger, the proletariat, the class that was destined to take political power in its own hands and transform private property into social property. But socialism as a concept and a movement antedates Marxism. There was socialism before Marxism.

Prodded by this set of three massive volumes, I am compelled to look back at that emotional 75-year-old debate. If we unburden the proletariat of any special mission, the world appears in a different light. It is not whether the proletariat has “proved incapable,” but that the very concept of “workers’ state” is inadequate to the times.

Apart from any proletarian “mission” or calls

for a workers’ state, the “contradictions” of modern capitalism remain. The scale of production and its potential are so vast, the needs of society so great, that this awesome social machine can no longer be adequately guided and dominated by the narrow free enterprise motive of private profit. The uncontrolled market is not only economically inadequate but the source of inequality, warped political power, and social injustice from which not only the proletariat but the whole of society suffers. The free-market force of private profit must be replaced, as the dominant force in society, by social usefulness. The goal of democratic social control of ownership is in the common interests of government and private employees, independent workers, artists, professionals, working farmers, students—the 99% mass of humanity. To pinch that goal into the narrow notion of “workers’ state” is to limit the appeal of the socialist message. Not “workers’ state” but “democratic socialist state” to break the hold of capital and install democratic control over the economy.

I concede that these reflections seem to have meandered afield from that war-dominated debate of 75 years ago. But for me they are closely linked. Heterodox Trotskyists emphasized the need for democratic control over nationalized property. From there to the explicit goal of democratic control over productive property—national, social, or private—is no giant ideological leap. As I see it now, the lesson is that no form of property guarantees social justice; the key to social justice lies in the control of the state, that is, in the battle of democracy. Such is the inseparable link between socialism and democracy. If that sounds like a mere truism today, it is because this is the one battle won by those heterodox in the community of radical socialism.

See for yourself. Read this book.

Samir Amin's Russian Campist Anti-Imperialism

DAN LA BOTZ

FOR SOME TIME NOW, MANY OF US have wondered how it is that a number of left-wing writers and some political organizations could support Vladimir Putin and the Russian government's role in international affairs. These groups and individuals have backed Putin in the seizure of Crimea, his stealthy intervention in Ukraine, and his support for the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad (whom they also support). Is this simply the crude politics of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"? Or is there some theoretical justification for their position? And if so, what is it?

Samir Amin, often seen as the leading theoretician of the Global South, has written a short book that answers that question—though the answer he provides is not only unsatisfying but disturbing. Amin's logic places him on the side of undemocratic and aggressive states against "the people," whose uprising, he says, he has always championed.

Amin, who is now 85 years old, was born and raised in Egypt, later studied in France, and has worked and lived in Mali and Senegal; he began his political life in the French Communist Party (PCF) but moved into Maoist circles as early as the late 1950s. He agreed with the

Maoist critique of Soviet "revisionism" and more generally with the Bandung Conference notion that the revolutionary movements of the third world (today the Global South) represented

the future of progressive politics. He has written thirty-some books informed by these politics, which are also at the root of this latest book.

Russia and the Long Transition, a collection of essays written over the

last 25 years, is a broad overview of the history of Russia, of Communism, and of the Eurasian world. At the center of the book is the question "What happened to the Russian and Chinese revolutions, and where are we now?"

This book is written expansively at the geopolitical level, more concerned with nation-states than with their internal politics or their social classes. Looking at the last thousand years, Amin contends that the fate of nations is determined not only by history but also by geography, and he focuses on the way Russia's Eurasian location—more Asian than European—determined its character. Russia's location between Europe, China, and Japan, he argues, tended to make it focus more on its own internal development than on external expansion.

Amin asserts that not only is Russia not imperialist today, it was never imperialist—not in the time of the czars, nor in the time of Stalin and his successors. This is so, he writes, because Russia—unlike the European Great

Russia and the Long Transition from Capitalism to Socialism

SAMIR AMIN

Monthly Review Press, 2016. 142 pp
Index.

DAN LA BOTZ is an editor of *New Politics* and a professor of history who has written extensively about popular movements for workers power.

Powers—did not profit from its empire; it always put more into its colonial possessions than it got out of them.

Amin asserts that not only is
Russia not imperialist today, it
was never imperialist—not in the
time of the czars, nor in the time
of Stalin and his successors.

Russia, argues Amin, has almost never been an aggressive power, nearly always content merely to defend its territory—including all of its contiguous colonies—against Europe, Turkey, and later, Japan. While he does not spend much time going into it, he holds the same view of China. Russia and China created autarkic economies that allowed them to largely delink from international trade, at least until recently. For Amin, it is their self-sufficient national character that suggests that both Russia and China once had and still may have the chance to play a progressive role in world history—that is, if the former can stop supplying petroleum to the West and if the latter can turn from exports to the development of its internal market.

Though they might no longer be able to become socialist societies, Amin believes that Russia and China might yet become “popular democracies” and stand forth as leaders of the world’s peoples in resisting the imperial “triad”: the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. Amin is not uncritical of Putin’s internal regime—its crony capitalism and its autocracy—but he believes that there are groups within the Russian political class that would like to create a more social-democratic society, and he hopes they will prevail upon Putin.

The principal point for Amin, however, is that the resistance of Russia today keeps the triad at bay, keeps it from creating one global

capitalist system that would become a cage for the world’s peoples. Amin is an advocate of a multipolar world, which he believes would keep the triad from foreclosing options and would open space for other nations and peoples. His desire is to see a polycentric world with a social-democratic Russia and China able to face down the United States. It is this that makes Amin, and some of the others who share his views, supporters of Putin’s Russia in Crimea and Ukraine and of its relations with Iran and Syria.

History Denied

Amin’s view of Russia ignores or denies much of the reality of czarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet history. Amin suggests that imperialism exists only if profits are flowing to the metropole from the colony. But, of course, imperialism existed long before Lenin wrote *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and often had no profit motive, but was imperialism nonetheless. Russia had no capitalist economy when Moscow’s soldiers incorporated Siberia and reached the Pacific in 1640, and it was still hardly capitalist even later when it conquered Central Asia in two stages (1715–1854 and 1865–1881). Russian imperialism was, like other imperialisms, driven by the desire to control territory and trade routes as well as by competition with other nations; Russia wanted to check Turkey, Britain in India, and later, China from encroaching on its space.¹

Just as with the British, French, Japanese, and Americans, building the Russian empire often meant spending money on the military to take territory, grab resources, seize trade routes, and command markets that might only later prove useful. Under the czars, the Great Russians took political control of a vast region, a continent within a continent, and even when they were content to leave local satraps and landlords in power, they commanded. Dozens of peoples from the Baltic to Siberia were conquered. That’s why Russian socialists (among others) referred to czarist Russia as “the prison house of nations.”

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 attempted at first to end the empire and Great Russian domination. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic established in 1917 was made up of sixteen theoretically autonomous republics and more than twenty other autonomous regions. Under Lenin there was an attempt to respect the right of nations to self-determination while also trying to preserve the old boundaries of the Russian empire. Lenin's criticism of Stalin for his treatment of Georgia shows the former's sincere desire to respect formerly subject nationalities, even if in the midst of foreign intervention, civil war, and the foundation of a workers' government this proved quite difficult.²

Under Stalin, all of that changed. The Russians dominated the federation politically and administratively as well as through Russian colonization of the Central Asian regions. As Moshe Lewin argues, Stalin believed in a Russian-led "super-state" that was in essence "a replica of the old Great Russian imperial ideology."³ All of Stalin's policies—the forced collectivization of agriculture, the purges, the Russification of non-Slavic areas—also affected the Central Asian republics, with the same ramifications in human terms.⁴ The modernization of Russia and the consolidation of the Soviet Union, at the cost of millions of lives, made possible the Red Army's victory over Nazi Germany and the "liberation of Eastern Europe"—followed within a few years by Eastern Europe's assimilation into the Soviet bloc.

Surprisingly Amin has virtually nothing to say about the Soviet conquest of the Baltic countries and of most of Eastern Europe at the end of World War II (only Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Albania had relatively autonomous movements) as liberation from the Nazis became subjugation to the Soviets, though it should be noted that Amin does pause to praise Stalin for his pact with Hitler, which divided Poland between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Amin implies, without explicitly saying

so, that the Soviet absorption of Eastern Europe into its empire was entirely progressive—while also suggesting that all movements against the Communist system and Soviet domination, such as *Solidarność*, were utterly reactionary.

The Soviet Union's collapse, he avers, was a tragedy caused by the Communist bureaucracy and led to autocracy and corruption. Since then, he believes, there has been a struggle within the state bureaucracy, between crony capitalists and social democrats, for the soul of Russia, though he provides no evidence for the existence of such a struggle.

Without much further discussion of the facts, and certainly without any admission of the complexities of the situation, Amin maintains that in Ukraine everything from the Orange Revolution of 2004-2005 to the Euromaidan Revolution of 2014 has simply been a fascist movement backed by the European nations and aimed at attacking Russia. He argues that behind the fascists in Ukraine and elsewhere in central and eastern Europe is the triad. While it is certainly true that the European nations and NATO would like to extend their control over Ukraine and are willing to encourage reactionary forces to do so, Amin's view simply ignores

If one read only this book, one
would think that Amin believes
that we can hope for nothing
from the working class and the
peasantry of these countries.

the reality that Russia has its own interests in attempting to regain control over Ukraine and other countries in the region.

The central point that Amin and others like him miss is that imperialism is a struggle among great powers and lesser powers, and that

a multipolar or polycentric world inevitably encourages even more imperialist conflict than did the Cold War bipolar world. Neither the bipolar nor the multipolar world is preferable, and the reply to both must be anti-imperialist movements from below.

History and Politics Without Class Struggle

Amin flies at such a high altitude in this book, way up in the stratosphere where the air is thin, that all we see below are nation-states and various actual or potential alliances among them. Amin, while very critical of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union—he refers to it as “rotten”—and in particular of the former Communist bureaucrats who tore it apart, has nothing to say about the potential for class struggle in the former Soviet Union or in China. If one read only this book, one would think that Amin believes that we can hope for nothing from the working class and the peasantry of these countries. Everything seems to depend upon struggles among the post-Soviet elites. He merely comments that if Putin or Chinese leaders were to make his longed-for left turn toward social democracy, they would have to have the support of their people.

In the 1950s Amin broke with the PCF because he believed that the Chinese Com-

munist Revolution of 1949 and the Bandung Conference of 1955, and the debate that they provoked within the world Communist movement, pointed to an alternative Third World peoples’ revolution. Ironically, Amin and others who shared his trajectory have ended up supporting reactionary, bureaucratic capitalist states, hoping that their leaders will warm to ideas of social democracy even if socialism currently seems to be impossible to achieve. This thinking leads them to support not only Putin but also the Chinese Communist Party, the ayatollahs of Iran, al-Assad in Syria, and many other reactionary regimes. In doing so they ignore and deny the real sources of potential progress in the world: the working class and poor peasantry, the exploited world peoples in struggle from below.

NOTES

1. Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (Overlook Press, 2011), 20–32.
2. See Moshe Lewin, *Lenin’s Last Struggle* (Pantheon/Random House, 1968), throughout.
3. Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (Verso, 2005), 19–38.
4. Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 20–32.

Reflections on Opportunity Lost

Greece and the Syriza Experience

AARON AMARAL

IN VERY DIFFERENT WAYS, Helena Sheehan's *The Syriza Wave: Surging and Crashing with the Greek Left* and *Looting Greece: A New Financial Imperialism Emerges*

by Jack Rasmus look back over the period of the Greek debt crisis, and the parallel rise and fall of Syriza, and try to take stock. This period represents an attempt by the left within Greece—including but not limited to Syriza—to offer an alternative to the Greek humanitar-

ian and political crisis, an alternative that was based on an affirmation of democracy and of human needs over the dictates of capital. Its failure in the broadest sense, with its profound international implications, is the obvious subtext of both books.

Sheehan's *The Syriza Wave* is part activist/intellectual memoir and part incisive political reflections. In the blending of personal anecdotes and substantive analysis, she writes with both clarity and partisanship that is scrupulously fair. For his part, Rasmus provides an equally well-written and concise analytical account of the political economy of the debt crisis, its origins

and meanings, and the strategic implications for, and the failings of, the Syriza government. For different reasons, and in particular for those

who have been following Greek events over the last several years to see unfolding the full impact of neoliberalism and the anti-democratic reality of pan-European governance and the eurozone today, in Greece and beyond, both books make for invaluable reading.

For activists in solidarity with the struggles in Greece over the last decade, the initial chapters of *The Syriza Wave* read like the diary of a fellow-traveler, in the best sense of the word. U.S.-born Sheehan is an intellectual, academic, and longtime activist of the Irish left. Incorporating these identities, her account of the dynamics of the now famous Democracy Rising conference in Athens provides an example of Sheehan's incisiveness. The conference took place in July of 2015 and opened mere days after the announcement that an agreement had been reached for a third austerity memorandum between the Troika (the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund) and the Syriza government. Among other things, the conference witnessed various defenses of the Syriza government capitulation by prominent intellectuals and academics, offered with greater or lesser degrees of philosophical

Looting Greece: A New Financial Imperialism Emerges

JACK RASMUS

Clarity Press, 2016, 315 pp., \$24.95.

The Syriza Wave: Surging and Crashing with the Greek Left

HELENA SHEEHAN

Monthly Review Press, 2016, 229 pp., \$26.

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obscurantism. Sheehan writes,

All through the conference I was conscious of the difference between left academics and left activists (who might also be academics). Not for the first time was I aware of this disparity. I had long ago adopted a participational theory of truth and believed that activism was

Writing off the reform/revolution problem may leave good-willed revolutionaries without a road map for the necessary work (including electoral) of the revolutionary in a non-revolutionary moment.

epistemologically important in how I think and write. It is not only a matter of knowing things we would not know otherwise, but it is a way of speaking and writing about political subjectivity, about concepts such as the people, the movement, or the party, that just does not have traction with those who have a more concrete experience of them (130-131).

As exemplified by her firsthand reflections of the Democracy Rising conference, Sheehan has longstanding ties to Greece (having spent time in the country since at least 1992) and with (mainly though not exclusively) Greek intellectuals and activists. The book is chock full of accounts of numerous discussions and debates with many of these individuals, from a variety of perspectives and persuasions within the left, throughout the period of which she writes.

There are chapters devoted to each year from 2012 to 2016, during each of which she spent time in the country and very often at crucial moments for the movements and the left. For example, she was actively involved in the struggle around ERT, the Greek public

broadcasting channel that was closed down in June 2013 by the coalition PASOK/New Democracy government. Sheehan was present at the time of the closure and provides vivid accounts of the immediate aftermath of this decision: the occupation of the facilities by the station's workers and their allies, the attempts to re-open ERT, and the promises and subsequent walking-back of these promises by the Syriza government in 2015. Sheehan was also involved in building international solidarity for the ERT struggle; she writes of speaking to audiences and news broadcasts in Ireland and trying to draw connections between the struggles there and this struggle against austerity in Greece.

In fact, one of the strengths of *The Syriza Wave* is that in writing as an international activist, Sheehan continually describes the impacts of the struggle in Greece—both good and bad—on the situation in Ireland and the rest of Europe. She writes of the influence of the rise of Syriza on the Irish left and the attempts to build unity out of the anti-austerity struggles there. Similarly, she writes of the scourging impact of the Syriza experience after the third memorandum. For example, in the run up to the Irish elections of February 2016, the right attempted to use its own narratives of the Syriza experience to exco-riate the center left. The Sunday *Independent* ran an editorial entitled “10 Reasons Not to Cast a Vote for Sinn Féin,” claiming “Greece is a basket case looking at decades of economic stagnation. ... Why would Ireland fare any differently if it heeded the siren's call [of the left]?” (205).

Sheehan also writes of the challenges both internal to Greece and internationally to regroup left forces following the Syriza government's final concession to those demanding inhuman austerity. For example, while appreciating the fact that his condemnations of the Troika were right on the money, she is critical of former Syriza Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, and his “flamboyant inconsistencies” (201), in regards both to his efforts in government and to his attempt to build resistance from above,

at the leadership level, without any coherence, unity, or strength from below. She writes, “It made me remember quotes from Phaedrus about a mountain giving birth to a mouse and from Marx about sowing dragons and reaping fleas.” In these assessments she writes much more sympathetically of the efforts and analyses of figures such as Stathis Kouvelakis, Costas Lapavistas, and George Souvlis.

For me the most riveting chapters of *The Syriza Wave* deal with the defeat in the summer of 2015 and its political aftermath. As an international activist and internationalist, Sheehan provides useful rebuttal to the defensiveness of those sections of the left who, often uncritically, rallied around Syriza after its capitulation to the dictates of the Troika. She writes,

I have struggled through writing this with the issue of what I had a right to say. To the extent that I immersed myself in these events, I could not be detached from them. The fate of the left anywhere is my fate. I have never been able to confine my thinking and my activity to Ireland. I don’t only live in Ireland. I live in Europe and the wider world. It is all interconnected. ... Some Greeks tell me that they can discuss Greek politics with me as they do with other Greeks. They tell me, “You are one of us.” Others will say otherwise. I hope I know my limitations. I am very aware as I come and go how alike and different is the crisis in Ireland and Greece. Specifically, I am conscious of things like how many fewer cuts there have been to my pension than to theirs, which is what allows me to come and go (184).

Yet while being self-reflective of her position as a non-Greek activist, Sheehan takes on Tsipras’ attempt to bait as “foreigners” those sections of the international left who opposed his actions after July 2015 (147). In fact, throughout Sheehan is clear about her own political allegiances and positions.

She writes,

Some international commentators decided that mainstream Syriza was reformist and had moved to the right and cracked down on its internal left. I did not see it this way. I had

strong relationships with both Left Platform and mainstream Syriza. I had great respect for people on both sides. I did not believe that the left was confined to the Left Platform. A party of this size was necessarily diverse and held ideological positions along a certain left spectrum. All of us looking at it had our own ideological positions and affinities to those closest to our own positions. My strongest ties were to ex-Synaspismos and to a position stemming from the tradition of left Eurocommunism. These ties crossed the Left Platform versus Left Unity divide (85).

In this regard, one of the theoretical tensions within the book is worth noting. On one hand, Sheehan quotes Aristides Baltas, a leading intellectual within Syriza and recently minister of culture, as arguing that “the old reform-versus-revolution debate was irrelevant now” (32) and Leo Panitch’s claim that in the aftermath of the Syriza experience, the term “restraint” needs to be added between “reform” and “revolution.” Both Baltas and Panitch have remained aligned to Syriza following the third memorandum and mobilize these arguments to support their position. Yet Sheehan, despite her

Flamboyant Syriza Finance
Minister Yanis Varoufakis made
Sheehan “remember quotes ...
from Marx about sowing dragons
and reaping fleas.”

healthy and critical accounts of what holding state power meant for the individuals involved, is sympathetic to some version of this position.

Regarding her previous support of Syriza she writes,

Unlike those who called themselves revolutionaries and denounced reformists, [Syriza] had stopped dreaming of storming winter palaces and bolshevizing the twenty-first

century. They were not holding out for an all-encompassing insurrection, which would destroy capitalism one day and inaugurate socialism the next day. They were planning for a protracted process, which would include winning multiparty elections, entering into difficult negotiations, agreeing to unattractive alliances, undoing damage done, building the new inside the shell of the old (84-85).

What Sheehan does not explain is what if any relationship the failure to grapple with the limits of the “protracted process[es],” and the prioritization of winning multiparty elections

Germany was the first to engage in neoliberal policies, with internal labor market changes known as Hartz reforms undertaken by a Social Democratic government.

after the exhaustion of the social movements, had with the capitulation of Syriza. It may be that writing off the reform/revolution problem leaves good-willed revolutionaries without a road map for the necessary work (including electoral) of the revolutionary in a non-revolutionary moment.

While there is much focus on the limitations and motivations of the leading figures, Alexis Tsipras first and foremost among them, the book leaves open the admittedly complex question of why the capitulation happened. Given the way in which Tsipras was able to wrest control over the direction of Syriza from the party members, the Central Committee, and the Political Committee, this is not simply a sterile academic, sectarian exercise. Some account(s) are needed for what allowed for the defeats of 2015 and their aftermath.

In any event, Sheehan makes clear she is not

abandoning hope for the people of Greece and its left. This is not surprising given her decades of commitment.

Sheehan writes,

Among the international left, people like me were subjected to swipes at Syrizamania and then attacked for disloyalty to Syriza, not necessarily by the same people. Those who have stuck with Syriza have not on the whole paid much attention to what has happened to Syriza since July. Many want to be on side with a party that can win elections and not one more party struggling at 2.8 percent. Some of them remind me of members of communist parties who defended the USSR no matter what. I believe that I have been more loyal to the best of what Syriza was by aligning with those who have broken away and begun to rebuild. I have not backed away from Greece when it became so depressing. I didn't end the story with “happily ever after” and leave it there (185).

The last chapter of *The Syriza Wave* provides a balanced account of the state of the struggle in 2016. With regards to the left wing of Syriza, which broke with Tsipras in the summer of 2015 and regrouped as Laikí Enótita/Popular Unity, Sheehan is in solidarity but not without concerns. She notes that there have been criticisms of Panagiotis Lafazanis' leadership “although everyone thought him to be an honorable and hardworking person” (210). And she notes that the party struggled to be seen as more than the party of the drachma, that is, the party of a Grexit (172-73, 196).

And she quotes favorably Antonis Davanellos, one of the leaders of the left within Laikí Enótita/Popular Unity,

What we've done so far is to regroup our forces in order to continue to be present, within certain limits, on the battlefield and to not give up on the possibility of victory. ... The reconstruction in Greece of a massive, radical, and anti-capitalist left in the twenty-first century will continue. ... Therefore, we do not consider the UP [LAE] a “finished party,” but a political front in the works (210-11).

Stylistically, *Looting Greece* departs sharply from the memoir-like quality of Helena Sheehan's book. Yet in writing such an analytically clear, historical account of the European and Greek debt crises, Jack Rasmus also has made a valuable contribution.

The book is divided into ten chapters, the first five of which deal with the evolution of the debt crisis prior to the coming to power of the Syriza government in January 2015. Chapters six through nine offer a blow-by-blow account of the failed strategy of Syriza in its dance with the creditors. The last chapter provides a broader overview and comparative analysis of how and why the Troika prevailed. Finally, in an extended conclusion, Rasmus puts forward an argument for financial imperialism as a new and growing form of imperialism.

For Europe, the creation of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and European Central Bank (ECB) in 1999, and the Lisbon Strategy, mark the origin of the current debt crisis. The ECB embarked on a devaluation of the EMU that led to external devaluation, which boosted trade. Simultaneously, internal devaluation occurred through labor market flexibility, that is, reducing labor security, wages, and benefit costs. Germany was the first to engage in neoliberal policies, with internal labor market changes known as Hartz reforms undertaken by a Social Democratic government; these kept German wages stagnant for nearly a decade and created a base for the production of cheap exports. With the German Bundesbank essentially dictating policy to the ECB, and cheap money and cheap goods flowing into the European periphery, the structures of the European economies were transformed. And so long as the money flowed back to the European central economies, primarily Germany, it was a virtuous circle for European capital. However, with onset of the 2008 economic crisis, this dynamic changed:

In addition to bank-provided money capital, German private foreign direct investment into Greece also rose from 1.4 billion euros

in 2005 to more than 10 billion by 2008. As the money and capital to Greece was recycled back to Germany and the northern core economies in the form of exports, Germany got business profits, economic growth, and its money capital returned to it. In addition, as financial intermediaries in the recycling of money capital, both core and Greek banks got interest payments from the Greek loans and Greek bonds, Greeks got German and core export goods for a few years, but loaded up on credit and debt in the process for what appears will remain an interminable period of debt repayments well into the future (63-64).

When the banking and financial systems froze up in the aftermath of 2008, the cycle and flow of credit and money stopped between the European core and periphery. And when the peripheral (Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, and other) economies started to slow down, German exports and investment began to shift overseas. This further slowed the flow of credit. As Greece had been running an internal trade deficit with Germany, the initial impact of the credit crunch in Greece was that private banks became loaded with debt, monies that had been borrowed to facilitate imports from Germany.

Rasmus does a good job of showing that this trade deficit was caused neither by higher wages to the Greek working class nor by escalation in Greek consumer spending. Rather the debt was driven up by European Union and ECB policy, in the interest of European capital.

Looting Greece then takes the reader, in exacting if painful detail, through the distinct though compounding circumstances that led to each of the three austerity memoranda.

The first memorandum provided that a total of 110 billion euros was "lent" to the Greek government, 91 percent of which went to bailing out the banks that had been left with bad loans following the 2008 crash. The initial austerity measures demanded by the Troika were premised on unrealistic economic projections of growth but caused very real cuts in wages, pensions, and social security. And the result was a

shifting of the massive debt load, mainly from the private banks onto the Greek government.

Then the second memorandum, argues Rasmus, “was primarily to refinance, pay off, and reduce Greek debt held by ... private investors” (99), many of whom had already taken advan-

(118).

The last chapter provides an explicit assessment of the relative strategies of Syriza and the Troika and the structural/institutional straitjacket within which Syriza was attempting to negotiate. It also unequivocally answers yes to the likelihood of a fourth memorandum, given the logic of indebtedness and austerity and the current strategic course of the Greek government:

To have succeeded in negotiations with the Troika, Syriza would have had to achieve one or more of the following: expand the space for fiscal spending on its domestic economy, end the dominance and control of the ECB by the German coalition, restore Greece’s central bank independence from the ECB, or end the control of its own Greek private banking system from northern Europe core banks. None of these objectives could have been achieved by Syriza alone. Syriza’s grand error, however, was to think that it could rally the remnants of European social democracy to its side and support and together achieve these goals (228–29).

An extended conclusion to *Looting Greece* is entitled “A New Financial Imperialism Emerges.” In part, Rasmus argues that the views found in Lenin, Bukharin, and Hilferding, that finance capital is subordinate to industrial capital, need to be revised. The space devoted to this argument, however, is limited. While he argues that Greece has become a state dominated by the supra-national imperialist state of the Troika, given the degree to which sections of the Greek left have historically argued for Greece as a neo-colony, or one for which national oppression is primary, the full implications are not untangled by Rasmus.

Nonetheless, as with *The Syriza Wave*, *Looting Greece* is a thoughtful post-mortem on the experiment of Syriza as a government of the left in Greece. Bittersweet, but worthy of the experience.

An Irish editorial claimed “Greece is a basket case....Why would Ireland fare any differently if it heeded the siren’s call [of the left]?”

tage of the bond markets to ramp up interest rates paid on Greek debt. *Looting Greece* does a great job in explaining the ways in which both the rules adopted by the ECB and the neoliberal ideology of “the German Hypothesis” (91), which drove their adoption, played a role in the cycle of debt and austerity that led to a humanitarian catastrophe in Greece.

Chapters five through nine offer an account of the rise of Syriza and a blow-by-blow telling of their approach to the problem of debt and austerity and the process of negotiations once the party came to power in January 2015. Rasmus’ account of the “institutional taming” of the Syriza government is painful to relive, but offers strong support for his argument that in the run up to the third Greek debt restructuring deal of 2015, Syriza and Tsipras would discover there was no option to return to social democracy and social democratic policies without austerity. The choice was either to leave the euro and the neoliberal regime, or remain caretakers for that regime on the system’s periphery, condemned to some degree of perpetual indebtedness, austerity, and long-run negative economic growth

Getting Away With It: Israel and Global Occupation

KYLE STANTON

AT THE HEART OF JEFF HALPER'S *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification* is the question "How does Israel get away with it?" In other words, how is Israel able to continually occupy Palestinian territory in contravention of international law? Halper, an anthropologist and former director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, brings a scholar's meticulous research skills and an activist's zeal to a subject that has not been thoroughly documented. Rather than delving into the internal nuances of the occupation, Halper suggests that we look outward at what the occupation allows Israel to do economically and politically. In order to do this, Halper argues that the military technology of Israel and its public, private, and semi-private companies must be analyzed in order to properly contextualize the situation. The primary sources the author relies upon for his analysis are defense industry and government documents. The reliance on these documents can be exhausting for the reader because some sections read like an instruction manual. However, Halper argues that they are necessary for understanding the depth of the occupation.

The occupation, argues Halper, has become

Getting Away With It: Israel and Global Occupation

JEFF HALPER

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indispensable for Israel as a veritable laboratory for its weapons and securities industries. It is in this way that Israel is able to find international legitimacy. Through arms deals and security "expertise," the state is able to play an international role that is disproportionate to its size. The arms and security training that it disperses, through its public and private sectors, act to aid hegemonic actors globally. Beyond merely aiding states militarily, the Israeli model, or "matrix of control," has become widely used to pacify actors who pose threats to the hegemony of ruling parties. The Palestinians have become human test subjects for tactics and weapons that will be used in securitizing others across the globe. This also means that the occupation has become more valuable to Israel than reaching a peace settlement. Additionally Halper is right to point out that after Likud took power in 1977, the transition that was made from counterinsurgency to counterterrorism made it difficult domestically to argue against expansionist policies in the West Bank because they were rebranded as security measures.

Ruling cadres in developing as well as developed countries make use of Israel's weapons and security systems. The United States, as Halper points out, has allowed for many of its police forces to become militarized and hyperaggressive through counterterrorism training with Israeli counterparts. A couple of examples of this dispersal of knowledge are the installation of

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roadblocks like those of the West Bank in a dangerous neighborhood in Washington DC and, infamously, the Ferguson Police Department's violent response to its citizens after the killing of Michael Brown. The United States has also leaned upon Israel to arm those that the U.S. cannot be publicly seen arming. For instance, during the 1980s, the genocidal military dictatorship of Jose Rios Montt in Guatemala was supplied weapons by Israel when the American Congress began to oppose the United States providing them. Beyond arming dictatorships, Israel also has forged military- and police-oriented working relationships around the world, notably with many European Union members, Russia, Singapore, India, central Asian republics, some Gulf States, Colombia, Equatorial Guinea, Zimbabwe, and much to the chagrin of the United States, China.

Halper brings a fresh perspective to the topic of the Israeli occupation. Rather than a recounting of the history of the occupation, *War Against the People* seeks to put the occupation in a global context for the reader. Halper does not lean upon arguments that explain the Israeli occupation as purely a lobbying success or a pet project of evangelical Christians who see support for Israel as integral to their millennial world views. Rather, Halper sees the Israeli occupation model as one which global elites can seek to emulate, tailor to their needs, and replicate in local contexts. For the large majority who find themselves on the Palestinian side of the equation globally, this means that they will be facing increased surveillance, a militarized

police force, and technology that seeks to pacify resistance.

One drawback of the book is the author's use of historical examples that are at times troublesome. For instance, the author jumps very quickly from the military culture of the Yishuv (pre-Israel Jewish community of Palestine) to the 1967 War and the beginning of the American-Israeli military relationship. When discussing the lasting importance of the Hashomer, the first Zionist paramilitary group, established in 1909, Halper does not cite the work of Anita Shapira, which would at least offer a counterargument to his assertion that the paramilitary group was created to simply evict Arab tenant farmers. This treatment of historical examples has the effect of creating a passive narrative of the developments that led to the contemporary situation.

Overall though, *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification* contributes something new to Israel-Palestine literature. Jeff Halper has strayed away from many well-worn arguments on the subject and has provided readers with a new global perspective on the conflict. His argument is essentially a call against compartmentalizing Israel-Palestine as a local conflict and for seeing it in broader terms. For an American audience, the connections between Israel and American police forces should raise eyebrows. Those with an interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict, global history, and contemporary international affairs will find this work of great interest.

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