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CHE GUEVARA

Jeanette Habel & Michael Löwy debate Samuel Farber

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From the Editors

WE ARE LIVING IN AWFUL, YET hopeful, times. As we go to press, several wars are raging. One of them, Israel's ferocious assault on Gaza and its systematic, genocidal massacre of Palestinians, is exacting a greater civilian toll than any conflict in recent years. Another, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has been going on for almost two years, with huge numbers of casualties and no end in sight. And there are also conflicts taking place in multiple locations in Africa.

These wars are not just humanitarian disasters, they are also entrenching and solidifying foreign occupation (in Kashmir and Western Sahara, as well as Palestine and Ukraine), while making it more likely that powerful states will flout international law in the future.

Simultaneously, authoritarianism has been growing worldwide. In Argentina, a Trump-like character has become president. In India, what was known as the world's largest democracy is moving in an increasingly authoritarian direction. In Europe, far right parties have been surging and entering governing coalitions; Italy has Western Europe's first far-right prime minister since World War II, and in Hungary, Viktor Orbán has become a role model for would-be authoritarians around the world.

In the United States, Trump remains a looming threat, and the Democrats' institutional inability to offer a progressive alternative seriously endangers even the limited democracy of our capitalist system. Meanwhile, the conservative-dominated Supreme Court continues to thwart the

popular will as well as suppressing democratic rights.

The Democrats' chances of preventing Trump's return are further diminished by their support for the Israeli war on Gaza. A growing powerful movement — often led by Palestinian groups, Jewish progressive organizations, and diverse young people — has arisen to support Palestine and oppose Washington's scandalous support for Israel's crimes. The left's ability to support — materially and critically — this movement in the heart of the U.S. empire, stands as one of the most urgent tasks of our moment.

The U.S. left can also take heart from a significant renewal of labor activism and militancy over the past year. This has included growing efforts by young workers to unionize their workplaces, strike victories by several large unions (including the Writers Guild of America, SAG-AFTRA, National Nurses United, and the UAW), and a wave of organizing and strikes in higher education. Some union leaders, including the new UAW president Shawn Fain, have also joined the call for a ceasefire in Gaza.

These wars, social struggles, and rising authoritarianism, all take place as the climate crisis continues to worsen, with the burning of fossil fuels continuing to outpace mitigation efforts, and as international climate conferences like COP28 are dominated by corporations and the oil-producing monarchies of the Middle East. Meanwhile, 2023 has now been designated the hottest year in recorded history.

In this issue of *New Politics* we take up many of these themes. We have a section on Israel's war on Gaza, featuring interviews with two leading experts, Toufic Haddad and Joel Beinin, and a reflection from Leena M. Leena has asked us not to use her real name due to the growing persecution of pro-Palestine activists in the United States, in attacks on academic freedom and civil liberties not seen in decades. There has been an upsurge of antisemitism and Islamophobia since October 7, but there has also been an exponential increase in spurious charges of antisemitism designed to silence criticism of Israel's crimes.

We continue to publish articles on the situation in Ukraine from a socialist perspective. Hanna Perekhoda explores Russia's attitude toward Ukraine and Emily Channell-Justice looks at the role of self-organization and the new left in Ukraine since 2013. In addition, in order to understand one of the chief examples of growing worldwide authoritarianism, Aparna Sundar examines the meaning and record of the Modi government in India.

Dan La Botz surveys the political scene in the United States, highlighting some of the challenges and the responses. Howie Hawkins, a Green Party veteran, discusses the Cornel West and Jill Stein third party campaigns, while Kim Moody offers a critique of left electoralism. Elizabeth Rapaport shows how some of the jurisprudence of the new Supreme Court threatens democracy, while James Gray Pope contributes some lessons from the recent, and successful, Rutgers University strike.

Due to the colonial context of capitalist extraction, struggles for climate justice and decolonization intersect in various ways.

Brian Ward looks at the Standing Rock struggle in the United States and Rafael Bernabe focuses on Puerto Rico and the need for political and energy transformation.

To meet these challenges, the left needs to expand its theoretical and political understanding. To that end, we present a debate on the historical record of one of the international left's iconic figures, Che Guevara. Several years ago, Samuel Farber wrote a book-length critique of Guevara. Jeanette Habel and Michael Löwy challenge Farber's interpretation and Farber responds to them. Gar W. Lipow makes a case for using proxies in the democratic structures we want for a future socialist society (as well as in our movements today), and Charles Post turns a critical eye to the ideology of neoliberalism.

Our issue concludes with three reviews. John Marot offers a critique of Simon Pirani's account of early dissent during the Russian Revolution. John Feffer reviews Kevin Funk's account of how Arab immigrants have come to play leading roles in Latin American economies. And John Clarke looks at how the Western surveillance state has been founded on, and expanded, racist logic.

We hope these articles contribute to helping us address these awful times by planting seeds of protest that grow into hopeful futures. We have purposely chosen as our Champion of Justice for this issue a group of Palestinian journalists who have become heroes to many of us. We see in them, and in their efforts to show us and warn us about a genocide happening in real time, the humanity we will need to build a socialist future.

Palestinian Resistance and the War in Gaza

An Interview with Toufic Haddad

TOUFIC HADDAD IS A PALESTINIAN author and academic living in Jerusalem. His book *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Territory* was published in 2016. He was interviewed on Zoom by *New Politics* editorial board member Phil Gasper on November 25, 2023. The transcript was edited in December.

New Politics (NP): *Let's start with October 7. The Hamas attack on October 7 certainly took the Israeli government by surprise¹, but it took most other observers by surprise as well. Should we have seen this coming? Were people in Gaza and the West Bank surprised by this as well? Or was this something that we should have expected given the terrible conditions in Gaza over the past many years?*

Toufic Haddad (TH): For those who are paying attention to the military-political dynamics in Palestine, October 7 was not entirely a surprise. The situation was ripe for something to happen given the increased marginalization of the Palestinian issue globally and regionally, broad indifference to Palestinian suffering under a particularly virulent settler colonialism and siege, and the strengthening conviction amongst Palestinians that armed struggle was needed to defend what remained of the Palestinian position in light of having other avenues toward acquiring Palestinian rights closed in their face.

Looking back, there were definitely

signs that something was in the works although the extent and scope of the attack was difficult to fully anticipate. I did a long interview with *International Socialism* journal that was published on October 5, and in that I spoke of the military potential that was developing and accruing amongst Hamas and that I have witnessed and written about as an academic, journalist and political observer for the last 20 odd years.² In 2018, for instance, I published an academic article called “Insurgent Infrastructures,” which speaks about the “city below the city” of Gaza composed of 500-plus kilometers of tunnels.³ It was clear that Hamas had not abandoned armed struggle and was preparing, while the organization also dropped a lot of hints in its rhetoric about its plans that basically fell on deaf ears. But if we look at the larger historical-political dynamics, and the particular calculus that emerged between Israel and the resistance factions in the Gaza Strip, we do need to acknowledge that Hamas had never demonstrated such a capacity on this scale previously.

With this said, you had 17 years of siege and a kind of perverse situation that emerged where the international community and Israel had conspired to essentially end any political process attempting to resolve the Palestinian question. We had 30 years of the Oslo process, which essentially allowed Israel to solve important demographic “separation” and military

objectives, and allowed it to hide these beneath the excuse of “security.”⁴ Part of that plan ended up meaning the suppression of any major Palestinian national-political project that could represent or demand Palestinian rights.

Then, of course, when elections happened [in 2006], the international community did not observe the results, which saw Hamas as hands-down winners, and instead opted for a divide-and-rule strategy over the Occupied Territories, with a Hamas-governed Gaza Strip and a Fatah-governed West Bank, and Israel given Jerusalem. This approach to dealing with the Palestinian question did not attempt to solve the political issue in anyway, and instead aimed to manage the “externalities” that emerged from this situation while using aid and military maneuvers to keep Palestinians divided and ensure no political process happened, but also ensuring that no major humanitarian crisis emerged.

In this light, the Gaza Strip became the most explosive concentration of all the contradictions because it is an untenable territory. Around 2012, the UN declared it “unlivable.” Its huge pockets of poverty, unemployment and political grievance made it a perpetual boiling cauldron of hardship and anger, as the territory underwent 17 years of siege and 14 different cycles of significant military conflagrations, where Israel routinely “mowed the lawn,”⁵ deciding when and how it did that. After each of these rounds, aid would be used as a form of blackmail against the Palestinians, perpetually creating this horrific situation where Gazans—most of whom are refugees of the 1948 war—were kept in a state of extreme vulnerability and oppression that made it a ghetto, “open air prison,”⁶ or even “concentration camp”⁷ by some observer standards. Basically, Hamas was able to glean the lessons of this situation and adapt accordingly within a long-term vision of

not giving up Palestinian rights, while building a civil and military infrastructure that could position it to act as a new nucleus of a revived Palestinian national project, with an armed military potential.

This was seen as more important in light of the broader regional marginalization of the Palestinian issue at the expense of the Arab revolutionary processes, and Israeli-Arab normalization deals, which had collectively led to less attention and finance to the Palestinian issue. We should also not forget the heightened importance of Israel to EU and U.S. regional plans, as well as the fact that Israel is envisioned to play a regional hegemonic role as an alternative natural gas supplier to Europe in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Let’s also not forget that Hamas did not exclusively go military. It was a democratically elected power that repeatedly signaled it was open to playing the official international political game. It changed its Charter in 2017⁸ and openly declared its intentions to join the PLO. It also supported the nonviolent resistance campaign of the “Great March to Break the Siege and for Return” in 2018-19, which developed out of the mobilization of grassroots actors.⁹

I think this latter initiative is a very important backdrop to what’s happening today. Hamas political leaders were literally standing in front of pictures of Martin Luther King and Gandhi, attempting to support a nonviolent approach to getting Palestinian rights back. Though Hamas did not initiate the movement, at a certain stage it did become a main player in it, and allowed the movement to continue for a good six months before it dissipated because of its high cost and ineffectiveness to mobilize significant international attention to the issues it was mobilizing around—breaking the siege and advocacy for the issue of refugee return. The movement in fact was brutally crushed, leading

to horrific casualty figures—around 8,000 Palestinians were shot by snipers with live ammunition and roughly 250 people killed.

So, you have Hamas together with allies abroad and Palestinian society attempting to play a political game while using nonviolent means, all of which were disregarded or crushed. Remember that these attempts were taking place for a full 17 years. Don't forget the Mavi Marmara incident [in 2010] and other international attempts to break the siege on Gaza using flotillas.¹⁰ These too were brutally crushed with lethal force. So basically, a military option was seen as the only means left for Hamas, with this opinion shared by all other factions in Gaza and Gazan society as well. In fact, Hamas was critiqued for not responding enough to this popular demand, as evidenced for instance in the movement's nonparticipation in the 2022 conflagration that targeted the Islamic Jihad organization.¹¹ In this context, it should not be surprising that Hamas never abandoned their military interests and sought to develop them without fully declaring their intentions and plans.

Gaza always had a tunnel network, which did not emerge out of a military resistance dynamic per se, but out of a commercial-survivalist one. Hamas simply invested in this experience and understood the strategic significance of tunnels in protecting resistance actors and assets, giving the movement supply lines and safe spaces to operate when everything above ground was closely monitored and targeted. Hamas organized the opportunities created by the conditions they were operating within, laying the foundations for Gaza to become the basis of Palestinian resistance and a new Palestinian national project, with an active military potential.

The Hamas leadership is composed of educated doctors, engineers and businessmen from refugee backgrounds, who were

distinct from Fateh in organizational praxis in so far as they were seen to have a more meritocratic approach to institution building, according to Harvard academic Sara Roy.¹² Developmentally, they were able to organize the army of unemployed within Gaza to build the tunnel network, while also establishing a small to medium-size (we don't know exactly how big) military industrial complex there that produces everything from Kalashnikov bullets to mortars, anti-tank magnet bombs and, of course, rockets of many sizes. There has always been a wing of Hamas that believed quite strongly in the role of the military, but the movement developed leaps and bounds throughout the past three decades on this front. Military dimensions also gave a strong emotional boost to Palestinian morale and exposed Fateh and the PA [Palestinian Authority] in the West Bank as insufficiently responding to Israeli colonialism, especially the variant imposed under the current "far-Right" Israeli government.

Another important issue that needs to be inserted in discussions of October 7 is the issue of Palestinian prisoners. You have to take into consideration that the Palestinian political leadership today, except that which is located in Gaza, is mainly in Israeli prison—6000 of them before October 7. These are the field and political leaders of the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territory], and are primarily now from the West Bank. Some of these prisoners were never released by the Oslo process, while a great many of them are also political leaders of the Second Intifada [2000-05], folks like Marwan Barghouti.¹³ You have their worsening conditions with many deaths due to medical negligence.¹⁴ You had the prisoner Khader Adnan, who died on hunger strike in April.¹⁵ You have people from the Shalit prisoner exchange deal [in 2011] re-arrested—major figures like Nael Barghouti, who has now been in



Dana Morgenstein

prison for a total of 45 years.¹⁶

Yahya Sinwar [the leader of Hamas in Gaza] spent 23 years in an Israeli prison. He knows these people well, is loyal to the Palestinian prisoner issue, and understands the importance of political leadership in enabling a confident and mature struggle. If you go back and listen to his speeches, you hear him speaking very clearly about the fact that Israel was ignoring all gestures to try and bring about a prisoner-release deal with four Israeli prisoners [captured by Hamas in 2014].¹⁷ He said explicitly in December 2022 that if Israel continued to ignore gestures for a prisoner-exchange deal, the movement would seek other means to free its brothers. So, this is also an important warning that was ignored or not taken seriously.

Much has also been made of Hamas' ability to deceive many people—the Israeli military and political class, but also several Palestinian observers—making them believe that it had become some form of pacified Palestinian national movement concerned exclusively with governance and local power. I think for any astute observer of things, you couldn't have really believed that. But for some people it was

too easy to think this. Israel and the international community, in their arrogance, believed their strategy of siege, occasional “carrots,” and “mowed lawns” had tamed Hamas. Palestinians, frustrated with the inadequacy of their leaderships both in Gaza and the West Bank, also raised criticisms that Hamas and the PA in the West Bank had merely become self-serving elites.

This is not a fully accurate reflection even of what Fatah is doing in the West Bank, although there are aspects of it that are true. In Gaza, there are also elements of this analysis that are correct, with Hamas clearly interested in

establishing a monopoly on power and in economics on the turf they “hold.” But it was clear at the same time that Hamas was also doing something totally different. And in that regard, I think we really do need to look at the political trajectory of Gaza and its leaders and of Hamas, which brought it to this point.

Of course, on the other side of the coin, you also have the Israelis themselves and the international approach and thinking, which became repetitive, assumptive and cynical—that they could indefinitely manage the externalities generated by the situation but not attempt to solve the conflict. I call this the “Oslo Ostrich syndrome” where the international community backing the peace process politically and financially, essentially stuck its head in the ground, thinking that the “threat” of Palestinian national organizing and demands would disappear because the apparatuses of control established by Oslo were seen as robust and effective. Let's not forget, Israel and the U.S. were playing this divide-and-rule game with Hamas and the Palestinian movement overall before October 7 whereby they were allowing \$30 million in briefcases to come

in monthly via Tel Aviv and the Qataris, believing this was a way to buy-off Hamas by enabling it to pay its civil servants to run their public administration. Ever since 2006, Fatah refused to have their public administrators work for Hamas, while the international community would not have their money go to pay for Hamas civil administration. But everyone acknowledged that there was a need for civil administration in Gaza.

So, the U.S. and Israel made sure these monies came in, with these streams financing one institutional constellation in Gaza, while another was being funded in the West Bank under Fateh, dividing-and-ruling Palestinian politics through donor aid. Here Israel just became arrogant and assumptive about the situation they oversaw. Some people call it the “Fauda fallacy,” which comes from the Netflix series in which Israel is portrayed as all-knowing and powerful, capable of infinitely keeping Palestinians down through high tech means and special operations.¹⁸ And Hamas taught them a very big lesson in that regard.

What actually happened on October 7 still needs to be studied more closely and explained, because there’s a lot of it that we still need to understand. Its central aspects are known though and were effectively executed from a military perspective. “Operation Al Aqsa Flood” (*Toufan Al Aqsa*)—the term Hamas named its operation—was a major military offensive against the holistic regime and apparatus of control that contained, starved, and repressed Gaza militarily, politically, and in terms of civilian life. The operation was a strategic gambit in an effort to change the rules of the game, both in the long term as well as the short. They wanted prisoners as bargaining power, that’s for sure. They also wanted to destroy the Gaza Command—the military regime that oversees, controls and represses Gaza and which is located throughout the Gaza

envelope in military bases and settlements, with headquarters in Re’im—incidentally right next to where the NOVA rave was taking place. In this respect the hapless rave-goers—whose casualty figures composed more than half of the Israeli “civilian casualties”¹⁹—were unwittingly located in an area that was to absorb the tip of the Hamas attack spear. Israeli police at the rave even directed them to escape southward from their forest location, which actually sent them into the “lion’s mouth” of the attack.²⁰ Such details together with the chaotic atmosphere in which Israel attempted to regain control—in some instances, firing hundreds of hellfire missiles at the Gaza envelope without adequate intelligence as to what was being struck²¹—certainly creates enough evidence to suggest that the Israeli narrative of what Hamas did on October 7 also needs to be critically investigated and read with more nuance, particularly in light of Israel’s declared intention not to investigate the potential of friendly fire incidents.²²

The Hamas attack targeted the “Gaza Command,” which tends to be overlooked in the sensationalism generated by the gory details of atrocities that certainly were committed there, even though exactly what, how many, and by whom, needs still to be determined. The Gaza Command operates a comprehensive military and civilian infrastructure of domination over the Gaza Strip, ensuring enforcement of the siege and suppression of Palestinian national mobilization there. It is this regime that oversees the siege—what and who goes in and out. This regime even developed the means of counting the number of calories that were entering Gaza, ensuring enough got through so Gazans didn’t starve, but no more.²³ This Orwellian and Machiavellian regime of control was invisible to those who did not suffer beneath it, and partially explains the insistence of the Hamas military

leadership to research and target the Gaza Command's main bases and personnel, in some cases even taking sensitive computer hard drives back to Gaza, while also killing the equivalent of four Generals who oversaw it on October 7, out of a total of 318 service member and 59 police officers killed—including 62 police and army officers.²⁴ In total, 695 Israeli civilians were also killed, including 36 children, and 71 foreigners, bringing the total to 1,139.²⁵

The Gaza Command's military wing was responsible for drawing up the list of targets for each round of "mowing the lawn." It was responsible for recruiting and mobilizing collaborators, while also preventing movement in and out of the Strip, including for life saving medical needs. It literally blackmailed women with breast cancer who needed to travel to get chemotherapy, and would deny them this access if they did not collaborate.²⁶ So it was a brutal system of control that Gazans despised and which Hamas dared to confront.

By Hamas's own admission, smashing the Gaza Command was the central focus of the attack.²⁷ This included its military infrastructure and personnel, together with the civilian settlement envelope it was embedded within. In this regard, many of these kibbutzim are what are known as "Nahal settlements," which means that they were originally military outposts established by the ambitious Zionist youth movements that were supposed to transition into civilian settlements, but which would always have a military dimension to them, including in infrastructure and materiel.²⁸ They were built as "pioneering" forward military-civilian settlements on Israel's periphery to detect invasions while also ensuring a presence on Palestinian refugee land—refugees who happened to be in Gaza only a few kilometers away.²⁹ Kibbutz Nir Oz, for instance, was roughly 2 kilometers from the Gaza armistice line,

and had less than 400 residents before October 7. The kibbutz nonetheless controlled 20 square kilometers of land. On October 7, it suffered 25 confirmed casualties, and had about 80 of its residents taken back to Gaza—composing roughly a third of captives held there, and a quarter of the entire kibbutz.

For me, October 7 is at least three different things. You have the initial attack on the envelope. You have a second wave of Gazans coming out to a collapsed Gaza envelope. And then you have the third wave, which is the Israelis attempting to retake the envelope, first on an individual basis by people who are in those communities or who try to come save them, and then a bit more of an organized attempt to take it back within the next 24 or 48 hours, or whatever it takes.

So, October 7 shouldn't be seen as a singular event, but a series of events that unfolded over a wide geography, in multiple locales and at different times, with dimensions that were not entirely planned and had their own dynamics. We can prove this from different aspects of that day which came out. A lot of video was shot by Palestinians in the Gaza envelope once it collapsed, showing them celebrating being on ancestral land; showing them amazed and enraged at how the kibbutzim were living in leisure, showing them taking whatever they could in the way of supplies, etc., to haul off back to Gaza.

There were also, of course, Palestinians who voluntarily took weapons and joined the fighting, and who took Israeli captives back to Gaza. I assume that the majority of Israeli civilians taken to Gaza came from these actors—particularly those which Hamas would have known had less "value" in terms of exchangeability and were even problematic to manage—the elderly, children, and so on. A few of the kibbutzim that were very close to the Gaza border—like

Nir Oz, Nahal Oz, and Be'eri—accounted for most of the Israeli civilian captives, while most of the remainder came from the rave, which accounted for more than half of those killed. When Hamas was attempting to negotiate and engage in a prisoner exchange during the ceasefire [in late November], it couldn't even pull together the entire list of where the captives were and who had them, because the movement simply did not know or control everyone who was taken, while the vicious Israeli assault began almost immediately.

There's still a lot more to understand, but to answer your question "Could we have seen October 7 happening?"—no, I don't think we could have seen it, but the military development of Hamas has been very clear. We are talking of a military sophistication that apparently even includes the production of drones and even anti-aircraft weaponry, with all of this working in synergy with an underground infrastructure. So, we're talking about something that's been well thought out, traces of which were evident, but with plenty still kept secret.

In my article about Gaza's tunnels complexes, I speak about an incident where seven tunnel diggers died in the collapse of a tunnel shaft in 2016. At the time, Ismail Haniyeh, one of the heads of Hamas, went to the community and gave a speech there to commemorate the fact that these people died and to absorb some of the feeling that "our kids are dying for you to build these tunnels, but for what, and what's going on?" So, he says, "Listen, they didn't die in vain. We're building tunnels that will double the size of what the Vietnamese had, and these tunnels will take us to Jerusalem and liberation." When I read that, I began researching what the Vietnamese built in Củ Chi City in Vietnam. The fact that he was mentioning Vietnam was an indication that the movement was really studying guerrilla tactics systematically at this stage.

Hamas definitely starts as a movement of folks who are translating how to make bombs from university chemistry books and who graduate to a whole other level of being able to achieve different forms of military expertise, while also knowing the local terrain and popular needs well. In that regard, the October 7 attack combines a kind of thinking that has intimations of the Tet Offensive of the Vietnamese movement, where 30-odd regional capitals in South Vietnam were hit at the same time, taking the struggle from the countryside to the cities, and shaking the mythology of U.S. control to its core.

There are some amazing quotations that show the extent to which there is parity in how the Americans were so confident about their positioning in Vietnam, similar to the Israeli myopia which couldn't see October 7 coming. The oversight was deadly, as Hamas was apparently able to overrun the entire Gaza Command in three hours. The second parallel, of course, is the battle of Dien Bien Phu, which is the decisive French defeat in Vietnam, where 11,000 French soldiers were taken prisoner.

In the Israeli case, the taking of 240 different people from Israeli communities and military bases is also a very significant haul. It's a huge hit for the Israeli army both on a personnel and intelligence level. Hamas did its homework and Israel was assumptive and arrogant, believing it had gotten to the stage of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience at the same time. We also know that its political class was preoccupied with infighting, while its military class was more concerned with the developments in the West Bank, even moving three battalions there in the weeks before the attack was launched.³⁰

NP: *You've drawn the parallel with Vietnam and other anti-colonial struggles, so I want to ask you about longer-term strategy. What is Hamas's strategy? They must have anticipated*

the Israeli response and the devastating Israeli attack on Gaza. Even if October 7 had been less chaotic, there would probably have been the same response. Even if it had been virtually nonviolent, I suspect there would have been a very similar response from Israel. So where does that leave the struggle at this point?

The parallels with Vietnam are interesting, but fighting a foreign occupier is very different from fighting a long-established settler-colonial state. Because you can drive the French out, you can drive the Americans out—they have somewhere to go. I don't know about France in the 1950s, but obviously by 1968 there was very significant opposition to continued U.S. presence in Vietnam in the United States itself. But what is the longer-term strategy that Hamas envisages? Do they think the attack has had the effect of demoralizing the Israeli occupiers and that this will put them in a stronger position to... well, to do what next?

TH: I think there are many tactical and strategic things at play regarding how Hamas sees things both near and long term. I think the most important thing that they did here was that they shook the Israeli state to its core in terms of launching an attack that took and held territory, that killed significant numbers of people, that was not able to be predicted, and that also took significant numbers of prisoners back as bargaining chips into Gaza. In that regard, it was a significant tactical if not strategic victory, at least from the beginning, although it remains to be seen whether Hamas can fully cash out all the victorious potential of what they have accomplished so far. On some level, it might be argued that it was “too successful” because the unanticipated aspects of the attack—particularly the sacking of the Gaza envelope after its collapse and the accusation of atrocities—laid the basis to wage horrific Israeli assaults, which is described by Israeli political leaders as an attempt to impose a “Gaza Nakba.”³¹

Certainly there are questions around the costs that a “ Hamas victory ” entails.

But this aside for the moment, when it comes to trying to understand Hamas’s gameplan for the near and long term, we can say the following. The attack certainly put the Palestinian issue back on the map as a political issue, and not merely a humanitarian one, which it had been transformed into under Oslo. It also unleashes unknown dynamics and processes in every locale where the question of Palestine can be raised—from happenings across the OPT, to contradictions in Arab states, to Western states that support Israel and the war crimes it is committing in full view. We can assume that the unleashing of this dynamic is something Hamas believes it can cultivate and use to make further gains for the Palestine movement, though it is too early to know if this can translate into something tangible and long lasting, while acknowledging that it also certainly entailed a dangerous gamble.

With this said, the movement clearly has a developed infrastructure for waging a kind of urban guerilla war against an invading force, with supplies they argue can last months, and in a calculus that the movement argues has been well studied, with different responses prepared for different contingency scenarios. Unfortunately, we cannot know or independently verify how accurate or well-founded this logic is and these preparations are. Clearly, it’s not nothing and the movement has also shown considerable sophistication in what they have already achieved. With that said, is it enough to hold off an Israeli ground assault with Western state backing? We will see, though the costs are obviously enormous on the population of Gaza, with this dimension alone raising questions as to whether anything could or should have been done to prepare or protect Gazans from Israel’s wrath.

Hamas remains insistent that they maintain command and control and that the real battle is actually only about to come about—the battle on the ground between its fighters and those of other factions, pitted against the Israelis. Aerial bombardment eventually has its limits and if Israel is to be effective towards its declared goals it will need a sustained campaign on the ground which Hamas has home field advantage for, and has been preparing for quite some time. Israel will need to indefinitely hold territory in Gaza which is something they were already unable to do before, opting for the 2005 disengagement and imposition of siege. But this is not enough after October 7, though it is unclear if it will be effective in enforcing its rule or a transition to what it deems “acceptable rule” after the fighting—international, Arab or otherwise—if an “after” ever comes.

So far [by late November], Israel has killed what, 13,000 people in Gaza? But over 70 percent of these are women, children and the elderly. Even according to the best Israeli estimates, you only have around 3,000 killed who are fighting age men. But of course, we have no idea that these people are militants. Maybe some are, but certainly many would also be civilians. Even if we presume they are all militants, that’s less than ten percent of Hamas’s power, in an organized military sense. Perhaps even less, if we consider that Hamas oversees not only a paramilitary force—the Izzedin al Qassam Brigades, with special forces within this—but also organized *aljeish al-sha’bi*—a popular army, that also prepared military and civilian supplies for the eventuality of an Israeli invasion. In this regard, I believe Hamas retains the large majority of its personnel, as well as enough of its infrastructure, buried up to 50m beneath Gaza’s soils, while also having plenty of weapons. In fact, we know that they have many weapons that have not yet surfaced—

particularly the anti-tank Kornet rockets that are much more effective against tanks than the RPGs which are already dogging the Israeli advance. Hamas also continues to demonstrate determination, will, and morale, to say nothing of their control of homefield advantage. They also have the advantage of the unknown, which is quite important, I would say.

On the other hand, we have a murderous, revenge-driven Israeli assault taking place, genocidal in its intentions and proportions. So far, it is remote from achieving its declared objective of returning captives and destroying Hamas. We don’t see Hamas losing command and control. We don’t see significant senior leaders that are taken out, though there appear to be many field commanders who have been killed. But the movement maintains an ability to conduct operations on the ground whether this be large rocket barrages or special ambushes. I also don’t fully trust Israeli casualty figures right now, but there is talk about 1,600 soldiers who are injured with 70 killed in the actual ground invasion. Such figures are of course very small compared to those on the Palestinian side, but the real question is to what extent can Israel maintain its operation over time, especially if casualty figures increase and international pressure builds. Clearly Israel is recalibrating its own “casualty tolerance” under the circumstances. But the real question will emerge around the extent to which demonstrable achievements can be made toward the declared military objectives Israel set out for itself, as well as the longer-term political horizon of the Israeli campaign—and at what expense.

Let’s not forget that Israel was going through significant historical divisions before October 7, which included significant distrust in leadership. Now this very leadership, which also could not predict October 7—and which many Israelis accuse of abandoning them on October 7—this

leadership is attempting to lead a major military campaign in Gaza on territory it has not been in for 18 years, and against a movement that has already outsmarted it once. So, if I was an Israeli reservist, I would certainly be worried, especially in the context where the aerial assault is so vicious and indiscriminate and poses a threat to Israeli captives themselves. So, the political and social grounding of the Israeli assault is less firm in that regard. Hamas is certainly betting on these dynamics taking shape.

A lot will be determined on the “battlefield” of the Gaza strip that has already largely been turned into rubble and displaced four out of every five Gazans. On one level, if Hamas survives, it wins. An optimistic scenario could theoretically see greater gains if the dynamics unleashed by the attack mature, although it is impossible to overlook the enormous costs Israel is exacting as well. In that sense, a brutal calculus is indeed at play.

On the other hand, Israel has set itself a very high task to complete. I don’t want to say it’s impossible, because it has incredible amounts of power. On the other hand, it’s very difficult for Israel to achieve, while it’s also important to acknowledge that the goal of “eradicating Hamas” is hazy and can mean many things. Killing the leadership? Killing the militants? Killing anyone who voted or expressed sympathy for Hamas? Killing the idea of Hamas? This vagueness provides room for maneuver for the Israeli leadership, but also creates an indefinite open-ended battle—one that would seem to perversely serve a political and military class that is intent on getting its revenge, getting the “egg off its face,” and that seeks to improve individual positioning through performance on the battlefield, to improve an anticipated “post-war” investigation of what happened on October 7. With this said, the fact that Israel is already making deals around recovering the civilian cap-

tives is a bit of a deviation from the initial declared goal: Israel is making a deal with an actor it said it was going to destroy. We’ll see where those dynamics end up.

I think the larger point here is, on the one hand there is the potential to at least deny Israel’s objectives. Remember, Israel was already forced out of the Gaza strip in 2005 because it found it impossible to control from within. Hamas is certainly banking on this dynamic. It is also waging a significant psychological campaign against Israeli society, releasing videos that aim to increase distrust in the leadership and in the military goals of the campaign overall. These are relatively sophisticated psychological operations, which in the context of the breakdown of trust and the “surprise” potential of Hamas, certainly engender dynamics that could split Israeli society and politicians between camps which prioritize different objectives of “captives” versus “destroy Hamas.” This already appears to be happening and may strengthen in light of the first prisoner-exchange deal.

Bear in mind that the Gaza envelope was not something that was marginalized in terms of the amount of money that was being poured into it for military infrastructure or security or whatnot. It was routinely turned into a military frontier where rockets were exchanged and invasions were taking place for the last 20–25 years. And the wall around Gaza was also the third incarnation of a barrier there since 1994. Israel was triumphant regarding the sophistication and impenetrability of its latest edifice completed in 2021, which cost \$1.3 billion and was claimed to be the highest scientific achievement.³² But in minutes it fell, with a Hamas tactical plan that enabled it to be on the doorstep of these military camps and settlements very fast after taking out the “eyes” and “ears” of the Gaza envelope with drones and snipers. That is extremely worrying from a military perspective and even

more so if you were an Israeli in a settlement who believed the state could ensure security by detecting and deterring attacks.

Now that Gaza has been largely turned into rubble, the terrain has become even more difficult tactically for Israel to control and maneuver in. There has also been talk for years that the army is not well trained for large-scale urban combat operations and that its reserves are unprepared.

When we speak about Hamas' attempt to achieve certain tactical and strategic goals, certainly the prisoner issue is a very important one for them. It is seen as a topic that is also unifying as it encompasses leaders from all factions, while almost all Palestinian families have a direct experience with the Israeli prison system. Prisoners also are associated with the politics and organizing that Israel wants off the streets so to speak. So, releasing that dynamic from a Hamas perspective is also important as it strengthens the "sea" within which its politics can operate and build momentum. This, in a broader context of the anemia generated by the post-Oslo order, with the national movement and its causes transposed into circumscribed institutions like the PA, NGOs, and UN humanitarian agencies, which do nothing to address larger historical injustices or prevent Israeli colonialism. So, Hamas is attempting to ignite (or reignite) a new dynamism, vim and impetus to Palestinian organizing.

Of course, it's a major gamble. A Fatah leader critiqued Hamas claiming it "took on America and the Israelis with only 15 Kalashnikovs." Certainly, they have more than 15 Kalashnikovs, but they also clearly do not have significant means to deter the Israeli aerial superiority which is waging such unprecedented and genocidal destruction on Gaza. It is horrific and frightful to witness, especially when we combine this with the known history of Zionist ethnic cleansing, and the declared annihilationist

rhetoric that is coming out of the entirety of the Israeli military and political establishment, not to mention significant aspects of its population. Without being on the ground in Gaza it is difficult to tell to what extent people are trustful, engaged and prepared for managing and resisting what has been unleashed. In the absence of this

The Gaza Strip became the most explosive concentration of all the contradictions because it is an untenable territory.

information, it can only be speculated, as all actors attempt to declare and demonstrate their advantage.

Hamas in any case, has been very clear about its objectives from the start, declaring its desire to end the occupation, the siege, and achieve national liberation. In a speech delivered on October 7, Hamas head Ismail Haniyeh declared *Kaffa lal'arbadab*—"Enough of thuggery." His words resonated with every Palestinian who witnesses the actions of the Israeli state toward Palestinians, and the impunity it enjoys. There was no paucity of things he could refer to: attempts to change the status quo in Al Aqsa, the Israeli settlement drive, the unhinged nature of the settlers, the fact that there's no political process, that Gazans were gunned down in their thousands when they were trying to demonstrate peacefully, the ongoing siege, and the failure of the internationals to lift a finger to any of this situation. In this sense, Hamas demonstrated clarity, logic, agency and determination in its actions, and explicitly called on others in Palestine and beyond to join the struggle. It's true

that some commentators have accused it of engaging in “magical thinking,”³³ miscalculation and overstepping its potential. There are certainly elements of its discourse and practice that can be read as such. But overall, the jury remains out as to what all this will ultimately bring about, though everyone can agree that the stakes are high on all sides, and that Gazans have already paid a severe cost, which in historical terms is in the realm of what happened in 1948, at least in terms of casualties.

Of course, the fear is that without effective mobilization of other frontiers, it will be difficult to reap longer-term gains from the sacrifices now being made in Gaza. The movement before October 7 was in an unenviable position of having its cause whittled away piecemeal by internal divisions and the Oslo straightjacket—especially when seen in light of Arab normalization deals with Israel, the fact that nobody was really holding Israel to account, etc. Hamas’s attack—which was widely supported by Palestinians—together with the Israeli assault, has plunged Gaza society and the movement overall into circumstances it was not prepared for, although this does not necessarily mean it can’t adapt. “Rising to the occasion” is not beyond the pale, although the latent institutional bent of international institutions and Western states and media certainly advantages Israel and the Western agenda/narrative in this game. This frontier nonetheless appears to be key to stopping the Israeli war machine though there is still a lot of terrain that needs to be covered to get to that point.

With all this said, and with the recognition that October 7 was a strategic gambit whose end is unknown, and whose costs have been extraordinarily high, Palestinians support the resistance—out of necessity or conviction—because they have lost all hope in the Oslo track, the Palestinian Authority model or international institutions, and

they are also on the brink of a possible coming transfer. In this regard, many are willing to endure the sacrifice, though of course there will be basic material and human limits. The real question will be whether Gazan society can survive what Israel is doing, staving off hunger, thirst, disease and bombs. The answer is not clear at all.

In this sense, developments have ignited a new sense of urgency and mobilization amongst Palestinians and their allies everywhere, while instigating a process of people trying to problem solve how they’re going to take October 7 into their locality one way or another, and to bring up all the questions that it raises in terms of the siege, the occupation, Gaza, refugees, the Gaza Nakba, the barbarity of the Israeli regime and the need for a political horizon for the Palestine question based on justice and an end to colonialism.

After the images that we’re seeing and how horrific they are, I don’t see it as realistic that Gaza can be put under international control or even be retained under Israeli control. These ideas seem fantastical to me, at least at this stage. I also don’t see how Israel can avoid a drastic increase in pariah-ization.

But this whole dynamic is dependent upon building effective pressure from other frontiers as well as from the fight on the ground in Gaza. In that regard, we’ve seen very impressive as well as shocking things. Impressive in terms of seeing a million people on the streets of London; shocking in terms of the speed with which some of the European governments circled wagons and became Israel’s cheerleaders and weapons providers. Indeed, Gaza shockingly has revealed how the world’s “liberal democracies” unflinchingly supported a far-right Judeo-supremacist and fascistic government to advance toward genocidal ends.

In this regard, there are bigger humanist and moral questions that are coming out of

what's happening in Gaza that all political actors, including those on the Left, can't ignore. I mean, even somebody like Bernie Sanders today, takes a horrible stance and can't even support a ceasefire, despite being considered the "radical Left" of the Democratic party.³⁴ So, unfortunately, the fate of Gaza has a lot to do with the struggles that will happen outside, and in the West in particular. It will also be fought within Jewish communities, between governments and their peoples, and amongst the Palestinian solidarity movement regarding what can be built or not. These struggles are ongoing and although we see some important things taking place there, it's still too early to see how or where they will lead.

At the same time, we have to realize that the political dynamics that are being unleashed right now are so horrifying and shocking, and portend such evil that there is no time to waste. Thousands have already been killed while tens of thousands more are in danger from dying because of the prevention of fuel, water, electricity and medicine. Israel is also declaring that it seeks a transformation in Gaza equivalent to what the Japanese and Germans went through after WWII.³⁵ On top of this are perverse interests pushing these dynamics forward, including ideological motivations, historical and careerist "legacy" opportunities for ethnic cleansing, political jockeying for after the "war," the desire for revenge, the desire to solve the problem of '48 more definitively, which Gaza very much represents.

There's even a perverse military-industrial incentive, because Israel as a major international arms supplier was discredited on October 7. If you had bought a set of sensors, or remote-controlled machine guns, or a "smart fence" from Israel before October 7, Hamas has just shown everybody how these can be overcome. That's a big hit to their military-industrial doctrine

and advertising "sex appeal."

Israel was also going to feature prominently in Western designs to reconfigure the region—containing Iran, while securing trade and fuel for East-West passage. Israel has always been the West's most secure ally, but it became more important in the context of the Arab uprisings. And the West backed Israel's interpretation of the Oslo process and gave it the excuse of security for it to set up this apartheid regime. So, America and the West have doubled down on their Israeli regional bet. These are a set of important geostrategic factors that are reinforcing the horrors that are taking place now.

So, I'm scared for the future right now. I see terrible suffering in Gaza and I feel it too, because these are places that I know and where I've been, and everyone I know from my days in Gaza has lost multiple people. All the places I used to work were demolished. I mean, it's shocking to see the images of what they've done there. And that is only this stage of the war.

On the other hand, when you listen to the Arabic press and you have your finger on the pulse of things, you see an incredible mobilization of people coming together who are saying, "we're not leaving north Gaza. We're not going to leave our patients. We're not going to leave anything. We don't care. We don't have anything else to lose." Israel and the West basically pushed it to this situation in many senses. Of course, many people understandably will do what they can to protect themselves and go to "safe zones" or whatnot. But I assume that Hamas is not, by any means, entirely militarily defeated and is going to engage in a tactic of extended urban warfare that will play the clock, while also using special operations to demoralize Israeli society and its army and weaken them from within.

Of course, this has a huge cost, but over time I think military dynamics will be

inconclusive for the Israelis. With that said, Palestinians remain in a very vulnerable position wherever they are, whether it's the West Bank or Gaza, or even '48 citizens. Regarding the latter, Israel arrested all of their political leaders for simply attempting to hold a demonstration that called for a ceasefire. Sami Abu Shehadeh, a Knesset member who headed one of the Arab lists in parliament, said at the time that "If I had been calling for ethnic cleansing, I would have been eligible to be a minister. But if I call for peace and a ceasefire, I'm arrested." I don't think the Western world has been aware of what la-la land Israel has been in recently.

NP: *The Palestinian resistance isn't going anywhere and you've outlined some of the tactical advantages it may have in the current situation. On the other hand, you've also pointed out this Israeli mindset, which is causing such incredible devastation. But at some point, the military phase of this current situation will come to an end and then the question is, what's the path forward? One of the arguments that the left has often made is that the resolution of the conflict will depend not just on what happens within the confines of Israel/Palestine, but on the whole regional balance of power. So, maybe you could say a little bit more about that.*

TH: There are certainly regionally important things happening that include military dynamics, too. What's happening on the northern border [with Lebanon] is not insignificant. I mean, you have significant losses up there. Israel has already withdrawn 80,000 people from the border region. It has mobilized 100,000 reserves as well, if they need them for a war. Hezbollah has taken out a lot of the eyes and ears of the Israelis on the northern border. So, it's certainly a worrying menace for the Israelis, not least, because Hezbollah is seen as significantly stronger than Hamas, and it

could do far graver damage in an October 7-type scenario. This is deeply worrying for Israel and the communities who live up there.

The military dynamic that has existed there is also altering significantly. Before October 7, the slightest shot across the border would have resulted in potential war. But now we have Hezbollah actually pestering Israeli positions and killing personnel on the northern border and Israel is not able to do too much about it, fearful that retaliation could lead to open war. Of course, it can and does retaliate—100 Lebanese and Palestinians have already been killed in Lebanon—and Israel may still escalate, but everyone is also aware that this would get very ugly, very quickly for both sides, and the West may ask Israel to back out of this "game of chicken," lest it too be dragged into another Middle East war.

The Yemen issue is also not insignificant. The other day there was the commandeering of a boat that passed through Bab el-Mandeb. Today a drone hit another Israeli-owned ship. This is a strategic choke point for global capitalism and trade, and if Israel and the West don't have safe passage through it, it's a major problem for them.

The Jordanian regime and its stability are also significantly threatened by developments as it sees a "successful" Israeli campaign in Gaza as essentially green-lighting an Israeli push to do the same in the West Bank, displacing this population across the Jordan river. It may not be able to retain its formal relations with Israel within this context, nor stop the mass mobilization of Palestinians and Jordanians organizing there now to help their brethren on the other side of the border.

So, I can see a situation emerge on multiple fronts where a war of attrition of different orders arises in Gaza, on the northern border with Lebanon, in Yemen, and possibly even Jordan, with these

dynamics individually and collectively frustrating Israel, while creating arenas in which the “Israel problem” begins to shake up Western capitalist alliances, as well as possibly their capitals as well due to strengthening mobilizations for Palestinians from Western citizens and movements.

You talk about the military situation eventually somehow being resolved, but the key question is to whose advantage, particularly with the question of the prisoners being at the center of it. If Hamas by the end of this still exists as an organization and holds on to 100 or 150 different prisoners, they will have the means to clear the Palestinian prisoner population held in Israeli jails while positioning the siege of Gaza, if not the entire Palestine question, at the center of the international community’s agenda in a way that is unavoidable. This would inevitably also entail an international reassessment of Israel as an apartheid state and even a possible fragmenting of Israel itself from within.

Let’s not forget that before October 7, 30 percent of the Israeli population was actively looking to emigrate. Out migration was a serious potential before October 7 and it may become more significant if things end badly for Israel, especially if things go regional. A significant percentage of the Israeli population—don’t quote me, but I think it’s at least 40 percent—have other passports, which means they actually do have options to go elsewhere. It’s not what Golda Meir said where “we have nowhere else to go.” It’s actually, “you came from Milwaukee, Golda Meir, and you can go back to Milwaukee.” I’m not advocating this as a comprehensive solution to the conflict, which requires a larger, more precise analysis that incorporates legal principles. I’m saying this is a realistic scenario that we could see emerge. Israel has been an ideological project, but it has also often operated as an additional citizenship option

for many Jews, who are free riding on seven decades of Palestinian disenfranchisement and ethnic cleansing, thanks to support from Western states and, ultimately, their taxpayers. It also has been a way for Western states to ignore addressing their own antisemitic and nationalist/fascistic pasts.

The United States also recently placed Israel on its visa waiver program, meaning we might see Israelis seeking ways to escape the madness they are engulfed by, relocating themselves in the U.S. or other Western states. For a long time, this has been a dynamic within Israeli leftist circles. After October 7, the composition and character of this out-migration might change to include non-ideological individuals who do not want to carry the weight of citizenship and service in an apartheid state, living under constant threat of war, where this state obsessively preoccupies itself with Jewish identity politics, colonialism, militarism, and repression, while locked in intracommunal infighting. The cost of being Israeli is certainly rising, while its returns are becoming more questionable.

In any case, it’s too early to say how the major social and political rifts in Israel will be affected by this, as the impact of October 7 on Israeli society is perhaps most prominently felt around the question of popular trust in the government. Moreover, the traumatic nature of October 7 will also affect it for generations to come, as areas like the Western Negev will hardly be seen as a viable or safe place to reside. In this respect, October 7 killed the Israeli national project to “Judaize the Negev,” at least for the time being and likely for a long time to come. But then again, ethnic cleansing is actually on the table, and in principle Israel has enormous powers and drivers to attempt it, so in this regard, nothing should be taken for granted. This dynamic partially accounts for the genocidal dimensions of Israel’s actions today—because it prefers

a “us or them” equation, as the former demographic and geographic spread was inconclusive toward Zionist ends. That’s what makes things so scary now, and what people need to recognize and mobilize around.

At the same time, October 7 has opened up so many questions and opportunities to expose, talk, and organize a whole new Palestine movement, which can and should also play a role in building

To have significant numbers of U.S. Jews rejecting [the Israeli government’s] logic tout court, and coming out targeting transportation hubs and things like that, is enormously important.

new Left movements. The politics, determination and organizing that is required to stop the Israeli war machine entails a much more radical set of politics, tactics and strategies than those which have been attempted up to now. There are signs of this emerging in efforts that target ports or arms manufacturers linked with Israel, or facilities which transport things to feed this war machine. In this regard, it is also important to emphasize that the forces willing to struggle look different in each country and are on different levels in their preparation, awareness, coalition building, and tactical and strategic options, so this dynamic is not linear or even.

A key area of struggle will thus be to attempt to raise this level of mobilization and its maturation and to find ways for the working classes in particular to understand, identify and mobilize towards these ends,

or to at least not be a part of making the situation worse. That’s going to be key.

There are other parts of this struggle as well. The mobilization that we’ve seen coming from Jewish communities has been so important—the fact that you have Jews coming out saying “not in my name” after an attack of this nature, while Israel cynically justifies its actions based on an attempted Nazification of the Palestinian question. To have significant numbers of Jews rejecting this logic *tout court*, and coming out targeting transportation hubs and things like that, is enormously important.

We are quickly feeling that every institution and every locality will have some variant of this struggle played out. Folks need to take inspiration from the incredible bravery, ingenuity, and humanity of Gazans, while also not over-romanticizing them, and rejecting their exceptionalization.

On the other hand, something horrific has been exposed by what’s happening, which has to do with the incredible level of suffering, humiliation and injustice that the world has tolerated in Gaza and Palestine at large for seven decades and more. Gaza was turned into an open-air prison, and the world ignored it, while Israelis and many internationals normalized this, feeling so comfortable or willingly ignorant about the situation that they organized large psychedelic raves right next door and partied till the sun came up. Someone has to account for these huge discrepancies and the enormous callousness that led to generations of humiliation and oppression, sponsored by the West, hidden behind lies that Israel was a form of protection against anti-Semitism or whatnot, when in truth it was building through force of arms a fascist-leaning, Jewish-supremacist, settler-colonial fantasy in a country that already had a major population in it.

While Israel has already been successful in establishing a state, the current battle is

about challenging the settler-colonial and Jewish-supremacist identity of this state, and its particular Gaza corollary. Gaza now becomes an opportunity to talk about all these things and to organize accordingly. It's not like we're going to look for a solution to Gaza after this. That's part of the problem. The question is what's the solution to Palestine? What's the solution to Israel? If the debate is about what we are going to do about Gaza, it's over, we've lost. Instead, the debate needs to ask: What is this entity called Israel that receives three or four billion dollars in U.S. aid every year, and then the minute an attack happens they get 10 billion dollars? What explains these dynamics? Why does this country merit so much attention and resources from Western governments when human rights groups identify it as practicing apartheid and committing mass war crimes? How is it that an international system might fail to prevent an obvious and declared intent to commit ethnic cleansing just because Israel's key allies veto resolutions simply calling for ceasefire? The question of Palestine's entanglement with historical and contemporary imperial and capitalist dynamics, together with the horrors of nationalism and fascism from the last century, necessitate that a resolution cannot come without reopening these questions.

NOTES

1. On November 30, 2023, *The New York Times* published a report with the headline "Israel Knew Hamas's Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago." According to the article, "Israeli officials obtained Hamas's battle plan for the Oct. 7 terrorist attack more than a year before it happened," but they did not take the plan seriously. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/30/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-attack-intelligence.html>
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The Political Context of the Crisis in Gaza

An Interview with Joel Beinin

Joel Beinin is the Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History and Professor of Middle East History, Emeritus at Stanford University, where he taught from 1983 to 2019. His research and teaching have focused on the history and political economy of modern Egypt, Israel/Palestine, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He has lived for extended periods in Israel/Palestine and Egypt, including two years as Director of Middle East Studies at the American University in Cairo. In 2002 he served as president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America. He was interviewed on Zoom by *New Politics* editorial board member Stephen R. Shalom on November 14, 2023.

New Politics (NP): *Is there a Palestinian left? What is its significance and what positions does it take?*

Joel Beinin (JB): The core problem of politics among the Palestinian people is that they are dispersed.

One group is Palestinians who are citizens of Israel—second class citizens to be sure. But they have the right to vote and to organize politically. They are the descendants of those who were not sent into exile or did not flee in fear during the 1948 war, what the Palestinians called the Nakba, or catastrophe.

Palestinians of East Jerusalem, which Israeli annexed in 1980, are mainly Israeli

residents. They can vote in local, but not national elections. Their residency, their property rights, and their right to build housing, etc. are always under threat. A small number of them are Israeli citizens.

There are Palestinians who live in the West Bank under military occupation, and they have a very different set of political rights. They don't vote for anything, or at least not on a regular basis. Most of them are nominally ruled by the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority, which is an authoritarian regime. Israel's military government has the ultimate say over everything that happens to Palestinians in the West Bank.

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip also haven't voted for anything since a plurality of them voted for Hamas in 2006 along with the West Bankers. Hamas also runs an authoritarian regime which doesn't tolerate free political discussion, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and so on. Gaza is also under Israeli occupation, since Israel controls much of what goes on there—entry, exit, the population register, etc.—despite having withdrawn its settlements and armed forces in 2005.

Then there are the Palestinians in various diasporic locations. The largest number are in Jordan, which is an absolute monarchy and has a nominal democratic apparatus, but with power remaining in the hands of the royal court. Another large group are in Lebanon, which has

become a dysfunctional state despite having many aspects of democratic process. There are also Palestinian communities in the United States, Western European countries, Australia, and so on, where up until October 7, anyway, they could more-or-less freely engage in democratic political processes. There's always of course been anti-Palestinian sentiment and Islamophobia. But October 7 escalated that many fold and there has been substantial repression against all manner of Palestinian political action and political expression, especially on various campuses.

In these circumstances, there couldn't possibly be a unified Palestinian left of any sort, one political party that would claim adherence and loyalty from all those various sectors of the Palestinian people.

The easiest sector to understand is the Palestinian citizens of Israel. They number 1.9 million, almost 21 percent of all Israeli citizens. They are divided today into four political parties, only three of which now have representation in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. The biggest is the Islamist party which has 5 Knesset seats, and which is in no sense left at all. It's socially conservative, vocally anti-LGBTQ, anti-women's rights, antifeminist. They are popular because they represent the wave of Islamism that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s throughout the Arab and Muslim world.

The next most important force among the Arab community is Hadash/al-Jabha, or the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality. This is a coalition whose core is the Communist Party of Israel, which is a Jewish-Arab party, but overwhelmingly Arab. Nonetheless, they always make sure that one of the members of Hadash who will be elected to the Knesset is Jewish. (Israel's electoral system is single constituency, proportional representation by party. If 10 percent of the votes go to your party, then you get 12 out of the 120 Knesset

seats. Therefore, they know roughly how many seats they're going to get.) In the current Knesset they have five seats, four occupied by Palestinian Arabs, and they are in a coalition with what we could call a centrist nationalist party (Ta'al) whose popularity came about because its leader, Ahmad Tibi, enjoyed a close relationship with Yasser Arafat. They are a kind of pro-Fatah force in Israel, except that they were never engaged in any kind of armed struggle against the occupation.

Then there is a party which is not represented in the Knesset, Balad/Tajammu', the National Democratic Alliance. I would call them a left leaning nationalist party whose principal slogan is that Israel should be a state of its citizens. That slogan is deeply threatening to Zionist sensibilities, which is to say to all the political parties in Israel that are dominated by Jews. The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality would also support that slogan as the way to achieve equal rights for Jewish and Arab citizens of the state of Israel alongside a Palestinian state.

Of those four parties, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality is the only one that openly identifies itself as left. Its roots are in the Communist Party of Palestine, which was established in 1923 (if you want to know what I think about them, you could read my July 28, 2023 article in +972 Magazine).

In the West Bank, there is the remnant of the historic Palestine Communist Party, the Mubadara, or Palestinian National Initiative, which has two seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (out of 132) and is led by Mustafa Barghouti, who is in my estimation the most honest, the most perceptive, and the most real in every sense of the word Palestinian political leader. I would vote for him if I were a resident of the West Bank. He has only limited popularity because he doesn't work on the

Bisan Owda



*"It's Bisan from Gaza, and diseases are spreading at these schools."
"The schools in Rafah contain 300,000 displaced people."*

basis of families and clans and those kinds of traditional alliances. Rather, he's built his public position out of work with grassroots NGOs. He himself is a physician and for many years he has led the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, which provides the largest network of primary care services in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

NP: *He's been on CNN and other media quite a bit now.*

JB: His English is perfect. He knows how to speak to a Western audience. He did a nine-month nonprofit management certificate program at Stanford. When people ask him about a two-state solution—because everybody asks that irrelevant question—he says, world opinion supports two states, Israel doesn't support two states. Why should I give that up? Meaning that he understands that there is no two-state process happening, but what do the Palestinian people gain by saying, no, we don't want our own state? He would be perfectly happy living on the basis of equality with Jews.

If we move to the Gaza Strip, there was

historically a very strong left. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which called itself a Marxist-Leninist organization, was strong there. It was decimated by Ariel Sharon in his capacity as commander of the Southern Front in the early 1970s. There are remnants of it still there. Some of them engage in armed resistance and other kinds of political struggle. But they're a shadow of their former selves. There was also a Communist Party presence in the Gaza Strip, but I haven't heard anything from them in decades.

Let's go to the United States where we have a very complex situation. There is a presence of a Palestinian-American left and their allies in Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). They dominated DSA's approach to Israel-Palestine until, amidst much rancor in 2022, the national leadership disbanded and then rechartered the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Working Group, while maintaining a ban on their members taking leadership in other DSA bodies. The bad feelings from that episode remain. On the *positive* side of that internal struggle, they shepherded

DSA's transition from a pro-Zionist, classically social democratic approach to Israel-Palestine—which came from its founding leaders and original social base—to a position of Palestine solidarity. DSA supports the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. Its members in Congress, most prominently Rashida Tlaib, who deserves to be promoted to sainthood for what she's been going through, are absolutely,

The U.S.-Israeli relationship is built on joint intelligence, joint production of spyware and surveillance equipment, and the close interweaving of Israeli high-tech with Silicon Valley.

unequivocally outspoken on Palestinian rights. Cori Bush, a DSA member, is the originator of the House resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. In this sense, there is a Palestinian-American left, which has support from broader elements of the still very small, not very powerful, American left. Jewish Voice for Peace, generally speaking, supports that trend. If Not Now has become increasingly assertive and outspoken in support of Palestinian rights. Others—neither Jews nor Palestinians, just people who are interested in international affairs and pay attention—tend to also support that perspective. All of this is positive.

The *downside* is that left politics in the United States today is dominated by identity politics. We have forgotten—many of us, but not all of us, hopefully—the values and ideals that used to be represented by a phrase like internationalist solidarity. Consider the debate over the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Rashida Tlaib was censured in Congress for defending the use of that slogan. On one level it's very difficult to be critical of that slogan. It doesn't say anything that anyone who thinks of themselves as on the left could oppose. Moreover, the platform of Likud (Israel's ruling right-wing party) says the same thing: “between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.” You can't say that “from the river to the sea” is antisemitic unless you're also willing to say, in the same breath “from the river to the sea” when Jews say it is anti-Palestinian racism.

That captures the problem. What is there going to be from the river to the sea, after Palestine is free? An organization that thought of itself as left in the traditional sense would propose something. Maybe they wouldn't have a detailed constitutional arrangement in mind, but something that could form the basis of a joint Jewish-Arab struggle for that liberated land to defeat the current settler-colonial regime in Israel with its quasi-fascist, Messianist, religious right-wingers in power, and to establish a regime—one, two, one-and-a-half states, or a confederation is secondary—that will ensure equal civil and political rights for all, and national rights for both peoples in its place.

I would counterpose to that slogan an organization in Israel which is comprised of both Palestinian and Jewish citizens; Standing Together is the English name. They have a website. Its leaders are Sally Abed who is Palestinian and Alon-Lee Green who is Jewish. They don't talk about how many states there should be in the future and what the constitutional arrangements might be. They say: Whatever there will be between the river and the sea, the principle is that all individuals have equal civil and political rights, and both peoples have equal rights to the land. That's good enough for me. I don't want to put myself down as an

unequivocal supporter, but that seems to me the minimal level of specificity and the right principles if you want to call yourself left.

NP: *I'd like to ask the same question now about Israel. Is there an Israeli left and what is it? How would you describe its components?*

JB: In Israel, left means being willing—in one form or another—to accommodate or conciliate with Palestinians. The traditional, historic international understanding of left isn't the relevant, definitional factor. Historically, elements of the labor Zionist movement were the most prominent forces in Israeli society that were prepared for some kind of compromise with Palestinians.

Let's take several steps back. What was historically known as the Israeli left—commonly considered to be the left wing of the labor Zionist movement and the various NGOs that it generated that imbibed a lot of its values—was decimated with the outbreak on the Second Intifada. That's because the vast majority of Israeli Jews, like the vast majority of the Western public, accepted the factually inaccurate Israeli narrative that Palestinians were offered everything at Camp David in 2000 and Yasser Arafat turned it down and in response to the failure of the 2000 Camp David summit, the Palestinians launched the Second Intifada with all of the suicide bombings. According to that narrative this proves that there's no one to talk to: anyone who talks about two states or any other kind of a conciliatory resolution of the conflict is just dreaming.

That's where things were until October 7. It was not possible for a Zionist party to even participate credibly in an Israeli election if they called for the establishment of a Palestinian state or for reopening political negotiation with the Palestinian Authority or the PLO. The Israeli Jewish left that survived in that context consists, first of

all of Jews who support and vote for the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality.

Second, there are Jews, like the former speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, who is, along with the Palestinian co-founder, Faisal Azaiza, a leader of a new political party called "All Its Citizens." That is its slogan: Israel should be a state of all its citizens, the same as the Arab party, the National Democratic Alliance. Burg wouldn't be considered a leftist if socialism were the criterion or anything like that. But in Israeli terms, he is very, very far left because that's a slogan that only primarily Arab parties have previously raised and he's trying to build a joint Jewish-Arab party on that basis.

What you have then in terms of political parties are historically the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality and this new effort to create a party that calls for Israel to be a state of all its citizens. There is also Standing Together and a plethora of NGOs like B'Tselem, a human rights NGO which has declared that Israel is an apartheid regime, and many, many others that work for various aspects of Palestinian rights, a shared Palestinian-Jewish society, or labor rights or women's rights or some combinations of those. They all have been catastrophically weakened by the Hamas attack of October 7.

I watched a webinar with the very intrepid journalist for *Haaretz*, Amira Haas, who lives in Ramallah and previously lived for several years in the Gaza Strip, and Noam Shuster-Eliassi, who grew up in the one intentional Arab-Jewish community in Israel, Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam/Oasis of Peace, so she is bilingual. She's a stand-up comic, but she's very much identified with the left, as is Amira Haas. They both were nearly crying and said, "We're afraid to go out of the house. We don't know what we can do now." Once the heavy fighting is over, that may change, there might be a little bit more space than there has been

since October 7. (Update: This has changed to some extent and there have been anti-war demonstrations.) But the short-term outlook for any kind of Jewish left is not very good.

NP: *And the political representation of any of these left forces that you mentioned is zero?*

JB: There's the one Jewish Knesset member for the Democrat Front for Peace and Equality, Ofer Cassif, who was suspended from the Knesset and had his pay docked for two weeks for criticizing Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip. The furthest left-wing Zionist Party, Meretz, which historically came into existence around support for two states and a social democratic economic and social program, didn't get enough votes in the December 2022 elections to get into the Knesset.

The Labor Party—the historic center-left social democratic party that led the establishment of the state of Israel, and which was hegemonic both in Zionist politics and in Israeli politics from the 1930s until 1977—has four Knesset seats, which is the minimum that you can get. If you don't get four seats worth of votes, you don't get into the Knesset. They are of almost no consequence whatsoever. That's it for political parties of what's historically called the non-Zionist and Zionist left.

NP: *Let me shift to Hamas. They were founded in 1988 as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood with a very reactionary founding charter. Then they had a new document in 2017 and made various statements in recent years suggesting that perhaps there was a basis for a non-maximalist settlement with Israel. Did October 7 suggest that that's totally changed? What do you think they were hoping to accomplish?*

JB: First, let's go back a little bit further. Hamas grew out of the Gaza Strip branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest and most well-established Sunni Islamist

organization founded in 1928 in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood was present in Palestine before 1948 and in the Gaza Strip after 1948 because Egypt administered the Gaza Strip from 1949 until 1967. In 1973, they formed *al-Mujamma' al-Islami*, the Islamic Center. In 1979, the Israeli occupation authorities that ruled the Gaza Strip after the 1967 War recognized them and allowed them to set up the Islamic University of Gaza and an array of social and cultural institutions. Why did Israel do that? Because they thought, these are Muslim social activists. They're pietists. They're not interested in Palestinian nationalism and certainly not in armed struggle to liberate Palestine—and that was true. And so, *al-Mujamma' al-Islami* functioned from 1979 until the first Intifada in 1987 with no confrontational attitude towards the Israeli occupation. When the first Intifada erupted, and the Gaza Strip was the flash point in early December 1987, all of a sudden the entire Palestinian people are rising up in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and they were supported globally by the Palestinian diaspora. And where is *al-Mujamma' al-Islami*? They're not part of this whatsoever. They had nothing to do with it. It's under those circumstances that they regrouped and, in August 1988, formed Hamas, which is an Arabic acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement.

The charter that you mentioned, which is highly antisemitic and politically reactionary, was formulated as an alternative to the secular organizations that were connected to the PLO—to Fatah first and foremost, but also to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and at that time the Palestine Communist Party, which was not part of the PLO, but which was part of the secret underground leadership of the first Intifada. Hamas was on the outside of that. The

Intifada pushed to the fore the two-state solution. That's the solution that the local West Bank and Gaza Strip leadership of the Intifada supported; it had a lot of popular support as a way of eliminating the occupation among the people of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The local West Bank and Gaza Strip leadership pressed the PLO leaders, who were then based in Tunis and had been debating adopting a two-state position for over a decade, to adopt it and that's how we got to the Oslo process and the 1993 Declaration of Principles. Hamas said, absolutely not. They opposed the two-state solution. They are for the liberation of all of Palestine from the river to the sea, and they have an Islamic argument for why that area is a Muslim religious endowment, a *waqf*, and it can't be ruled by Jews—religious argumentation that even a lot of observant Muslims would not accept. The only way we're going to get that, they say, is jihad. That has been their doctrine consistently, although there have sometimes been indications of a willingness to consider tactical compromises.

The 2017 political document reflects the thinking of some of the leadership of Hamas that at that point that was outside the Gaza Strip, in Qatar, Turkey, and elsewhere. (Some of them were in Syria before 2011, but they couldn't stay after the Syrian civil war broke out). Outside the Israeli occupied territories, these Hamas leaders were exposed to all the political currents in the world, where somebody probably whispered to them, "you know, your charter is an antisemitic document, you won't get much international support with this kind of document." One time I was giving a lecture on Israel-Palestine and a guy from the Rotary Club asked me, why does Hamas hate the Rotary Club? I said, "What? Hamas hates the Rotary Club?" And he said, yeah, look at the Hamas

Charter: it says the Rotary Club! Whoa, I hadn't paid attention to that, but it's there. Hamas has a deeply regressive view of the world. The leaders outside Gaza led the way in developing, shall we say, a more open approach. They didn't abandon the notion that jihad is the only way to liberate Palestine because that's the *sine qua non* of their organization's ideological perspective. What they came up with was, we could have a hundred-year truce with the Zionists, because Muhammad had a truce with the forces that were opposed to Islam and then ten years later when he got stronger, he conquered Mecca and overcame those forces: we could do that for a hundred years and then we'll eliminate the Jewish state.

Of course, no Israeli political figure is going to take that very seriously. I mean, it was hard enough in 2017 for Israelis to accept any Palestinian peace offer since, from their point of view, Israel had made one in 2000 and the Palestinians rejected it. That's not exactly true but it is what most Israelis think. That makes peace with an organization that says they'll wait a hundred years before they eliminate you not very attractive.

NP: *It sounds like what you're saying is that there was never really—beyond image—a change in Hamas's ideology.*

JB: It may be that the leaders abroad, and those within the Gaza Strip who supported them, truly believed that they were leading the organization in a direction that would make them more acceptable to global opinion, and which might even moderate substantially the organization's commitment to armed struggle. I don't know exactly what they thought. Tareq Baconi would be a good person to ask that question. He's the author of a very fine book called *Hamas Contained*, published by Stanford University Press. But at the same time that this political recalibration

was going on, Israel and Egypt, but primarily Israel, were holding the Gaza Strip in a state of permanent siege that was imposed in 2007 after Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections of 2006 and refused to bow to the dictates of Israel, the United States, and the EU that they abandon their political program and adopt the political program of Fatah who they had defeated in the elections.

There are now people who are teenagers or even twenty years old who remember nothing but living in this open-air prison

The principle that refugees have
the right to return has to be
part of any kind of reasonable
final settlement.

in the Gaza Strip, in which Israel controls everything from outside. I cannot imagine trying to convince angry, frustrated teenagers and twenty-somethings, among whom unemployment rates are over 65 percent, who are on the edge of malnutrition, who suffer from the lack of everything imaginable, who have never been outside of the Gaza Strip in their life, who have no horizon whatsoever, to adopt the perspective that we need to abandon armed struggle against Israel. Can you imagine trying to convince people of that? Palestinians, and there are many, who are committed to popular unarmed forms of struggle have a very difficult political task.

NP: *There were statements from Hamas that if the Palestinian people voted for the Arab Peace Plan—that was essentially a two-state plan—they would not object.*

JB: Right, the political leadership of Hamas said that they would accept the will of the

Palestinian people. The 2002 Arab Peace Plan, which has been renewed on several occasions, is a very important document, which doesn't have a lot of public acknowledgment in the West. It is first and foremost a proposal for two states. But a *very specific* kind of two states that every Zionist political party in Israel rejects. The 1967 lines—the Green Line—should be the boundary; East Jerusalem should be the capital of the Arab state. Today there are about 215,000 Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem alone. It also advocates that Palestinian refugees should have the right to return. No Jewish political party in Israel accepts that as the basis for a discussion.

If we actually got into it, and they wanted to be serious, the real sticking point is the right of return of the refugees, which most Israelis imagine is the end of the Jewish state because they have a certain understanding of what a Jewish state means. It entails Jewish supremacy, which would be very difficult to sustain if the Arab population were much larger than it is. In fact, for many Jewish right-wingers, the Arab citizen population is already too large.

When the PLO and the Israeli representatives were negotiating in Taba in the Sinai Peninsula after the collapse of the 2000 Camp David summit, the refugee question was put on the table, though it had not been on the table at the summit. There was never going to be any agreement unless this question was addressed. There's no written record of this so it could be not entirely so, but according to well-informed people who were close observers of the negotiations, the Palestinian side said we want you to allow 200,000 refugees to return. And the Israeli side said, 50,000. There are lots of questions to be raised about that. One, if they had split the difference and the Israeli side went home with an agreement based on that, would the Labor Party have been reelected in the elections scheduled

to take place only weeks later? Maybe, maybe not. As it was, the Labor Party and its prime minister Ehud Barak went down in the biggest defeat in Israeli history because people were convinced he was going to give away East Jerusalem and because Barak's own government had promoted the false narrative that Israel made a generous peace offer and the Palestinians responded with violence.

On the Palestinian side, there are some five million refugees and their descendants. There would have been a huge outcry. What? A hundred or however many thousand of us are going to be allowed to return and you call this a peace agreement and end of the conflict and we have no more claims? What is that? The core of the Palestinian experience is the Nakba and exile. There can't be a peace agreement that doesn't honestly engage with that question.

The 2002 Arab Peace Plan does engage the issue of the right to return. The UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 says all refugees have the right to return to their countries. Palestinians typically would rather base their claim on UN General Assembly resolution 194, which I think is more equivocal than that. But whatever: refugees have the right to return. That's a principle of international human rights law and practice.

If we get down to the mechanics; are all of those five million refugees going to return? No, not likely. Some years ago, there was a survey in Lebanon where at the time there were about 400,000 refugees. They asked people: Would you return? A big majority—I don't remember the exact numbers—said yes. When it got down to the details: "Would you return to the state of Israel if it remained in its current form as a Jewish state?" 10 percent said yes. Things have surely changed a great deal since then, but it's clear that once you establish the *principle* that refugees have the right to return, you could have a negotiation that

would figure out who and how many and when and under what circumstances and all those things. But the principle that refugees have the right to return has to be part of any kind of reasonable final settlement.

NP: *Returning to Hamas, what do you think they were hoping to accomplish on October 7?*

JB: Of course, they haven't told me. So this is speculative to a certain extent.

There were several different objectives. This had been planned for a very long time, some Israeli analysts now are saying as much as a year in advance or more. There were reports in the Israeli press that army spotters actually observed them training for this. But their commanding officers refused to take their reports seriously—which is a comment on colonial hubris and also male chauvinism, since the spotters were young women and their commanders were men (these are explanatory factors in many different circumstances).

The most important thing I think that Hamas wanted was to break the stalemate. Israel imposed this siege on the Gaza Strip since 2007. They have been de facto annexing large chunks of the West Bank with a slow-motion ethnic cleansing. Some twenty Palestinian villages and settlements have been forcibly evacuated by the pressure of Israeli settlers since 2020 in the South Hebron Hills, the Jordan Valley, and the hills east of Ramallah. Settlers have also targeted several neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. There is little discussion of this problem in the corporate media. There are no negotiations. There is no international pressure. Everybody says, "two states, two states, two states," and where is this Palestinian state going to be? The settlers are gobbling up more and more Palestinian land.

Even before October 7, the Gaza Strip was living in desperate conditions. In 2017, the UN Conference on Trade and Development declared that by 2020 Gaza would

become uninhabitable. Now it's 2023 and it has indeed become uninhabitable, except that 2.2 million people were living there, with 96 percent of the water from the aquifer unpotable and over 50 percent of the people depending on international aid; the majority of the population food insecure and under the poverty line and unemployment around 50 percent with youth unemployment even higher. These were totally outrageous circumstances. And no political leaders in the West thought that this is an urgent problem. So, first and foremost, Hamas sought to break that stalemate. To show that Israel can't dominate us forever: seize the initiative, demonstrate Palestinian agency; show that Israel is not invincible, show that there is indeed a threat to Israeli security if they continue to treat us like this.

Some people would say, they achieved that. I would say they achieved that at the cost of their international credibility. No one who thinks of themselves as a leftist or a liberal can believe that Hamas represents the potential to liberate *anything* after what they did on October 7. That is simply not a humane political perspective.

More immediately, there was the danger that Israel was going to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia. That would effectively liquidate the question of Palestine in the Arab world—among the Arab governments. The cause of Palestine remains popular among Arab people. You could see that at the last World Cup where every time Morocco won a game, they would take out a Palestinian flag and there were Palestinian flags flying in the stadiums in Qatar, and the Moroccan team tied itself openly and enthusiastically to the cause of Palestine. Palestine remains a very potent issue in the Arab world.

But the Arab *governments* would have long ago liked to be done with it if they could. The only reason that the Saudi-Israeli recognition didn't happen is because

the Saudis are embarrassed that Israel is treating the Palestinians the way they're treating them and the Saudis want to claim leadership of the Arab and Muslim world and so, "Israel, please give us at least a fig leaf so that we can do this deal" is basically what the Saudis were saying and Israel said, "No, we're not doing it, that's not a price we're willing to pay."

There's a lot of talk about whether the plan included all of the atrocities, the rapes, the really abusive behavior that they engaged in. I don't think we know the full story of that yet. Apparently, the political leadership didn't know all the details of the operational plan; they approved it at a very high level of generality and maybe they didn't approve some of the worst atrocities. However, a detailed accounting of the extent of the atrocities that Hamas committed, who did or did not order or approve them, and how they occurred would not alter my view that Hamas as an organization and an ideology has no liberatory potential.

NP: *What do you think about the speculation of an Iranian role? Perhaps precisely to prevent the Israeli-Saudi rapprochement?*

JB: There's no evidence that Iran played a direct role in the planning and execution of this attack. Iran has funded and trained Hamas. But Hamas is not a proxy for Iran in the way that Hezbollah, in Lebanon, is a proxy for Iran.

It's probably the case that the military leaders who planned and carried out the attack on October 7 hoped, maybe even expected, that Hezbollah would enter the battle to support them, and maybe they expected other things would happen too. A popular uprising in the West Bank? Perhaps also in Jordan where Palestinians are the majority of the population? And those things haven't happened. Yes, Hezbollah has fired rockets into Israel, but

as of mid-November—this could change tomorrow—they have played by what are called the rules of the game. Munitions only up to a certain size, bombardment of only a certain intensity. Now, of course, the rules of the game are not written down and they're not precise and miscalculation is built into this structure of armed equilibrium. There are already debates in Israel, "No, they violated the rules. Let's hit them hard." And then other people in the Israeli military and political hierarchy say: "But then we would have to fight a war on two fronts, and we know that Hezbollah is a much more formidable opponent than Hamas. We can take them on easily if it is one on one, but one on two? Let's try to chill it down, at least for as long as we can."

Hamas leaders have been saying, "Go Hezbollah and hit them hard." And Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech in which he said all the right words, but he also said in effect, "We're responsible for the Lebanese people." Hezbollah is the biggest political party in Lebanon in addition to having a powerful militia. And they don't want to bring havoc to the Shia population of the Lebanese South, which would surely happen judging from what Israel is doing in the Gaza Strip. So, both sides have reasons to keep it at a low boil rather than a full-fledged war.

NP: *Let me go back a little bit. Before you talked about Israel's role in supporting Hamas early on. But now there are stories about Israel having supported Hamas in recent years. Can you say what was behind that?*

JB: Yes, that's true. Absolutely true. There are many published quotes in which Netanyahu and his supporters say very clearly that Hamas is our ally in preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state. Why? Because supporting Hamas splits the Palestinian political leadership between Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Fatah in the West

Bank, *and* it keeps the Palestinian people divided geographically because the idea of a Palestinian state is based on the premise that the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and East Jerusalem would all be part of it.

For example, in a Hebrew book Haim Ramon, former member of the Israeli Knesset, a very well-informed person politically, quotes Netanyahu as saying, "those who want to thwart the possibility of a Palestinian state should support the strengthening of Hamas." Adam Raz, a very perceptive and hardworking historian who has been scouring declassified Israeli documents and writes articles about them in the Israeli *Haaretz* weekly magazine, wrote on October 20, "for fourteen years Netanyahu's policy was to keep Hamas in power." And Major General Gershon Hacoen, now in the reserves, who's particularly close to Netanyahu, said to the Israeli news web outlet, Ynet, "We need to tell the truth. The Netanyahu strategy is to prevent the option of two states. So, he's turning Hamas into his closest partner. Openly, Hamas is an enemy. Covertly, it's an ally." Since Netanyahu came to power, in March 2009 — and except for the period between June 2021 and December 2022, he's been in power constantly since then — that's been the policy.

NP: *What has the U.S. role in all this been, both since October 7, but also in bringing us to this point?*

JB: There is one view that says the United States is Israel's biggest supporter. We give them \$3.8 billion in military aid every year. We veto all the resolutions of censure against Israel that come up in the UN Security Council. We run diplomatic interference in various international bodies. And all of that is true. Israel would not be able to do what it is doing today, it would not have been able to impose this open-air prison on Gaza since 2007, without the

nearly unrestrained support of the United States. However, we know that except for the Trump administration, whose foreign policy deviated from the inside the Beltway consensus, American presidents of both parties would have preferred that Israel relinquish control of at least a large part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state, lower tensions in the region, enhance stability, and not embarrass important American allies, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt over this question.

President Clinton, after not pressing for a final status agreement and supporting Israel for most of his eight years in office during which the Oslo process was underway, very belatedly decided that he was going to try to deal with this and—too little, too late—there just wasn't enough time. Also, fundamentally, he was not prepared to twist Israel's arm hard enough to make it happen. President George W. Bush made some movements in this direction. Condoleezza Rice shepherded secret negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2008 that came close to an agreement. There are differing views about whether it actually could have come to fruition or not. I tend to think not. But the Bush administration wanted that to happen.

The Obama administration began with a very strong statement. No less a person than his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said, "Settlement freeze means settlement freeze, including Jerusalem." And Netanyahu just gave her the finger. Belatedly, President Obama sent John Kerry to mediate talks and they blew up because, as even Kerry and others close to him said, Israel didn't want to make a deal.

What we see is a picture that's a little bit more complicated. Yes, Israel is America's ally. Right up there with Saudi Arabia in importance in the Middle East. The United

States is not going to allow any fundamental weakening of Israel. The U.S. is not going to allow any coalition of Arab countries—and especially not if they're backed by Iran or China or Russia—to gang up on Israel. At the same time, the U.S. would like Israel to solve this problem. But the Israeli right-wing—both the secular right-wing represented by Netanyahu and the religious right-wing represented by the quasi-fascist Messianist religious extremists in his government—say no. And the religious folks have the best argument: "We don't have to do that because what we're doing, settling the West Bank, and eventually annexing the West Bank and Judaizing the whole region from the river to the sea, that's going to bring the Messiah. And the Messiah's going to come and solve all the problems, so don't tell us about political instability and whatever diplomatic problems. The Messiah's coming!" You can't argue with that.

NP: *People like Mearsheimer and Walt in their book, *The Israel Lobby*, say that U.S. support for Israel has been contrary to American national interests. It's only the influence of the Israel lobby that causes the United States to act this way. On the other hand, there are those who say, Israel is America's aircraft carrier in the region and therefore the Israeli tie is precisely in the U.S. national interest. How do you assess that question?*

JB: The fundamental problem is that the category of U.S. imperialism does not exist for Mearsheimer and Walt. On the one hand, they claim to be realists and so, no soft talk about human rights and things like that. But they imagine the United States as a force for good in the classical liberal internationalist version of international relations. They don't really fundamentally differ with the prevailing foreign policy consensus on that. When the United States acts out of what they imagine to be America's national interest, that's good for everybody.

But we could bring the whole list of anti-democratic, destabilizing actions—from supporting the coup in Iran in 1953, to Guatemala and Chile, and we could go on and on and on forever—to show that their view of the world and of America's role in it is simply historically wrong.

They do, however, have their finger on a very important problem: the Israel lobby is indeed very, very powerful in this country. It intimidates Congress in particular. Very few American politicians have been willing to call them out on what they do. Several of those who have, have been defeated. Both Republicans and Democrats. That's not an insignificant thing.

The money of Sheldon Adelson, of accursed memory, was not a small factor in American politics and in the Republican Party. On the Democratic Party side, Haim Saban doesn't have as much money as Adelson but is equally single-mindedly supportive of Israel. Their money, and that of the various lesser figures makes a real political difference. According to one informed analysis, 50 percent of all the money raised by pro-Democratic Party PACs in a presidential election cycle comes from Jews. Not all those Jews are gung-ho Zionists; many of them are more interested in climate or other kinds of issues. But that's a pretty big deal, like an elephant in the room. Of course, the Israel lobby does not consist only of Jews, there are organizations like Christians United for Israel, which claims over ten million members and is an important component of the social base of the Republican party. The arms industry also supports Israel. They directly profit from the \$3.8 billion in annual military aid the United States gives to Israel and from the arms purchases of Israel's Arab neighbors. Israel's current war in Gaza has been good for business. Military industry stock prices were up about 7 percent in the weeks following Hamas's October 7 attack.

The kind of support for Israel those profits produce for the American ruling class is perfectly consistent with maintaining and supporting America's hegemonic role in the Middle East, which it has had since the late sixties, early seventies. During the Cold War, the value of the U.S.-Israeli alliance was clearly visible, not only in the Middle East when Israel stood against Soviet allies like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. In

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addition, Israel supported the dictatorial regimes in Latin America; Israel supported apartheid South Africa. It was a global U.S. partner in the Cold War.

What happened after the Cold War? Clinton came into office, and he was probably the most pro-Israel president there had ever been to date. Why did that happen? Well, Clinton's personal commitments, just like Joe Biden's personal commitments, play a role. It matters who the person of the president is. It's not just simply an empty cipher that you move around. Clinton was through his whole being inclined to be supportive of Israel and was personally very close to Yitzhak Rabin and then also to Ehud Barak who succeeded Rabin as Prime Minister of Israel. And the same is true for Joe Biden.

After Clinton passed from the scene, very quickly we had 9-11. And then there was this astonishing scene of Ariel Sharon, then prime minister of Israel, a quintessential hardliner, the most hardline prime minister Israel had until Netanyahu began

to toughen himself up in opposition to Sharon and seize from him the leadership of Likud. Sharon comes to the United States, embraces George Bush, who looks like a child next to him, and says, “We know what terrorism is. Now you’ve experienced what we’ve experienced. We’re going to teach you how to deal with terrorism.” The whole repressive anti-terrorist mania that dominated the United States from 9-11 arguably until today, but certainly for the next good number of years, was very heavily influenced by Israel and deepened the U.S.-Israeli alliance.

The U.S.-Israeli relationship is also built on joint intelligence, joint production of spyware and surveillance equipment, and the close interweaving of Israeli high-tech companies with Silicon Valley. Hebrew was the second language of Silicon Valley at a certain point. There were companies where you could do the language of the interview in Hebrew. There are 200 Israeli companies listed on the NASDAQ. There is an extraordinarily dense interpenetration at the level of political economy. At the personnel level, high tech people commute back and forth from Silicon Valley to Israel every two weeks. That’s not just a figure of speech. I know people like that. With that level of interpenetration in one of the most important economic sectors of the U.S. and with Barack Obama being elected with critical support from that sector, that’s going to limit how hard he’s going to land on Israel when Netanyahu spits in his face repeatedly, as he did.

Did Obama like the fact that Netanyahu gave him the finger? Did he like the fact that the Republican Party brought Netanyahu to give a speech to a joint session of Congress to oppose the Iran nuclear deal? No, he didn’t like it whatsoever. But the social-economic structure of the Israel-U.S. relationship at that point made it very hard for Obama to smack Israel down. Doubly

hard for a Black man with Muslim connections and all of the racism that would have been deployed against him — and which was in fact deployed against him anyway—had he actually done anything.

So, it’s very complex. Even the domestic politics argument that Mearsheimer and Walt make contains a political economy element that they ignore.

NP: *For those of us in the United States who support justice for Palestinians, what are the possibilities for action? What are the pressure points that is it possible to influence?*

JB: The immediate prospects do not look very good at all. We are going to have to play a defensive game for a while. That means, first, defend people like Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, and Cori Bush in Congress against the attacks that have come and will probably come in even greater force in the primary season. Personally, the first thing I did after Rashida Tlaib was censured was send her a donation. I don’t do that very often. There are very few politicians who I think deserve fifty cents of my money. But I thought it was very important to stand with her at that moment. Second, Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students have come under vicious assault on college campuses. Brandeis banned the local Students for Justice in Palestine chapter, Columbia banned both the Students for Justice in Palestine chapter and the Jewish Voice for Peace chapter for the rest of the semester.

At Stanford—although all the facts of this are not out yet—a white supremacist community member, not someone affiliated with the university, ran down an Arab Muslim student, after yelling vile remarks about Islam. That person had been previously seen harassing people at events of Students for Justice in Palestine. And there’s been a news blackout on what happened after the student victim was interviewed on CNN.

This was not a small deal. He went to the hospital as a result, although he didn't suffer a serious long-term injury. I don't know the outcome of that story, but that's terrifying. I'm going to Stanford University to talk about Israel-Palestine, tomorrow. My next-door neighbor thinks I have to ask them if they're going to have armed security, which I certainly don't want. But it's scary. (Update: They did have security but unarmed.) I should also mention the murder in Illinois of a Palestinian, because the landlord decided to hate him.

It's also true that there has been an enormous increase in antisemitism in this country, perhaps especially on college campuses. Swastikas have been painted on several Jewish institutions here in Portland, Oregon, and there have been similar incidents all around the country. It is not good.

We're experiencing a wave of anti-democratic repression of free speech if your opinions are supportive of Palestinian rights, and we are experiencing a wave of antisemitism. That genie was let out of the bottle by Donald Trump and all of the forces that supported his election the first time around and who are the same forces that are supporting his election in the current cycle, people who believe in Jewish space-lasers and the like. If we believe the polls, although it is still very early, his chances of being reelected at this point are very good. In that context, we can still keep the pressure on, although we have to be cognizant of the possibility that this will bring about Biden's defeat by Trump in the next election. Jewish Voice for Peace led a sit in in the Capitol in collaboration with If Not Now. They are the two biggest activist Jewish organizations that are not supportive of Israeli policy. They led a sit-in at Grand Central Station. They led a sit-in here in Portland of the Federal Building and there have been others in San Francisco and elsewhere. (Update: And many similar actions

since then.)

All of that should continue and escalate to the extent of our capacity. As long as Israel is slaughtering civilians in the Gaza Strip, we have to try to make that stop as soon as possible. Yesterday would have been too late. But that too is defensive. It's basically a reaction to the horrific loss of human life.

If we're thinking about what a left would want to do going forward, then U.S. support for Israel is one small piece, an important piece, but a small piece of a broader foreign policy based on imperial domination, projection of military force everywhere. And we need to advocate for that to change. I think the horror that many Americans have expressed about what Israel is doing now could be translated into a broader critique of the militarized imperial foreign policy that the United States has had since the end of World War II. But even the best of our congressional representatives, the Squad and its extensions, aren't taking that on because they got elected based on domestic political issues. Bernie Sanders has, from time-to-time, said something about foreign and military policy, though not nearly enough. In the Senate, Sanders is usually the lone voice. At least in the House, there are a dozen or more Representatives who are prepared to speak about this, though not the broader Congressional Progressive Caucus.

NP: *There are more than a dozen House signatories (currently over 40) to a ceasefire resolution, but I think now only Dick Durbin in the Senate and not Bernie Sanders supports a ceasefire. (Sen Jeff Merkley, D-OR and Peter Welch, D-VT have since called for a ceasefire.)*

JB: And they are all going to be targeted by AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby. And much as I don't think that electoral politics ought to be the center of gravity of any kind of left politics in this country, we need to defend

them. We cannot allow it to be established that if you speak out for Palestinian rights, you're going to be erased from the political map. And we need to support others who want to run for office and have expressed a willingness to join them.

NP: *You referred to both the increase in antisemitism and in Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian dynamics. But the antisemitism seems not at all structural or institutional, while you find all kinds of significant institutions canceling Palestinian programs.*

JB: That's right. It is important at the analytical level that we bear that in mind. The antisemitism, as I said, was the genie let out of the bottle with Trump's election campaign and the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlotte, which was openly antisemitic in a way that hadn't been seen in this country in decades. Defeating Trump and eliminating Trumpism would go a great distance towards rolling back antisemitism.

You also come up against this bizarre contradiction that the most right-wing, gung-ho supporters of Israel in the Jewish community also support Trump. There's a problem that Trump is very pro-Israel, but he's unleashed all these antisemitic elements and it's an incoherent politics.

On the other hand, Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian sentiment is deep in the structure of very substantial American institutions: the FBI's Abscam Program of the late 1970s/early 1980s, the infiltration of mosques post-9-11, and the no-fly lists which inadvertently or intentionally targeted Muslims and made it very difficult for Muslims to go about their normal lives after 9-11. There have been murders of Muslims, and even Sikhs because somebody thought they looked like a Muslim, in this country since 9-11. And vile expressions in Congress by right-wing Republicans, which have no basis in reality, and they are not censured as Rashida Tlaib was.

All of that has to do with the whole structure of white supremacy and the way that our ruling institutions—maybe more so under Republicans than Democrats, but the Democrats are not immune from this by any means—turn our focus on new immigrants, this ethnic or that religious minority, this gender orientation—that's how the ruling class keeps itself in power by turning us against each other and keeping people disunited.

NP: *I'd like to ask you something that may be out of date by the time New Politics comes out. What do you think is a good way to encapsulate our position in a series of demands? What should we ask for in terms of hostages, ceasefire, the siege, military aid?*

JB: There are the immediate demands which hopefully will be out of date: ceasefire, free the hostages, stop killing civilians, provide humanitarian aid to Gaza. What will likely still be appropriate to be on the table in two months and going forward is: end the siege of the Gaza Strip, allow the people of Gaza to go back to their homes, mobilize international support to help them rebuild their homes (according to some accounts, 40 percent of all the structures in the Gaza Strip have been damaged and 10 percent of them are totally unusable), demand that Israel end the occupation, demand that the U.S. stop funding the Israeli occupation by giving the \$3.8 billion to Israel. Those are the demands that we should make of the political system.

In our own movement—or movements—we should encourage approaches to the resolution of this problem that are based on internationalism and reject identity politics as the way to understand this issue. Meaning there are two peoples in Israel/Palestine. Neither one of them is going anywhere. Whatever resolution of the conflict there will be must be based on full equality of both peoples and all individuals who live between the river and the sea.

On Martyrdom

LEENA M.

IT IS OCTOBER 8TH, 2023 AND I AM at a protest at Duwar al Manara, a roundabout in the center of Ramallah, on the West Bank, with hundreds of others, young and old. The city, usually lively and bustling all hours of the day, is closed today, mourning for the already hundreds of Palestinians killed in just twenty-four hours. A young man sitting on someone's shoulders yells, his voice cracking: "*ya im al shabeed neyalik, ya reit imee badalik*. (Oh mother of the martyr, how lucky you are. If only my mother were in your place)." He yells it again and again and my eyes fill with tears as other young people in the crowd repeat the chant, shouting it from the pits of their stomachs. My body heats up, flushed with grief, pride, and overwhelming love.

Since that day, I have heard this chant every day at Duwar al Manara, and it shakes up something inside of me every time. All these beautiful Palestinians, each one's existence itself a miracle, yearning for martyrdom. It feels like a tragedy, and it is. But it is also a reflection of the indomitable spirit that has kept our people alive.

Martyr, or *shabeed*, literally translated, means "witness." And the act of martyrdom, *istish-had*, means "to witness." Martyrs are witnesses to the injustices by which they were killed, and in turn, their

communities bear witness to their deaths. It is a title of honor used all across the Arab world to describe a person murdered in a struggle for freedom and justice. This honor is not reserved solely for those who take up arms in this struggle, but anyone, including journalists, teachers, medics, and children, whose death is caused by an oppressor.

One of the most common beliefs amongst Zionists about Palestinians, employed to dehumanize us and blame us for our own oppression, is that we do not value our own lives or the lives of our children. Israeli officials and Zionists repeat ad nauseam the claim that Palestinian militants use children as human shields. A quick google search of "Palestinian human shield" reveals countless examples, including a video published by the IDF in May, 2018 during the Great March of Return. The video plays a lullaby with the sound of gunfire and the words "where are the children of Gaza today?" After showing children amongst the protestors at the border fence, it then repeatedly displays the word "here" in all caps across the screen. Golda Meir, former prime minister of Israel, is famously known for saying that peace will only come "when [Palestinians] love their children more than they hate us." This quote has made its rounds again in the last two months as the Israeli propaganda machine works tirelessly to manufacture global consent for this current iteration of Palestinian genocide.

Every few feet in the West Bank you will find a poster, mural, or monument

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dedicated to a *shaheed*. At the funeral of a martyr, when their body is brought out of their home—wrapped in white cloth and a Palestinian flag—the women in their family will *zagbrit* through their tears, an ululation of celebration usually reserved for weddings, graduations, and births. When Bassel Al-Araj, beloved Palestinian intellectual and activist, was murdered by the Israeli occupation forces, his father was asked to identify him through a photo of his dead, brutalized body. Upon seeing the photo, he exclaimed, “yes that is Bassel. May Allah bless you, my boy, I’ve never seen you look more handsome.” More than just honoring martyrs, Palestinians celebrate martyrdom. But that is not because we don’t love life; in fact, it is because we love life enough to fight for our right to a dignified one.

To see our extraordinary love of life, you only have to see the youth of Akka diving from atop the city’s ancient walls into the Mediterranean Sea, or families gathered after prayer on the large steps of Damascus Gate in the Old City, cracking nuts and laughing in the cool evening breeze. You only have to see my family sitting around a *tabla* under our Jerusalem grape vines, singing *Abdel Halim Hafiz* in unison. You only have to see my grandma, older than the state of Israel, dancing her dance with her hand on her hip, forgetting all her aches and pains. Or attend a Mohammad Assaf concert—as I did on October 6th—and see the old and the young singing and dancing, sweat dripping down their faces as they dance *dabka* hand-in-hand.

But under military occupation, families cannot sit on the steps of Damascus Gate, the area now surrounded by military outposts staffed by eighteen-year-olds with baby fuzz on their lips and M-16s in their arms. In fact, since 1980, most Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are not allowed to travel to Jerusalem at all. And most Palestinians won’t ever jump off the

sea walls of Akka, because they will never make it to the Mediterranean Sea. Most Palestinians, trapped by an apartheid wall and checkpoints, will never visit the ocean. My family, whose home is now surrounded by settlers, no longer sits outside under our grape vines. Our yard, where my mother grew up, was once a haven from which you could see much of East Jerusalem. That view is now covered by straw matting installed to protect us from settler attacks and intimidation.

Palestinians love life so much that we are not willing to live it like this. We are not willing to live under indefinite military occupation, under siege, in *Bantustans*, deprived of our natural resources and our dignity, under violent rule and a puppet government that hands over its dissenting youth to the occupier.

And more than loving life—we love each other. Anyone who has been to Palestine knows this. I am a child of Palestinian parents in exile and grew up in Brooklyn. After being unable to travel to my homeland for five years, my partner and I quit our jobs to fulfill a longstanding dream of mine: to live in Palestine for the maximum number of days Israel permits me to be here: ninety. When I (somewhat recklessly) hit another car in my first week, the driver and passenger of that car immediately ran to my grandmother in my passenger seat to make sure she was okay. Although the accident was absolutely my fault, they calmed me down and praised God for everyone’s safety, especially my grandmother’s, who they also called “grandmother.” The driver assured me that I would not have to pay a shekel for the repairs. He was driving his employer’s vehicle and he would take responsibility so that his employer—a large egg distribution company—would cover all of the costs. I was, after all, “*bint el balad* (daughter of the country).” After we dropped the car off at a garage to be repaired, he drove my

grandmother and me home, gifting us four dozen eggs. I was anxious for days while the car was being repaired, unable to imagine that there was not some sort of catch to this man's inexplicable kindness. There was not, and I was ashamed at the American individualism that let me doubt him.

Last week, I saw someone fall while riding a motorized scooter, and twenty people rushed to be at his side, lift him up, giving him a drink of water, checking on his scooter, and helping him get home safely. Being in Palestine for the first time, my partner could not comprehend the kindnesses she received. She comes from an Indian family and thought she knew the heights of hospitality and generosity. Palestinians, she said, blew all the other Brown cultures out of the water. Within days, every shopkeeper in Ramallah was committed to teaching her Arabic. They fed her free falafel and waited patiently as she slowly formulated each sentence, gently correcting her mistakes (of which there were many).

"Ma ikhlaqnash in'eesh bil thul, ikhliqna in'eesh b-hureeya." Palestinians remind the world at every turn that: "We were not created to live in degradation, we were created to live in freedom." We were created to live in freedom, and yet, none of us have ever known freedom on our land.

During the First World War, the British asked for the Arabs' assistance in overthrowing the Ottomans, who had controlled the region for the last twenty generations. In exchange, they promised independence in the form of nation states—a modern artifact imposed on former colonies after the demise of imperial rule. Although most Arabs were in fact granted this independence, the British promised Palestine to European Zionists for the creation of a "national home for the Jewish people." Following three decades of colonial rule under the British Mandate, Palestinians

lived under Israeli and Jordanian rule until 1967, and since then were entirely subject to settler-colonization by the state of Israel.

Since 1920, the strategies employed by the British and the Israelis to repress Palestinian demands for self-determination have been disturbingly similar. The first organized iteration of Palestinian resistance to the settler-colonial project came in the form of a six-month strike against the British in 1936, one of the longest in colonial history, in protest of British support for the Zionist state.¹ That strike brought Palestinians nowhere closer to their goal of self-determination, despite lip service by the British to the contrary. Eventually, Palestinians took up more militant resistance in what is known as the "Great Revolt of 1936-39."² Thousands of Palestinians suspected of having participated were arrested and subjected to military tribunals. The homes of those believed to be involved, and the homes of their families, were demolished. Hundreds were executed and thousands were indefinitely detained without charge. Movement leaders were deported or detained outside of Palestine in what the British themselves called "concentration camps." By 1939, 10 percent of the adult male population had been killed, injured, deported, imprisoned, or exiled.³ Each of these tactics is used regularly by Israel today, most frequently in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. In the face of such imperial violence, martyrdom has been an inevitability of Palestinian life for most of the last century.

Four days before that first protest at Duwar al Manara, I was walking back from my music class and saw a little boy trailing behind his mama carrying a pack of new toy trucks. He trips and falls, dropping his toys. He cries loudly and a young man and I help him up. A third person collects his toy trucks and hands them to him. *"Baseeta, baseeta"* I tell him, as I rub his back, which

translates literally to, “it’s simple, it’s simple” or more accurately, “It’s okay, you’re okay.” An older man standing nearby hears me and adds, “ah, *baseeta* wallah—oh people of Palestine how many beatings you will endure.” That’s the thing—there is almost no set of circumstances that protect a Palestinian from a beating at the hands of his oppressor. We are killed walking to school,⁴ providing emergency medical care to protestors,⁵ while harvesting our olives,⁶ and when we are reporting in our press gear. We are beaten in our coffins⁷ and our dead bodies are regularly detained.⁸ So perhaps, as my friend Ghazi told me, “Either you go to them, or they will come to you.”

So much of life as a Palestinian is defined by a loss of agency, calculated to destroy our spirits. There is almost no part of Palestinian life that is untouched by arbitrary and seemingly random acts of Israeli control and violence. One morning, Israel might set up a new military checkpoint with absolutely no warning, and prevent thousands of people from getting to work, school, or doctors’ appointments. It can use an air-strike to blow up a mosque in a refugee camp in the West Bank.⁹ It can break into our homes in the middle of the night, pull us out of our beds, blindfold us, beat us, and detain us indefinitely without charge or any semblance of due process. It can record this torture and post it on social media. It can shoot and kill a young girl looking for her cat on the roof of her home.¹⁰ It can detain and torture children in solitary confinement and prevent their families or lawyers from contacting them. Settlers can burn our ancient olive trees and light our homes on fire under the protection of the military. These settlers can shoot and kill four Palestinians at once, and then at the funeral procession, in broad daylight, kill two more—a father and son.¹¹

Israel can do almost anything, with im-

punity. So, martyrdom and the celebration of martyrdom is about claiming agency. It is about reframing the losses of our people, of our bodies, as victory. Because even if we have nothing else, we have our resistance. Martyrs are proof that we are still fighting, that we have not given the colonizer what it wants most, second only to our complete decimation: our docility. When we recognize and celebrate martyrs, we are celebrating the fact that we have not given up, nearly one hundred years later.

As a Palestinian in the diaspora, I am wary of romanticizing the struggle of Palestinians living every day of their lives under Israel’s boot. So, I asked the following question to a few of my friends, fifteen-year old Tamer, who leads the daily protests in Ramallah, and shopkeepers in my neighborhood who have become good friends, “Why is martyrdom such an honor for Palestinians?” Everyone who answered said that resistance is a natural response in the face of occupation and land theft. It is the only option for people who live under systematic humiliation and degradation; “Of course, we love life, everyone loves life—but they steal life from us,” Tamer told me.

While Western media portrays Palestinian resistance fighters as anti-Semites or religious fanatics, history tells us that armed resistance has been employed by people of all faiths, and people of no faith. My friend Kifah, whose very name means struggle, sees Palestinian armed resistance as a continuation of the struggle against imperialism initiated by Cubans, the Irish, and South Africans, for example. He says Palestinians, “learned and saw what gets you freedom, what language the enemy understands—which is violence unfortunately—so it’s forced on us.” Somberly, he says, “we were born in Palestine and this was our destiny.”

In Gaza, civil service workers like med-

ics and rescue teams are unable to meet the overwhelming need for support. Most of the rescuing of the people trapped under the rubble is done by civilians, the majority of whom have also lost family members and friends; and who have also been displaced, are hungry and thirsty, and in live in fear for their own lives. Yet they continually run to the scene of the next bombed tower, dig through the rubble, carry bleeding children, men, and women in their arms and on their backs in search of relief. In disbelief, they take turns kissing and rubbing the heads of babies who are pulled out alive from under tons of concrete. With bare hands, they dig mass graves for entire families. And then they pray over them, and cry with those who knew them. Young people in overcrowded shelters play games with the children, singing and dancing with them. Journalists allow these traumatized children to play with their cameras for a few minutes, to give them something to think about besides the terror they endure, to get them to smile, if just for a moment. Men and women in hospitals cradle babies whose parents are missing—dead perhaps—and hold them for as long as they need to be held. Doctors refuse to evacuate hospitals, despite threats that theirs will be next, refusing to abandon their patients. Instead, they sing. They tell the world, “We will stay here until the pain is over. We will live here and we will keep singing.”

We Palestinians celebrate martyrdom because it is the ultimate manifestation of a love of life and a love of people; a love of the collective, and a refusal to accept anything less than a life of dignity. Palestinians celebrate martyrdom, not for the sake of dying, but because it is proof that we are still living. We long for a world where martyrdom is not necessary, not inevitable. Until then, as the saying goes, martyrs lay down and put their bodies as a bridge, so

that others can cross.

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Turmoil in American Politics

DAN LA BOTZ

AMERICAN POLITICS ARE IN TURMOIL, all of politics in the broadest sense.

In the White House, in the Congress, in the courts, in state governments, in communities urban, suburban, and rural, in labor and social movements, and in the streets. There is constant controversy, much confusion, occasional conflict and alienation from political parties, as well as widespread agonizing, and a spreading cynicism. Since Donald Trump's campaign of 2016 and even before, far-right influencers on social media draw the disaffected and disoriented into the web of conspiracy theories, about vaccines that carry chips to take over your mind and pedophiles at the highest levels of government grooming our children for their perversions. Everywhere, fear spreads. And anger grows. Fueled by Trump's rhetoric, Fox News, and ultra-right social media, hate crimes—against Blacks as always, against Asians, Latinos, Jews, and Muslim—have increased, leading to violent attacks, including occasional murders. There is a lot of grief for these killings as well as for the more than 600 killed this year alone in senseless mass murders. We are haunted as well by rising temperatures, scenes of floods and forest fires killing hundreds in America, which as almost everyone knows results from burning coal and oil, that we seem unable to stop, and that therefore a planetary inferno seems

inevitable.

On the positive side, there has been a wave of strikes, women are winning fights for abortion rights, and we have a new movement in solidarity with Palestinians. But this has been accompanied by a rise in Islamophobia and of antisemitism, and all of the other old racisms.

How can one orient oneself in this Category 5 Hurricane of increasingly bewildering and dangerous ideas and activities, an intellectual and political storm in which it becomes increasingly difficult to make out the horizon or to find shelter, much less engage in meaningful action? What does this turmoil mean for the future of the country and in particular for the left? How can we get our bearings and move forward?

For decades—at least until the Great Recession of 2008—American domestic politics had been pretty quiet. The two major parties, Democrats and Republicans, alternated in power every few years with only the occasional kerfuffle. Unions calmly declined in membership and seldom struck, their power atrophying. Reproductive rights had come to be taken for granted. LGBTQ people had made significant gains, though there was a growing backlash. Black people, as always were the least complacent. They could not afford to be because every economic crisis knocked them back, and racist police violence continued to target them at a higher rate than other groups.

With the coming of the 21st century things began to change. Every five or ten years there was a major outburst of some

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social movement: immigrants in 2006, Occupy Wall Street in 2010, the enormous 15 or 20 million participants in Black Lives Matter in 2020. But they soon faded away, usually without creating any on-going organization and certainly no new political party. There was also the occasional call-to-conscience, such as the Me Too awakening, which changed many minds but never became a movement.

At the same time, on the right, beginning in 2010 there were the racist protests against Obama as the right for the first time in years entered into public protest at congressional representatives' meetings in their districts, some of them wild disruptive affairs. Created by Republican politicians and wealthy business interests who financed this simulacrum of a movement, it was made up of middle-class conservatives and small, far-right groups who turned out carrying racist and anti-Communist signs to protest what came to be called Obamacare. Those protests became the Tea Party movement, then the Congressional caucus of the same name, and then the Freedom Caucus allied with Trump. At the same time there was a discreet and almost surreptitious Republican accumulation of influence in local politics and the courts, accompanied by seemingly random outbursts of rowdy armed men in camouflage, who had been training in the woods for some coming battle, and now appeared at conservative rallies, words of revolution on their lips and pistols on their hips, waving "Don't Tread on Me" flags from the American Revolution of 1776.

So, things are no longer quiet. Since the 2008 economic crisis and especially since Trump's campaign for president in 2016, we no longer stand on solid ground. The earth is moving, now at about magnitude six on the Richter scale, but many fear that a magnitude eight or nine earthquake is coming.

What is giving rise to the pervasive fear in society? Part of the fear gripping people comes from concerns about the economy, perhaps because of the devastating experiences of many in the 2008 recession and the economic impact of the 2020-22 COVID pandemic.

Things have gotten somewhat better. Though in the last year over three million jobs were created, though job growth has slowed some, so the current (Nov. 2023) unemployment rate, while historically low, is up slightly to 3.9 percent. Rising prices are another major concern of working people, but the inflation rate has moderated and is now at 3.2 percent and gas prices, always a big consumer concern, have fallen significantly. Wage gains were generally canceled by inflation, but wages did not decline. High interest rates remain a big problem because of their effect on housing. The current mortgage rate for houses is 7.5 percent, making home ownership impossible for many younger families. Rents have been very high and most apartment dwellers spend 30 percent of their incomes on rent, while low-income renters may spend an even higher percentage, but for the moment rents have stopped rising. Some 82 percent of Americans have a credit card and total debt is now at a record one trillion dollars, largely due to COVID, but people are generally paying down their debt. Looking to the near future, many economists now predict there will be no recession or only a slight recession in 2024 and interest rates are expected to decline.

Biden and the Democrats addressed the economic fallout from the COVID crisis, first with the American Rescue Plan that provided economic support to businesses and financial assistance to workers. Then turning to long-term economic issues Biden and Congress passed the Chips Act to ensure that the United States, rather than relying on Taiwan, could produce sufficient

chips for the computer, semiconductor and electronic device industries, the bipartisan infrastructure deal, and the Inflation Reduction Act, all aimed at shoring up and building up the U.S. industrial economy on a more environmentally friendly basis. All of this taken together is called Bidenomics, but most of these are long-term, large-scale projects that have so far had little direct impact on the economy.

Yet the most recent Gallup poll on the issue of the economy (Sept. 2023) shows

The Republicans' racist cartography threatens to undo important gains made by the civil rights movement through the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

public pessimism, reporting that only 22 percent of the population think things are excellent, while 32 percent think they're only fair, and 48 percent think they're poor. These gloomy attitudes might seem irrational, except that working people know that there's always a downturn every few years and a real crisis every decade or so and that they're the ones who lose their jobs and their homes. And for a good part of the population, the rosy economic figures mean little, because they have low-wage jobs, work part time, or are unemployed. Some 12.4 percent of Americans lived in poverty in 2022, up from 7.4 percent from 2021; and child poverty doubled from 5.2 percent to 12.4 percent. In any case, people are aware of a growing economic inequality and of the possibilities of hard times to come, and this contributes to the sense of fear in society.

It seems likely, however, that another

quite important factor in the public's fears regarding the economy comes from the rightwing mass media and the social media's conspiracy theories, the attacks on Biden and the Democrats, on the deep state, and the predictions of a coming social catastrophe, race war, civil war, or Q-Anon's promised "storm," all of which undermine confidence in government, the economy, and everything else.

Let's take a look at what's happening now in the political arena, starting on the right and then turning to the left. We should keep in mind that the current situation began in 2020, when Trump denied that Biden had been elected and generated a complex scheme to fabricate new state electoral delegations and to have Vice-President Pence refuse to accept Biden's victory. And to put pressure on his second-in-command, Trump called a rally in Washington attended by as many as 80,000 people, then directed them to the Capitol where groups like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers led more than 2,000 in an insurrection, invading the building in an attempted coup intended to put Trump in office. Since Pence refused to obey Trump by sabotaging Biden's election, the boss denounced Pence, the mob chanted, "Hang Mike Pence," and Trump, watching the erection of a gallows, agreed that he should be hanged. Subsequently, over 500 were arrested and hundreds pled guilty or were convicted of misdemeanors and felonies. Several who were charged with insurrection have gone to prison for years. Trump calls them heroes and promises to pardon them. This is a major source of the rightwing movement that we face today.

Following the 2020 election, Trump and his followers launched an attack on election officials and poll workers, accusing them of stealing the elections for the Democrats. Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani began by demonizing Wandra "Shaye"

Moss and her mother Ruby Freeman, two Black women poll workers whom he accused of putting fake ballots in the ballot boxes. Rightwing media made their lives miserable. Despite the failure of his many court cases seeking to prove the election was stolen from him, Trump argued (as he continues to do) that he won the election and urged his followers to challenge the electoral system.

And so they did. Around the country, election officials and poll workers began to receive harassing calls and letters, threats, sometimes death threats, which led hundreds of election officials to resign. Many poll workers, who volunteer or receive a day's pay for their work, became reluctant to continue their election-day duties, fearing threats or violence. The point of all this rightwing intimidation is to both erode public trust in the election process and to make that process as difficult and unworkable as possible.

At the higher level of local and state government, Republican politicians around the country worked to remove voters from the election rolls, passing laws or making regulations that made it harder for the elderly, college students, Black and Hispanic voters, and ex-felons to vote, because they vote disproportionately for Democrats. Republican legislators have also worked to gerrymander election districts to advantage Republicans over Democrats. The Republicans' racist cartography threatens to undo important gains made by the civil rights movement through the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The act itself is the target of lawsuits in several states intended to eviscerate it and thereby weaken the rights of minority voters.

The most active and visible right-wing grassroots movement of the last couple of years has been Moms for Liberty. Founded in Florida in 2021, the group initially opposed mask and vaccine mandates in

schools but became a national organization principally focused on opposing "critical race theory" and LGBTQ and especially Trans rights. In cities and towns around the country, the group mobilized its members and other parents and local residents to attend and disrupt local school and library board meetings, demanding an end to race and sex education in school curricula and the removal of books dealing with Black history and LGBTQ issues. Moms for Liberty worked to create a frenzied atmosphere, disrupting meeting agendas, and sometimes provoking violent incidents. All of these encouraged threats of violence against teachers and librarians who were accused of "grooming" children to become gay or trans, and so we have also had a wave of teacher resignations. Interestingly, Moms for Liberty candidates in local school and library board elections generally lost to moderates in the off-year 2023 election – a good sign for Democrats.

While middle-class Moms shrieked at school boards for having classes on the history of racism and their hubbies got into shoving matches with defenders of books about gender at the library board, the more militant and menacing far right also continued to organize, the neo-Nazi white supremacist group Patriot Front, active in 40 states, focused recently on disrupting LGBTQ events. Wearing their uniform of white caps and masks and displaying fascist symbols, they shout "reclaim America," meaning for the white race.

All of this, of course, builds toward the Trump presidential campaign of 2024. The Donald is facing four indictments for a total of 91 felonies, ranging from falsifying business records, to election interference, to fomenting insurrection. The trials for these will keep him busy so that rather than ranting at his rallies and dancing to the gay anthem "YMCA" for much of the campaign season he'll be sitting in court. But that is

not likely to impede his campaign; from the courthouse he will portray himself as the victim of what he claims is the Democrats' persecution. Remarkably, these criminal accusations have not cut into his loyal base, but have contributed to his fundraising. He has felt no need to debate given that he leads the closest Republican challengers Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley by 30 to 40 points in the polls. The latest polls, as this is being written, show Trump ahead of Biden. The ex-president and his team are preparing their comeback.

Trump and his advisors like Jeffrey Clark, Steve Bannon, Roger Stone, and Mike Flynn are making big plans for a second term that involve using the Justice Department to persecute his enemies. His "Project 2025," being worked on by advisors and rightwing think-tanks, would go after his former disloyal staff and officials such as chief of staff, John F. Kelly, attorney general William P. Barr, attorney Ty Cobb, and Joint Chiefs of Staff chair Gen. Mark A. Milley, and members of the Justice Department and FBI, as well as Joe Biden and his family.

In his desire to destroy the deep state, Trump may also revive his former executive order known as Schedule F that would reclassify tens of thousands of civil service employees as at-will employees, who could then be fired.

He is also contemplating invoking the Insurrection Act of 1871, which would allow him to mobilize the military for domestic policing. He has said he regretted not having done so to deal with the Black Lives Matter movement. So we could face martial law on a national scale.

Trump and former aide Stephen Miller are also making big second term plans on immigration policy. They say they will use not only ICE officers, but also police and the National Guard to carry out massive

raids, rounding up undocumented immigrants, putting them in camps, holding hearings that ignore due process, and deporting them by the millions each year. All of this will end up in front of the conservative Supreme Court, and what can we hope for there? Deportations will be accompanied by a revived Muslim ban to keep out immigrants from certain nations. And Trump would try to end constitutional birth-right citizenship for babies born in the United States.

These plans of Trump and Miller speak to the Republican base, the core of which is made up of middle-class people who fear that the white Christian majority that has ruled America for 250 years is being overwhelmed by immigrants who will take their jobs, their schools, their neighborhoods, their country. In fact, demographers predict that the non-Hispanic white majority will end by 2045; people of color will outnumber them. The fear and increasingly the hatred of these others is the glue that unites the Republican Party. Trump is many bad things, but racism forms the core of his dangerous politics.

We now have a cottage industry that produces news stories, TV programs, and books that openly discuss Trump's fascist politics. The late Madeleine Albright, Bill Clinton's Secretary of State, suggested as much in her book *Fascism: A Warning*. Republican political consultant Stuart Stevens's new book, *The Conspiracy to End America*, explicitly describes Trump as a fascist. Former congressperson and "Morning Joe" host Joe Scarborough labeled Trump a fascist. And night-time comedian Stephen Colbert dedicated a November 2023 opening monologue to a discussion of whether or not Trump was a fascist, and while there were some jokes it was mostly serious, and he concluded that indeed he was. We now, all of us in America, are talking about the possibility that our next president could be

a fascist whom commentators and authors compare to Adolf Hitler.

The fascism of the 1920s and 30s in Europe was generally a reaction to the growing threat of labor and the left; fascism created mass movements and political parties financed by the bourgeoisie. Today the threat from the left does not seem great enough to warrant a fascist response, and the American capitalist class is divided in its attitude toward Trump. As the AP reported in 2020, “On Nov. 6, more than two dozen CEOs of major U.S. corporations took part in a video conference to discuss what to do if Trump refuses to leave office or takes other steps to stay in power beyond the scheduled Jan. 20 inauguration of former Vice President Joe Biden.” The CEOs pledged to pressure the GOP if and when Trump engaged in illegal action and they stopped contributions to Trump and his supporters, but in January 2022 a report of the Citizens for Responsibility in Ethics found that, afraid of losing influence, “In addition to donations to the 147 members of the Sedition Caucus and the GOP’s party committees, corporations have resumed giving to the state attorneys general challenging the election results in four battleground states.” Americans for Prosperity, backed by billionaire businessman and rightwing libertarian Charles Koch, has put up \$70 million to defeat Trump in 2024 and has endorsed his rival Nikki Haley. But Koch also put up big bucks to stop Trump in 2016 and failed. So don’t count on the capitalist class to come to the rescue.

So now, let’s turn to the left, beginning at the bottom and working our way up. Workers and their unions, now facing not only all the old problems but also a new cybernetic revolution, awoke with a start this year and walked out of classrooms, coffee shops, hospitals, warehouses, movie studios, and auto plants in the largest strike wave since the 1980s. Led by outspoken leaders

who talked about challenging the billionaire class, like Shawn Fain of the Autoworkers and Fran Drescher of SAG AFTRA, the actors union, tens of thousands of workers struck and in most of these labor conflicts won significant improvements in wages and benefits and new clauses protecting them from the threats of technological displacement, whether by electric cars in the auto industry or by artificial intelligence in the movie business. There are new organizing drives: the Teamsters are working to organize Amazon, and the United Auto

Led by leaders who talked about challenging the billionaire class, like Shawn Fain of the Autoworkers and Fran Drescher of the actors union, thousands struck.

Workers are planning to unionize Tesla—both very big challenges facing militantly anti-union employers.

Some of these movements, such as those among teachers and autoworkers, were inspired in part by rank-and-file caucuses fighting for more democratic and militant unions. Though they represent only scores of activists, the Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) has been involved in these developments, as has the educational center Labor Notes. The left is present, if not yet leading.

While this is the biggest strike wave in many years, it comes nowhere near the historic strikes of the 1930s and 40s or 1970. But for the first time in decades, the working class is in motion. Is this merely a brief outburst or a turning point for labor? Are workers, their unions, and their leaders

prepared to mount a class-wide assault on non-union employers? Only time will tell, but it seems like there is now a militant minority in the unions prepared to fight.

Biden, in a first in presidential history, appeared at workers' picket lines, as did Bernie Sanders, and both expressed support for the strikers, and later congratulated them on their victory. Democrats hope these workers will return the favor by voting for Biden and his party in November. In 2020 most union voters supported Biden, but most white non-college voters supported Trump, so we'll only know in November who wins working class votes this time.

Women and their allies have also been on the move in the fight for abortion rights, principally through the ballot box. The Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, which had provided federal protections for abortion, led to the rise of a new generation of feminist fighters for abortion

The destruction and slaughter in Gaza has provoked a mass movement of sympathy for and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

rights who after a spate of protest demonstrations turned toward electoral action. In the November 2022 mid-term elections, voters approved measures to protect abortion rights in California, Michigan, and Vermont, while those in Kentucky and Montana resisted further restrictions. And in the off-year elections in November 2023, voters in Ohio put abortion rights in the state constitution, while in Kentucky and Virginia they voted against anti-abortion

candidates. Women are working to get abortion rights on state ballots in Arizona, Florida, Nevada, Colorado, South Dakota, and other states.

Biden and the Democrats believe, no doubt correctly, that the abortion issue will help them to draw women and young voters to the polls. In the meantime, the recent abortion rights victories inhibit the Republicans from advocating that Congress pass a national abortion ban.

Suddenly, since October 7, 2023, we have a new movement precipitated by the Israel-Hamas War. Israel's war on Hamas, which began in retaliation for Hamas' invasion of Israel and heinous murder of civilians including children, then was transformed by Israel into a war of revenge against the long-suffering Palestinian people, mass murder that has killed thousands of civilians and among them thousands of children. The destruction and slaughter in Gaza has provoked a mass movement of sympathy for and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The movement has been led by Jewish groups like Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and If Not Now, and Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim groups such as Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and American Muslims for Palestine, as well as other organizations championing Palestinian rights. There have been hundreds of protests with tens of thousands of participants in cities and on college campuses across the United States demanding a ceasefire and an end to funding of Israel. The multiracial and religiously diverse demonstrations have been dominated by young people. Many of the protests have involved civil disobedience, blocked highways and bridges, taking over Grand Central Station and the Statue of Liberty in Manhattan and a government office building in Washington, D.C., in all of which over a thousand people have been arrested. SJP and other groups have

organized protests on college campuses, though several university administrations banned the organization and cancelled its activities, which then led to new protests demanding the right to discuss and debate these issues. Several labor unions, particularly teachers unions, passed resolutions in support of Palestinians leading to condemnation by Jewish groups. What will happen to this new movement over the next several months as the war is resolved one way or another but the Israel/Palestine situation—occupation, apartheid, land seizures, and abuse—continues?

The conflict in the Middle East has given rise to an increase in antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents. Most seriously, a Palestinian child in the Chicago area was murdered and three Palestinian college students were shot in Vermont. Rightwing antisemites have been flourishing on social media. Israel supporters were quick to label any criticism of Israel as antisemitic – the Anti-Defamation League, for example, considers support for the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement to be inherently antisemitic. Unfortunately, however, not all allegations of antisemitism within the pro-Palestine movement have been bogus. Some of this is attributable to the fact that while the movement's core activists have thought deeply about these problems the thousands of newer participants have not, or they have been educated in DSA, or perhaps, the Party of Socialism and Liberation (PSL) in a politics that led them to automatically support any Palestinian action. DSA initially supported a rally organized by Hamas supporters. Some DSA affiliates and members have avoided criticizing Hamas for its murders of civilians. Some on the left have even suggested that October 7 proved that Hamas was the vanguard of the Palestinian liberation movement, apparently unaware or dismissive of its religious, rightwing ideology, its authoritarianism,

and its long history of attacks on civilians. Unfortunately, these politics mesh with the campist left groups like Workers World Party and the PSL, who view as allies states like China, Russia, and Iran because they oppose the United States.

Biden's and the Democrats' virtually unconditional support for Israel and their refusal over more than a month to call for a ceasefire appears to have cost them dearly among young voters. In 2020, almost 60 percent of young voters, 18 to 29, supported Biden over Trump. At present, Biden's popularity among young voters is collapsing. He is popular with only 25 percent of voters under 35. Yet not all young voters are prepared to sit out the election. As Eva Borgwardt, a spokesperson for JVP, told Amy Goodman on "Democracy Now,"

I worked for President Biden in Arizona in the 2020 election. Let's be clear: I am terrified of Donald Trump and the white supremacist, antisemitic movement that's behind him. And I feel immense stake in the Democratic Party winning in November 2024. And frankly, again, I am deeply terrified and angry at Democratic leadership for ignoring the calls from the majority of their base for a ceasefire, a hostage exchange, and a de-escalation, and creating a lack of faith in the Democratic Party that I am very concerned will hurt Democrats' chances in November.

Whatever young voters do, Biden might also lose Muslim and Arab voters, and this could be very serious. Biden won Michigan by 150,000 votes, but the state has 200,000 Muslims and 20,000 Arab Americans. Tens of thousands of Arab Americans also live in the states of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Georgia, and Arizona, that Biden won by anywhere from 2,000 to 10,000 votes. Losing these voters could be disastrous for Biden and might lead to the election of Trump.

The coming election has gotten pretty complicated. In addition to what looks like a Trump-Biden rematch, barring any un-

foreseen development, there are also several other real or possible candidates, left, right, and center. In the Democratic Primary, Marianne Williamson, the crystal age spiritual advisor and author has little following, and Rep. Dean Phillips of Minnesota will receive few if any convention votes. Neither represents any sort of threat to Biden. The Democratic Socialists of America, the country's largest left organization, backed Bernie Sanders in the last two elections, though after he lost in 2020, most of its members then voted for Biden. Whether officially or more likely unofficially, DSA members will probably work for Biden.

A little further left, African-American professor and major progressive public intellectual Cornel West created a brief sensation with his plans to run for president first on the Peoples Party ticket, then on the Green Party line, but finally, apparently as an independent, though he currently doesn't appear on the ballot in any state. The less well-known Jill Stein of the Green Party, the physician who was her party's candidate for president in 2012 and 2016 and for governor of Massachusetts in 2002 and 2010, is running again for president. In her last campaign she received 1.1 percent of the national vote. While both espouse progressive positions, neither West nor Stein has supported Ukraine's fight for independence and its right to get arms from the EU countries and the United States, and their Ukraine talking points often seem taken from Vladimir Putin. There is no chance that West or Stein could be elected, though Stein whose Green Party is on the ballot in many states might win enough votes from newly disaffected Democrats, students, Muslims and Arabs, to cost Biden the election.

In the Center, we may see Joe Manchin run as the candidate of the No Labels Party. Manchin, a stockholder in coal mines and a conservative Democrat from West Virginia, is retiring from his Senate seat and

flirting with the No Labels Party. Firmly planted in the center-right, he might as the No Labels candidate gain momentum and draw votes from both Trump and Biden. And then on the right we have Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., scion of the famous, wealthy, and politically connected Kennedy clan, all Democratic Party liberals, who was once an environmental activist and still holds some liberal opinions, but has now become a peddler of conspiracy theories about COVID vaccines targeting whites and Blacks and passing over Jews and Chinese, and about prescription drugs causing mass shootings. With his famous Kennedy name, he could win votes from Democrats though his kooky theories place him nearer the Trump followers. None of these campaigns, left, right, or center, seems capable of doing much except functioning as spoilers, mostly for Joe Biden.

There is no doubt that we are living in threatening times. Yet our society of economic inequality has also set many working people in motion and political crises open some opportunities. All of the left will be involved in the revitalized labor unions, in women's fights for abortion rights, in the Palestine solidarity movement, and in Black and Latino movements when they revive. And we will all work to build a more powerful movement not only against climate change but for system change. Many on the left will argue that it is important to build a left party alternative to Biden and Trump, a proposition with which virtually everyone on the left agrees. The question is, given Trump and the fascist movement, and the fact that minor parties will take votes from the one candidate who has proven he can beat Trump, whether now is the time to try to build a left party.

Thanks to my friends Stephen R. Shalom and Rust Gilbert for their helpful comments on this article and to Tom Harrison for editing it.

Cornel West, Jill Stein, and the Green Party

HOWIE HAWKINS

THE GREEN PARTY PERSISTS BECAUSE it is needed. Hundreds of thousands of progressives vote for Green candidates because they want an alternative to the neoliberal corporate Democrats, not to mention the increasingly neofascist Republicans. On issue after issue—climate, inequality, wars—Green voters find most elected Democrats fight their progressive demands. The Green Party's ranks are constantly replenished by progressives disillusioned and angry at Democratic resistance to progressive policies.

Like the Democratic and Republican parties, the Green Party is memberless. It has no membership in the national party based on agreement with party principles and support with dues. Dues-paying mass membership parties were invented by the left in the 19th century. It is how Green parties around the world are organized. But conforming American political culture where the major parties have not had dues-paying memberships, the members of the U.S. Green Party are its state parties, which have varied organizational forms and membership standards. A growing number of local and state parties have dues-paying memberships, but most are based on party registration in states that keep partisan

registrations (31 states and D.C.) or registration with the state party in nonpartisan registration states (19 states).

Without a common membership in the national party, the Green base of support can be estimated by counting registered Greens and Green votes in presidential elections. 255,575 people are registered Green today in 23 states where Green Party ballot qualification permits Green Party registration. That is up over 15,000 from October 2020 and about where the

I am skeptical that the spoiler dilemma progressive voters face is much diminished. It is built into our plurality winner elections.

total Green Party registrations have been since 2008.¹ One could estimate from this registration figure covering nearly half of the states that about 500,000 votes identify with the Green Party. Presidential vote totals bear this estimate out. Green presidential candidates received 469,627 votes in 2012 from 37 state ballots, 1,457,216 votes in 2016 from 45 state ballots, and 407,068 votes in 2020 from 30 state ballots. Ballot access was down in 2020 largely due to the Covid lockdown that made petitioning

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extremely difficult among a public avoiding close contact.

Ideologically, the national Green Party affirms ecosocialism in its national platform. A plank opposing capitalism and calling for an ecosocialist economy was adopted in 2016 and strengthened in 2022.² Also in 2022, a detailed Ecosocialist Green New Deal plank was adopted.³ Both planks were approved by the National Committee by more than 70%. My presidential campaign with Angela Walker as my vice-presidential running mate won the 2020 nomination on an explicitly ecosocialist platform.⁴ However, most Green Party candidates and issue campaigns push progressive policies without calling for ecosocialist system change. Identification with ecosocialism is strongest among younger party members. The party's formal Youth Caucus of nearly one hundred dues-paying members has called itself the Young Ecosocialists since 2018.

Without membership dues, the Green Party has been too poorly funded at the national level to support organizers to help local and state party organizing or to lead national issue campaigns. The national Green Party relies on appeals for voluntary donations. For these donations it competes with the local and state parties and their candidates for public office. As a consequence, the annual national party revenues have been only in the \$200,000–\$250,000 range for the last decade. That is just enough to support an office manager and a web manager, organizational overhead, and some small contributions to candidates and ballot access drives.

The strength and energy in the Green Party is at the local and state levels in 40 affiliated state parties. Greens show up. They are reliable participants in street politics, from public hearings and issue canvassing to marches and demonstrations. Most of Green electoral action is local. 142 Greens across 19 states currently hold elected office,

all of them local.⁵ Greens won 40 of 79 local races they ran in 2023.⁶ Nine Greens have served in state legislatures, five of whom were elected as Green candidates and four of whom switched out of disgust with their Democratic colleagues.⁷

In the 2024 election cycle, state party organizing is on the upswing. Indigenous activists spearheaded the formation of the South Dakota Green Party this year. Their introductory video is in English with Lakota subtitles.⁸ They have collected enough signatures to be on the ballot, which will make 2024 the first time ever that the Green Party presidential ticket will be on the South Dakota ballot. In Arizona, a re-invigorated Green Party that had lost its ballot line in 2018 submitted approximately 63,000 signatures to overcome the onerous ballot access petition barrier of 34,110 signatures that were due by an early deadline of November 30, 2023. Green ballot access petitioning is starting earlier than ever before in this cycle in many states.

Most of this local and state Green Party activity goes under the radar of the mass media as well as progressive and socialist publications. It is when the Green Party runs a presidential candidate that the mass media and publications on the left pay some attention, with most of it describing the Green candidate as a spoiler for the Democratic candidate. The 2024 election cycle has been no different since June 14, 2023, when Cornel West announced he was seeking the Green Party presidential nomination. On October 5, West decided to run as an independent, saying that campaigning in Green primaries and conventions would distract him from speaking directly to the people. So, on November 9, Jill Stein, the Green presidential candidate in 2012 and 2016, announced she would seek the Green nomination.

The media coverage of both has been somewhat different this cycle so far. While

the spoiler issue is always included, they are getting coverage of their messages and electoral strategies as well. What seems different this cycle is that Biden and Trump are the most unpopular candidates in history judging from favorable/unfavorable polling. Clinton and Trump in 2016 were barely less unpopular. A difference in 2024 is that both Biden and Trump have been President. It is not surprising that Gallup finds that a record 63% of Americans want a third major party.⁹

Besides West and Stein, several people have announced they are seeking the Green Party presidential nomination but none of them have demonstrated the capacity to build a campaign organization and raise the funds for a credible presidential campaign. West was the early frontrunner and Stein was his interim campaign manager. Since West announced he was abandoning the Green Party for an independent run, Stein has remained friendly to West. She suggested in an interview soon after announcing her campaign that she would welcome West as her running mate and that in fact she had asked him in 2016 to run with her.¹⁰ Stein thinks that West will be open to a joint ticket once he realizes his ballot access problems. She suggests that as a vice-presidential candidate, he could do what he does best, speaking to the media and public, and not have to worry about the organizational and fundraising side of the campaign. Their joint name recognition and the spirit of unity on the left would generate enthusiasm among progressives and interest by the media. A Stein/West ticket is a real possibility.

As an independent, West will have a much harder time getting on state ballots than he would have as a Green candidate. He is losing the Green Party ballot line that already exists in 20 states, including big states like California, Florida, and Texas where he will have to mount massive

petition drives for 219,403, 145,000, and 113,151 qualified signatures respectively. The Greens have a sizable volunteer base experienced in ballot petitioning. With supplementation in the more difficult states by paid petitioners, the Greens should get on the ballot in almost all states, if not all of them. West will have to rely on petition drive management companies that are charging \$10-\$20 per signature.¹¹ It is unlikely that West can raise the millions needed. His first quarterly financial report to the Federal Election Commission showed he had raised \$321,808 in his first three months of his campaign through September 30, with only \$105,407 left on hand. By comparison, the Jill Stein for President account active since 2015 has raised \$169,326 this presidential election cycle, with \$70,402 left on hand. Those funds were raised to deal with legal and FEC reporting issues related to wrapping up her 2016 campaign. Stein opened a Jill Stein for President 2024 campaign account with the FEC on November 9, 2023, but its first quarterly financials will not be reported until the end of 2023. Stein thinks that West would be open to a joint ticket once he faces his ballot access problems.

Most polls have shown both West and Stein receiving 1 percent to 4 percent each, with the lower numbers in battleground

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states and higher numbers in national polls.¹² Robert Kennedy Jr. is receiving percentages in the teens in most polls, with

indications that he is drawing support from across the political spectrum. However, he is losing support from progressives as they learn about and react to Kennedy's policy positions, particularly his anti-vaccine and pro-Israel policies, instead of just his family name.¹³ West and Stein have said the polls showing substantial support for alternatives to Biden and Trump, as well as the 63 percent Gallup poll support for a third major party, indicate that the two-party system is in crisis and that 2024 could be a breakthrough year for an independent progressive.

I am skeptical that the spoiler dilemma progressive voters face when it comes time to vote is much diminished. It is built into our plurality winner elections. The pull of the anti-Trump vote in November 2024 will be powerful. Most progressives will hold their nose and vote for Biden to stop Trump. Given their ages and Trump's legal problems, it is quite possible that one or both of them will not be on the ballot. But the ultra-conservative extremism of any likely Republican nominee is going to push most progressives to vote for any Democrat as the lesser evil.

That electoral reality should not mean the Green Party should stand down in the 2024 presidential election. As part of the long tradition of challenges to the two major parties from their left, the Green Party campaign will put demands into public debate that would otherwise be ignored. From the abolitionist Liberty Party running against slavery in the 1840s, through the Greenback-Labor and People's parties challenging corporate monopolies in the Gilded Era, to the Socialist Party's demands for labor protections and social welfare programs in the Progressive Era, progressive third parties have precipitated many reforms. The Green New Deal for climate action and economic rights, which was the Green Party's signature issue in

the 2010s, was picked up by progressive Democrats and put on the national agenda, albeit in a watered-down form.¹⁴

More practically for the Greens, running a presidential candidate helps with organizing and ballot access. Green Party presidential campaigns bring attention and activity that local and state parties use to draw presidential campaign supporters into their local issue and election campaigns. Securing a ballot line for the next election cycle is affected by the presidential vote in 40 states. The petitioning requirements for a Green candidate to qualify for ballot placement are far easier with a ballot-qualified Green Party than running as an independent.

Both West and Stein are similar on policy, if not on style. Both support strong climate action and anti-poverty measures, Medicare for All, and deep cuts in military spending. West is more expansive in proclaiming his values and broad policies, while Stein spells out her policies in some detail. Stein does not identify as a socialist and presents herself as a progressive campaigning for immediate reforms. West identifies as a Christian socialist, although he cites more biblical than socialist references in his presentations.

Ecosocialists in the Green Party, particularly in the Young Ecosocialists, have expressed concern that much of the socialist content of the platform that Angela Walker and I ran on in 2020 may be neglected in the 2024 campaign. That socialist content included a direct call for a socialist economy based on social ownership and democratic planning. It proposed a National Health Service that would fully socialize and democratize the organization and assets of health care, not just the payment system through National Health Insurance, or Medicare for All. It called for an Ecosocialist Green New Deal that emphasized public ownership and democratic planning in the

key industrial sectors, including energy, transportation, and manufacturing, in order to coordinate a complicated transition to 100% clean energy and zero carbon emissions in a rapid timeframe.¹⁵ While Green ecosocialists may be concerned about a de-emphasis on socialist policy content, they are still supporting Stein as the only viable candidate seeking the Green nomination.

Another concern of many Greens with both West and Stein is foreign policy. Both, unlike Biden, call for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to military aid to Israel until it ends its occupation and apartheid. They are clear that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve peace and human rights. But also unlike Biden, both oppose arms to Ukraine for its self-defense and call for a ceasefire and negotiations, as if Russia will cease its aggression if Ukraine is disarmed. When asked about Ukraine, both condemn Russia's invasion, but then claim that Russia was provoked by NATO expansion. They provide a geopolitical analysis of state interests that highlights U.S. imperialism without a class analysis of the oppressed and oppressor in Ukraine that gears their policy to support the oppressed.

I have debated Stein on Ukraine.¹⁶ I have also privately debated West on Ukraine, which led to a policy briefing for West that I set up in early August with the Ukrainian socialist political scientist Denys Pilash. Pilash presented the view of the Ukrainian left who are appealing for solidarity from Western leftists in their struggles against both Western banks and Russian tanks. They ask for campaigns to cancel Ukraine's enormous Western debt burden as well as to provide the arms Ukraine needs for its self-defense. West stayed on the call for two hours, half an hour past another appointment he had. He seemed persuaded by Pilash's analysis of both Russian and Western imperialism and suggested we do a public conversation

with Pilash on Ukraine. But he never confirmed a date for that event. In subsequent media interviews, West has reverted to his geopolitical analysis and call for a ceasefire and negotiations.

Ukraine policy has divided the Green Party as it has the broader left.¹⁷ The dilemma for socialist internationalists who oppose colonial occupation in both Ukraine and Palestine is whether to support Stein or West who do not support Ukrainian resistance to Russian occupation or to support Biden who does not support Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Looming in the background of this decision is Donald Trump, who could not care less about either Ukrainians or Palestinians.

When West was a Green Party candidate, I shared my thoughts with him on campaign organization, platform policies, and messaging based on my experience as the 2020 Green presidential candidate. I have been doing the same with Stein since West left the Green Party and she announced her candidacy. One suggestion I gave to both of them is how to address the spoiler problem, which comes up in every media and public appearance. Both agree

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with a ranked choice national popular vote for President, which would eliminate the spoiler problem. I hope their campaigns will go on the offensive and turn the spoiler problem around by demanding that Biden join them in supporting that reform. If he doesn't, he should be blamed for the spoiler

problem.

I share the concern of many progressives that Green votes might contribute to a Trump victory. I think that risk is small. Most Green votes are simply Green votes, not wayward Democratic votes. The 2016 exit poll asked what third-party voters would have done if their candidate had not been on the ballot. 61 percent of Stein voters would have not voted, with 25 percent voting for Clinton and 14 percent for Trump.¹⁸ If those numbers are plugged into the three closest states in 2016—Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania—Trump still wins. In the competitive battleground states in 2024, which most pollsters and political scientists put at four to seven states, the pressure for lesser evil voting will be intense. But in the other non-competitive 44 to 47 states with over 80 percent of the electorate, the Green alternative should be part of the debate.

My conclusion is that the small risk of Trump is worth having a credible independent progressive voice in this race instead of silencing ourselves and abandoning our demands. Stein will bring out the hundreds of thousands of partisan Green voters who will not vote for a Democrat or Republican and perhaps many more, such as the many Arab, Muslim, and young voters who are angry at who they call “Genocide Joe” over Gaza.

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The Party's Over

The Crisis of Left Electoralism

KIM MOODY

THE EXPERIMENT OF SOCIALIST and left-progressive electoral action on the Democratic ballot line now faces a fundamental crisis. The momentum created by the 2016 Sanders presidential primary campaign, which helped propel the Squad to political office and inspired the rapid growth of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), was lost in the aftermath of Sanders' truncated 2020 run and his rapid surrender to Biden. The drift of the Squad and others toward the party's political and operational center and their support for the party's neoliberal leaders has raised serious questions about using the Democratic Party for socialist goals. This was underlined by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's (AOC) and other Squad members' endorsement of Biden even after his move to the right, in early 2023, on key issues such as immigration and oil drilling, as noted by *FiveThirtyEight* (March 23, 2023). More generally, increased resistance from the party's leadership and institutions has limited the left's ability to expand significantly. This was reflected in the relatively slim gains made by socialists

and left progressives in the 2022 House elections. On top of this, the soaring costs of congressional elections and the recent decline in small political donations has further crippled the ability of the electoral left to expand its efforts.

The evidence for this crisis is everywhere in the organizational state of the electoral left. The Justice Democrats (JD), arguably the most effective driver of progressive primary challenges, laid off nine of its twenty staff members in July due to lack of funds. As the *Huffington Post* put it, "its mission more muddled and its coffers depleted." In August, it let go of three more staffers for a total of twelve—more than half its staff. Even before this in April, the JD-allied and now mainly electoralist Sunrise Movement fired 35 of its 100-member staff, while Middle Seat, a political fundraiser and one of AOC's top 2020 and 2022 campaign vendors, dumped about a third of its staff. Even Emily's List saw layoffs. All of this in the run-up to the crucial 2024 election.

The immediate cause of this crisis is funding. For one thing, the cost of winning a House seat has risen on average from \$1.3 million in 2016 to \$2.5 million, for an open seat, and \$2.9 million, to defeat an incumbent, in 2022. Small donations have been lower in this cycle due to disgust with politics and with the Democrats in particular, examined below. As the *New York Times* reported (July 16, 2023), with small donations slow in coming, the Biden campaign is even more

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heavily dependent on wealthy donors than in 2020. At the same time, many major political donors are shifting contributions directly to party campaign committees and to “dark money” funds for both Senate and House 2024 campaigns. But the paucity of small donations hits left organizations that lack sufficient wealthy donors, PAC money, or foundation support much harder.

One result of this crisis and increased resistance from the party leadership is a further retreat from “primarying” the old guard. This is particularly critical because, assuming the point is to change the Democratic Party or move it to the left, there is no other way to clear out the centrist majority of Democrats in the House and throughout the political system. Retirements and open seat contests are too few to be a path to a sizable presence in the Democratic Party Caucus in the House or for that matter in the Senate or just about any state legislature. An indication of this is that the JD appears to have abandoned challenging incumbents altogether. JD is currently focusing on supporting incumbent Jamaal Bowman, who is under attack from pro-Israel PACs. Whereas, the organization endorsed eight House candidates challenging centrist incumbents in 2020 and two in 2022, it has not named any such challengers for 2024, according to *Huffington Post* (August 10, 2023).

Similarly, while Our Revolution has endorsed Rep. Barbara Lee (CA) for Dianne Feinstein’s open Senate seat as well as a number of candidates mostly for local office, it has not endorsed anyone for the House in 2024, as of late October. In 2022, Our Revolution endorsed 18 House candidates, six of whom opposed a sitting mainstream Democrat. Sanders, who backed 13 House candidates in 2022, four of whom challenged incumbents, has endorsed only one House candidate in 2023. That is Aaron Regunberg, an unsuccessful candidate for Democratic nomination for

an open seat representing Rhode Island’s first congressional district, which was filled by special election. So far, Sanders has not endorsed anyone for the House in 2024.

AOC also endorsed Regunberg, but her Courage to Win PAC, with over \$500,000 cash-on-hand, contributed just \$5,000 each to only two House candidates, incumbents Cori Bush and Greg Casar, according to its September 30, 2023, Federal Election Commission report. No other official House endorsements by AOC for the 2023–2024 election cycle could be found as of this writing. The DSA’s national electoral commission, which in the past endorsed House and state legislative candidates, has so far only endorsed a small number of local candidates. Clearly, the electoral left is in retreat.

Part of this retreat is due to the relatively poor performance of left challengers in 2022. Despite a large number of open House seats in the 2022 midterms, the net gains for left progressives that year were small. Of the 23 left candidates, defined as those endorsed by either Bernie Sanders, JD, and/or Our Revolution, ten won their primary. Of the eight who challenged incumbents, only one (Jamie McLoed Skinner) won, and she lost the general election. Of the 15 who fought open-seat primary contests, nine succeeded. This was down significantly from 2020, when left progressives won 22 out of 32 open seats, according to FiveThirtyEight (September 27, 2022).

Altogether in 2022, ten left progressives won their primaries and thirteen lost, not that bad a showing. But three sitting left progressives, as defined above, lost to moderates in incumbent-versus-incumbent primary fights in redrawn districts, and three new challengers who won their primaries were defeated in the general election. The net gain for 2022 was just four, none of whom won a primary challenge to a sitting incumbent.¹ This is clearly a bad sign for those hoping to transform the

Democratic Party. The prospects for 2024 are, if anything, significantly worse for the left, with the House incumbent survival rate at 94 percent, the increasing pressure to support moderates in swing districts and not rock the boat, and the financial crisis of the electoral left deepening.

State legislative elections are, of course, much cheaper and somewhat more accessible. The incumbent rate for state legislatures was nevertheless over 95 percent in 2022, though only 22 percent of Democratic incumbents faced a challenge that year. Turnover is higher, however, and open seats are more frequent, about 24 percent in 2022. Only about 4 percent are term-limited, about a third of them held by Democrats. A sobering thought, however, is that there are over 7,000 seats to contest in the nation's state legislatures. While the cost of running for a state legislative seat is much lower than that for Congress, on average it has doubled in the last two decades to over \$100,000 by 2020, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. No doubt it is higher by now and, of course, higher still in states like New York, California, Washington, and others.

DSAers, who run more often at this level, held 56 state legislative seats by 2023.² But whereas in 2022, national DSA endorsed 18 candidates for state office, this year so far, no state-level candidates have been endorsed by DSA's national electoral commission, according to its website. No doubt some have been backed by local chapters. Our Revolution, which endorsed 80 state legislative candidates in 2022, had not endorsed any this year as of late October, according to its websites. Neither had Bernie Sanders. It appears that the crisis of the electoral left hit down ballot as well.

Politics as Auction: Capital-Driven Crisis of Election Finance

That the electoral left's 2023-2024 elec-

tion cycle political crisis should take the form of plunging financial sources is, itself, significant. For one thing, it reveals just how dependent current left electoral action on the Democratic ballot line is on top-down, staff-driven outfits like JD, for-profit fundraising firms like Middle Seat, and even outfits like private-equity-owned digital giant NGP-VAN, which is the party's major data processor and is used by all Squad members. For another, it also shows the heavy reliance of left candidates on out-of-state and out-of-district donations rather than on permanent grassroots district organization.

The underlying cause of this funding crisis, however, is the long-term, capital-driven escalation of the cost of elections. It began with the entrance of corporate PACs in the 1970s but has accelerated well beyond that, pushed by wealthy and well-to-do donors.³ Including money spent by candidates, party committees, and "outside" money, the cost of midterm congressional elections rose from \$1.6 billion in 1998, already far above earlier years, to almost \$9 billion in 2022.⁴ As OpenSecrets' executive director put it, "The ever-increasing spending race between political parties means the price of admission to Congress keeps climbing." Political office has become the object of an auction in which the highest bidder wins 90 percent of the time.

And it is big money that is driving the process. Just 18 percent of all House campaign money in the 2022 cycle came from donations of \$200 or less. The Democrats did slightly better, but small donations still accounted for only 19 percent of all the funds they raised. The further decline in small donations and the continued increase in the cost of elections tells you that wealth and capital will play an increasingly larger role in upcoming elections. And Opensecrets.org (August 2, 2023) expects 2024 to be "the most expensive election in history."

Squad members, who don't take corporate money, raise millions for their elections primarily on individual donations from outside their own states and districts. Most of this is raised via hired digital vendors such as ActBlue or Middle Seat. AOC is one of the most extreme. She raised over \$12 million in the 2022 election cycle, far more than any other Squad member. Of this, over 80 percent came from out of state. In 2020, the latest year for district-level figures from OpenSecrets.com, less than 1 percent of AOC's funding came from within her district. It should be obvious that, with funds for leftist candidates drying up, this dependence on large numbers of smaller donations from across the country cannot underwrite much of an expansion of leftist primary challengers while also defending their incumbents.

Consider this: The JD raised just \$6.5 million, mostly from more than 1,300 individuals, in the 2022 election cycle before facing its financial crisis. Hakeem Jeffries, a militant centrist, leader in the fight against left challengers in the 2022 midterms, and declared anti-socialist who is now the unanimously elected House minority leader,⁵ alone pulled in \$5.9 million that year. Of this, almost 80 percent came from large donations or PACs and just 5.5 percent from small contributions. This year, he has already raked in \$7.8 million. It is pretty obvious that the electoral left of the Democratic Party cannot possibly compete with the party's mainstream majority who are heavily funded by corporations and wealthy individuals.

Consider also that while the electoral left is pulling back on challenging incumbent centrists, the *New York Times* (October 29, 2023) reports that the party establishment's occasional allies, the deep pockets American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Democratic Majority for Israel (DMI) are gearing-up to challenge

some or all of the nine incumbent Democrats who, on October 25 in the midst of Israel's intense and indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, voted against further military aid to Israel. Unconditional support for Israel has long been a core policy of the Democratic Party, and opposition to candidates critical of Israel's apartheid policy toward the Palestinians is not new.

In the 2022 midterms, AIPAC spent \$13 million and DMI, \$9 million, much of it "outside" money, to defeat left challengers not considered friendly enough to Israel. According to Opensecrets.org (November 17, 2022), AIPAC spent \$2 million in "outside" money to defeat Summer Lee, a critic of Israel's apartheid policy, in the 2022 midterm primary and another \$3.2 million in the general election, together more than twice what Lee raised that cycle. In this case, they failed to prevent her victory. (The most money only wins 90 percent of the time.) Lee, who is one of the nine Democrats voting against military aid to Israel this October, already faces a challenger and is certain to be a target of AIPAC spending in 2024. Ilhan Omar and Jamall Bowman, who also opposed the additional military hardware for Israel, have attracted primary challengers as well. The issues may change, but the escalation of the political auction continues.

At a more basic level, one might ask, why are socialists playing money-driven marketplace-style politics in the first place? A look at how AOC spent the millions she raised mostly from outside her district reveals that in the 2022 cycle, 60 percent went to staff salaries, fundraising, and administration, and another 24 percent to media purchases, which compose the bulk of election campaigning. The rest, presumably, went to basic election campaign work like getting out the vote and to beefing up her sizable cash-on-hand. Permanent grassroots organization doesn't figure in. The actual practice of DSA and left elec-

totalism depends not on mass organization or actual class struggle, as is sometimes claimed, but on electing individuals to office to do “good” on behalf of the working class through primaries that attract the more affluent voters,⁶ all in hopes that the base will follow. Their election methods are scarcely different from those of mainstream Democrats, reliant on professional fundraising firms and campaign experts. They are more than a little dependent on high-vis personalities like Bernie and AOC. It is top-down and, from a socialist perspective, upside-down.

Socialist electoral politics need to be organized on an entirely different mass, grassroots basis with an entirely different strategy outside the real-time institutional confines of the Democratic Party and its ballot line, which the state provides but the party determines the candidate-entry rules. Independent working-class political organizations with a permanent, mass, grassroots organization in neighborhoods and workplaces could easily replace money with direct, democratic voter organization and mobilization—not to be confused with today’s typical and temporary “get out the (computer-targeted) vote” efforts.

A (Well Deserved) Crisis of Confidence in Politics, Politicians, and the Major Parties

But if funding is the proximate problem, this crisis is also a result of a fairly recent increase in distrust of politics, politicians, and the major parties that has itself led to the slump in small donations. Our Revolution, for example, found in a recent survey of its “members” that “41% told us they are feeling *depressed, angry, or unmotivated* by the 2024 election” (emphasis in original). With Bernie, the Squad, the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC), and most progressives lined up behind Biden, there is no space for a Democratic Party left

opposition.

This disillusionment goes well beyond the political left. As a recent survey from the Pew Research Center reveals, most Americans’ typically skeptical view of politics has actually gotten much worse precisely in the period of rising socialist electoralism through the Democratic Party, 2018-2023.⁷ Some of the worst of this is focused on Congress. For example, the proportion of Democrats and Democrat leaners who think members of Congress “care about the people they represent” fell from 51 percent in 2018 to 40 percent this year. Those Democrats and leaners who thought members of Congress promoted policies “in the public interest” dropped from 48 percent to 37 percent over that period. In addition, politicians, including Democrats, are judged “out of touch” with their constituents.

Among Democrats and leaners, 74 percent thought members of Congress did a very or somewhat *bad* job of listening to their constituents. A full 81 percent of these Democrats said that “most elected officials don’t care what ‘people like them’ think.” Presumably many were thinking about their own Democratic representatives. Eighty-four percent of all those “highly engaged with politics” gave the same answer. In terms of influence, among those who answered, 70 percent thought people in their districts had too little influence, while 80 percent said “people who donated a lot of money to their political campaigns” had too much influence. This negative view, however, wasn’t just about the individual politicians.

One of the most revealing findings of the Pew Survey was the sharp drop in those with a favorable view of the Democratic Party as a whole. Whereas more than 60 percent had a positive view of that party in the late 1990s and early 2000s, this fell to the mid-40s from 2008 until 2018, no

doubt a result of the recession and of disappointment with the Obama administration. Then from 2018 through July 2023, approval of the Democratic Party dropped to 37 percent while those with an unfavorable view of this party rose to 60 percent. When asked, almost three-quarters of Democrats and leaners respond that the sentence “I often wish there were more political parties to choose from in this country” describes their view extremely (44 percent) or somewhat (30 percent) well. Among independents, far more of those who lean Democrat express this view than among Republican leaners. Democrats just aren’t very happy with their party.

As the Pew survey points out, the declining positive views of the Democrats in particular are “now at their most negative point in the last three decades.” And this precisely during the period of rising socialist electoralism in that party. I’m not arguing that Bernie Sanders, AOC, the Squad, or DSA are to blame for this dismal picture of how most people view politics and the Democratic Party in particular. But, as their increasing failure to oppose the party leadership, indeed their consistent endorsement of party leaders including Biden, their high level of “unity” votes on Biden’s legislative agenda,⁸ and, hence their stronger public identification with the party suggest, neither did they prevent or even moderate it, despite their individual popularity or personal views. There is no indication in the Pew survey that people see a counter trend to this deteriorating view of politicians and the Democratic Party.

Perhaps the most immediate impact of this growing political malaise for the left has been the fate of the DSA itself. With the collapse of the Sanders dynamic and the increase in sometimes bitter internal fights over the organization’s inability to keep its Democratic “electeds” on track, notably over Israel/Palestine and Biden’s

strike ban in rail negotiations, the group has experienced a steep and continuous loss of membership. According to its June Budget Report, DSA saw its “constitutional” membership (which includes lapsed dues-payers) fall from its high point of 94,000 in mid-2021 to 78,000 by May 2023. Actual “members-in-good-standing,” a more realistic measure, fell from 78,000 to 57,000 over that period—the loss of a quarter of its real membership precisely as the favorable attitudes toward the Democratic Party slumped to new lows and the controversy over the behavior of the “electeds” took center stage for a time. While it is too soon to assess, the current fallout from the Israel-Gaza war is already threatening to fragment DSA further.

In spite of the preexisting crisis, in what appeared to be a consensus at its July convention, DSA reaffirmed its commitment to “tactically contesting partisan elections on the Democratic ballot line” as a priority. In recognition of the problem of holding DSAers in political office to the organization’s politics, this was amended by the proposal to “Act Like a Party,” that is, to attempt to organize the work of DSAers in office and provide support. A proposal to have some type of accountability or discipline over “electeds,” however, failed. The “dirty break,” which never attracted any interest from DSA’s “electeds,” crumbled to dust even before the convention and has virtually disappeared from the discussion. On the other hand, there has been a revived interest in the “party surrogate,” a mass organization with its own identity that would parallel the party itself and, in the case of Congress and most state legislatures, would compete with the Democratic Caucus for the loyalty of its office holders. Given the initial institutional and financial imbalance of power between the two and the fact that legislative impact depends on the party caucus not the party-surrogate, it

is not hard to estimate which organization has the advantage in this contest for loyalty.

The term “party surrogate” appears to have been first introduced by Jared Abbott and Dustin Guastella in 2019, though the idea of such an organization was proposed in some detail without the term by Seth Ackerman in August 2016.⁹ The dates are significant—right in the wake of Sanders’ most successful challenge and the subsequent election in 2018 of the four members of the Squad. If such an ambitious electoral project was to have any chance of organizational growth it was certainly during the first few years of momentum coming out of the 2015–2016 Sanders campaign, the election of the Squad in 2018, and the initial growth of DSA. Those DSAers elected to office in 2018 and 2020, without whose support such a project would not be credible precisely because it is a Democratic Party-centered electoral project, however, have never shown any interest in this type of grassroots organization. Instead, they settled for the CPC and a cluster of NGO-style 501(c)4s, staff-driven campaign outfits like JD and Our Revolution, and digital fundraisers such as for-fee ActBlue or for-profit Middle Seat. And now, the momentum is lost, the crisis has set in, and the potential “party-surrogate” supporters among today’s left office holders in Congress are tightly in alliance with the party’s leadership.

How to Get Out of This Mess

The crisis of electoral politics (and of much more) cannot be resolved or transcended by more “tactical” electoralism in an increasingly resistant and unpopular Democratic Party. “Just try harder” seldom works in the midst of a crisis, particularly when that activity is part of the problem. As has been the case throughout U.S. history, notably in the 1850–1860s (slavery), 1890s (agrarian and labor populism), 1930s (labor), 1950–1960s (civil rights, oppressed liberation,

rank-and-file upsurge), it has taken mass disruptive social upheaval to loosen the dead hand of the ruling classes on politics and reduce the barriers to any social and political progress. The crying need is a durable and comprehensive working-class movement with unions, organizations of the oppressed, and grassroots independent political expressions from community and workplace groups to take the first steps toward a new party of the working class. All of this has to come first and foremost from the roots of class power in the production of goods and services. In this seemingly overwhelming task, socialists now have a couple of things going in our favor.

One is the well documented upswing in union and worker action. This is not yet the upsurge needed to break the impasse, but it is motion in the right direction. Furthermore, unlike electoral politics, the vast majority in the United States view this favorably. Support for unions has been rising since 2017, when it jumped to 61 percent, from 56 percent in 2016, then reaching 67 percent in 2023. Gallup reported that it had hit 71 percent in 2022 and then fell to 67 percent, but I believe this is due to a statistical fluke. The jump to 71 percent in 2022 was due entirely to a sudden and suspect leap of nine percentage points in Republican approval of unions, from 47 percent in 2021 to 56 percent in 2022. It then fell back down to a more typical Republican level of 47 percent in 2023, bringing the overall average to 67 percent in that year. This made it appear as though there had been a significant drop in support for unions in 2023. There is no reason to believe that was the case.

For one thing, the drop Gallup reported in 2023 was definitely *not* due to a reaction against strikes. The same Gallup poll headlined one section, “Americans Favor Workers in Labor Disputes,” and shows that in 2023, big majorities support the

auto workers against the companies (75 percent), striking movie and TV writers by 72 percent, and actors by 67 percent against their employers. A Reuters/Ipsos poll taken in September during the Detroit (formerly “Big”) Three-UAW auto workers’ strike showed that 58 percent supported the strikers. A September 21-25 joint Global Strategies Group/GBAO poll found 76 percent supported the UAW over the auto companies, while an October 4-9 CNN survey said 76 percent sided with the strikers and just 23 percent with the company.

For another, an August 2023 AFL-CIO poll of registered voters with “oversamples of voters under 30, AAPI voters, and union members,” a rather different sample than the randomly selected Gallup poll, showed 71 percent approved of unions, 88 percent among those under 30, and 91 percent among Democrats. On top of that, 75 percent support workers going on strike, 93 percent for Democrats and 90 percent for under-30s. Even allowing for bias in the sample, this reveals strong support for unions *and* strikes in key constituencies. By all the indicators in the Gallup, Reuters/Ipsos, GSG/GBAO, AFL-CIO, and CNN polls, increasing numbers of U.S. residents think unions are a good way to improve one’s life, even if it takes a strike to do so, and typically only a quarter or less support capital against workers. As we saw, this contrasts sharply with what a majority thinks of politics, politicians, and the Democratic Party in particular. This includes Biden, whose approval hit 37 percent in September, while that of his handling of the economy fell to 30 percent, according to the *Washington Post-ABC* poll.

The contrast as well as the timing are striking! No doubt Biden or his advisers noticed this, which is one reason why the president showed up at a UAW picket line in Michigan in September. If the Democrats need those well-to-do suburban votes

to win a majority in the House, Biden needs the still substantial union and blue-collar vote in midwestern swing states to take the Electoral College. Actually, Biden is not new to the political uses of the picket line at election time. During the 2019 GM strike, *Bloomberg* (September 23, 2019) reported that as the presidential primary took off in September, candidate Biden joined striking UAW members at a Kansas City GM plant. On almost the same day, Elizabeth Warren also walked a UAW picket line at GM’s Detroit-Hamtramck plant.

As former Clinton aide Paul Bledsoe recently told *Politico* concerning the 2024 elections, “From now until election day, he’s got to err on the side of the worker and the consumer. That’s just the politics of our time.” And, after that? Well, Biden consults about the future of the auto industry regularly with GM CEO Mary Barra, who has visited the White House eight times since Biden took office, according to *Politico* (September 19, 2023). One day for the workers, eight for the boss. That, too, is the politics of our time.

Of course, public opinion or presidential appearances by themselves do not win strikes or bring success to organizing drives. That requires organization and direct class struggle. While socialists cannot create an upsurge, they have often played a leading role in the development and even direction of class struggle in the United States and around the world. Even in our time, socialists have helped lead mass actions, from the 2018 teachers’ upsurge through the rank-and-file organizations of teachers, Teamsters, autoworkers, and others, as well as the efforts to organize Amazon, and more. These are movements in which working-class people participate collectively and directly and feel their power—something most clearly don’t feel in today’s electoral politics.

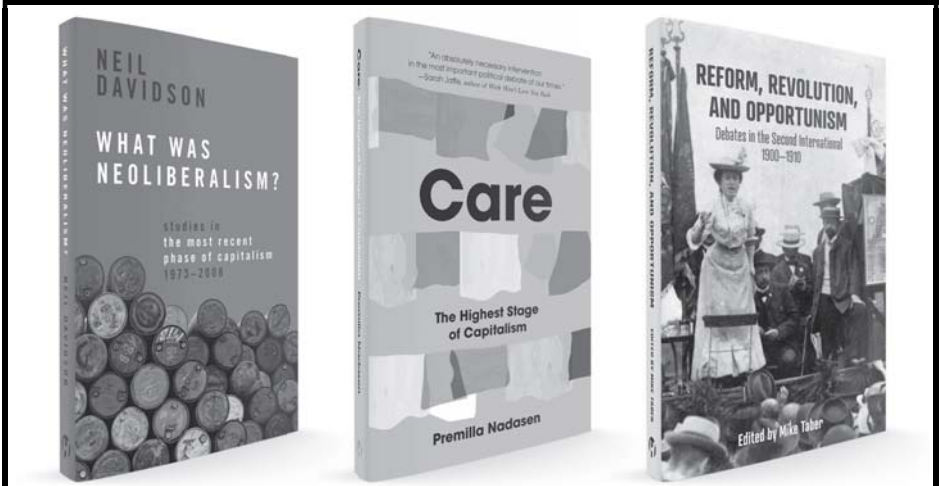
The acceleration of class conflict now

in motion along with its rising popularity is an invitation and a challenge to today's socialist movement in the United States to get on board and make a difference. This is how we inspire people to act, break the cynicism and fatalism caused by the reality of mainstream electoral politics, and help people change themselves in order to change the world "from below"—and maybe even create a new type of (small "d") democratic working-class politics in the United States.

NOTES

1. Moody, "Stuck in the Mud, Sinking to the Right: 2022 Midterm Elections," *Against the Current* (2023, March/April 2023), 25.
2. Even the rate at which DSA members have been elected to city councils, by far the cheapest and easiest to win, has slowed. Of the 95 currently holding these offices, excluding mayors, 29 took office in 2022 and just nine in 2023. *Wikipedia*, "List of Democratic Socialists of America public officeholders," last edited Oct. 23, 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Democratic_Socialists_of_America_public_officeholders.
3. Kim Moody, "The 'Class Ceiling': Political Money and the Primary Election," *Spectre* (Issue 6, Fall 2022), 38-45.
4. Unless otherwise specified, all elections finance figures are from OpenSecrets.org and most endorsement or election results are from Ballotpedia or candidates' websites.
5. Moody, "Stuck in the Mud," 26.
6. Moody, "The 'Class Ceiling,'" 37-38.
7. Pew Research Center, *Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics* (Sept. 19, 2023).
8. Squad members each voted in favor of Biden's agenda over 90 percent of the time. FiveThirtyEight, "Does Your Member of Congress Vote With or Against Biden?" Jan. 3, 2023, projects.fivethirtyeight.com/biden-congress-votes/house/; Ronald Brownstein, "The House reached a stunning new milestone this year," *CNN Politics*, June 21, 2022, edition. cnn.com/2022/06/21/politics-house-democrats-vote-unity/index.html.
9. Jared Abbott and Dustin Guastella, "A Socialist Party in Our Time?" *Catalyst* (3, No. 2, Summer 2019), 7-63; Seth Ackerman, "A Blueprint for a New Party," *Jacobin*, Aug. 11, 2016, jacobin.com/2016/11/bernie-sanders-democratic-labor-party-ackerman.

NEW BOOKS FOR CHANGING THE WORLD



Electoral Democracy and the Roberts Court

ELIZABETH RAPAPORT

IN THE MAJOR ELECTION LAW CASE *Moore v. Harper*, the Supreme Court rebuffed the Independent State Legislature Theory (ISLT). ISLT aims at one party rule. It is designed to take advantage of the current political environment of aggressive Republican-dominated state legislatures. Chief Justice John Roberts authored the 6-3 decision rejecting ISLT. ISLT was deployed in *Moore v. Harper* to contend that state legislatures are given unlimited power to construct congressional districts by the U.S. Constitution, and that therefore state courts could not restrain extreme gerrymandering by imposing state constitutional limits. I discussed ISLT and *Moore v. Harper* in some detail in *New Politics* Winter 2023 after oral argument in November 2022 but before the case was decided in June 2023. As explained in that article, ISLT would, if adopted by the Supreme Court, also bless the kind of manipulation in presidential elections that the insurrectionists failed to pull off following the 2020 election. Trump's congressional allies sought to replace legitimate Biden slates of presidential electors with Trump slates selected by state legislatures.

Three conservative Justices joined the three liberal justices to say “no dice” to ISLT. If the Court holds to its decision in *Moore v. Harper*, a similar move by congressional Republicans in 2024 could not look to the Supreme Court for legitimization.

This 6-3 decision was good news. Two of the three Trump appointees, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, voted with Chief Justice Roberts and the liberals to reject ISLT. It is more evidence that Republican-appointed federal judges, including Trump appointees, in many instances behave as “normal” conservatives, observing the familiar norms and incentives that characterize the elite legal profession. When Trump contested his 2020 loss in the courts to the tune of some sixty lawsuits, we saw dozens of instances of judges appointed by Republican presidents, Trump included, refusing to carry the insurrectionists' water. The federal judiciary to date has out-performed Congress in defending electoral democracy against the insurrectionists. The Senate failed to convict the impeached president, the Republican Party has embraced him, the Biden Justice Department was slow, likely too slow, to indict Trump, and the Democratic Party thus far proved feeble in countering his re-election bid. Should Trump secure a second term in 2024, we can expect a combination of more careful judicial selection and opportunism to produce a more compliant federal judiciary.

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As welcome as the result in *Moore v Harper* is, a brief survey of recent election law cases reminds us that “normal” legal conservatism has degraded electoral democracy during the tenure of the Roberts Court. This Court has closed the federal courts to challenges to partisan gerrymandering and sharply curtailed federal protection of the rights of minority voters. While the Roberts Court has not done Trump’s bidding, the “normal” conservative course has softened the ground for the putschist pursuit of one-party rule.

In 2019 Roberts authored *Rucho v Common Cause*, a decision concluding that partisan gerrymandering posed inextricably “political questions.” Political questions are outside the competence and legitimate jurisdiction of the federal courts. Justice Kagan wrote a bitter dissent for the then four liberal justices. She criticized her colleagues for leaving violations of constitutional voting rights without remedy in the federal courts. However, racial gerrymandering—depriving minorities of an equal opportunity to vote—violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment and the Voting Rights Act. The Court took the legal world by surprise in June 2023 by ruling in *Allen v. Milligan* against the Alabama state legislature’s determined effort to confine Black electoral power to one out of the state’s seven congressional districts. This despite Black Alabamians comprising a quarter of the state’s population and being geographically concentrated. Roberts wrote the majority opinion joined by Kavanaugh and the three liberal justices.

But one swallow does not a summer make. Just a few months later, in October 2023, the Court heard oral argument in another racial gerrymandering case, *Alexander v. South Carolina Conference of the NAACP*. All six conservatives expressed great skepticism that they would be able disentangle a racial from a partisan basis for

this gerrymander. South Carolina is poised to prevail. If so, South Carolina Black voters will have to settle for one of seven congressional districts although their numbers and geographical concentration are very similar to the pattern in Alabama. The decision will come down by summer 2024. The message to be conveyed by this case, if the tenor of oral argument is a guide, is that with modest efforts at subterfuge racial gerrymander will pass muster with this Supreme court. There are a number of racial gerrymandering cases making their way through the courts as we approach the 2024 election. We won’t have to wait too long to see whether the Alabama redistricting case signifies greater commitment to minority voting rights. Or, was the Court perhaps tacking to fend off the perception, troubling to Roberts and Kavanaugh, that the Court is partisan and extreme on the sensitive issue of race and political power?

The Roberts Court has issued two important decisions hostile to the Voting Rights Act. *Shelby County v. Holder* delivered a severe body blow to the VRA in 2013. The VRA requires districts with histories of discrimination against minority voters to submit changes in voting procedures to “pre-clearance” by the Department of Justice. Chief Justice Roberts writing for the majority held that the VRA formula for determining whether a district must get pre-clearance was obsolete and therefore unconstitutional; federal supervision of voting regulations could not be justified by reference to conditions fifty years earlier. Unless and until Congress passes a bill with a contemporary formula, regulations governing voting are free from federal oversight.

Pre-clearance was the heart of the VRA’s strategy to protect minority voters. The VRA provided some back-up to pre-clearance by allowing voters to sue when their right to an equal opportunity to vote

is forfeited on account of racial discrimination. In the 2021 case *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* (Brnovich was Attorney General of Arizona), the Court applied the VRA to regulations governing how ballots are collected and counted. Justice Alito authored a majority opinion disparaging interests protected by the VRA. All five of Alito's fellow conservatives signed on to the opinion. It makes very discouraging reading. Alito does not propose a test for determining when a state's methods of regulating the "time, place and manner" governing voting deprive racial minorities of an equal opportunity to vote. Instead, he weighs the state's interest in preventing fraud heavily against the "convenience" of Native American, Black, and Hispanic voters with respect to two regulations challenged as racially discriminatory by minority voters. An Arizona regulation treats out-of-precinct votes as invalid. Twice as many minority voters cast their ballots out-of-precinct as do white voters. Arizona criminalizes ballot collections services *aka* "ballot harvesting" in the language of its critics. Native American voters living on transportation-poor reservations depend more than white voters on ballot collections

services. Both regulations were upheld in *Brnovich v. DNC*. Advocates for minority voters are left to ponder when obstacles to voting might rise to a level sufficient to outweigh the state's interests when conducting an election. To sum up the status of the Voting Rights Act in the Roberts Court: Department of Justice pre-clearance is a dead letter and the chances of prevailing in an individual lawsuit weakened and uncertain.

If the future is like the recent past, the 2024 election may well be close in both the Electoral College and Congress. Close presidential elections in the battleground states under our antiquated Electoral College system and the narrow majorities in recent congresses magnify the influence of the Supreme Court decisions in voting rights and redistricting cases. The import of these decisions is not as easily grasped as a case like *Dobbs* that wiped out half a century of bodily self-determination for women. But they are in fact quite consequential and quite dangerous. The more voters understand the Roberts Court's anti-democratic record on voting rights, the more likely democratic opposition becomes.

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The 2023 Rutgers Wall-to-Wall Strike

Taking the Class Struggle in Higher Education to a New Level

JAMES GRAY POPE

LAST SPRING, NINE THOUSAND Rutgers faculty and grad student workers struck against the corporate university and won. In many ways, the strike marked a breakthrough in the class struggle over higher education. All sectors of the academic workforce—full-time faculty, adjunct (nominally part-time) faculty, grad workers, and post-doctoral fellows—joined in strike action. As one unionist put it, “Our punch was magnified by four because we’re wall-to-wall.” The strikers directly challenged the corporate program for higher education, namely “corporatizing” universities by cutting education and research to hire armies of managers, pay them corporate salaries, and invest in real estate, hedge funds, and anything else that might turn a profit. Tenure-track faculty struck primarily to support gains for the more vulnerable and grossly underpaid adjunct faculty and grad workers. Undergraduate students embraced the unions’ program and provided crucial support. Less publicized was the fact that, unlike other recent higher-ed strikers, the Rutgers workers struck in the face of judicial decisions declaring public worker strikes “unlawful.” In the end, adjunct faculty won a roughly 44-percent increase over four years, grad workers won 33 percent,

post-docs, 28 percent, and full-time faculty, on average, 14 percent. Adjuncts and other non-tenure-track faculty, who work on temporary contracts, gained substantial improvements in job security, and grad workers won a guarantee of five years of funding for those admitted 2024 and after.

The Rutgers strike has been touted as a possible model for the future, and my aim here is to explain how the workers pulled it off. First and foremost, they had to transform their unions. Until 2015, the Rutgers unions had been operating as politically liberal business unions, top-down organizations providing expert services in exchange for dues. Instead of building worker power, they relied on professional staff, polite negotiations, and tit-for-tat political lobbying to protect membership interests. Such unions never could have staged a strike, much less a wall-to-wall strike that challenged university corporatization. But over the next seven years, Rutgers workers moved their unions away from business unionism and toward solidarity unionism. In this article, I use “solidarity unionism” as a term for many models of left unionism, including rank-and-file unionism, class struggle unionism, social justice unionism, and Staughton Lynd’s version of solidarity unionism.¹ All of these models embrace solidarity as the core principle of the labor movement, and the story that follows is more concerned with their commonalities than differences. In their present-day forms,

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each envisions the labor movement as a democratic, moral movement of workers seeking to substitute human thriving for corporate profit as the goal of economic activity; each strives to unite workers across lines of race, gender, nationality, trade, and industry; each embraces issues of social justice including racial and gender equity as labor issues; and each understands that workers will never improve their conditions unless they find ways to neutralize or work around the crippling constraints on strikes and organizing imposed by capitalist labor laws as interpreted by reactionary courts.

Most models of solidarity unionism arose out of struggles pitting traditional industrial workers against capitalists in the manufacturing, extractive, and transportation industries—the strategic centers of the Fordist, mass production economy. Today, however, the production of information rivals in importance the production of things, and it should come as no surprise that education workers have been in the forefront of the current strike surge. Teachers in Chicago (2012) and Los Angeles (2019) demonstrated the power of solidarity unionism by striking and winning gains not only for themselves but also for the students and communities served by their schools. The stakes are just as great in higher education, where corporate-dominated university governing boards have been shifting employment from tenured to contingent positions not only to cut costs but also to stop faculty from exercising their tenure-protected academic freedom to expose inconvenient truths such as corporate malfeasance, climate change, and the brutal inequalities of race, gender, and class that afflict capitalist America.² As they prepared to strike, Rutgers workers could find inspiration in numerous recent higher-ed strikes, including by adjunct faculty at the New School and grad workers at Temple, Columbia, and the University

of California.

So how did Rutgers workers manage to transform their unions from sleepy business unions to solidarity unions? It might seem that they had it easy. Leftists rose to the top leadership of the biggest and strongest local, which covers more than 5,500 full-time faculty, grad workers, and post-docs, simply by volunteering to step up—an unimaginable head start from the viewpoint of solidarity unionists in industries like automobile, trucking, or health care. But this turned out to be less of an advantage than one might think. At the same time that it relieved them from the arduous tasks of building a rank-and-file caucus and toppling an entrenched leadership, it also propelled them into office without a tested core group of like-minded unionists or a following among the rank and file. And when they commenced the turn toward solidarity unionism, they discovered that business unionism was far more deeply rooted in habit, custom, systemic pressures, and law than anyone would have imagined.

Turn Toward Solidarity Unionism

The shift began in 2015, when Deepa Kumar, an Executive Council member who had written a book about the Teamsters' successful 1997 UPS strike, recruited some like-minded co-workers to join in an effort to transform the faculty-grad local. Kumar stepped up to vice president in 2015 and president in 2017, and the union hired several socialist organizers who had the skills and commitment to engage in bold organizing. The Executive Council, previously almost all white, gained a significant representation of people of color. In 2018, as the contract expiration date approached, the union invited Rutgers workers to enlist in a long-term campaign to transform the university and the industry. The key elements of solidarity unionism were highlighted:

Vision. For the first time, the local put forward a contract program that consisted not only of specific demands, but also a core theory of the problem (the ongoing corporatization of Rutgers) and a positive vision of what could be achieved: a genuine university centered on education, independent research, and service to the community. The union carefully detailed the evils of corporatization at Rutgers. As of 2017, about 2,300 adjunct faculty taught 30 percent of the undergraduate courses while management held adjuncts' compensation to less than 1 percent of the university budget. Meanwhile, 206 Rutgers administrators each garnered more than \$250,000 a year, and another 38 reaped more than half a million. Tenure track faculty had declined by one-third, to 30 percent of the academic workforce. Athletic programs sucked in \$45 million a year above revenues for such expenses as paying the football coach \$4 million and hiring private jets for recruiting athletes to serve as unpaid entertainment workers. To remedy this shameful situation, the union proposed redirecting resources to the core missions of the university: teaching, research, and service.

Worker control. Implicit in the vision was the idea that workers are often more knowledgeable and better situated than management to determine policy, not only on wages and working conditions but also on the basic direction of the university.

Wall-to-wall solidarity. The union had previously attempted to counter the corporate attack on tenure by demanding that management commit funds to hire new, tenure-track faculty. But this time, demands were shaped to implement the labor movement's core principle—solidarity. Instead of protecting the tenured faculty as an enclave of decent pay and job security, the union demanded higher pay and increased job security for non-tenure-track faculty and grad workers. Extending tenure-like status

to all in this way would reduce the corporatizers' incentive to cut tenured positions and would provide a degree of academic freedom to everyone.

Social justice unionism. The union had long supported racial and gender justice, for example sending buses to DC for pro-affirmative action and pro-choice

Leftists discovered that business unionism was far more deeply rooted in habit, custom, systemic pressures, and law than anyone would have imagined.

demonstrations. But political action did not produce progress at Rutgers. As of 2017, the number of Black tenure-track faculty stood at 89 (down from 175 in 1976) and the budget allocation for diversity hiring had been cut to \$0. So the union advanced equity demands, including the creation of a fund for diversity hiring. In addition, the union served as a center of resistance to such Trump administration policies as the Muslim exclusion and the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which delayed deportation proceedings against undocumented immigrants who had arrived as children, a category that included a number of Rutgers students.

Bargaining for the common good. The union maintains that, as the second largest employer in New Jersey and the biggest landlord in New Brunswick, Rutgers has a responsibility to aid its employees, students, and surrounding communities. Accordingly, it has intervened strongly on community issues (for example joining with



community groups to oppose the closing of a public school to make way for Rutgers expansion) and collectively bargained for the creation of a Beloved Community Fund to aid employees and community members in need.

Rank-and-file unionism. Prior to 2018, the union lacked an organized layer of activists between the leadership and the base. None of the union’s three chapters—New Brunswick (4,300 workers represented), Newark (900), and Camden (400)—had a functioning, chapter-level organization. There was no union department rep (steward) structure, and many Executive Council members did nothing more than attend council meetings, if that. So the union recruited people to fill the chapter officer positions and adopted a strike-readiness plan calling for the creation of a department rep structure, an escalating series of actions, and a progression of benchmarks to test membership involvement.

The 2018–2019 Contract Campaign: Lurching Between Business and Solidarity Unionism

By late summer 2018, the old union contract had expired and the union’s officers and Executive Council had endorsed the solidarity program and the strike-readiness

plan. But the turn toward solidarity unionism quickly ran into trouble when it came time to put these ideas into practice.

Business union habits persist.

To begin with, habits of top-down decision-making, staff-driven organizing, and heavy reliance on professional expertise proved resilient. As of late October 2018, there was no representative body charged with leading the contract campaign and meeting the benchmarks specified in the strike-readiness plan. Democracy thrived only

at the Executive Council level, where the sheer number of issues usually precluded in-depth deliberation. From the viewpoint of many rank-and-file activists, the union was effectively run by a tight-knit group of officers and staff, tagged “Stone Street” after the headquarters location.

All of this happened despite the fact that most leaders and staff were strongly committed to union democracy and the strike-readiness plan. Top-down habits are hard to break, in part because they can be efficient in the short run. It is far less time consuming in the crunch of the moment for expert organizers to do the organizing themselves than to develop inexperienced rank and filers and deal with the experienced ones who have different ideas about what should be done. But solidarity unionism thrives in decentralized small groups defined by geography or common interests, where active unionists develop trust, build solidarity, and take responsibility for organizing their co-workers. Developing such groups takes time and effort—a difficult project for organizers and activists who are already overburdened with urgent tasks.

Nevertheless, it was clear by the end of October that the union would never achieve strike readiness unless the top-

down pattern was broken. With a little push from rank-and-file activists, the leadership resolved to form a Contract Action Committee (CAC) charged with directing the campaign between council meetings. The CAC included at least one faculty and one grad representative from each of the three chapters, along with a chairperson and the university-wide president as a nonvoting member. Once the CAC was up and running, a considerable amount of organizing work was decentralized to the chapters and the Grad Steering Committee.

Divisions between grads and faculty.

Unfortunately, workplace hierarchies tend to replicate in unions. As of 2018, grad workers made up about 24 percent of the faculty-grad local's membership, but only one grad served in any of the union's 14 university-wide and chapter officer positions. Grads had less than proportional representation on the university-wide Executive Council and were rarely listened to. Grads did, however, have something that the faculty lacked: a university-wide, representative steering committee that was not burdened with past habits of business unionism. Throughout the contract campaign, grads provided the largest contingent of member-participants at union actions and consistently pushed for an aggressive approach to the campaign.

Faculty response was mixed. The freshly reconstituted chapter organizations in Camden and Newark had little trouble welcoming grads as leaders. New Brunswick, on the other hand, lacked any operational chapter leadership that could incorporate grad leaders. There, a number of faculty members found fault with the increasingly assertive Grad Steering Committee. From their point of view, the committee resembled a faction that sometimes operated outside the democratic structure of the union. But to many grads, union democracy wasn't working: They were un-

derrepresented, and most faculty members did not respect their views.

The formation of the CAC ameliorated but did not solve the problem. On the CAC, faculty and grad leaders from each of the three chapters interacted as equals and, with help from a university-wide officer, made decisions for the entire union. This dynamic did not, however, spill over to the Executive Council, where grads presented ambitious and carefully thought-out proposals for action that, in their opinion and that of their faculty allies, were rejected without adequate consideration.

Divisions between bargainers and campaigners. There is a tension between the technical-professional and social movement sides of organized labor. At Rutgers, the bargaining team adopted a professional approach, relying on economic research and reasoned discussion to persuade management. But solidarity unionism thrives on democratic bargaining, confrontation, and impolite exposures of management behavior at the table. During the 2018-2019 contract campaign, bargainers and campaigners repeatedly disagreed on tactics. Backed by the union's lawyer, most bargainers called for confidential and polite negotiations. They strongly resisted democratic control, arguing that the Executive Council should defer to them because of their collective expertise, bargaining experience, and enormous commitment of time and energy. Campaigners disagreed. They argued that the membership would not understand the need to strike unless management's bargaining behavior could be directly observed by rank and filers and publicized widely. From their point of view, the bargainers were conceding important elements of the de-corporatization program without a fight. This tension exacerbated the faculty-grad division, with the grads and outlying chapters tending to side with the campaigners while faculty members in

New Brunswick split on the issue.

In the end, the Executive Council was not willing to override the bargainers, whose hard work and apparent dedication were appreciated by all. The union terminated open bargaining and toned their down criticisms of management's bargaining behavior. Such choices made it difficult to build strike momentum, contributing to the strike authorization vote's barely meeting the minimum target for going forward.

Division between adjunct and faculty-grad union officials. Historically, efforts to achieve wall-to-wall solidarity have often been thwarted by divisions among unions. Usually, it is the unions representing higher-skilled, better-paid workers (traditionally tagged the "labor aristocracy") who reject solidarity across trade and bargaining unit lines. But at Rutgers, it was the adjunct local. At the outset of the 2018-2019 campaign, leaders of the faculty-grad local urged adjunct leaders to join them in aggressive action to improve adjunct wages and job security—a key plank in the de-corporatization program. But the adjunct officers were business unionists to the core. Their greatest achievement in office had been to vote themselves union salaries. Instead of organizing to achieve strike readiness, they tried to win concessions by demonstrating their professionalism to management negotiators.

Upshot of the 2018-2019 contract campaign: Advances on social justice, but ...

In the end, a deal was reached the night before the strike deadline. The union claimed that the workers had won a "historic contract." Had they? On social justice, yes. In the midst of the strike mobilization, University President Robert Barchi had unilaterally announced that he was committing \$20 million for diversity hiring as if the union had nothing to do with it. Nobody was fooled. Instead of deflating discontent, Barchi's announcement

forcefully demonstrated to the membership both the power of strike mobilization and the utility of unionism in the struggle for social justice. This victory was inscribed in the contract, which established a process for seeking equity adjustments in faculty salaries and gave the union a role in determining the distribution of diversity funds.

On the other hand, there were few gains on de-corporatization other than improved job security for full-time non-tenure-track faculty. Some grad leaders felt that the union's much-publicized commitment to Rutgers' most underpaid and vulnerable workers rang hollow in light of their modest gains, a feeling intensified by the leadership's decision to launch an electronic ratification vote without any chance for prior deliberation. Worse yet, an essential element of the anti-corporatization program—improvements for adjunct faculty—had been effectively torpedoed by the adjunct leadership's business-unionist strategy. Adjunct faculty reaped just what business unionism sowed: nothing of significance.

From the 2019 Near-Strike to the 2023 Strike

Business unionism is tough to shake in part because it is hard-wired into the labor law, most union bylaws, the professional culture of labor lawyers, experts, and staffers, and—in the Rutgers case—habits developed during the previous period of low activity. The Rutgers union had made considerable progress on some of these problems during the 2018-2019 contract campaign, but formidable obstacles remained.

Unfortunately, the union made no attempt to sum up the successes and failures of the 2018-2019 campaign. Some leftists did push for a summary, but exhaustion and fears of divisive debate prevailed. As a result, there was no collectively formed memory of the campaign. Instead, sub-

groups each came away with their own conclusions. As new recruits came on board, they tended to absorb the perspectives of their subgroups, and new experiences were often processed in light of old perspectives. Unresolved grievances and feelings of distrust simmered beneath the surface, especially between faculty and grads. Despite this difficulty, Rutgers unionists did make considerable progress toward solidarity unionism between the 2019 near-strike and the 2023 strike.

Rank-and-file insurgency in the adjunct local. American labor law carves the working class into bargaining unit boxes and anoints a single union as the “exclusive bargaining representative” of the workers in each box. Rutgers workers started out with a big head start on this problem because full-time faculty and grad workers were already united in a single unit—an extremely rare arrangement shared by the Rutgers AAUP-AFT and the Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York, two of the strongest higher-ed locals in the United States. But adjunct faculty occupied a separate unit, and, as related above, they were stuck with business-unionist leadership.

By far the single most important advance between 2019 and 2023 came when adjunct activists organized an insurgent caucus and toppled the old leadership. They started by running a campaign to “vote no” on the 2019 adjunct contract. Although the contract was ratified, activists expanded their core group and began the process of educating the membership about the bankruptcy of business unionism and the potential gains from a new approach. The campaign served as the launching pad for winning a majority on the local’s Executive Board in the next election. The Board then voted to eliminate the president’s salary, after which she resigned and defected to management. Caucus stalwart Amy Higer

was elected president, and the adjunct local transformed from a business-unionist impediment in 2018-2019 to a center of solidarity unionism in 2022-2023.

Pandemic worksharing: Pushing out the walls of wall-to-wall solidarity. Rutgers President Jonathan Holloway—like other corporatizers across the country—seized upon the COVID pandemic as an excuse to cut jobs and wages. The faculty-grad and adjunct unions responded by crafting a worksharing plan, which would have brought in state money, avoided layoffs, and eliminated wage cuts for all but the most highly paid faculty. Holloway bluntly rejected it, so the unions launched an intensive educational campaign. Drawing on an AAUP economist’s analysis of public filings, they demonstrated the benefits of worksharing, exposed the cruel consequences of Holloway’s false austerity for the most vulnerable Rutgers workers, and showed that Rutgers could easily afford the minimal costs of the program. Union members came to see in real time both the evils of corporatization and the enormous potential of union solidarity. Many tenure-track faculty, who were not themselves seriously threatened with layoffs, supported worksharing out of solidarity even though they had to file for unemployment benefits to break even.

In the end, the campaign preserved contractual raises and saved the jobs of many adjunct faculty, administrators, and dining hall workers. Although it fell short of its original goals, it did convince many Rutgers workers not only that the union’s vision for the university was far superior to management’s, but also that full-time faculty could effectively intervene on behalf of more vulnerable workers.

Consolidating advances on social justice unionism. As the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum in 2020, unionists of color formed a Rutgers AAUP-AFT

People of Color Caucus on the Executive Council to provide leadership for solidarity work. Some white members objected that such formations would be divisive, triggering a debate over the appropriate role of identity-based caucuses in the union. At one point, the discussion became so acrimonious that the leadership had to call a moratorium. In the end, however, the Executive Council and leadership strongly supported the caucus and its work. The union launched a series of well-attended Freedom Schools that took an intersectional approach to race, class, gender, and social justice unionism. Topics ranged from mass incarceration in New Jersey to the nationwide movement to turn back university corporatization.

Countering top-down drift with new bylaws to support solidarity unionism. No sooner had the 2019 contract been ratified than the hard-earned organizational gains of the campaign began to slip away. The CAC, where faculty and grad leaders from all three locations had joined to coordinate organizing, was disbanded. With the demise of the CAC, the old faculty-grad division reintensified. And without the CAC as a leadership center for campaigners, old patterns reemerged. Worksharing negotiations were conducted in secret and, in the view of critics, with too much emphasis on politeness and too much willingness to concede demands without authorization from the Executive Council. In addition, numerous provisions of the existing bylaws obstructed the development of solidarity unionism. For example, grad eligibility for union membership was defined to coincide rigidly with the government-defined bargaining unit instead of shared worker interests. This excluded a large number of grad fellows from membership and union office, even though grads commonly went back and forth between unit and non-unit positions and did much of the same work.

So the union assigned a committee to revise the bylaws. Although there were sharp disagreements along the campaigner-bargainer divide, the committee was able to arrive at a compromise proposal. Major changes included reviving the CAC and making it permanent as the Organizing and Action Team, expanding union membership eligibility to include non-unit grad fellows, and strengthening sectoral representation and leadership by adding directly elected special vice presidents for grad workers, non-tenure-track full-timers, and other major job categories. As it turned out, some of the most effective 2023 strike leaders were elected to office under the grad fellow provision.

Breaking out of bargaining-unit boxes. In 2022, the adjunct and faculty-grad unions launched a campaign to merge the locals. A majority of adjuncts signed merger cards, but management refused to recognize the merger. Around the same time, the biomedical local, which represents 1,300 physicians, dentists, researchers, and health science faculty, indicated an interest in joining with the other unions in a united contract campaign. The three unions issued a joint statement pledging “to work together as ONE FACULTY” and “fight collectively to bring dignity and respect to all faculty, regardless of campus or school or discipline.” Although these efforts fell short of formal merger, they did lay the groundwork for the impressive cross-unit solidarity displayed during the ensuing contract campaign.

The 2022-2023 Contract Campaign

By 2022, the Rutgers faculty-grad and adjunct unions were enormously thicker and more thoroughly imbued with solidarity unionism than the hollow organizations that had commenced the 2018-2019 campaign. With the addition of the biomedical local, the entire academic workforce—nine

thousand strong—entered the campaign united. The faculty-grad local's Organizing and Action Team joined with representatives from the adjunct and biomedical locals in a combined Contract Action Team (CAT), and each faculty-grad chapter formed a multi-union CAT in its location. Business union habits lingered, however, and obstacles remained.

Division between bargainers and campaigners. In 2018–2019, the union had chosen a strategy of polite, closed bargaining, rejecting campaigners' arguments that tough and transparent bargaining was necessary to build support for striking. But in 2022–2023, the campaigners' position prevailed. At one point, management tested the union's commitment to open bargaining by ceasing to bargain. But the union held firm, and a month later the parties compromised with limited attendance by non-bargainers—enough to ensure that management's egregious bargaining behavior could be exposed. My sources attributed the bargainers' new militancy to three factors. First, and most importantly, adjunct unionists joined the bargaining team and combined with grad workers and full-time faculty leftists to push for tough and transparent bargaining. Second, management stiffened the unions' resolve by implementing a strategy of crude obstruction combined with insulting proposals. And finally, the negotiators knew that they had the firm support of the membership behind them, especially after 75 percent of the entire membership (94 percent of the 80 percent who turned out) voted to authorize a strike. Although nonmembers remained a variable, the unions (correctly, as it turned out) counted on the membership to carry most of them along.

Role of Leadership. Solidarity unionism stresses the role of rank-and-file union militants, but there is no denying that the top officers of a union—especially in dis-

persed units like the Rutgers faculty-grad and adjunct locals—are in a unique position to nurture or undermine it. Since 2017, the faculty-grad union has had three presidents: Deepa Kumar, Todd Wolfson, and Becky Givan. Solidarity unionism would

Solidarity unionism thrives on democratic bargaining, confrontation, and impolite exposures of management behavior at the table.

never have gotten off the ground at Rutgers without Kumar, whose accomplishments included, crucially, operationalizing the union's theoretical commitment to social justice unionism. Wolfson, who stepped up in 2019, combined a deep understanding of solidarity unionism with a rare ability—attributed by some of my sources to personal kindness—to bring people with disparate perspectives together. This capacity proved important given that Givan, who served as vice president during Wolfson's term and traded places with him in 2021, came out of the more professionally inclined, bargaining side of the union and did not come easily to strike. Wolfson and Givan could easily have spent much of their terms feuding, but Givan—a strong supporter of wall-to-wall solidarity and the anti-corporatization program—accepted Executive Council votes calling for confrontation with the employer. She set an example for everyone through hard work at all levels, from acting as the union's primary spokesperson to phone-banking. In the adjunct local, meanwhile, President Amy Higer headed a leadership group of 15–20 strong solidarity unionists who had developed trust and mutual respect

while building the insurgency that ousted their business-unionist predecessors.

Educating the members in solidarity unionism. Few academic workers have any experience with unions, much less knowledge of strikes or the workers' movement. So the union conducted "strike schools" (borrowing the name from Jane McAlevey) for the membership. Hundreds of workers attended, and my sources credited this with strengthening solidarity and commitment among the active unionists who formed the core of the strike movement. The strike schools, which were conducted routinely and not just when there was talk of strike, covered organizing skills, university power dynamics, strike tactics, and Rutgers finances. As a result, attendees were prepared to understand the issues when the union had to decide between business unionist and solidarity unionist approaches.

Lawyers acting like lawyers. New Jersey courts, like those of most states, routinely enjoin public worker strikes upon request by the employer. This rule is midway between making strikes illegal outright, as under statutes like New York's Taylor Law (which makes all strikes punishable the moment they commence), and American-style capitalist law, under which striking is permitted but only for approved objectives (like higher wages) and approved tactics (like polite picketing outside employer property). As the Rutgers strike movement gained momentum, University President Jonathan Holloway—a onetime progressive who served as a teaching assistant for the radical labor historian David Montgomery—threatened to file for an injunction.

Throughout both strike mobilizations, the unions' lawyer asserted that if the workers struck, an injunction would almost certainly issue—possibly within a day. But when union leaders pressed for evidence in support of this assertion, none was forthcoming. Luckily, a unionist stepped up and

studied 36 New Jersey public education strikes since 1973. He found that injunctions issued in 16. Of the 7 cases where injunctions issued and the outcome could be classified as a union win or loss, 6 were union wins.

Why did the union's lawyer overstate the injunction threat and resist helping the union find a solution? Not because he was sell-out minded but because he was immersed in the professional culture of labor law. Union and management lawyers, who interact repeatedly with each other, tend to develop patterns of resolving disputes that often include a strong dose of professional courtesy. Sometimes, lawyers even substitute their own norms for official law. New York state, for example, has a strong anti-injunction statute in the private sector but—as revealed in a classic study—union lawyers in Buffalo declined to enforce workers' rights under the statute, preferring instead to work things out in orderly fashion with management attorneys.³ The Rutgers unions' lawyer often followed this pattern, including at the moment when management publicly threatened an injunction. Union leaders instantly understood that they needed a public response to stop fear, but the lawyer argued that he should first try to work things out with management's lawyer. Fortunately, this counsel was rejected, and the union issued a strong statement affirming the workers' right to strike and declaring, "We will not be intimidated."

Confronting the injunction threat. With their lawyer's foot-dragging, the unions developed their own approach to the injunction threat. They resolved to expose the evil of labor injunctions with the aim of pressuring Holloway to back off and, failing that, inspiring the membership to defy the injunction or engage in other types of direct action such as sit-ins or grade strikes. The New Brunswick Chapter president

organized an open letter to Holloway from prominent social justice scholars castigating him for calling the strike unlawful and quoting Martin Luther King's stirring condemnation of the injunction against the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike as unconstitutional and un-American. My sources agreed that the letter helped to steel the membership against the injunction threat. As the strike approached, union activists secured a resolution from the University Senate (a tripartite body of faculty, students, and administrators with advisory power) calling on Holloway to refrain from injunctions and negotiate in good faith. The resolution stressed three points: (1) that the strike would be legal unless Holloway chose otherwise; (2) that an injunction would clearly violate international standards,⁴ and (3) that "the leading New Jersey case authorizing injunctions was decided in 1968 during a period of judicial repression against public worker strikes including, notably, the Memphis strike injunction defied by Martin Luther King." As the strike drew near, picket captains were trained in how to deal with an injunction.

A dangerous dance with New Jersey's "pro-labor" governor. In the end, Holloway neither withdrew his threat nor filed for an injunction. New Jersey's Democratic governor, Phil Murphy, played an important—though problematic—role in avoiding the injunction and settling the strike. Murphy, who has the reputation of being strongly pro-labor, never did publicly support the Rutgers workers. He did, however, do everything he could to avoid a situation where he could be blamed for a labor injunction. First, he urged the union to accept mediation and delay the strike. This is a classic pitfall for any strike-ready union, especially if the opportunity to strike is time-limited, as it was in the Rutgers case by the impending end of the semester. It is easy for employers to watch the strike

window shrink while moving just enough to create an illusion of progress. In the Rutgers case, the union did accept mediation, and—sure enough—some unionists urged that the strike be delayed to avoid offending the governor. But management overplayed its hand and offered such stingy concessions that few were fooled, and the strike commenced on Monday, April 10. Holloway then temporarily suspended his injunction threat, crediting Murphy.

Once the strike was on, it quickly became apparent that the workers were in the driver's seat. Management did not even dare to cease paying the strikers. This reflected various factors, including the difficulty of replacing highly skilled workers, the strategic timing of the strike near the end of the semester (when only the incumbent teachers can certify that students have completed the term), and the strikers' strong bond with students, who understood that the strikers—not management—were fighting to deliver quality education. Statistics are not available, but unionists estimate that about two thirds to three quarters of all classes were cancelled—an impressive rate given that there was no picketing in the traditional sense of guarding facility entrances to identify and shame scabs.

The strike began on a Monday, and by Wednesday, management was ready to stop stonewalling and make major concessions. Murphy offered state money to help with the pay increases, and most elements of the final economic package were in place by the end of the day. Murphy threatened that unless the parties reached a "framework agreement" (meaning agreement on the raises plus vague understandings on more complicated issues) on that day and the unions suspended the strike, he would withdraw his funding offer.

Re-emergence of faculty-grad division. Grad workers argued that the union should refuse and call Murphy's bluff. They

claimed that the gains for grads fell short given the power generated by the strike. Most adjunct and full-time faculty, on the other hand, felt that to reject Murphy's deadline would risk losing historic gains for adjuncts in order to improve what they perceived as already impressive grad gains. After gauging the intensity of grad feeling, the union did call Murphy's bluff. Grads proceeded to organize a strong action in

In many ways, the strike
marked a break-through in
the class struggle over higher
education.

Trenton that shook out some additional gains, though these fell short of grad objectives. Murphy set a new deadline of Friday end of business, and this time the Executive Council voted to suspend the strike in exchange for the raises and a guarantee of no retaliation against strikers. Grad workers voted no, and many were outraged that the vote took place at midnight on Friday with no opportunity to solicit membership feedback. They argued that nothing was going to happen until Monday anyway, so there was no reason to rush.

This kind of discord among job categories is totally normal, but in the Rutgers case it gave rise to hurtful recriminations and feelings of betrayal on both sides that, as one leader put it, produced a victory that felt like a defeat. It would not be helpful to delve into the dispute here, except to suggest that the faculty-grad division is not likely to go away without sustained attention. All of the unionists I spoke with are highly committed to faculty-grad solidarity. And yet, in the heat of the moment, they said things about each other that revealed

deep-running suspicions and antagonisms. Some important leaders were so deeply hurt that they were thinking of retiring from union activity. I was left with the impression that the union could use some kind of consciousness raising on the divergent perspectives and structural positions of grads, part-time faculty, and full-time faculty. One obvious place to start would be a systematic sum-up of the 2022-2023 campaign.

Post-strike negotiations. As grads had feared, management interpreted the vague "framework" in its interests and promptly returned to its old ways of dodging negotiations and stonewalling. But Rutgers unionists recovered their focus on victory and came up with new ways of pressuring management, for example seeking a vote of "no confidence" in Holloway from the University Senate. With biomedical faculty in the forefront, the union staged numerous actions to demonstrate that there was energy to renew the strike. In the end, the result was better than might have been predicted at the time of the strike "suspension," but still fell short of grad workers' goals.

Assessing the outcome. The media and everyone I talked with—faculty and grads—agreed that the unions won a breakthrough victory. Management had tenaciously resisted the central plank of the de-corporatization program—larger raises for the most vulnerable workers—until the last minute, but was ultimately forced to yield and yield big. The ratification vote was overwhelming, with 93 percent voting yes.

But if the strikers won, were there also losers? The de-corporatization program is designed to benefit every constituency except two: the corporate interests that control higher-ed governing boards, and their lackeys—the high-level administrators who feed off corporatization. No unionist would object if Rutgers were forced to pay educators' raises by diverting money from overpaid administrators or other corporate

priorities like sports entertainment ventures, speculative hedge fund investments, or real estate acquisitions. But it appears that a considerable amount of the funding came from the taxpayers of New Jersey. My sources were divided on whether this represented a defeat or a victory. To some, it was a welcome reversal of declining state support for public higher education. To others, it meant that the taxpayers were—in effect—subsidizing the corporatizers’ payment of educators’ raises rather than requiring the corporatizers to divert the full amount from their pet projects.

Many challenges remain. To mention just one, the Rutgers strike was “wall-to-wall” only within the walls of the academic (teaching and research) workforce. The faculty-grad and adjunct locals had tried hard to bring other unions along, organizing a “Coalition of Rutgers Unions” and fighting to preserve the jobs of nonacademic workers (mostly low-level administrators and dining hall workers) during the pandemic. But none of the many unions representing Rutgers’ thirteen thousand nonacademic workers either joined the strike or honored the strikers’ picket lines. In most cases, timid leadership or business-unionist parent organizations blocked action. Hopefully, nonacademic unionists will be emboldened by the academic workers’ victory to join in, or at least honor, future strike movements.

Going Forward

The Rutgers strikers demonstrated the power of solidarity unionism to challenge public university corporatization in a blue

state, even one with a judge-made legal doctrine declaring public worker strikes “unlawful.” Can the model be replicated elsewhere? It won’t be easy, but just as the Rutgers strikers learned from previous breakthroughs, we can expect that others will learn from the Rutgers example. And in the current period of rising labor activity and public support for unionism, prospects for further advances are good. Today, Higher Ed Labor United (HELU), which Wolfson helped found in 2021, provides a center for higher ed workers and unions to build the nationwide struggle against corporatization and for “a U.S. higher education system that works for and is led by workers, students, and the communities it serves.”

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Standing Rock

A Struggle for Land and Sovereignty

BRIAN WARD

AS THE CLIMATE CRISIS WORSENS, struggles against fossil fuel pipelines have united such unlikely forces as young climate activists, white-settler land owners, and Indigenous nations. These fights have started to center the issue of Indigenous land rights, both on the ground and in the courts.

Land rights have been a focus of Indigenous struggles since the first Europeans came to the continent of Turtle Island, but the radicalization that now puts settler colonialism itself on trial has its origins in the Standing Rock encampment in 2016. This article gives an overview, in part from the author's firsthand experience, of the roots of the struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), what the encampment was like, the violence of the state's response, and the lasting impact of these events.

[The inset italicized sections below are from the author's personal journal.]

As we drove through heavy thunderstorms, we felt the nerves, excitement, and sacredness of where we were going. This was a historic time of resistance, but it's not the first time this has happened on the northern Great Plains.

Once we hit North Dakota, we saw that the

signs for state roads were labeled with an Indigenous head—a reminder of not-so-thinly veiled racism. On roads with large numbers, they just stretch the Indigenous head to fit.

As night fell and we drove on, it was possible to imagine the time before the United States invaded Lakota country. Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse would be proud of what their relatives are doing today.

We turned onto a road with a handmade sign pointing us toward the Sacred Stone Camp—the area on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation started back in April 2016 to protest the pipeline. Signs say, "No alcohol, no drugs, no guns." Someone else added another slogan at the bottom: "No DAPL."

We were greeted with excitement, like everyone is who comes to offer solidarity and support. We dropped off donations of food and camping supplies and got the lay of the land.

We were told it was about a 15-minute walk to the Oceti Sakowin camp. Oceti Sakowin is the Seven Council Fires, or the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota people (Sioux). This larger camp was not on the reservation, but on land stolen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which made it more vulnerable to forces of the federal government coming in and kicking them out.

We can see hundreds of flags whipping violently in the strong wind. Taking a closer look at these flags, we see Indigenous nations represented from all over Turtle Island and the world—flags representing Leonard Peltier, Omaha Nation of Nebraska, Cherokee Nation, Oglala Lakota, Ojibwe Nation, Hiarwatha Nation, Turtle Mountain Band

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of Chippewa, Forest County Potawatomi, the American Indian Movement. There were also flags from Palestine, Iran, and the Sami people of northern Europe and an LGBT pride flag.

This is the first time in recent history that this number of nations have come together in a united struggle—defying the long history of divide and conquer on the part of colonizing governments.¹

Such was the view before me upon entering the Oceti Sakowin encampment at Standing Rock. The struggle attracted the attention of millions from around the world. The encampment lasted nearly a year, from April 2016 to February 2017, but the struggle against the DAPL has been ongoing ever since Energy Transfer Partners, a Canadian fossil fuel company, began building a \$3.8 billion project in 2014.

DAPL stretches 1,172 miles from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota through South Dakota and Iowa, before ending in Illinois.² It carries a daily load of 570,000 barrels of oil, extracted through hydraulic fracturing, across 209 rivers, creeks, and tributaries. Activists, dubbed water protectors at Standing Rock, forced the Obama administration to stop the pipeline in 2016, until Trump reversed the decision during his first days in office.³ The pipeline permits are still being challenged in the courts, and President Biden is facing renewed pressure to shut down DAPL, having shut down the Keystone XL pipeline in 2022 following a catastrophic oil spill.

In the fight against DAPL, the environmental and Indigenous movements united under the slogan Mni Wiconi, which is Lakota for “water is life,” to emphasize that the demand for clean water is not just for Indigenous people but for everyone down river. But the forces rallying at Standing Rock also stood for treaty rights and Indigenous sovereignty, and against settler colonialism. An increasingly radical climate

justice movement had started to critique the core of the ecological crisis: capitalism and colonialism.

Why Standing Rock? Why Now?

Referring to the invasion by the United States of the Lakota country, Hunkpapa Lakota medicine man Sitting Bull once stated,

We have now to deal with another race—small and feeble when our fathers first met them, but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough, they have a mind to till the soil, and the love of possession is a disease with them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break but the poor may not. They take their tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich and those who rule.⁴

His assessment still stands: DAPL and other pipelines extend the dispossession, heedless of the consequences for the earth or the people whose land is invaded. The history of the United States is one of extraction involving the attempted and sometimes successful removal of Indigenous nations from their homelands. Indigenous people have resisted, and in some cases they have been successful in preventing further environmental destruction.

So why was Standing Rock different from other times? How did it become the largest Indigenous gathering in the United States since the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973? Before we answer those questions, we must take a step back and look at the role land has played in the U.S. colonial project.

The United States made more than 300 treaties with Indigenous nations and has continued to break every one of them in its thirst for more profits by the fossil fuel industry. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz puts it in *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*,

Everything in U.S. history is about the land. Who oversaw and cultivated it,

fished its waters, maintained its wildlife; who invaded and stole it; how it became a commodity (“real estate”) broken into pieces, to be bought and sold on the market.⁵

Along with land theft, the United States projects myths around the taming of the wilderness, implying that Turtle Island (North America) was empty of people when European settlers arrived. In reality, millions of people were living on Turtle Island, the majority of them farmers who lived sustainably with their nonhuman relatives.

In his book *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Glen Coulthard, a citizen of the Yellowknives Dene, describes Marx’s theory of primitive or primary accumulation as the process where capital displaces the Indigenous population and privatizes the land to make it a commodity. This is what Coulthard calls a “violent transformation of noncapitalist forms of life into capitalist ones.”⁶

That totalizing power of capital in the North American context required set-

One of the more powerful moments of solidarity came in December 2016, when more than two thousand veterans gathered to offer defense.

tlers and settler colonialism to overturn Indigenous modes of production and relationship to the land and to supplant them with capitalist markets. Previously, most Indigenous nations on Turtle Island did not have “private property,” and land was held in common. Along with private

property, colonialism brought individualism to drive the commodification of land. In contrast, Indigenous nations relied on interdependence and what Winona LaDuke calls co-evolution with their environment and surroundings. From the Indigenous perspective, colonialism transformed abundance to scarcity.

Capitalism and settler colonialism entail more than simply taking land. They also separate people from the whole living world they inhabit — animals and plants as well as land. The attempted removal of Indigenous people was intentional because their knowledge and connection to their homeland threatened the capitalist process of commodifying the entire world to exploit it for profit.

The struggle at Standing Rock challenged this dynamic. It came on the heels of a new push for Indigenous liberation on Turtle Island, starting with the Idle No More movement in 2013 in Canada and continuing through to the struggle against the Keystone XL pipeline that lasted throughout the Obama administration. Within this same era, we saw the rise of the Occupy movement in 2011 and the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013. Standing Rock became a moment and a specific struggle that drove people to question the nature of the U.S. colonial project.

Leading to the Oceti Sakowin Encampment

The encampment against DAPL started in the wake of the proposal that the pipeline be routed north of Bismark, the capital of North Dakota.⁷ Residents of the city, which is 90 percent white, opposed its construction, and the pipeline company quickly responded by relocating the route to right outside of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The not-so-thinly veiled racism was evident from the outset.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

In April 2016, protesters set up the first encampment, known as the Sacred Stone Spiritual Camp, at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri Rivers, which form the borders of the reservation. This camp, which was located on the reservation, quickly grew to capacity, and the second and the most well-known camp, Oceti Sakowin, was built on land that was stolen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which left water protectors more vulnerable

"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."

— Nancy Romer
Correspondent
New Politics

"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."
— Joe, a part Lakota

— Joe, a part Lakota
from Colorado

"I am so proud of my work here... 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."

— Elmer, a Sioux camp security guard

to state violence. The camps would attract thousands of water protectors, both Native and non-Native, over the coming months. Jon Eagle Sr., SRST's tribal historic preservation officer, explained the historic and cultural significance of the site:

The land between the Cannonball River and the Heart River is sacred. It's a historic place of commerce, where enemy tribes camped peacefully within sight of each other because of the reverence they had for this place. In the area are sacred stones where our ancestors went to pray for good direction, strength, and protection for the coming year. Those stones are still there, and our people still go there today.¹⁰

In 1851 and 1868, the Oceti Sakowin signed the Fort Laramie Treaty with the

U.S. government, creating the Great Sioux reservation, which included all of South Dakota west of the Missouri River. The 1868 treaty stated that “no white person or persons shall be permitted to settle upon or occupy any portion of the [territory]; or without the consent of the Indians, first had and obtained, to pass through the same.”¹¹ The treaty also protected hunting rights in the surrounding area, including where the pipeline was set to go through. The United States unilaterally ended treaty-making in 1871 and in 1877 officially stole the sacred Black Hills, which the Lakota knew as He Sapa. Though the United States broke its treaties with the Lakota (and every other Indigenous nation), the agreements have been the legal framework for Indian law since the 1970s.¹²

It is with this framework that we must understand the events at Standing Rock: It was a struggle for self-determination and treaty rights. It was also a continuation of the successful fight waged by Native activists and environmentalists against the Keystone XL pipeline.

The SRST called on the Obama administration to halt the pipeline. Obama’s relationship with the SRST began after his June 2014 visit to their reservation, making him only the fourth sitting president to make an official visit to an Indian reservation.¹³ But Obama and 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton were silent on the issue of the DAPL. The Democratic Party continued to promote an “all of the above” energy strategy that includes fracking and the new oil fields in North Dakota.

Life at the Oceti Sakowin Encampment

To continue from my account of entering the encampment:

Within the Oceti Sakowin camp is the Red Warrior camp, which has been the base of

the most vibrant and militant direct-action protests.

As we walked to the Oceti Sakowin camp, our way was partially blocked off by a broken-down car that has been spray-painted, “No DAPL, Save the Water” and “Protectors.” This last slogan is a reference to what Native leaders of the struggle have been saying: “We are not protesters, we are protectors.”

We come up around a bend to see the confluence of the Cannonball River and the Missouri River. There are hundreds of tents and teepees—which immediately gives me chills at the historic moment I’m a part of.

We went to what was called “Facebook Hill,” the highest point of the camp and the only place to get somewhat decent cell phone reception, to check in at the press tent. There are solar stations to charge phones and laptops.

From this vantage point, you can see the entire camp, sprawling toward the river and beyond the small hills. There are over a thousand small tents mixed with teepees, and it’s impossible not to think about generations of Lakota, going back hundreds of years, who pitched camps just like these.¹⁴

The struggle at Standing Rock played out in the media with a series of court cases and high-profile police conflicts, but day-to-day life in the camp was the fuel that kept the fight going. The encampment gave us a glimpse of what a world based on kinship and good relations with mother earth looks like, by contrast with destruction and oppression inherent in a system that values commodities over human lives. It was led by (as Indigenous scholar Kim TallBear said) “badass Indigenous women.”¹⁵ As Charlie Aleck reflected in an *International Socialist Review* article,

At its peak, 15,000–20,000 people lived and worked at the Oceti Sakowin and Sacred Stone camps. You could get lost from one side to the other in a day as new tents were put up, old tents collapsed, and new pathways worn in. The usual landmarks

were “the green tent with such and such flag” or “the beige van next to the porta potties.” If you had been there more than a few days, you could recall the smaller camps by name—Lower Bruhle, Red Warrior, Two-Spirit, the International Youth Council, and so on. You might even know there was a second sacred fire at the Headsmen camp.

Each day starts with a water ceremony at 6:00 a.m. Each meeting begins with a prayer. You take these opportunities throughout the day to remember that you and the people standing next to you are all fighting for a sacred land and water, and you speak of it in the language of the Oceti Sakowin (the original name of the Sioux Nation). You pray under the banner “Mni Wiconi,” water is life, because the Oceti Sakowin have used this place for ceremony since time immemorial, and downstream are several million people who depend on this waterway for their drinking water. The fight is very literally life or death.

The prayer gives you a break in the hustle and bustle to ground yourself again and offers you the courage to fight another day. To survive the coming cold, you must be able to depend on your neighbor and they on you, until the pipeline, this “Black Snake” of Oceti Sakowin prophecies, is dead in its tracks. At the end of Lakota prayers, they say, “Mitakuye Oyasin,” meaning, “We are all related.” It is solidarity in action borne of necessity.¹⁶

The ethic of Mitakuye Oyasin was central to the activity in the camp, which included action training, food distribution, media, legal support by the National Lawyers Guild, two-spirit support, and much more. Everything was free for everyone and genuinely embodied what Karl Marx meant in writing, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

State Violence Against Water Protectors

Not surprisingly, the state had zero tol-

erance for this protest. The peaceful encampment quickly faced violence from the police, private security (including the counterinsurgent private contractor called TigerSwan), and National Guard forces from all over the country. Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier made absurd claims during the summer of 2016 that the

The radicalization that now puts settler colonialism itself on trial has its origins in the Standing Rock encampment in 2016.

protesters were about to physically destroy the pipeline. “They were preparing to throw pipe bombs at our line, M80s, fireworks, things of that nature to disrupt us,” he said.¹⁷ These claims were a pretext for law enforcement to come out and harass water protectors, including setting up checkpoints near the encampment.

Following Kirchmeier’s claims, Energy Transfer Dakota Access LLC filed lawsuits against protesters at the site, including SRST Chair Dave Archambault. The company claimed protesters “have created and will continue to create a risk of bodily injury and harm to Dakota Access employees and contractors, as well as to law enforcement personnel and other individuals at the construction site.”¹⁸

Police attacks on water protectors came after a federal appeals court lifted a temporary injunction against construction on October 9, opening the way for Energy Transfer Partners to resume construction. On October 22–23 nearly 130 water protectors were arrested and charged with crimes including aggravated assault, participating in a riot, and resisting arrest.¹⁹

On October 27, police unleashed a wave of brutality on water protectors in Standing Rock, who had recently moved their encampment directly in the path of DAPL construction. Over 300 highly militarized police with armored vehicles and riot gear joined with 80 military personnel and 150 DAPL workers to unleash rubber bullets and bean bag rounds on the water protectors. More than 40 people suffered injuries, including welts and broken bones. Some 141 people were arrested.²⁰

Tara Houska, then national campaigns director for the Native activist group Honor the Earth, described the brutality on *Democracy Now!*:

There were police walking around everywhere with assault rifles. Directly across from us, there was actually a policeman holding his rifle trained on us, directly on us. Bean bag rifle assault—bean bag nonlethal weapons were also aimed at us. Every time we put our hands up, they'd put them down. As soon as our hands came down, they would aim back at us. Police officers were smiling at us as they were doing these things. There were police officers filming this, laughing, as they—as human beings were being attacked, being maced. I mean, it was a nightmarish scene. And it should be a shame to the federal government, it should be a shame to the American people, that this is happening within U.S. borders to Indigenous people and to our allies, to all people that are trying to protect water. Yesterday was a really shameful moment for this country and where we stand.²¹

Others on the ground recalled the violence. Lauren Howland, a 21-year-old member of the Youth Council, described her experience outside the Morton County jail in Mandan, North Dakota, in a video that appeared on Facebook:

They flanked us, they corralled us, and then they started taking us out ... They gave us two options—either get arrested or leave peacefully, and we were on our

way out peacefully, and they started macing us ... and pushing us with their batons. They surrounded us.²²

Then came the famous images of the Morton County police shooting cannons of water and rubber bullets on the encampment in below-freezing conditions on November 20, 2016.²³ The violence of the police continued until the final days of the encampment after Donald Trump came into office.

Although the physical attacks ended, state violence continued through lengthy court cases and imprisonment of water protectors such as Red Fawn²⁴ and Marcus Mitchell.²⁵ Within Indigenous communities this is nothing new; after all, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and countless others were imprisoned resisting U.S. settler colonialism in the 1800s, and the FBI infamously did the same to the American Indian Movement following the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. Standing Rock is merely one of the latest iterations of state-sanctioned violence against Indigenous people.

Solidarity Against Settler Colonialism

Despite the extreme violence, millions were inspired to join the struggle at Standing Rock, including billions of people who “checked in” on Facebook in order to try and confuse law enforcement who were using social media to find water protectors.²⁶ Indigenous people led the way, creating the opportunity to build a multiracial movement against climate change.

One resounding message from Indigenous activists has been the power of solidarity. During the fight against the Keystone XL pipeline, for example, Natives and non-Natives formed the Cowboy-Indian Alliance.²⁷ Similar coalitions were forged in the Standing Rock struggle.

Crow Creek Sioux Tribal Chair Bran-

don Sazue explained in a Facebook statement why he and his tribe were offering support:

We will stand with you, my relatives. Whether we are Native, white, African American, etc. Our water is our most precious resource along with our children. We must all stand together in this most urgent of times. This is not about race, but about the human race! What we do today will make a difference tomorrow! If there was ever a time to stand united, that time is now!²⁸

This sentiment was widespread in Indian Country. Oglala Sioux Tribal President John Yellow Bird Steele sent supplies and buses of people from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation to Cannonball to support the protesters.

The environmental implications of what was happening helped the movement gain traction among non-Natives, but from an Indigenous perspective, sovereignty was at the core of this fight. The immediate connection between environmental justice and Indigenous sovereignty enabled many non-Native activists to see Indigenous land rights as a lynchpin to the fight for climate justice and, ultimately, to question the nature of the U.S. colonial project.

One of the more powerful moments of solidarity came in December 2016, when more than two thousand veterans gathered to offer defense amid worrisome signs that law enforcement intended to destroy the encampment. It would have been a public relations nightmare for the pipeline and the authorities if police forces turned their weapons on veterans. These veterans did not just come to help, but also to apologize for the military's role in the attempted ethnic cleansing of Indigenous peoples. Wesley Clark Jr. led the group and spoke passionately at a ceremony, saying,

Many of us, me particularly, are from the units that have hurt you over the many years. We came. We fought you. We

took your land. We signed treaties that we broke. We stole minerals from your sacred hills. We blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountain. When we took still more land and then we took your children and then we tried to make your language and we tried to eliminate your language that God gave you, and the Creator gave you. We didn't respect you, we polluted your Earth, we've hurt you in so many ways but we've come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service and we beg for your forgiveness.²⁹

The emotion was palpable. It was a turning point for so many and created even greater determination to fight back.

Lasting Impact: The Struggle Continues

The fight against DAPL shifted after Donald Trump was inaugurated, with activists split between continuing the encampments and pursuing a legal path forward in the courts. On February 1, 2017, the final encampment was shut down by law enforcement after they carried out 74 arrests of water protectors establishing a new camp.³⁰

Though the pipeline was completed following Trump's green light, the permits continued to face legal challenges. As recently as July 2020,³¹ courts ordered the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct an environmental impact study, only to be overturned by an appeals court the following month.³² Then in early 2021, a judge ruled that the pipeline was operating without the necessary federal permit and needed to undergo an environmental impact review. The courts are hearing evidence from both sides to determine whether the pipeline should be shut down while the review is conducted.³³

Since President Biden shut down the Keystone XL pipeline, pressure to shut down DAPL has increased. Celebrities, along with key environmental organizations such as the Sunrise Movement, Indigenous

Environmental Network, 350.org, Zero Hour, and the Sierra Club, signed a letter urging President Biden and Vice President Harris to shut down DAPL.³⁴ The letter came on the heels of Lakota youth running a 93-mile relay across Standing Rock to the site of the former Oceti Sakowin encampment, demanding that DAPL be shut down.³⁵

Even as the struggle continues and changes, Standing Rock's radicalizing influence persists. It was Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's experience at Standing Rock that inspired her to introduce the Green New Deal. The struggle inspired countless other protests against pipelines throughout Turtle Island, from Wet'suwet'en territory in Northern British Columbia to Line 3 in Northern Minnesota.

A whole new generation of activists has learned the long history of the United States continually breaking treaties with Indigenous nations: how the United States stomps over their self-determination any time the government or corporations need access to Native lands to extract energy and raw materials. As our planet burns and our ecosystems are destroyed for profit and capitalist expansion, it is vital that our solutions to the crisis center Indigenous nations' historic right to their lands, resources, and sacred sites.

This piece would not have been possible without two of my close Indigenous comrades, Ragina Johnson and Charlie Aleck. I have collaborated and worked with them over the years. All three of us went to Standing Rock together and collaborated on our journals.

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Colonial Capitalism and Puerto Rico

The Case for an EcoSocialist Green New Deal Regardless of COP28

RAFAEL BERNABE

IT IS NOW WIDELY ACCEPTED THAT A climate crisis due to global warming, resulting from the emission of greenhouse gases, poses an unprecedented threat to human society. Global mean temperature must be kept at less than 1.5° C above the pre-industrial level if catastrophic impacts are to be avoided (desertification, rising sea levels, reduction of bio-diversity, water shortages, reductions in agricultural productivity, extreme climate events). A rise beyond 2° C will probably unleash a tipping-point dynamic in which the effects of warming generate further warming in a runaway process that will slowly but surely make human existence progressively harder and harsher in a once lush and fertile biosphere.

Capitalism and Natural Limits

The notion that this threat is the result of human activity is true, but insufficient. After all, the process we now call climate change only began in the second half of the 1700s and accelerated tremendously after 1945. The dates are enough to indicate that

the threat of climate change is the result, not of human activity in general, but of a specific type of social relationship. It is the cumulative result of the rise, expansion, and generalization of capitalist production. The basic elements of such relations are well-known. Simply put: most people lack the means to live on their own and must hire themselves out to those who own land, factories, service locations, commercial establishments, transportation systems, and so on. The latter compete in the market. To do so successfully, they must reduce costs in order to offer attractive prices while ensuring a profit, which, in turn, they must largely reinvest, if they are to survive in the competitive race. This implies a constant drive to intensify the exploitation of labor (lengthen the working-day, lower wages and benefits, speed-up work, reduce rest periods, etc.), to deplete natural sources and resources (from soil exhaustion to misuse of non-renewable materials) and to ignore natural limits, all in the pursuit of the profit that each capitalist must secure, under threat of extinction. Competing capitals cannot behave in any other way: this is the nature of the capitalist game. If we do not like the consequences, then we must change the game.¹

Each capitalist seeks to grow and expand. Capital, after all, is an amount of value that grows. If it ceases to grow, it ceases to be capital. This is not the result

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of a cult or religion of the GDP: capitalism exhibited its tendency to expansion long before that statistical notion was invented. Its tendency toward increased productivity and expanded production has been one of its defining characteristics since its birth. This is the aspect of capitalist society which once made it a progressive moment in human development, but which always had a destructive dimension that carried a horrendous human and ecological cost. That cost has now clearly overshadowed all other aspects of this particular form of organizing human affairs.

The struggle for survival in the capitalist market can rarely see beyond the next yearly report: it lacks the broad or long-term view required to consider ecological impacts or the equilibriums, limits or rules of natural systems. Capitalism, ruled by the pursuit of private profit, is incompatible with even the plainer definitions of sustainability, such as the Brundtland report's oft-cited formula: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Capitalism fails on both accounts, present and future: it cannot adequately meet the needs of many in the present while it *also* undermines the ability of future generations to do so.

As John Bellamy Foster and others have underlined, Marx himself recognized the importance of Justus von Liebig's studies on the results of capitalist agriculture, namely his description of how it extracted nutrients from the land, with the double result of polluting the cities and exhausting the soil.² He considered that capitalism was thus not only characterized by the exploitation of labor, but also by the rift, or rupture, in humanity's metabolic interaction with nature. Climate change is another spectacular example of the metabolic rift described by Marx. Capitalism eventually found a technological fix to the particular rift studied by

Liebig: the invention of synthetic fertilizers, which in turn brought unwanted ecological consequences. The rift can only be repaired by abolishing the system that produces it, not by technical mitigations that seek to perpetuate it. This does not mean, of course, that we must not seek changes within the existing system.

Capitalist Limits

Capital does not respect natural limits, but it has limits: the limits created by its own contradictions. The very same drive for profit that pushes it to expand production regardless of environmental impacts leads it to increased mechanization, the replacement of workers by machines, in order to reduce unit costs and undercut the competition. But capitalist profit is unpaid labor: in the pursuit of profit each capital acts in a way that reduces the relative significance of labor in production, a process which eventually pulls down the general rate of profit. This is often indicated by the fact that many commodities cannot be sold at the expected profit. All of a sudden there are too many commodities, machines and money to be used as capital, that is to say, that can bring back increased value, at the expected rate. Investment slows down, or stops, unemployment grows, demand falls, debtors default, some corporations and banks fail. Briefly put: capitalism is irremediably afflicted by recurrent moments of crisis and of prolonged recession and depression.³

Consequently, in certain periods and locations, capitalism's ecological destruction combines malignantly with economic crisis and aggravated social distress. Under such circumstances, capitalists expertly mobilize the desire for jobs and economic recovery to push any environmental concerns away. And during periods of expansion they argue that environmental measures will result in job losses. An environmental program, to

gain mass support, must therefore address not only ecological but also other concerns of working people. Otherwise many will go for the promise of jobs and income, at the expense of nature.⁴

Puerto Rico is an example of this dynamic. The Puerto Rican economy has not grown since 2006. Its real GDP has fallen by close to 14%.⁵ Energy consumption has fallen significantly. In some respects then, the crisis of Puerto Rico's colonial-capitalist economy has been good for the planet. But this comes at a terrible social cost: loss of 250,000 jobs (about 20% of the jobs that existed in 2006), deeper and wider poverty, mass migration, deterioration of infrastructure and public services, growth of informal economies, etc. Meanwhile, ecologically destructive practices, such as energy generation with oil and coal, are still in place. Continued economic paralysis is not an acceptable or just option for Puerto Rico, but nor is renewed growth and economic expansion based on ecologically destructive practices, such as the reliance on fossil fuels. Puerto Rico needs both economic and ecological well-being. That, of course, is what the whole world needs.

Basic Needs and Nature

What are the basic elements of such an economic and ecological reconstruction? Two dimensions are evident: the basic needs of all must be satisfied in a manner that progressively repairs the "metabolic rift" mentioned above, i.e. that reduces our destructive impact on the environment. Basic needs certainly include water, food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, health, education, energy, transportation and mobility, but the list is open to debate and expansion.⁶

Avoiding catastrophic climate change requires a 40-60 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. This requires a shift from fossil to renewable, clean, and secure

energy. But, given the speed of the required change, the technology available, the desirability of not relying on nuclear energy and of reducing the use of carbon capture, it will not be enough. Reducing emissions will demand a reduction in overall energy consumption. This will require a reduction in production.⁷

Satisfying basic needs will require the expansion of production in some sectors. Thus, attaining the goal of covering basic needs and addressing the climate crisis will require the elimination and reduction of certain activities and the expansion of others. It requires the cessation of all harmful and wasteful production (armaments is an evident example); rapid move away from the individual car and the expansion of collective transport; replacement of agribusiness with ecological farming; localization of production to reduce transport needs; protection and restoration of forests; dietary shifts, (reduced meat consumption), among other changes proposed by many activists and movements.

Such a program can and must offer a vision, not of impoverished existence, but of richer lives, not only through the guaranteed satisfaction of basic needs but through the combined offer of jobs for all and a reduced working-day or working-week. Shortening the working-day, a classical demand of the labor movement, is the concrete basis for the redefinition of human progress and well-being in qualitative and not qualitative terms, not as the accumulation, acquisition, or desire for an ever growing number of commodities, but as the conquest of free time for creative, relaxing, pleasurable, intellectual or physical, individual or shared, self-determined activities.⁸ Nothing could be further from the logic of capitalism, which condemns many to unemployment and forced idleness in order to impose overwork on others.

Such a coordinated reorientation of

production and priorities will not result from the imperatives of capitalist competition, which operate blindly as if the planet was limitless. Not surprisingly, during the last two decades, capital and the states that represent it have subordinated climate action to the profit motive and the rules of the market. Climate initiatives, therefore, have been slow, limited, partial, and altogether insufficient.

Adequate climate action must be imposed on capital from without and against its will. It must be forced to act against its nature, relinquishing present or potential profits in order to respect environmental limits. Indeed, the rapid and coordinated de-growth of some and the expansion of other activities combined with the social reforms required to address climate change ideally demand social control of key economic sectors and a democratically planned economy, freed from the imperatives of maximum private accumulation, incompatible with the triple objective of covering basic needs, qualitatively enriching human lives and respecting natural limits.⁹

Some could object that this argument leads to a bleak outlook, since such a political and economic transformation is not in the immediate agenda. But it is wrong to conclude from our argument that nothing could or should be done, besides proclaiming the need for ecosocialism. Quite the contrary, gains are not only possible within capitalism, but only through the struggle for them can a growing number of people come to understand the need for radical change and develop the capacity and the confidence to attain it.

Within and Against the System

Anti-capitalism does not mean abandoning the struggle for change within capitalism, but rather understanding that the change we need runs counter to its logic. The choice is not between abstractly proclaiming the

need for socialism or working within the system, but rather between different ways of acting within it. Do we seek to turn the race for profit into an engine for “green growth” or are we willing to denounce and attack profits in order to protect people and nature from capital’s voracity?¹⁰

As the experience of the last two decades demonstrates, even the mildest legislation to address climate change will be bitterly resisted, mutilated, and hobbled, if it somehow impinges on capitalist profits. Climate legislation will require far more than law drafting and lobbying initiatives. It will require mass mobilization. And the movement against climate change will only become massive if it addresses other key questions, besides climate change. The general guiding principle is simple enough: at any juncture and dilemma we must put people and nature before profits. This should guide our response to capital’s predictable reaction to any encroachment on its prerogatives: if it goes on investment strike, it must be nationalized; if it tries to relocate to avoid ecological measures, its movement must be controlled; if the financial sector is complicit with this, it should be nationalized as well.¹¹

Two Souls of the Green New Deal

In 2019 Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward Markey introduced a resolution in Congress for a Green New Deal (GND), which sparked considerable debate.¹² Did the GND square with the perspective formulated above? The short answer is yes and no. On the one hand, it posed ecological tasks with the urgency they demand, while also linking them to key struggles for social and labor justice. This must be applauded. On the other hand, it sought to jump-start the capitalist economy into a new green expansion in which “green jobs” will be coupled with green profits: capitalist growth and

profits are to be reconciled with zero-net emissions by 2050.

The GND rightly denounced that many in the United States lack access to clean air, water, healthy food, health care, housing, transportation, and education. Four decades of stagnant real wages and the erosion of the bargaining power of organized labor have led to levels of inequality unseen since the 1920s. To this impact on working people, the GND added the “historic oppression” suffered by “front-line and vulnerable communities” which include: indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, depopulated rural communities, the poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth.

The GND proposed a full transition to clean, renewable, zero emission energy sources in ten years while also building an energy efficient smart-grid; upgrading buildings for energy efficiency; eliminating greenhouse emissions from transportation, and other infrastructure; expanding public transit, and promoting “family farming.” It coupled these actions with elements required for a socially just transition to a green economy: guaranteed jobs; career employment; protection of the right to organize, unionize, and collectively bargain; policies that attack racial, gender, regional, and other inequalities, including programs to address and repair the injustices suffered by the historically oppressed communities listed above.

In the GND, as formulated by the Ocasio-Markey resolution, the means to attain this remain rather vague. But the basic framework suggested corresponded to what some have characterized as “Green Keynesianism”: monetary stimulus and private-public partnerships to promote profitable investment along the lines mentioned above.¹³ The GND seemed to be a wager on “green profits” as the lever toward

jobs and a sustainable economy. But this would leave capitalism’s drive toward limitless expansion untouched. Indeed, like the original New Deal, it seemed to embrace the re-launching of rapid growth as its goal, a projection hardly compatible with an ecological perspective in a limited planet and, more specifically, with the objective of zero-net emissions by 2050.

Things would be worse if in order to reconcile capitalist growth with reduced emissions in the time available to us, the GND were to embrace nuclear energy or the widespread use of carbon capture technology. Of course, these considerations refer to the limits of the GND if enacted. But enactment was hardly assured. Opposition will come from all sectors of the vast petro-industrial complex including the oil, petrochemical, automobile, aeronautic, shipping industries, and all their materially and financially related sectors. Only a mass movement capable of breaking the resistance of the most powerful sector of the dominant class can gain enactment of anything approaching the GND. Such a movement can and should seek to go beyond Green Keynesianism toward the creation of a broadened public sector and real steps toward a nationalized and democratically planned economy.

The GND was thus both too radical and not radical enough. It was not radical enough in terms of the action required to avert catastrophic climate change between now and 2050, not to speak of constructing a sustainable economy, which is incompatible with infinite capitalist growth. But it was too radical from the perspective of the ruling capitalist class and its political representatives.

Neither Rejection nor Indifference

Our attitude towards reforms like this cannot be rejection, indifference, or blind endorsement. It must include at least four

elements. We must, one, embrace its basic climate and social justice goals; two, seek to build mass mobilizations demanding immediate action in that direction; three, point out the limits of the reform as it is formulated; and, four, propose a more adequate response to the task at hand. We must also argue for an effective response to capital's predictable resistance: investment strikes must be answered with nationalization, capital flight with capital controls, etc. Our watchword at all junctures is simple: people and nature before profits.

Our critique of the GND cannot overlook the lack of consideration of the past and present impact of imperialism and colonialism and the need to address it. The issue is not entirely absent: the GND referred to the "historic oppression" of indigenous communities and called for the enforcement of the "sovereign rights of tribal nations." Yet it said not one word about Puerto Rico, the largest remaining U.S. colony, and the need to combine decarbonization with decolonization. The absence was somewhat striking, since Puerto Rico's debt and economic crisis, combined with the consequences of an extreme climate event (Hurricane Maria in September 2017) had reignited the debate in Congress, the U.S. press, and elsewhere on what the impact of U.S. policies toward the island have been in the past and what those policies should be in the present and the future. Should not people under colonial rule be listed among the communities impaired by a form of "historic oppression" that the GND sought to abolish?

Imperialism, Colonialism and Climate Action

For the purposes of this discussion we can define imperialism as the tendency of the developed capitalist economies and states to subordinate the rest of the world to their needs, as defined by their dominant capital-

ist interests. Imperialist control takes many forms, from colonial rule to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Trade Organization (WTO). It has marched under different banners, from the protection of exclusive economic zones to "free trade." It is propelled by the search for profit to access masses of labor to exploit, vast extensions of land to cultivate, and additional materials to extract.

Thus, underdeveloped countries have been the object of particularly harsh forms of exploitation of labor, depletion of resources, and destruction of nature. The international division of labor, imposed by the developed economies, specialized them in export production, forcing them into ecologically destructive activities (over exploitation of forests, for example, or fossil fuel extraction, in countries that possess such resources).

A climate program for these countries requires a rapid transition from fossil to renewable sources of energy; the cessation of oil and gas extraction and deforestation; increased localization of production, that is to say, reduced production for export and decreased dependence on imports, including but not limited to increased food production for the home market.

Underdeveloped countries cannot be expected to embark on this transformation while burdened with massive debts that push them to prioritize exports to access hard currency, or while subjected to WTO regulations which prohibit any attempt to favor local producers as violations of the tenets of free trade. Nor can they be expected to undertake such a transition with their restrained financial and weak technological basis.

Therefore, a global climate program must include the cancellation of Third World debt, the cessation of IMF, WTO and other free trade impositions, as well as a massive transfer of resources from

the developed countries.¹⁴ Needless to say, beyond the crucial question of climate change, these are also some of the measures that would enable these countries to escape their chronic situation of impoverishment. In other words, the need to prevent catastrophic climate change adds urgency to the link that socialists have historically argued should exist between the struggle for social justice in the advanced capitalist countries and the anti-imperialist struggle in the subordinated countries.

Puerto Rico is an example of this. It is a colony of the United States, suffering from the consequences of a decade-long economic depression. Its colonial status must end. Its economy must be reconstructed. And key elements of a program to address its economic crisis and the legacy of U.S. colonial rule fully coincide with the central features required to confront the threat of climate change in the Global South: cancellation of an unsustainable debt burden; liberation from the imperatives of free trade policies to enable localization of production, including but not limited to increased food production; and transfer of considerable resources to enable a rapid transition to renewable energy.¹⁵ These elements need to become part of a viable and just GND. For this, the original New Deal provides some interesting precedents and lessons. But first we must take a brief look at Puerto Rico's situation under U.S. rule and its present crisis.

Puerto Rico under U.S. Colonial Rule

Puerto Rico has been a colony of the United States since the Spanish-American War of 1898. In a series of decisions in 1901, known as the Insular Cases, the U.S. Supreme Court defined Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory, a possession but not part of the United States, under the plenary powers of Congress.¹⁶

Although Congress has reorganized the territorial government over the years, the colonial nature of the relationship has remained unchanged. Under the present status, established in 1952 and officially known in English as "Commonwealth," Puerto Ricans elect their governor and legislature, but they only attend to insular matters. Puerto Rico is subject to both federal legislation and executive decisions, but its inhabitants have no participation or representation in their elaboration.

But colonialism has an economic as well as a political dimension. Through the different epochs of Puerto Rico's economic evolution since 1898, some features have remained constant. Let us briefly point out six of them.¹⁷

First, since 1900 Puerto Rico's economy has been shaped by the movement of U.S. capital. U.S. corporations have owned the main sectors of its economy. Such was the case before World War II, when sugar production was the main industry, during the expansion of light manufacturing from the 1940s to the 1970s, and during the following period, characterized by capital intensive manufacturing (pharmaceuticals, for example).

Second, under the control of external capital Puerto Rico's economic evolution has been unbalanced and one-sided (before 1950, monoculture without industry, after that, fragmented industry without agriculture); marked by discontinuity (specialization in one activity abandoned for the next) and vulnerability to external shifts in the sectors of specialization (sugar, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals). After 1950, this included the destruction of agriculture. Puerto Rico now imports more than 85 percent of its food.

Third, a further consequence of the domination of Puerto Rico's economy by U.S. capital has been the outflow, largely toward the U.S., of a significant portion of

the income generated in Puerto Rico. At present, it is estimated that around \$35 billion leave the island each year, in the form of dividends and other payments. This is around 35 percent of Puerto Rico's gross domestic product. This figure includes both profits generated in Puerto Rico as well as declared there for tax avoidance purposes.

In other words, this capital is not re-invested in Puerto Rico. Which leads to a fourth feature of its economy: Puerto Rico's dependent economy has never been able to provide sufficient employment for its workforce. At present, Puerto Rico has a 40 percent labor participation rate (compared to 63 percent in the United States). The official unemployment rate is 10 percent. Even between 1950 and 1964, that is to say, during the period of Puerto Rico's postwar economic expansion, which led many to see it as a model for other underdeveloped countries, the number of jobs fell.¹⁸ In other words, manufacturing was not able to compensate for the jobs lost in agriculture.

This leads us to the fifth feature of Puerto Rico's economic evolution since 1898: given the lack of employment, considerable migration has been a feature of Puerto Rican life. This was the case in the 1910s and 1920s, when the first Puerto Rican *colonia* took shape in New York, as well as in the mass migration of the 1950s and during the last decade of economic contraction. Puerto Ricans have been incorporated into the U.S. working class as one of its discriminated and super-exploited sectors, along with African Americans and other Latinos. Deeply connected and concerned with the situation of their homeland, they are also part of a multiracial and multinational U.S. working class.

Mass unemployment depresses wages, which deepens inequality and creates high levels of poverty. This helps explain the sixth feature: the persistence of the wide gap in living standards between Puerto Rico

and the United States. Puerto Rico's per capita income is a third of the U.S. figure. It is half of the per capita income of the poorest state, Mississippi. The yearly median household income in the United States is \$53,900. In Puerto Rico it is \$19,000.¹⁹ Around 45 percent of the people and 55 percent of the children in Puerto Rico live under the U.S. poverty level.

Ecological Consequences

The ecological consequences of colonial underdevelopment would make a longer list than we can provide here. Sugar monoculture in the coastal regions (with the well-known effects of such one-sided forms of cultivation) was replaced with fragmented industrialization and the marginalization of agriculture. Both excluded a diversified agriculture and food production for the home market. They implied high dependence on food imports, with the attendant reliance on long-distance shipping. The process of partial industrialization during the postwar boom deepened the ecological impact of colonial underdevelopment. The pursuit of hydro-electric power was replaced with oil-fueled plants. Railroad and streetcar systems were dismantled to be replaced by complete dependence on private cars. Suburban sprawl destroyed agricultural land and commercial life in town centers. Highway construction fragmented the landscape, mutilated the habitat of many species, increased erosion, and accelerated the sedimentation of river beds. U.S. consumption patterns, with a high component of packaging and disposable elements were adopted, generating a tremendous amount of waste, leading to the present crisis in garbage disposal.²⁰ Lack of regulations and negligent enforcement led to indiscriminate urbanization of beachfronts and coastal areas, generating erosion that has reached crisis proportions in some areas. Oil and coal-burning electrical plants, manufactur-

ing and food processing operations, cement factories, refineries and petrochemical installations and the oil tankers serving them polluted air, water, and soil in or around the island.

As the initial wave of investments in light manufacturing faltered, in the mid-1960s government planners adopted a program centered on oil: the island was to become a hub of oil refining, petrochemical and related operations, including the port facilities for the tankers and other vessels required for such activities. Fortunately, and largely thanks to widespread opposition, Puerto Rico was not transformed into the petro-island envisaged by some. But enough oil-related operations were built to inflict significant damage on the island, as part of the fossil fuel industry's assault on the planet.

In recent years a significant portion of the tourist industry has relied on cruise ship operations, major emitters of greenhouse gases, to mention just one of their dire ecological consequences. To complete this bleak record, after the sugar monoculture was replaced by neglect of agriculture, in recent years Puerto Rico has become the site of experiments and test operations conducted by Monsanto, whose chemical fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified crops are the opposite of the ecological farming that Puerto Rico and the world needs.

Ashley Dawson has referred to "extreme cities" located in coastal areas and in the normal path of hurricanes and typhoons, often characterized by unplanned urban growth, widespread poverty, and inadequate or fragile infrastructure. They are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change.²¹ Following Dawson, Puerto Rico could perhaps be described as an extreme island, a diagnosis tragically confirmed by the human and material impact of Hurricane María in 2017.²²

A History of Resistance

Puerto Rico has a long history of environmental struggles beginning in the mid-1960s with the movement against projected copper mining operations in the center of the island (Lares, Utuado, and Adjuntas) and continuing in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the opposition to the plans to build an oil "super-port" along with a hub of refining and petrochemical operations on the western coast.²³ Through the 1970s and 1980s, dozens of initiatives also emerged against the pollution of air, water, and soil by manufacturing and food processing operations (tuna canning and packing plants, for example), oil refining and petrochemical installations, quarries, cement factories, and hotels around the island.

Since the 1960s, different initiatives have struggled to protect coastal areas from sand extraction by the construction industry, appropriation and pollution by tourist operations, and reckless building by urban "developers." The opposition to the destruction of the Piñones coastal and mangrove area in Loíza and the displacement of its communities by a housing and tourist project (named Costa Serena by its promoters); the fight against the seaside building complex Paseo Caribe, near old San Juan; the struggle against the destruction of Playuela in Aguadilla, and the displacement of its community by a hotel and casino project (Christopher Columbus Landing Resort); the defense of the Isla Verde beach in Carolina against the encroachment by hotel operations. All are examples of the many past and ongoing efforts to defend the island's coasts from the blind pursuit of private profit.

In the energy field, movements in Puerto Rico have fought pollution by oil-burning electrical plants, while blocking the construction of a coal-fueled plant in Mayaguez in the early 1990s. But the movement was not able to stop the con-

struction of a privately-owned coal-burning plant in Guayama, which operates under a contract with the state-owned Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority. The toxic ashes generated by it are transported across the southern coast to a land-fill in Peñuelas. The struggle by the communities directly affected by this and the fight to close the plant in Guayama have been key environmental battles in recent years. Meanwhile, the government and allied private interests have pushed both gas and incineration of trash as alternative energy sources (and as an alternative form of waste management in the case of incineration). The proposed shift to gas included the construction of a north-south pipeline which would have destroyed agricultural and forest areas right through the center of the island. The project generated growing opposition leading to mass protest marches and had to be abandoned. The project to build an incineration plant in the north coast near Barceloneta is stalled, due to the persistent protests and lawsuits led and promoted by community and environmental activists. The *Queremos Sol* (We Want Sun) project, with the participation of ecological groups and, significantly, of UTIER, the electrical workers' union, has formulated a program for a full transition to renewable energy by 2050.²⁴ Providing for the completion of this project would be a major contribution of a real GND.

Since the 1980s, different initiatives have mobilized, lobbied, protested, and initiated projects to defend agricultural lands from sprawling suburban expansion and highway construction, while demanding the creation of forest and agricultural protected zones or reserves. In recent years, with little or no government support, dozens of initiatives have promoted the adoption of agro-ecological farming, as steps toward healthier diets and food sovereignty.

The struggle against the occupation of

much of the island-municipality of Vieques by the U.S. Navy and its use as an air and naval firing range had a significant ecological component, given the massive environmental impact of such activities. The struggle demanding the thorough clean-up and decontamination of Vieques after the end of Navy activities in 2003 continues to this day. In recent years, educational campaigns and yearly protests have been organized opposing Monsanto's presence in Puerto Rico while demanding government action to support agro-ecological projects and food sovereignty.

These environmental struggles have made use of numerous tactics: pickets, marches, rallies, civil disobedience, lawsuits, presentations in legislative and regulatory agency hearings, educational campaigns and local agricultural, renewable energy, and coastal restoration projects, among others. While discontinuous and loosely coordinated, if at all, these struggles over more than four decades have made environmental and ecological issues an important aspect of public policy debates in Puerto Rico.²⁵

Since 2006, the chronic problems of Puerto Rico's colonial economy and their ecological consequences have been aggravated by a punishing economic depression and debt crisis, followed by the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Maria.

Perfect Storm: Colonial, Economic and Ecological Crisis

Puerto Rico's economy grew rapidly after World War II, without shedding its colonial nature. This was not exceptional: the world capitalist economy went through a period of expansion between the end of the war and the early 1970s. Puerto Rico's participation in that expansion was shaped by several factors.

In 1947, the government of Puerto Rico adopted a policy of tax exemption in order to attract U.S. investment. This

made Puerto Rico attractive enough, since U.S. corporations in Puerto Rico were also exempt from federal taxes on profits. Puerto Rico also had unrestricted access to the U.S. market, plus it offered the lowest wages under the U.S. flag. Tax exemption, access to the U.S. market, and low wages combined, in the context of the postwar boom, to attract investment and to fuel economic expansion, even if it was never able to provide nearly enough employment.

Yet, since the 1990s, the workings of neoliberal globalization and congressional decisions have undermined these three pillars of Puerto Rico's colonial economy. With trade liberalization, Puerto Rico's access to the U.S. market ceased being exceptional.²⁶ In 1996, Congress began phasing out the federal tax exemption, section 936, which was completed in 2006. Tax exemption was never able to guarantee development or employment. But Congress replaced an inadequate mechanism with nothing. Meanwhile, the same corporate policies that pushed trade liberalization while intensifying competition and exploitation of labor worldwide also included financial deregulation and unfettered speculation. This led to the Great Recession of 2008.

Under the cumulative impact of neoliberal trade policies, the crippling of tax exemption policies by Congress without providing alternatives, and the recession of 2008, Puerto Rico's colonial economy slowed down, stopped growing and then began shrinking. Its average yearly growth withered from 3.82 percent in the 1990s to 0.71 percent between 2000 and 2009 and then to negative 0.56 percent between 2010 and 2016.²⁷ Puerto Rico's economy has not grown since 2006 (with a very mild exception in 2012). It has shrunk about 1 percent annually since 2005.²⁸ More than 250,000 jobs have been lost since 2006; 20 percent of the jobs that existed a dozen years ago have vanished. Over two decades, manufacturing

jobs in particular collapsed from 180,000 in the mid-1990s to less than 70,000 today.

As government revenues stagnated or fell, successive administrations had several options: reconsider the tax privileges of U.S. corporations, apply austerity measures, or issue more debt.²⁹ In 2009, a 4 percent excise tax on sales by local subsidiaries to their international parent companies was imposed. Even this limited measure has generated around \$2 billion annually or close to 20 percent of Puerto Rico's government revenues: testimony to the magnitude of the profits generated or declared in Puerto Rico. The fact that ten companies pay around 90 percent of this tax indicates how fragile Puerto Rico's economy is and how vulnerable it is to the decisions of a handful of private interests.

But the emphasis was not in increased corporate taxes. Instead of reconsidering its economic strategy, including tax exemptions, the government began a series of austerity measures while issuing more debt. The former included new sales taxes (in 2006, increased in later years), mass government layoffs, attacks on public sector labor rights, and reduced public employment through attrition (90,000 jobs eliminated since 2006).

Meanwhile, public debt (central government and public corporations) grew 64 percent between 2006 and 2014, from \$43 to \$73 billion. Puerto Rico's debt was attractive to investors since it is exempt from municipal, state, and federal taxes. Even after Puerto Rico's debt was degraded to junk or non-investment status in February 2014, investors bought \$3.4 billion in bonds issued a month later. Needless to say, Wall Street brokers made millions in commissions by issuing \$30 billion in new debt since 2006.

Inevitably, servicing the growing debt demanded an increasing portion of the public budget. Meanwhile, electrical and

other infrastructure was mismanaged and allowed to deteriorate, often to generate support for privatization. By 2014 Puerto Rico was spending more servicing its debt than financing its public school system.

Debt Crisis and PROMESA

In June 2015, the governor of Puerto Rico admitted that Puerto Rico's debt was, as he put it, "un-payable." It was evident that Puerto Rico's debt would have to be renegotiated. A year later, Congress adopted the Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Stability Act (PROMESA). PROMESA created a non-elected, federally-appointed control board, with broad powers over Puerto Rico's state finances. It provides no funds or measures for economic recovery. It enables austerity policies that deepen poverty while perpetuating the present depression. In other words, it is antidemocratic, colonial, socially unjust, and economically counterproductive.

Board plans have followed the neoliberal script: the debt crisis is attributed to "big government," and economic stagnation to excessive regulation and to "over-generous" labor benefits. The cures follow from this diagnosis: cutbacks in government spending, privatization, attacks on labor rights and benefits.³⁰

Nevertheless, it was evident that, even in the scenario most favorable to the creditors, Puerto Rico's debt would have to be restructured. PROMESA thus provided for a temporary stay of creditor suits against the government of Puerto Rico. As no agreement was reached with the creditors in the time allowed by the stay (May 1, 2017), the board took action under Title III of PROMESA, which allows it to file a bankruptcy-like plea in federal court on behalf of the government of Puerto Rico. The renegotiation of Puerto Rico's debt now proceeds under the supervision of Judge Laura Taylor Swain of the U.S.

District Court for the Southern District of New York.

What Puerto Rico Needs

Instead of a socially regressive, colonial agenda, Puerto Rico urgently needs an adequately funded program of economic reconstruction (including the transition to renewable energy) and a process of decolonization and national self-determination. A truly comprehensive GND should contribute significantly to both objectives.

An alternative program to the punitive neo-liberal agenda imposed on Puerto Rico in recent years should seek to:

- Revoke PROMESA.
- Maintain the stay on the claims by creditors on Puerto Rico's public debts.
- Audit and annul the illegitimate portion of the debt.³¹ Renegotiate the remainder with three priorities: protecting pensions, maintaining essential public services, and retaining resources required for economic renewal.³²
- Declare a moratorium on all debt payments until the audit has been completed.
- Adopt an economic reconstruction plan centered on reinvesting profits generated in the island that must include a reconsideration of the tax exemption policies.
- Stop austerity and privatization measures and revoke recent labor law "reforms."
- Democratically reform the public sector with labor and citizen participation.
- Self-initiate a process of decolonization and self-determination through a constitutional status convention.
- Seek and obtain sizable funding from Congress for Puerto Rico's economic reconstruction as well as action for Puerto Rico's decolonization.

The struggle for a GND in the United States needs to incorporate the final demand, thus linking the fight for climate action and justice in the United States

with the struggle for decolonization and for economic and ecological reconstruction in Puerto Rico.

There are many examples in the past of such collaboration between progressive movements in Puerto Rico and the United States, from the links of the insurgent CIO with Puerto Rico's similarly renewed labor movement in the late 1930s and early 1940s, to the support in the United States for the mass mobilizations and activism in Puerto Rico that forced the U.S. Navy out of Vieques.³³

In 1936, in the midst of the Great Depression and at a moment of deep crisis of the colonial regime in Puerto Rico, radical Congressman Vito Marcantonio introduced a bill granting independence to Puerto Rico under just and favorable conditions. The bill recognized the "responsibility" of the United States "for the present disastrous situation of [the] Puerto Rican economy and the poverty of the people of Puerto Rico." It provided for the "free entry" of Puerto Rican products into the United States and "no immigration restrictions on Puerto Rican citizens" and it committed the United States to pay "any claims of indemnity which... Puerto Rico may make."³⁴

In fact, the original New Deal sponsored by Roosevelt's administration propitiated the creation of an ambitious federally funded program for the economic reconstruction in Puerto Rico: the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA), organized in 1935, which bears reexamination in the present context.

Sugar and the New Deal

In the 1930s, the U.S. sugar market was supplied by domestic beet and cane sugar producers (Western states and Louisiana and Florida, respectively) and outlying cane-sugar producers, including U.S. territories (Hawaii, the Philippines and Puerto

Rico) and Cuba. All enjoyed unrestricted access to the U.S. market, with the exception of Cuba, which paid 80% of the tariff levied on foreign raw sugar. As the world price of raw sugar fell through the 1920s, the U.S. Congress responded with successive tariff hikes, seeking to ease the blow on U.S. producers. But expanded U.S. production still resulted in falling prices. Plus, producers in the Philippines and Puerto Rico took best advantage of the increased tariff and conquered a greater share of the U.S. market. Higher tariffs excluded a growing portion of Cuban sugar from the U.S. market, adding economic hardship to the political discontent with the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado, an explosive combination that led to the Cuban revolution of 1933, which initially had a radical anti-imperialist component.³⁵ Late 1933 and early 1934 was also a moment of widespread, often violent, working class and consumer (against gasoline and electric power companies) mobilizations in Puerto Rico.³⁶ Meanwhile, U.S. beet interests were pushing for Philippine independence, as a way of excluding a competitor from the U.S. market.³⁷

By early 1934, the Roosevelt administration had to simultaneously address the crisis in the sugar industry, due to falling prices; the demand of the beet interests for protection from competition by the insular territories (including Puerto Rico); the need to redefine the relationship with the Philippines, to appease social and labor unrest in Puerto Rico, and to defuse the revolutionary situation in Cuba. The "American Sugar Kingdom," as Cesar Ayala has referred to it, required major and urgent reengineering.³⁸

The Sugar Act, adopted in February 1934 was a central component of its response to this situation.³⁹ It imposed a processing tax on refiners and mill owners to finance payments to beet and cane

growers to reduce production. It created a quota system which allotted a portion of the market to each producing state and territory to Cuba. Given the Congressional might of the beet states and the need to ameliorate the situation in Cuba, U.S. colonies, namely the Philippines and Puerto Rico, bore the brunt of the required reduction in raw sugar production. Puerto Rico's quota was 20 percent short of its projected 1934 harvest of one million-plus tons. In this context, reform minded New Dealers managed to include a provision in the Sugar Act allowing for the use of the processing tax to finance, not only individual payments, but for programs for the general benefit of agriculture.⁴⁰ This led to the appointment by President Roosevelt of a Puerto Rico Policy Commission entrusted with the task of devising such a program for the island. Puerto Rican critics of U.S. corporate control, land-ownership concentration, and the sugar monoculture quickly understood that they could now seek some of the desired reforms within the framework of the New Deal and the need to reduce sugar production.

In June 1934, the Puerto Rico Policy Commission delivered its landmark *Report*, popularly known as the Chardón Plan.⁴¹ The document was an implicit critique of the social consequences of economic development led by market forces: it proposed a "fundamental reconstruction" of Puerto Rico's economy through the replacement of "blind development" with a "fundamental plan." As a student of planning in Puerto Rico has pointed out, the Chardón Plan "is one of the technically best formulated documents in the history of planning in Puerto Rico."⁴² After considerable delays, President Roosevelt created the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) through Executive Order 7057, on May 28, 1935.

The PRRA, following the indications

of the Chardon Plan, sought to redistribute land, diversify production, operate mills as public corporations, electrify, and build other infrastructure.⁴³ Congress initially appropriated \$35 million to finance its operations. By 1936, the PRRA directly or indirectly employed around 50,000 persons, a number close to half the labor force of the sugar industry during harvest time. Organized in 1935, it operated until 1954, although its most significant work was carried out through the first decade of its existence. The PRRA brought two sugar mills (Lafayette in Arroyo and Los Caños in Arecibo). It first attempted to run their cane-growing operations as cooperatives, but later turned them over to large cane growers (*colonos*) operating under contract with the government-owned mills. It bought close to 40,000 acres which it turned into 11,000 farms or homesteads. (This fell short of the original Chardon Plan, which envisaged the acquisition of 76,000 acres in the sugar cane areas alone and the creation of 24,000 small farms around the island.) The PRRA undertook the reforestation of 22,000 acres. It appointed legal counsel to assist Puerto Rico's Attorney General pursue court action to enforce legislation limiting corporate landholdings in Puerto Rico to 500 acres.⁴⁴

The PRRA also engaged in the construction and rehabilitation of public infrastructure and buildings. Over the years it constructed 25 agricultural vocational schools and 125 medical dispensaries. It built new schools and repaired existing rural and municipal schools. It built the theater of the University of Puerto Rico, to this day one of the island's best indoor venues, as well as the iconic tower of the university's campus in Rio Piedras. The PRRA engaged in urban renewal, building Puerto Rico's first low cost housing project, located in Puerta de Tierra, near old San Juan, which bore the Fourierist name of El Falansterio.

To carry out its projects, the PRRA built a cement factory in Cataño, across the bay from San Juan. Electrification, and rural electrification, in particular, was a key aspect of the PRRA's activity. It relied on the development of hydro-electric power. It modernized and expanded the existing dam and generating facilities of Toro Negro in Villalba and built new ones in Carite in Guayama, Las Garzas, and Dos Bocas in Arecibo and Toro Negro #2 in Villalba.

Beyond the New Deal

It would be wrong to propose a mechanical imitation of the PRRA in the 21st century. Nor can the GND simply be a new "greener" version of the original New Deal. The PRRA had some admirable aspects. It recognized the negative consequences of "blind development" led by capitalist profit and market imperatives: concentration of property and wealth; monoculture and dependence on food imports; chronic mass unemployment and low wages; widespread poverty and external control of productive assets.⁴⁵ And it sought to address them through conscious, planned public intervention, in contrast to the *laissez-faire* tenets prevailing before 1929 and the neo-liberal dogmas dominant today. Through it Congress did provide a significant amount of resources to finance economic reconstruction in Puerto Rico. The original \$35 million dollar appropriation would amount to more than \$600 million today.

But there were problems as well. First, the PRRA retained a colonial structure as a U.S. agency, ultimately directed by Federal appointees in Puerto Rico or from Washington. It was a federal project or agency in Puerto Rico, not a Puerto Rican project or agency. Secondly, it was more often than not presented as a gift or rescue of Puerto Rico by the United States, and not as it should have been: a compensation or reparation for the consequences of three

decades of U.S. colonial rule. Thirdly, most Puerto Rican New Dealers at the time envisaged a two-stage process: economic reconstruction through the PRRA and other programs would be followed in due time by a transition to political independence. But by the early and mid-1940s, the most significant sector in this current, grouped in the Partido Popular Democrático and led by Luis Muñoz Marín, opted to first postpone and then abandon the objective of independence. They eventually settled for a reformed colonial relationship, the existing Commonwealth status, established in 1950-52. Finally, the New Dealer's perspective, while questioning the worst consequences of *laissez-faire* capitalism, still clung to the fundamental structures of capitalism and was unwilling to question or challenge the prerogatives of capital. As they moved away from the search for political independence and settled for colonial reform, Muñoz and the Puerto Rican New Dealers turned to private capital and foreign investment as the means for Puerto Rico's modernization: land distribution was discontinued; state-owned industries (such as the cement factory built by the PRRA) were privatized; export promotion replaced attempts to localize production. Through tax exemption, access to the U.S. market and relatively low wages Puerto Rico was hitched to the capitalist postwar boom. The results were not insignificant: Puerto Rico escaped extreme poverty. But the problems of one-sided underdevelopment, mass unemployment, external control of the insular economy, and surplus extraction have persisted to this day, while ecological destruction has spread and accelerated. As a result Puerto Rico today faces urgent 21st century problems, such as the transition to renewable energy sources, while still confronted with the problems posed and debated in the 1930s.

Today we must demand a GND that

provides for Puerto Rico's economic and ecological reconstruction. Programs related to this must be formulated and coordinated in Puerto Rico and they should be coupled with a process of decolonization. Such an economic, ecological, and political project must abide by the guideline: people and nature before profits. In other words, it must be willing to sacrifice capitalist profits and bend market rules to guarantee the satisfaction of human needs and to protect nature. That, of course, should also be the watchword of the GND in the United States. Progressives in the United States and Puerto Rico should fight together for their shared objectives, adopting what was valid in the first New Deal while opening a path beyond it toward an ecosocialist alternative to capitalist catastrophe.⁴⁶

NOTES

1. There is a vast literature on capitalism and the environment. See for example: John Bellamy Foster, Fred Magdoff, *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism. A Citizen's Guide to Capitalism and the Environment* (New York: Monthly Review, 2011); John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Revolution. Making Peace with the Planet* (New York: Monthly Review, 2009); Daniel Tanuro, *Green Capitalism: Why it Can't Work* (London-Amsterdam: Merlin, Resistance, IIRE, 2013).
2. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology. Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review, 1999).
3. Marxist theory of capitalist crisis is admittedly an issue of considerable debate. For an analysis of the 2008 crisis see Andrew Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production. Underlying Causes of the Great Recession* (London, Pluto Press, 2012). For a discussion of crisis and long depressive periods see Ernest Mandel, *Long Waves of Capitalist Development. A Marxist Interpretation* (London: Verso, 1995).
4. Ashley Dawson, "A greener New Deal?," *New Politics*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, Winter 2019. https://newpol.org/issue_post/a-greener-new-deal/
5. Pablo Gluzmann, Martin Guzman, Joseph E. Stiglitz, "An Analysis of Puerto Rico's debt: relief needs to restore debt sustainability," *Espacios Abiertos*, (2018) 51. <http://espaciosabiertos.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/DSA-English.pdf>.
6. As Michael Löwy has underlined, the need to separate real from false needs and to reduce all unnecessary production requires the suppression of the advertising industry. True needs would be those "that can be expected to persist without the benefit of advertising." Michael Löwy, "Ecology and Advertising" in *Ecosocialism. A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe* (Chicago: Haymarket 2015), 41-51.
7. The point is well argued in Daniel Tanuro, *Green Capitalism...*; Ashley Dawson "A Greener New Deal?"; Mark Burton, Peter Sommerville "Degrowth: a defence," *New Left Review*, 115, Jan-Feb 2019, 95-104. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II115/articles/mark-burton-peter-sommerville-degrowth-a-defence>;
8. Erald Kolasi, "Energy, Economic Growth and Ecological Crisis," *Monthly Review*, Vol. 71, Issue 2 (June 2019) <https://monthlyreview.org/2019/06/01/energy-economic-growth-and-ecological-crisis/>.
9. Löwy, "Ecosocialism and Democratic Planning" in *Ecosocialism*, 35; "Why Ecosocialism: For a Red-Green Future" (December 2018) <https://www.tellus.org/pub/Lowy-Why-Ecosocialism.pdf>.
10. Löwy "Ecosocialism and Planning," 19-39.
11. Vaios Triantafyllou, "John Bellamy Foster on the Green New Deal" (February 12, 2019) <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2019/02/12/john-bellamy-foster-on-the-green-new-deal/>
12. Richard Seymour, "What's the Deal with the Green Deal?" (April 27, 2019) <https://mronline.org/2019/04/27/whats-the-deal-with-the-green-new-deal/>.
13. Dawson, "A Greener New Deal?"; Peter Hudis, "The Green New Deal: Realistic Proposal or Fantasy?" (May 26, 2019) <https://newpol.org/the-green-new-deal-realistic-proposal-or-fantasy/>
14. The point is forcefully made in Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Simon and Schuster, 2014).
15. We argued this in our review of Klein's *This Changes Everything*: "Capitalismo fósil" (October 24, 2014) <http://www.80grados.net/capitalismo-fosil/>.
16. The most important is Downes v. Bidwell, 182 U.S. 244 (1901).

17. On Puerto Rico's economic, political and cultural history under U.S. rule see: César J. Ayala, Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: a History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 2006). More on Puerto Rico's economic history in James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) and *Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

18. Total employment in Puerto Rico, 1950: 603,000; 1963: 586,000. Ayala, Bernabe, 195.

19. Lara Merling, Kevin Cashman, Jake Johnston, Mark Weisbrot, "Life after Debt in Puerto Rico: How Many More Lost Decades?" (Washington D.C.: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2017), 9. <http://cepr.net/publications/reports/life-after-debt-in-puerto-rico-how-many-more-lost-decades>

20. Rafael Bernabe "Isla desechable" (September 14, 2012) <http://www.80grados.net/isla-desechable/>

On this topic see: Heather Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow. The Hidden Life of Garbage* (New Press, 2005).

21. Ashley Dawson, *Extreme Cities. The Peril and Promise of Cities in the Age of Climate Change* (London: Verso, 2017).

22. Rafael Bernabe "La isla extrema (o su resiliencia y la nuestra)" (December 1, 2017) <http://www.80grados.net/la-isla-extrema-o-su-resiliencia-y-la-nuestra/>

23. As usual, the apologists of capitalist development posed the problem as a choice between the environment and jobs. See for example, Alex W. Maldonado, "Las minas de cobre," *El Mundo*, January 4, 1968. The struggle led to pioneering environmentalist statements, such as the document prepared by Tomás Morales and José del Castillo and signed by sixty scientists and educators entitled "An Urgent Call to Our Government. An Urgent Warning to Our People," *San Juan Star*, January 31, 1966. This had been preceded by a letter by Morales published in the *New York Times* (January 8, 1966) under the title "Despoliation in Puerto Rico." On the birth of the environmental movement in Puerto Rico see: Carmen M. Concepción, "The Origins of Modern Environmental Activism in Puerto Rico in the 1960s" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 19, 1, March 1995, 112-128 and Jorge Colón Rivera, Félix Córdova Iturregui, José Córdova Iturregui, *El proyecto de explotación minera en Puerto Rico (1962-1968):*

Nacimiento de la conciencia ambiental moderna (Río Piedras: Huracán, 2014).

24. <https://www.queremossolpr.com/>. UTIER stands for Unión de Trabajadores de la Industria Eléctrica y Riego.

25. The Puerto Rican left and independence movements have played a central role in ecological struggles. For example, as early as 1974, when much of the world left was beginning to grapple with these issues, the program of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (a major organization of the left at the time) pointed out that, socialism requires "the strictest environmental planning," in order to avoid "the destruction of the environment and of natural resources." "Equilibrium" had to be found between human needs, production and nature. Oil in particular, had to be replaced by "less polluting" sources of energy: such as the sun, the wind, sea waves and marine currents. Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño, *La alternativa socialista. Tesis Política* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Puerto Rico, 1974) 20, 119, 125.

26. Some steps in that process of trade liberalization were the adoption of North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that went into effect in 1994 and the launching of the WTO in 1995.

27. Merling, Cashman, Johnston, Weisbrot, 5

28. Merling, Cashman, Johnston, Weisbrot, 6.

29. Tax revenue fell in real terms since 2005. See José Caraballo Cueto, Juan Lara, "From deindustrialization to unsustainable debt: the case of Puerto Rico" (2016), 12. http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~bobonis/CaraballoLara_PR_debt_16.pdf

30. Rafael Bernabe "Punitive Neoliberalism in Puerto Rico," *Against the Current*, 191 (Nov.-Dec. 2017). <https://solidarity-us.org/atc/191/p5117/>.

31. In 2015 the government of Puerto Rico created a Commission for the Comprehensive Audit of the Public Credit. It was largely ignored by Governor García Padilla's administration and dissolved by the following Roselló administration. It managed to prepare two preliminary reports on central government bond issues since 2014 and Electric Power Authority bonds issued in 2013. Both found irregularities that make more than \$30 billion in debt illegal. The initial report in: Commission for the Comprehensive Audit of the Public Credit. First Pre-audit report: http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/Puerto_Rico_Commission_Interim_Report.

pdf. Second pre-audit report: <http://sptpr.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Second-Interim-Pre-Audit-Report-on-2013-PREPA-debt-emission-con-anejos.pdf>

32. The 2017 study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research concluded that “there is a substantial case for federal aid to Puerto Rico, as well as sufficient debt cancellation, to allow for speedy economic recovery.” Merling, 6. Before Hurricane María, a study by Joseph E. Stiglitz and two associates concluded that to attain “debt sustainability” (debt that could be paid while allowing for economic recovery) would require cutting Puerto Rico’s debt by at least 62 percent and perhaps as much as 80 percent. In December 2017, Martín Guzmán, one of the authors of the study, concluded that after Hurricane María, all of Puerto Rico’s debt would have to be cancelled. See Pablo Gluzmann, Martín Guzmán, Joseph E. Stiglitz, “An Analysis of Puerto Rico’s debt: relief needs to restore debt sustainability,” *Espacios Abiertos*, 2018, 2, 3, 5). <http://espaciosabiertos.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/DSA-English.pdf>; “Paying bondholders not viable” Joanisabel González, *Nuevo Día*, English web version, 12 December 2017.

<https://www.elnuevodia.com/english/english/nota/payingbondholdersisnotviable-2381610/>

33. Taller de Formación Política, *No estamos pidiendo el cielo: la huelga portuaria de 1938* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1988). Katherine T. McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

34. “A Bill to Provide for the Granting of Sovereignty to the Island of Puerto Rico, and to Provide for Neighborly Relations with the Proposed Government of Puerto Rico” (H.R. 12611, 74th Congress, 2nd Session.) Introduced by Representative Marcantonio (R-NY), May 6 1936.

<https://scholarscollaborative.org/PuertoRico/items/show/17>.

35. The Roosevelt administration never recognized the “100-day” government (September 1933-January 1934) headed by Ramón Grau, whose cabinet included radical anti-imperialist Antonio Guiteras.

36. Taller de Formación Política, *Huelga en la caña* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1982); Rafael Bernabe, “Luchas obreras 1933-34,” *Pensamiento Crítico*, Año XII, num. 63, mayo-julio 1989.

37. See Grayson L. Kirk, *Philippine Independence: Motives, Problems and Prospects* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936).

38. Cesar Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom. The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898-1934* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

39. See John E. Dalton, *Sugar. A Case Study of Government Control* (New York: Macmillan, 1937).

40. “It became apparent to the Administration that Puerto Rico’s market quota, 803,000 tons of sugar, checking the future growth of its most important industry and bringing a reduction in output of about 20%, would mean serious hardship to the island.” Dalton, 218.

41. *Report of the Puerto Rico Policy Commission* (June 14, 1934). The members of the commission were Carlos Chardón, Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico; Rafael Fernández García, of the UPR agricultural extension service and Rafael Menéndez Ramos, Commissioner Agriculture.

42. Leonardo Santana Rabell, *Planificación y política durante al administración de Luis Muñoz Marín: un análisis crítico* (San Juan: Análisis, 1984), 48.

43. Our summary relies on Miles H. Fairbank, *The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 1934-1954* (San Juan: The Fairbank Corporation, 1978).

44. The limit had been in effect since 1900, but had not been enforced. Attorney Miguel Guerra Mondragón was entrusted with this task.

45. The PRRA commissioned a landmark report on the consequences of the sugar monoculture. Esteban Bird, *Report on the sugar industry in relation to the social and economic system of Puerto Rico* (1937) (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1941).

46. We have advocated for such internationalist collaboration in the past, for example in the wake of Hurricane María and responding to attacks by President Trump. See Rafael Bernabe, Manuel Rodríguez Banchs, “Open Letter to the People of the United States, a Month After Hurricane María” (October 20, 2017) <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/10/20/open-letter-to-the-people-of-the-united-states-from-puerto-rico-a-month-after-hurricane-maria/>

How to Understand Russia's Imperialist Attitude Toward Ukraine

HANNA PEREKHODA

ON FEBRUARY 24, 2022, THE KREMLIN launched a “special military operation” with the stated aim of completely eliminating Ukraine’s independence as a state and society. The decision by Russian president Vladimir Putin came as a surprise to many observers, as few experts had envisaged such a scenario. Their predictions were often clouded by the prevailing belief that Russia had no “objective motivation” for engaging in a war of this magnitude. Soon after, when Russian forces encircled Kyiv, those who had initially argued that these troops would not cross the Ukrainian border began to argue that Russia simply had no other alternative. They claimed that the invasion was due to pressure from “the West.”

Those who support this view adopt, sometimes unconsciously, a neorealist approach to international relations. This approach is based on several fundamental principles, one of which postulates that states are rational actors operating in a hostile and ruthless world, where there is no authority to protect them from each other, and so they seek to maximize their chances of survival. According to this perspective,

the Russian state was behaving as a rational actor, and war was a logical response to objective threats from outside. The invasion of Ukraine was thus be a reaction to the “expansion” of NATO, which posed a *real* danger to Russia. If this had not been the case, then why would Putin have started a conflict that could involve the entire West? According to this reasoning, the scale of Russian military aggression *must* correspond to the severity of the perceived threat. Otherwise, Putin’s decision would be irrational and therefore impossible to explain.

At this point, it is pertinent to note the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO in 2023, doubling the length of the organization’s border with Russia. It is all the more interesting to note that no Russian military presence has been reported along this new border. If Russia really sees NATO as a threat, why don’t we see a build-up of Russian troops or propaganda portraying Finland as a military threat with Finns as enemies? Clearly, Finland’s accession to NATO, despite its 1,340 km long border with Russia, does not seem to be a major concern for Putin. On the other hand, Ukraine, which was not at the time officially a candidate for NATO membership, was perceived as being so hostile that it must be destroyed militarily. This difference in treatment raises questions about the reasons for this disparity.

It is not new that by focusing exclusively on the structure of the international

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system, advocates of neorealist analysis tend to underestimate the impact of internal national factors on the behavior of states on a global scale. When Russia invaded Ukraine, adherents of this view struggled to make sense of the situation, resorting to post-event explanations that aligned with their theory rather than acknowledging factual realities. But the political implications of this entrenched mindset are too significant to ignore or leave unchallenged.

From our perspective, in order to fully grasp the motivations behind Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, it is crucial to look at the internal dynamics of Russian politics. This involves examining the way in which power is exercised between the state, economic actors, and society in Russia, as well as the influence of ideologies and, more generally, imaginaries. As stated by Alexander Wendt, one of the core social constructivist researchers in the field of international relations, actors act towards objects based on the meanings that the objects have for them. Ideology significantly influences how political elites perceive their interests, especially within authoritarian regimes like Putin's Russia, where information is monopolized.

It is worth remembering that Russia under Putin has not always adopted a hostile stance towards the West. Initially, the president was open to cooperation, even going so far as to establish partnerships with NATO and participate in joint military exercises. Some argue that Russian elites genuinely aspired to integrate their state into the international community but were disappointed by an arrogant and hostile West. However, we believe that Putin's stated willingness to cooperate with the West at that time could be better compared to that of a criminal group seeking to establish connections with corrupt law enforcement agencies.

In the early 2000s, Putin aimed to

secure his hold in the post-Soviet space made up now of the independent nations of the former Soviet Union. In return, he was willing to offer the Western "policemen," whose hegemony he did not yet challenge, a kind of "bribe." This included the sale of fossil fuels at bargain rates, the opening of the Russian market to foreign investment, as well as the injection of substantial funds, often of obscure origin, into Western companies. To some extent, the Europeans accepted these arrangements: Russian money has flowed through financial circuits without much question about its sources, while gas and oil have flowed to new pipelines. Leaders of the time, such as German chancellor Gerhard Schröder, French president Nicolas Sarkozy, or Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, were conciliatory. However, achieving an absolute monopoly on the post-Soviet backyard proved complex. The United States had not been as involved in this agreement as the European Union. Moscow had also failed to offer its neighbors a truly mutually beneficial model of cooperation: local mafiosi in power in the former Soviet republics have struggled to perceive the benefits of submitting to Russia, a much larger and more predatory mafia cartel. In addition, the people of these countries regularly voiced their dissatisfaction with the autocratic and corrupt leaders supported by Putin. In sum, Putin failed to establish effective mechanisms to maintain control over what he perceived as Russia's traditional sphere of influence.

In 2011, ordinary Russian citizens took to the streets to protest the rise of authoritarianism: Putin had violated the Constitution and was seeking a third presidential term. From that point on, the Russian authorities began to promote an ideology that portrayed Russia as surrounded by enemies, with Putin being the only one capable of protecting the country from this existential threat.

The control of Putin's elites over Russia itself was now threatened. At the time, the regime was trying to suppress any democratic impulse inside and outside the country. Two years later, faced with the failure of its Eurasian economic integration project, the Maidan revolution in Ukraine, and a decline in its political legitimacy in Russia, the regime had shifted from an approach aimed at luring corrupt elites in the states of the former Soviet Union to a strategy of direct control of the territories of neighboring countries, often to the detriment of Russian private sector interests. After the revolution in Ukraine in 2014, Crimea was annexed and the Russian army was deployed in Donbass region of the eastern Ukraine. The message was clear: "Any attempt to overthrow authoritarian rule will be severely repressed." In 2015, Russia backed Bashar al-Assad in Syria, who was engaged in a brutal war against his own people. In 2020 and 2022, the dictators of Belarus and Kazakhstan benefited from Russian support to violently suppress popular movements in their countries, where the influence of the West, especially NATO, was not an issue on the agenda.

But why has Ukraine become the main target of Russian aggression? First of all, Ukraine is one of the few countries in the post-Soviet space where a popular revolution has not been followed by the return to power of forces politically and economically linked to Russia. Moreover, Ukraine is a country with which ordinary Russians share a great cultural and linguistic proximity. If a country similar in so many ways to their own succeeds in building a democratic and prosperous state, Russians might ask the question: "If Ukrainians, people like us, don't need an authoritarian and repressive state to lead a normal life, why would we Russians need it?"

In addition, Ukraine, which was the second most powerful Soviet republic after

Russia, has considerable strategic assets, including its geographical position, fertile land, natural resources, relatively developed industry, and a skilled workforce. Russia's political elites believe that integrating Ukraine into an alliance with Russia and Belarus would make the bloc a major power in world politics. Putin regularly evokes this idea when addressing Ukrainians, stressing that "together we have always been and will be much stronger." However, the drive to maintain control over Ukraine has much deeper motivations.

The Russian president firmly believes that the distinct national identity of Ukrainians is an artificial construct created by enemies. Once separated from Russia, the Ukrainian state, he believes, inevitably becomes a strategic base for hostile forces in the West who use it "as a battering ram" to undermine Russia from within through subversive ideologies, thus hindering Russia's – that is, Putin's – aspirations to occupy its rightful place in this world. According to this view, independent Ukraine, simply by virtue of its separate political existence, is transformed into an "anti-Russian project" and becomes an immediate threat to Russia's very survival, which can only endure as a great power.

The "historic" arguments of this kind put repeatedly forward by Putin in his public speeches should not be seen as ideological junk resulting simply from opportunistic political choices. They have their origins in the collective imaginary forged over time: Ukraine's role in the identity narrative of Russian state elites was shaped in the particular historical context of the nineteenth century.

Indeed, the Russian leadership of Tsarist times believed that the assimilation of Ukraine was crucial in order to strengthen external power and ensure the internal stability of the Russian state. First, in order to compete with modern colonial empires

that adopted policies of nationalization in their “home countries,” Russia also needed to create and consolidate a “national” community, a Russian nation composed of Orthodox eastern Slavs – Great Russians, Little Russians (Ukrainians) and Belarusians. The integration of Ukrainians into this “nation” built from above was therefore seen as an essential step to increase Russia’s power on the international stage.

Second, the Tsarist elites sought to preserve their autocratic regime in a world disrupted by democratic movements, especially after the revolutionary upheaval of 1848 that shook Europe. The Russification of the populations of the western frontier was seen as a way to protect them from the influence of subversive ideologies, thus contributing to the internal stability of the regime. Third, as an ever-expanding continental empire, Russia faced a chronic shortage of loyal populations capable of populating the newly colonized regions of Asia and the Caucasus. Therefore, the assimilation of a vast demographic reservoir of Ukrainians became crucial to maintaining the cohesion of this heterogeneous empire, as this Orthodox Slavic population had to fill the ranks of potential settlers in an empire where ethnic Russians were in the minority.

The current ideology of the Russian state is strongly influenced by the nationalist political imaginary that took shape in the nineteenth century. It continues to be based on the conviction that the assimilation of Ukrainians into the “Russian nation” is a vital necessity for the very survival of the Russian state. It is therefore impossible to understand Russia’s war in Ukraine if we limit ourselves to considering only the military and economic aspects of security. What is mainly at stake is the *ontological* security of the Russian ruling elite, with Ukraine occupying a central position in their identities and in their representations of the world.

Increasingly, we hear arguments suggesting that in order to end the war, “the West” should address Russia’s security concerns, such as guaranteeing that Ukraine or other post-Soviet countries will never join NATO. However, what leads us to believe that simply keeping Ukraine out of NATO or even dividing its territory will appease Putin?

The existence of an independent and democratic Ukraine, whether within its internationally recognized or significantly reduced borders, is unacceptable to a regime whose ruling classes are convinced that Ukraine is a creation of enemies who use it as a basis to corrupt Russians with ideas of individual rights and freedoms and thus destroy the imperial body of a thousand-year-old Russia.

But let us set aside all moral and ethical questions and consider for a moment that the key to world peace lies in the acceptance of the principle that only the “great powers” have the right to sovereignty, while the others are destined to remain in the great powers’ “sphere of influence,” i.e. to remain colonies or neocolonies. This is what many international relations experts and “pragmatic” politicians tell us, either explicitly or tacitly. But a crucial question arises: where does the Russian sphere of influence that we are supposed to respect end?

We have bad news. Putin’s Russia’s sphere of influence knows no bounds. For the ruling classes of an autocratic “great power,” who live in constant fear of popular revolution, the only way to ensure security is expansion, often in defiance of the demands of a “rational” international strategy.

Russian state ideology and its ruling circles’ imaginary are essential elements to keep in mind if we want to understand the logic behind Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and especially if we are looking for possible solutions to end this conflict and ensure lasting peace in the region.

Self-Organization and the New Left in Ukraine

From Maidan to War

EMILY CHANNELL-JUSTICE

IN EARLY DECEMBER 2013, I FOUND myself on Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), holding a sign reading "Don't Believe Politicians—Self-Organize!" as part of a protest with a small group of student activists. Weeks before, then-president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich had refused to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. This Association Agreement would have integrated Ukraine's economy more closely with the EU's, and most people hoped that, by extension, Ukraine's democratic political system would be strengthened. At the last minute, when he was already in Vilnius to sign the agreement, Yanukovich refused. European governments had implored him to release his former political opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko, from prison so she could seek medical treatment in Germany. Yanukovich would not approve her release, and in Vilnius, he announced that he would instead accept a Russian proposal to join Vladimir Putin's Customs Union (along with Belarus and Kazakhstan). Putin also promised Yanukovich \$5 billion in cash



The author (right) on Kyiv's Independence Square. December 2013.

aid instead of the loans and development grants that EU institutions were offering.

While Yanukovich had worked to consolidate power as president, he did not have the authoritarian control that Putin did in Russia. When he refused to sign the Association Agreement, hundreds of people came to Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti to protest his decision. The initial protests were largely driven by student activists, including those with whom I was doing research in Ukraine. As a whole, students hoped eventual European accession would improve the quality of Ukrainian education as well as allow them the chance to study more easily in European universities. Ultimately, the protests would move far beyond this focus on Europe, and hundreds of thousands of people would join students in their condemnation of the use of violence

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against protesters.

Who Is the Left in Ukraine?

Ukraine became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991. In the early part of the 1990s, leaders focused on building the new government, as well as navigating the country's relationship with major powers—the United States, the European Union, and, of course, Russia. After generations of Russian influence, beginning during the Russian imperial period and continuing through the Soviet Union, Ukrainian national identity was also a key focus after independence.

As an anthropologist in Ukraine to study the student activist movement, I was interested in higher education reform and how student activist groups navigated an increasingly authoritarian, pro-Russian government in Kyiv. The activists who contributed to my research were born around the time of Ukrainian independence. They did not experience the lived realities of state socialism, but they did grow up in the chaotic period of the 1990s. Most of them did not grow up around political ideas that would be considered part of an ideological left, because Ukrainians were distancing themselves from socialist ideas. However, they were all able to find their way to various leftist political positions by the time I met them in 2012 and 2013.

Many of them told me they developed their political ideas in 2004. The presidential elections of that year featured well-documented electoral fraud that worked in favor of the very same Viktor Yanukovich whose decisions would push mass protests almost ten years later. Known as the Orange Revolution, mobilizations in 2004 brought pro-European leader Viktor Yushchenko to power. But Yushchenko was unable to implement most economic reforms because of power struggles with his former allies—such as Yulia Tymoshenko—as well as his



Pro-European student protesters gather at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, November 2013. Photo by E. Channell-Justice.

former rival, Viktor Yanukovich. While these protests are called a revolution, they were organized around one specific political candidate, and his failures led to the widespread disappointment of its participants.

This disappointment was key to motivating young students who participated in my research to find other avenues for political engagement. Some of them became active within their universities, finding their way to others who wanted to advocate for students' rights. Others noted the rise of right-wing violence in the 2000s and wanted to fight against its perpetrators. Still others were involved with punk music and discovered leftist ideas within that scene. And some were readers of leftist political thought, ranging from Marx and Engels to Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin to leftist psychoanalyst Erich Fromm. Together, the Ukrainian left that was active in 2013 was a diverse group of people with different motivations and different interests in political action. While they did not present any kind of unified leftist position when the protests began, they were able to influence how the protests developed through their idea of self-organization.

Leftist Roots of Self-Organization

From the beginning, leftist student activists saw the political potential in these protests. In their earliest days, I joined leftists to

hand out fliers that advocated for self-organization alongside self-determination, arguing that Ukraine's status in Europe would not be economically equal to other countries, even its neighbors such as Poland or Czechia. These fliers urged protesters not to fall into political camps but to reject the exploitation of the global capitalist system that pitted different groups against one another instead of creating the space to unite against the ruling elites.

Leftists had reason to intervene in these early days. Even as they wanted to support the protests in late 2013, they also wanted to make sure that participants did not simply rally around one political figure, who would surely be a disappointment in the long run. Leftists advocated for self-organization because it avoided existing political parties and empowered people of various political beliefs to participate in the protests.

At its most basic level, self-organization is the idea that if something needs to be done, and someone is able to do that thing, then they should simply do it. They should not wait for a political figure to intervene on their behalf—even if the thing that needs to be done is the responsibility of a political figure or institution. This way, self-organization does not need the support of political parties but has the potential for more horizontal political participation.

Leftist students had been self-organizing throughout the 2000s, creating a foundation for the practice. Ukrainian universities had official student unions, but these institutions were typically the mouthpieces of the university administrators, who were nearly always appointed by the Minister of Education. In other words, official student unions were most likely to represent the Ukrainian government's position. They were not there to advocate for student rights. When student rights were routinely violated, leftist activists from the

independent student union Priama Diia (Direct Action) self-organized to advocate for students in the face of these university administrations. They fought for anything from lower student fees and higher student stipends to 24-hour access to dormitories. While they did not win every fight, they became a strong political force, and their independence from existing political structures lent them legitimacy.

When the Kyiv protests on Maidan began, these leftist students and Priama Diia activists promoted self-organization because they wanted to use their experiences working outside the political system to be more effective. They also were aware that their leftist political beliefs were not usually welcome in Ukrainian political society. Often accused of affiliation with the Communist Party or with nostalgia for the Soviet Union—both of which were almost never accurate descriptions of these activists—self-organization was a tactic leftists could share that would allow them to participate without being defined by leftist political beliefs.

Against a Police State: How the Maidan Protests Responded to Violence

On the night of November 30, 2013, riot police (Berkut) beat and arrested students who were camped out on Maidan. Until that night, most of the protest signs and chants had been about Ukraine being part of Europe. The attack on students prompted more people with varied backgrounds from across the city to come to the square to condemn the police for their actions. Leftists created banners calling Ukraine a “police state,” language that resonated with protesters because it was calling out the Yanukovych regime and his allies while not having a particular right, left, or center political position.

Fighting against the police state allowed

for a broader participation of self-organized activists in a variety of spheres. Student activists, for example, rallied at different universities over the next months of protests, ultimately forcing administrations to agree not to punish students for participating in the mobilizations. When Maidan activists occupied the Ukrainian House (a convention center just outside the central square), students created the Student Assembly in that building to plan demonstrations and student-led interventions. In late February, when the mobilizations turned violent around Maidan Nezalezhnosti, students occupied the Ministry of Education and Sciences after Yanukovich's pro-Russian minister of education, Dmytro Tabachnyk, fled the city. In all of these, students did not allow the participation of political figures or parties. Indeed, early efforts of political parties to co-opt the student protest body into party-based action was unsuccessful and unwelcome.

Leftists and activists in *Priama Diia* traced self-organization to leftist political ideas, sometimes even referencing Marx or Kropotkin. Self-organization in the case of the Maidan protests was a political intervention that criticized the capitalist elites and the disenfranchisement of citizens. However, over the course of the protests, groups that were very far from leftist political views began to use the language of self-organization. Claiming to be "self-organized" was a way to position oneself or one's group outside of the existing political structures, so references to self-organization ranged from the occupation of buildings around the main square to ecological protests to legal aid hotlines to the formation of brigades that participated in the violent uprising in February and, later on, in the war in eastern Ukraine.

Another important characteristic of self-organized initiatives, particularly for leftists, was that they only lasted for as

long as they were necessary. This avoided their institutionalization and also kept self-organization flexible and able to meet changing needs. In January and February 2014, amidst ongoing clashes between protesters and riot police, leftists organized *Varto u likarni*, the Hospital Guards. When injured protesters were taken to hospitals, they were often arrested or pushed to sign false confessions about illegal actions. The Hospital Guards protected protesters from these police, and they also helped coordinate a hotline that assisted families in finding missing loved ones who were in one of Kyiv's hospitals. This initiative was exceptionally successful because it was responding to a very particular need, was detached from any political ideology or party, and because it was a way to support protesters without participating in violence. And, as a self-organized initiative, it disappeared when it was no longer necessary at the end of February.

Self-Organization after Maidan

When the protests ended, an interim government was established in Kyiv. The interim president, Oleksandr Turchynov, had been active in the Maidan protests and was a member of one of the opposition parties during Yanukovich's presidency. While the interim government attempted to create some kind of unity and stability before the presidential elections in 2014, Vladimir Putin took advantage of the opportunity



A sign reading "We are against the police state" hangs outside of the occupied City Hall in Kyiv. Photo by E. Channell-Justice.

caused by the chaos. First, in February, unmarked Russian troops invaded the Crimean Peninsula in southern Ukraine, officially part of Ukraine's territory since 1954. After swift repression of dissenting voices, including the indigenous Crimean Tatars, an illegal referendum on March 16 changed Crimea's status to be part of Russia. These developments emboldened pro-Russian separatist groups in Ukraine's eastern regions, and Russian actors immediately intervened to support these groups. Fighting in the east forced thousands of people to leave their homes in and around the large cities of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Over the course of its independence, Ukraine's Armed Forces had progressively deteriorated without the institutional support of the Soviet military-industrial complex. In the wake of the Maidan protests, without a strong standing army, it was brigades (*sotnia*) that formed during the protests to fight the Berkut that volunteered to fight against separatist and Russian forces in eastern Ukraine. These groups also considered themselves to be self-organized; by definition, they were. Something needed to be done (fighting against separatists and Russians to defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine), someone could do it (brigades that formed on Maidan, many of whose members had previous military experience), so they simply did it. This broad notion of self-organization also meant that brigades with far-right political views considered themselves to be self-organized. Because of their distance from both the discredited Yanukovych regime and the ineffective Turchynov interim government, these brigades gained support and credibility. While not exactly political activist groups, volunteer military brigades filled a huge gap that was left by the absence of a functional armed forces in 2014.

Additionally, self-organization framed actions that were not political at all. When

thousands of people were forced to leave their homes in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, the interim government in Kyiv could not organize to help them. Instead, ordinary people self-organized to help newly displaced families and individuals. In the city of Dnipro, for instance—a popular destination for newly displaced people because of its relative safety and its proximity to the eastern regions—ordinary Ukrainians found housing for new arrivals and created a registration system so that when humanitarian aid eventually appeared, it could be distributed. Later on, most of these self-organized initiatives were integrated into Ukrainian state policy or international organizations' interventions, but the initial response to mass forced displacement was entirely self-organized. All kinds of people, such as my Ukrainian language tutor in the western city of Lviv, who had supported and participated in her local Maidan protests but who would never consider herself a political activist, volunteered for a hotline that helped find host families for newly displaced people from Crimea.

Over the next eight years, self-organization was in the background of Ukraine's political development. Various government ministries developed policies and programs to serve internally displaced people, integrating self-organized projects and their organizers into official positions. Activists who participated in the Maidan protests established civil society organizations that advocated for judicial reform and anti-corruption policies. And reforms in the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) ultimately led to the integration of the volunteer brigades of 2014 into the Territorial Defense Forces, a branch of the UAF officially established in January 2022. Viewed one way, it seems that self-organization was entirely integrated into the Ukrainian state between 2014 and 2021. Viewed another, self-organization is the foundation of post-Maidan

Ukraine, even if the political figures and institutions that make up that state come from the same political establishment that existed before 2014.

Everyone in Their Place: Self-Organization and the Full-Scale Invasion

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the scale of the attack was unexpected and unprecedented. However, so was the Ukrainian response—at least to those who had not really paid attention to the lessons of Maidan. Because of this experience of self-organization, not just during the protests but also in the wake of Russia's first invasion, people already knew what to do. They knew that they couldn't wait for someone else to save them—although they would also take on the task of advocating for extensive military and humanitarian aid—but instead, they acted in any way they knew how. Many of the people who were student activists when I started my research are now in Territorial Defense Units and are fighting on the front lines or serving as combat medics. Others have worked at gathering and delivering humanitarian aid in cities close to the front lines. Even President Volodymyr Zelensky has asked people to help Ukraine win by doing what they do best: “*Kozhen na svoiemu mistsi*,” everyone in their place to do whatever they can.

We have also seen self-organization across Europe in response to the waves of millions of refugees that crossed the border in the first months of the war. In May and July of 2022, I went to Warsaw to work with groups that helped refugees, including at a shop that provided free groceries and basic need products, as well as secondhand clothing, to Ukrainians who had been displaced by the full-scale invasion. The shop served hundreds of refugees weekly, and it was staffed entirely by volunteers. Its founders included a Ukrainian woman who

had been living in Poland for many years, as well as Poles who simply wanted to do something that needed to be done; many volunteers had full-time jobs and worked at the free shop on the side. The shop received donations from people around Warsaw who wanted to give, as well as from international groups. However, in the summer of 2022, as many Ukrainian refugees returned to Ukraine and the shop was no longer sustainable by volunteers alone, the physical location closed. Volunteers packed up what was left and drove the goods to the Ukrainian border so they could be distributed within Ukraine as humanitarian aid. Some volunteers from the shop continue to work together to help refugees who plan to stay in Poland, for instance helping with finding jobs and Polish language classes.

Self-organization in response to the full-scale invasion can also be considered to exist outside of politics. Both in Ukraine and in Poland, self-organized initiatives are functioning side by side with state actors who work on behalf of Ukraine. For instance, the Polish government created a special status for Ukrainian refugees so that they could access education for their children, work legally, and receive cash benefits (the last of which ended in the summer of 2022). Self-organization in response to refugees is not serving to criticize or challenge the Polish government; instead, because the need has been so great, each person is doing what they can when something needs to be done.

Certainly, as the war continues, the expectation of sustained self-organization changes. Can people continue to do what needs to be done in perpetuity? Will Western governments continue to act however they can to support Ukraine? Self-organization can be draining, as it relies on ordinary people to do extraordinary work. However, it also created the foundation for a new idea about Ukraine after 2014.

The Modi Moment

APARNA SUNDAR

As India's federal elections approach in 2024, it's time to reckon with what Modi means for India and the world.

INDIA'S DECISION TO ABSTAIN FROM the October 26, 2023, UN General Assembly vote calling for a ceasefire in Gaza—in effect standing with Israel, the United States, and its allies in the Western bloc against the 121 countries who supported the motion—provides a snapshot of the contradictory claims of the government of Narendra Modi as it seeks to maneuver itself into a prominent position within a shifting global order. In other arenas, Modi has been quick to dismiss any criticism of his human rights record or democratic backsliding as coming from the imperialist and colonial “West,” while asserting India’s claim to be a leader of the Global South. This is an important part of Modi’s appeal to his base. A recent survey in India showed that, while people are not optimistic about their own future in terms of the economy, welfare, or women’s safety, they think India is doing well on the world stage.

The repositioning toward the U.S. axis is not new and has been taking place since India opened up its economy in 1991, moving away from the state-protected model, and drawing closer to the Western bloc economically, but also politically; positioning itself as the “world’s largest democracy” with stakes in the “war on terror.” This is a

positioning Washington has embraced in its new Cold War with China, turning to India as an “Asian democracy” to be included in formations such as the Quad group of countries along with Japan and Australia. In a state visit to the United States in June 2023, Modi was received with a 21-gun salute, hosted at a White House dinner, and invited to address both houses of Congress. Meanwhile, for the fourth year running, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended that the State Department designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom”; the founder of Genocide Watch has warned of an impending genocide against Muslims in India; the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* have been consistently documenting evidence of Modi’s expanding authoritarianism; and India continues to slide on almost every global index—democracy, freedom for journalists, poverty, and so on.

While geopolitics may be the basis of the U.S.-India relationship, other factors also inform India’s growing closeness to Israel under Modi, and specifically to the government of Benjamin Netanyahu. As Azad Essa documents in *Hostile Homelands: The New Alliance Between India and Israel*, India started quietly buying defense technology and training from Israel in the 1960s, while maintaining its official position in favor of Palestinian self-determination. But under Modi, the defense partnership is enhanced

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and celebrated, and the support for Palestine more conditional. Modi and Netanyahu recognize and respect each other as authoritarian leaders; Hindu nationalism and Zionism have strong affinities as movements of majoritarian domination; the two states see themselves as fellow defenders against “Islamic terror”; and Modi’s pet capitalists now have major investments in Israel. These features flow from three central and interlinked features of Modi’s “New India”: the success of the project of *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalism) aimed at transforming India into a Hindu nation; Modi’s ability to secure the support of capital through enabling a predatory form of accelerated accumulation for his cronies and more broadly, for capitalists as a class; and his ability to bind the public through a canny combination of personal appeal, populist welfare measures, institutional capture, and straightforward repression.

Hindu Nationalism

What distinguishes Modi from other populist authoritarian politicians such as Bolsonaro, Erdogan, Duterte, or even Trump, is the long and deep ideological and organizational basis of the movement to which he and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) belong. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the organization spearheading the *Hindutva* movement of Hindu supremacist nationalism, was founded in 1925 as one of the currents of the nationalist resistance to British colonialism, drawing its ethno-racial supremacist vision of nationhood from the ideologies of European fascism.

From the start, the movement has had two prongs. First, to construct a Hindu identity out of the diverse sects and practices of the subcontinent under a patriarchal, *Brahminical* (privileged caste), scriptural definition of Hinduism. This involves resisting challenges from *Dalits* (oppressed castes) to its deeply hierarchical caste order

and, simultaneously, coopting them and *Adivasis* (Indigenous communities) into the Hindu fold in order to construct a majority. And second, to create stakes in this identity by defining others, such as Muslims and Christians, as alien to the nation. The RSS has an extensive organizational apparatus to build broad-based cultural consent for its doctrines, with thousands of fronts across the country, catering to different social groups—children, youth, women, university students, workers (including the country’s largest central trade union federation), soldiers, *Adivasis*, and different caste groups. It runs schools and carries out charitable and service work, including relief work in natural disasters. The BJP, formed in 1984 out of earlier parties affiliated with the movement, rose to prominence through mass campaigns aimed at resisting the expansion of affirmative action programs to a wider range of castes, and at erasing symbols of India’s Muslim history in favor of its “authentic Hindu” past.

Since Modi was first elected federally in 2014, the genocidal intent of his efforts at erasing Muslim life have become clear. While it is inconceivable that 196 million Muslims, some 14 percent of India’s population, can be done away with, they can be subject to violence and humiliation, silenced, disenfranchised, and deprived of basic human rights. From the rewriting of history textbooks to the renaming of places, their over millennium-long presence in India’s history is being systematically erased. The very means for them to “eat, pray, love” have been criminalized, beginning in 2014 with a growing number of lynchings of Muslim men by vigilante groups for eating or trading in beef, or for “luring” Hindu women into marriage in order to convert them to Islam (“love jihad”). Poor Muslim men have been particular targets, set upon and beaten up by vigilante mobs and asked to recite “*Jai Sri Ram*” (Long live

Lord Ram). Even much-loved film stars and cricket players, if they are Muslim, have not been spared vicious trolling and threats. Calls for the economic boycott of Muslim businesses have deepened the economic and social marginalization that was already a pervasive fact of Muslim life in many parts of the country, with Muslims unable to find homes for rent in many cities. Hijab-wearing women were prevented from attending college in a BJP-ruled state, allegedly because the constitution forbids the wearing of religious symbols in public institutions. Hindu prayers and practices remain routine in such institutions. It has become increasingly common during Hindu festivals to see large mobs of Hindu men wearing saffron bandanas, armed with sticks and swords, marching aggressively through Muslim neighbourhoods chanting anti-Muslim songs and slogans, beating up Muslims and destroying their property. No doubt they believe themselves to be obeying the extremist Hindu religious leaders who have declared the rape and killing of Muslims a religious duty.

Modi and his party members have remained silent in the face of this violence, occasionally distancing themselves, calling it the work of isolated individuals, but more often making dog-whistle references to provoke and intensify the polarization for electoral purposes. Almost none of those who have carried out the lynchings and other attacks have been arrested. On the contrary, men involved in the gang rape of a Muslim woman and the murder of several Muslims in the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, when Modi governed the state, as well as the men involved in the lynching of a Muslim cattle trader, have been released and welcomed as heroes by BJP legislators. Police routinely stand by and watch the violence, and Muslims defending themselves have had their shops and properties razed to the ground by mu-

nicipal governments in BJP-ruled states on grounds of “illegal construction.”

In Modi's second term, which began in 2019, BJP governments passed a series of laws aimed at the disenfranchisement of Muslims. Several BJP-ruled states have passed cow protection laws and laws forbidding inter-faith marriages (supposedly only entered into for purposes of conversion), adding the force of the police and courts to legitimize vigilante violence. In 2019, three major legislative and legal changes, including a Citizenship Amendment Act, irrevocably transformed the nature of citizenship, effectively making Muslims second-class citizens of a Hindu nation.

One such law, the Kashmir Reorganization Act, institutionalized India's occupation of Kashmir. The Act removed the limited autonomy granted to Kashmir under the Indian constitution and did away with the law preventing land being sold to non-Kashmiris, opening the way for full-scale occupation and demographic transformation. Kashmir continues to be one of the most militarized regions in the world, with frequent internet shutdowns, random arrests, especially of journalists and human rights activists, under draconian “anti-terror” laws, and disappearances and “encounter killings” carried out by a police and military granted impunity by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, in force in Kashmir for over three decades now.

The total mobilization of state and society to wage war on what the Hindu nationalists consider the “old India”—a multi-ethnic, multi-denominational nation, both in terms of its social fabric and its constitutional guarantees of secularism, equality, and non-discrimination—has other targets as well. Christians (like Muslims, seen as subscribing to a faith that originated outside the Indian landmass) have been subject to violent attacks for allegedly carrying out conversion activities among

Adivasis and Dalits (potentially whittling away at the Hindu “majority”). Electoral calculations about the benefits of creating a hardline Hindu base similarly informed the recent campaign of rapes and murders of members of Christian communities in the northeastern state of Manipur. An extended protest movement against neoliberal farm laws was sought to be delegitimized by alleging that the Sikh farmers leading it were “separatists” and “terrorists.” Others too have been cast as “anti-national” and subject to both vigilante and state violence. Left and liberal intellectuals and activists, journalists, university faculty and students, artists, feminists, and members of civil society organizations—all have been portrayed as members of an established, anglicized, “pseudo-secularist” elite, against whom the BJP portrays itself as the representative of the authentic nation.

Predatory Capitalism

The relatively high growth rate of the Indian economy (7.2 percent in 2022-23) masks the growing crises of inequality, unemployment, and pauperization, reflected more accurately in the data on such things as malnutrition, infant mortality, and women’s health. Modi’s government has failed spectacularly to address India’s biggest economic challenges—increasing investment in manufacturing, attracting foreign investment, job creation, and export growth. In part, the growth rates reflect the consumption power of a middle class that, while large in absolute terms, is a small sliver of India’s population of 1.4 billion. A greater part of the explanation, however, lies in the nature of the growth, generated by the purchase of distressed assets by international speculators, the acquisition of land and resources at extraordinarily low costs, and privileged access to capital and to existing markets for favored capitalists.

The government has passed a fleet of

neoliberal laws to improve the “ease of doing business,” including labor reforms decimating regulation and industrial relations standards, and changes to environmental impact and forest protection legislation that ease corporate access to natural resources. Plans to further privatize public assets include allowing commercial mining of coal; increasing the foreign investment limit in military manufacturing; auctioning airports to public-private partnerships; and giving public sector assets to private players on “long-term lease.” Three new farm laws rushed through parliament with scarcely any time for debate in 2020 would effectively have reversed policies that ensured that farmers were able to sell a certain amount of their produce at a fixed price and opened agriculture to corporate-dominated markets, had the farmers not fought back.

In his fourteen years as chief minister of the state of Gujarat, where he fine-tuned his model of government, Modi built a close relationship with leading Gujarati corporate actors, who bankrolled his federal campaign in 2014. These cronies—especially those closest to him, Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani—have been richly rewarded, assisted in acquiring land cheaply and given licenses to build everything from ports to universities. In March 2022, Hurun Global Rich List reported that Gautam Adani, who had become India and Asia’s second-richest person in 2020, added \$49 billion to his wealth in 2021—more than the combined addition of wealth by the top three global billionaires Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Bernard Arnault—and representing a 153 percent increase in his wealth in a year when India was devastated by the pandemic. Mukesh Ambani, who continues to be the richest Indian, saw a 24 percent rise in his wealth that year. In the ten years since Modi became prime minister, Ambani’s wealth has grown 400 percent and Adani’s 1,830

percent; although, as a January 2023 report by Hindenburg Research revealed, stock manipulation and accounting fraud enabled a massive overvaluation of Adani's wealth. More broadly, the number of Indian billionaires has grown, as has the wealth they have added over the last decade: the head of the Hurun Global Rich List noted that over the last ten years, Indian billionaires added some \$700 billion to their cumulative wealth, equivalent to Switzerland's GDP and twice that of the UAE.

The rich have also grown richer through policies such as the shift to indirect taxes, like the Goods and Services Tax, the cut to corporate tax rates, and the abolition of the wealth tax for the super-rich, contributing to the growth of the nation's fiscal deficit. While the predatory capitalism Modi has enabled has generated vast new numbers of the displaced, dispossessed, and pauperized, India's social welfare expenditure remains among the lowest in the world. Health spending remains at 1.2 to 1.6 percent of GDP and actually declined in 2021, and education spending has averaged 3 percent of GDP for the past two decades. In 2022, Oxfam reported that during the pandemic an estimated 46 million Indians fell into extreme poverty.

An Electoral Autocracy

In its 2021 report on the status of democracy, the Swedish V-Dem Institute downgraded India to an "electoral autocracy." This formulation captures the increasingly performative role in India of democratic rituals to demonstrate legitimacy even as much of the process of governance is removed from public accountability. Like most other public institutions, the Election Commission, historically respected for its neutrality, is now subject to political capture. The BJP has a vast amount of funds, more than all other parties combined, raised, among other routes, through opaque

financial instruments called electoral bonds that draw massive corporate donations made anonymously from India and abroad. The party is constantly in election mode, and the funds are necessary to maintain its formidable election machine as well as to induce sitting legislators to switch sides.

The performance of democracy is also one that Modi the populist seems to delight in. Like some Hindu gods, Modi is a man of many avatars. He is both monarchical—issuing policies as decrees and raising monumental projects to mark his reign—and a man of the people, making constant reference to his humble origins, unlike the Gandhis of the rival Congress party, with their caste and dynastic privilege. He wears a new outfit each day and designer accessories, yet his followers (or worshippers, as his critics call them) describe him as an ascetic. His seemingly ill-thought and erratic decisions—like making worthless 87 percent of India's currency with a few hours' notice, or imposing a national lockdown for COVID-19 overnight—were hailed as "masterstrokes" and evidence of the ability to make tough decisions required of a strong leader. His technocratic projects—Smart Cities, bullet trains, a Digital India—even if poorly executed and incomplete, create an image of action and modernization, while his speeches skillfully weave in Hindu nationalist images and tropes.

Modi's welfarism shares these populist features. Rather than long-term investments in nutrition, health, and education, the welfare he delivers takes the form of small, targeted cash transfers, and limited schemes for the distribution of toilets, cooking gas cylinders, housing, and electricity and water connections, with women as particular beneficiaries. Distributed centrally, rather than in response to local needs, the welfare is personalized, with Modi's picture on the gas cylinders, food parcels, and billboards promoting the schemes.

Modi's populist projections are aided by his effective capture of the public sphere. Already in 2014, the corporate-owned media had built him up even before he was elected. Since then, this media has been kept in line by threats to withdraw government advertising revenue that constitutes a large proportion of its income, or to carry out raids for income tax violations. Meanwhile, new sources of pro-government media have been created, and his crony capitalists have bought the few independent ones. Social media plays another important role, with a paid troll army of thousands disseminating BJP propaganda and an even larger number of sympathizers disseminating fake news and hate-filled memes, while trolling its opponents with the vilest of threats. Paralleling the control and construction of what counts as news is the non-collection, suppression, or fudging of data, combined with the systematic undermining of universities and research institutes.

The state is at war with civil society. Non-profits have been threatened with police action or the cancellation of their licenses to receive foreign funding. Among the countries found to have deployed the Israeli company NSO's Pegasus surveillance software, India's target group was among the largest and included opposition leaders, journalists, and a range of civil society actors. Dissenters and truth-tellers—protestors, opposition party leaders, farmers, journalists, student leaders—have been arrested on cooked-up charges and held without bail under draconian anti-terror legislation. Even among his worshippers, there is fear of the surveillance state and the crumbling of legal and institutional protections.

Resistance

None of Modi's moves have gone uncontested, with court challenges around the

Kashmir Reorganization and Citizenship Amendment Acts, electoral bonds, Pegasus, and so on. Journalists have covered the crimes, uncovered the swindles, and critical pieces continue to be produced in some of the English language newspapers. Non-BJP parties, in power in about half the states, have strongly protested the federal government's increasingly centralizing tendencies around fiscal matters and cultural and linguistic homogenization. Some judges on the Supreme Court, and lower courts, have shown independence in challenging arbitrary arrest and other non-constitutional measures. There have also been mobilizations, especially in Modi's first term, against the growing instances of anti-minority violence. Two massive movements in particular, unprecedented in scale since the nationalist movement of the 1940s, are hopeful signs.

The first began in November 2019 against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that effectively makes Muslims in India second-class citizens. Initiated by students at the Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi, the movement spread across the country, with protests and demonstrations held even in smaller towns. Large numbers of previously apolitical Muslims, as well as significant numbers of non-Muslims, joined in. A historic sit-in initiated by the women of Shaheen Bagh, a largely Muslim neighborhood in Northeast Delhi, lasted a couple of months until it was shut down by the pandemic lockdown in March 2020 and, simultaneously, many of the anti-CAA activists were arrested, allegedly for inciting violence. Although the movement was disbanded, the government has been slow to make regulations based on the CAA, a sign of the scale of the opposition.

The second movement was in response to the three farm laws aimed at corporatizing agriculture. Starting in November 2020, some 250,000 farmers from three northern

states camped at three sites on the borders of Delhi for a year, with the sole demand of having the farm laws repealed. Farmers' organizations from across the country sent contingents. The action was coordinated democratically by a national committee. Over the year that the farmers remained camped, the resistance to the corporatization of agriculture grew to connect issues of labor and agricultural distress, patriarchy and women's work, caste and landlessness, and Hindutva and the repressive state. With all his attempts at repression and cooptation failing, Modi finally agreed to withdraw the laws a few weeks before elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

These two large movements, the earlier protests, and the range of Hindutva's targets—Muslims and Christians, Dalits, Adivasis, women, environmentalists, liberals, journalists, students and faculty, artists—have created alliances well beyond the left. In India, “the Left”—referring mainly to the mainstream parties of the left, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM)—was already facing criticism for its lack of inclusion of caste and identity issues and its historic attachment to industrial development. From 2014 onward, new Blue (caste-oppressed/Dalit movements), Red (Communist), and sometimes Green alliances have been forged on campuses and more widely, joining hands with national trade unions, the Gandhi-inspired social movements against development-induced-displacement that defend the rights of natural resource dependent communities, and the civil and democratic rights organizations that have been a vital part of the democratic landscape since the Emergency of 1975–77. Their efforts are documented and amplified by a small but influential section of digital media, most of it less than a decade old, that continues to speak truth to power despite court cases and the

surveillance and arrests of its journalists.

Much of this resistance faces severe government repression. A crucial question is how the resistance will translate in electoral terms in the federal elections, likely to be held in May 2024. A promising move is the recently formed I.N.D.I.A. alliance that includes all the major opposition parties, including the Indian National Congress, the BJP's chief contender federally. But this is a big tent, in their own words, and questions abound as to how well it will hold together and whether it is already too late to offer an effective challenge, given that the BJP never really ceases being in electioneering mode. Recently concluded elections in five states that saw the BJP win three of them further confirm doubts about the strength of the opposition.

Global Implications

In thinking about the global implications of the Modi moment, attention must first be paid to India's diaspora in the West. The VHP, or World Hindu Organization, a member of the RSS family, has been working since the 1960s to build the Hindu community worldwide. Modi's successful blending of market friendliness and “Hindu culture” (yoga, attire, and the like) represents a moment of cultural arrival for this diaspora. Indians are now the second largest immigrant group in the United States, numbering some four million. A large portion of the more successful among them come from privileged-caste Hindu backgrounds and are an important constituency for Hindutva, contributing to the BJP and to charitable organizations that channel funds to the RSS, and increasingly adopting the violent symbols and practices of the Hindu mobs in India.¹

But other members of the Indian diaspora are actively taking the fight to them. Campaigns led by Dalit organizations have won recognition for caste as a protected

category in universities such as California State, UC Davis, Harvard, Brandeis, and Brown, and other places like the U.S. city of Seattle, the Canadian cities of Brampton and Burnaby, and the Toronto District School Board. Progressive diasporic organizations, including those representing India's religious minorities, are working to challenge the flow of funds to the BJP/RSS in India, and to try and influence the American and Canadian governments and publics to recognize India for what it is. These efforts have in turn led to a campaign by Hindutva organizations, taking from the Zionist playbook of using "antisemitism" to deflect all criticism of Israel, to try to get criticisms of Hindutva labeled as Hindu-phobia. And so, the fight goes on.

Recent events have brought home to the wider North American left the implications of some of these battles. In September 2023, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood up in parliament to make the startling announcement that India was behind the assassination of a Sikh separatist activist in Canada in June 2023. And in November of that year, U.S. intelligence reported that they had warned a U.S.-based Sikh separatist activist of a similar threat on his life, adding to the concern that the Indian state is willing to extend its repression beyond its borders.

The Indian right-wing is a big player in the growth of a global far-right, not necessarily in the sense of organizational cohesion or global conspiracy, but in the sense of shifting public discourse in that direction, undermining liberal democratic values, delegitimizing any kind of equalitarian mobilizations, normalizing fake news and anti-science perspectives, and aligning with White supremacists and Zionists. Fake news and images generated by the

Hindutva universe have been a major part of social media disinformation around the genocide in Gaza.² There have also been reports that Israel has requested India to send up to 100,000 workers to replace Palestinian workers.

The left in India and its diaspora is fighting back. A petition addressed to U.S. state officials, already signed by some 3,000 Indian Americans, calls for a ceasefire in Gaza. It also highlights the Hindu-right sources of disinformation helping to justify the attack on Gaza.³ And all the major Indian trade unions, except the BJP-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (Indian Workers' Union), put out a statement announcing that they would resist any India-Israel labor agreement if implemented.⁴ But to turn back the fascism that is Modi's India will take a much stronger and more coordinated international response than global progressive forces have thus far demonstrated.

NOTES

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2. Mohammed Asif Khan, "India is the Epicentre of Hate and Misinformation Against Palestinians," *Middle East Monitor*, Nov. 10, 2023. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7z947/how-far-right-hindu-supremacy-went-global>.
3. Indian Americans for a Ceasefire Now, <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/indian-americans-demanding-a-ceasefire-in-gaza>.
4. "Indian Trade Unions Stand with Palestine, Reject 'export deal' to Replace Palestinian Workers in Israel," *People's Dispatch*, Nov. 16, 2023. <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2023/11/16/indian-trade-unions-stand-with-palestine-reject-export-deal-to-replace-palestinian-workers-in-israel/>.

CHE GUEVARA

A Debate of Interpretation and Translation

Against Samuel Farber's Biased Approach

JANETTE HABEL AND MICHAEL LÖWY

Translated from the original review in French by Iain Bruce

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *For the quotes taken from Farber's book by the authors, Habel and Löwy, we have gone back to Farber's original text in English. However, in several places the text of the French Syllepse edition differs from the English original in significant ways. For example, while the original English title is neutral, the title in French *Ombres et lumières d'un révolutionnaire* (The light and shade of a revolutionary) suggests a value judgement. Where the differences affect the authors' argument, we have indicated the differences in the lettered footnotes, distinct from the numbered endnotes.*

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*In this critical review of a French translation of Samuel Farber's original English-language *The Politics of Che Guevara: Theory and Practice* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2016), Ombres et lumières d'un révolutionnaire (Paris, Ed. Syllepse, 2017), Janette Habel and Michael Löwy, two well-known scholars of the Cuban Revolution and Ernesto "Che" Guevara's thought, reveal and analyze some of the historical judgements and errors of interpretation that give rise to what they consider Farber's biased approach to Guevara's life, personality, actions, and thought.]*

THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN CUBA ON July 11, 2021, highlighted the seriousness of the crisis facing the island. Never since the victory of the revolution has Cuba experienced such dramatic economic, social, and political difficulties, with the exception of the years following the fall of the USSR, during the so-called "special period," which was marked by shortages of all kinds. The death of Fidel Castro in 2016 and the retirement of Raúl Castro in 2021 have opened the way to a new government. While this generational transition has gone smoothly, its legitimacy is far from consolidated and is even beginning to be questioned. This has been shown in the more local-level protests against shortages of food and medicine and prolonged power cuts that have been taking place across

the country since July 11, and which have been reported on the many independent websites, zines and blogs that have emerged on social media since these events first became known around the country. New generations of Cubans want to re-read the past and review the revolutionary narrative, in order to understand and explain the current impasse, more than 60 years after the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship.

It is in this context that the political and theoretical legacy of Ernesto Che Guevara, murdered in Bolivia at the age of 39, has resurfaced. Many of his abundant writings are still inaccessible. The last letter he wrote to Fidel Castro on the eve of his departure from Cuba on March 25, 1965, was not published until 2019, 54 years later.¹ More than a letter, it is in fact an analytical document of great importance. Although Fidel Castro read a farewell message from Che in October 1965 at the unveiling of the new Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP), of which Che was not a part, he made no mention of this much longer letter. The text, described by Guevara as “constructive criticism,” gives an uncompromising analysis of the economic and organizational disorders that affected the country during those early years of the revolution, and sheds light on Che’s political ideas about the economics of the transition to socialism and his differences with the Soviet system.

Six decades later, Cuba has changed, and the country is no longer the same. But Che’s last writings, his criticism of the Soviet regime and his ethical conception of power resonate with those of the new generation who are questioning the past. On the other hand, most opponents of the Cuban system challenge Che and disfigure his legacy. They are not the only ones. Some on the left are lending them a hand.

What follows is a review of *Che Guevara. Ombres et lumières d’une révolution-*

naire [Che Guevara. The light and shade of a revolutionary] (Paris, Ed. Syllepse, 2017)² by Samuel Farber, who presents himself as a “marxist” critic of Guevara. Of course, it is entirely legitimate to examine Guevara’s mistakes or limitations. But Farber’s work, in its overall negative assessment of Guevara, is rife with false, inaccurate, and caricatured accusations. His book, originally published in English in 2016³ and then in French in 2017, focuses mainly on the “shade” and very little on the “light.”

A “Classical Marxist” Tradition?

Farber refers to a supposed “classical Marxist tradition” which he claims to be part of: “My political roots are in the classical Marxist tradition⁴ that preceded Stalinism,” he writes. Conversely, “while Guevara was an honest and dedicated revolutionary, he did not share Lenin’s background in classical Marxism, which assumed the democratic heritage of the radical wing of the Enlightenment.”⁵

The Cuban revolution was born in particular historical and geopolitical circumstances that enabled the victory of an unforeseen revolutionary process in a country—an island—where it was not expected: 165 km from the southern flank of the United States, in the middle of the American Mediterranean, where geographical fatalism seemed to preclude any possibility of emancipation from North American tutelage. Yet it was on this island that the continent’s first socialist revolution—which began as an armed rebellion against the Batista dictatorship—took place, in Latin America’s “far west.”⁶ The specific nature of the Cuban revolutionary process, the organization of a guerrilla war accompanied by civilian uprisings, its radical nature, the scale of the popular support it received and the originality of a leadership that seemed difficult to place ideologically, make it a singular case in the history of revolutions.

The Cuban revolution needs to be located in its own historical context, not reduced to the fixed principles of a “classical Marxism” that would remain constant at all times and in all places.

This was “a rebellion against revolutionary dogmas,”⁷ wrote Che. It was a revolution that confirmed the prediction of the great Latin American Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui: “We certainly don’t want socialism in Latin America to be

Che cannot be identified with
the failures of the USSR; a
quarter century before the fall
of the USSR he had foreseen
crisis and collapse.

either an imitation or a copy. It must be a heroic creation.”⁸ As for Lenin, cited as a reference for “classical Marxism” by Farber, here is what he wrote in *Letters from Afar*: “That the revolution succeeded so quickly and—seemingly, at the first superficial glance—so radically, is only due to the fact that, as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, *absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political and social strivings have merged*, and in a strikingly ‘harmonious’ manner.”⁹ An analysis that can be applied a century later, word for word, to the Cuban revolution.

A Generational and Political Break

It was in an exceptional national and international political context that a new revolutionary generation was forged, whose political consciousness was to grow more radical under the pressure of events. In the 1950s, a new, young, and militant generation was born and became politicized in Cuba and

in the countries of the Third World. The emergence of national liberation struggles, the Bandung Conference and the Cold War were shaping a new historical order. In Latin America, the revelations of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had weakened the already marginal Communist parties. It was against this backdrop, which had little to do with the so-called “classical Marxism” to which Samuel Farber claims to belong, that the July 26 Movement (M-26-7) was born, its founding act being the deadly attack on the Moncada barracks. Coming from the ranks of the Orthodox Party, a nationalist party, Fidel Castro and the leaders of the M-26-7 embodied the revolt of young people in the face of the passivity of the other political parties, expressing their desire to overthrow the Batista dictatorship but also to free themselves from corruption and the centuries-old domination by the powerful neighbor to the north. It is these young rebels that Farber characterizes as “declassed”, in the sense that they were detached from the organizational life of the Cuban working, middle, and upper classes.¹⁰ It should be noted that to limit Cuban society at the time to the “working, middle and upper classes” is schematic, to say the least. But what is most significant is Farber’s analysis of the M-26-7 as a “petty bourgeois movement,” as opposed to his later characterization of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP)—as the Cuban Communist Party was then called—as a workers’ party. A strange interpretation of Marxism, which turns a petty bourgeois movement into the promoter and actor of a socialist revolution!

As the writer Robert Merle, who spent many months investigating the situation in Havana in the early 1960s, pointed out, “the Movement’s recruitment after Moncada was to include a very large number of peasants once it succeeded in establishing itself in the Sierra Maestra.

It is therefore all the more striking to note that, before Moncada, the Movement was almost entirely proletarian.”¹¹ It should be remembered that in Cuba, the University Student Federation (FEU) had historic links with the workers’ movement, dating back to the time of the so-called “treinta” (1930s) revolution, which put an end to the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado and brought Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, then a stenographer, onto the Cuban political scene. In December 1955, the FEU had actively supported the strike by workers in the banking sector as well as the great sugar workers’ strike.¹²

Finally, Farber seems unaware of the ideological path travelled by F. Castro. As early as 1953–1954, when he was in prison, he referred to Marx and was already developing a way of thinking and a political strategy that had nothing “petty bourgeois” about it. He quoted *The 18 Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, “a formidable work,” in which “Karl Marx sees the inevitable result of social contradictions and the clash of interests ... Here I have completed my vision of the world,” he concluded.¹³ But Farber maintains that the revolution “was carried out by a multiclass movement led by a declassed ... leadership group.”¹⁴

The Bohemian Che

From the very introduction to his book, Farber insists that he wants to “dispel many of the common myths about Che,” a laudable concern given the extent to which Guevara’s personality has been misrepresented. But far from doing that, Farber strangely begins by examining “the bohemian origins of Che’s political thought” and “his bohemian career,”¹⁵ which Farber contrasts with his own “political roots.” The adjective “bohemian” appears nine times in the first chapter, an average of once every three pages. To understand the derogatory connotation of this term, we need to set it

alongside Farber’s characterization of the July 26 Movement as petit bourgeois, made up of “déclassés” and “adventurers.”¹⁶ If it was “bohemians” who carried out one of the most important socialist revolutions of the 20th century, that would suggest a need to revise the “classical Marxist tradition” to which Farber lays claim.

As is often the case, at each historical moment, each generation develops a distinct political vehicle. That’s what happened with M-26-7. Farber’s lack of understanding stems from his dogmatic, inadequate vision of the foundations of the July 26 Movement, its origins, its orientation, its leader Fidel Castro, and the political influence exerted by an Argentinian, Ernesto Guevara, whom he met in Mexico. But in addition to these criticisms, Farber goes on to assert something untrue: Che “instead, grew up with the political legacy of a Stalinized Marxism. Thus, his revolutionary perspectives were irremediably (sic) undemocratic.”^{17,A} Yet nothing in Che’s childhood, in his family environment or in his career had anything to do with “Stalinist Marxism.” His motorbike trip at the age of 23 with Alberto Granado is evidence of the evolution of his political thinking and his radicalization, a journey that was rounded off with his experience of the failure of the revolution in Guatemala, the lessons he drew from the behavior of the Guatemalan CP and his exchanges with his Peruvian companion Hilda Gadea, who was close to Trotskyist circles in Peru. As Hilda Gadea remarked, “it was in Guatemala that his real transformation began,” even though at the time of President Arbenz’s overthrow, “he

^ATRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The French translation of this quote suggests that Che was educated in the Stalinist tradition. The English original just indicates that the Marxism available at the time was mainly of a Stalinist sort. “Le Che avait au contraire grandi dans la tradition politique du marxisme stalinisé.”

already had a good theoretical training in Marxism.”¹⁸ The former Cuban diplomat Raúl Roa Kouri confirms this: “At that time [in Guatemala] Che already had an advanced political education: above all, clear convictions about the roots of our ills in imperialist exploitation and the domination of a dependent, foreign-oriented bourgeoisie.... You could say that his thinking basically tended towards marxism from that time onwards. He admired the October Revolution and he knew about Leninism.”¹⁹ After his meeting with F. Castro and the M-26-7, Che for the first time made a commitment to a political movement. Before that he had never been a member of any communist party.

He trained with M-26-7 members in Mexico. Fidel Castro was preparing to land on the Cuban coast in November 1956 to organize the overthrow of the dictatorship. The landing was a failure, with many casualties. Guevara was one of the survivors, 28 years old when the armed struggle began in the Sierra Maestra. He would later write: “I began the struggle honestly, without any hope of going beyond the liberation of the country, prepared to leave when the conditions of the struggle turned to the right later on.”²⁰ When he first arrived in Havana in December 1958, now as commander of the Rebel Army and buoyed by his impressive military victories, Ernesto Guevara was 30 years old. He had spent two years fighting with Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra, two years of reflection and discussion. His thinking was evolving. He regarded himself as a Marxist and, for a brief period, believed he could find in the countries of Eastern Europe, “on the other side of the Iron Curtain,”²¹ useful points of reference for building a different society. Disillusionment soon followed, as did criticism.

In 1960, he explained: “We were following him”—in other words Fidel Castro—“we were a group of men with little

political training, only a lot of goodwill and a naive sense of honor.”²² He soon returned to his reference to the countries behind the “Iron Curtain.” He also spoke of his mistake regarding F. Castro, described at the time as an “authentic left-wing bourgeois,” whose convictions and anti-imperialist strategic vision he underestimated, a process that would give birth to “a heretical revolution.”²³

The Old Stalinist Party (PSP) Elevated

At the same time as he attributes a “Stalinized Marxism” to Che, the bohemian petit bourgeois, Farber praises the old Cuban Communist Party, the PSP, as a “workers” party whose Stalinist character and serious political errors he underestimates. In 1959, for Moscow and the international communist movement, the Cuban revolution, the first victorious socialist revolution in Latin America not led by a communist party, was a heresy. The growth of Latin American communist parties had always been hampered by their dogmatic alignment and subordination to Moscow, that “classical Marxist tradition,” far removed from the heterodox Marxism of the Peruvian Mariátegui. In fact, it was Farber (and not Guevara) who rehabilitated the role of the PSP in the Cuban revolution. According to Farber, the PSP “did play an integral part of the Cuban revolutionary process, particularly after the triumph of the revolution.”^{24,B} He even went so far as to defend the PSP against the accusation of reformism, stating that, “during the course of the Cuban Revolution, no important

^BTRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The French translation puts the PSP as playing a DECISIVE role: “joué un rôle déterminant dans le processus révolutionnaire.” This is not the same as playing “an integral part,” which is what the original in English says.

PSP figure showed any inclination or commitment to the preservation of the capitalist status quo.”^{25,C}

We do not share this positive assessment of the old Stalinist Communist Party in Cuba. After the revolutionary victory of 1959, the PSP firmly opposed, in the name of the Stalinist doctrine of revolution by stages, the socialist turn of the Cuban revolution. One example will suffice to illustrate this attitude: in August 1960, when the Cuban revolutionary government began to intervene in companies and expropriate large Cuban owners, in the start of an anti-capitalist turn, here is what Blas Roca—not an “important figure” but the General Secretary of the PSP—said at the VIII National Assembly of the Party:

In the present democratic and anti-imperialist stage, it is necessary, within certain limits to be established, to guarantee the profits of private companies, their operation and their development.... There have been excesses, there have been unwarranted interventions which could have been avoided Intervening, without sufficient reason in a company or a factory, does not help us, because it irritates and turns against the revolution ... elements of the national bourgeoisie who must and can remain on the side of the revolution in this stage....²⁶

Worse still: at the same time, the PSP published a pamphlet entitled Trotskyism: Agents of Imperialism, which proclaimed:

Trotskyist provocateurs are lying when they say that the Cuban people are expropriating the property of the imperialists and their national allies. This is what AP, UPI and other imperialist mouthpieces say every day. But it is not true....²⁷

These quotes illustrate how far apart

the PSP—like other Latin American communist parties—stands from the great Latin American Marxists like Mariátegui.

These judgements are part of a political continuum. Already in an article in the PSP magazine *Carta Semanal*, published on September 3, 1953, 5 weeks after the attack on the Moncada barracks, when dozens of young people had been murdered by the dictatorship’s police, the PSP publicly condemned their action in these terms:

Everyone knows that the PSP has been the most resolute opponent of these adventures, the most consistent in showing the people that this is the wrong path to take. Everyone knows that the PSP is the only party that has shown the right way to resolve the Cuban crisis: the resolute rejection of adventures, terrorism, and expeditions, of schemes and isolationism.²⁸

The Sixties and the Building of a New Party — the Growing Influence of the PSP

From the very first years of the revolution, the question of organizing a new party was on the agenda. For F. Castro it was necessary to bring together and unify the three political currents which had contributed, to varying degrees, to the victory—the M-26-7, the Revolutionary Directory, and the PSP—while ensuring the hegemony of the M-26-7. However, Moscow and the international communist movement distrusted the Cuban leaders, while placing their trust in the PSP. The construction of the new party would be long and difficult and would go through several stages. The successive projects of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI) and then of the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba (PURSC) came to nothing. It was not until 1965, 6 years after the seizure of power and after lengthy negotiations, that the organization of the new party, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), began. But

^CTRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The original, “no important PSP figure.” is not quite the same as the French, “aucun membre important du PSP.” The difference detracts from the irony in the following paragraph.

its General Secretary was no longer Blas Roca, but Fidel Castro.²⁹

The conception of this new party was illustrated at the time by the words of a PSP political instructor, Gaspar

It is legitimate to examine Guevara's mistakes or limitations. But Farber's work, in its overall negative assessment, is rife with false, inaccurate, and caricatured accusations.

Jorge García Galló, who established the supremacy of the PSP and its cadres in relation to the July 26 Movement, a lasting supremacy that was to provoke a great deal of tension. In a speech to militants at the Leoncio Guerra Basic School of Revolutionary Instruction (Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria - EIR) entitled *The Party of the Proletariat and the People*, García Galló reminded them: "Of course comrades, we know that July 26 was not a Marxist-Leninist party. It lacked Leninist organizational norms. Several currents existed within it, different fractions from the right, the center and the left, even if everyone accepted Fidel's leadership without question."³⁰ Referring to the rapprochement then underway between the three political currents—the M-26-7, the PSP and the Revolutionary Directorate—within the framework of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas - ORI) intended to found the future single party, García Galló anticipated its operating norms: "The members of the party must be disciplined. They must apply the policies decided upon in the same way

as a soldier applies the orders of the General Staff." "The all-out struggle against factions is one of the characteristics of the party of the proletariat. No factional activity can be tolerated."³¹ It was this conception, inherited from Stalinism, that was to prevail when the future CCP was formed, contrary to the initial political pluralism. The links with the USSR facilitated the bureaucratic grip of the PSP. This explains the many crises that arose and which marked the first revolutionary decade. The CCP's organizational norms would never change. Fidel Castro lived with them. Che increasingly distanced himself from the stranglehold of the PSP and the growing influence of Soviet economic, political, and cultural concepts.

Unfounded Assertions

Contrary to Farber's unfounded assertions that "Guevara's politics were closer to the ultraleftist militancy of the Communist International's so-called Third Period of the late 20s and early 30s [than to the political maneuvering of Popular Front politics],"^{32, D} a brief comparison of Guevara's ideas with those of the Stalinism of the so-called "Third Period" reveals the absurdity of this argument. One of the main aspects of Stalinism in the years 1929-33 was the refusal to see fascism (Hitler in Germany) as the main enemy. In fact, Stalinists in Germany and elsewhere saw social democracy—defined as "social fascism"—as the greatest enemy of the communist movement, with catastrophic consequences for workers, and for humanity. This was the most important and decisive feature of

^DTRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Another change of emphasis in the French translation: "Guevara's politics were closer to the ultraleftist militancy of the Communist International's so-called Third Period" is not the same as "Le marxisme du Che serait l'équivalent du communisme stalinien de la Troisième Période."

the Third Period of the Comintern, and the reason why Trotsky had come to the conclusion, as early as 1933, that a new international was necessary.

In the 1930s, the Cuban Communist Party, forerunner of the PSP and faithful follower of Moscow, had accepted without qualification the Third International's slogans on "social fascism" and the "class against class" struggle, which led it, like the other Communist Parties on the sub-continent, to adopt a sectarian and sterile policy and to refuse any collaboration with other left-wing political forces. The Communists did not take part in the struggle to overthrow Machado's dictatorship.

Can we find anything similar in Guevara? Did he consider that the military dictatorships in Latin America, supported by imperialism, were not the main adversary to be fought? Did he define the socialist parties, in Chile and Argentina for example, as the main enemy? Did he ever use the term "social fascism" to designate social democrats or reformists?

The "Third Period" of Stalinism was not a "left turn" in foreign policy, but a period of brutal repression of dissent, when thousands of communist opponents, supporters of Trotsky and his companions, were sent to concentration camps in Siberia, and sometimes murdered. It was also the period when millions of peasants, accused of being "kulaks," were exterminated. Any similarities with Guevara?

Are Che Guevara's views on the economy and politics equivalent to those of Soviet forced industrialization in 1929-33? It should be remembered that Ernest Mandel, a Marxist economist, went to Cuba in 1964³³ at Guevara's invitation, and that Mandel had written an article supporting his positions in the economic debate then taking place in Cuba. Apparently, he was unaware that these were Stalinist views from the Third Period.... Moreover, another

Marxist economist, Charles Bettelheim, had strongly criticized Guevara's thesis, describing it as heretical and "non-Marxist" because it contradicted ... Stalin's economic theories.³⁴

According to Farber, "Third Period Stalinism, Maoism, and Guevaraism had a more aggressive and revolutionary attitude toward capitalism as they tried to spread their form of class rule to countries beyond their own."³⁵ To be sure, the "internationalism" of Stalinist discourse during the Third Period, or of Maoism in the 60s and 70s, was nothing more than an instrument serving the interests of the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracies. Does this apply to Guevara's internationalism? Was it true of his failed internationalist revolutionary attempts in the Congo and Bolivia? What bureaucratic interests did he serve when, as an Argentinian, he joined the Cuban revolutionaries in 1956?

To conclude on this question, there is nothing wrong with a critical examination of Guevara's positions, which he himself encouraged in his debates with his collaborators at the Ministry of Industry.³⁶ But the artificial, not to say slanderous, analogy with Stalinism of the Third Period is a sure way of missing the point. Not only can Che Guevara not be identified with the failures of the Soviet Union, but a quarter of a century before the disappearance of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall, he had foreseen the crisis and the collapse of the Soviet regime and predicted the restoration of capitalism.

Che and the Great Economic Debate — the Transition to Socialism and Underdevelopment

It is in the light of his experience in power that Che analyses the problems and difficulties of the transition to socialism in Cuba. A re-reading of his last texts in the great public debate on economics, which

pitted him against the supporters of Soviet liberal reforms in the 1960s, his essay on *Socialism and Man in Cuba*,³⁷ his last speeches, in particular the one he gave in Algiers in 1965, and his *Critical Notes on the Manual of Political Economy* of the Soviet Academy of Sciences³⁸ all illustrate his prescient vision of the serious problems facing the USSR and the difficulties that were likely to ensue for Cuba, given its economic and financial dependence on Moscow.

The great debate that took place between 1963 and 1964 within the Ministry of Industry, which he headed, was first and foremost a debate on the building of socialism, on planning and the organization of the economy during the transition to socialism in a small and dependent island, subject to the pressures of the international market, whose development was hampered by a drastic economic and trade blockade imposed by the world's leading economic power.

Beyond the theoretical debate on the existence of market categories and the persistence of the law of value during the transition period, distinct political approaches were to emerge within the Cuban government, even as proposals for market-based economic reforms were put forward during the 1960s by the Soviet economists Evsei Liberman and Vadim Trapeznikov. Noting the inefficiency of the management methods used in the USSR, Liberman and Trapeznikov criticized a planning system based on mandatory targets which they considered too restrictive. To remedy this, they proposed the introduction of profit as one of the criteria for the sound management of enterprises.

The debate took place in Havana at the same time as these reforms were being introduced. The island was facing the need to redefine a strategy for economic and social development in the face of the challenge posed by its integration into a globalized

capitalist economy. An added difficulty was that, as Ernesto Che Guevara wrote, "We were just beginning to learn about this march towards communism,"³⁹ at the same time as "the political economy of the transition period is completely missing."⁴⁰

Farber devotes more than 20 pages of his book to these economic debates. From the outset he states that Che "came to see socialism itself as centralized economic planning and the rejection of competition and the law of value."⁴¹ But Samuel Farber has misread these texts by Che. In fact, in relation to the application of the law of value under socialism, and in response to an article by Alberto Mora entitled, "On the question of the operation of the law of value in the Cuban economy at the present time," Guevara wrote:

How to manage consciously our knowledge of the law of value ... is one of the most serious problems posed by the socialist economy ... We are not denying the existence of the law of value, we simply consider that this law derives its most developed form of action from the capitalist market and that the changes introduced into the market by the socialization of the means of production and distribution lead to transformations which make it impossible to clarify its action immediately⁴² ... while we accept the existence of the commodity, we do not accept the primary role of the market ... as the organizer of the national economy.⁴³

In contrast to Farber's assertions, here are the nuanced comments of one of Che's opponents, the former minister Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, who underlined the complexity of the controversy:

The theory of eliminating the law of value was not put forward by Che as absolute, and it is interesting to remember this, since we accept the validity of the law of value for certain purposes. He said that the law of value should not govern economic activity, that we had the possibility created by socialism to manipulate the law of value, to use it for the benefit

of socialism. I think this is important Because, in fact, it is not a question, as some of the defenders of economic calculation at the time tried to establish, of the absolute defense of the validity of the law of value and the inevitability of the market, but of the use of the law of value in a controlled way, fundamentally taking into account the elements imposed by our responsibility for the economy in our times, in our country.⁴⁴

FARBER MAKES ACCUSATIONS against ideas attributed to Che without substantiating them. We shall highlight three of them.

His “opposition to the capitalist market and competitive system that tends to commodify everything, including human relations, and ... [his] praise for the individual’s selfless dedication to the collectivity,... can in fact be the basis for a reactionary utopianism attempting to emulate pre-capitalist social formations.”^{45,E} Where does Guevara refer to “pre-capitalist formations”? How is his argument against the capitalist market and in favor of altruistic commitment “a reactionary utopia”? Farber gives no explanation and cites no text by Che to back up this strange accusation. José Carlos Mariátegui, in the 1920s, referred to the collectivism of pre-capitalist formations, considering that the tradition of the *ayllu*, the pre-Columbian rural community, could be a starting point for mobilizing peasants in a modern socialist movement. He was not, however, a “reactionary,” even if his point of view was rejected as “populist” (*narodnik*) by the Stalinists. We do not know whether Guevara shared Mariátegui’s ideas, but they were considered a “reactionary utopia” only by the Stalinists.

In his “Critical Notes” on the Soviet

manual of political economy, Guevara, according to Farber, implies that a decision on economic priorities “would be decided solely by the ruling Communist Party.”⁴⁶ Yet Che wrote exactly the opposite in his “Critical Notes,” kept under wraps by the authorities in Cuba until the early 2000s, when he asserted that the plan should be conceived as “an economic decision by the masses, conscious of their role.... We have seen something fundamental, something elementary, the importance, the enthusiasm of the people when they know they are going to elect their representatives.”⁴⁷ In the same vein, Farber accuses Guevara of showing “his disregard for the principle of the popular election of representatives in every facet of socialist society.”⁴⁸ This inaccurate reading is belied by Che’s criticism of the unions and the role of the party:

Here, union democracy is a myth, whether we like it or not, but it’s a perfect myth. The party meets and proposes to those present so-and-so, X or Y, a single candidate, and from that moment on, someone is elected, with a more or less large turnout, but in reality, there was no process of selection by the participants.⁴⁹

He stresses:

From an institutional point of view, we need to be attentive to the fact that people need to express themselves, we need a framework so that they can express themselves, we need to think about this ... the need to create the necessary democratic basis for the construction of new institutions.⁵⁰

He also criticized the union bureaucracy that had developed, and which did not want to return to manual labor.⁵¹ He pointed out that “the work of the CTC has left a lot to be desired recently.”⁵² The relationship between socialism and man was at the heart of his concerns. To claim that for Guevara the major economic decisions “would be decided solely by the ruling Communist Party” is simply untrue.

^ETRANSLATOR’S NOTE: Again, the French translation by Syllepse differs from the original in English.

According to Farber, “there was a deafening silence in *Socialism and Man in Cuba* about substantially increasing consumer goods and, more generally, about raising the standard of living of the Cuban population.”⁵³ Yet Farber himself contradicts this statement. A few dozen pages earlier, he observes that Guevara, as Minister of Industry, wanted “the doubling of living standards in just four years.”⁵⁴ Admittedly, as he himself later admitted, this plan was not realistic. But it shows that the “significant increase in consumer goods” was not at all outside his conception of socialism. “The peasant (*guajiro*) also aspires to have a television,” he wrote.⁵⁵ As usual, he also acknowledged the mistakes that had been made, pointing out the need for housing for Cubans and regretting that house building was steadily on the decline. “We mustn’t forget that people need to live in a house, yet we are building fewer and fewer of them, investing less and less in their construction.”⁵⁶ This was an implicit criticism of the planning mistakes and decisions made by other ministries. It’s worth noting in passing how decisive planning was for Che, a strange preoccupation for a “bohemian” mind.

“In mid-1961, he announced, on behalf of the revolutionary government, a highly unrealistic four-year economic plan,”⁵⁷ wrote Farber, in what he saw as an illustration of Che’s “voluntarism.” Let’s overlook the fact that this was a decision made “in the name of the government,” a government whose president Fidel Castro was not one to allow choices he did not share to be imposed on him. This was all the more true given that the drive towards rapid industrialization attempted at the start of the revolution was in line with the commitment made by Fidel Castro in 1953 in his speech *History Will Absolve Me*, and later by the M-26-7 leadership in the Sierra Maestra, to break with Cuba’s historical de-

pendence on the monoculture of sugar cane. However, the revolutionary leadership had underestimated the obstacles it would face in severing the ties of economic subordination that had developed over decades, ties documented by numerous authors including the Cuban historians Ramiro Guerra and Manuel Moreno Fraginals.⁵⁸

Carried away by his own enthusiasm, Farber compares the plan attributed to Guevara, “to Mao Tse Tung’s great leap forward,” an economic policy that caused “a famine that killed millions of people.”⁵⁹ Once again Farber targets Guevara and blames him for the agricultural disaster of the early 1960s, while overlooking Fidel Castro’s own responsibilities, as highlighted by R. Dumont. The real agricultural disaster was caused by the failure to harvest 10 million tons of sugar in 1970, an objective linked to agreements signed with Moscow, which Che Guevara had nothing to do with.

Against Dogmatism

Farber’s accusation that Che had a “monolithic conception of socialism that ignored the hierarchical division of labor and ruled out any conflict of interests other than the class interests that were being eliminated”⁶⁰ is perhaps the most outlandish, given the abundance of evidence to the contrary. He was considered a heretic and wrongly labelled a Trotskyist by the Soviets. Farber does not mention Che’s stance in favor of freedom of expression. He acknowledges that he protected the Trotskyists, but plays this down: it was because the Cuban Trotskyists “were supporters, even if critical ones, of the one-party state that had just been established in Cuba.”^{61,F} A curious

^FTRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The French translation, “soutenaient le régime de parti unique,” could imply support for the principle of a one-party state. The original English seems to refer more to support for the revolutionary government (against those attacking it).

thing to say about the members of a Cuban Trotskyist party that was independent of the Cuban Communist Party, semi-clandestine, repressed and eventually banned.

In 1964, during a discussion with his comrades at the Ministry of Industry, when Trotsky's books (including *The Permanent Revolution*) were about to be destroyed, Guevara reaffirmed: "We must be capable of fighting opposing opinions with arguments, and if not, we should let them express themselves. It is not possible to fight opinions by force because that kills the free development of the intellect."⁶² These statements are all the more significant in that they confirm his disagreements with the Trotskyists. In 1965, on the eve of his departure from Cuba, he had the Cuban Trotskyist Roberto Acosta Echevarría released from prison, embracing him and declaring: "Acosta, ideas cannot be killed with batons."⁶³ At the Ministry of Industry, meetings to take stock and discuss issues gave rise to disagreements and polemics, reproduced in the book by his deputy minister Orlando Borrego.⁶⁴ He had opened his doors to Alberto Mora, the former Minister for Foreign Trade and his opponent in the economic debate.

In his closing speech to an international meeting of teachers and students of architecture in 1963, Che further clarified his views:

We have never refused confrontation or discussion. We have always agreed to discuss all ideas and the only thing we have not allowed is the abuse of ideas to blackmail or sabotage the revolution. On that, we have indeed been inflexible ... There were some professionals who were jailed for counter-revolutionary acts, for sabotage. In prison, these professionals began working, then they returned to work in our industries. We trust them, as we do our other technicians, and they got back to work even though they've experienced repression, which is the hardest and darkest part of the revolu-

tion, the repression that is inevitable in a victorious revolution ... Because when it comes to those who take up arms against us, be they weapons of direct destruction, or ideological weapons to destroy society, we are implacable. To the others, to those who are just discontented or disagree, who are not and never will be socialists, we say: nobody ever asked you before if you were in favor of capitalism, you had a contract to fulfil and you did it. Now do the same, work, hold on to whatever ideas you like, we won't meddle with your ideas.⁶⁵

The testimony of the poet Heberto Padilla is revealing. Returning from a trip to the USSR, he gave free rein to his criticism and disillusionment during a meeting with Che. Guevara agreed: "All of that is crap, I've seen it with my own eyes."⁶⁶ Guevara was clear about his concerns, telling the poet, who was looking for a job in journalism: "These are bad times to be a journalist,"⁶⁷ and advising him to abandon the project and get a job in the Ministry of Foreign Trade headed by Alberto Mora. H. Padilla would later, in 1971, be subjected to a Stalinist trial and forced to make a public self-criticism.

Farber tries in every way possible to reduce Che's thinking to the Stalinist mold. Using quotes from a declared opponent of the revolution and detractor of Guevara, he cites Jorge Castañeda⁶⁸ to claim that "Guevara had closely identified with Joseph Stalin" and says that this "identification with Stalin continued."⁶⁹ It is true that in a letter to his aunt in 1953, during his first trip through Latin America, Guevara praised "comrade Stalin." But the fact that he did not join any communist party shows how unimportant this youthful episode was, at the age of 25. From there to making Che out to be a Stalinist is a step that Farber, the "orthodox Marxist," takes without hesitation.

In fact, as Luis Simón, an M-26-7 intellectual, recalls, when he met Guevara

in September 1958 “in the middle of the rain and the mosquitoes,” Guevara borrowed Merleau-Ponty’s Existentialism and Marxism from him and, when discussing international politics, “he bitterly criticized Stalinism and the Budapest massacre.”⁷⁰ In his “Critical Notes,” he pointed out “the terrible historical crime of Stalin: to

The last letter Che wrote Fidel Castro was not published until 2019. Although Fidel read the farewell message, he didn’t mention this longer letter.

have scorned communist education and introduced an unlimited cult of authority.”⁷¹

Farber also accuses Guevara of being a repressive — albeit “honest” — communist, comparable to the Russian Felix Dzerzhinsky. He writes: “A parallel can perhaps be drawn between Ernesto Che Guevara and Felix Dzerzhinsky.... Although known for his often arbitrary repressive activities as head of the Cheka, the Soviet secret police, Dzerzhinsky was also thought to be an honest and principled communist.”⁷² But did Guevara lead a political police force comparable to the Soviet Cheka under Dzerzhinsky, responsible for the execution of thousands of opponents, including left-wing opponents (anarchists, left-wing agrarian socialists, etc.)?

Similarly, for Farber, Che’s views “were far from the ‘humanist’ philosophy that some sympathizers have attributed to him. During his days in the Sierra, Guevara opposed Fidel Castro’s very effective tactic of returning prisoners.”⁷³ Farber obtained this “information” from Castañeda’s hostile and scathing biography of Che. In his bibliography, Farber often favors the writings of

opponents of the revolution⁷⁴ over the many testimonies of the fighters in the Sierra⁷⁵ and all those who accompanied Che at the Ministry of Industry until his departure in 1965. But the reality is exactly the opposite of Farber’s assertions! “So long as there are no large operational bases or secure locations, don’t take prisoners. Survivors should be released and the wounded treated by all possible means,” proclaimed Guevara in his manual, *Guerrilla Warfare*. This was also his practice as a guerrilla commander in Bolivia. In his *Bolivian Diary*, he wrote: “Two new spies were taken prisoner: a police lieutenant and a policeman. They were taken to task and set free.”⁷⁶ Farber himself had to admit that Che had opposed the execution of Huber Matos, an anti-communist opposition figure, and even his imprisonment (he was sentenced to 20 years in prison). He had contacted his family and suggested that they appeal against the trial (according to testimony given by Huber Matos after his release).⁷⁷

Another testimony, published in France by Luis Alberto Lavandeyra, a former member of Che’s guerrilla column in the Sierra Maestra, illustrates Che’s ethics and respect for life during the battle of Santa Clara:

He had meticulously prepared an ambush at the top of a valley where a battalion of soldiers was due to pass. Batista’s whole army was black. He told us: I’ll shoot first and that’ll be the signal. So the company marched through, but Che didn’t fire. Once the company had gone, the whole troop hurried over to him in surprise: “We were waiting for your signal. Why didn’t you fire, Commander?” I was thinking. We’ve won the war. What’s the point of a massacre? These are soldiers recruited from the poorest backgrounds and they have wives and children.⁷⁸

It was a case of ethical thought in the midst of combat. Che asked himself ethical questions on a daily basis. And he would do the same in Bolivia, freeing soldiers who

had been taken prisoner.

Leaving Cuba. Bolivia

“Although he had failed in the Congo,” writes Farber, “he (Guevara) saw no reason to change the decision he had made in 1965 to resign his Cuban citizenship and government responsibilities.”⁷⁹ Farber echoes the official version, presenting this decision as a personal choice independent of the political situation characterized by tensions with Moscow after his speech in Algiers. Farber cannot be unaware that the reality was quite different. After his return to Havana, Guevara made no further public appearances. By the end of 1964, the Minister for Industry had already made clear his many differences with Soviet foreign policy and economic reforms. He was the target of vilification by certain PSP apparatchiks. He knew this. “In some respects, I have expressed views close to those of the Chinese on the People’s War and guerrilla warfare. And since I am also identified with the Budget Financing System, I am also accused of being a Trotskyist. They say that the Chinese also are factional and Trotskyist, and they hang the San Benito on me too,” he writes. (The San Benito is the garment of infamy which the Inquisition placed on those it condemned to be burnt at the stake).⁸⁰

On his return to Havana on March 14, 1965, he wrote to his mother that he was “leaving for the provinces for a month to cut sugar cane,”⁸¹ to the disbelief of his close colleagues. As René Dumont notes, in reality, disavowed, he had already discreetly resigned from his post as minister.⁸²

This decision was the culmination of growing tensions between Havana and Moscow, in which he was one of the protagonists. During his last trip to the USSR, he had had, in his own words, “several scientific arguments” with Soviet students and economists invited to the Cuban Embassy.⁸³

The Algiers speech was the culmination of the public expression of his disagreements, which he would comment on in his analysis addressed to F. Castro, published only in 2019 after the latter’s death.

After the failure in the Congo, he wrote to Fidel to dissuade him from sending reinforcements, returned to Cuba clandestinely and then left the island in 1966 for Bolivia. The choice of location and the organizational and political preparations were made at the highest level of the Cuban leadership.⁸⁴

Farber asserts that “Che’s expeditionary force was unable to forge an effective supportive relationship with the Bolivian left.”^{85,G} However, statements by the miners’ unions and left-wing political organizations—with the exception of the Bolivian Communist Party (Partido Comunista de Bolivia, PCB) but not including its youth organization—categorically refute these assertions. According to Guillermo Lora, secretary general of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR),⁸⁶ in an interview with the Mexican journalist, Rubén Vázquez Díaz: “The only road to power for the working class, the Bolivian proletariat, starts from the mines....⁸⁷ Without the working class, the guerrillas are nothing. The POR supports the guerrilla movement unconditionally because it is the logical outcome of the current situation in Bolivia.... Our help and support is unlimited.”⁸⁸ When asked by Vázquez Díaz if the POR was prepared to send men to join the guerrillas, Lora replied without

^GTRANSLATOR’S NOTE: the French version says: “le corps expéditionnaire (sic) du Che en Bolivie va se montrer incapable d’obtenir le soutien de la gauche bolivienne,” which suggests there was no political support, in the sense of political sympathy and approval. That is not the same as “an effective supportive relationship,” which refers more to the provision of practical, logistical support.

hesitation “Yes, men too.”⁸⁹ The other Trotskyist organization, affiliated to the 4th International (González Moscoso’s POR), had sent members to train in Cuba to join the Bolivian guerrillas. They remained stranded on the island, unable to leave the country to join the guerrillas.

The Bolivians Carlos Soria Galvarro, José Pimentel Castillo, and Eduardo García Cárdenas⁹⁰ recount this key conflict in the history of the Andean-Amazonian country. Soria Galvarro tells the story in the book’s first chapter, “Mineros y guerrilleros,” of the days in May 1965 when the pact between miners, academics and students was ratified. It was a period in which the courts came down hard on the miners and union leaders who organized assemblies and strikes to defend their demands were attacked and sentenced, in which the death penalty was reinstated by the dictator Barrientos, left-wing parties were outlawed for having publicly expressed their solidarity with the guerrillas and all public meetings and demonstrations were strictly forbidden; after the confrontations between the guerrillas and the army began in March 1967 in the south-east of the country, the presence of the guerrillas made the front page of the newspapers.

Another testimony that contradicts Farber’s claim is that of Domitila Barrios de Chungara, a Bolivian miners’ leader, who recalls that in Che’s guerrilla movement there were several fighters who came from the mines and that workers organized activities in favor of the guerrilla movement, because this was the army of the people, of the workers, of the exploited, and that they decided to support it by sending the money earned from a day’s work, food and medicine. According to Barrios de Chungara, many miners believed that she was in charge of coordinating support for the guerrillas and even went to sign up with her to join the guerrilla movement.⁹¹

On May 25, 1967, in its issue 17, the magazine *Fedmineros*, put out by the powerful Mine Workers Trade Union Federation of Bolivia (FSTMB), published an article entitled, “Frente Guerrillero,” in which it said:

Hunger, misery, exploitation, violence, gangsterism and the persecution imposed by the Barrientos government are all the result of the appearance of the guerrillas. The generals say they are bandoleros (bandits), enemies of the poor, but nobody believes them. We can safely say that the majority of workers view the action of the guerrillas with sympathy. This is the truth. And it couldn’t be otherwise when you live with injustice, when you’re unemployed and underfed. We know that the yanquis are fighting against the guerrillas, and that outrages the workers.⁹²

On June 6, a general assembly of mine-workers and union leaders from the Siglo XX and Catavi mines passed a resolution with 13 points. In one of these, they called for “Moral and material support for the patriotic guerrillas operating in the south-east of the country,” and for “the sending of medicine and food.”⁹³

The next day, the military junta declared a state of siege. “According to the [Bolivian] government spokesman, the measure was taken mainly because of the Huanuni miners’ threat to march in protest to the city of Oruro and because several miners’ leaders had made speeches that were ‘frankly subversive and in support of the guerrillas operating in the southeast of the country.’”⁹⁴

In an interview given in 1967, the sociologist René Zavaleta Mercado, former Minister of Mines in the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) government, stated: “in three months’ time we will be able to send our first contingents to the guerrillas and, if we get help, we think we will be able to set up a propaganda network. ... The great merit of the guerrillas

is that they have broken with all traditional political conceptions and have been able to move beyond partisan politics.”⁹⁵

The miners were to suffer a massacre on the night of San Juan. It was after this butchery that Guevara published his Communiqué No. 5 to the Bolivian miners, which Farber misinterprets. Farber claims that Guevara warned “the miners to refrain from following the ‘false apostles of mass struggle’ ... and instead made the highly unrealistic proposal of asking the miners to abandon their jobs, families, and communities to move elsewhere to join his guerrilla group ... led mostly by people foreign to their class and country.”^{96,H} But what does the communiqué in question⁹⁷ actually say?

We must not persist with false tactics, which are heroic but sterile, which plunge the proletariat into a bloodbath and decimate its ranks, depriving us of its most combative elements.... Against machine guns, heroic breasts can achieve nothing.

The communiqué recommended “not committing forces to actions whose success is uncertain, even though the pressure of the masses against the government must be exerted continuously, because this is a class struggle with unlimited fronts. The text concluded, “Comrade miner, the ELN guerrillas are waiting for you with open arms.”⁹⁸ It was a conclusion in keeping with the debates of the 1960s on the relationship between armed struggle and mass struggles in Latin America, seven years after the Cuban victory.

An Act of Indictment

Farber’s book reads like an act of indictment. He goes on and on about Che’s shortcomings and defects. A whole section of Chapter 2 is titled “Guevara’s Political

Schematism and Indifference to Specific Contexts” (pp.23-25). There are many variations on this theme: his “frequent inability to understand specific political situations” (p.4), his “ignorance of, and indifference to specific political contexts” (p.23), “his inability to recognize specific political tex-

While he attributes “Stalinized Marxism” to Che, Farber praises the Cuban Communist Party, as a “workers” party whose Stalinist character he underestimates.

tures and historical conjunctures in Cuba during the period of armed struggle” (p.23), the “political deafness” (p.23), “Guevara lacked that hard-to-define but real trait called political instinct” (p.23 and 46), “tactical blindness” (p.24), and indifference “to the concrete historical record and political meaning” of the period marked by the 1940 Constitution (p.25), and so on. All of this is always in contrast to the “genius” of F. Castro.

Even Che’s internationalism is called into question because, according to Farber, it was based on a project that he shared with the Castro brothers and the pro-Soviet communists right up to the end, “a project based on the creation of a new class system.”⁹⁹ For Farber, the bureaucracy is a new social class that the non-proletarian, “bohemian petit bourgeois,” Che, would have embraced very naturally. QED.

Farber maintains that “most Cubans also think of Che as a failed quixotic figure.”¹⁰⁰ According to him, today “Che is not at all influential among the various wings of the Cuban opposition.”¹⁰¹ But the Cuban opposition is not homogeneous. The

^HTRANSLATOR’S NOTE: Here too, the French translation differs from Farber’s original in English.

reflections of the new Cuban generations on the record of the country's leaders are harsh. Their criticisms are diverse and in flux. Guevara's fight against the privileges of the bureaucracy and growing inequalities, his analyses anticipating the collapse of the USSR, and his ethical conception of power, explain the prestige he enjoys among the critical left, particularly among young people who have broken with orthodoxy. In a text published in March 2023 in *La Joven Cuba*, the young Afro-Cuban Alexander Hall Lujardo (who had been arrested during the demonstrations of July 11, 2021), referring to Che's last letter to Fidel, reminds us that "for more than 40 years Cuba's leaders have ignored the criticisms made by the internationalist revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, a radical Marxist point of view in favor of the island's economic autonomy as the only way of guaranteeing its national sovereignty."

Nothing could be more alien to Ernesto Guevara's way of thinking than an apologetic approach that glosses over errors and differences. "If you disagree, then write it down," is what Enrique Oltuski recalls Che saying when he commented on some aspect of the revolutionary war.¹⁰²

Interrupted by his death at the age of 39, Che's project for a socialist transition remained unfinished, as the Cuban historian Fernando Martínez Heredia has pointed out. His thinking was constantly evolving. He lacked a structured, organic conception of the necessarily pluralist, political democracy in the transition to socialism. However, as he himself wrote, in his short life he had known only "an armed democracy."¹⁰³

Nonetheless, we can understand nothing of Che Guevara's theoretical and strategic thinking, his political and ethical influence, if we reduce him to a Stalinist of the Third Period or a Chekist of the 1920s. Nor can we portray him as a pure idealist, whose "personal and political characteristics—his

political honesty and his radical egalitarianism—might have made him better suited to being a Communist oppositionist than a long-term Communist ruler..."¹⁰⁴

It is impossible to write about Che Guevara without referring to the context in which he thought and acted, firstly between 1955 and 1959, and then between 1959 and 1965, when he was entrusted with the highest responsibilities in a revolution that was starting a process of socialist transition along unforeseen paths, in a historical context that forced him to "navigate between the imperialist Charybdis and the totalitarian Scylla."¹⁰⁵

NOTES

1. Aurelio Alonso, "Discutirla, con veneración e irreverencia. A propósito de la carta de Che Guevara a Fidel, 26/03/1965," *La Tizza*, June 28, 2019.
2. Samuel Farber, *Che Guevara. Ombres et lumières d'un révolutionnaire*, Paris, Ed, Syllepse, 2017.
3. Samuel Farber, *The Politics of Che Guevara. Theory and Practice*, Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2016.
4. Farber, 2016, p. xvii.
5. Farber, 2016, p. xviii.
6. Alain Rouquié, *Amérique Latine. Introduction à l'Extrême-Occident*, Paris, Seuil, 1987.
7. Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary*, Melbourne-New York, Ocean Press, 2006.
8. José Carlos Mariátegui, "Aniversario y balance," in *Ideología y Política* (Obras completas, Tomo 13), Lima, Amauta, 1971, p. 252.
9. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 23, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, p. 303.
10. Farber, 2016, p. 10.
11. Robert Merle, *Moncada. Premier combat de Fidel Castro*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1965, p. 84.
12. Julio García Oliveras "El movimiento estudiantil antibatistiano y la ideología de la revolución," in *1959, una rebelión contra las oligarquías y los dogmas revolucionarios*, Havana, Ruth Casa Editorial, 2009, p. 20.
13. Merle, *Moncada*, pp. 341-348.
14. Farber, 2016, p. 116.
15. Farber, 2016, pp. 1-5.

16. Farber, 2016, pp. 8-9.
17. Farber, 2016, p. xviii.
18. Hilda Gadea, *Che Guevara. Años decisivos*, México, Aguilar, 1972, pp. 14-15.
19. Raúl Roa Kouri, *En el torrente*, Havana, Casa Editora Abril, 2018, p. 72.
20. Ernesto Guevara, letter dated 14 December 1957 to René Ramos Latour ("Daniel"), in: Carlos Franqui, *Diario de la revolución cubana*, Barcelona, R. Torres, 1976, p. 362.
21. Ibid.
22. Lettre à Ernesto Sábato, April 12, 1960, in Ernesto Che Guevara, *Lettres 1947-1967*, Paris, Au Diable Vauvert, 2021, p. 261.
23. René Dumont, *Cuba est-il socialiste?* Paris, Seuil, 1970.
24. Farber, 2016, p. 116.
25. Farber, 2016, p. 20.
26. Blas Roca, *Balance de la labor del Partido desde la última Asamblea Nacional y el desarrollo de la Revolución*, Havana, 1960, pp. 87-88.
27. Quoted by Silvio Frondizi, an Argentinean anti-stalinist revolutionary, in his book *La revolución cubana*, Montevideo, Editorial Ciencia Política, 1960, p. 151.
28. *Carta Semanal*, N° 7, 26.9.1953, quoted by Caridad Massón Sena in 1959, *una rebelión contra las oligarquías y los dogmas revolucionarios*, Havana, Ruth Casa Editorial, 2009, p. 229.
29. Che Guevara was not a member of the Political Bureau nor the Central Committee of the new CCP. He left Cuba after a speech given in Algiers that questioned Soviet policies.
30. Gaspar Jorge García Galló, "El partido del proletariado y del pueblo," Havana, Departamento de Extensión Educacional, 1962, p. 23.
31. García Galló, pp. 25-26.
32. Farber, 2016, pp. 17, 113.
33. Published in Havana in the journal *Nuestra Industria* edited by Guevara, and later in *Pensamiento Crítico*.
34. See Ernesto Che Guevara, Charles Bettelheim, Ernest Mandel, *The Great Debate on Political Economy*, Havana, Ocean Press, 2006.
35. Farber, 2016, p. 113-114.
36. Alonso, "Discutirla, con veneración e irreverencia...."
37. Ernesto Guevara, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, Havana, Ocean Sur, 2005.
38. See Ernesto Guevara, *Apuntes críticos a la economía*, Havana, Ocean Sur, 2006, and Orlando Borrego, *Che: El camino del fuego*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Hombre Nuevo, 2001, pp. 381-422.
39. Alonso, "Discutirla, con veneración e irreverencia...."
40. Guevara, *Apuntes críticos*, p. 342.
41. Farber, 2016, p. 90. Our emphasis.
42. Ernesto Guevara, "Sobre la concepción del valor (Contestando algunas afirmaciones sobre el tema)," *Nuestra Industria. Revista Económica*, La Habana, October 1963. Taken from Ernesto Guevara, *Escritos económicos*, Córdoba (Argentina), Ediciones Pasado y Presente (Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente/5), pp. 69-77.
43. Ernesto Che Guevara, *Ecrits d'un révolutionnaire*, Paris, La Brèche, 1987, p. 31. Cf. also *Apuntes críticos*, p. 369. Also quoted by Aurelio Alonso in "Del debate de ayer al debate de mañana," Prologue to the 29th edición of Carlos Tablada *El pensamiento económico del Che*, Havana, ditorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2017, p. 13.
44. Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, "Sobre la contribución del Che al desarrollo de la economía cubana," *Cuba Socialista*, N° 33, 1988.
45. Farber, 2016, p. 81.
46. Farber, 2016, p. 93.
47. Guevara, *Apuntes críticos*, p. 413.
48. Farber, 2016, p. 93.
49. Orlando Borrego (comp.), *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, Havana, Editorial José Martí, 2013, vol. VI, p. 438.
50. Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, vol. VI, p. 438.
51. Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, vol. VI, p. 439.
52. Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, vol. VI, p. 529.
53. Farber, 2016, p. 78.
54. Farber, 2016, p. 21.
55. Guevara, *Apuntes críticos a la economía*, p. 304.
56. "Opiniones del Ministerio sobre el Plan perspectivo de 1964," in Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, vol. VI, p. 732.
57. Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, vol. VI, p. 21.
58. Manuel Moreno Friginals, *El ingenio. Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, Havana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978.
59. Farber, 2016, pp. 113.
60. Farber, 2016, pp. 67-68.
61. Farber, 2016, p. 17.

62. Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, Vol. VI, p. 566.
63. Rafael Acosta de Arriba, “El fin del Trotskismo organizado en Cuba,” in Caridad Massón (ed.), *Las Izquierdas Latinoamericanas. Multiplicidad y Experiencias durante el Siglo XX*, Santiago de Chile, 2017, Ariadna Ediciones, pp. 299–230.
64. Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, Vol. VI, *passim*.
65. Borrego, Vol. IV, p. 390.
66. Heberto Padilla, *La mala memoria*, s/l, Hypermedia, 2018, p. 107.
67. Padilla, p. 108.
68. Jorge Castañeda, *La vida en rojo. Una biografía del Che Guevara*, Barcelona, ABC, 2003.
69. Farber, 2016, p. 16.
70. Luis Simón, “Mis relaciones con el Che Guevara,” Paris, *Cuadernos* (N° 60), 1962. Cited by Pierre Kalfon, *Che, Ernesto Guevara, une légende du siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 1997.
71. Guevara, *Apuntes críticos a la economía*, p. 214.
72. Farber, 2016, p. 135, note 8.
73. Farber, 2016, p. 72.
74. One example is Jacobo Machover — who Farber quotes on p. 15 — whose implacable opposition to the Cuban Revolution has led him to deny the destructive impact of U.S. sanctions against Cuba.
75. There are countless accounts by former guerrillas that we have assembled — some of them are in a film by Maurice Dugowson, as well as in the book by Pierre Kalfon — which contradict these claims.
76. Ernesto Guevara, *El Diario del Che en Bolivia* (Prólogo de Fidel Castro), Madrid, Siglo XXI de España Editores (33ª edición), 2003, p. 166.
77. Farber, 2016, p. 143, note 26.
78. Fabien Augier, *Souvenirs d’un guérillero ténéré, Luis Alberto Lavandeyra, le lieutenant français de Che Guevara*, Paris, Les Indes savantes, 2022.
79. Farber, 2016, p. 42.
80. Borrego, *Che en la Revolución Cubana*, Vol. VI, p. 428.
81. Dumont, p. 51.
82. Dumont, p. 51.
83. K. S. Karol, *Les guerrilleros au pouvoir*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1970, p. 331.
84. Preface by François Maspero to the new edition of *Journal de Bolivie*, Paris, Maspero, 1995.
85. Farber, 2016, p. 44.
86. Bolivian Trotskyism was divided in two organizations, the POR of Guillermo Lora and the POR-Combate of Hugo González Moscoso (4th International), both of which supported the guerrillas. There were also two communist parties, that of Mario Monje (Partido Comunista de Bolivia - PCB), pro-Moscow, and that of Óscar Zamora (Partido Comunista de Bolivia (Marxista-Leninista) — PCB(ML)), pro-Chinese.
87. Rubén Vázquez Díaz, *Bolivia a la hora del Che*, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1978 (4th edition), p. 162. See also, Carlos Soria Galvarro, José Pimentel Castillo y Eduardo García Cárdenas 1967: *San Juan a sangre y fuego*, La Paz, Punto de Encuentro, 2008, pp. 264.
88. Vázquez Díaz, p. 162.
89. Vázquez Díaz, p. 162.
90. Soria Galvarro *et al*.
91. Soria Galvarro *et al*, p. 181.
92. Soria Galvarro *et al*, pp.148-149.
93. Soria Galvarro *et al*, pp.155.
94. Soria Galvarro *et al*, p. 17.
95. René Zavaleta Mercado, “Debemos organizar la resistencia armada” (Interview, 1967), in *Escritos sociológicos y políticos*, Cochabamba, Serie del Pensamiento Latinoamericano, 1986, pp. 9-12.
96. Farber, 2016, p. 52, p. xx.
97. Guevara, *Diario de Bolivia*, p. 285.
98. Guevara, *Diario de Bolivia*, p. 286.
99. Farber, 2016, p. 119.
100. Farber, 2016, p. xv.
101. Farber, 2016, p. xvi.
102. Enrique Oltuski, *Gente del llano*, Havana, Imagen Contemporánea, 2001, p. 13.
103. Fernando Martínez Heredia, *Pensar al Che*, Havana, CEA/Editorial José Martí, 1989-1992, tome I, p. 357.
104. Farber, 2016, p. 118.
105. Dumont, p. 236.

Reply to Janette Habel and Michael Löwy

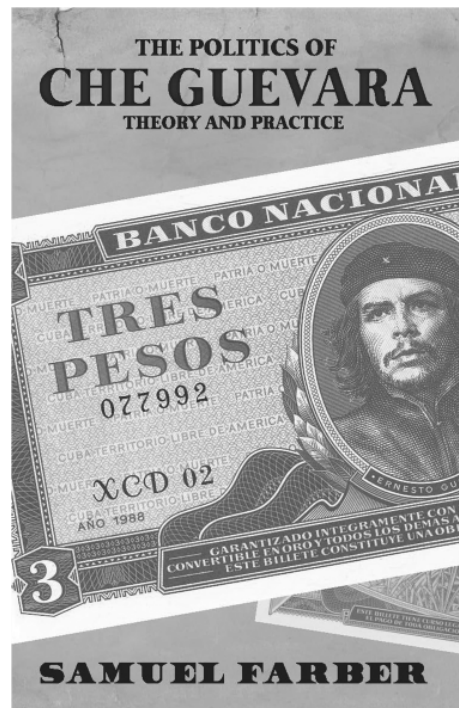
Che Guevara and Socialist Democracy

SAMUEL FARBER

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT SEVEN YEARS have passed since my book, *The Politics of Che Guevara. Theory and Practice*, was published by Haymarket Books (it was also translated into French by the editorial house *Syllepse* under the title *Che Guevara. Ombres et Lumieres D'Un Revolutionnaire* in 2017). Thus, it is unlikely that most of the readers of this *New Politics* article remember or are familiar with that book's contents. Otherwise, they would immediately detect the falsehoods and quotations out of context that these authors attribute to me for the purpose of delegitimizing me as a marginal sectarian intent on slandering Ernesto (Che) Guevara. Thus, for example, Habel and Löwy cite me in a distorted manner dismissing Che Guevara as "a failed quixotic figure." But this is the final sentence of a paragraph that presents a far more nuanced interpretation of Guevara and his impact in today's Cuba:

It is ironic that, politically, he has become less relevant in today's Cuba than he is in other countries around the world. Nevertheless, he continues to exercise a

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subtle but real influence on Cuba's political culture—not as a source of specific programmatic or political proposals, but as a cultural model of sacrifice and idealism. In that limited sense, the official slogan "seremos como el Che" (we shall be like Che), chanted regularly by Cuban schoolchildren, probably has a diffuse but significant influence over the popular imagination, even if most Cubans also think of Che as a failed quixotic figure. (XV)

Moreover, when I analyze the political and social composition of the leadership of the 26th of July Movement, I never use the concepts and phrases “petty bourgeois” and “adventurer,” terms invented by the authors of the review to portray me as somebody that should not be taken seriously. The concept that I have used throughout some sixty years of researching and writing about Cuba is classlessness. Certainly, the movement’s leaders originally came from diverse social classes and strata, but most of them had not participated in the social and political life of those groups, which considerably diminished the ideological and normative influence that those groups may have had over them, and to that degree not only liberated them from those influences, but also made them freer and more available to adopt the politics of rebellion and insurrection. Of course, there were exceptions to this general tendency, as in the cases of Frank País, who had been very involved in the activities of the Baptist Church in Santiago de Cuba, and of Crescencio Pérez, the leader of peasant organizations who joined the Rebel Army and played a very important role in the Sierra Maestra, but no significant role at all after the victory of the revolution in 1959.

I also maintain in my book that the old pro-Moscow Cuban Communist Party (PSP) had a significant number of workers in its ranks. In 1956, the PSP conducted an internal study that showed that 15% of Cuban unions were led by members of the PSP or by leaders that collaborated with that party (Jorge Ibarra, *Prologue to Revolution: Cuba, 1898* trans. Marjorie Moore. Boulder, Colorado, Riener, 1998, 170). Similarly, the PSP won 10 percent of local leaderships in the elections of the Spring of 1959, (although we must bear in mind that there was also a sector among the 26th of July unionists who sympathized with the Communists). These were the only

free and pluralist elections held in Cuba at a national level after the revolutionary victory. But the fact that there had been a significant worker presence in the PSP does not mean, and I never said, although Habel and Löwy attribute it to me, that the PSP had been a workers’ party. It was a party highly controlled by a bureaucracy, under a supposed “democratic centralism,” that had a lot of centralism, but no democracy at all, and in which some of its most important leaders, were of working-class origin and/or were active unionists.

The traditional distinction between reform and revolution, which originated in the disputes between social democracy and revolutionary Marxism at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, does not apply to the Communist parties under Stalin’s control starting at the end of the twenties. It certainly does not apply to the analysis of the Cuban PSP. The Cuban Communists generally followed Moscow’s guidelines, acting as ultra-leftists and sectarians at certain times such as the so-called Third Period (1928-1935)—that had disastrous results for the 1933 Cuban Revolution and contributed significantly to its failure—as well as political opportunists and wheeler-dealers together with the rest of the Latin American Communist parties, in other periods. It is worth noting that throughout all these stages, Cuban Communists had the same principal political leaders with relatively few purged or leaving the party.

During the Cuban Revolution, no important figure in the PSP showed any inclination or tendency to preserve the capitalist status quo. None of them broke with Fidel Castro when the Cuban leader announced the “socialist” character of the revolution in April of 1961, as was the case with almost all of the authentically reformist Cuban political leaders who had broken with the regime even before that

declaration. In fact, as I show in detail in the fifth chapter of my book *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 137-166), in the early months of the revolutionary period, the PSP maintained a much more radical position than Fidel Castro, though the “Maximum Leader” later surpassed the PSP’s radicalism. In this new stage, the PSP began to behave more cautiously than Fidel Castro, although it usually ended supporting the anti-capitalist measures adopted by the Maximum Leader. Even more important is the fact that the PSP joined together with the *Directorio Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Directorate) and Castro’s *Movimiento 26 de Julio* organization to establish the new Cuban Communist Party in the sixties where it played a very important role through leading figures such as Carlos Rafael Rodríguez. Considering these facts, it makes no sense to refer to the Cuban Communists as reformists in the sense that this term acquired in twentieth century Marxism.

The Political Evolution of Ernesto “Che” Guevara

For Habel and Löwy, my discussion of the Bohemian origins of Che Guevara in my book’s first chapter is pointless and irrelevant. Nevertheless, for me it is part of an effort to trace the origins of the great emphasis that Che Guevara, as different from other leaders of the Cuban Revolution, placed on moral incentives. As I explain in my book, all the revolutionary leaders eventually adopted a de facto policy of moral incentives due to the absence of material goods—caused as much by the criminal U.S. blockade as by the very bad and inefficient state administration—to motivate workers to put forth a serious productive effort in their workplaces.

Nevertheless, for Che Guevara, the moral incentives were not merely a practical

matter that depended on the existing conjuncture. They were rather a product of his worldview that was developed initially in a home where the acquisition and possession of material goods was not a central value of his upper-class family with a certain tendency towards downward social mobility. Che Guevara had already demonstrated in his childhood and adolescence an inclination towards asceticism, as indicated by his great admiration for Gandhi, who aside from the central role he played in India’s independence, was perhaps the best-known twentieth century ascetic. Che’s asceticism expressed itself in a different manner in his adult life, but he never abandoned that outlook. A very illustrative example was the reflection he discussed during a meeting with the principal managers of the Ministry of Industry in 1964, related to the difference between Cuba, where a TV set that did not work well was a problem, and Vietnam where there was no television at all. According to Guevara, the development of consciousness allowed for the substitution of what he considered “secondary comforts” (*comodidades secundarias*) that had been converted into part of the life of the individual, but that expressed a need that society’s general education could have eliminated (Che Guevara, *Apuntes Críticos a la Economía Política*, edited by María del Carmen Ariet García, Ocean Press, 2006, 304). It is worth underlining that Che Guevara was not merely arguing that in crisis situations, people had to resign themselves to not obtaining certain goods and benefits, and that the revolutionary conscience would facilitate such resignation. His argument went much farther and proposed an even deeper political and even philosophical perspective that people be educated not to desire such goods by reverting to a previous period when those needs did not yet exist.

The bohemian life of Guevara’s family in Buenos Aires tends to be a phenomenon

of rich countries such as France, Italy, the United States, and the Argentina of the childhood and adolescence of Che Guevara (born in 1928) when it was still considered one of the richest countries in the world and certainly the richest country in Latin America. But the bohemian life, in the sense of a cultural rejection of the acquisitive values of advanced capitalism did not exist in Cuba. In fact, in the decades of the forties and fifties, the term “bohemian” was applied in Cuba almost exclusively to the night life of cafes, restaurants, and cabarets, and to the people that very often for reasons of employment (artists, waiters, journalists, newspaper and service workers in general) went to those places as part of their social life.

For ideological and political reasons, Che Guevara as well as the other revolutionary leaders limited themselves to material and moral incentives and completely ignored the additional alternative of political incentives such as workers self-management. This would have meant the possibility of being able to discuss and take democratic decisions from below with respect to production and the management of workplaces. Those types of political incentives could have been a remedy for the apathy and indifference of the workers in the bureaucratic systems existing in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and that continue to prevail in Cuba.

Given the total absence of democracy, moral incentives and the so-called consciousness were a way of making workers responsible for their assigned tasks, without having the power to decide what is to be done, and how, in their places of employment, and without being able to count on the unions to defend their rights and interests. These had stopped being organizations whose purpose was to defend the rights and interests of the workers to gradually become, as we shall see below, arms of the

state and of the bureaucratic administrations after the historic workers' congress of November 1959.

With respect to guerrilla warfare, we can appreciate how Che Guevara's political strategy meant a “from above” and “from outside” relationship with the peasantry. Thus, for example, Guevara cited approvingly a fragment of the Second Declaration of Havana of February 4, 1962, stipulating that as a result of the ignorance in which they have been kept and the isolation in which they lived, the peasantry needed the political and revolutionary leadership of the working class and the revolutionary intellectuals, [and consequently, the party that represents that vanguard] (cited by Ernesto “Che” Guevara in “La Guerra de Guerrillas: Un Método” in Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés (editors): *Che: Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara*, Cambridge, Mass., 1969, 91). And in his treatise on guerrilla warfare of 1960, Guevara himself rejected the idea that democratic discussion and decision making was applicable to the various aspects of guerrilla life aside from combat itself. He did recognize that it was necessary to create organizations to establish rules for the peasants in liberated areas, but never formulated mechanisms of democratic representation so peasants could learn self-government in practice. (Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Third Edition, edited by Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, Jr., Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1977, 108.)

Che Guevara's Communism

It was in the reformist Guatemala of the 1950s led by Jacobo Arbenz, the democratically elected president overthrown by the open intervention of the CIA, that Guevara became a Communist, although he refused to join the local Communist Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo or PGT) for several reasons, but especially because the

PGT, which controlled the government workers' union, demanded that he join the party as a condition of obtaining a government job, a condition that Guevara rejected with justified indignation. After joining the ranks of the 26th of July Movement in Mexico City, Guevara participated in and was part of the small group that survived the landing of the boat *Granma* in Cuba in December 1956. The Argentinian distinguished himself in the guerrilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra and rose to the rank of Comandante, the highest of all. Already in the Sierra, although Guevara never joined the old Cuban Communist Party (PSP), he began to collaborate with that organization. Towards the end of 1957, when Guevara founded his first school for the political instruction of cadres in the Sierra Maestra, he asked the PSP to send him his first political instructor. The PSP sent Pablo Ribalta, a young but politically experienced Black Cuban Communist who years later, after the Rebel Army's victory, was appointed Cuban Ambassador to Tanzania. In this way, Ribalta became the principal contact with Havana when Che Guevara became involved in the guerrilla war in the Congo. (Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara. A Revolutionary Life*, 296-97).

In contrast with other leaders of the 26th of July Movement, Guevara was very open with respect to his political views. For example, Che entered a dialogue with "Daniel" (Comandante René Ramos Latour) whose politics were described by Paco Ignacio Taibo as "radical workerist and nationalist," who later died in combat in the Sierra Maestra. In a letter that Che wrote to "Daniel" on December 14, 1957, that Guevara later described as "rather idiotic" but without explaining why it was so, Che told "Daniel" that "because of my ideological background I belong to those who believe that the solution to the world's problems are behind the so-called Iron

Curtain and I see this [July 26] Movement as one of the many, provoked by the eagerness of the bourgeoisie, to get rid of the economic chains of imperialism." In the same letter, Guevara continues describing Fidel Castro as an authentic leader of the left-wing of the bourgeoisie, but who possesses qualities that place him well above his class. He also praises Fidel Castro for important actions that he had recently taken with respect to opportunist sectors of the opposition to Batista. Che admitted feeling ashamed for not having anticipated that Fidel Castro could take those actions. (Carlos Franqui, *Diario de la Revolución Cubana*, Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 362, and Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Ernesto Guevara también conocido como el Che*, México, D.F.: Planeta, Joaquín Mortiz, 1996, 188.)

The close collaboration of Che Guevara with the old PSP lasted almost four years, which included the critical years of the consolidation of the Cuban Communist system. At the beginning of 1959, there were three tendencies within the revolutionary government: the liberal tendency, headed by President Manuel Urrutia and various ministers such as Roberto Agramonte and Elena Mederos. There was a revolutionary nationalist tendency described by Paco Ignacio Taibo II (op. cit., 354) as a leftist sector that combined "anti-imperialism with a strong critique of the communists who were considered conservative and sectarian." This anti-imperialist group included David Salvador, principal leader of the CTC (Cuban Workers Confederation), Carlos Franqui, editor of the daily newspaper *Revolución*, organ of the 26th of July Movement, and other important leaders of the 26th of July Movement such as Marcelo Fernández and Faustino Pérez. The third group was composed of an alliance of several important revolutionary leaders, such as Che Guevara and Raúl Castro (chief of the Armed Forces), with the PSP. Meanwhile,

Fidel Castro pretended to abstain from these internal regime struggles, allowing for example the polemics between *Revolución* and the PSP, although in fact he had frequent meetings in secret with the group headed by Che Guevara, Raúl Castro, and leaders of the PSP at Guevara's residence in Tará Beach to prepare the agrarian reform law adopted in May of 1959. It is worth noting that none of the members of the revolutionary nationalist tendency were invited to these meetings.

A series of events that took place beginning in September of 1959 and through 1960 clearly pointed to the end of the open and pluralist stage of the Cuban Revolution. On September 14, 1959, Euclides Vázquez Candela, one of the principal editors of *Revolución*, ended his newspaper's polemics with the PSP. On October 1, Alexander Alekseev, an agent of Soviet intelligence posing as a journalist and later as a diplomat, arrived in Havana as an unofficial envoy of Moscow to the revolutionary leadership, and after meeting with some of the principal leaders of the PSP, had a meeting with Che Guevara (Jon Lee Anderson, op. cit., 429, 437). Later in October, Major Huber Matos, military chief of Camaguey province in eastern Cuba and a former schoolteacher who had fought against the Batista dictatorship in the Sierra Maestra, resigned his position in protest against what he denounced as the increasing Communist influence in Fidel Castro's regime. Reacting with great fury, the Maximum Leader accused Matos of treason, which led to a twenty-year prison sentence, in a trial where proof that Matos had conspired or incited violence against the revolutionary government was never presented. Matos was not freed until 1979 when he had completed his sentence in its entirety.

The closing of the pluralist stage of the Cuban Revolution continued with the elimination of the independence of Cuban

labor unions. In November of 1959, the CTC (Confederation of Cuban Workers) celebrated its tenth congress. When the election of delegates that would attend the congress took place in early November, it became clear that the results would be like the union elections that took place in the spring and that based on their small vote, the Cuban Communists would not be included in the leadership of the CTC. This provoked a personal intervention by Fidel Castro to ensure that the elected leadership would be favorable to the Communists. Even though the Communist leaders were not included in the new leadership slate, the so-called unitarian leaders of the CTC led by Jesús Soto that were allied to the Communists obtained the new dominating position in the CTC. Shortly thereafter, approximately half of the union leaders hostile to the PSP were purged in assemblies that were far from democratic, and some ended up in prison. This purging process opened the door to Soviet-style state control of the unions that culminated in the eleventh congress celebrated in November of 1961. In contrast to the debates of the tenth congress in November of 1959, this was the congress of unanimity that elected without any opposition, the old Stalinist union leader Lázaro Peña as Secretary General.

As part of the offensive against all autonomous and pluralist social and political expressions in Cuba, Fidel Castro's government lashed out against both Black and women's independent organizations. Black associations used to take the form of mutual aid organizations. Carlos Moore relates how in one of those organizations formed by plain working class people and called "Amantes del Progreso" (Lovers of Progress), Black men regularly got together to drink and discuss political questions, help children with their homework, and to study Black Cuban history, a subject matter virtually ignored by the public

education system (Carlos Moore, *Pichón: A Memoir; Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba*, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008, 45–46). Sometime during 1959, revolutionary leaders decided to eliminate this source of independent power. Shortly after Juan René Betancourt, a well-known Black intellectual who was acting as provisional supervisor of the National Federation of Negro Societies, informed the government that the seventh national convention of that organization had been programmed for the end of November 1959, he unexpectedly found out through a radio program that he had resigned from his position “due to the pressure of other obligations.” This was the beginning of a process that by the mid-sixties had eliminated the independent associations of people of color as a vital force in Black Cuban society. (Juan René Betancourt, “Castro and the Cuban Negro,” *Crisis* 68, no. 5 [1961]: 271, 273.)

Something similar happened with the situation of Cuban women. This involved the revolutionary government's creation of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) as one of its various “mass organizations” (later converted into the transmission belts for the single party) that translated into the compulsory dissolution of 920 independent women's organizations that had existed in Cuba before the revolution. Because the Cuban women's movement had disappeared twenty years earlier, the government achieved its purposes without much resistance, in contrast with the struggles and purges that took place in the union movement in 1959 and 1960. (Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 32.) Finally, beginning in May of 1960, the revolutionary government eliminated all significant independent newspapers such as the right-wing *Diario de La Marina* and the liberal *Prensa Libre*. The weekly *Bohemia*,

the most important Cuban publication that followed a left liberal and social democratic orientation, but hostile to the Soviet bloc and to the PSP, was taken over by elements following the government's orientation. Its veteran editor, Miguel Angel Quevedo, a sympathizer of Fidel Castro for many years, had to leave the country. As one

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well-known columnist put it, the hour of unanimity had arrived.

We don't know the degree to which Che Guevara was directly involved in these very important events, but it is well established that aside from his non-public objections to the way the revolutionary government treated Huber Matos, he certainly supported, without making any public criticism, the radical anti-democratic changes that took place in the critical period from September 1959 to the summer of 1960. In any case, it is quite clear that as one of the principal government leaders, Che Guevara was politically responsible for the turn that the government took in those days.

With respect to the unions, Che Guevara followed a policy very close to the one that the CTC adopted after November 1959. As the Minister of Industry, he declared in June of 1961 that Cuban workers should accustom themselves to a collectivist regime and could therefore not participate in strikes (Ernesto Che Guevara, *Revolución*, June 27, 1961). Che

Guevara was expressing in his own words the notion that given that the Cuban state was a workers' state, it was impossible for any conflict of interests to exist between the workers and the state. This certainly ignored the persistence of class differences and the hierarchical division of labor under Cuban "socialism." Years later, when he was preparing to travel to the Congo, Che privately admitted in his *Apuntes* (published in Cuba over fifty years later with little public impact) that although unions were not required under socialism in order to deal with class exploitation—which didn't exist, they *were* necessary to deal with potential abuses in workplaces. Che also admitted in his *Apuntes* that union democracy in Cuba was a "perfect myth" because the Communist Party proposed the single list of candidates for union office that were always elected but without the involvement of the masses. (María del Carmen Ariet García [editor], *Apuntes Críticos a la Economía Política*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2006, 412-413.) About what Che Guevara harbored no doubt is that he was opposed to any adversarial relationship between the workers and the employer state, that according to Guevara's own definition was identical to the working-class vanguard (*Apuntes Críticos*, 249). In his article of June 18, 1960, "The Working Class and the Industrialization of Cuba," Che Guevara recognizes that it is not the same thing to be a worker and be the administrator of a factory since the two groups perceive problems from different perspectives. To resolve this problem, Che proposed that the two groups exchange views with each other in order to address the problems from both points of view and thus reach a solution. Essentially, what Che was doing was reducing the problems of class conflict and the hierarchical division of labor to a failure of communication.

When René Dumont, the French left-

wing agronomist, tried to convince Che Guevara about the importance of worker participation in their cooperatives in order to create the notion that the cooperatives belonged to them, or to have a sense of their being co-owners of those institutions, Che reacted angrily and proclaimed "that the members don't need a sense of proprietorship, but a sense of responsibility" (René Dumont, *Cuba: Socialism and Development*, New York: Grove Press, 1970, 51-52). The government decided that the decision-making power was the exclusive prerogative of the administrators appointed by the central government, a process that was described as collective discussion, but with the responsibility and decisions taken by a single person (Ernesto Che Guevara, "Discusión colectiva: Decisión y responsabilidades únicas," en *Escritos y Discursos*, cited in Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 102).

Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Today's Cuba

The one-party system has been the principal obstacle to the democratization and progress of Cuba. Che Guevara never criticized, let alone opposed, the one-party state system. The PCC, the single legal party, is not in fact a party: in reality, a party only exists in relation to other parties. But neither is the term "party" useful because it is associated in the minds of millions of people with electoral systems. In the case of Cuba, the Party is far more than an electoral machine because of the transmission belts that it possesses in relation to the so-called mass organizations such as the unions, women's organizations, and many other institutions including the judicial system, to which the party transmits "orientations" that establish the policies to be followed and implemented in the many different sectors of society. The PCC controls the means

of mass communication (radio, television, newspapers, and magazines) through the “orientations” transmitted to such organs by its Ideological Department. We must bear in mind that this department not only censors any domestic news that may harm the government and Cuba’s existing system of government, but also if it is seen by the Cuban government as harming foreign governments that are its allies (e.g., Venezuela and Nicaragua) or with which the government maintains friendly relations (e.g., Lula’s Brazil.) This was also the case decades ago with the Cuban government’s relations with the friendly governments of Francisco Franco’s Spain and of the Mexican PRI. The PCC also controls the Cuban electoral system through the Candidate Commissions as a filter to veto not only opposition candidates, but also those that the Commissions consider likely to ignore the “orientations” of the party in the future. It is the unlimited powers of the PCC spelled out in the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, that is the principal cause of the pervasiveness of government arbitrariness, that laws are not democratically adopted and in any case are ignored and violated through police and administrative decisions, when the government considers it necessary.

The undemocratic one-party state also allows for the extensive political and social repression in Cuba. According to the British academic institution Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research that publishes the “World Prison Population List” prepared by Helen Fair and Roy Walmsley, Cuba occupies fifth place in the number of common prisoners per capita (the Cuban government does not recognize the category of political prisoner) among 223 prison systems in independent countries and dependent territories. Cuba is only surpassed by the United States of America, Rwanda, Turkmenistan, and El Salvador. Recently, the number of political prisoners

properly speaking rose to many more than 500 because of the trials that took place in connection with the widespread street protests in Cuba on July 11, 2021. The Cuban courts condemned dozens of protesters to many years in prison (including sentences of over twenty years in prison) for damage caused to property. There was not a single case where the demonstrators, who in their great majority were peaceful, caused serious injury or death to any people.

It is necessary to insist that Che Guevara never opposed the one-party system in Cuba or in the USSR, although he did comment on one occasion that the term “democratic centralism” had been used for so many different political systems that it had ceased to have a clear and distinctive meaning. (Guevara, *Apuntes Críticos a la Economía Política*, 137) It is nevertheless striking that although Guevara harshly criticized the Soviet system, especially regarding the changes that had taken place in its economic structures favoring market forces, and even changed his previously positive opinion of Stalin, at the same time he maintained an uncritical attitude with respect to very important aspects of the Soviet one-party state. Thus, for example, Che Guevara declared “that the Soviet atom bomb was in the hands of the people,” a manifestly false statement that only the uncritical supporters of that political system would have maintained (*Apuntes críticos a la Economía Política*, 294), aside from the fact that nuclear weapons involved the elimination of entire peoples and cannot distinguish by their very nature between combatants and civilians, and between the ruling classes and the rest of the people.

We must also consider the very serious crisis that Cuba is going through, which approximates in its dimensions the economic disaster that the country suffered immediately after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early nineties. Today, Cuba suf-

fers grave shortages of products essential to the feeding and health of the population, with a rate of inflation that reached 45 percent in April 2023, having previously ascended to 77 percent. Consequently, it is not surprising that the value of the dollar has risen a great deal and was quoted as worth 211 pesos (July 13). For a long time, the Cuban economy has been in free fall because the rate of investment has been well below what is needed to maintain the existing standard of living, and even less to support the economic growth required to significantly improve the living conditions of the great popular majorities in the island. The last two years have witnessed the greatest emigration wave — allowed, and indirectly promoted by the government — that Cuba has ever witnessed. It has been calculated that by the end of 2023 more than 450,000 people will have emigrated in the last two years, an extraordinary number for a country of 11 million people. This emigration will worsen the demographic crisis that Cuba has experienced for many years, especially if we consider that it is generally young people that are more likely to emigrate.

Given the very difficult economic circumstances and nature of the Cuban economy, any kind of socialist democracy in Cuba would inevitably have to include a significant private sector composed of small enterprises (although not the so-called “medium” size private enterprises with up to 100 employees allowed by the Cuban government that are really capitalist enterprises) and foreign capitalist investment regulated by the socialist and democratic state. This would require continuing the struggle against the criminal United States blockade that would surely constitute an obstacle to reaching that objective. This

would be a new version of what in Russia was called the New Economic Policy (NEP) with concessions to the peasants and small businesspeople and industrialists that Lenin introduced in 1921. The NEP was a consequence of the profound crisis of the policies of War Communism established in 1918. War Communism faced a great deal of resistance from the peasantry (80 percent of the population) as well as armed rebellions, such as the “green” rebellion among the Tambov region peasantry from 1920 to 1921 and that of the sailors and people of Kronstadt in March of 1921.

It is in this context that an extreme voluntarism such as Che Guevara’s would not only not be relevant to today’s Cuba but also politically very harmful. In his analysis of the Russian NEP, Che Guevara ignored the reality of the enormous economic crisis of the Russia of the twenties with the astonishing assertion that in that epoch “there was nothing that was economically impossible” adding that the only thing to be considered was if any economic plan was based on “the development of socialist consciousness” (Guevara, *Apuntes Críticos a la Economía Política*, 246). In other words, “socialist consciousness” could have conquered the economic obstacles of economic underdevelopment and the great shortages created by the bloody civil war in Russia. In that case, if that “consciousness” had been successful in conquering power, it would have resulted in a brutal and exploitative “primitive accumulation” as in fact occurred under Stalin several years later.

Habel and Löwy accuse me of focusing on the issue of democracy in order to defame Che Guevara and the Cuban revolution. But Guevara’s and Cuba’s consistent opposition to democracy defames the cause of socialism.

Participatory Democracy Minus Endless Meetings

GAR W. LIPOW

A MOSTLY IGNORED TOOL COULD improve democracy within legislative bodies and political organizations. Failures of democracy contribute to the current reactionary moment, and play a part in the rise of fascism and authoritarianism.

Many, but not all, of the policies that helped create the current conjuncture are deeply unpopular. In the United States, for example, majorities support strict gun safety rules (Edwards-Levy 2023), far higher taxes on the rich (Newport 2023), and stronger policies favoring renewable energy and efficiency (Tyson 2022; Roberts, 2018, Gallup 2023). Most voters also oppose the Republican “anti-woke” crusade (Page 2023), anti-trans bills (Marist Poll 2023), and abortion bans (Pew Research Center 2022). If majority preference drove policy starting today, the United States would still have long way to go to solve the crises it faces; democracy is not magic. But genuine democracy would make this nation a far better place than it is, and a more favorable terrain for struggle. In its absence, unpopular policy within a nominally democratic

society is one of many drivers of people towards fascism, especially when that society provides tempting targets for scapegoating in the form of oppressed groups.

Similarly, flawed democracy within left movements and organizations contribute to their current weakness. For instance, members of groups and movements can become disillusioned when they discover that their nominal democracy conceals control by a minority with resources and time to prepare for and participate in meetings. The tendency of such minorities to gradually shift the focus of such groups in directions not corresponding to member priorities can also disappoint participants.

A tool which increased both citizen control of legislatures and member control of democratic voluntary organizations could be as revitalizing to grassroots groups and movements as to states. This would be especially true if this tool allowed an increase in democratic control without indefinitely prolonging debate, or piling meeting upon meeting.

Ironically, one of the most undemocratic of institutions, for-profit corporations, invented that tool, the voting proxy, at least as early as 1710 (Axe 1942, 41). A voting shareholder, unable to participate in a meeting, usually may delegate their voting proxy to someone who will attend. That attendee, in addition to casting their own votes, can also cast the votes of those whose proxies they hold. Shareholders also have

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the right to revoke proxies. There is no reason someone who may rightfully vote in a democratic organization's meetings should not be allowed to similarly delegate voting proxies to another voting member. This is not a new idea. Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland*) first proposed it in 1884, calling it liquid democracy (Dodgson, 1884). Although proxies themselves are a simple concept, how they can transform democracy is not.

Proxies in Representative Democracy

Focusing on representative forms of democracy will help explain many of the implications of proxies. One well known flaw in representative democracy is that politicians break campaign promises (Shalom 2021, 7-14). Some democracies do have recall processes, but these are often limited to criminal or extreme misbehavior. Regardless of formal limits, gathering signatures, and winning a recall election is too burdensome a process to provide routine accountability for broken campaign promises. In a legislature consisting of proxy holders, each lawmaker would act as proxy-holder for a number of citizens, and would cast that number of votes within the legislative body. If a legislator acted contrary to the will of those citizens, voters could simply shift their proxies to a different legislator. The ability to revoke and redelegate proxies serves as a low-barrier recall.

This raises a question. If a legislative election consists of voters delegating proxies to proxy-holder candidates, what prevents this resulting in legislative bodies of tens of thousands or even millions of members? The answer: proxy-based legislatures, like conventional ones, would consist of a fixed number of lawmakers. A 101-member legislature, for example, would only seat the 101 candidates receiving the most proxies. Candidates placing

below the 101st ranking, in number of proxies received, could redelegate their proxies through a negotiated process. Voters who disapproved of the result could, in turn, redelegate their proxies, leading to a new round of negotiations.

Legislative elections would then consist of several steps. Initially, voters delegate proxies, by mail or in voting booths; then a negotiation process places proxies of candidates who did not win seats. After that, voters dissatisfied with the results revoke and redelegate their proxies; a final round of negotiations follow.

The ability of proxy holders to revoke and redelegate proxies on the individual voter level not only provides more accountability than recalls in conventional representative bodies, it also resolves a contradiction between the democratic accountability recalls provide and democratic representation.

Election of representatives can easily result in a minority of voters electing a majority of representatives due to gerrymandering. One example, Shalom gives, "...in 2012, Democrats received 1.4 million more votes than Republicans for the House of Representatives, but Republicans won more seats in the House of Representatives, 234 to 201" (2021, 9).

One solution, seldom used in the United States, though often adopted by parliaments, is called Proportional Representation (PR). In PR, seats are allocated in rough proportion to votes cast. All forms of PR count votes across multiple legislative seats, then allocate those seats according to formulas which differ between types. These formulas ensure that a party winning 30 percent of the vote in a legislative election wins roughly 30 percent of the seats. How roughly depends upon the specific implementation. But conventional forms of PR make conventional recalls, as weak a form of accountability as they are, somewhere

between impractical and impossible. Allocation of votes across multiple seats prevent fairly determining who should vote in a recall election for a single member. Fairness would require re-running the whole election, or at least a good part of it.

Proxies reconcile accountability and representation. While providing a low-barrier form of recall, they also constitute a type of PR. Unlike conventional forms of PR, where seats are allocated in rough proportion to votes, representatives cast the exact number of votes within the legislature that they received. If a member of a legislature received 30,000 votes, either directly or via redelegation from other candidates, that member holds 30,000 proxies and can cast 30,000 votes for or against bills and motions. If 60 percent of voters in a legislative election voted for strong supporters of gun safety regulation, then 60 percent of the voting proxies in that legislature will be held by strong supporters of gun safety regulation. Unlike conventional PR, if legislators try to back off on that commitment, then voters can simply revoke their proxies, and shift their support to a different member of that body—in extreme cases even to one who is not currently seated.

Proxies mitigate another problem in representative democracy: the “lesser evil” paradox. Suppose a voter cares about ten issues. There are 1,024 ($2^{10}=1,024$) possible combinations of pro and con on those ten issues. That number rises drastically if more views are possible on those issues than simply pro and con, or if the voter cares about more than ten issues. Thus, the vast majority of voters will end up supporting someone with whom they seriously disagree on some policies. The simple mathematics of choosing from the limited selection of candidates available in a conventional representative democracy make this almost unavoidable, aside from other major contributing factors.

The lesser evil paradox, though serious, is not quite as structurally implacable as the mathematics imply. Policy positions relate to one another. Someone who supports gun safety likely supports worker and consumer safety rules as well, and probably protection for the environment. Social, economic, and

Proxies can allow modification of the nested council proposal to keep its advantages, while eliminating some of the disadvantages and compensating for others.

foreign policy views don’t always connect to one other, though such disconnects happen less often than pundits sometimes pretend. Policy preferences mostly form around bundles of connected issues. Looked at this way, the overwhelming majority of the population probably hold no more than four bundles of policy preferences,* with a spectrum of perhaps three positions (left, center, right) on each one. That yields around eighty-one ($3^4=81$) possible policy combinations, still too many for conventional representative systems to reflect. It

*Please note that 4 “bundles” is a generous estimate. There is a great deal of literature on multidimensionality in policy preferences: much of that literature that compares such theories to empirical data find a two-dimensional model yields a good match to actual public policy polling data (Ashton, et.al 2005; Achterberg, and Houtman 2009; Feldman and Johnson 2013, 7-10; Hellwig 2014; 596-624). One of the early pioneers in this analysis eventually added a third dimension (Eysenck 1975) based upon further analysis.

is not just a matter of comparing number of seats to eighty-one possible combinations. In district-based systems, views held by a percentage of the population that in theory could win a seat or two would be divided among too many districts to elect any members. Systems not using districts, party-list forms of PR, would exclude

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those same views via threshold requirements—minimum percentages parties must obtain to win seats. Proxies, however, would allow the reflection of eighty-one different viewpoints and even a bit more.

Take the earlier example of a 101-member parliament, quite small for a national or state/provincial level legislature, but larger than required to elect more than eighty-one points of view. Most importantly, quite small portions of the population will be represented. It is quite possible that one or two candidates will be popular enough to win 20 percent of the vote. It is almost certain that one or two will win 5 percent. Others will win 3 percent or 2 percent or 1.5 percent of the vote. And others will win that 1 percent. Thus, it is near certain that the member winning election with the lowest number of votes will represent a fraction of a percent of the voters, probably quite a small fraction. That becomes even more certain with larger legislative bodies.

This does not quite eliminate the lesser evil paradox, but it reduces it to something bearable. To be sure, some may deceive

themselves that they decide issues case-by-case but, as documented in the note, four bundles is generous. Few people hold views that map beyond two dimensions, let alone four. However, three choices per bundle is probably too small. Views on bundles lie upon a spectrum, rather than dividing neatly into left, right, and center. Still that division does capture the ends and middle of the spectrum. Thus, a large majority will find candidates who represent their views exactly, and most of the remainder will find candidates close enough. And even views shared by too small a portion of the population to achieve direct representation will have a chance to extract concessions during the negotiation process between failed and successful candidates. That is important in legislative bodies such as city councils, which often are composed of fewer than a dozen members.; though at this level there are probably fewer policy “bundles” possible, and the 3-viewpoint spectrum is probably closer to reality than at the state or national level.

Does this advantage require eliminating local districts? No, but it necessitates letting voters sometimes bypass them. Ballots can list only local candidates from within a voter’s district. But they would allow write-in votes for candidates in any district. The premise: in (say) a national election, a voter will prefer a representative who represents their views and also knows their local conditions; but they will prefer a distant national representative who supports their national policy priorities to a local who opposes them.

One important warning about proxies. Since, within democracy, they serve as a form of ballot, they should be treated like ballots. If mail is used rather than voting stations then, like vote-by-mail ballots, blank proxies should only be sent directly to the voters (or official guardians and caretakers where appropriate). No one should

be able to print out blank proxies and set up tables in the public square or go door to door and pressure people to fill out a proxy for them immediately, just as nobody can (in most cases) do that now with blank mail-in ballots.

Participatory Democracy and Proxies

Arguably, the proxy system described so far gives citizens enough control to border on a participatory democracy. It is at least delegatory. However, it does not create institutions where citizens meet in small groups to engage in discussion and democratic decision-making face to face. Advocates of participatory democracy consider it essential that actual policy making and selection of delegates occur at such meetings. They argue that face-to-face deliberation and decision-making acts as education, and trains people to think politically, in a way that simply choosing candidates on a ballot does not.

What would this look like in practice? Steve Shalom proposes what he calls “nested councils” (Shalom 2021, 16-24). These combine deliberative direct and delegatory self-governance. Councils making decisions that affect smaller geographies elect recallable delegates to councils managing larger areas. Direct democracy occurs at the smallest local level where people deliberate and vote on issues critical to their lives. Neighborhood assemblies discuss and debate issues and allow modification of proposals in response to discussion before they are voted upon. (To increase concision, this article will refer to such local councils as “neighborhood assemblies,” and larger councils as “city,” “county,” “state,” and “national” councils. Neighborhood assemblies are far from the only possible basis for a nested council system)

Neighborhood assemblies practice delegatory democracy by electing delegates

to city councils to resolve issues which affect multiple neighborhoods. These city councils, in turn, elect delegates to county councils, and so on. All delegates are subject to recall by the councils that elected them. Participatory democracy has seldom been practiced beyond the city scale. Shalom’s proposal, unlike many nested council proposals, does not call for delegates to be mandated how they must vote—for good reason. Mandates would prevent the next level of council from deliberating on mandated policy. In addition, legislators in California proposed about 2,000 laws during 2022; the governor ultimately signed about 1,000 of them, including a state budget (Kamal 2023). The U.S. Congress typically passes between 2 and 3 million words of legislation each year (GovTrack 2023). For obvious reasons, extensive staff do most policy work. Basing a political system larger than the municipal level on voter mandates would face serious information constraints. Note that the same constraints, plus the need for deliberation, means that democratic proxies, unlike many corporate ones, should not include the ability to mandate how proxy holders must vote.

Most decision making under nested councils is still delegated. The only decisions made via direct participation are neighborhood issues and selection of delegates to city councils. All other decisions, including the selection of delegates to county, state, and national legislatures are made indirectly, sometimes very indirectly. The idea seems to be that at each level of decision making, council members will personally know those they are delegating further decision making to. One problem with relying on this is that personal acquaintance with a candidate can cloud judgement as much as it clarifies; “what a wonderful person” can trump disagreeing with them on a multitude of issues, when the multitude of issues is what is at

stake. If people personally knew all their delegates, direct and indirect, the point would at least be arguable. But it is hard to see a huge advantage to a citizen if their city council member personally knows their county council delegate, nor if their county council delegate knows their member in the state council.

Another problem: the lesser evil paradox may be greater in a nested council system than in conventional representative democracies. Citizen input into policies at all levels of legislative governance are packed into the choice of city council delegates from the small set of people attending a single neighborhood meeting. What are the chances that most attendees at a neighborhood meeting will find a candidate from that tiny universe who matches their policy preferences closely at all levels from municipal to national? The extreme indirection also presents an information problem. In the party game “Telephone,” if the starting phrase “San Andreas Fault” is passed from person to person, the phrase at the end of the chain could be something along the lines of “Sam and Dre’s fall.”

In addition, remember how in conventional legislatures without PR, a minority of voters can elect a majority of representatives? The same type of gerrymandering applies to this council system. Shalom allows plebiscites to overrule council decisions if they are made by a narrow majority or if councils from smaller geographies call for a direct vote. That would help if uneven distribution of opinions happened for only a few issues. If that gerrymandering reflects fundamental splits affecting views on large numbers of issues, then nested councils would run into the same constraints as plebiscitary systems; too many referendums for voters to keep track of.

In spite of these flaws, nested council systems hold one important advantage. At least policy decisions at the neighbor-

hood level are made through a deliberative process by those choosing to attend the meetings. Proxies can allow modification of the nested council proposal to keep its advantages, while eliminating some of the disadvantages and compensating for others. If democracy must rely on extreme indirection, let that indirection take the form of passing along bundles of proxies. In a proxy-based version of nested councils, a vote for a city council member also passes along the voter’s proxies for the other councils: county, state, and national. City council members select county council members by re delegating the county council-level proxies they received from individual voters, and also pass along proxies for the other councils to the county council. County council members vote for state council members by using the individual state-level proxies passed to them, and pass along individual national-level proxies to the state-level members they elect. As a final step in the process, state council members use their bundles of national council proxies to select national council members.

As in the representative process discussed in the previous section, though default choices will be within districts, voters can elect candidates from any district in the body they are voting for. The city council ballots that voters cast at neighborhood assemblies will contain only candidates running within their neighborhood. But if nobody in their neighborhood satisfies them, they may write in someone running in a different neighborhood. The same applies for county, state, and national councils.

This leaves the problem of extreme indirection, the game of telephone. But the process of passing along individual proxies suggests a solution. In addition to (for example) a city council having the right to recall a county level delegate, individuals could also revoke and redelegate proxies. If a citizen objects to the policies or char-

acter of their county or state or national legislative proxy-holder, they can revoke that proxy directly and redelegate it. The use of indirect proxies for initial selection, and both indirect and direct redelegation of proxies thereafter gives nested councils the same advantages proxies provide in representative democracy; PR combined with low barrier recall for true accountability.

I think though, the nested council system complicates delegation unnecessarily. The main advantages of nested councils over the delegatory system I outlined in the first section are neighborhood assemblies. Let neighborhood assemblies decide neighborhood level issues and delegate proxies to city council members. Let citizens delegate proxies to all other levels of government directly, as in the delegatory system outlined in the representative democracy section.

Hopefully, the advantages of proxies in choosing delegates are clear at this point. But the question arises, should participatory democracy allow citizens to delegate proxies to neighborhood assemblies, where direct deliberative democracy takes place? The performance of nested council systems,

which have been tried on a small scale, suggests the answer is yes.

Small-scale participatory democracy has success stories. Porto Alegre's participatory budget process greatly reduced poverty and corruption. New England, with its town meetings, was a center of the abolitionist and women's suffrage movements, and avoided some (though by no means all, or even a majority) of the recent craziness rampant in other parts of the United States. The Zapatistas, surrounded by a hostile Mexican government and pressured by a hostile United States, still halved maternal and infant mortality in areas they control, and made similar gains in literacy. But all of these examples have failed miserably to reach one key goal of a participatory democracy. No attempt at participatory democracy has ever succeeded in what the name implies is its primary goal: – having the majority of citizens **voluntarily** participate in governing themselves over a long period of time.

The Porto Alegre case, which so many find inspirational, at its peak consisted of 17,200 citizens (Sintomer 2012) out of a

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population of 3.6 million (Macrotrends 2023), less than one half of one percent of the population. The subset of New England open town meetings which allow direct voting on issues and modification of proposals in response to discussion average turnout rates from 2 percent (Rolheiser 2020, 32) to 20 percent (Preer 1986). No more than 35 percent of the population of Venezuela ever took part in neighborhood citizen assemblies under Chavez (Hawkins 2010, 42), before it became a dictatorship under Maduro. Those assemblies often had trouble reaching their quorum (Azzellini 2016, 209) of 30 percent.

The Zapatistas in Chiapas are an exception, with very high turnout rates. That is, in part, because attendance, at least until fall 2023, was mandatory (for good, culture specific, feminist reasons). In most contexts, “join our liberatory project; attendance at monthly meetings will be mandatory” does not seem like a good selling point for participatory democracy. In the absence of such forced attendance, only proxies ensure the majority gets a voice and a vote at such meetings.

Immediate and Short-Term Implications

The value of proxies transcends legislatures, as they can be useful for democratically-run voluntary organizations as well. A large labor union, or a good-sized socialist organization such as Democratic Socialists of America, would probably need proxies if they wished to run them via participatory democracy. Almost certainly, a minority with time and resources to show up at critical junctures would dominate any attempt by that size organization to implement participatory democracy without them. The necessity of proxies probably applies not only to large and medium groups, but even to tiny groups of as few as five dozen members, if they wish to avoid minority

rule. Usefulness to groups below that size would depend upon goals, ambition, structure, resources, and circumstances.

Two last points:

- Proxies are an important tool to help democracies in name become democracies in practice. But proxies also respond to a criticism sometimes made of participatory democracy as a goal: it requires too many meetings.

- Because proxies make member day-to-day influence easier and more practical, they bring an important and difficult question to the forefront. Who should have voting rights? Geographical political bodies and labor unions both answer that question in well-known ways. In a political body governing a geographic region, at minimum every citizen within that region over a certain age resident for a minimum period of time, and probably non-citizens as well, should have the right to vote. Similarly, anyone hired into a bargaining unit, or participating in a union drive under certain conditions specified by the union, should (as now) be able to vote. That is because membership in both these cases connects to social roles, and anyone occupying those roles has a moral right to a say in such organizations. But who should constitute the voting membership of a voluntary group where membership does not tie so closely to well defined social roles?

One practice that goes back at least to the 1960s, and is still found in organizations with roots in that era, is clearly wrong. No one should get a vote in a voluntary organization five minutes after they show up in a meeting for the first time. While I have no comprehensive answer, I can outline some general principles.

Anyone joining a truly voluntary organization as a voting member should:

- share the principles, goals, and ambitions of that organization on a general level, with plenty of room for disagreement on non-core principles and upon details.
- have a stake in that organization and have contributed to it in some way.

- have been part of that organization long enough to understand it in a practical sense.

If these seem unsatisfactorily general, it is because they are. Specifics are best decided on a case-by-case basis. Especially, striking a balance in the first principle is difficult. Steering between the sectarianism of “democratic centralism” or the “value-based” narrowness of some Green groups, and the silly putty vulnerability of Occupy requires a difficult balance. My personal experience of groups too slack in voting requirements include the following:

An organization (admittedly one that was already dying) taken over by hostile forces, systematically looted and dismantled.

The frustrating of an organization’s ability to accomplish anything by participants who were there for the fun of debate rather than to advance the group’s goals.

An organization destroyed by a faction of people who joined it shortly after formation in order to change the organizational goal, who opposed the intent with which it was founded.

Any democratically-run membership organization faces these risks. But the very advantages of proxies, that they are a path to participation by everyone, becomes a disadvantage if membership requirements do not protect against both hostile takeovers and influxes of chaos agents. Proxies make more urgent a need faced by all democratic organizations.

Conclusion

Any truly democratic polity, and any truly democratic membership organization, even one as tiny as five dozen, probably needs proxies; they may sometimes prove useful for even smaller groups. They are important for participatory democracy, but also for any form of democracy that seeks to carry out the will of the majority of people, rather

than merely obtaining their tolerance of decisions made by a minority. In participatory democracy, they allow the practical maximum of direct participation while ensuring that delegates both represent and are accountable to those who select them. The sheer volume of political decisions required in complex democratic societies ensures the need for such accountability; time costs and information constraints prevent voters from making most decision directly.

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The Nature of Neoliberalism

What can we learn about neoliberalism from Neil Davidson's new book?

CHARLES POST

NEIL DAVIDSON DIED IN MAY of 2020 after being diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor the previous fall. His tragically early death, at the age of 62, robbed the English-speaking world—and Scotland in particular—of an original and provocative Marxist intellectual and militant. Neil was a true working-class auto-didact—with little formal academic training, he made crucial contributions to contemporary Marxism. His intellectual interests ranged from the origins of Scottish capitalism and nationalism, through the “bourgeois revolutions,” to various aspects of socialist politics over the past three decades. While we often disagreed on theoretical and historical issues, our shared commitment to the tradition of revolutionary socialism from below—of working-class self-organization and self-emancipation—provided the basis for what many saw as a model of comradely debate.

*What Was Neoliberalism?*¹ is the first book-length work by Davidson to be published posthumously. His friends and comrades, Jamie Allinson and Steve Edwards, lightly edited this near finished manuscript, which is an ambitious attempt to grapple with the origins and historical evolution of neoliberalism. Davidson

refused to engage in speculation about the future of neoliberalism, “whether the future of capitalism will involve a further mutation of neoliberalism, or the replacement of neoliberalism by a new method of capitalist organization or—however distant this may seem—the overthrow of the entire system.” Instead, he focusses on “what neoliberalism was before 2008 and, equally importantly, what it is not.” (5-6) Davidson sees neoliberalism encompassing three distinct but interrelated phenomena. First, it is an ideological discourse, first elaborated by Central European economists hostile to both Marx and Keynes in the 1930s, and revived by the “Chicago School” in the 1970s. Second, it is a strategy state managers adopted in response to the capitalist crisis that began in the mid-1960s. These policies were first deployed by the Chilean military dictatorship in the 1970s, then adopted in the UK, United States, and New Zealand in the 1980s, before becoming capitalist state policy across the globe. Finally, neoliberalism is analyzed as a distinct “era of capitalism.” (7)

Davidson begins his discussion of the ideological foundations of neoliberalism with a spirited defense of the best-known figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, Adam Smith. Despite the attempt by neoliberal ideologues to appropriate his heritage, Davidson argues that:

When Smith attacks unproductive labor, he is not making some timeless critique of

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state employees, but thinking specifically about Highland clan retainers. When he opposes monopolies, he was not issuing a prophetic warning against the nationalization of industries in the twentieth century, but criticizing those companies which relied for their market position on the possession of exclusive royal charters in the eighteenth... [H]e did not see the market as a quasi-mystical institution that should be made to penetrate every aspect of social life, but rather as a limited mechanism for liberating humanity's economic potential from feudal and absolutist stagnation. (19)

He highlights Smith's deep suspicions of "businessmen and their conspiracies against the public" and his description of pin manufacturing, foretelling the degradation of labor under capitalism where "the efficiency of the division of labor" goes hand in hand with "the soul-destroying repetition that awaited the new class of wage laborers." (20)

Instead, the roots of neoliberalism are found in what Marx called "vulgar economics"—neo-classical economics and its fetish of the market and its independence. For the neo-classical economists, a strong state was necessary to reproduce the legal-judicial conditions for the operation of the law of value. The state became a problem when it "acted as a rival means of economic organization which could threaten the existence of private capital." (22) During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Hayek led a group of central European economists who opposed the trend toward greater capitalist-state intervention in the capitalist economy. They targeted Keynesian attempts to smooth the business cycle and contain growing working-class militancy with limited nationalizations, indicative planning and an expansion of the welfare state. However, it was not the power of "free market ideas" (54) that led state managers across the globe to abandon Keynesian for neoliberal state policies in

the late 1970s, but the long-term impact of the globalization of capitalist production in the post-World War II period. Sharpening inter-capitalist competition, especially after the onset of the crisis of profitability in the mid-1960s, and the growth of cross-border production and finance pushed capitalists and state managers away from Keynesianism toward lower taxes, less regulation, and privatization as a way of enhancing the competitiveness and profitability of their capitals in the world economy.

Davidson's treatment of the emergence and consolidation of neoliberalism is one of the high points of the book. Rather than a fully worked out set of capitalist state policies adopted in a "once and for all" manner across the capitalist world, neoliberal regimes emerged in a piece-meal manner through the late 1970s and 1980s, before being consolidated and transformed in the 1990s and 2000s. Davidson labels the early adopters of neoliberal policies in the UK, United States, and New Zealand the "regimes of reorientation." Neoliberalism emerged as a series of pragmatic policy innovations by state managers facing the deepening crisis of profitability. The permanent bureaucracy of the capitalist state had to negotiate a path acceptable to capitalist classes united behind policies that would discipline the unruly working-class movements of the 1960s and 1970s, but deeply divided over state policies to restore profitability that would necessarily bankrupt the least competitive capitalists. Under the leadership of figures like Thatcher and Reagan, politicians ready to fight for policies "with absolute conviction, if necessary, against individual members of the capitalist class themselves" (68), state managers first adapted "monetarist" policies that sharply raised interest rates to discipline both labor and the least competitive sectors of the capitalist class. They then launched a series of successful battles against the labor move-

ment—Reagan’s smashing of the air traffic controllers’ strike in 1981 and Thatcher’s war against the miners in 1984-1985. Finally, they promoted the establishment of new plants and industries in regions of the global North “with low or nonexistent levels of unionization and ... prevent[ed] as far as possible the culture of membership becoming established.” (78) In the wake of these defeats, the labor movement was unable to press for higher wages or improved working conditions when rising profitability and renewed growth tightened labor-markets in the early 1990s. The result was a continuous rise in the rate of surplus-value, *the rate of exploitation*, that sustained profitability until the crisis of 2008.

Having crushed the disruptive working-class struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, “vanguard neoliberalism” effectively transformed social-democracy from parties of pro-working-class reform within capitalism to parties of continued deregulation, low taxes, and the dismantling of the welfare state. By the early 1990s, they had become *social liberal* parties. In the first phase of neoliberalism, right-wing figures like Reagan and Thatcher envisioned a world where people were “free in relation to economic activity, but unfree in relation to social morality and state legality.” (95) In the second phase they were replaced by ostensibly “left” figures like Clinton and Blair who combined “fiscal conservatism” with a “cultural liberalism” that gave a “place at the table” to “respectable” women, non-whites, and queer folks, while continuing their war against labor and the poor.

Davidson draws on the work of one of his prime polemical targets in the debates on the origins of capitalism, Ellen Meiksins Wood, to grasp the deepening transformation of the “democratic” form of capitalist rule under social liberalism. Wood argued that capitalist “representative democracy,” from its origins in the late eighteenth

century, abandoned *substantive democracy*—with its bothersome majority rule—in favor of elected government that ensure the “rule of law” which protects capitalist social property relations.² Under neoliberalism, Davidson highlights how more and more elements of state economic and social policy were removed from the purview of “politicians who might be expected to deploy it for electoral purposes.”³ (92) Unchallenged

The roots of neoliberalism are found in what Marx called “vulgar economics”—neoclassical economics and its fetish of the market and its independence.

by a trade union officialdom suffering from a “structural reluctance to engage in official all-out action” (90), social liberalism combined “social or liberal democratic rhetoric” with “maintaining and even extending the essential components of neoliberalism.” (93) For Davidson, the “normalization of neoliberalism” as “the framework within which politics would henceforth be conducted”—a world in which “there was no alternative”—was accomplished not by Reagan and Thatcher, but by Clinton, Blair, and Obama.

Davidson highlights three results of the victory and consolidation of neoliberalism in the global North—the “boom economies” of 1982-2008, the growing cultural crisis of “broken societies,” and the growth of “market states.” We will examine the limits of Davidson’s analysis of the global economy in the twenty-five years preceding the global recession of 2008 below. Neoliberalism exacerbated the cultural

dilemmas of late capitalism identified by conservative ideologues Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol. For Bell and Kristol, capitalism's promotion of economic individualism led to a "disinhibition in social and cultural life, which the moral and legal codes of bourgeois society were designed to repress." (127) How could neoliberalism reconcile its "aspiration to create a population which behaves as sovereign individual consumers in the market place" with the need for "obedient wage laborers in the workplace, and subordinate mass citizens before the state." (126) The failure of neoliberalism to deliver rising living standards, while dismantling the post-war welfare state, only exacerbated "poverty and inequality on the one hand, and of the illnesses, family breakdown, and crime which they tend to bring on the other." (129) Neoliberal deregulation and austerity reinforced most people's sense of being powerless in the face of economic disruption and instability, outside of individually "getting ahead" in the competitive market.

Two cultural tropes attempted to make sense of the dystopian world of neoliberalism. On the one hand, there was a proliferation of different social identifiers and the development of a "progressive" neoliberalism that was "multicultural" and "inclusive"—at least of those women, people of color, and queer folks who were college educated and "played by the rules." On the other, there was a rise of racism and xenophobia that saw social decay as the result of the "bad character" of non-whites and "illegal" immigrants. Individual social behavior was blamed for the growing cultural crisis, scapegoating "the Intruder, characteristically an asylum seeker or illegal immigrant, who adds to the ranks of the Criminals while being housed and protected by the Incompetents, enslaved as they are to doctrines of Political Correctness." (133) Put another way, the growing crisis

of lived experience under neo-liberalism gave rise to *both* liberal identity politics, with its belief in "equal opportunity" for all, *and* reactionary populism, which blamed both "cultural elites" and the criminal, the incompetent and foreign intruders for the "decline of the middle classes."

Neoliberalism also produced a crisis of capitalist political rule. Davidson rejects both mainstream and "radical" claims that neoliberalism was a "retreat" of the state. Instead, the capitalist state apparatuses and state expenditures have expanded since the 1980s. Most of the institutional growth was in the repressive apparatuses of the capitalist state—the militarization of police forces and greater restrictions on strike actions and public protest—"required to deal with the social problems neoliberalism generated in practice." (145) State expenditures have expanded as well, with military spending and subsidies to private firms "too big to fail" in the lead. State spending on social welfare has also increased, but with universal, direct state support for the reproduction of labor power curtailed. Instead, individualized households have the primary responsibility for children, the elderly, the disabled, and the ill. Private charities and NGOs, using state resources, monitor the "success" of these atomized efforts to deal with social problems and provide greatly reduced, highly conditional services and support.

Neoliberalism has also made the capitalist state's role in establishing "the interests of capital as a whole" more difficult. Historically, individual capitalists have been generally uninterested in their broader class interests—they are focused on their individual struggle to survive the battle of capitalist competition. State managers—in particular, the permanent, unelected state officialdom—have historically been the main cadre negotiating the divisions among "the band of warring brothers" to establish

a ruling-class consensus. According to Davidson:

...in the developed West at least, neoliberal regimes are increasingly displaying an uncritical adherence to the short-term wishes of particular business interest. Nor is this the only emergent problem: the increasingly narrow parameters of neoliberal politics, where choice is restricted to “social” rather than “economic” issues, has encouraged the emergence of far-right parties, usually fixated on questions of migration, which have proved enormously divisive in working-class communities, but whose policies are in other respects by no means in the interests of capital. (157-158)

State managers—facing narrowing constraints on state economic policies, and the “politicization” of formerly “non-political” state offices with more private sector appointees to these positions—avoid “any policies that might incur corporate displeasure” (160).

As the policies under the control of elected officials constrict, the electorate has become more and more disproportionately middle class and increasingly politically polarized. On one side is a successful, college-educated layer of professionals and managers, who embrace both cultural diversity and economic freedom, providing electoral support for social liberalism. On the other are economically squeezed and precarious traditional small business people and lower-level supervisors and technicians, who embrace a right-wing populism that blames both “globalizing elites” and deviant racial, gender, and sexual minorities for their declining position. The latter are increasingly dominating the parties of the traditional right and pose a potential *threat* to the stability of neoliberalism.

Davidson concludes that neoliberalism’s current crisis—with no visible alternative to stabilize capitalist rule on the horizon—is the result of its *success*. Neoliberalism was “too successful as a mode

of capitalist regulation... [and has] finally brought about the situation which Schumpeter feared, where creative destruction has no limits or boundaries.” (174) Faced with a weak working-class movement, a rising tide of right-wing middle-class populism, and a weakening of state economic planning agencies, Davidson sees no Keynesian—or, more accurately, military-imperial Keynesian⁴—strategy to reestablish capitalist profitability and competitiveness in the short to medium term. Only a new rise of working-class struggle can stem the tide of continuing neoliberal attacks and the threat of right-wing populism. Davidson joins Kim Moody⁵ and others in rejecting claims that a wholesale migration of manufacturing to the global South or the rise of precarious employment—both of which are greatly exaggerated in most mainstream and “radical” accounts of neoliberalism—are responsible for continued relative quiescence in the working classes of the global North. Instead, he correctly identifies the disorganization of the *militant minority* of the class—the cadre of workplace and community activists who remain active between lulls in struggle and who have a social vision and political strategy to lead successful struggles in an upsurge.

The strength of *What Was Neoliberalism?* is its analysis of the origins and consolidation of neoliberalism as a capitalist political program, and its impact on capitalist culture and politics. However, it ultimately fails to make the case that neoliberalism constitutes a distinct “era” or “phase” of capitalism. Davidson attempts to find a middle ground in the debate surrounding “stages” or “phases” of capitalism. On the one hand, he rejects claims by the French “Regulation School”⁶ that each “regime of accumulation” has distinct laws of motion and crises tendencies. He is clear that capitalist crises “all have the same cause, in the tendency of the rate of profit

to fall, and take the same form, in the overproduction of commodities.” (8) On the other, he rejects criticisms of the “Regulationists” by such diverse Marxists as Robert Brenner, Mark Glick, and Anwar Shaikh,⁷ for focusing “on the underlying exploitative and competitive relationships of the system, rejecting attempts at periodization as being focused on mere epiphenomena.” Instead, he asserts that:

... capitalism has never existed in a pure form, operating according to the model established by Marx in *Capital*, and this is why we attempt to identify successive stages of capitalist development. (11)

For Davidson, all crises, while having similar causes, are “*historical* events, the trajectories of which are determined by—among other factors—levels of working-class organization and resistance, the availability and strength of countervailing tendencies to that of the rate of profit to fall, and the capacity and ability of states to intervene.” (8)

Davidson outlines the three phases of capitalism that preceded neoliberalism. The first was “classical capitalism,” ostensibly analyzed in Marx’s *Capital*, which goes into crisis in 1873. The second phase sees the formation of monopolistic corporations in the global North and the expansion of a specifically capitalist colonization into the global South, which formed the basis of the “monopoly capitalist” or “imperialist” phase of capitalism analyzed by Lenin and Bukharin.⁸ Finally, there is the post-World War II consolidation of “state capitalism” buoyed by the Cold War “permanent arms economy.” State capitalism took its most complete form in the USSR, China, and other Stalinist states, and produced a social-democratic or liberal form in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, and “hybrid forms... in the non-Stalinist areas of the former colonial world.” (12) Following the work of Michael Kidron, and

Chris Harman⁹ and others in the British International Socialist tradition, Davidson rejects claims that Keynesian demand management was primarily responsible for the extraordinary growth of the capitalist world economy during the “Golden Age” between 1945 and 1970. Instead, it was the growth of “unproductive” investment in armaments that slowed the rise of the organic composition of capital, supplemented with the growth of mass consumption and the transformation of agriculture that reduced the value of labor-power.

The crisis of “state capitalism” that began in the mid-1960s set the stage for the fourth phase, neoliberal capitalism. Davidson’s assessment of the impact of neoliberalism on capitalist profitability and accumulation from 1983 through the 2008 recession is ambiguous. On the one hand, he criticizes many of his co-thinkers in the British International Socialist tradition for ignoring the recovery of profitability after the recession of the early 1980s. On the other hand, he expresses doubts about the “boom economies” of the following twenty-five years. While recognizing that the 1980–1982 recession did, like any recession, cause “the destruction of some capitals and the rationalization and retooling of those which survived” (112), he emphasizes short-term factors that maintained turbulent growth in the pursuing decades. Like Robert Brenner,¹⁰ he points to financial and real-estate speculation as the main drivers of volatile cycles of boom and bust. Davidson also agrees with Brenner that the increase in the rate of exploitation was based solely on the intensification of the labor-process and not technological innovation. He draws on David Harvey’s notion of “accumulation by dispossession”¹¹ to highlight the violent processes that brought various natural resources (land, water, forests, minerals) into the orbit of capitalist accumulation, and the privatization of state-owned industry.

Finally, he points to the role of the explosive growth of the Chinese industrial economy in sustaining the neoliberal expansion.

Davidson's economic analysis suffers from a number of theoretical and empirical problems. First, he—like many on the Marxist left—views *Capital* as either an analysis of the phase of “competitive capitalism” or as an “ideal type” of capitalism. These claims fundamentally confuse Marx's method and his analysis of competition with those of neo-classical economics. Marx's *Capital* is not an “ideal type” of capitalism, which never “corresponds” to actual “historical capitalism.” Instead, Marx's method involves the production of *scientific abstractions* that capture *the necessary relations and processes* of capitalism as a distinct form of social organization. Put another way, Marx identifies the *invariant* relations and processes that characterize capitalism's specific dynamics. While the relations of exploitation and competition remain unchanged, the institutional framework for capitalist accumulation—particular forms of the capitalist state, the different forms of organization of capital and labor—vary tremendously from one capitalist society to another. As Anwar Shaikh puts it “capitalism's sheath mutates constantly, but its core remains the same.”¹²

The notion of “perfect competition” in neo-classical economics is an ideal type. It exists only when a large number of small, labor-intensive, “price taking” firms quickly adopt uniform techniques, wage and profit rates. Any “deviation” from this idealization is oligopoly—a form of “imperfect competition” that creates obstacles to capital mobility, different techniques, and higher than average profits and wages. Perfect competition is an ideological construction, it *idealizes* capitalist competition as the basis for an efficient and just economic order. By contrast “real capitalist competition,”¹³ from the birth of capitalism in sixteenth

century English agriculture to contemporary transnational corporations, has never resembled perfect competition. Capitalist competition involves constant technological innovation, taking the form of the increasing mechanization of production. As Marx commented, capital wages the competitive battle with “the artillery of fixed capital.” Older investments in fixed capital, even if they no longer allow a particular

As the policies under the control of elected officials constrict, the electorate has become more and more disproportionately middle class and increasingly politically polarized.

firm to reduce unit costs and raise its profit margins and rates, cannot be abandoned immediately in favor of new and more efficient machinery. As a result, competition and accumulation do not *homogenize* labor-process and profit and wage rates, but constantly *differentiate* these conditions of production. While the dream world of perfect competition produces uniform and mutually beneficial outcomes for all competitors, real competition is “antagonistic by nature and turbulent in nature” and “it is as different from so-called perfect competition as war is from ballet.”¹⁴ As Shaikh and his co-thinkers have demonstrated, real competition has produced amazing regularities in the historical dynamics of capitalism across societies over the past two hundred and fifty years—including the competitively driven turbulent equalization of profit rates between industries.

Nor does the notion of “state capitalism” as a distinctive phase of capitalism, or the “permanent arms economy” as an explanation of the post-World War II boom, withstand critical scrutiny.¹⁵ The notion that there was an historic “fusion” of private capital and the state, beginning during the first World War and consolidated after 1945, tends to ignore the separation of capitalist political rule—institutionalized in the capitalist state—and capitalist accumulation throughout the history of the capitalist mode of production.¹⁶ Capitalist state “economic interventions” are always limited to policies that attempt to mobilize counter-tendencies to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.¹⁷ As capitalism developed and larger masses of fixed capital were deployed, putting downward pressure on the rate of profit, capitalist state institutions mobilizing counter-tendencies to declining profits multiplied in the post-war era. However, the state institutions remained “relatively autonomous” from capital accumulation—ultimately unable to prevent a renewed crisis of profitability in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁸

Nor does the “permanent arms economy” explain the dynamism of accumulation in the “golden age.” Since the 1960s, various Marxian economists challenged the notion that investment in arms production slowed the growth of the organic composition of capital and boosted profitability.¹⁹ A recent study by Adem Yavuz Elveren²⁰ found that increased military expenditures tend to depress employment, and had contradictory effects on profitability—boosting U.S. profits rates between 1963 and 1980, but having no effect after 1980.

The roots of the exceptional recovery of profitability and accumulation during the “golden age” was neither the “fusion of state and capital,” nor the growth of arms expenditures. Instead, it was the massive—and unprecedented—destruction of fixed

capital, first during the Great Depression of 1929–1931 and then the Second World War. The radical reduction in the capital stock produced a sharp rise in profitability that sustained the unique period of capitalist growth from 1945 to 1970.

Finally, there is significant evidence, in particular in the work of Michael Roberts and Shaikh,²¹ to demonstrate that the rate and mass of profit rose from 1983 through the early 2000s. The recovery was founded in the elimination of a significant number of uncompetitive firms, significantly lowering the organic composition of capital, during the sharp recession of 1980–1982 and the wave of “mergers and acquisitions” in the 1980s. The resulting rise in profitability sparked new investment in fixed capital, including the introduction of new, more capital-intensive technology. The historic weakening of unions and other working-class organizations suppressed the rise of real wages and allowed capital to intensify the labor-process, allowing profits to remain high through the 1990s and early 2000s. The “neo-liberal boom” was, in fact, similar to the capitalist expansion of 1894 to 1914, marked by work intensification, relative wage-stagnation and “free market” policies in most capitalist states.

In sum, *What Was Neoliberalism?* displays Neil Davidson’s incredible breadth of knowledge and theoretical acumen. His analyses of the ideological origins and political evolution of neoliberalism are both original and insightful. Despite the weaknesses of his economic analysis, the book is a crucial contribution to the Marxist understanding of the recent history of capitalism and the roots of the current world political and economic crisis. It is essential readings for all of us who are seeking to respond to this crisis and build a working-class response to the continued capitalist offensive and rise of middle-class reaction.

NOTES

1. Neil Davidson, *What Was Neoliberalism? Studies in the Most Recent Phase of Capitalism, 1973–2008* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2023).
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3. Davidson argues that William Burroughs’ satire of politics in the 1950s “now seem[s] uncomfortably close to reality”: “The forms of democracy are scrupulously enforced on the Island. There is a Senate and Congress who carry out endless sessions discussing garbage disposal and outhouse inspections, the only two questions over which they have jurisdiction.”
4. Ashley Smith, “Trapped in the Democratic Party: The Left, Bidenomics, and Socialist Strategy,” *Tempest*, August 21, 2023. <https://www.tempestmag.org/2023/08/trapped-in-the-democratic-party/>
5. *On New Terrain: How Capital is Reshaping the Battleground of the Class War* (Haymarket Books, 2017), Parts I and II.
6. Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (Verso Books, 2015).
7. Robert Brenner and Mark Glick, “The Regulation Approach: Theory and History” *New Left Review* I/188 (July–August 1991); Anwar Shaikh, *Capitalism: Competition, Conflict, Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.724–740.
8. V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>; N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* (1915) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1917/imperial/>.
9. Michael Kidron, “A Permanent Arms Economy,” *International Socialism Journal* 1:28 (Spring 1967) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kidron/works/1967/xx/permarms.htm>; Chris Harman, *Explaining the Crisis: A Marxist Reappraisal* (Bookmarks, 1984), Ch. 3.
10. *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945–2005* (Verso Books, 2006).
11. “The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession,” in L. Panitch and C. Leys (eds.), *The New Imperial Challenge: Socialist Register 2004* (Monthly Review Press, 2003).
12. Shaikh, *Capitalism*, p. 726.
13. Shaikh, *Capitalism*, Part II.
14. Shaikh, *Capitalism*, p. 14.
15. We will leave aside the question of whether the Soviet Union and other similar societies were capitalist. See John Fantham and Moshe Machover, *The Century of the Unexpected: A New Analysis of Soviet Type Societies* (London: Big Flame Publications, 1979) for an alternative to critical Marxist theories of the Soviet Union as either state capitalist or some form of transitional society.
16. Ellen Meiksins, Wood, “The Separation of the ‘Economic’ from the ‘Political’ in Capitalism,” in *Democracy Against Capitalism* (Verso, 2016).
17. Joaquim Hirsch, “The State Apparatus and Social Reproduction: Elements of a Theory of the Capitalist State,” in J. Holloway and S. Picciotto (eds.), *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate* (Edward Arnold, 1978).
18. K. Moody, “Alex Callinicos on State and Capital,” *Against the Current* 52 (October 1994) <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc052/p3007/>, and “A Reply to Callinicos on the State and Capital” *Against the Current*, 56 (May–June 1995). <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc056/p2770/>
19. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975), Chapter 9; Paul Mattick, “Economics of War Production,” *American Socialist* (April 1959); Paul Mattick, “Arms and Capital,” *International Socialism Journal* 1:34 (Autumn 1968).
20. *The Economics of Military Spending: A Marxist Perspective* (Routledge, 2019).
21. Michael Roberts, *The Long Depression* (Haymarket Books, 2016), Chs. 1 and 4; Shaikh, “The First Great Depression of the 21st Century,” in L. Panitch, G. Albo and V. Chibber (eds.), *The Crisis This Time: Socialist Register 2011* (Monthly Review Press, 2010).

Early Criticism of the October Revolution

JOHN MAROT

SIMON PIRANI HAS COLLECTED AND edited five documents written between 1920 and 1922 by little known (even to Pirani) critics of the Communist Party and its policies. The collection is valuable—if only to show that the dissidents offered no reasonably realistic policy alternative.

Communist Dissidents in
Early Soviet Russia
TRANSLATED AND
INTRODUCED BY SIMON PIRANI
Troubador, 2023

Midway in this period, in March 1921, the Bolsheviks executed a great turn. The 10th Party Congress decreed an end to War Communism and the beginning of the New Economic Policy, a sea change in policy, opening a new chapter in post-October history. This is the key event that one must bear in mind to assess the larger significance of these five, largely hostile, interventions against Bolshevik leadership of the Communist Party—one written shortly before the NEP went into vigor; four written shortly after.

Unfortunately, Pirani does not do enough to make clear to the non-specialist reader what the transition from War Com-

munist to the NEP meant to millions of ordinary workers and, above all, to the peasantry, on the one hand, and what it meant to a pocketful of “communist dissidents,” chosen by Pirani, on the other. The changeover meant very different things to each. Acknowledging the distinction is vital to maintain a sense of proportion and historical perspective.

In a nutshell, the mass of the Russian people wholeheartedly welcomed the NEP. Responding somewhat belatedly to popular protest, the Bolsheviks demilitarized the economy, ended compulsory labor, abolished merciless requisitioning of grain from the peasantry restoring “free trade” between town and country, curbed the Cheka, and implemented a host of other popular measures. In sharp contrast, Pirani’s handpicked dissidents either opposed the new orientation, seeing it as a regressive restoration of “state capitalism,” or pined for a mysterious “Third Revolution” to transcend the October Revolution, or simply cried out in desperation.

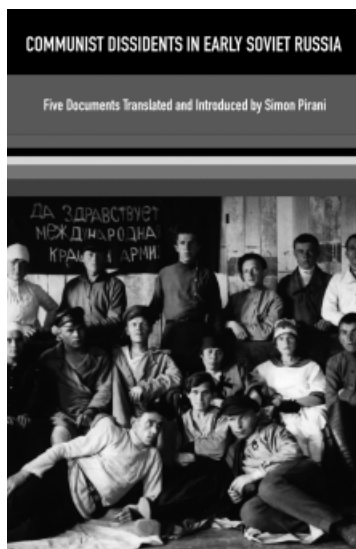
The nadir of the October Revolution’s domestic fortunes came in 1922. That year, famine carried off the last tranche of victims—nearly 10 million men, women, and children—arising from seven consecutive years of World War, Revolution, and Civil War. The following year was the great turn-

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around. Moscow and St. Petersburg, two-thirds of whose inhabitants had fled into the countryside, regained their pre-1914 populations. Workers went back to work, and peasants tilled the land largely without hindrance.

Soon, the “daily face” of NEP Bolshevism meant three square meals a day for millions, warm milk and clean diapers for hundreds of thousands of abandoned or parentless children, free literacy classes for the illiterate, and other improvements. Such were the benefits brought by the economic revival to most inhabitants of the former Tsarist Empire—modest benefits to be sure—but benefits all the same. But neither Pirani nor his chosen dissidents have much to say about the progressive dimension of NEP Russia, one that catered above all to the immediate material interests of the immediate producers.

Pirani concedes “communist dissidents” made “little impact” on the course of events. He explains this solely in terms of police repression by the Cheka. Certainly, there were many cases of surplus repression. But what more persuasively explains the dissidents’ lack of popular appeal, I would argue, was precisely the NEP’s popularity, together with the renewed support garnered by the Bolshevik leadership for launching it, not intimidation by the Cheka. Ordinary people looked favorably on the NEP because it went a long way to remove their well justified grievances. And so, it was difficult for any of Pirani’s chosen dissidents and *groupuscules* to gain traction and attract workers because their calls for reform or



revolution were not allied with a realistic policy alternative to the NEP. The dissidents didn’t see matters this way, of course.

The author of the first document, a certain Anton Vlasov, served as an officer in the Red Army—presumably a very low-level one since no historian has been able to identify who he was or what, if anything, he represented.

In an unpublished letter to the Russian Communist Party (RCP) leadership, Vlasov declared that the RCP had been “completely torn away from the masses,” a “sentiment,” Pirani affirms, “widespread among rank-and-file communists at the time.” “I have seen depravity among our responsible communist officials,” Vlasov wrote, “and I have seen the free-for-all they have created being encouraged by the Central Committee. I have seen how a petty-bourgeois lifestyle is completely predominant among domesticated communists.”

Vlasov went on to recite flagrant instances of wrongdoing by party officials, vilifying, denouncing, and mocking the perpetrators. In the end, Vlasov made a hail-Mary appeal to the “only real revolutionary” left to sort matters out—Lenin.

I appeal to the Central Committee of the RCP, as the leading body, and to you, dear comrade Lenin, to you, the only real revolutionary who lives in a spartan manner: think, help, sort out whoever needs sorting out. If you can’t do it yourself, tell us, we will help. Act quickly, before it’s too late. Winter will be here soon: the Army will run out of boots, of clothing, it will clear off. It will rise in revolt. Hurry, Il’ich!

Vasilii Paniushkin penned the next

document, "Declaration of the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party." Paniushkin served in the Civil War as special military commissar and member of the collegium of the Cheka.

His declaration addressed the 1,128 delegates attending meetings of the Moscow Soviet in May, 1922. According to Pirani, Paniushkin's "tiny" group—it counted fewer than 28 delegates—represented the "workers," the "ranks"; the rest were (all?) "bureaucrats" who, presumably, represented only themselves, the "tops."

Paniushkin denounced the party leadership for betraying the October Revolution. Transitioning to the NEP and decreeing a tax in kind on the peasantry (as opposed to forced requisitioning) and "freer trade" only benefitted "capitalists, landowners, and bourgeoisie" and nobody else. Indeed, the bourgeoisie was back in power and the workers' state was no longer a workers' state. And that was that.

Paniushkin ultimately returned to the Communist Party, holding responsible political or administrative offices in Stalin's terror-state until 1937. He died in 1960.

The next documents are "We Are Collectivists," author(s) unknown, and "Appeal of the Workers Truth" group. Pirani says both "strike a contrast with the others in content and style." Indeed they do because both take readers on a magical mystery tour, inspired by the visionary Alexander Bogdanov, theoretician of "proletarian culture."

Pirani, not quite sure about his Russian language skills for a proper English translation of Bogdanovite lexicon, called for assistance from a native speaker of Russian. He did not have to. To those who read Bogdanov for the first time, or have little familiarity with certain "philosophical" aspects of Marx's theory that Bogdanov hypostasized to create a theory of his own, the ex-Bolshevik remains very difficult to understand in any language.

Like Bogdanov himself, his aficionados opposed the October Revolution because the working class had not developed, prior to the revolution, a "proletarian culture" incubated in "proletarian universities" to make workers fitted to run the new, socialist, society. Owing to the historically premature Soviet seizure of power in 1917, it was inevitable that the "technical intelligentsia" should rule over a "state capitalist" society instead. This technical intelligentsia would unleash a "technological revolution," creating the material prerequisites for socialism. In the meantime, We Collectivists would organize in the Communist Party, clandestinely if necessary, to explain why state capitalism—the NEP—was an inevitable but progressive phase toward socialism. For all practical intents and purposes, Bogdanov's followers here supported the NEP, and it is unclear why Pirani thinks the collectivists wrote an "oppositional" document.

The Workers' Truth group chimed in with a similar diagnosis—flanked by a political conclusion opposite that of the collectivists. It was formed by a score or so Red Army veterans, including several who had been invited to take university courses in advanced Marxist theory.

Adopting a stringently "workerist" outlook, common to many sects and micro-sects of the time—and standard among rank-and-file "proletcultists"—the group peremptorily declared the Communist Party had "increasingly, irretrievably, lost its relationship ... with the proletariat"; the "chasm" dividing it from the working class was "getting ever deeper."

The Bolsheviks, they said, were now in the grip of the "technical organizing intelligentsia" and needlessly prolonging the very rule of a social element utterly alien to the working class. Only a new party, representing the proletariat and not the technical intelligentsia, could guarantee safe passage to socialism.

Pirani bookends his collection with a lengthy extract from Iosif Litvinov's diary. A Latvian Jew, Litvinov, too, was a Red Army veteran. He wrote in his diary while studying at the Institute of Red Professors in Moscow.

Disillusioned communists were committing suicide on a "daily basis" reads, disturbingly, the first entry, cited by Pirani. It is not known how widespread this phenomenon was—at least I have not come across any study of it. But one, I think, can reasonably argue that "Old Bolsheviks"—militants who had joined Lenin's partisans before 1917—were more likely to take their lives than recent recruits: The old-timers, numbering a few thousand, recognized how vast the chasm between the dream and the reality was, whereas, for late-comers, enchanting visions of the socialist Elysium were a subsidiary motive for revolutionary action. Food, shelter, the eight-hour day, and peace—pressing material necessities in 1917 and after—were more likely the prime motivation for hundreds of thousands to rally to the Bolsheviks.

In any event, Litvinov felt that the NEP had extinguished any hope for progress toward socialism. The "New Exploitation of the Proletariat" as some called it, was, in Pirani's words, "the bonfire of their hopes for changing society; at most, a betrayal." Nevertheless, Litvinov, contradicting Pirani, could declare in his July 10, 1922, diary entry,

The harvest will be terrific. I could travel to Crimea, to Yalta, for two months. The ruble has stabilized. Prices of foodstuffs are falling every day. Soviet power is solid as never before.

Finally, in his commentary, Pirani highlights Bolshevik "encroachments" on "soviet democracy," a major, perhaps exclusive theme in all his writings, where Pirani makes Lenin's partisans ultimately responsible for the victory of Stalinism.

No doubt, the Bolsheviks played fast

and loose with due process on many occasion. But soviet democracy, however limited, was for the working class, not the peasantry. The vehicle the peasantry used instead to regulate their daily affairs on the land was their centuries-old institution, the *mir*. Here, the peasants enjoyed their own form of democracy under the NEP, something most Marxists, Pirani included, do not acknowledge because they do not tie definite political forms to definite relations of property and class. As a consequence, they end up with a misleading, ahistorical conception of "democracy" that doubles as the solution to all political problems, no matter the context.

Pirani concludes,

Revolutions often raise hopes they cannot fulfill, and the documents in the collection are striking ... for the way that they react to the collision between the hopes of 1917 and the civil war, and the harsh economic and political facts of the NEP.

If taken as more than a literary flourish, Pirani's conclusion raises questions, these two at least: If the October Revolution *sic et simpliciter* could not "fulfill hopes," why put the onus of responsibility for cruelly deceived expectations on the Bolsheviks alone, giving lip service to objective constraints on the range of possible Bolshevik policies, as Pirani seems predisposed to do throughout his commentary, prejudicing the reader against "Leninism"? And if the dissident communists' "hopes" collided with the realities of the NEP—as they undoubtedly did—does a sincere, genuinely felt "reaction," whether couched in "scientific" terms or in the cries of tormented souls, constitute an adequate explanation for the collision? Or is something a bit more analytically coherent and empirically grounded required? Pirani's intervention raised these issues in my mind. If they were raised in other people's minds as well, Pirani will have accomplished his purpose—and mine too.

The Flat World and the Flat-Worlders

JOHN FEFFER

MCDONALD'S IS THE EPITOME OF globalization. More than 40,000 franchises around the world serve the same hamburgers and French fries to Spaniards, Congolese, and Malaysians. The "golden arches" are a powerful symbol of a common culture, based on U.S. eating habits, that has transformed global tastes. Americans can find familiar food in practically every city in the world, and today the citizens of nearly every country can participate in an identical eating experience.

McDonald's is an example of the "flat world" that journalist Thomas Friedman described in his 2005 bestseller.¹ The fast-food corporation took advantage of new rules around trade and investment to establish itself around the world, create a global supply chain that ensured a cookie-cutter product across national boundaries, and flood countries with advertising to secure market dominance.

But it turns out that the world is not uniformly flat.

Rooted Globalism: Arab-Latin American Business Elites and the Politics of Global Imaginations

KEVIN FUNK
Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 2022

McDonald's is not in every country.² Bhutan, for instance, has kept out the franchise in order to prioritize local cuisine. North Korea maintains an ideological resistance to Western fast-food restaurants (though not to fast food itself). Other countries are too poor or too engulfed by war to attract the interest of the megacorporation.

More interestingly, the menu of McDonald's changes according to locale.³ You can get a por-

ridge at the McDonald's in Malaysia that features chicken strips, fried shallots, and diced chilies. Indian franchises offer a vegetarian Big Mac with two corn-and-cheese patties studded with jalapeno peppers. And the French fries in Canada come in a *poutine* version with cheese curds and gravy.

These variations fall under the rubric of "glocalization," the concessions that globalized products make to local preferences. It's not just McDonald's. You can buy *oden*⁴ and other popular Japanese snacks at a 7-11 in Tokyo but not in Pittsburgh. In China, the furniture giant Ikea puts greater emphasis⁵ on the outfitting of balconies, which are prevalent in apartment buildings in that country. Car manufacturers put the steering wheel on one side or the other depending on the country, global computer manufacturers offer keyboards in a variety of alphabets, and global clothing manufacturers have to take into consideration the

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climate and sartorial tastes of the country where they're selling. The weave of the global economy warps to accommodate stubborn particularities.

The "flat world" that Thomas Friedman depicted in his book needs a cadre of "flat-worlders" to literally level the playing field, not to make it more equal but to render it more accessible to capital. This "Davos man"⁶ has no loyalty to a particular state but is instead committed to tearing down all obstacles to the greater mobility of trade and investment. "Davos man" is not likely to eat at McDonald's or buy his furniture from Ikea.

But the question remains: have such titans of globalism created a class of actors who no longer think in nation-state terms as they consciously advance a borderless world? Or does this business elite of bankers, entrepreneurs, and heads of parastatal enterprises retain an essentially national perspective that reflects their particular environment, like *oden* in the 7-11 in Tokyo?

In his new book, *Rooted Globalism*, political economist Kevin Funk seeks to answer this question in the context of a very specific case: the business elites of Arab ancestry in Latin America. This intriguing community, disproportionately represented in their countries' wealthy classes, straddles the regions of residence and origin. Considering the success of the community, this biculturalism seems almost like a superpower.

Many of the most prominent economic actors in Latin America are of Arab descent. The richest man in the region, Carlos Slim of Mexico,⁷ was born to Lebanese parents. As much as 10 percent of the business elite in Brazil is of Arab descent. In Venezuela, the former head of the oil ministry who resigned this year amid charges of massive corruption—Tareck El Aissaimi—is of Lebanese and Syrian extraction. Politically, too, this community has excelled. Leaders of Arab descent have presided over Argen-

tina, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. The paternal grandparents of the current president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, were Palestinian Christians.

Often facilitated by these success stories, commerce between Latin America and the Middle East has surged over the last few decades. By the end of the 2000s, for instance, trade between South America and the Middle East had tripled since the 1990s. Today, the Arab world has become a larger market than Western Europe for Brazil's agricultural exports. Wealthy elites in the Middle East awash in petrodollars and a well-positioned Latin American business elite that has ancestral roots in the region combine to make a powerful global connection.

This community, in other words, offers an unusual opportunity to answer the question of whether a cosmopolitan business elite views itself more in global terms or according to national reference points. Funk sets out to discover whether this particular set of business professionals is thoroughly globalized, merely "denationalized" in the sense of sweeping aside national loyalties without establishing a global identity, effectively glocalized in their straddling of the national and the international, or exclusively national in their perspective.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the transnational variations in something as simple as a McDonald's menu, Funk discovers in his research that the promoters of globalization take on many of the attributes of the countries where they live. These members of a global economic elite are, in other words, "rooted" even though they may share many of the same preferences (in music, food, movies) and ideological demands (fewer government regulations, lower taxes) with their counterparts in other countries.

As Funk explains "Even if business elites the world over purchase the same

newspapers, suits, cars, food, airline tickets, and kinds of music, we cannot necessarily presume that they have become a global capitalist class for itself at a precisely corresponding level.” He finds theoretical comradeship with the sociologist Saskia Sassen, who has similarly argued that global identities will necessarily be “dressed in the clothing of the national.”

Funk does in-depth interviews with several members of this Middle East-focused elite in Latin America: the founding leader of an Arab-Chilean business group, an Argentinian economist of Lebanese extraction who heads up a business association focused on Lebanon, a senior executive in an organization devoted to Arab-Brazilian trade. The vignettes drawn from these interviews are fascinating. They reveal that, for the most part, this elite doesn’t think like “Davos man” in that they are not consciously striving to achieve globalist goals. They retain local tastes, such as their loyalty to national soccer teams. They are going about their jobs in rather traditional ways, like market traders from centuries ago, except that they fly business class rather than sail on merchant ships.

In search of a more globalized perspective, Funk turns to international ad campaigns sponsored by multinational companies like Emirate Airlines, HSBC, and the Brazilian firm Itau. Here, too, there is much rhetoric connected to a flat world of no borders (that allow airline passengers to roam the world), of limitless tomorrows (where everyone is connected to everyone), and unbounded intercultural exchange (regardless of language and other barriers).

But even in these ads, certain markers indicate the extent to which brands remain grounded in locales. A woman skateboarder wears a headscarf; an ad emphasizes the importance of “local knowledge”; a famous Brazilian actress proclaims herself a “global Latin American” who is simultaneously

known around the world and rooted in her region (and by extension her country as well).

Funk concludes from these interviews and this survey of advertising campaigns that contrary “to still-prominent discourses of inevitability, teleology, and the ‘end of history,’ the global capitalist discursive utopia of a fully borderless economy, dominated by a global capitalist class in itself and for itself, has only been partially realized in practice. It is not a *fait accompli*. Rather, it is an ideological project advanced through corporate advertisements and other means.”

Or, as he puts it not once but twice in his book, “Reports of the death of place-based imaginaries thus appear to be greatly exaggerated.”

These arguments take place against the backdrop of a three-way struggle among political positions on globalization. Liberals, particularly of the neoliberal variety, have generally supported market-based solutions at the global level and thus have been the closest to achieving the “Davos man” ideal. The left, meanwhile, has challenged globalization as a vehicle of corporate empowerment and the enrichment of the one percent. The right, increasingly, has attacked globalization as well but largely because it has eroded national sovereignty.

All three positions have their nuances. Neoliberals claim to adhere to universal values like the rule of law and human rights that often undercut their commitment to unregulated market activity. The left supports some aspects of globalization, like the free flow of information, culture, and people.

And the populist right, as Funk points out, is not against globalization *per se* but only the conditions under which it flourishes. Populists like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Donald Trump in the United States critique globalization much as they attack government: as a set of administra-

tive obstacles and threats. They remain wedded to “free markets” but want specific forms of regulation to “encase” the market at a national and global level with only the barest commitment to universal values like human rights. They are globalists, to be sure, and in the case of both Trump and Bolsonaro, have addressed the global powerbrokers at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Although they lambaste “Davos men” as convenient political targets, Trump and Bolsonaro are ultimately glocalists who combine global avarice with local politicking.

Funk’s research is intriguing and his writing fluid. But it’s hard not to get the feeling that he chose interview subjects that were sure to confirm his thesis. Business leaders who live in their country of birth—or in a couple cases, their adopted country—are certainly more likely to be dressed in the clothing of the nation, however global their affiliations. They are “rooted” because they have not strayed far from their roots, whether adopted or otherwise.

But what if Funk had interviewed an Argentinian of Arab descent working for the IMF in New York? Or a Brazilian of Lebanese extraction working for a multinational corporation in Doha? Or even a Chilean Palestinian heading up the OECD’s National Contact Point in Santiago? Perhaps all three would have answered his questions about how they think about their jobs in the same “glocalized” manner as the subjects in his book. But the “Davos man,” if he or she truly exists, is more likely to be found in environments that are more denationalized than the ones where Funk went searching for his interviewees.

Or perhaps “Davos man” doesn’t exist because Davos does not yet have a set of accompanying political institutions.

The first class of modern globalizers emerged within the context of strong na-

tion-states in the nineteenth century. They were acting on behalf of empires and global powers when they built firms, banks, and insurance companies. A class that is truly denationalized and operating on behalf of global aims would likely accompany the creation of some form of global government devoted to creating a single market, something like the European Union on a global scale. A new consciousness requires new material conditions, and these “globalized” conditions have yet to take root. Funk’s search for such a global class today is akin to attempting to find monopoly capitalists in the Renaissance before the rise of modern nation-states.

Still, Funk’s conclusions are sound. Political economists should indeed undertake more analyses of corporate executives and those who prowl the centers of global power. Equally important, the left should not retreat into a parochial populism out of disgust with globalization. Rather, the left must seek out a new kind of internationalism that produces not a flat world, but a world of interesting and very particular nooks and crannies that simultaneously strives to adhere to agreed-upon universal values.

As Funk writes in his conclusion, “If the left chooses to fan nationalist flames, it will almost certainly get burned—as well as find itself straying from core principles relating to universal and global emancipation.” Like McDonald’s and the business elite that Funk interviewed, the left must be global to a degree. Instead of uniform food products or fewer barriers to trade and investment, the left should be fighting for universal principles of equity and democracy. At the same time, however, the left must aim for a rooted cosmopolitanism that pays homage to the particularities of place, whether it’s a taste for *oden*, a preference for larger balconies, or the specific political demands of the communities where progressives are

organizing.

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The Surveillance State and the Color Line

JOHN CLARKE

A GLOBAL SYSTEM OF DOMINATION and economic exploitation must develop strategies and tactics. Its political leaders need information and analysis to do so. Given the interests they serve, we shouldn’t be surprised to find that the intelligence agencies that provide these resources aren’t exactly impartial seekers of the truth.

Oliver Kearns states at the outset of *The*

The Covert Colour Line: The Racialised Politics of Western State Intelligence
OLIVER KEARNS
Pluto Press, 2023

Covert Colour Line, his new book published by Pluto Press, that “(t)he point of this book is to demonstrate that the intellectual tools used by practitioners to measure good or bad intelligence are most certainly biased, have been shaped by U.S. and British imperial history, and prevent us from understanding how intelligence makes global inequalities

and state violence appear plausible and legitimate” (1).

To explore these biases, Kearns feels it necessary to “examine what kind of social ideas were reflected in intelligence assessments, and how those assessments might then have made certain policies seem pos-

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sible to policy-makers" (13). Modern British and U.S. intelligence agencies developed in the context of the break-up of the old empires and intelligence analysis played the role of "an emergency intellectual response to decolonization, where they provided policy-makers with ideas and arguments about what was happening in the world and how they could respond to it" (16).

As he considers the role of intelligence agencies, Kearns argues that the assumptions that have guided them have been fundamentally racist all along. Their perspective always "treats people beyond the West's imagined borders as being unable to think and act well in world affairs due to their inferior cultures." Intelligence analysts' "sense of unfamiliar forms of governance" assumes that "this difference reflects others' lack of properly-functioning state structures, ones which the West is presumed to have" (21).

The Role of Intelligence

The first chapter provides "a sketch of an intellectual biography of Anglosphere intelligence during decolonization" (35). The assumption was that "an Anglo-American presence in the Middle East benefited 'political stability' in the region" (35-6). Anti-colonial politics and nationalist sentiment were seen as disrupting an equilibrium that flowed from the self-contained politics of the region.

This notion of a destabilizing "nationalism (that) was here to stay...laid a foundation for understanding post-colonial governments and their interactions with the Anglosphere" (36). In the post-war context, moreover, an agenda of U.S. and British regional domination had to contend with the role of the Soviet Union; suitable interpretations of Soviet society and its leadership were pressed into service.

The same concepts of irrationality and inferiority that would consistently be applied to political leaderships in the Global South were directed at the Soviet political

structure, with their "immense Asiatic element" and "an oriental regard for the maintenance of their dignity" (39) that might render them volatile and unpredictable for those in Washington and London, who supposedly functioned at the level of fair-minded rationality.

In this challenging period, intelligence agencies could only think and function within a framework that accepted the agenda of domination they served. They asked themselves "how, if at all possible, could these movements for self-determination be satisfied or controlled while maintaining U.S./British political command, without the cost outweighing these movements' potential damage?" It was simply inconceivable that nationalist forces were inevitable without "a reduction in the presence and political power of a receding empire and an ascendant superpower" (43).

Kearns shows how intelligence agencies decided that those challenging colonialism were motivated by "a deep-seated racial hostility" and resentment at "white superiority" that led them to overlook the reality "(t)hat backwardness, that lack of political capacity, means that anti-colonialism's success against empire can only produce 'a political vacuum' in the region which the Soviet Union might enter into" (48).

In the second chapter, we are introduced to the notion of "the mirror-image problem" (67). In 1958, a senior CIA staff officer pondered "how to think your way into the mind of people outside the West" (68). Though CIA recruits conformed to "American moral standards, social mores, and conventionalities of behavior," they needed to "endure the discomfort" involved in properly understanding "backward and unwesternised people throughout the world" (68). Analysts developed "a confident description of other populations' internal qualities: their obtuseness, their secrecy, and their irrationality" (70). They believed "that Westerners are so

civilized and reasonable in global affairs that they often cannot imagine a different strategic outlook, one that is irrational and unreasonable." Taking this different cultural and racial level properly into account, it was necessary to avoid "the mirror-image fallacy" (70).

Kearns shows how this view played out in various settings where liberation struggles were being confronted. In 1968, for instance, British intelligence operatives warned against "emotional nationalism, extremism and arrogance, 'latent' in the Middle East." Interestingly, "British objectives ... are all stated explicitly—oil investment benefits, economic power via sterling, military bases—but are denied a place in analysts' account of what helps or hampers 'stability' in the Gulf" (85).

In the 1970s, CIA consultant Richard Pipes went further in exploring the dangers of the mirror image approach. He argued that the concept had to be upheld in the face of liberal attempts to deny the "meaningful differences among human beings, whether genetic, ethnic, racial, or other" that made global inequality inevitable (89). Kearns characterizes the intellectual and political functions of this form of racist rationalization with the observation that "(g)oing on about the danger of mirroring is a way of reasserting racial belonging: some people have shared objectivity, whereas those who live over there cannot surpass their cultural limits" (98).

Constructing an Enemy

The third chapter explores how intelligence assessments of Saddam Hussein developed, as the imperialist powers worked to contain and eventually defeat him. For all the time and effort expended on this undertaking, Kearns points out that "(w)hen it comes to intelligence, it seems, only certain lessons are allowed to be learned" (104). In Iraq, a "narrative of intelligence failure as a failure to measure the true awesome power of de-

ceptive Middle Eastern regimes found its apotheosis in the figure of Saddam" (104). An evaluation of Saddam developed that was in line with the needs of imperialist aggression and domination. A picture was created of "psychological and cultural irrationality" justifying the conclusion that "a man like him was inherently incapable of reading international relations intelligently in the way that Anglosphere analysts could" (106). A view of Saddam was constructed that "by the early 2000s, hemmed analysts into the judgement that political brokerage with Iraq's head of state was impossible and that force was a valid, indeed the only viable, policy towards him" (106). This image of the Iraqi ruler as volatile and treacherous developed in a cultural and racial context. "Race—specifically, an assumption of engrained limits to Ba'athist clear thinking and emotional control—lies as the unspoken foundation for this distinction between Iraq and Anglosphere politics" (113).

When Kuwait was invaded in 1990, failure to foresee this was presented in terms of an underestimation of Saddam Hussein's tendency to deviate from the standards of Western decency and fair dealing. Shortly before coalition forces began bombing Iraqi troops, "Jerrold Post, the former director and founder of the CIA's own psychological-personality center, painted a picture of Saddam as a "malignant narcissist with dreams of historical grandeur" (127).

Even a readiness to compromise on Saddam's part couldn't win him any reprieve:

The issue, then, is not whether Saddam now complies with coalition demands; it is that he is by definition dishonourable in his objective of disrupting the Anglosphere's transparent, honest policing of the Middle East. How he acts in the future, including backing down, cannot change this assessment of his character and its essential threat (131-32).

British intelligence was clear that Saddam Hussein must be denied any oppor-

tunity to compromise and it was “essential to deny him any face-savers or diplomatic prizes.” As Margaret Thatcher put it, Saddam had “to face his people as a beaten leader” (133). Military intervention was justified in terms of containing the racialized concept of the dangerous despot.

In the fourth chapter, Kearns looks at the Chilcot Inquiry, established in 2009 at the behest of Tony Blair. In his view, “(i)t is worth paying attention when former spies talk about how they themselves understand their role in the world” (140).

False claims as to the weapons of mass destruction at Saddam’s disposal were entirely linked to the intelligence view of the Iraqi leader as a volatile and treacherous foe. Minutes of a meeting of British analysts tell us that “(r)eaders of the paper needed to be reminded of Saddam’s unpredictability, and of the fact that his thought processes did not work in a recognizably Western, rational and logical way” (156).

Kearns solidifies his case that intelligence agencies are suppliers of the distorted notions that justify an agenda of domination. The responsibility for any failure to properly assess Saddam’s destructive capacities was deftly turned back on him and his rule. To the British intelligence operative, “this was a highly autocratic state, where almost everybody revolved around the person, the thinking, the behavior and whims of the leader.” This meant “what was going on in his mind [...] was critical, and that was very difficult to fathom” (163). Everything the analysts fed to “British decision-makers” was crafted to bolster “pre-conceptions about Saddam’s inherent threat (and) the wisdom of a coalition invasion in terms of producing ‘stability’ in the Middle East” (176).

Libyan Redux

In the final chapter, Kearns decides that “(a) good place to look after Saddam’s

downfall for the continuing role of intelligence’s post-colonial racial thinking is in the 2011 Libyan intervention” (177). As with Saddam, whether Muammar Gaddafi took a confrontational or more conciliatory approach, he was doomed to be assessed in a damning light. Thus, despite his efforts to improve relations with Western governments, the “U.S. embassy in Tripoli...stuck to the intelligence script for the Arab world, characterizing Gaddafi as incoherent and lacking real politics, and Libyans themselves as easily manipulated and ignorant” (178). Kearns shows how “Gaddafi was being analyzed through an anti-mirroring logic, whereby his behavior and policy actions stemmed from something radically different to professed Anglosphere norms of geopolitics and rationality.” Thus, “(w)hen the 2011 uprising began, the Libyan leader’s intentions were assessed through this historical analysis” (180).

The NATO intervention that so shattered Libya was justified (however dishonestly) on the grounds of the need to save Libyans from the repressive bloodbath that would otherwise be unleashed by Gaddafi. Intelligence assessments of the Libyan leader were pressed into service to this end. Jerrold Post, of the CIA’s personality analysis center, captured this view of Gaddafi starkly, attributing to him “‘a borderline personality’ that ‘swings from intense anger to euphoria’ and reacts to pressure by clinging to distorted beliefs” (182). As he moves to a conclusion, Kearns points out that “(c)ritical debate over what to do about intelligence nearly always rests on the assumption that agencies’ danger lies in their autonomous excess. They have grown too large; they do things far beyond their intended function—they are out of control” (197).

However, for Kearns, even a drastic reorganization of the intelligence role doesn’t get to the heart of the matter. He asserts that “(i)ntelligence analysis has provided

policy-makers with a way of understanding the revolutionary changes of the post-war, post-colonial world in a way that preserved the legitimacy of the few states that still dominated the rest" (198). With a distorted and deluded "combination of political focus and racial assumptions, geopolitics started to look like it needed the Anglosphere to remain supreme, in order to secure something called stability. Analysis made certain ways of holding on to supremacy seem possible, and acceptable" (198).

For Kearns, the real debate around intelligence failure isn't shaped by this or that missed development or factual inaccuracy, but rather by the need to supply those in power with a view of international developments that will justify and enable their agenda of domination. This means that "(d)issenting from Anglosphere foreign policy aims means asking what role intelligence analysis plays in allowing statespersons to think that those aims are possible and justifiable" (199).

Kearns ends the book with the well supported contention that "(t)he answer is challenging the wider shared political assumptions that undergird agencies' analysis, which ultimately means challenging the right of some states to retain their inherited advantage and to use it to dictate the destinies of others" (203).

With *The Covert Colour Line*, Kearns provides an enormously well informed and meticulously researched look at the role of Western intelligence agencies. The impacts of their ugly trade are considered, over a period stretching from the post-war years, through the war on terror and up to present intensification of global rivalry.

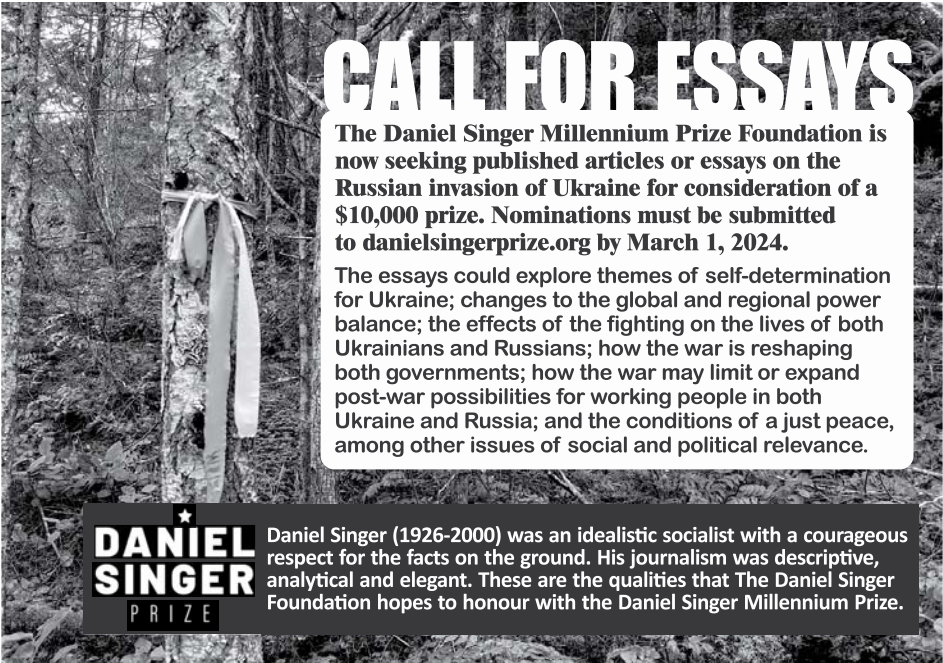
Kearns argues very convincingly that the interests of U.S.-led Western imperialism are furthered by the selective analysis

that intelligence agencies dutifully provide. The oppressive world order they defend is written out of the picture and resistance to it is constructed as a racialized resentment in the hearts of those who are incapable of attaining Western standards of sensible and civilized conduct.

In reading this book, it struck me that the false view that intelligence agencies have constructed is part of something much bigger and more fundamental. Just as an honest and accurate picture of the relationship between the West and the countries it dominates would be the ultimate "intelligence failure," so too any exploitative social order can only accept partial truth and comforting falsehood.

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukács argued that "(a)t this point bourgeois thought must come up against an insuperable obstacle, for its starting-point and its goal are always, if not always consciously, an apologia for the existing order of things or at least the proof of their immutability." The delusions of intelligence agencies are ultimately those of the social and economic systems they serve. Coming at things from the opposite end, Malcolm X told a crowd in Harlem in 1964 that "truth is on the side of the oppressed." If an accurate understanding of capitalism and imperialism is neither useful nor possible for those who seek to defend and justify those systems, it is most certainly in the interests of those who challenge them.

Kearns has undertaken a painstaking and diligent study of the role of U.S. and British intelligence agencies, but he could only reach the conclusions he did from an oppositional point of view. On that basis, he's written a very valuable book for those who can handle the truth.



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The Daniel Singer Millennium Prize Foundation is now seeking published articles or essays on the Russian invasion of Ukraine for consideration of a \$10,000 prize. Nominations must be submitted to danielsingerprize.org by March 1, 2024.

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CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE



Hind Khoudary, Motaz Azaiza, Plestia Alaqad, and Bisan Owda are four of the many Palestinian reporters and photojournalists risking their lives to report on the dire conditions in Gaza. At least 63 journalists have been killed as of December 2023. Hind Khoudary's home was destroyed, friends killed, and her family separated. Plestia Alaqad decided wearing her Press vest and helmet was too dangerous, and soon after, temporarily left Gaza because her reporting was endangering her family. Bisan Owda, 25, said, "I no longer have any hope of survival."

November: "I'm Bisan Owda and I'm escaping South, Thousands are walking for three or four hours. Many places are bombed. Even the road around us is being bombed during our walking... I don't have any place to go. I'm going to the unknown. Nowhere to go. Nowhere."

Hind Khoudary: "For the past 28 days I've been exposed to horrifying scenes that have been breaking my heart." "Can you imagine there are people still under the rubble. 24 family members under this rubble." "Last night was a deadly night. It's heartbreaking." "My colleagues and I are literally homeless right now. We don't have any place to work... We've been cut off from electricity and Internet." On the deaths: "No, we are not used to it. Every single time it feels like it's the first time." Her sign-off: "This may be the last."

Plestia Alaqad: "Since I was seven years old I witnessed the brutal killing of my own people and what for— because they are Palestinian civilians. Today is my birthday and I turn 22. All I wish for is to have some joy, all I wish for is Palestine to be free." "How many Palestinians are supposed to die for this to end?"

Motaz Azaiza: "Hi, I'm Motaz. No one is safe... No place in Gaza is safe. I'm asking you all, as humans, to act and protest, to stop this genocide, this killing." "Every day hundreds of Palestinians are getting killed in Gaza and also the West Bank...I hope this is not my last video."