

79

Neofascism, Imperialism, War, and Revolution in
the Middle East ■ An Interview with Gilbert Achcar

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TOWARD FASCISM?

Dan La Botz ■ [Authoritarianism and Resistance](#)

Robert Francis ■ [ICE Was Built for This](#)

Samuel Farber ■ [Reflections on Arbitrariness](#)

Science and Politics

Attacks on Science: Is There an Underlying Logic? ■ [Sam Friedman](#)
Climate “Post-Apocalypse” and the Utopian Imperative ■ [Brian Tokar](#)
A Leftist Alternative to Artificial Intelligence ■ [Rezgar Akrawi](#)

THIRD CAMP SOCIALISM

Julius Falk (Jacobson) ■ [Capitalism’s Threat to Democracy \(1953\)](#)
Christopher Ford ■ [Lev Yurkevych’s Anti-Colonial Marxism](#)
Lev Yurkevych ■ [Ukraine and the War \(1916\)](#)

Marxist Theory and History

Marx’s Ethics ■ [Vanessa Wills](#)
Marx on Communal Villages as Loci of Revolution ■ [Kevin Anderson](#)
An Historical Analysis of Three-Way Fights ■ [Javier Sethness](#)

REVIEW ESSAYS

[Alan Wald](#) ■ [Red Like Me: Marx in America](#)
[Paul Messersmith Glavin](#) ■ [Saito’s Degrowth Communism](#)

REVIEWS

■ [Frieda Afary](#) on Holmstrom’s Marxist-Feminism ■ [Peter Drucker](#) on Sears’ Queer Marxism
■ [Judy Cox](#) on Camfield’s Red Flag ■ [Stephen R. Shalom](#) on Bello’s Memoir
■ [Sean K. Isaacs](#) on Jaffe on Grief

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 TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITORS	1
------------------------	---

TOWARD FASCISM?

DESCENDING INTO AUTHORITARIANISM. RESISTING. BUT NOT ENOUGH	3
Dan La Botz	

ICE WAS BUILT FOR THIS: HOW TRUMP TURNED IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT INTO POLITICAL REPRESSION	7
Robert Francis	

REFLECTIONS ON ARBITRARINESS.....	13
Samuel Farber	

SCIENCE AND POLITICS

ATTACKS ON SCIENCE: IS THERE AN UNDERLYING LOGIC	21
Sam Friedman	

CLIMATE “POST-APOCALYPSE” AND THE UTOPIAN IMPERATIVE	30
Brian Tokar	

A LEFTIST ALTERNATIVE TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	41
Rezgar Akrawi	

THIRD CAMP SOCIALISM

NEOFASCISM, IMPERIALISM, WAR, AND REVOLUTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: AN INTERVIEW WITH GILBERT ACHCAR.....	49
Rodrigo Utrera	

INTRODUCTION TO “CAPITALISM’S THREAT TO DEMOCRACY (1953).....	60
Kent Worcester	

CAPITALISM’S THREAT TO DEMOCRACY (1953)	61
Julius Falk (Jacobson)	

UKRAINE: BETWEEN EMPIRE AND REVOLUTION—LEV YURKEVYCH’S ANTI-COLONIAL MARXISM	66
Christopher Ford	

UKRAINE AND THE WAR (1916, FIRST TIME IN ENGLISH)	78
Lev Yurkevych	

(contents continued)

MARXISM: HISTORY AND THEORY

MARX'S ETHICS: AN INTERVIEW WITH VANESSA WILLS	97
Phil Gasper	
COMMUNAL VILLAGES AS LOCI OF REVOLUTION, IN RUSSIA AND BEYOND ...	104
Kevin Anderson	
AN ANALYSIS OF THREE-WAY FIGHTS	114
Javier Sethness	

REVIEW ESSAYS

RED LIKE ME	123
Alan Wald	
Rev. of Hartman, <i>Karl Marx in America</i>	
ACTIVATING THE EMERGENCY BRAKE: SAITO'S DEGROWTH COMMUNISM	132
Paul Messersmith-Glavin	

REVIEWS

WHAT IS MARXIST-FEMINISM?	140
Frieda Afary	
Rev. of Holmstrom, <i>From a Marxist Feminist Point of View</i>	
A QUEER CLASSICAL MARXISM	143
Peter Drucker	
Rev. of Sears, <i>Eros and Alienation</i>	
"THROWING OUT THE BABY"	147
Judy Cox	
Rev. of Camfield, <i>Red Flags: A Reckoning with Communism for the Future of the Left</i>	
ON THE BARRICADES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE	150
Stephen R. Shalom	
Rev. of Bello, <i>Global Battlefields</i>	
TIME TO GRIEVE, TIME TO ACT	153
Sean K. Isaacs	
Rev. of Jaffe, <i>From the Ashes</i>	

From the Editors

SINCE DONALD TRUMP, PROJECT 2025, and the Republican Party took control of the U.S. government six months ago, we have faced war abroad and authoritarianism and repression at home. Trump has given the U.S. government's full support to Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, where the population is being starved to death and massacred.

When Israel decided to make war on Iran, in violation of the U.N. Charter, Trump approved and then joined in without consulting Congress, in violation of the U.S. Constitution. Trump has said he wants to take back the Panama Canal, acquire Greenland, and even make Canada into an American state. This is a return to the imperialism of the late nineteenth century.

The implementation of Project 2025's policies via executive orders constitutes a relentless attack on democratic institutions, on immigrants, and on the social and economic infrastructure that supports the majority of Americans. Trump put Elon Musk in charge of a hastily created Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) that closed entire government agencies and fired hundreds of thousands of federal workers, ignoring both their civil service protections and their labor unions. He has attacked science, public health, education, the environment, and gender, reproductive, civil, and human rights. As we write, Trump is pushing what he calls his "big beautiful bill" through Congress, a law that would increase tax breaks for the rich while cutting money for Medicare, which funds health-care for low-income and disabled people, and for food stamps. These are cuts that

will lead to hunger, sickness, and to death for an estimated fifty thousand people each year, according to experts.

Trump has promised to round-up and deport millions of undocumented immigrants. Over 200,000 have been deported so far. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have been conducting raids on neighborhoods, workplaces, churches, and schools. They have arrested children as young as six years old and separated parents from their children. They have kidnapped people off the streets and deported them without a hearing, some to Guantanamo, some to a Salvadoran prison, and now some to South Sudan. Students with visas, starting with Mahmoud Khalil, have been detained and targeted for deportation for their opposition to Israeli policy.

Millions of people have responded with a series of local and national demonstrations, one of which, No Kings Day on June 14 was the largest social protest on a single day in U.S. history.

On June 25, Zohran Mamdani, a Muslim immigrant and a democratic socialist, won the Democratic Party primary for New York City's mayoralty. He campaigned on the promise of taxing the rich to pay for a rent freeze and free buses, and he was not afraid to denounce Israel's war on Palestinians. He could win the general election, but the backlash against him by Wall Street will make it hard. The billionaires will bankroll and try to unite the anti-Mamdani forces. A Mamdani victory would provide the Democratic Party with a different model, one that the party will most likely reject.

In this issue, we address several current

themes, while exploring socialist traditions and analyses.

Three articles look at the descent toward authoritarianism in the United States. Dan La Botz provides an overview of Trump's program and policies and the resistance that has sprung up in opposition. Robert Francis addresses the horrors being perpetrated by ICE, arguing that their repressive behavior is a feature, not a bug. Samuel Farber considers arbitrariness more generally, one of the key characteristics of the Trump regime.

In a section on "Science and Politics," Sam Friedman asks whether the sustained attack on science is the result of an intentional plan. Brian Tokar looks at the dangers and potentials being unleashed by the environmental crisis. And Rezgar Akrawi puts forward a leftist alternative to artificial intelligence.

New Politics has always promoted Third Camp Socialism. In his interview with Rodrigo Utrera, Gilbert Achcar discusses political developments in the Middle East from a perspective that refuses to align with either U.S. imperialism or its enemies. We reprint a 1953 article by Julius Jacobson, one of the founding editors of this journal, introduced by Kent Worcester, co-editor of a new volume of writings by Julius and Phyllis Jacobson on Third Camp Socialism. Jacobson argues that the key characteristic of socialism is not control over the means of production, but democracy. Lev Yurkevych was a Ukrainian socialist from more than a century ago who emphasized the mutual need for socialism and self-determination of peoples. We publish here for the first time an English translation of his timely 1916 pamphlet "Ukraine and the War." Christopher Ford, who has annotated the Yurkevych text, also offers an extensive background essay on its importance.

Three articles make up a special section on Marxism: History and Theory. Some on

the left dismiss ethics as a bourgeois defect. Vanessa Wills, however, in her interview with Phil Gasper insists that Marxism has an important ethical core. Kevin Anderson looks at the late Marx for an appreciation of the revolutionary potential of the communal village. In contrast, Javier Sethness argues that anarchism has been more progressive and more consistent with human emancipation than what he sees as Marxism's authoritarian prescriptions.

We publish two review essays in this issue. In one, Alan Wald takes up Andrew Hartman's *Karl Marx in America*, to argue that it is "in Marxist critiques of Marxism that one can find the most thought-provoking avenues for possible explanations and guidance." As an example, Paul Glavin-Messersmith examines the analysis by Kohel Saito of a degrowth Marxism.

The issue also includes five shorter reviews. Frieda Afary evaluates Nancy Holmstrom's collection of her writings on Marxist-feminism. Peter Drucker discusses Alan Sears's integration of Queer studies with classical Marxism. Judy Cox reviews David Camfield's history of anti-Stalinist Marxism. Stephen R. Shalom appraises the memoir of one of the Global South's leading intellectual/activists, Walden Bello. And Sean K. Isaacs grapples with Sarah Jaffe's discussion of our need for grief.

The United States has an increasingly authoritarian federal government, but there is also a broad network of groups and organizations in opposition. We can stop Trump, protect working people, defend immigrants, women, gender non-binary, and people of color. We can speak out on Israel's war on Palestine, Russia's war on Ukraine, the war between U.S./Israel and Iran, while we raise the need for socialism.

When this issue of *New Politics* reaches you, we hope we are in the midst of a summer of protests and mobilizations. We will be part of the resistance.

We Are Descending into Authoritarianism. And We Are Resisting. But Not Enough

DAN LA BOTZ

WE ARE BEING PUSHED AND we are sliding toward an authoritarian state. We now live in a country where many democratic institutions, including the courts, have been seriously weakened, civil society organizations have been deeply compromised, and our civil liberties are being undermined. The United States has never been a model democracy, far from it, especially for people of color. But during the first five months of Donald Trump's second term as president things began to change fundamentally as he attacked the media, universities, science, medicine and public health, judges and lawyers, public employees and their unions, and above all immigrants, taken from workplaces or even schools, arrested and deported. Agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have arrested and detained Democratic Party officials, including a U.S. Senator and a New York City Comptroller who was also a mayoral candidate. He established new travel bans for Middle Eastern and African countries, while welcoming white South Africans as victims of "genocide." There were lawsuits and when Trump lost, he delayed complying and even

ignored the courts, including the Supreme Court. And then, gradually—as Masha Gessen put it—normalization; that is, it all began to become routine for us. But in truth, nothing is normal now.

We were aware for months that our rights and our democracy were being eroded, we protested and we lived with it, but gradually many of us recognized that everything was different. We no longer live in the same country to which as native-born people or immigrants we had become accustomed, a country that, whatever its many problems, was not an authoritarian regime. People are becoming aware of this new reality at different moments. For some it came when they saw that immigrant students were being kidnapped off the streets by men in masks who didn't identify themselves, stuffed into unmarked cars, and sent to camps for deportation. For others it was the site of immigrants who had been sent to a notorious prison in El Salvador or South Sudan, without due process, no hearing or trial, just snatched up and flown away.

The turning point for many, the flash of recognition, from high government officials, to reporters, and to ordinary people, came on June 7 when Trump illegally federalized and deployed the California National Guard to Los Angeles (L.A.) without an invitation from Governor Gavin Newsom

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or L.A. Mayor Karen Bass. Illegally deployed them because there was neither an invasion nor an insurrection as required by law to justify their mobilization. Soldiers on the streets of an American city are being used to suppress protestors.

Trump initially sent to L.A. 2,000 soldiers, but within a couple of days he mobilized another 2,000, and also sent in 700 Marines. He invoked Title 10 of the U.S. Code, which permits the president to send in federal troops if there “is a rebellion or danger of rebellion against the authority of the Government of the United States” or when “the President is unable with the regular forces to execute the laws of the United States.” But there was no rebellion nor was there the danger of one. The deployment of the Marines is a violation of the Posse Comitatus Act that forbids using troops for domestic policing. Trump doesn’t care. As he said, “We’re going to have troops everywhere.”

Trump has been referring to protestors as “violent, insurrectionist mobs” and “paid insurrectionists,” clearly concocting an argument to justify the invocation of the Insurrection Act. In any case, Trump doesn’t really worry about legal niceties. The Insurrection Act could lead to a nation under martial law. We would then live in a full-blown police state.

At the same time that U.S. troops were intimidating the people of Los Angeles, Trump held a military parade to celebrate the 250th birthday of the U.S. Army—and, by coincidence, his birthday. Marching past the White House were 6,700 soldiers, dozens of M1A2 Abrams tanks and other military vehicles; helicopter gunships flew overhead, and descending from the sky were the Golden Knights Parachute Team who presented the president with a flag. Such parades usually celebrate the end of a war, in this case, they celebrated the beginning of one, against us.

The lack of humanity, the absence of compassion at home, has been paralleled by a similar policy abroad. Trump’s new imperial foreign policy, calls for the United States to take over and rule Panama, Greenland, and Canada, and he has suggested it might also take over Gaza when the Palestinians are removed and turn it into a resort. He has aligned the United States with the dictator Vladimir Putin of Russia against Ukraine, and has supported Israel’s genocide in Gaza and its campaigns against Hezbollah in Lebanon, against the Houthis in Yemen, and its bombing of Syria. Now he has joined Israel’s war on Iran raising the danger of a wider regional conflagration. He has also launched a tariff and trade war against Canada and Mexico, against Western Europe, and against China and Vietnam and other nations of Southeast Asia. The United States has always been an imperialist nation, but under Trump there is no pretense of advancing democracy and human rights or bettering peoples’ lives. The shutting down of USAID, once part of U.S. soft power, will lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands or even millions from disease and hunger. He is competing against China for world domination. Our present is war of conquest and genocide, our future could be world war or nuclear war.

Clearly, we are in a new period in America, living under a populist, right-wing, authoritarian president. One has to wonder if in Los Angeles he is practicing, preparing the ground for a national imposition of military power over the states, especially the Democratic Party-led states with sanctuary laws that forbid state police from cooperating with ICE. We have to ask ourselves whether Trump is preparing what in Latin America is called an “*autogolpe*” or “self-coup,” that is, maintaining presidential power while replacing a liberal democratic state with a dictatorship.

At the moment, depending upon the

poll one reads, Trump has the support of between 40 percent and a half of all Americans, among them tens of thousands of members of armed militia groups like the Three Percenters and many others, and we have to wonder what happens if he also mobilizes them. Are these the first steps in the imposition of a fascist regime? Do we see in his militarization of Los Angeles the suggestion of a coming civil war, geographically between the coasts, on the one hand, and the Midwest and South, on the other, between urban America and suburban and rural America?

Some political leaders have spoken up both about the danger and about what needs to be done. In an address to Californians, Governor Newsom called Trump's measures "the acts of a dictator." He told them and other Americans:

This is about all of us. This is about you. California may be first—but it clearly won't end here. Other states are next. Democracy is next. Democracy is under assault right before our eyes—the moment we've feared has arrived.

What we are witnessing is not law enforcement—it's authoritarianism. What Trump wants most is your fealty. Your silence. To be complicit in this moment. Do not give it to him.

Similarly, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson called Trump a "tyrant." "I am counting on all of Chicago to resist in this moment," Johnson said. "Whatever particular vulnerable group is being targeted today, another group will be next."

Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota said, "We are in the midst of the creation of a police state.... We should all collectively be out in the streets rejecting what is taking place [in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.]."

This is the first time in my lifetime that I have heard such politicians call for popular resistance to the federal government, encouraging the millions already in

the streets. Omar, Johnson, and Newsom are politicians with their own agendas and aspirations—Newsom wants to be president—but they are giving expression to the concerns and feelings of many of their constituents who have taken the same in massive demonstrations—opposing Trump as a dictator. But the Democratic Party, which is bolted and welded into the system, has not thrown itself into the fight against Trump at every level.

Trump may have hoped that his mobilization of the National Guard and the Marines to Los Angeles would intimidate his opponents there and throughout the country, but that has not happened. In L.A. and in forty other cities in twenty-three states there were demonstrations against ICE raids, arrests, and deportations as well as Trump's deployment of the National Guard and the Marines to L.A. and they did so despite the tear gas, flash-bang grenades, rubber bullets, and the arrest of hundreds of protestors. And wherever ICE goes, locals come out to resist, even at the risk of arrest and imprisonment.

Then, on June 14, an estimated five to ten million people participated in two thousand "No Kings Day" protests in big cities and small towns in all fifty states, the largest yet in a series of national demonstrations against Trump and the largest protest on a single day in U.S. history. The protestors' signs criticized the president for his attacks on health care, on food programs for children and the elderly, on education and science, and on LGBTQ people and especially transpeople. Some banners read "Fight Oligarchy." More signs than in earlier protests said, "Fight Fascism!" Where I protested in New York City people chanted, "Whose country? Our country!" In all of the protests there were more American flags and more chants that expressed a desire for national redemption. The anti-ICE protests and No Kings Day

marches represented another step forward for the resistance to Trump.

Trump may have thought his immigration raids, bolstered by the military, would enhance his popularity, but various polls conducted in mid-June suggested this was not the case. Trump had promised to go after criminals, but when people saw him arresting working people and breaking up families, support for both him and his immigration raids, declined, though nearly half of all Americans still support him as we head toward the midterm elections in November 2026.

Trump is pressing down on us, and we are rising up. Yet we will need more strength to protect ourselves and to rid ourselves of him. The demonstrations in some places, such as in New York City, have been too white and have lacked proportional participation from communities of color. And a movement like this needs more power, needs strikes and mass civil disobedience.

We have to win over working people and their unions. The labor bureaucracy remains a problem. Teamster President Sean O'Brien gave a virtual endorsement to Trump by speaking at the Republican Party's national convention. And Shawn Fain, who had supported Democrat Kamala Harris and criticized Trump, subsequently came out strongly in support of Trump's tariffs. While public employees, especially federal workers oppose Trump, the Building Trades, leaders and ranks, generally

support him. Union leaders don't seem to understand that Trump represents an existential crisis for the unions and for the American people, one that is greater than any particular policy. We need a union movement of workers of all races, ethnicities, and religions opposed to Trump and on the side of democracy and civil liberties—and immigrants—and that unity will have to be built from the bottom up, up from the rank-and-file.

While the large and growing anti-Trump protests are great, we need to see that this movement has a political impact and creates an independent political force. We cannot rely on the Democrats but have to work for a real left, multiracial, all-gender, working-class political party. Such a party, both an electoral party and a social movement, will need a program that speaks to working people about wages, food prices, the cost of housing, the need for health care for all, and free public education from K to PhD—and taxing the corporations and the billionaires to pay for it all. It will need to be a party about social justice for all, about immigrant rights, about reproductive rights, and the rights of racial minorities. It will have to be a working-class party about freedom.

If we have a program that speaks to working people and the oppressed, and a unified working class, and if the movements are willing to engage in strikes and mass civil disobedience, we have a chance to stop the slide from authoritarianism to fascism.

ICE Was Built for This

How Trump Turned Immigration Enforcement into Political Repression

ROBERT FRANCIS

DONALD TRUMP'S RETURN to the presidency signals a deeper push to use executive power as a tool for repression and control. At the center of this effort isn't the military or intelligence agencies. It's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). From the beginning, ICE has operated with broad authority, little oversight, and a structure that makes abuse easy and accountability rare. It was built to function outside traditional legal norms and was always ripe for abuse.

What makes ICE especially dangerous is its unique position within the executive branch. Of all federal agencies, immigration enforcement offers the president some of the most unilateral power to act without Congressional approval, without judicial review, and often without public scrutiny. Trump has seized on this fact. He is not targeting immigrants because they pose a threat to the country but because immigration enforcement provides the most incredible freedom for him to consolidate control.

Trump is leveraging ICE and the broader Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to test and expand the boundaries

of executive authority. And he's doing so in a way that invites outrage. His cruelty toward migrants is not incidental; it is strategic. It provokes his opponents, polarizes debate, and opens the door for expanded extrajudicial repression under the guise of national security. This dynamic is not new. What's different now is how openly it's being used not only to attack vulnerable communities but to silence political opposition. The more brutal his actions are toward migrants, the more they elicit protest. The more protests there are, the further dissenters fall under DHS and ICE purview. The more executive powers grow, the greater the opportunity to turn the machine against not only scapegoat immigrants but U.S.-born opponents as well.

ICE was not created in a vacuum. It emerged from the aftermath of 9/11, when fear eclipsed foresight and the U.S. security state expanded with bipartisan support. Agencies once separated by function were fused under the DHS. The result was an agency with broad discretion, minimal accountability, and a mandate shaped more by executive interpretation than legal constraint.

From its inception, ICE was built for control. Created through the Homeland Security Act of 2002, it was structured to operate primarily outside traditional checks and balances. ICE uses administrative warrants signed by its officers, not judges, un-

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like criminal agencies, and operates under executive authority.¹ A few lawmakers—Ron Paul and some Democrats—warned against handing such unchecked power to the executive, but were ignored. The bill passed 295–132 in the House and 90–9 in the Senate, pushed through in a climate

What makes ICE especially dangerous is its unique position within the executive branch. Of federal agencies, immigration enforcement offers the president the most unilateral power.

where questioning national security was equated with disloyalty.

Democrats helped build the system, Republicans expanded it, and Trump weaponized it. What began as an immigration agency now functions as a domestic repression tool poised in Trump's second term to move beyond borders, punishing dissent and consolidating executive power through fear. Though more Democrats than Republicans opposed the Homeland Security Act, President Obama greatly expanded ICE. He increased its budget, rolled out Secure Communities (later revised as the Priority Enforcement Program), expanded E-Verify, and strengthened ties with local police.² Simultaneously, he sought to humanize enforcement through DACA and deferred action, but these rested on executive discretion, not lasting reform. Obama governed as a technocrat, believing the system could be fine-tuned. However, he never limited ICE's authority, and groups like the ACLU and United We Dream and progressive

lawmakers warned of potential misuse.³

During his first term, Trump transformed ICE into a blunt enforcement tool. He reinstated Secure Communities, expanded workplace raids, and removed Obama-era enforcement priorities, directing DHS to target virtually all undocumented individuals. DHS agents separated families and detained them for extended periods, leading to children being unaccounted for, according to government representatives.⁴

Whistleblower reports and oversight organizations documented concerns about mistreatment and the absence of standardized reunification procedures.⁵ Although the Biden administration introduced policy changes, ICE's underlying structure remained largely intact.⁶

In Trump's second term, the DHS and ICE have metastasized into something more dangerous. Shortly after Trump's return to power, Trump declared a "national emergency" at the southern border, prompting the Department of Defense to deploy an additional 1,500 troops.⁷ Framing immigration as a national security threat, the administration leaned heavily into post-9/11 "War on Terror" rhetoric, the same ideological foundation from which DHS and ICE were born.

The State Department officially designated several cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, a move that dramatically expanded the scope of executive power.⁸ This designation, combined with the emergency declaration, opened the door for Trump's team to attempt the invocation of the Alien Enemies Act of 1798.⁹ Crafted initially to authorize the arrest and deportation of nationals from enemy states during wartime, the Act was now being weaponized against foreign nationals allegedly affiliated with gangs. Once the administration started describing gang violence in terms usually reserved for war,

it didn't take long before legal boundaries began to erode. What had separated domestic law enforcement from military authority started to disappear, along with the checks on presidential power.

While the groundwork was being laid for expanded executive powers, actions were being taken on an individual basis. Student activists critical of U.S. policy in Gaza were detained under immigration powers despite facing no criminal charges. Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian lawful permanent resident and recent Columbia graduate, was placed in deportation proceedings under a rarely used foreign policy provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act for his public speech at pro-Palestinian protests.¹⁰ Mohsen Mahdawi, a Palestinian-born U.S. resident at Columbia University, was held under a provision targeting those deemed threats to foreign policy.¹¹ Rümeysa Öztürk, a Turkish doctoral student at Tufts, was detained for alleged visa violations after co-authoring a critical op-ed on Palestine.¹²

All were targeted not for wrongdoing, but for dissent—their immigration status made them uniquely vulnerable to political retaliation.¹³ This weaponization of immigration status did not stop with non-citizens, but inevitably expanded to sweep in U.S. citizens as well.

ICE began wrongfully detaining U.S. citizens, including Juan Carlos Lopez Gomez in Florida and José Hermosillo in Arizona, even after evidence of citizenship was provided.¹⁴ In Gomez's case, a judge explicitly ruled there were no legal grounds to hold him, but ICE continued his detention, demonstrating how the agency can disregard judicial authority. These were not isolated errors but early signs of a system increasingly untethered from legal constraints.

A Salvadoran national, Kilmar Abrego Garcia, with legal protection from deportation due to a prior immigration court

ruling, was wrongfully deported in March 2025, an act the Trump administration later described as an "administrative error."¹⁵ The case marked a shift: what had previously been framed as immigration enforcement began to take on the contours of a broader national security crackdown that increasingly affected U.S. citizens.

After the unlawful deportation of Garcia, Trump adviser Sebastian Gorka warned that those protesting the removal could be guilty of "aiding and abetting" terrorists. He implied that those criticizing the Trump administration for overreaching immigration policy could be classified as security threats.¹⁶ Under this pretense, ICE and DHS, once focused on non-citizens, could now be positioned as tools to suppress domestic dissent. The message was clear that if you stand with immigrants, you may be treated as an enemy.

This shift deepened when Trump suggested using the deportation system against

Democrats helped build the system, Republicans expanded it, and Trump weaponized it. What began as an immigration agency now functions as a domestic repression tool.

so-called "homegrown"—citizens—even telling the Salvadoran president to expand prison capacity in anticipation of more removals.¹⁷

Then came Stephen Miller, who proposed framing the southern border as an "invasion" to trigger special executive powers, including the suspension of habeas corpus, a constitutional protection.¹⁸

While Miller focused this justification on immigrants and asylum seekers, the legal precedent set would allow broad detention powers under the national security pretext.

Together, Miller's legal strategy and Gorka's inflammatory rhetoric revealed a troubling alignment: immigration law functioning as one of the executive branch's most adaptable tools—used not only against migrants, but increasingly against U.S. citizens who voice dissent.

That framing gained further traction in a Senate hearing where Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem mischaracterized habeas corpus as “a constitutional right that the president has to be able to remove

The danger is not what ICE
does but how it's redrawing
boundaries of dissent,
citizenship, democracy. What
begins with deportations ends
with disappearances of rights.

people from this country.”¹⁹ Maggie Hassan (D-NH) correctly explained that habeas corpus protects individuals, including U.S. citizens, by requiring the government to justify detention publicly.

This convergence of rhetoric and executive power sharpened in May 2025, when Trump posted that Democrats used immigration to destroy the country and that it was treason. The word “treason” can't be assumed to be a metaphor.²⁰ Paired with the administration's words and acts, the post reads like an accusation that dissent is a punishable offense.

The last time habeas corpus was

suspended was during the Civil War. By calling immigration an “invasion” and dissent “aiding and abetting,” constitutional protections are being eroded not only for immigrants, but for Americans who stand with them, being framed as an internal battle or cold civil war. As Gorka's rhetoric makes apparent, protest, legal defense, and even speech can be reframed as threats to national security. ICE and Homeland Security are no longer just border tools—they're instruments of political control in this battle.

That logic came to life in May 2025, when Newark mayor Ras Baraka was arrested by ICE while accompanying members of Congress on an oversight visit.²¹ Charges were dropped against Baraka, but the MAGA acting U.S. attorney has charged Rep. LaMonica McIver (D-NJ10) with assault and suggested that more Democrats could face arrest. This was followed by an incident in Democratic Rep. Jerry Nadler's office in which DHS agents forced their way in, handcuffing one of his staffers in the process.²² Immigration enforcement had fully turned inward, targeting citizens, elected officials, and dissent.

After a series of high-profile immigration raids in blue states, a disturbing pattern has emerged: federal enforcement is becoming increasingly targeted, theatrical, and politically motivated. Notable operations in Massachusetts, San Diego, and, most recently, Los Angeles triggered protests and community pushback. Rather than de-escalate, the administration used the unrest to justify activating the National Guard, framing the demonstrations as an “insurrection” perpetrated by a “foreign enemy.”²³ The escalation continued when the Pentagon deployed 700 active-duty Marines to Los Angeles.²⁴ This trend of provocation and escalation will surely continue to ever higher stakes.

These actions show that DHS and ICE

are being used to consolidate executive power and suppress political opposition. Under the guise of national security, the administration has recast immigration enforcement to justify expanded detention, surveillance, and even military deployment within U.S. borders, creating a framework that allows political opponents to be targeted as alleged collaborators with “foreign enemies.”

This moment demands more than policy reform. It requires recognizing that the very structure of immigration enforcement is inseparable from authoritarian drift. ICE cannot be “returned to its original purpose” because its original purpose was always expansive, unaccountable state power. It was built for this. If we fail to dismantle or fundamentally transform it, the machinery Trump is using will remain intact long after his term ends, ready for the next strongman to seize.

The danger is not only in what ICE does at the border but in how it is being used to redraw the boundaries of dissent, citizenship, and democracy itself. What begins with deportations ends with disappearances not just of people but of rights.

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Reflections on Arbitrariness

SAMUEL FARBER

THE WORLDWIDE RISE OF authoritarianism has impacted the United States with great force, challenging the long-held view that the American political system has been a paragon of democracy, stability, and the rule of law, and thus a standard for other countries to follow. This new development should not be really surprising if we consider that the American political system is probably one of the least democratic among the capitalist democracies in Asia, Europe, and elsewhere.

One of the key components of this authoritarianism is its rapidly increasing arbitrariness. To be sure, there is not a single clear definition of arbitrariness that has, like so many other concepts, a less clear penumbra that surrounds its core. But we can identify a hard core consisting of the antidemocratic policies and decisions that are not formulated and implemented in an equitable, predictable, and uniform manner, and that systematically disregard institutional rules no matter how just and democratic these might be. These arbitrary decisions from the top generally pursue a political and socioeconomic power agenda to preserve and extend, often illegally, top-down power grabs and the creation of new political and social inequalities.

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The Social Bases of Arbitrariness

At the most fundamental level, class and power inequalities are the basis of arbitrary practices and decisions. Arbitrary decisions by those higher up in the class and hierarchical division of labor are “normally” so much part of the fabric of daily life that even against our better judgment we tend to take them for granted and assimilate them as an unquestioned part of our existence. Now and then, however, we become aware of them because some groups have begun to courageously object to unjust social practices. We know, for example, that one of the important issues separating workers from their bosses and supervisors is the arbitrary scheduling of working hours with very little advance notice. This has been a fighting issue at many retail chains, particularly at those Starbucks coffee shops that have been unionized. What is especially interesting about these current public struggles is that there is nothing arbitrary about these practices from management’s point of view. Workers are moved around various shifts following a “rational” logic of staffing, the principal aim of which is to save on labor costs. Significantly higher levels of staffing would obviously take care of the problem, but at the cost, from the employer’s point of view, of some workers being “idle” at least part of the time, and therefore of lower profits. From the workers’ point of view, these management practices are discovered to be arbitrary when workers find out, sometimes at the last possible moment, when they must show up for

work, thereby disrupting not only their own individual lives, but also the work schedules of partners, school attendance of children, and the leisure time and sleep patterns of the whole family.

The Defense against Arbitrariness

Hundreds of local unions today actively defend the interests and just claims of their members by trying to improve their wages and working conditions, in the context of which the struggle against management arbitrariness plays a central role. This primarily takes place through the vehicle of collective bargaining agreements, disgracefully only in the minority of cases when workers are able to win a union recognition election and then successfully negotiate their first contract—a no-less-difficult accomplishment.

Take, for example, the typical collective bargaining agreement or contract between the United Steelworkers (USW) and the ArcelorMittal corporation of Marion, Ohio, selected at random from the hundreds of collective bargaining agreements American unions submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor. The Marion, Ohio factory, one of twenty plants that ArcelorMittal operates in the United States, manufactures welded mechanical tubing for many industries, including the automobile manufacturing industry.

The content of the USW's contract or agreement with ArcelorMittal management has important similarities to many other contracts in other plants and companies in the United States. This is especially the case for section III of the contract, which outlines what it calls the Functions of Management. This section spells out in great detail the unlimited powers of management to produce what it wants and dictate how it wants it to be produced. Thus, the "functions of management" include everything that needs to be

decided and done in the factory except for some legal limitations concerning matters such as occupational safety, discrimination, and other decisions that the corporation has agreed to cede to the union. See, for example, the contract signed by Arcelor and the USW union in October of 2017.

However, just because under certain circumstances the employer has signed a collective bargaining agreement does not mean that the company will fully enforce it. If management thinks it can get away with not doing so, especially under circumstances different from those existing at the time the contract was negotiated and signed, it will. In fact, many shopfloor union struggles in the United States are about enforcing contracts, to such a degree that this often constitutes a measure of the militancy and effectiveness of both official and rank-and-file union leaders. It can be said that generally, the more bureaucratic and undemocratic a union, the less likely it is that it will insist on the full enforcement of the collective bargaining agreement. In fact, in the worst cases, union members don't even have access to the text of their existing collective bargaining agreement. That is why organizing the union's rank and file to fight for the enforcement of the contract is truly indispensable.

It is very clear from this ArcelorMittal contract that their most important features center on two issues: the size and timing of wage increases and the seniority rules that come into operation after the end of the six-month probationary period for newly employed workers at the Marion plant. In this context, seniority rules apply to the rights of recall after layoffs, to bidding rights for the better job openings that may occur during a worker's employment, and when a particular job is eliminated by the employer. In this latter case, the least senior person in that job classification will be the first to be eliminated. Similarly, the

workers recalled after a layoff will start with the recall of the most senior workers. Clearly, seniority rules do not create jobs, nor do they improve the quality of those jobs. What seniority does, and it does it in a major, decisive way, is to sharply curtail if not eliminate management arbitrariness by playing favorites or engaging in discriminatory practices against those workers it dislikes for whatever reason.

Regrettably, seniority rules may also be, under certain circumstances, an obstacle to the retention and promotion of workers who are Black or of Latin American descent in those workplaces where they have been, because of racial discrimination, refused employment until recently, and once they were employed, ended up having lower seniority. Women workers may have also suffered because pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare, as well as sex discrimination, may have interrupted their continuity at work and as a result reduced their seniority rights.

However, most of these problems might have been avoided by a system that made the *needs* of different kinds of workers regardless of gender differences the principal criterion to prioritize who kept or lost a job at a time of retrenchment. This was the situation prevailing in revolutionary Petrograd at the end of 1917, as the production of war industries began to decline after the October Revolution. At the Okhta explosive works the factory committee developed a list determining the order in which workers were to be laid off. (Similar lists were developed at the old Parvianen works and at Putilov, a critically important factory.) Those who had a marginal relationship to the factory and would be the first to be laid off included those who volunteered to help in production, had entered the factory to avoid conscription, or had refused to join a trade union. For the rest, *need* became the central consideration with the members of

families in which more than one member worked at the factory were given the smallest priority, while the last to be laid off were workers with dependents, according to the number of dependents they had. (S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917–1918*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, 242–43.)

It is worth noting that the factory committees' decisions regarding layoffs did not

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even mention workers as members of political parties or as supporters or opponents of the October Revolution, even though these layoff plans were developed at a time when party and revolutionary activities were at a fever pitch in Petrograd. Neither did the urgency of the political situation lead to the notion that seniority issues should be settled by the arbitrary partisan decisions of revolutionary factory leaders rather than by the application of the democratically agreed rules.

Confronting Trump's Arbitrariness

As stated earlier, the issues of arbitrariness and, more generally, authoritarianism are confronting us with great force under the rule of Donald Trump, the very embodiment of these political vices. The left and popular opposition to his second presidency have tried to understand the various aspects of his clear dictatorial actions and threats using a variety of analytical tools. There

is, for example, the ongoing debate as to whether Trump's rule fits the characterization of being fascist and if so of precisely what kind. Others have left aside that debate to focus on the similarities of Trump's rule to specific authoritarian modalities such as Viktor Orbán's current Hungarian regime.

Be that as it may, while we fight Trump and Trumpism, we must deepen our analysis of his authoritarianism. Often these Trumpian arbitrary actions and proposals appear—precisely because of their arbitrariness and sometimes even irrationality—as unprecedented and thus “coming out of nowhere.” Such are his proposals to eliminate the 14th Amendment's unambiguous statement that all those born in this country are automatically citizens of the United States, his proposals for the United States to take over Greenland and even Canada next door, changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico, declaring Biden's pardons of a number of imprisoned people serving sentences null and void, and worst of all, his outrageous proposal to expel Palestinians from Gaza to create a “Gazan Riviera,” another Trumpian tourist paradise to be created at the expense of and without the consent, participation, or control by the long-oppressed, attacked, and abused Palestinian residents of the area. The interesting thing is that while some of these proposals, such as the annexation of Greenland, could be presented in a conventional way as part of an ordinary imperialist expansion, Trump feels obliged to present them in jingoistic arbitrary outbursts presumably to strengthen the appeal to his extreme right-wing supporters.

Trump as a Lumpen Capitalist

I published an essay almost seven years ago titled “Donald Trump. Lumpen Capitalist,” (*Jacobin*, October 19, 2018) that attempted to provide a social structural explanation of Trump's position in American society.

Contrary to what many Americans have thought, Donald Trump has not been a consistently successful, and much less some kind of, idealized “model” capitalist. Throughout his career, Trump has declared bankruptcy numerous times and has frequently acted as a hustler and grifter to make a “quick buck,” as in the cases of the corrupt enterprise Trump University, the equally self-serving and corrupt Donald J. Trump Foundation, and more recently

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the selling of bibles as merchandise, the crypto-presidential enterprises, and family deals in the Gulf states.

Although it has been argued that there has been a move toward similar kinds of corrupt behavior among the capitalist class as a whole (personal communication from Robert Brenner), Trump still stands out not only for his corrupt capitalist conduct, but also for his behavior as a convicted sexual harasser. Moreover, his choice of friends and associates is illustrative of the kind of person he is. Among his dear friends have been David J. Pecker, past editor of the *National Enquirer*, the most important organ of the gutter press in the United States, and Michael Cohen, former friend and personal attorney turned enemy (often referred to as his former “fixer”), who in turn had a close association with members of the Russian Mafia. In the worlds of entertainment and professional sports, Trump has been friendly in the past with Mike Tyson and Kanye West, two people who have been closely associated with hate-

ful qualities ranging from violence against women to antisemitism. Most important of all, Trump's early influential mentor was attorney Roy Cohn, who came into prominence as a lawyer for none other than Senator Joseph McCarthy, the witch-hunting senator from Wisconsin. According to his biographer Nicholas von Hoffman, one of Cohn's partners described him as "a person who was free of the rules" so "whatever he wanted at any given moment was the right thing." That was consistent with Cohen's unscrupulous and transactional approach to life that eventually even got him disbarred in the State of New York.

As a "lumpen" capitalist, Trump the politician is not an organic product of the capitalist class. He is instead an external political agent currently running the political system, which as long as its key foundation on the sacredness of corporate private property remains untouched, will preserve the assets of the ruling class, but not necessarily on ruling-class terms. This is so *precisely* because of Trump's arbitrary behavior, which resists, if not altogether refuses to follow, certain behavioral norms and obligations, although this does not mean that he will not react and accommodate ruling-class pressures in many situations.

In addition, although individuals such as Elon Musk and sections of the ruling class (such as oil corporations) backed Trump in some or all of his three runs for president, he was not supported by most of the ruling class in any of these elections. According to Albert Serna Jr. and Anna Massoglia ("Big Money, big stakes: 5 things everyone should know about money in 2024 elections," *Open Secrets*, November 6, 2024) Kamala Harris raised hundreds of millions of dollars more than Trump. In fact she more than doubled Trump's electoral fund raising: \$1,156 million for Harris versus \$463 million for Trump. Although a few candidates in the 2024

elections may have raised a major part of their campaign money through small donations, that was not the case for the two principal presidential contenders. However, once elected, many big capitalists, including many important ones even in the "Silicon Valley" segment of the class, cravenly bowed their heads before Trump in part because they hoped to benefit from his rule even if they had not supported him in the election and in part because they might have been afraid of what he could do against their interests. However, after Trump's first one hundred days in office, many capitalists and other "opinion leaders" faced with the economic disaster of Trump's protectionist chaos began to change their tune and criticize him, while the same was happening in American society at large with Trump's increasing unpopularity.

Donald Trump and Albert Gore Contrasted

Perhaps there is no better way to show the character of Trump's politics in relation to ruling-class interests, in which his arbitrariness plays a key role, than to compare him with Albert Gore. As the Democratic presidential candidate in 2000, Gore lost by a tiny margin of 537 votes in what turned out to be the decisive state of Florida. But the Florida recount was far from finished when the Supreme Court stepped in and brought an end to it. Moreover, in contrast with Trump, who presented no evidence whatsoever to support his fake claim of fraud in the 2020 election, Gore could have produced an excess of evidence showing that he was the actual winner in 2000. Scholars have demonstrated that the very poorly designed ballot (referred to popularly as the "butterfly ballot") in Palm Beach County, Florida, caused more than two thousand Democratic voters (including hundreds of Jewish Americans) to vote by mistake for Nazi-loving candidate Pat

Buchanan, a number larger than George W. Bush's statewide certified margin of victory. (Jonathan N. Wand et al., "The Butterfly Did It: The Aberrant Vote for Buchanan in Palm Beach County, Florida," *American Political Science Review* vol. 95, no. 4 (2001), 793810.) Moreover, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a highly detailed report on the 2000 election in Florida showing that there was voter suppression, a systematic and intentional diminution of citizen participation benefiting the Republican Party, especially in the case of racial minorities, created by the rules and organization that presided over the election in that state. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Voting Irregularities in Florida during the 2000 Presidential Elections. Chap. 9. Findings and Recommendations." www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/vote2000/report/ch.9.htm).

Nevertheless, even though Gore had a very strong case that he had won the election in Florida and therefore was the duly elected president of the United States, he quickly accepted the Supreme Court decision of December 9 stopping the recount and conceded the election to Bush. On December 13, 2000, Gore addressed the nation in a televised speech, in which he declared that although he disagreed with the Supreme Court's decision, he accepted it, while concerning President-elect Bush, he added that,

"... what remains of partisan rancor must now be put aside, and may God bless his stewardship of this country. Neither he nor I anticipated this long and difficult road. Certainly, neither of us wanted it to happen. Yet, it came and now it has ended, resolved, as it must be resolved, through the honored institutions of our democracy. While there will be time enough to debate our continuing differences, now is the time to recognize that which unites us is greater than that which divides us. While we yet hold and do not yield our opposing beliefs, there is a higher duty

than the one we owe to the political party. This is America and we put country before party; we will stand together behind our new president." (www.upi.com/Archives/2000/12/13/Al-Gores-concession-speech-in-2000-presidential-election/9003976683600/)

This was the vice president of the United States (1993–2001) speaking, a man who had become successively a Democratic congressperson, senator, and vice president associated with the "moderate," most neo-liberal wing of his party. He had grown up in Washington, D.C., where his father had also been a congressperson and senator representing the state of Tennessee. Al Gore's speech was a tribute to the political stability required by the security and permanence of the system and in that sense shared the spirit of the ruling class. That does not mean of course that the ruling class met in a smoke-filled room (they never do) and instructed Gore in what to do and say on their behalf. What it did mean was that Gore had, through his upbringing and political associates and business contacts, internalized the norms and values of a dominant class that needed and wanted to preserve their rule under the most peaceful and predictable political conditions. In any case, Gore did very well after "losing" the presidency in 2000. Besides campaigning in defense of the environment, Gore has since been a member of the board of directors of Apple and a senior adviser to Google. In addition, he has been a cofounder and chairman of Generation Investment Management and a partner in Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, where he has been the head of its climate change solutions group.

In drawing a balance sheet of this very important incident in American political history, one could be tempted to argue that the stability pact between Democratic and Republican leaders to repair what could have been a dangerous rift provoked by the very undemocratic "solution" decreed

by the Supreme Court in 2000 was sealed by president-elect George W. Bush. Shortly after Gore's speech, Bush Jr. responded by putting forward the old notion that "our nation must rise above a house divided," adding that "Americans share hopes and goals and values far more important than any political disagreements. Republicans want the best for our nation, and so do Democrats. Our votes may differ, but not our hopes" (www.upi.com/Archives/2000/12/13/Bushs-remarks/2587976683600/). George W. Bush, like Al Gore, had deep roots in the American ruling class as the son of a man who had been a Texas oilman, member of Congress, and president of the United States, besides having been ambassador to the UN and head of the CIA.

But one could draw such a conclusion only at the risk of ignoring a disturbing event that could be retrospectively seen as containing the seeds of future threats to American democracy. On November 22, 2000, hundreds of Republican Party supporters invaded the Stephen P. Clark Government Center in Miami to protest the local Dade County's vote recount. These Republican rioters succeeded in interrupting the recount process as an outcome of what was called the "Brooks Brothers riot" because many of the participants were dressed in khakis and button-collar shirts. As it quickly became evident, the event was not a spontaneous impromptu protest, but an organized effort by local conservative politicians brought together by GOP operative Roger Stone. Looking back, this event could be seen as a predecessor of the far more important Capitol riot in Washington, D.C., organized by the Trump forces more than twenty years later on January 6, 2021, to prevent Congress from officially declaring Biden and Harris the winners in the general election held in November of 2020.

Thus, Gore played by the rules of the

game, and Bush appeared to have done so, although with brazenly unequal results. Bush made a show of avoiding the appearance of Trump-style rule-breaking arbitrariness, but his hand or at the very least that of his close associates was clearly

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involved in the "Brooks Brothers Riot." After all, Bush Jr. sent former Secretary of State James Baker, a man known for his political experience and skills managing crises, to oversee and organize the Republican forces in the electoral dispute in Florida.

None of the above implies that capitalist politicians do not typically break rules. In fact, they do so all the time as practically a requirement of their careers, but only up to a point and mostly in secret, which is significant from the perspective of maintaining stability and at least some measure of the legitimacy of the system. That is why Donald Trump's outlandish lies and outrageous behavior constitute further evidence that he does not care one bit about the long-term credibility and stability of the system. Loyalty, whether to the system or even to his own father when he unsuccessfully tried, in 1990, to take total control of his business and fortune behind his back, is a concept alien to Trump, unless it refers to the loyalty of followers and government functionaries to him.

In fact, Trump has surpassed even the notorious record of the sinister but more talented Richard Nixon. The man from Whittier, California, did everything he could to stay in power after the Watergate

scandal was revealed, such as his infamous “Saturday Night Massacre” of October 20, 1973, when he fired the special (Watergate) prosecutor and forced the resignations of the attorney general and deputy attorney generals. Nixon did indeed stay in office far longer than would have been possible in most capitalist democracies, but he finally resigned after he realized that a successful impeachment was inevitable. Although Ford denied that Nixon had been promised a pardon, Jeffrey Toobin has just described in great detail, in his book *The Pardon: The Politics of Presidential Mercy* (Simon and Schuster, 2025) the negotiations between the two politicians to establish the terms of the pardon and the ownership of such items as the former president’s papers.

Conclusion

How could Trump succeed in the first place? There was no huge economic crisis in the United States like the world depression of the 1930s that brought about the triumph of barbaric Nazism in Germany. However, there was a very strong recession in 2007 to 2008 that did serious damage to the U.S. economy and particularly to minority and working-class people. This on top of the long period of deindustrialization that traumatized the U.S. working class, dramatically reducing its size and even more its social and political power as shown in the recent work by Lainey Newman and Theda Skocpol about the one-time steel workers’ union stronghold in the Pittsburgh area (*Rust Belt Union Blues. Why Working-Class Voters Are Turning Away from the Democratic Party*, Columbia University Press, 2023). There was not much the neoliberal capitalist Democratic Party was even inclined or wanted to do to seriously intervene in the crisis to try and protect working class interests and

thus maintain its electoral support. After all, the Democratic Party relies on the financial and political support of the very capitalist interests that would suffer greatly from any radical structural change in the United States.

Of course, neither could the Republican Party, the other major capitalist party, certainly not under the leadership of people like House Republican leader Paul Ryan, who had openly advocated the “reform” of Medicare (i.e., reducing benefits), or even the so-called Tea Party Republican rebels of 2010 who made opposition to taxes and state intervention in the economy their central plank (Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, Oxford University Press, 2012). But then along came Trump. Contrary to a widespread perception, he won a plurality, but not a majority of the vote in the Republican primaries of 2016, thereby showing the weakness and failure of the Republican Party to unite around an orthodox ruling class candidate such as Jeb Bush. Trump opportunistically promised not to touch Medicare while offering the pie in the sky of tariffs that would make workers think he was doing something for them. He probably thought that his newly high tariffs would finance his real program, a substantial tax reduction package for the capitalist class, including of course his rich friends and associates. At the same time, federal expenditures would be reduced through the firing of thousands of federal employees, thereby easing the tax reduction process. Nevertheless, he showed to his supporters that, unlike the other Republican and Democratic politicians, he meant business and would immediately proceed to carry out his reactionary promises.

Attacks on Science

Is There an Underlying Logic?

SAM FRIEDMAN

ALTHOUGH IT IS CLEAR THAT THE Trump regime has launched a massive attack on the economic support of much scientific research—and is imposing racist, sexist, Zionist, imperialist, and other political controls over what research the Federal government funds and what universities can research and teach—the scope and exact contours of this attack are still somewhat murky. Scientific incompetents like Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (who clearly believes that vaccines do little good and lots of harm) have been appointed to lead major scientific agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees, among other agencies, CDC and the National Institutes of Health.¹ Over one thousand biomedical research grants have been terminated, and critical public health and medical research programs slashed, paused, or terminated. These cuts have interrupted or destroyed the careers of thousands of students and researchers. Thousands of other scientists and technical personnel have been summarily fired from Federal agencies. Federal agencies have been deleting scientific information from websites that had previously made

it available to the public, while also discontinuing crucial data-collection projects such as the National Household Study on Drug Use and Health, which gathers data vital to research on overdosing and overdose prevention.

The institutional basis for scientific research at academic institutions has been undermined by efforts to cut “indirect cost rates” for research to 15 percent, far below what is needed for most research. Colleges and universities themselves are under attack politically through efforts and threats to terminate all Federal funding, often on the grounds of alleged “antisemitism” and “wokeness”; these are thinly disguised pretexts for restricting free speech on campuses, including any form of anti-racist or anti-sexist research, teaching, or demonstrating. Attacking institutions of higher learning seems to be the standard practice of extreme right-wing governments around the world—as Orbán has done in Hungary, for example.

The attacks on science seem not to have included certain fields. Research for military needs or for artificial intelligence continues without interference. Yet the anti-science ethos and cuts in basic research may, over time, erode these supports for American capital and imperialism. That is one reason that some capitalists, and some capitalist institutions (such as Harvard University) are opposing the attacks, at least as of this writing. The economic and military power of the United States has long depended upon the country’s strength in

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many scientific fields. Attacking science is a response to—and likely a source of—deep contradictions in capitalist society and in its regime legitimization. This article will probe into these contradictions.

Some Assumptions

I want to set out some background assumptions for this argument. I assert them not because they are self-evident or non-controversial, but rather for the purpose of brevity. Others have made the case for these presuppositions in *New Politics* and other left publications; to elaborate them here, yet again, would turn the article into a book.

In quick summation, then:

- Inter-imperial rivalry around the globe is heating up both economically and militarily.² The sources for this lie in the global economic situation since 2008; the specifics of China's economic and military rise; and the looming uncertainties over how when, and where, climate-change disruptions will take place.
- Trump's strategy seems to be to confront China economically and, if necessary, militarily, including through wooing Russia away from its subordinate alliance with China. This continues the strategies of the Obama and Biden administrations, but with greater emphasis, verging on provocation.
- The United States is now highly dependent on commodity chains that can become vulnerable to economic or pandemic disruptions or conflict with China or other countries. Reducing this dependency requires a return of manufacturing to the United States. This is one goal of the Trump administration's tariff strategies.³
- Heightened inter-imperial conflict requires concentrating available surplus value and personnel resources on strategic areas like the military, high tech, and domestic industrial manufacturing. This will involve losses for some capitalist industries, as reflected in clashes over tariffs as well as challenges to some of the research Big Pharma depends on.⁴

• Politically, inter-imperial conflict requires heightened nationalism and the disruption of political opposition. The latter in particular underlies the Trump administration's aggressive approach to universities, which are viewed as centers of independent and sometimes progressive thought.⁵ But doing so may have negative consequences through undermining some "hard science" research budgets, provoking a brain drain to other countries, and deterring scientific creativity in various fields, including those central to imperial plans.

• Capitalist states and capitalists as a class have no solution to the climate crisis. Most of them probably understand that it is real, given the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or the expressed concern of the Pentagon and other agencies regarding global warming as a threat enhancer. Of course, it is impossible to tell what Trump and his close allies believe about climate change given their penchant for lying. But in any case, neither they nor the left can conceptualize any way the crisis can be resolved within the bounds of capitalism.⁶

With the forgoing considerations in mind, two problems come into focus. They

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are interrelated, but should not be confused. One is why members of the ruling class, whether as representatives of capital or as government leaders, attack science. Another is why some sections of the public give credence to what the ruling class is saying. To address these questions, I will start with some history, then take up the logics and ideology of the current attacks on science

and why many accept them.

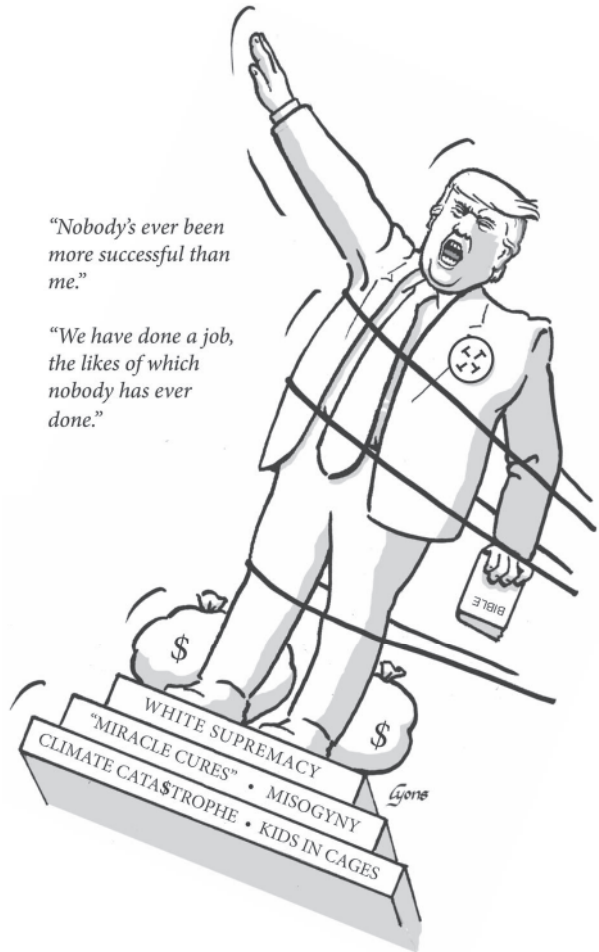
Some History

When evidence emerged that smoking was a cause of cancer, the tobacco industry responded by sowing doubts about the neutrality and methods of the scientists investigating the matter as well as advertising (and sometimes paying for) research intended to cast doubt on their conclusions.⁷ Fossil-fuel companies followed the same strategy toward scientific work on climate change, as did agribusiness when research showed that GMOs were dangerous. While these campaigns focused on specific findings by researchers, the strategy as a whole was to attack the integrity of scientists and the value of scientific methods.

These attacks were not attacks by capitalism as a whole. While some very powerful industries and companies found it in their interest to smear scientific research, other sections of capital did not join these attacks, or even defended the validity of particular findings. Companies and government officials concerned about the impact of lung cancer or GMOs on their workers had no incentive to deny the evidence. Although the fossil-fuel and associated industries are enormous, so is the threat of global ecological catastrophe; climate-change research has received considerable support from many governments and some sections of capital. In addition, capitalist and

military competitiveness as well as product development depend heavily on scientific research, giving capital and governments in general grounds to fund scientific research and training.

The *susceptibility* of millions of people to the anti-science messaging is not exclusively the product of campaigns to shore



up certain industries' profits, of course. For a variety of reasons, most students do not get good scientific education in schools; and, indeed, many find their science classes

boring. (Personal confession: I hated my tenth-grade biology class and vowed never to have anything to do with the field. It is deeply ironic that the last forty-plus years of my life I have worked in fields like pub-

The anxiety of living under the uncertainties and violent upheavals of capitalism have spawned New Age mysticism and strengthened apocalyptic religions.

lic health and epidemiology.) This lack of knowledge and interest leaves people vulnerable to misinformation and corporate propaganda. They also may see scientific expertise as elitist and/or as part of the institutions of power and exploitation. Their resentment can be warranted. People may remember being taught that scientists are an intellectual elite, or hear them making disrespectful remarks about non-scientists in the media—and when science manifests itself in ordinary life, it is often in the form of technology that makes them work harder or steals their jobs. These uses of science by capital and ruling bureaucracies bear much of the responsibility for working people's susceptibility to reactionary anti-science rhetoric. That includes cases of belief in non-existent conspiracies,⁸ such as the one about chemicals in tap water turning frogs (and people) gay.

The very workings of capitalism generate irrational thinking of various sorts. Unlike prior modes of production, capitalism obscures the existence of exploitation. Marx himself spent decades trying to describe how this worked. To most people in the

world, the workings of the economy seem much like weather or pestilence did in ancient times: the product of unpredictable and inexplicable forces that dominate and threaten human life and social relations.

An employer or industry can suddenly collapse, leaving you jobless and perhaps with skills that are outdated or irrelevant. This was the experience of the hand-loom weavers during Marx's lifetime, of steelworkers in the Rustbelt a generation ago, and many Federal government employees in 2025. (For that matter, many capitalists and ruling bureaucrats find themselves crushed by the invisible hand of the market, as happened to numerous financial CEOs in 2008 and most of the *nomenklatura* of the former Russian empire circa 1990.) Once, disasters could only be explained as the action of gods and other supernatural forces. The anxiety of living under the uncertainties and violent upheavals of capitalism have spawned New Age mysticism (also reflecting, perhaps, the defeat of the New Left movements in the 1970s) and strengthened apocalyptic religions. The latter are in some ways more sensible than the liberal worldview, since we indeed may be approaching the End Times of a planetary inferno.⁹

Current Logics

What is it about the current situation that leads large parts¹⁰ of the American capitalist class and political elites to open a broad attack on the institutions of science? And why has this proven to be appealing to wide swathes of the U.S. population—at least at the level of rhetoric, if not always in practice? I will first discuss why (apart from the factors already discussed) so many voters and others have gone along with such attacks *at this time in particular*.

The logic of popular support for attacks on science

The legitimacy of science became a

political football during the COVID-19 crisis. The absence of a revolutionary left response to this deep social crisis meant that the liberals (including social democrats), traditional conservatives, and the ultraright controlled the discussion globally and in the United States in particular. The utter failure of U.S. rulers' response to COVID, and the huge tolls in sickness and deaths that this created, have been discussed by my colleagues and me elsewhere.¹¹ Workers who had to go to their workplace faced many months of heightened risk to their health and lives just to earn a living, especially if they had to use public transportation to get there.¹² They and the many workers and other adults who stayed at home may also have had to cope with issues around child-care and home learning for children whose schools were closed. A revolutionary left with any weight in the U.S. working class would have had a wonderful opportunity to build collective responses to the situation. And some groups, such as Peoples CDC and a few scattered union locals, did try to help this along. Unfortunately, they had no way to make their efforts known to many people, so the moment was lost.

The extreme right, on the other hand, came into the pandemic well-organized and well-funded. They were able to seize upon the incompetence of the responses by the Trump and Biden administrations to make major gains. Some sections of the populist and even anarchist "left" went along with the attacks on vaccines and/or lent credence to various bogus nostrums that Trump and others were boosting.¹³ The right seized on public health-related school closures and the difficulties they caused for children and parents as a focus for propaganda talking points. The fact that the parents suffering most from COVID were heavily Black, Latino/a, American Indian, and/or poor workers also gave the right more traction with those white working-class members

who had "respectable" incomes but had relatively few friends or relatives who had died from the pandemic.

Liberal leaders, by contrast, were unable to respond effectively to the crisis of ideological legitimacy created by the pandemic. Their commitment to an individualistic ethos made them unwilling and/or unable to mount a collective response rooted in norms of solidarity. Instead, they defended government policies by claiming that they were "just following the science." When that approach failed to prevent some of the worst infection and death rates of any country on the planet, the effect was to discredit "science" in the eyes of millions of people.

In sum, the right-wing's propaganda offensive combined with the burdens that liberal pandemic policy left on working-class people, made wide swathes of the U.S. population quite open to attacks on scientific funding, institutions, and intellectual freedoms.

The logic of support by capitalists and government elites for attacks on "science"

On its face, the support many American capitalists and government elites are providing for these attacks on research and universities appears like a suicidal response both to the existential threat of climate change and to the imperial challenge posed by China. On climate change, one popular interpretation is that most capitalists and politicians do not understand that climate change is real and threatens current civilization. But even if this were true, isn't attacking the scientific base a suicidal response to the Chinese and other threats to American imperialist and economic interests?

It is possible that Trump and many of the leaders of his administration believe that climate change is a hoax. They have said so many times. But they are also inveterate liars and flip-flopers, which I would

argue is, to some extent, a deliberate strategy to keep their opponents off balance. So it is not possible to be sure what they are thinking. Nonetheless, some of them may be pursuing a rational (though tragically mistaken) strategy.

The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—like the perspective of many though not all Marxist analyses¹⁴—is that no solution to the climate crisis exists under capitalism. It can be useful, if not especially pleasant, to put oneself into the mind of a billionaire or a member of some capitalist think tank as they face the dilemma faced by our species as a whole: we can have either capitalism or an inhabitable planet, but not both.

It is not a hypothetical alternative. The concept of ending capitalism is literally unthinkable for most capitalists. They know only growth and competition, and many have accepted Margaret Thatcher's mantra that "there is no alternative" to the market and accumulation. If they do manage to think outside that box, the only imaginable alternative would be something like Russia under Stalinist rule or China under Maoist rule (something I would call either state capitalism or bureaucratic collectivism, not socialism). And an economy modeled on those societies would, like the present system, still generate enormous quantities of greenhouse gases.

Our imagined ruling-class individual would—as the product of economics courses and what they have learned as a corporate or government leader—likely trust "free enterprise" as the best way to meet challenges—that is, they believe that corporate competition is creative and efficient and far better than government bureaucracy at finding solutions. And like most people on Earth at the current time, they have no understanding of how a socialism from below could be created and how it could avoid devolving into Stalinism, much

less how it could solve the climate crisis.

Given the contradiction between capitalism and survival, then, the only ruling-class option would seem to be determining how to profit during the climate crisis as it gets worse—how to be "the last man standing." If there is a solution, they would think it will take the form of new technology (to

When "just following the science" failed to prevent some of the worst infection and death rates of any country, the effect was to discredit "science."

clear the atmosphere of greenhouse gases, for example) created through the "genius" of capitalist competition, making billions of dollars for the entrepreneurs who develop it.

Assuming the capitalist whose brain we have picked grasps the extraordinary potential for environmental disaster in the not-too-distant future, they will recognize that this scenario is somewhat of a "Hail Mary pass." But they will see no alternative. And in the meanwhile, they will concentrate on rivalries and competition, as capitalist dynamics force them to do at pains of being eaten by other capitals and/or states.¹⁵

Although this rationale seems to make some sense,¹⁶ the prospect of a Trumpian execution of it shows some of its contradictions. From a strictly economic point of view, or from the perspective of imperial competition, attacking the economic basis of universities by cutting the indirect cost rate on research grants to 15 percent and by suddenly terminating billions of dollars of research funding is suicidal.¹⁷ It will seriously weaken economic innovation and growth in the United States, and at least in the long

term, weaken the U.S. military as well.

On the other hand, the attacks on universities may be politically necessary to weaken opposition to the policy and to the regime and to further the racist and sexist goals that have been a defining feature of Trumpism. The prospect of skilled scientific and professional workers leaving the universities (voluntarily or otherwise) to find jobs in the private sector might also benefit some capitalists by lowering their labor costs and increasing their capacity to innovate and develop new products.

So the underlying rationale for MAGA anti-science policies may seem logical from the capitalist perspective of trying to muddle through the contradiction between capitalism and survival. In human terms, it is of course madness and genocidal (indeed, species-cidal), but murderous cruelty is endemic to capitalism, as the history of the last five hundred years has shown.

For the left, the political implications should be clear. The liberal defense of “science” even by institutions as powerful as Harvard University is not likely to change these policies, nor will institutionally acceding to them (although it may yield some competitive advantage at getting research and other funding for reactionary institutions.) Defeating these attacks will require massive popular revolt, led by working-class organization and mobilization in workplaces and in oppressed communities. Such a revolt, if powerful enough, might make the ruling class reverse its attacks on science. They will not, however, suffice to resolve the contradiction between capitalism and survival. That will require a global revolution from below that terminates capital relations of production once and for all and lets us collectively and democratically figure out sustainable ways to live and thrive.

NOTES

1. This is particularly concerning because the U.S. was particularly incompetent in dealing

with COVID-19 so far; since COVID-19 continues to mutate; the HIV/AIDS pandemic is being reignited through U.S. cutbacks of programs to provide treatment and prevention funds overseas; and other pandemics loom. See Sam Friedman, “Plague-pusher politics,” *Against the Current*, Mar. 30, 2025, againstthecurrent.org/plague-pusher-politics/; S. Friedman and S. Kay, “Marxism and the U.S. Response to the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 Pandemics,” *Spectre*, Aug. 25, 2023, spectrejournal.com/marxism-and-the-u-s-response-to-the-hiv-aids-and-covid-19-pandemics/; and Sam Friedman, Sara Johnson, and Karyn Pomerantz, “Pandemic Futures,” *Tempest*, 2025, tempestmag.org/2025/02/pandemic-futures/.

2. Thomas Hummell, “Building International Solidarity Against Imperial Rivalry,” *Tempest*, Nov. 2024, tempestmag.org/2024/11/building-international-solidarity-against-imperial-rivalry/; Ashley Smith, “U.S. and China Conflict: The 21st Century’s Central Inter-Imperial Rivalry,” *New Politics*, Aug. 28, 2019.

3. Council on Foreign Relations, “The Contentious U.S.–China Trade Relationship,” Apr. 14, 2025, www.cfr.org/background/contentious-us-china-trade-relationship; Paolo Confino, “Trump’s trade war with China...,” *Fortune*, Apr. 14, 2025, fortune.com/2025/04/14/trump-trade-war-china-tariffs-imports-imbalance/.

4. Congressional Research Service, “Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress,” Aug. 28, 2024, sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R43838.pdf.

5. John Aubrey Douglass, *Neo-nationalism and Universities: Populists, Autocrats, and the Future of Higher Education*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021; Ashley Smith, “Part Two: Resisting authoritarian populism,” *Tempest*, Dec. 8, 2024, tempestmag.org/2024/12/resisting-authoritarian-populism-pt2/.

6. D. Camfield, *Future on Fire*, PM Press, 2023; J. B. Foster, “The Epochal Crisis,” *Monthly Review*, Oct. 2013, monthlyreview.org/2013/10/01/epochal-crisis/?v=7516fd43adaa; J. B. Foster, “James Hansen and the Climate-Change Exit Strategy,” *Monthly Review*, Feb. 2013, monthlyreview.org/2013/02/01/james-hansen-and-the-climate-change-exit-strategy/; J. B. Foster, *The Robbery of Nature*, Monthly Review Press, 2020; A. Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century*, Verso, 2020; K. h. Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge University Press, 2022; Richard Smith, *Green Capitalism: The God that*

Failed, 2016. But cf. P. Schwartzman & D. Schwartzman, *The Earth Is Not for Sale: A Path Out of Fossil Capitalism to the Other World That is Still Possible*, World Scientific, 2019.

7. Robin McKie, “Attack Paid for by Big Business Are ‘Driving Science into a Dark Era,’” *Guardian*, February 18, 2012; Linda Rosenstock and Lore Jackson Lee, “Attacks on Science: The Risks of Evidence-Based Policy,” *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 1 (2002); Genna Reed et al., “The Disinformation Playbook: How Industry Manipulates the Science-Policy Process—and How to Restore Scientific Integrity,” *Journal of Public Health Policy* 42 (2021).

8. I want to clarify that conspiracies obviously do exist. It can be hard to differentiate them from plans that various people make that simply are not widely publicized. Did Purdue conspire to make Oxycontin part of the daily lives of millions of people? Probably—they certainly knew it would be addictive and did their best to deny and later to obfuscate this fact. Indeed, it can be difficult sometimes to get at the truth on some issues. However, there is another kind of “conspiracy theory” that takes the form of believing conspiracies to be omnipresent and disregarding clear counterevidence about particular examples. For instance, many on the “left” greeted the mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 with claims that Pfizer and Moderna had faked the evidence for the vaccines and that they were highly toxic substances that would harm vast numbers of people. In my experience, those holding this belief were immune to counterarguments that given the magnitude of the COVID crisis, the scientists and technicians involved in the trials (and maybe even the company executives) would never have gone along with such a conspiracy; as well as being total unwilling to recognize the vast number of lives saved by these vaccines and the relatively small number of people harmed by them. (Personal confession #2: I am friends with, and collaborate closely with, a woman who was almost certainly one of the relatively small number of people whose reaction to the vaccine has been serious and long-lasting.)

Similarly, the White House, under the name of Donald Trump, issued “Lab Leak: The True Origins of Covid-19,” www.whitehouse.gov/lab-leak-true-origins-of-covid-19/, which on its face both pushes a dubious hypothesis about COVID and simultaneously blames the damage the pandemic did on scapegoats like Tony Fauci and Joe Biden. This is also an attack on science (see this excellent article for a discussion of this:

J. Alwine, et al. “The harms of promoting the lab leak hypothesis for SARS-CoV-2 origins without evidence,” *J Virol*, Sep. 17 2024.) In addition, underlying such scapegoating is the same kind of cultural style—blaming social ills on evil actors—that Trump and Orban have promulgated in attacking immigrants to the United States and Hungary, or that the Nazis used in attacking Jews and queers.

9. Marx and Engels wrote extensively about these social roots of religion, as have many Marxists. References to the writings of Marx and Engels, and useful further discussion of some of their ideas, appear in Michael Löwy, *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America*, London, Verso, 1996; Alexander Saxton, *Religion and the Human Prospect*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006; Samuel R. Friedman, Review of *Religion and the Human Prospect*, by Alexander Saxton. (2008). In *Historical Materialism* 16:219–226; and Samuel R. Friedman, “War and Religious Beliefs,” *International Yearbook for the Sociology of Religion*, v. IX, p. 253.

10. I have been asked whether I think this is a “majority” of the ruling class. I find this question very difficult. The ruling class does not work on the basis of majorities. Indeed, even its members would find it hard to define who is and who is not a member of the ruling class, and thus to try to figure out what constitutes a majority. Capitalists work through a whole range of official and unofficial institutions to develop world views and strategies, as well as through economic processes like markets, and to reach decisions about what to do. For this article, the key institution is the government of the United States. Marxists and non-Marxists (such as William Domhoff) have all written many books about these processes. Capitalists are by no means united around the attacks on science—which is why an eminently capitalist institution like Harvard is in open conflict with the Trump administration.

11. LZ Jirmanus, et al., “Too Many Deaths, Too Many Left Behind: A People’s External Review of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s COVID-19 Pandemic Response,” *AJPM Focus*, 3(4), Aug. 2024 Aug;3(4):100207; Sara Johnson and Sam Friedman, “Long COVID and Social Struggle,” *Tempest*, July 25, 2024, tempestmag.org/2024/07/long-covid-and-social-struggle/; Mary Jirmanus Saba and Sam Friedman, “The Left and COVID: A response to Mike Haynes,” *Historical Materialism*, Dec.

2023, www.historicalmaterialism.org/the-left-and-covid-a-response-to-mike-haynes/; S. Friedman and S. Kay, "Marxism and the U.S. Response to the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 Pandemics," *Spectre*, Aug. 25, 2023, spectre-journal.com/marxism-and-the-u-s-response-to-the-hiv-aids-and-covid-19-pandemics/; Sam Friedman, "Learning from the COVID War," July 5, 2023, blog.petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2023/07/05/learning-from-the-covid-war/; Sam Friedman, Sara Johnson, and Karyn Pomerantz, "Pandemic Futures," *Tempest*, Feb. 3, 2025, tempestmag.org/2025/02/pandemic-futures/; Justin Feldman and Sam Friedman, "Where is the Left on pandemic politics?" *Tempest*, Apr. 18, 2022, tempestmag.org/2022/04/where-is-the-left-on-pandemic-politics/; Danny Katch and Sam Friedman, Truthout, June 13, 2021, truthout.org/articles/activism-made-aids-treatment-more-accessible-thats-what-itll-take-for-covid/.

12. Jamie K. McCallum, *Essential: How the Pandemic Transformed the Long Fight for Worker Justice*, New York: Basic Books, 2022, provides great detail on these experiences and their meanings.

13. I am working on an article on this topic at present.

14. See note 6.

15. This argument parallels, in some ways, the arguments of Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor in "The rise of end times fascism," *The Guardian* Apr. 13, 2025, www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/apr/13/end-times-fascism-far-right-trump-musk.

16. One member of the New Politics editorial board, on reviewing this article, doubted this argument, saying: "...it's based on what I think is an untenable assumption of rationality among the ruling classes, that they're attacking science out of cynical political reasons etc. This is the same ruling class that has apparently convinced itself that AGI will replace all white-collar labor within 2-5 years. I think it's much more sensible to argue that decadent late capitalism has found itself in the same position as decadent late feudalism -- they have forgotten the source of their own wealth and really believe that they rule due to their 'will' and 'superior genetics.' They *sincerely* no longer believe in science and assume ChatGPT or something will

be able to construct a superior machine intelligence that will make them Gods."

Nowhere in the paper, however, do I say that the ruling class (or classes) is (are) rational as a unified entity. Capitalists, like every other class, have conflicting beliefs, and capitalist competition creates both conflicting interests and conflicting world-views (to an extent) among different capitalists. What I am saying is that some ruling class members may be acting in accord with a logic they believe in. The fact that this particular capitalist logic is inhuman and irrational was made pretty clearly by Marx in *Capital* so it should be no surprise to any of us. And if one has ever taken a microeconomics course, the logic of such teaching indeed dismisses the working class as the source of much of their wealth. (Not *all* of their wealth, a point Marx made clear in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.) Keynesian economics at times does seem to treat workers mainly as consumers, and insofar as this is central to it, indeed has lost sight of workers as the source of profits.

On another level, at least in the U.S. at present, there is a sustained attack on science, and it is supported by a governmentally-dominant part of the capitalist class including what Sam Farber has called lumpen capitalists ("Donald Trump, Lumpen Capitalist," *Jacobin*, Oct. 2018, jacobin.com/2018/10/donald-trump-lumpen-capitalist-class-elections) but also by many corporations and corporate leaders of a more establishment sort. The above-quoted member of the editorial board and I agree that they are wrong in their attacks in human terms, and arguably so in terms of defending their own interests. But my point is that there is an underlying (anti-human) logic within the confines of capitalist thinking that holds that the Hail Mary Pass is the best bet not merely for them but for humanity as a whole.

17. See for example Jason E. Lane and D. Bruce Johnstone, eds. *Universities and Colleges as Economic Drivers: Measuring Higher Education's Role in Economic Development*, SUNY Press, 2012; or a recent report by an economics major in the *Harvard Crimson*, Julien Berman, "To Kill a University," www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/4/2/berman-harvard-trump-cuts-damage-americas-economy/.

Climate “Post-Apocalypse” and the Utopian Imperative

BRIAN TOKAR

IMAGES OF CLIMATE-DRIVEN DISASTER have come to dominate our awareness on nearly a weekly basis. This is true even in North America, which was one of the last places on earth where climate disruptions were widely seen as a problem for future generations. Images of rural towns and urban neighborhoods devastated by wildfires across California may now be permanently etched into our minds. Places once seen as climate refuges, from Vermont to North Carolina and beyond, have experienced repeated cycles of destructive flooding. The intensity of tropical storms, tornadoes, and even midwinter blizzards sometimes far exceeds our accustomed norms. And we know these experiences are matched throughout the world, from raging wildfires in Greece to flooded towns in parts of central and western Europe, flooded major cities across south Asia and persistent droughts from the Middle East and East Africa to Central America and Australia.

Satellite data spanning many decades now confirms what advocates for climate justice have been saying for some time: that the onset of climate-driven disasters

and excessive heating, which arrived relatively recently to the global North, occurred decades ago in the world's most vulnerable regions. We now know that the signal of climate disruptions was perceptible in the Caribbean, East Africa, and East Asia as long ago as the 1970s, arrived in much of the rest of the global South in the 1980s, and then came to affect much of the North during the mid-1990s to 2000s.¹ Not always a commonly shared view among climate activists, it is now widely understood that those who contribute the least to excess emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are by far the most impacted by climate changes, and that this has been true for many decades.² Furthermore, the climate attribution of weather-related disasters has evolved from a broad conjecture into an almost routinely measurable quantity—it is no longer possible for honest commentators to claim that we cannot determine whether or not calamities experienced by people on earth are consequences of broader climate-related disruptions.³ There is also no longer significant doubt that today's extremes of global heating surpass anything the world has experienced in at least a hundred thousand years, and that current carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere are likely higher than at any time in at least two to three million years.⁴ It is also now clear that today's climate disruptions are unfolding

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amidst the unraveling of other so-called planetary boundaries that help assure the integrity of life on earth—declines in measurable parameters such as the diversity of species, integrity of water resources, viability of land use patterns, and the cycling of biologically essential elements such as nitrogen and phosphorus.⁵

For several decades, climate activists believed that once the evidence for anthropogenic climate changes and their impacts became widely apparent, public alarm would be aroused and viable climate solutions would be legislated into effect. This happened to some extent, with the emergence in the 2010s of global campaigns such as Extinction Rebellion, the student-led Fridays for Future movement, huge demonstrations in major U.S. and European cities, and the significant albeit insufficient scaling up of climate-protective policy measures. Building new renewable energy installations now costs less than even maintaining existing fossil fuel infrastructure in many regions, and power generation from the wind and the sun frequently displaces fossil fuels rather than simply adding to the total power supply.⁶

An emerging global climate justice movement has brought together voices from Indigenous and other land-based peoples experiencing extreme climate impacts with environmental justice communities fighting toxic contamination and global justice advocates working to expose the roots of the climate crisis in the structures of global capitalism.⁷ That movement has also aroused awareness of vast inequities in the responsibility for climate-damaging pollution, both among the world's countries and especially due to inequalities within countries. Research from several sources has revealed that the wealthiest 10 percent of the world's people are responsible for roughly half of all climate-damaging carbon dioxide emissions, while the poorest half

of the world only emits a few percent of the total.⁸

Unfortunately, though, the popular response to continuing climate disasters has become disturbingly muted, especially in the aftermath of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Following a precipitous fall in energy consumption at the height of the pandemic, fossil fuel use began to rise beyond previous record levels, most notably in the United States, where oil and gas production now exceeds past levels and the country became one of the world's top fossil fuel exporters in the early 2020s.⁹ It is apparent that falling prices for renewable energy are far from sufficient to reverse this trend, as renewables' heightened dependence on the vagaries of capital markets stands squarely in the way of their profitability—which matters far more in a capitalist context than their cost.¹⁰ The political discourse in many countries has also drifted onto an increasingly threatening path, toward a redoubled push to scapegoat immigrants and other marginalized people, conspiracy theories around supposed weather manipulations, and the global rise of neo-fascist regimes and political parties that aim to dismantle the modest climate progress the world has made thus far. In just the first few weeks of the second Trump presidency in the United States, the administration moved to cancel international climate commitments and dismantle climate science, energy information, and environmental justice policy, along with countless other essential public services. Combined with post-Covid supply chain problems, AI-driven leaps in power consumption, concerns about expanded mining to build solar, wind, and battery installations and the increasing skepticism of capital markets, the potential for an organized transition to a renewable energy future sometimes appears to be slipping away before our eyes.

Predicting Collapse

In the climate movement today, as well as in popular culture, the turn toward dystopian images of chaos and collapse sometimes appears overwhelming. It's far from a new tendency, but rather one that was well established by the time the global climate movement began to take off in the early 2010s. The rise of popular dystopian fiction and cinema was well underway by the era of *Blade Runner* and *Waterworld*, of *Children of Men* and Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer*, along with Octavia Butler's visionary novels and countless others. By the early 2010s, authors such as Derrick Jensen and John Zerzan had come to dominate many conversations among radical environmentalists with their dire warnings of the collapse of civilization, fabulist notions that such a collapse would be the only viable path toward an ecological future, and suggestions that radical hopelessness had become the last viable expression of human agency.¹¹

A related but distinct intervention was launched in the late 2000s by a UK-based group calling itself the Dark Mountain project, advocating a more psychological and literary-focused approach to the idea of civilizational collapse. “[H]uman civilization is an intensely fragile construction,” its founders wrote in a widely circulated manifesto. They continued: “It is built on little more than belief: belief in the rightness of its values; belief in the strength of its system of law and order; belief in its currency; above all, perhaps, belief in its future.”¹²

They called for a new literary movement that breaks “the last taboo ... the myth of civilization,” and went on to publish a couple of dozen volumes of writing in an effort to launch such a movement. The project's persistence may affirm the salience of their prediction of a declining belief in the future. By the mid-2010s, the project's primary founder, Paul Kingsnorth,

announced his withdrawal from active political engagement, but then went on to endorse Britain's withdrawal from the European Union and embrace a politics of overt ethnic nationalism, framing it as a supposed antidote to globalization.¹³

In 2018, an unpublished paper that had apparently been rejected by several leading “sustainable management” journals began circulating even more widely online. Authored by the British management studies scholar Jem Bendell, the paper insisted on the absolute inevitability of near-term social collapse. Bendell's assessment of current climate science led him to foreground the views of critics who believed that such a collapse was not only virtually certain, but likely to occur within the next one to five years. He proposed that ongoing efforts toward climate adaptation should place equal emphasis on “psychological resilience” and an attitude of “relinquishment”—akin to how people respond to receiving a terminal medical diagnosis—along with more typical ecological restoration efforts.¹⁴

These are only some of the more popular expressions of a broadly dystopian outlook that has gained increasing support in recent decades. This is understandable in a world where climate-driven catastrophes are all around us, and where already-inadequate mitigation measures are being dismantled. But what does this mean for the future of climate advocacy and movements for climate justice?

Utopia or Catastrophe

Historically, the most effective social movements have complemented struggles to overturn an oppressive status quo with a longer-range view of a liberated future. More than sixty years ago, well before the emergence of an organized environmental movement, the leading theorist of social ecology, Murray Bookchin, advanced the idea that ecological science is inherently

both critical and reconstructive in character.¹⁵ A decade later, he and Dan Chodorkoff, already an activist anthropologist and student of utopian thought, founded the Institute for Social Ecology to teach a mix of social ecological theory and hands-on praxis in renewable energy technology, agriculture, and ecological building.¹⁶

In its early years, the Institute recruited hundreds of students and activists to spend entire summers at an innovative experimental farm in central Vermont, creating one of the first public demonstration sites for ecological technologies. Its approach had an important catalytic role in the emerging movement against nuclear power throughout New England and across the country, which emerged as a network of decentralized local alliances committed to nonviolent direct action and a reconstructive vision of ecological, solar-powered communities. Publications like *Rain Magazine* from Oregon and the *Coevolution Quarterly* (later renamed the *Whole Earth Review*) from northern California brought this synthesis to a much wider readership. The vision was fleshed out by small but influential groups of green architects and urban designers, visionary horticulturists and permaculturists, backyard inventors, creative artists, and a wide array of social activists throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This synthesis of oppositional and reconstructive thinking significantly influenced the global justice movements of the 1990s and early 2000s, Occupy Wall Street and its numerous offshoots in the 2010s, the first decades of climate justice activism around the world, and the emergence of



solarpunk as a visionary new cultural movement. Even today, it can inspire us toward a world beyond fossil-fueled capitalism, where we can all achieve a higher quality of life once freed from the stultifying cycles of ever-increasing capitalist production, consumption, and accumulation.

Despite these developments, however, more pessimistic outlooks still frequently come to dominate public discussions. Facing an earlier wave of popular collapse discourse in the climate movement and beyond, a circle of mostly west coast writers published an important collection of essays in 2012 under the title, *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*.¹⁷ Without underestimating the dire seriousness of the emerging climate crisis, they offered a searching critical outlook on popular "catastrophism" among environmentalists, in movements of both the left and the right, and in popular culture. For

one of the contributors, Bay Area scholar-activist Eddie Yuen, apocalyptic scenarios serve as "a kind of 'substitutionism,' in which a miraculous event ... transforms consciousness, wipes the slate clean and abruptly changes the world [without] the need for difficult organizing and conflictive politics."¹⁸ Over a dozen years ago, it was already predictable that forecasters of ecological collapse could be far more likely to fuel right-wing, anti-immigrant fanaticism than to facilitate a progressive awakening. Real solutions "must be prefigurative and practical as well as visionary and participatory," wrote Yuen, appealing to "community and solidarity" rather than "austerity and discipline."¹⁹ Writer and filmmaker James Davis described in detail how apocalyptic visions and a siege mentality are "central to the propaganda and ideology of the modern right,"²⁰ from Christian millenarians to militia members craving an all-consuming race war. He concluded, with striking resonance to recent political campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic, that "fear and paranoia serve a rightist political predisposition more than a left or liberal one. Authoritarian politics benefits more than left politics from fear."²¹ Media producer Sasha Lilley demonstrated in her chapter how expectations by left theorists that worsening social conditions would advance revolutionary movements have frequently led to just the opposite result.

More recently, the Iceland-based philosopher Ole Martin Sandberg offered a pointedly pragmatic argument against succumbing to climate despair, describing how times of crisis often advance an ethic of competition over cooperation, a heightened obedience to authority, and a distressingly Hobbesian view of society. He writes,

Exaggerating the threat of social collapse is more likely to make us cling to the social system that exists, to make us want to preserve the status quo and the system of domination and exploitation

that is causing the crisis. Panic is easily exploitable by authoritarian figures that promise to maintain order.... Seen this way, the narrative of social collapse might be part of the problem, leading to counterproductive and even harmful affective states and behaviors.²²

Sandberg cites a variety of alternative, prefigurative currents, from Common Ground Relief in post-Katrina New Orleans to the Occupy movement's response to Hurricane Sandy in New York City, as offering the counterpoint of a "lived and 'concrete utopia' [a phrase borrowed from philosopher Ruth Levitas], which can give us the hope and trust necessary to break the paralysis caused by an overpowering fear of climate induced societal apocalypse."²³ The movements he cites are in the spirit of those memorialized a generation earlier by Richard Flacks, a sociologist and frequent advisor to New Left formations, who chronicled the numerous ways that popular movements demonstrate

that people are capable of and ought to be making their own history, that the making of history ought to be integrated with everyday life, that [alienated] social arrangements ... can and must be replaced by frameworks that permit routine access and participation by all in the decisions that affect their lives."²⁴

Ernst Bloch, the celebrated mid-twentieth century chronicler of the "principle of hope" throughout Western history, offered a nuanced rejoinder to later views of hope as an inherently false and pacifying emotion, pointing out in the opening pages of his three-volume epic that, "Fraudulent hope is one of the greatest malefactors, even enervators of the human race, [while] concretely genuine hope its most dedicated benefactor."²⁵ At the turn of the millennium, the New York Public Library and Bibliothèque nationale de France collaborated on a comparably impressive exhibition titled *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western*

World. A large-format book that accompanied the exhibit features a catalog of images of utopian art from ancient times through the twentieth century, together with the writing of seventeen prominent historians and social critics. Alain Touraine, once a leading French historian of social movements, explained in his contribution that the idea of “Utopia was born only when the political order separated from the cosmological or religious order.”²⁶ He went on to describe utopian thought as an inherent product of secularization and modernity, coming to the fore as millenarian religious views were supplanted by more secular visions of a revolutionized social order. Political theorist Lyman Sargent’s essay quotes the early Dutch futurist Frederick Polak, who argued that our images of the future invariably affect how the future will unfold, writing in 1961 that

if Western man [*sic*] now stops thinking and dreaming the materials of new images of the future and attempts to shut himself up in the present, out of longing for security and for fear of the future, his [*sic*] civilization will come to an end. He has no choice but to dream or to die, condemning the whole of Western society to die with him.²⁷

Toward Post-Apocalypse?

We know that the utopian impulse is often central to the long-term sustainability of social movements, and can see how it may be an essential feature of society as a whole. So how are we to sustain such a utopian imperative in the current social and political climate? As I am writing these words in early 2025, the memory of the wildfires that ravaged many diverse Los Angeles neighborhoods is still fresh in our minds. The world has experienced an entire year of global temperatures averaging over 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, exceeding the predictions of the most reliable climate models.²⁸

The limited but essential legacy of environmental and civil rights protections in the United States is now highly endangered in the United States, along with the entire edifice of institutional safeguards nominally aimed at protecting society from the whims of would-be autocrats. An unelected 400-fold billionaire, with an apparently boundless ego matched only by the president’s, has begun to apply a kind of video-game sledgehammer to regulatory agencies, publicly funded science, civil servants’ employment safeguards, and numerous elements of our fragile social safety net. The reactionary and thoroughly racist insurrectionary impulses of the now-pardoned January 2021 US Capitol rioters now threaten nearly every public institution, and those who stormed the Capitol building on that day—or wish they had—can now cheer on the results from the safety of their computer or television screens.

How can hopes and dreams for a better world be sustained amidst this overt authoritarianism, disruption, and chaos? Can social movements prefigure a more lasting response to worsening climate conditions? We will briefly examine the views of some current European social movement researchers on these questions, and then consider how the radical legacy of mutual aid might help us navigate a way forward.

In one recent paper, researchers from the United Kingdom and United States argue for a clear distinction between “climate doomism” and “climate realism,” with the latter view emphasizing that catastrophe represents a *potential* future that can still be “assessed and guarded against.”²⁹ They caution against the view that our options are limited to total apocalypse or its complete prevention, as often expressed within movements like Extinction Rebellion, while embracing the existential otherness and “epistemic humility” that can be aroused by some of the best climate fiction.³⁰ Swedish

sociologist Carl Cassegård argues that we are already living in a “postapocalyptic” era, with severe climate-related disruptions very much a part of our present reality.³¹ While such a view can be seen as inviting hopelessness, fatalism, and passivity, he describes a series of interviews with fifteen collapse-minded activists whose approaches are far more nuanced. His informants’ views are placed along two distinct axes, assessing people’s sense of hope and their inclinations toward or away from political confrontation. Those who lack hope but don’t fear confrontation often redouble their efforts to live morally meaningful lives, whereas those who are somewhat hopeful but more confrontation-averse often convey a deep engagement with their natural surroundings and with collective efforts to live better on the land.³²

Dutch political scientist Joost deMoor has profiled proactive climate adaptation efforts in five northern European cities, frequently led by people with a postapocalyptic outlook. The most impressive is in Antwerp, Belgium, where people are countering their despair by greening neighborhoods, practicing agroecology, and “imagining the city of the future.”³³ Joe Davidson in the United Kingdom, one of the authors of the first “climate realism” paper cited earlier, elaborates on how postapocalyptic narratives “pique the imagination” and can further efforts at social rebuilding vs. mere fatalism.³⁴ He warns, however, that this approach often carries a distinctly Eurocentric bias, failing to acknowledge the experiences of people throughout the global South who have been contending with the ravages of extreme climate-related social disruptions for many years.

Finally, British geographer and social critic Erik Swyngedouw similarly warns against the superficial universalization of climate threats, as well as the tendency of many commentators to fall back on techno-

cratic false solutions. While it may already be too late for those around the world who “already live in the post-apocalyptic interstices of life,” acknowledging this reality can also be the harbinger of a new politics.³⁵ He embraces the rising demand for “system change not climate change” among radical climate activists and the potential for the present crisis to aid us in “constructing a real ‘humanity,’” a view that resonates with Murray Bookchin’s earlier insistence that our response to ecological crises can uphold humanity as an ethical and potentially revolutionary historical subject, rooted in community and able to reach beyond the limits of both class- and identity-based politics.³⁶

Mutual Aid and the Future

Popular responses to the Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented public attention to the legacy of mutual aid, an approach rooted firmly in anarchist theory and praxis that draws on the strongest human capacities for empathy, solidarity, and proactive community care.³⁷ While many Covid-era mutual aid efforts felt more like short-term, emergency band-aids than systemic challenges to an inherently inequitable and dehumanizing social order, others were firmly linked to political education and longer-term community organizing efforts. They introduced people to anti-hierarchical, horizontalist forms of praxis and countered the often stultifying hegemony of what is often described as the “non-profit industrial complex.”

Several of these projects have directly fed into longer-term programs of organizing and action, such as those of the Woodbine Center in the outer boroughs of New York City (based in Ridgewood, Queens) and Food Not Cops in Burlington, Vermont, which still provides daily free meals to those in need and also supported a fall 2020 encampment in a park across from the

local police headquarters, demanding the firing of officers with documented histories of brutality.³⁸ A network organized as Mutual Aid Disaster Relief came to master the art of diverting commercial supply chains to facilitate the movement of essential goods to where they are needed the most.³⁹ In the sprawling city of Los Angeles, a Covid-era mutual aid effort spawned a neighborhood-based electoral campaign and a series of People's Movement Assemblies, inspired by a process rooted in the 2010s-era U.S. Social Forums. Local groups involved in worker co-ops and debates over housing development on public lands, among others, founded an organizing project called Los Angeles for All, inspired by ongoing municipalist efforts in cities as diverse as Jackson, Mississippi, and Barcelona in Spain.⁴⁰

Cheryl Rivera, a participant in a Brooklyn-based mutual aid group that arose during the pandemic, describes the difficulties of sustaining the more system-challenging dimensions of mutual aid amidst the difficulties of day-to-day fundraising, distribution of goods, etc., but maintains a guardedly hopeful outlook:

Mutual aid can be transformative in a way that moves beyond crisis response and survival when it is consistent, militantly political, and when it creates community space out of a mere place.... What is less certain is whether the mutual aid networks we've built can help us go beyond crisis mode and become a tool for actually getting free of the exploitative structures of capitalism that undergird all of the basic functions of society.⁴¹

At its best, local mutual aid efforts can nurture new organizing methods and help inspire radically democratic approaches to community governance, beginning to fill in the gaps left by the failures of larger public institutions and ultimately enabling bolder directly democratic confederations throughout our cities and regions.⁴²

Similar efforts have emerged across the Atlantic as well. Tazio Mueller, a prominent German climate justice organizer and researcher, has become increasingly discouraged by the movement's perceived failures and proposes a movement for a "just collapse," rooted in the knowledge that climate chaos has arrived, that routine aspects of life can no longer be taken for granted, and the urgent need for resolutely antifascist, collective responses to emergencies.⁴³ He has highlighted the activities of a Swedish group called *Preppa Tillsammans* ("Prepping Together") that seeks to transform the typically hyper-individualistic "prepper" outlook into a program for co-operative, neighborhood-centered mutual aid.⁴⁴ Mueller and others have called for a different kind of European climate camp, a "Kollapskamp," with a combined focus on resilience and resistance. Their call for August 2025 proclaims that

even under these difficult conditions, we can build, protect and expand places of good living. There are role models and possibilities not to stop at the acceptance of collapse, but to use it to retain our collective agency in a darker future. Even in collapse, our struggle for the best possible world for all does not stop.⁴⁵

The world we are now experiencing can require us to sustain two apparently contradictory outlooks at the same time: first, that the current situation is dire and that some horrifically devastating outcomes appear inevitable; and, second, that the legacy of mutual aid and community repair remains a harbinger of a more forward-looking and even utopian outlook on the future. Public health advocate Brad Stulberg, writing in the *New York Times* not long ago, called for a sense of "tragic optimism": "Recognizing that we maintain agency fuels hope, and maintaining hope reminds us that we have agency."⁴⁶ Acclaimed education theorist and social critic Henry Giroux, reflecting upon the deep-seated culture of cruelty that

typifies the actions of the Trump administration—and its resonance with a fascistic politics of humiliation and “perpetual insecurity”—concluded that, “Hope, in this context, is not naïve optimism but a call to organized resistance—a refusal to accept the conditions of cruelty as inevitable.”⁴⁷

In a recent article in *Orion* magazine, environmental justice researcher and disability advocate Sunaura Taylor echoed the caution against viewing the climate future only in terms of apocalypse or salvation, as described earlier. We need to acknowledge, in Taylor’s words, “that nature has been altered and damaged in profound and serious ways,” and that we are experiencing the “mass ecological disablement of the more than human world.”⁴⁸ In her book *Disabled Ecologies*, exploring the consequences of a plume of toxic chemicals that spread over a five-mile span around Tucson’s international airport through decades of military aircraft production, Taylor wrote that we are now in an “Age of Disability,” one that “exposes how systems of power rely on, benefit from, and produce disability in and among human people...[,] ecosystems and nonhuman species.”⁴⁹ She calls for a “vast coalition of an environmentalism of the injured,” which draws on the lesson of critical disability studies that “with access to health care, social supports, and community, disabled life can be not just livable but flourishing.”⁵⁰

In a report on their immediate response to the flooding that devastated the city of Asheville, North Carolina, in the fall of 2024, members of the Firestorm radical community center noted, “It’s a strange paradox that the utopia we dream of becomes most visible in the dark.”⁵¹ Hope is “an act of defiance,” in the words of Rebecca Solnit in her now-classic work, *Hope in the Dark*. The book’s first chapter insists that: “To hope is to gamble. It’s to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and

safety. To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk.”⁵²

This is the kind of risk and “dangerous hope” that our movements will need to embrace if we are to find a sane and humane way through what are sure to be difficult times ahead.

This essay will appear as a chapter in *Climate Collapse and Revolt*, edited by Matthew Azoulay, to be published later this year by Arkbound books in the UK.

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The Leftist Alternative to Artificial Intelligence

REZGAR AKRAWI

[This is chapter 6 of *Capitalist Artificial Intelligence, Challenges for the Left and Possible Alternatives: Technology in the Service of Capital or a Tool for Liberation?* by Rezgar Akrawi.*]

THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN artificial intelligence have opened up vast possibilities for its applications across various fields. However, they have also sparked concerns about how this technology is being directed. From the perspective of digital leftism, AI can be a revolutionary tool that contributes to restructuring society toward greater justice and equality.

This vision aims to liberate AI from the constraints of the capitalist market and redirect it toward serving all humanity, transforming it into a means to improve quality of life, free people from burdensome routine labor, and enhance human creativity in all areas.

For the first time in history, it has become realistically possible to meet the needs of the majority of the population

with minimal human effort, and to provide goods, services, and knowledge abundantly, sometimes even for free, without relying on intensive wage labor or traditional bureaucratic structures. However, these possibilities are being constrained and used to maximize profits, reduce wages, and deepen class and ideological domination, rather than to free people from exploitation.

Today, AI is not merely a new tool in the hands of capital, it is fundamentally a reflection of a qualitative transformation in the nature of production and an exposure of capitalism's structural limits. Many digital applications and platforms, from 3D printing to cooperative systems, home-based production, mass automation, and the removal of capitalist intermediaries in some sectors, demonstrate that society now effectively possesses the tools that could allow for a socialist reorganization of the economy in a horizontal, participatory, and community-based manner.

Yet this transformation remains constrained and stifled by the monopolistic structures that dominate technology and redirect it toward profit rather than social benefit.

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*The complete book is available for free in English as an ebook at rezgar.com/books/i.asp?bid=4. However, for those who wish to obtain a version that supports various applications and is tailored for digital publishing, it can be downloaded for a symbolic price from: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0DYYYRHJK>

In the following sections, we will explore how a socialist, leftist vision, particularly that of digital leftism, can redefine artificial intelligence as a liberating force serving human and progressive values. These ideas, however, are merely an outline for collective dialogue within the left. Proposing such an alternative requires broad discussion among leftist, progressive, and activist movements and individuals around the world. By presenting these ideas, the goal is not to offer ready-made solutions, but to open up debate about urgent priorities. These priorities should serve as an open invitation to contribute to developing a digital leftist vision based on the collective ownership of artificial intelligence specifically, and technology in general, through an organized global leftist effort.

1. Developing Leftist, Neutral, and Open-Source AI Systems

As a feasible solution, developing neutral, democratic, and open-source AI systems is one of the core strategies to confront the dominance of major states and corporations over AI. These systems must be managed with transparency and independence, and kept as far as possible from monopolistic capitalist interests, to ensure their use in service of the people.

Achieving this requires collective effort and coordination among leftist, progressive, and human rights organizations around the world, to advocate and work toward making technology a tool that enhances democracy, freedom, and equality to the fullest extent possible under current class power dynamics.

Open-source systems offer an opportunity for the public and leftist/progressive organizations to participate in technological development in ways that reflect their values. Individuals or groups can access source code, understand how the systems work, and freely modify and improve them.

This approach can enhance collective ownership and innovation, support transparency, and partially dismantle the control of monopolistic states and corporations. The public accessibility of these systems for review also reduces the risk of ideological manipulation or hidden agendas, making them more reliable and independent from narrow capitalist interests.

It also provides safeguards for data protection and privacy. By enabling the auditing of source code, hidden biases and manipulations that serve ruling class interests can be identified and minimized.

Building transparency and trust in AI is a critical first step toward transforming technology into a liberatory tool.

The ultimate solution that we must struggle for in the long term lies in global coordination among leftist, progressive, and human rights organizations to develop and promote leftist and progressive, transparent alternatives to AI, ensuring the technology becomes collective property, under full public oversight and direction, aligned with respect for human rights, equality, democratic values, and intellectual pluralism.

Instead of AI remaining the exclusive domain of wealthy states and monopolistic corporations, it should become a progressive, popular tool that helps solve global and local problems such as poverty and exploitation, achieving equality and justice, enhancing democracy, addressing climate change, and developing more inclusive and equitable health and education systems, alongside other major human challenges. In this way, artificial intelligence becomes a global liberatory project, redefining the relationship between humans and technology according to socialist values and opening the door to a new model where technology is in service of humanity.

Until a progressive leftist model of AI is fully realized, current technologies must be subject to independent international

legal and human rights oversight to ensure transparency and fairness. This oversight can help curb, or at least frame, capitalist manipulation of technology as an initial step toward redirecting it in service of the wider public under suitable safeguards.

2. A Tool for Achieving Social Justice and Promoting Equality in the Labor Market

Artificial intelligence, if directed through a progressive, socialist-leftist lens, can become a powerful tool for liberating humanity and achieving social justice by analyzing complex social problems and providing effective solutions to reduce economic inequality and class oppression. But achieving this goal is not automatic; it requires directing its mechanisms and capabilities toward addressing the root causes of poverty, unemployment, lack of basic services, and social discrimination, so that it can truly serve the people.

AI can also help monitor these disparities through advanced data analysis systems, allowing for the identification of the most deprived groups and directing fair policies to correct structural imbalances in wealth and service distribution.

In this context, progressive governments and left-leaning institutions can employ these technologies to design more just and systematic economic and social programs, using precise data models to determine the actual needs of marginalized communities, thus promoting equal opportunities, reducing class inequality, and achieving the highest possible level of social justice.

The leftist alternative to AI focuses on making it a tool to free people from exhausting, repetitive labor, while ensuring the provision of dignified and stable employment at equal wages. Fair use of automation can reduce overall working hours, giving individuals more time for

personal growth, community participation, and enjoyment of life, instead of trapping them in the cycle of intensive capitalist exploitation. In this model, the labor market becomes a space that is more just and free, eliminating gender, racial, religious, and age-based discrimination through evaluation systems based on competence and skills, independent of social or ideological biases that reproduce existing class structures. It becomes a mechanism for ensuring equal opportunities for all, with a work environment that enhances the well-being of manual and intellectual workers alike.

Furthermore, AI can be a powerful tool to support labor organizing and union activism, through the development of apps that help workers build digital unions, create solidarity networks, strengthen their ability to negotiate with employers, demand their rights, and improve working conditions.

Finally, AI can be used to develop software capable of infiltrating production centers and imposing digital strikes, by disrupting production systems within corporations or government institutions that violate workers' rights or ban union activity. In authoritarian regimes that deny workers the right to organize and strike, this becomes a last-resort option to force these entities to grant more rights to their workforce.

3. Artificial Intelligence as a Practical Tool for Scientific Liberation and Creative Empowerment

Rather than allowing artificial intelligence to weaken human abilities and produce generations overly dependent on technology, it can be redirected to become a tool for scientific liberation and enhanced creativity. AI should not replace human thinking entirely, but should instead assist in expanding human capacities, enabling

access to advanced knowledge tools, and freeing up time from routine tasks, thus allowing people to focus on innovation and creative work.

Instead of reinforcing dependence and overreliance, including the trap of digital addiction, AI can be designed to assist rather than replace human agency. Progressive, open-source AI systems can be developed to stimulate critical and creative thinking, encouraging users to explore knowledge independently by prompting analytical questions rather than simply offering ready-made answers. These systems can suggest research ideas, analyze data to support inferential reasoning, and inspire users to generate original thought, rather than passively consume information.

The leftist alternative promotes using AI to strengthen collaborative scientific research by making big data analysis tools freely accessible to independent scientists and researchers. This can accelerate scientific innovation in fields like medicine, chronic and rare disease treatment, sociology, renewable energy, environmental protection, and more.

Collaborative AI projects can be established involving workers, women, engineers, researchers, and social activists, ensuring that technology is used in service of the public interest. It is crucial to provide AI technologies as fully free public services, granting individuals access to all features, both basic and advanced, that support creativity across fields, without the burden of high costs.

4. Community Oversight of Artificial Intelligence

The leftist alternative to AI seeks to impose transparent, democratic, community oversight over technology, especially artificial intelligence, to ensure its use is fair and equitable. Effective oversight requires redistributing digital power so that technol-

ogy is socially owned and used to serve the public, rather than being monopolized by major corporations.

This calls for the creation of participatory institutions and platforms that allow the public to examine how algorithms are designed and implemented, enhancing transparency and enabling users to understand how these technologies affect their daily lives. Popular oversight bodies should be established at both local and international levels, including broad representation of workers, academics, human rights advocates, and technical experts, to ensure neutrality and justice in the development and deployment of AI systems.

Furthermore, binding legislation and guidelines must be introduced requiring developers to embed values of justice and equality at the design stage, with mandatory community review before any system is marketed. Developers must be obligated to modify or halt any biased system that causes social harm, and no technology should be marketed without undergoing a thorough review to ensure it does not negatively impact marginalized groups or reinforce class inequality.

Additionally, oversight bodies must be given real authority to continuously audit algorithms and monitor for embedded biases that may lead to discrimination or exploitation. These bodies should also have the power to impose regulatory standards to prevent AI from being used, as it is today, as a tool for perpetuating inequality or class domination.

5. Restructuring Production and Distribution Using Artificial Intelligence

Restructuring production and distribution is a central pillar of the leftist vision for AI. This technology can be employed to build democratically centralized planning

systems based on accurate data and socialist principles, allowing resources to be efficiently allocated to meet society's real needs with the goal of achieving maximum social justice. These systems would rely on precise analysis of demand and consumption, enabling the production of necessary goods and services based on actual needs, and avoiding the overproduction that characterizes the capitalist system. A democratic socialist system powered by AI could achieve a balance between production and consumption and redistribute resources equitably to maximize the benefits of available capacities.

AI can play a critical role in restructuring supply chains by reducing waste, directing production toward the most underserved areas, and promoting environmental sustainability by minimizing energy and raw material consumption. Smart logistics systems can help distribute goods and services more efficiently and determine optimal routes to reduce carbon emissions, ensuring fair access without market manipulation or monopoly control.

Moreover, AI can enhance transparency in production and distribution by tracking how resources are allocated and ensuring they align with community priorities.

AI also has the potential to revolutionize cooperative, socially oriented production. It can empower cooperatives and community-based projects to utilize intelligent technologies that improve operational efficiency, lower costs, and ensure fair distribution of resources among members. In this context, technology becomes a tool for building a solidarity economy, helping poor communities achieve economic and political independence through joint production and equitable distribution of available resources, free from the grip of monopolistic capital.

6. Artificial Intelligence for Gender Justice

Leftist, feminist, and human rights forces must actively work to design and develop AI systems that promote gender justice and support full equality. To achieve this, there must be balanced representation of women in technology development teams, helping to reduce gender biases embedded in algorithms. There must also be pressure to enforce policies that mandate gender diversity at all stages and levels of AI design and development, aiming to dismantle the prevailing male dominance in the field.

Additionally, algorithms must be trained on comprehensive, diverse datasets that reflect women's experiences and roles in full and non-stereotypical ways. This would help break traditional gender molds reinforced by patriarchal structures. Governments must be pushed to adopt legislation requiring companies to publish transparent reports on gender diversity in their tech teams and programs, with significant penalties for non-compliance.

Evaluation metrics must shift to focus on "gender equity" in system performance rather than just technical efficiency.

AI can also be used to support women's issues and promote gender equality by developing advanced analytical systems that detect workplace discrimination. It can also support policies that strengthen women's rights in education, healthcare, and economic and political inclusion. Additionally, AI technologies can be used to analyze gender pay gaps through intelligent systems trained on labor market data, helping to develop fairer policies that achieve wage justice and gender parity.

Leftist, feminist, and human rights organizations must adopt a discourse that redefines technology as a liberatory tool for gender equality, rather than one that reproduces discrimination. This includes challenging stereotypes tied to voice-based

and service systems, and developing smart assistants that reflect progressive values like justice and equality, acknowledging women as full, equal partners in building society.

Moreover, male-dominated language must be removed from AI systems, and gender-neutral language must be developed to help dismantle sexist bias. This can be achieved by designing algorithms based on comprehensive, diverse linguistic data that do not reflect traditional gender stereotypes.

AI tools can also be developed to review texts and analyze discourse to eliminate linguistic or gender-based discrimination, helping reshape the language of intelligent systems to be more inclusive and equitable, and to promote respect and equality in expression and communication.

Such measures will contribute to building an alternative vision that redefines the relationship between AI and gender justice, where technology becomes an effective tool for empowerment and liberation and supports full gender equality and justice.

7. Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for Advancing Human Rights

Artificial intelligence must be redirected to become a tool for the protection and promotion of human rights, not for their restriction or violation. To achieve this, progressive leftist initiatives must be adopted to ensure transparency, oversight, and the use of AI in ways that promote justice and equality, instead of being used by authoritarian regimes and major corporations to monitor individuals and suppress freedoms.

Strict local and international legal frameworks must be established to criminalize the use of AI in violating human rights, whether through surveillance, targeting dissidents and activists, or digital censorship that leads to digital arrests, digital assassinations, and restrictions on freedom of expression.

All AI applications must respect the principles of justice and fundamental human rights as enshrined in international charters. Security-based applications of AI must be subject to independent judicial review, with civil society organizations participating in evaluating the risks these systems pose to freedoms. Global solidarity networks should be formed to monitor AI-related human rights violations and boycott companies that sell surveillance technologies to authoritarian regimes, placing them on international blacklists.

To ensure accountability, open-source AI systems and programs must be developed and managed by independent bodies composed of civil society and human rights representatives, with democratic oversight to prevent misuse by governments, monopolistic corporations, or authoritarian regimes. These systems could be used to protect human rights by exposing violations, monitoring government performance, and analyzing data to reveal repressive practices.

Strengthening the role of leftist, progressive, and human rights organizations in monitoring the use of AI is essential. International coalitions can be formed to pressure against the exploitation of this technology for domination and digital repression.

AI can also be an effective tool in resisting digital surveillance by supporting the development of encryption technologies and secure communications to protect activists and dissidents, while also monitoring dictatorial governments and exposing their human rights violations.

Raising public awareness about the dangers of digital surveillance and control is also crucial, along with enacting local and international laws to prevent privacy violations and providing tools to help individuals protect their data and ensure freedom of expression in digital spaces.

8. Toward an Eco-Socialist Alternative for Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence must be redirected toward environmental protection, an objective that can only be fully achieved within a socialist framework that redefines the relationship between technology and nature, away from the capitalist market logic that currently drives its development.

A leftist alternative to AI must seek to liberate technology from capitalist control and turn it into a tool for democratically and socially managing resources. Its applications should serve to combat climate change, reduce the environmental impact of production, and ensure equitable resource distribution, instead of reinforcing the capitalist model of unlimited consumer-driven production that undermines ecological balance.

In a leftist model, AI would serve as a mechanism for environmentally conscious economic planning. Its analytical capabilities would be employed to align production with actual societal needs, not market demand and competition, which constantly drive expansion. Through progressive AI governance, resources could be used more efficiently, waste could be minimized, and technological development could be directed toward deep environmental solutions, such as improving renewable energy systems, ensuring sustainable water management, and reducing emissions in industrial sectors.

AI should be banned in projects that harm the environment, and any AI technology must be subject to environmental impact assessments before being approved. Smart monitoring systems should be created to ensure corporate compliance with environmental standards, with popular oversight of technological development policies to prevent destructive resource exploitation.

Ending the dominance of powerful states and monopolistic corporations over technology is not only about redistributing its benefits, it's about redefining its priorities. Technology should be redirected toward strategic environmental initiatives that serve society and the planet, rather than corporate interests.

Capitalist technology in its current form does not solve the environmental crisis, it exacerbates it. Within a socialist framework, however, technology can be redirected to become a powerful tool for protecting natural resources and building an economy based on environmental justice, not human and ecological exploitation.

While some reforms may be possible within capitalism, such as environmental regulations and green legislation, experience shows their limitations and inability to bring about fundamental change.

The root solution requires a radical transformation in the relationship between technology and society, where all technologies and AI systems are subject to strict democratic and ecological standards that prioritize environmental protection.

This also involves developing intelligent systems that reduce energy overconsumption and promote full reliance on renewable energy, ensuring that technology serves both society and the environment.

9. Artificial Intelligence for Peace and Disarmament

AI must be reoriented as a tool for promoting global peace rather than as a weapon of war and destruction. To achieve this, international policies must be adopted that prohibit the development and use of AI in weapons, especially autonomous systems that operate without direct human intervention, as these pose an unprecedented threat to global peace and reinforce the dominance of military superpowers.

Leftist and progressive movements can

lead global initiatives to pressure governments and international institutions into enacting clear and strict legislation banning the military development of AI. This technology could instead be used to analyze current conflicts, study the root causes of wars, and propose solutions that address those causes.

AI can also enhance international cooperation through platforms that foster dialogue between peoples and promote diplomacy and peaceful solutions.

Additionally, AI should be used to document war crimes and human rights violations, holding authoritarian regimes, states, and large corporations accountable for militarizing technology and using it to wage war.

Leftist movements, peace advocacy groups, and antiwar organizations have a key role in raising public awareness about the risks of AI militarization, through educational campaigns, progressive media, and on-the-ground activism, to expose the links between capitalism and war and the commodification of destruction.

Empowering the masses to resist the militarization of technology means building a global resistance movement capable of pressuring governments and institutions to end this inhumane and criminal use of technology in general, and artificial intelligence in particular.

10. Artificial Intelligence for Supporting Democracy and Popular Participation

AI must be transformed from a tool that contributes to the erosion of democracy into one that strengthens and advances it. Technology should empower the public, enhance political participation on the basis of equality, and ensure transparency and integrity in democratic processes.

AI can be used to develop secure and transparent digital platforms for dialogue and voting, allowing citizens to express their views and participate directly and effectively in decision-making at all levels. This would promote participatory democracy and restore power and agency to the people.

AI tools can also be developed to automatically detect and expose fake news and misinformation, protecting the public from disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining their ability to make informed decisions. These tools can be made widely and freely available as part of a public initiative to promote media transparency and combat monopolistic media dominance.

This requires fighting for local and international laws that clearly prohibit the use of AI to manipulate public opinion and ensure that information provided to the public is accurate, objective, and reflective of reality, free from class or ideological bias.

Neofascism, Imperialism, War, and Revolution in the Middle East

An Interview with Gilbert Achcar

RODRIGO UTRERA

Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon and has lived and taught in Paris, Berlin, and London. He is Professor Emeritus at SOAS, University of London. His many books include *The Clash of Barbarisms* (2002, 2006); *Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy*, co-authored with Noam Chomsky (2007); *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (2010); *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism* (2013); *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (2013); *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising* (2016); and *The New Cold War: The United States, Russia, and China from Kosovo to Ukraine* (2023). This interview was conducted online on March 30, 2025, by Rodrigo Utrera, a student of sociology at the University of Chile. (Email: rodrigo.utrera@ug.uchile.cl.) He is a member of the Editorial Committee of *Actuel Marx Intervenciones* in Chile. The interview was first published in Spanish in that journal (no. 35, August 2025), in an issue dedicated to examining war and its mutations in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

The New Cold War and Its Dangers

Rodrigo Utrera: *First, Gilbert, we thank you for the time you gave us for these conversations about the mutation of war in the twenty-first*

century, especially about your knowledge of the Middle East and North Africa, as part of your work on international relations. In the first place, we have some short questions to introduce the conversation.

Gilbert Achcar: You're most welcome.

RU: *If we introduce some global view of the problem, it is important to understand imperialist strategy in this context. The war between Russia and Ukraine and the trade competition between China and the United States generate in a lot of people in the world many ideas about a terminal crisis in United States imperialism. Some more optimistic people have supported the BRICS initiative, which has already expanded to include new countries. And others, like Michael Roberts¹ for example, have some criticism about the return of campism on the left. So, the question is how you define the confrontation between powerful countries at this moment. Do you think it's like an inter-imperialist confrontation? Is it a new cold war? That's our question to begin with.*

GA: First of all, it is important to emphasize that it does not make much sense to speak of a terminal crisis of U.S. imperialism. U.S. imperialism is unfortunately far from dead. And what is happening is a mutation of U.S. imperialism. What is ending is what I call the Atlanticist liberal order that has built up since the Second World War. And its government institu-

tions like NATO, like the treaties between Washington and Japan, and Washington and South Korea. This international liberal order was supposedly built on rules, but that was always a big lie, because Western powers never really abided by any rules, except their own, especially the United States. So, what we have seen is the beginning of the collapse of this liberal international order, this Atlanticist liberalism. And this does not begin with Donald Trump, contrary to what many people believe. Biden and the war in Gaza were a key moment in that, especially due to the huge contrast between the attitude of the United States toward Ukraine and its attitude toward Gaza. This showed in the crudest possible way the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the so-called Atlantic liberalism. They could say that the United States was defending a relatively liberal government in Ukraine against a Russian regime that could arguably be described as neofascist. But then, the same United States fully endorsed a genocidal war waged by a coalition of neofascist and neo-Nazis in Israel. That's the true character of the Israeli government. It is a coalition of neofascists, Likud, and neo-Nazis, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir, Bezalel Smotrich, and other people. And so this huge contradiction was the final nail in the coffin of Atlanticist liberalism, the whole so-called international liberal order. What Trump is doing is taking this process to the extreme, to the ultimate logical conclusion, getting rid of any pretense of liberalism. Trump has zero pretense of being liberal, pro-human rights, or whatever. The "free world" ideology of the Cold War, that's very far from Donald Trump. He doesn't care about free or not free. Actually, his administration openly supports the international far right, from Milei, to Bolsonaro, to Narendra Modi, to of course all the European neofascists.

This is a huge historical mutation, ab-

solutely huge. In my view, it is even more important than the end of the Cold War. Because you had the end of the Cold War and then it was followed by a new Cold War for twenty-five years. But now we are getting into a complete reconfiguration of international relations. We entered into what I called the age of neofascism. As you had the age of fascism in the 1930s, we are now in an age of neofascism, which is worse because today the most important imperialist power is leading the neofascist coalition. In the 1930s, the United States was the bulwark against the rise of fascism. It was defending liberalism, if you want, with the British. Now this is dead. This is completely dead as a role of the United States, and this is something of tremendous consequence in every field: political, ideological, and ecological, because these people are very much climate denier pro fossil fuel. So that's the situation in which we are now.

RU: *Well, about something you mentioned. We have some questions because you exchanged some opinions about the crisis with another British Marxist, Alex Callinicos. He talks about a new age of catastrophe.² In that view, we know that revolutionary Marxism has some difficulty in characterizing the stage we are living in in the twenty-first century. So, the question is what do you think about the concept of a new age that Callinicos describes, and do you think this new era comes after the Covid-19 pandemic or was its origin a long time ago? And also, do you think this age has some similar points with the age of war and revolutions that Lenin pronounced in 1914?*

GA: First of all, the age of catastrophe is a rhetorical formula. It does not characterize politically what's happening. Of course, we are facing a lot of catastrophes, right? Climate, pandemics, etc. There are a lot of very big problems facing the planet today. But calling it the "new age of catastrophe" is a literary choice of the author. When I speak

of the age of neofascism, I mean something that really starts with the second Trump presidency, as *a culmination of a process* that developed over twenty years. The key point here is this rise of far right forces, far right governments, far right regimes and their convergence, the convergence between them. As we can see, even between Trump in the United States and Putin in Russia. Because Trump and his administration have more ideological affinities with Vladimir Putin than they have with Zelensky or with the European liberal governments of France, Germany, Britain, and such countries. So this is the key point we have to understand. And as for war and revolution, to be frank, we are unfortunately not in an age of war and revolution. We are in an age of war without revolution. There's no revolution on the horizon now. We have to be clear.

RU: *Maybe it's more similar to the situation of the 1930s?*

GA: No, because in the 1930s or in 1914, as you mentioned, with the famous analysis on war and revolution, you had a huge workers' movement that was still socialist. You had social democrats, you had people who later called themselves communist, but they had in common that they were anti-capitalist working class forces, and they were very big forces. And when you had the war, you had the rise of these forces, and especially you had the Russian revolution, the German revolution, the Hungarian revolution, and other uprisings. In the 1930s, you had the rise of fascism, but in the face of fascism, you had the communist movement, led by the Soviet Union, and you had a clash between the two. Of course, you had a brief period of truce between them, between 1939 and 1941, but basically they were in fierce opposition. And the communist movement, worldwide, managed to grow tremendously during the Second World

War, which led to taking power in China, Vietnam, and Korea, while in many European countries, you had communist parties becoming huge and playing a key role in the politics. So there's no way to compare the situation of today unfortunately to that. The workers' movement is weaker than at any point, the organized workers' movement. This translates even into very low unionization rates in most countries. There are no powerful working class parties. Most of the left has gone completely into a neo-liberal mutation and that applies to social democracy. Others were not able to do an *aggiornamento*, to adapt to the new age, to the new century, to the new conditions. They have not really drawn the lessons from the collapse of Stalinism and all that.

There is a welcome rise of youth movements on ecology, on gender, on identity policy, on anti-racism, but look at the difference between this and 1968 when you had huge student movements everywhere led by Marxists. Today the youth movement is not Marxist. We have to face the truth. So, from that point of view, I wrote explaining that in some way, this present age of neofascism is even more dangerous than the previous one. Because the balance of forces is worse than it was even in the 1930s. I wrote that in my article on the age of neofascism.³

It may be unlikely that there will be a new world war, but the impact of neofascism on the global climate crisis, which is a major threat to humanity, is huge. Not to mention every other regression that is happening. Just look at what the United States is doing in terms of cutting aid, pushing millions of people into poverty. So, we are in a very dangerous epoch, and we have to be very much aware of that.

Of course, the hope is that the new generation, young people, will be able to build mass movements, new anti-capitalist movements, that can take up all these struggles

in an intersectional way. Take the issues of race, gender, and climate and combine them with the class perspective, the anti-capitalist perspective. But the truth is that the balance of forces today is quite weak. There are some encouraging signs like the mass resistance in Turkey to the neofascist turn of Erdogan. We'll have to see who wins: the mass movement or this neofascist regime? These are encouraging signs, but we are still far from the emergence of the kind of movement that is needed to fight back, defeat neofascism, and push forward the fight against capitalism.

Clash of Barbarisms and Arab Revolts in the Twenty-first Century *Understanding Imperialism and Counter-revolution in the Middle East*

RU: *Now that we have a global point of view, we want to move to the question about imperialism and counter-revolution in the Middle East. Especially about a concept that you use in your works, because it's very interesting to us. This describes the confrontation between two forces: first, imperialism, and second, fundamentalist forces that, in many cases, have their origins in imperialism itself. We are talking about the concept of the clash of barbarisms. Can you explain this concept to us? Also, an important aspect: when you define the element of Islamic fundamentalism, are you considering only the Sunni jihadist movements or are you also talking about Khomeinist movements supported by Iran?*

GA: Well, I wrote my book *The Clash of Barbarisms* in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. It was in a way a counter-thesis to that of Huntington about the clash of civilizations.⁴ What I explained in the book is that these were not civilizations clashing, but the barbarism that each civilization produces. Each civilization produces some type of barbarism which in time of crisis can take over. And this is how I interpreted

what was happening at the time between the barbarism of the United States (and their hubris after the collapse of the Soviet Union) and the countereffect of that barbarism in the Islamic radicalization of forces that are politically and ideologically deeply reactionary. Of course in the case of jihadist forces like Al Qaeda or the Islamic State (ISIS), I think that should be obvious, but the issue is more general. All religious fundamentalist forces are reactionary and Islam is no exception. We immediately understand that Christian fundamentalist forces are reactionary. I really always wonder why some Western leftists can't understand that the same applies to Islamic fundamentalism. All fundamentalism: Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, whatever. By definition, fundamentalism is a reactionary ideology. Socially, culturally, ideologically, politically. And that's what we have.

Now, ten years after 2001, you had in 2011 the beginning of what was called the Arab Spring. That was the result of a deep structural social economic crisis in the Middle East and North Africa in Arabic-speaking countries. In my analysis, this deep crisis from the start produced what I called a long-term revolutionary process. The region entered into a long-term process of decades. Now, in this process, you had a peculiarity. It was not the usual revolution versus counter-revolution. It was something specific: a triangle of revolution and two counter revolutions. One counter revolution represented by the old regime, the existing regimes, and another counter-revolution represented by opposition forces of a reactionary character. And that complicated the whole picture. In this part of the world, the left has been atrophied historically. It's quite weak. It played some disproportionate role in 2011. Then you had the second wave of the Arab Spring in 2019 and again you had some disproportionate role of the left, but that was not

enough to change. And that's why there has been a historical failure until now. But this does not mean that the revolutionary process is dead, because as long as you have the structural crisis, the crisis of the mode of production, the specific capitalism that exists in this part of the world, as long as we have this crisis, it will produce new uprisings. It will produce a new crisis. The big question is whether the new generations will be able to build a strong movement that is capable of leading social, economic, and political change. That's a very big challenge to be frank. There is no reason to be optimistic because the regimes in the region are ferocious and they are backed by both U.S. imperialism and Russia. This makes the situation very difficult. But we still see nevertheless then and now some rise of mass movements. The future is a big question mark. But the crisis will not be solved unless you have radical change.

RU: *Now that we have this concept, the clash of barbarisms, we want to delve into a characteristic of wars in the Arab context. The Western press sometimes uses the concept of proxy war. We could say it's fashionable among mainstream journalism. We can define it, vulgarly, as a confrontation in which a state uses a third parastatal force against its enemies. A force that the first state has trained and financed. According to the mainstream press in the West, this technique, this method of confrontation, has been especially prevalent in the Arab world in recent decades. The question is: how do you interpret this concept, from the perspective of the clash of barbarisms?*

GA: About the proxy wars, I think the concept is reductionist because it denies the agency of local actors. So it represents local actors as puppets, used by foreign actors. Now, if we mean by proxy war the fact that when you have war in some countries, soon afterwards you have foreign states intervening in support of one or another

faction, this definitely exists in the region. For example, the war in Libya. You have on one side Turkey and Qatar supporting the forces based in Tripoli—in the west of Libya—and you have Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt supporting the forces in the east, in Benghazi, led by Khalifa Haftar. If you take the war in Yemen, you had direct intervention from the Saudi Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates in the war, and Iran was backing the other side, the Houthis. So you could also say it's a proxy war, but again this is reductionist.

These wars are used as a proxy war by these foreign states, but there is also a local agency of the actors that are clashing. The Sudan war is the same. You can find on one side the United Arab Emirates and Russia. On the other side you have Egypt and the Saudis. And you had some changes recently in the positions of these states, especially Russia. So it's normal that wherever you have a civil war, you will have people intervening in support of one of the two camps. After all if you think of the Spanish Civil War, you had the Axis Powers, Italy and Germany, supporting Franco. And you had the United States, France, and Britain supporting the Republican camp as well as the Soviet Union of course. So that's not something new.

The thesis of a proxy war was mostly invoked about Ukraine. Again, this was a denial of agency. If you say this is just a proxy war between the United States and NATO and on the other hand Russia, you are denying the agency of the Ukrainians because that's their country. Their country has been invaded. They are fighting an invasion. And in some sense the Russian vision of Ukraine is a colonial one. It denies even the right of Ukraine to exist as a state. So it's true that in part this war has been a war between Russia and the Western bloc, but there is also the fight of the Ukrainians

and here I make a distinction. I think that it's absolutely fair and right that they defend themselves and defend their population against Russian aggression. But at the same time, of course, I support anything that could lead to a peaceful settlement and I am not at all in the logic of nationalist maximalism. I think you can find this kind of maximalism in Ukrainian nationalism and it is supported by some European countries like Britain. It translates in the support for the Ukrainians' right to fight on until they liberate all the territories invaded since 2014. That doesn't make sense. That would mean a very, very long war, a very costly war. So you have to find a balance in the position in what is a complex issue and not settle it with simplistic formulas.

RU: *You mention some interesting points, because we can think that proxy war is a reductionist concept because the Western press forgets that a long time ago, during the Cold War, the imperialist states used mercenary forces in many countries, for example to fight against the Cuban revolution. We have the case of Chile where the United States financed a lot of conservative press, conspiratorial and fascist groups, etc. So I say, it is not something new.*

GA: Yes, absolutely. And the example of Chile that you're raising is very good. I mean, of course the United States supported Pinochet. That's well known. But does this mean that Pinochet was just a puppet of the United States and he would not have acted without a green light from the United States? No, I don't think so. I think that he and the part of the army that were deeply reactionary and opposed to the government would have acted anyway, and were betting on support from the United States if needed. So again, this idea of proxy war can be very reductionist and simplistic, whereas we have to understand the complexity of local politics. The local actors have their own interests and their

own aspirations, and the same goes for the foreign actors that intervene in this situation in support of one camp or another.

RU: *Exactly. We want to ask you about one important actor in the Middle East because it's very interesting and some new generations of left militants don't know the origin of the regime of that country. We are talking about the Islamic Republic of Iran. So, what is the origin of the Iranian Revolution of 1979? Why did that event have a lot of influence on the future of the country? How can we explain that revolution passed to history as an Islamic Revolution, although it had an important participation of a workers' movement and also some workers' councils, known as Shoras?*

GA: Well, that's another good illustration of what we have discussed. Iran had accumulated under the Shah a lot of social and economic problems. And the country reached an explosive condition. There, in Iran, two competing forces participated in the revolution. One was revolutionary, the workers' movement and the left. The other was a counter-revolutionary force, the reactionary clergy, led by Ruhollah Khomeini. And that was a big party because you had something like one mullah for every 320 people in Iran. It was a huge party. So what happened? In 1981, I wrote a piece drawing a parallel between the Russian revolution and the Iranian revolution. In both cases, you had an in part spontaneous, not fully, but in part spontaneous mass movement of protest against a regime that had become hated by the great mass of the people. And then what happens in the Russian case is that one force, which is the most radical, the Bolsheviks, managed to lead the process, to take the leadership of the process and turn it into an anti-capitalist revolution. In Iran you had a mass uprising, a revolutionary situation, but the force that managed to lead the process was the reactionary clergy that took it into a reactionary direction,

into establishing a theocracy. The Iranian regime has long been the only theocratic regime, aside from the Vatican. There are today the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Houthis in Yemen, theocratic regimes where constitutional power is in the hands of the religious, of the clergy. And this is again extremely reactionary and only what I call Orientalists in reverse, that is people who invert western orientalism. Where western orientalism put minus signs on Islam, you have some people, including people on the left, who reverse that and put plus signs on everything Islamic.

Now this theocratic regime emerged as very much anti-American because the United States was the main backer of the Shah, the previous regime. The Khomeinist regime was a very ideological and sectarian regime on the basis of Shiism, which is the majority branch of Islam in Iran. They were first attacked by Iraq, leading to eight years of war that actually allowed the clergy to centralize its power more firmly in Tehran. And later, when the United States invaded Iraq, Iran took full advantage of this to spread its influence into Iraq where the majority is Shia, the same branch of Islam. They managed therefore to become more influential in Iraq than the United States: the U.S. invasion of Iraq was a total failure from that point of view.

And then, in 2012 you had the Syrian Civil War. Iran intervened, contradicting its ideological logic, because Syria saw a clash between a regime that called itself socialist and secular and forces that were Sunni Islamic fundamentalist. But Iran supported the so-called socialist secular regime on the basis of sectarianism because the leading group in the Syrian regime belonged to a branch of Shiism. They acted according to a sectarian logic, not a general Islamic ideological logic. They engaged in building a corridor of a sectarian character from Iran to the Mediterranean Sea, including Shia

militants in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

RU: *The forces you mentioned are some type of defense alliance that Iran names the Axis of Resistance.*

GA: Yes, that's what they call it, but if you look at it, it's primarily a sectarian axis. It is based on sectarianism above all, even though, of course, Iran played the card of opposition to Israel in its ideological battle against the Arab States of the Gulf and especially the Saudi Kingdom. At some point the Obama administration wanted to appease them, and went into a negotiation with them on the nuclear issue to prevent their developing a nuclear weapon. This led to an agreement between the Obama administration and other European states and the Iranian government. That agreement was revoked by Donald Trump during his first term in 2018. The Iranian regime reacted by developing its nuclear capabilities and enriching its uranium. And also expanding its Axis of Resistance, as they call it: from Iran into Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, plus Hamas, which they supported as well as Islamic Jihad in Palestine.

RU: *So maybe one element important in clarifying the character of Iran and its Axis is to understand not only its geopolitical actions but also to understand the class character of the regime, because it can clarify for comrades on the left the position and role that Iran plays in the Middle East.*

GA: Well, the Iranian regime is a capitalist state with peculiarities, with the existence of large institutions controlled by the clergy and the existence of the Revolutionary Guards who are a parallel military organization controlling an economic empire. This is not exceptional in the region. In Egypt, for instance, the army controls an economic empire. So you have the same in some way with the Revolutionary Guards in Iran. But it is a capitalist and even

neoliberal regime, with such peculiarities related to its ideological character and the fact that it is a theocracy. This is very specific. It's not an ordinary capitalist state, of course. Now, Iran in its confrontation with the United States and with Israel has a just cause, because opposing U.S. imperialism and opposing Zionism are just. In that sense one can support Iran against Washington or Israel. We shouldn't be neutral on this. But this does not mean that Iran or Hezbollah are progressive forces. They are not. They mix opposition to Israel and to America with a reactionary social and economic program.

RU: *And it is interesting to note that there isn't a 100 percent ideological or political harmony within this Axis, because we have some cases, like the recent fall of the Assad regime, in which Hamas celebrated Assad's fall. This can be confusing to some people.*

GA: Well, that was an opportunist position. Hamas has been very opportunist in the case of Syria. At the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, they supported the opposition because of the role of the Muslim Brotherhood as the key force in the opposition. Hamas itself is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Then later on because of their need for Iranian support, they shifted their position and reconciled with the Assad regime. Now, after the Assad regime collapsed last autumn you had a rise of Islamic Sunni forces in Syria. And the Muslim Brotherhood is part of what you have today in Syria. So Hamas shifted their position in support of the new regime. In summary, Iran supports, first, the forces that are organically linked to Iran, to Shi'ism, Shia forces. And secondly, it supports Sunni fundamentalist forces that are anti-U.S. and anti-Israel. It supported the Muslim Brotherhood for many years before the Syrian Civil War and then the relations between Tehran and the Muslim

Brotherhood deteriorated. They supported Hamas for a while, then the relationship at some point deteriorated but was resumed later on. They support another group in Gaza that is closer to them, Islamic Jihad.

RU: *Gilbert, now that we have more clarity on the issue of Iran and the Axis of Resistance, we want to ask about the Arab Spring before going straight to October 7. Sometimes, people on the left talk about the uprisings of 2011 in the Arab World as "Color Revolutions." This is a controversial concept. Some use it to refer to nonviolent tactics of popular mobilization, while others use it to describe the role played by imperialism through the CIA, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), or the Open Society. It is hard to deny that this strategy of cultural and media insertion played an important role in post-Soviet Eastern Europe. However, is it possible to speak of the Arab Spring uprisings as "color revolutions"? Did the United States use these methods?*

GA: The only people who described what happened in the Arab World in 2011 as color revolutions were campist people, supporters of the Assad regime, supporters of Iran, supporters of all this. And it does not make any sense because the first uprising was in Tunisia against a very pro-western regime. The second uprising was in Egypt, against a very pro-western U.S.-linked regime. Then you had an uprising in Libya and some people on the left believed that Libya was anti-imperialist, but since 2003 Kadhafi had shifted and established close relations with the imperialist powers of the United States, Britain, Italy, and the rest. And then you had Yemen where the regime again was closely linked to the United States. You had an uprising in Bahrain, which is an oil monarchy, of course linked to U.S. imperialism. So to call these uprisings against regimes, most of which were pro-Western or friends of Western imperialism, to call them color

revolutions, meaning that there was some kind of invisible hand of Washington behind them, was absurd, completely absurd. This view of things developed because of the U.S. and NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 and mostly because of the civil war in Syria, where the regime of Assad was backed by Iran and later by Russia and the opposition was backed by various Arab oil monarchies. This led to a neo-campist perspective, as I call it.

The old campism consisted in blind support for the Soviet Union. With neo-campism, there is no single state that neo-campists relate to, but neo-campism consists in the automatic support of any forces that the United States opposes. The logic is “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Thus any force that is the enemy of Washington is my friend. And this leads to extremely bad positions such as support for Assad, which was a terribly murderous dictatorship with an absolutely barbaric prison system in which tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people were caught, many of them dying there. A regime that has been a reactionary capitalist regime. But the fact that Washington opposed this regime and some of the Gulf monarchies also were opposed to it, led some people to support it. The whole depiction of what happened in the Arab region as a color revolution is just completely out of touch with reality. You could say that in Eastern Europe, in some of the events that happened there, there was some interference of U.S. organizations. Even then, you cannot deny the agency of the local people. This is a very conspiratorial vision of the history of the world that is the exact replica of that of the reactionary regimes. Whenever there is a popular movement rising up, the reactionary regimes say that it is led by foreign powers. And likewise some people on the left, when there is a popular movement rising up against a regime that they

believe is anti-imperialist, they say that it is manipulated by foreign powers.

Toward Regional War? *From October 7th to the Imperialist Attack against the Entire Middle East*

RU: *Gilbert, with all that is happening now, it is possible to venture the hypothesis of a de facto regional war. Perhaps, we could review some of the most significant events since October 7 in order to understand this situation.*

GA: Well, when October 7, 2023, happened, Iran faced a dilemma because Hamas didn't consult them about this operation. And yet Hamas asked them openly to join it in the war. So, either they entered the war more fully and took huge risks of the United States attacking them, or they didn't do anything and lost face, appearing as cowards. What they chose was a middle way. Limited war through Hezbollah in Lebanon, a limited exchange in a limited territory on each side of the border between Lebanon and Israel, an exchange of fire that continued for almost one year within limits. Israel didn't want to escalate because it was fully engaged in Gaza. Then after one year, the Israelis basically had occupied all of Gaza. They were continuing the genocide, but the major part of the war was behind them. So, they turned toward Lebanon. And they ran an attack that came as a full surprise to Hezbollah. They managed to decapitate Hezbollah basically in a few days.

RU: *Yes, they used this massive electronic technique, blowing up the pagers and walkie-talkies of Hezbollah militants.*

GA: Yes, but most importantly Israel directly killed Nasrallah and others very soon after. In a few days, they decapitated Hezbollah. And Hezbollah had to agree to withdraw from the border and go north, and even to agree on a settlement that

calls for its own disarmament. So Hezbollah has been weakened a lot. And when this happened, you had the offensive of Islamic fundamentalist forces in Syria against the Syrian regime, seizing the opportunity of Hezbollah being so weakened that they could no longer support Assad as they did in the past. And Russia being involved in Ukraine had removed most of its planes from Syria. The Assad regime was standing on two legs, Iran and Russia. These two legs collapsed and so the whole regime collapsed very quickly. This further weakened, and very much so, Hezbollah and the whole Iran Axis; the corridor got closed. Iran doesn't have the means to send arms to Hezbollah as they did after 2006, the previous war of Israel on Hezbollah, which was very destructive already. However, very quickly after that war, Hezbollah rebuilt its military force and even became much stronger than before 2006. This time this will not be possible because of the fall of Assad in Syria, which was the main bridge over which Hezbollah was getting weapons. Syria is now on the opposite side if you want. So, Iran has been very much weakened and then you had this exchange of attacks between Iran and Israel. Now, Netanyahu is waiting for an opportunity to convince the Trump administration to join him in an attack on the nuclear facilities of Iran. That's what Netanyahu wants. Trump has tried to offer the Iranian leadership a negotiated settlement, but he did it in such a way that it looked actually like asking them to capitulate. Iran rejected what might look like capitulation under threat, and therefore the likelihood of war and attack of Israel and the United States on the nuclear facilities of Iran is quite high.

RU: *And also Trump attacked the Houthis in Yemen, one of the key allies of Iran.*

GA: Yes, although it is a different story. Trump and his administration are very

much anti-Iran, that's very obvious, much more than the Biden administration, and they say that the Biden government did not react forcefully enough against the Houthis when they started throwing missiles at U.S. ships in the Red Sea. Trump wants to demonstrate that he is much stronger in imposing U.S. imperialist will. That's why he is attacking Yemen and you can expect more of that, along with the possibility, as I said, of a direct attack from the U.S. and Israel against Iran.

RU: *Yes. I think it is interesting because Hezbollah in this moment is weakened, Syria's regime has fallen, and Trump attacked the Houthis before Netanyahu went back on the offensive against Gaza, aggressively breaking the ceasefire. I'm referring to an elaborate strategy to wear down all of Iran's regional allies while continuing the genocidal offensive that has been deployed since October 2023.*

GA: Well, the Houthis have continued to attack U.S. ships in the Red Sea. And of course, U.S. imperialism cannot tolerate seeing its ships attacked in international waters. The Red Sea is an international waterway. And that's why Trump is reacting in this way. Now, the Houthis are no big threat. Militarily, they are certainly not a big force. They are not like Iran. So the Trump administration will carry on attacking the Houthis until they capitulate and stop their missile launches and it is very much contemplating the possibility of attacking Iran.

RU: *Finally, Gilbert, one last question. As I said previously, I think that Israel, from October 2023 until now, has practiced a de facto regional war. Because within different intensities at different moments, they have advanced aggressively, then retreated to attack another position. So can we talk about this regional war? It is important to conclude by highlighting the objective of this battle and how, on the revolutionary left, we need to correctly interpret this offensive to be able to fight*

against the main objective of the Zionist state in the long term.

GA: Well, the Israeli state is waging two simultaneous wars. One war, which is in part a genocidal war in Gaza, and more generally a war aiming at ethnic cleansing, that is expulsion of the Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank. These wars are being waged by the Israeli state that has seized the opportunity of October 7, 2023, in the same way that the George W. Bush administration seized the opportunity of September 11, 2001. They exploited this opportunity to wage wars that went far beyond reaction to the event. The goal of Israel is expelling the Palestinians, and if this proves impossible because of international conditions, then at the very least, squeeze the Palestinians into very limited territories, open-air prisons under Israeli surveillance. That major war is the essence of Zionism. Since 1948, the Israeli state has been built on ethnic cleansing of the part of Palestine that it conquered, 78 percent of the land between the river and the sea. From that land, they expelled 80 percent of the population. So it was a major act of ethnic cleansing. And now that is what the Israeli far-right would very much want to repeat and the only impediment to that is the international situation, the Arab states and the United States.

And then you have a second war, which is the war against Iran. Israel regards Iran

as an existential threat and the possibility that Iran acquires nuclear weapons as being intolerable. So they are waging their war against Iran. They dealt Hezbollah a very heavy blow and inflicted a lot of losses on it. They took advantage of the collapse of the Syrian regime to destroy the Syrian military potential and occupy further territories in the Golan. Their real concern now, as I said earlier, is to attack Iran. They want to convince the Trump administration to launch a major attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. That is where they are at.

RU: *Well, with all these questions, we have a very interesting and powerful interview. So, we can say that we finished the conversation today. So, on behalf of Actual Marx, we want to thank you for the conversation and for the generosity in doing this interview.*

GA: Muchas gracias, un gran abrazo a ambos.

NOTES

1. vientosur.info/fmi-y-brics-no-volver-a-bretton-woods/
2. Alex Callinicos, "Into a New Era of War and Revolution," *Socialist Worker*, Nov. 7, 2023. socialistworker.co.uk/alex-callinicos/into-a-new-era-of-war-and-revolution/
3. G. Achcar, "The Age of Neofascism and Its Distinctive Features," Feb. 4, 2025. <https://gilbert-achcar.net/age-of-neofascism>
4. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

Introduction to “Capitalism’s Threat to Democracy” (1953)

KENT WORCESTER

JULIUS JACOBSON WAS IN HIS EARLY thirties when he penned “Capitalism’s Threat to Democracy” for the May 4, 1953, issue of *Labor Action*, a publication of the Workers Party, founded in 1940 as a result of a split within the Socialist Worker Party.*

This issue of *Labor Action* was devoted to a single theme, socialism and democracy, and it retailed for five cents. Alongside Julie’s article were pieces by Herman Benson, Hal Draper, Albert Gates, Gordon Haskell, and Max Shachtman.

The aim of the special issue was to make the case, as Gordon Haskell suggested in his opening editorial, that democracy “requires the active participation in public affairs by the widest possible layers of the people” and that “such participation” is “indispensable as a school through which the masses must go in order to administer the truly democratic society of the future.” It is precisely for this reason that the “fight for democracy and the fight for socialism are inseparable.”

Julie’s contribution, reprinted here, is concerned with the McCarthy-era attack on civil liberties and the concomitant failure of liberals to defend their own program in the face of “the not-so-creeping tide of reaction in America.” Here in the “citadel of world capitalism,” Julie writes, “the fundamental values of political liberalism,



Julius and Phyllis Jacobson, based on a photograph taken in the early 1940s. Illustration by Lisa Lyons

freedom of speech, press and conscience are becoming increasingly weakened in real content.” He adds, “The extent to which socialists must take up the defense of liberal values, and the degree to which they have been abandoned by liberals and sold out by ex-radicals, is a telling reminder of the backward movement of political life in America.”

“Capitalism’s Threat to Democracy” addresses themes that Julie would return to again and again in his later writings, from the value of nonconformity and the dangers of the Cold War to the decay of the liberal tradition and the long shadow of Stalinism. It is also one of over two dozen essays that are reprinted in *Third Camp Socialism: A Phyllis and Julius Jacobson Reader*, which has just been published by Brill, with a paperback edition to follow from Haymarket Press in summer 2026.

KENT WORCESTER is the coeditor, with Paul Heide-
man, of *Third Camp Socialism: A Phyllis and
Julius Jacobson Reader* (Brill 2025; Haymarket
2026).

*The complete run of the newspaper
(1940–1958) can be found at www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/laboraction-ny/.

Capitalism's Threat to Democracy

Labor Action, May 4, 1953

JULIUS FALK (JACOBSON)*

POLITICAL DEMOCRACY AND capitalism were never synonymous. The rights of the individual for which early capitalism fought were mainly rights for *itself*. The assumption of the intelligence and rationality of man and his inalienable right to act according to the dictates of his own conscience was the basic philosophy of the theorists of political liberalism; but these concepts were never broadly applied voluntarily by the bourgeoisie.

The democratic rights acquired by the mass of people under capitalism had to be won from the ruling class, frequently after years of bitter struggle and sacrifice.

The Marxist's dispute with liberalism has not been so much over its abstract democratic values as over its confidence in the ability of capitalist society to guarantee and safeguard the rights of the individual. The inability of a society based on increasing economic inequality to preserve, let alone extend, individual liberties has proved to be not "Marxist cant" but the ugly reality of the bourgeois world.

In America, the citadel of world capitalism, the fundamental values of political liberalism, freedom of speech, press, and conscience are becoming increasingly weakened in real content.

The crusade against democracy in the United States is not just the work of evil men, wicked people here and there who are con-



genitally incapable of appreciating the worth of democracy between campaign speeches. True, not every specific attack on civil liberties is the inevitable result of a socially weakened capitalist class; nevertheless, the poisoned political atmosphere in this country as a whole is the inevitable end-product of a disoriented and frightened ruling class.

This reaction stemming from a fear of Stalinism is heightened and exaggerated by the primitive character of the American bourgeoisie.

America's economic titans have notoriously been men with social understanding of very modest proportions, and its political leaders and statesmen significantly lacking in political education. A quick glance at the chief executive, his advisors, and Congress should suffice. It is a paradox, indeed, that the most powerful capitalist nation in the world is led by a bourgeoisie which is more politically bumbling, inept, and crude than its European counterparts. The peculiar arrogance and crudeness of this class bears a direct relationship to the excesses of the post-war reaction. But it would be self-deception to see this reaction as primarily

*Julius Falk was a pen-name used by Julius Jacobson during the McCarthy era.

due to the backward social psychology of the ruling class.

Drive against Civil Liberties

Within the American capitalist class there are many conflicting crosscurrents; conflicts arise from sectional differences, power interests, ideological antagonisms, economic loyalties, etc. On the question of civil liberties these differences are no less real.

The mentality and approach of [Senat-

It must be understood that an established principle of socialists is the right of all people to organize into political parties of their own choosing, including parties dedicated to the spreading of reactionary capitalist and Stalinist ideas.

tor Joseph] McCarthy cannot be identified with the techniques of [former president Harry] Truman. But important as these differences are, they are not nearly as profound and irreconcilable as they and their supporters would lead one to believe. One of the great hoaxes of our decade is the manner in which the "liberal" wing of capitalism, the Fair Deal wing, with the assistance of what remains of the liberal press, has passed itself off as the defender of the best in American democratic traditions.

It is conveniently forgotten that it was the Truman administration which provided the soil in which the McCarthys could breed. The loyalty oaths, the purges, the advice to individuals to keep a sharp eye on their neighbor and report misdeeds, the Smith Act, etc., were among the dubious accomplishments of the New and Fair Deal administrations. These

sanctimonious unliberal "liberals" of the Fair Deal are less extreme and less militant in their witch hunts than the McCarthyites, but they are no less responsible for the ever-widening shadow that is now obscuring hard-won democratic rights.

The Fair Dealers are themselves somewhat frightened—and sometimes victimized—by the reaction which they have set in motion, but that is no reason to believe that if they remained in the Washington saddle they either could or would restore the civil liberties which they have been so instrumental in partially liquidating. Not for all his forceful and pious campaign promises would a Stevenson administration effectively cope with the instinctive reaction of the capitalist class to the threat of Stalinism and the needs of its Permanent War Economy. Perhaps such an administration would have provided some setbacks for the now rampant extremist McCarthyites, but it would have neither the incentive nor the ability to stem the not-so-creeping tide of reaction in America.

The drive toward a permanent, enforced conformity is the political reflex of a Permanent War Economy. The American ruling class is a frightened class. It does not understand Stalinism; it cannot successfully combat it politically. But it is practical enough to react to Stalinism in a "practical" manner: through a purge system, the organization of a vast governmental apparatus, enormous military appropriations, subsidies and profitable contract awards to private war industry.

A byproduct of this policy is a tenuous and artificial economic prosperity, but its essential aim is military. In this vast political, economic, and military preoccupation with defense, millions of workers, students, and intellectuals are either directly or indirectly involved. Scientific research has increasingly become a military affair, students are potential scientists and technicians working

on government projects, and from the bulk of the population are recruited the military forces and the workers in war industries.

In an effort to make their position more secure the leading government bureaucrats and the all-powerful economic interests can only regard non-conformism among the population as a threat to the status quo. The labor movement is looked upon with increasing suspicion and the Taft-Hartley Law is an attempt to ensure the war economy against disruptive class strife.

The academic world bears watching, and McCarthy and [Congressman Harold E.] Velde compete for honors as to who can best intimidate the faculty and student body. Ex-radicals, no matter how they humiliate themselves, cannot expiate their youthful transgressions to the satisfaction of loyalty boards and congressional committees. Artists and intellectuals who may enjoy some popularity have both their artistic talents and private political activities reviewed by committees of Know-Nothings. A new and more stringent loyalty program is devised by the "liberal" Republican administration which is greeted with accolades by McCarthy, [Senator William] Jenner, [Senator Robert] Taft, and Velde. FBI men assume the unofficial role of political police.

More Ominous Today

These are a few of the political tactics of the war economy. But these methods take on a momentum of their own; the life of the entire nation is affected. Prejudices are revived and new ones created.

The most disturbing elements of the present conspiracy against civil liberties can be seen in those factors which contrast with, rather than parallel, the reaction which set in during and immediately following the First World War. The reaction of the earlier period was in a real sense of a hysterical nature. Newspapers were suppressed, non-conformists jailed *en masse*,

political parties driven underground. The authorities in their enthusiasm knew no bounds, they were not inhibited by the constitutional rights of their victims or other legal considerations. Patriotic organizations were inspired to take it upon themselves to raid political offices, break strikes, beat and even murder individuals, and violently disperse peaceable political rallies, knowing full well that they enjoyed a form of government immunity.

The hysteria lasted for over five years, but its life span was limited, and it served no useful economic or political function for the bourgeoisie by the early 1920s. The war was long over, the world revolutionary movement was at an ebb, the American socialist movement had shrunk to relatively small size, the labor movement was quiescent, and the capitalist class felt confident and economically secure in its growing peacetime prosperity. The hysteria, then, was in its degree an aberration of American political life.

The current drive against civil liberties is more ominous, not because it is more violent or more hysterical. The violence was greater in the earlier period and the hysteria more pronounced. Today, however, there is no reason to believe that our "vanishing civil liberties" will be returned by a swing of the pendulum. Basically, the reaction today is in no sense a political aberration. It is slowly being incorporated into the American "Way of Life."

The needs of the war economy, the dynamism of Stalinism, the cold war are all related phenomena providing the stimulus for the current reaction, and none of these factors are of a transitory nature. Much of the legal basis for compulsory conformity has already been established by the three branches of government; and the pernicious doctrine of guilt by association, though without any legal foundation, has been given the virtual status of law through common usage.

The passivity and resignation with which the current reaction is received is no less alarming than the reaction itself. During the Wilson and Harding administrations the hysteria met with a solid wall of resistance from socialists, liberals, and the organized labor movement. Today, this resistance is not to be found on any comparable scale. Even if the Stalinists were the only victims of our thought control experts—which is not the case—it would provide no justification for the failure of liberals to defend their own principles.

It would be unfair, perhaps, to abuse the liberal world too much for its “failure of nerve,” for it is obviously more than that—it is failure of conviction. The traditional values of liberalism are gradually being abandoned by their one-time exponents.

The conflict between Russian and American imperialism brings to the fore the inherent contradiction in the political philosophy of men who are theoretically devoted to both freedom of thought and “free enterprise.” But freedom of thought and capitalist free enterprise are proving to be mutually exclusive freedoms. Faced with this dilemma and trembling before Stalinism, which they do not understand any better than their more conservative brethren, they are sacrificing their democratic principles for the sake of the cold war.

The extent to which socialists must take up the defense of liberal values, and the degree to which they have been abandoned by liberals and sold out by ex-radicals, is a telling reminder of the backward movement of political life in America. The labor organizations, too, particularly their leaderships, must accept their portion of responsibility for the failure to stem the reactionary tide. Labor has done little on an organized, integrated campaign level to combat McCarthyism, though it is victimized by it, and it remains politically tied to Fair Dealers whose administration initiated the offensive against democracy.

In this situation socialists have a dual responsibility: they must demonstrate how the fight for truly liberal values is inseparable from the fight against capitalism, for socialism; and, second, in a more concrete manner they must emphasize the validity of democratic values which are being called into question by liberals and negated by politicians.

The Right to Dissent

The virtual illegalization of the Communist Party is a case in point. The liberal world has done little to protest it, but has given its tacit and frequently outspoken approval, while the most reactionary elements in Congress find “heavy” intellectual support in the small men of the intellectual world, often former radicals.

Their attempts to prove that the Communist Party is not a party but merely a menacing “conspiracy” consists of dangerous half-truths. The Stalinist movement in this country is, of course, a tool of Russian imperialism, but its membership is voluntary, it is not coerced in joining the party and it does so out of its belief in its ideology and objectives. This membership is just as entitled to its political life as Sidney Hook is entitled to write specious rationalizations for the Smith Act.

It must be understood that an established principle of socialists is the right of all people to organize into political parties of their own choosing, including parties dedicated to the spreading of reactionary capitalist and Stalinist ideas.

Independent Socialists are for full freedom of expression of OPINION, within the framework of the clear-and-present-danger doctrine, and this has a meaning only when it is a question of opinion which we (or anyone else) believe to be harmful, reactionary, false, or what-have-you. The genuine democrat is for this as a freedom for all and not just as a “privilege” for himself, his friends or for

opinions which are sufficiently close to his to be considered "tolerable." This we view not only as a guide to civil liberties under capitalism, but also as a guide to civil liberties under the socialist democracy for which we fight.

In the academic world socialists must be no less vigilant in defending the rights of students and faculty. The drive against academic freedom is stifling intellectual life on the campus. The arguments for dismissing Communist Party teachers as such are no more valid than the arguments for suppressing the Communist Party.

Socialists must demonstrate how the fight for truly liberal values is inseparable from the fight against capitalism, for socialism.

There can only be one consideration for determining the rights of an individual to teach: his competence in his field and in his teaching of his subject. Should a

Stalinist teacher of math decide to spend his semester extolling the virtues of Russian science, then his competence should be called into question. But by the same token the bourgeois-minded professor who turns his class into a tendentious tirade against radicalism is subject to questioning on the grounds of incompetence and not because of his political views. The same would apply to the socialist or any other instructor. The same applies to any Catholic teacher who indoctrinates with the pope's views on science and society.

These attacks on the Communist Party and the Stalinist teacher and student are used as a springboard for the invasion of all liberties of all present and former non-conformists. Liberals may find this abhorrent and extreme, particularly when they themselves are made to prove their innocence of something-or-other before an investigating committee, but they do not understand that a capitalist nation preparing for a total war which is a life-and-death struggle cannot brook real and potential criticism and opposition, and in its drive to attain national conformity will exhibit no squeamishness over whom it victimizes.

Ukraine: Between Empire and Revolution

Lev Yurkevych's Anti-Colonial Marxism

CHRISTOPHER FORD

PRESENTED HERE FOR THE FIRST TIME in the English language is the pamphlet *Ukraine and the War* by Lev Yurkevych offering what is arguably the earliest concise Marxist analysis of the Ukrainian question to be presented to international socialists.

Yurkevych, a figure whose name and role have been long forgotten in the history of the labor movement, was during his lifetime one of the foremost Ukrainian representatives of the Social Democracy of the Second International. For decades, those who encountered his name—if they did at all—typically did so through the polemics of Vladimir Lenin. In the Soviet Union, where Lenin was venerated as saint without sin, Yurkevych was maligned as a “bourgeois nationalist,” his writings suppressed, and hidden from view.

Yurkevych forms part of a lost left—lost not only through the physical extermination wrought by Stalinist repression and the Nazi occupation of Ukraine but also

through a long succession of retrogressive approaches to the history of the revolutionary period which have cast the Ukrainian Marxist tradition pejoratively.

The ideas articulated by Yurkevych and the Ukrainian Social Democrats extend beyond mere historical interest; the challenges they confronted remain profoundly relevant today. In his opening remarks to *Ukraine and the War*, Yurkevych observed that prior to 1914, European democrats had shown little concern for the Ukrainian question, yet it would play a significant role in shaping the post-war order.

Similarly, prior to Russia's war against Ukraine commencing in 2014, there was little interest in Ukraine in the West. Since then, interest has markedly increased—a welcome development, but one accompanied by new forms of retrogression.

We have seen a revival of reactionary ideas that Ukrainian Marxists faced in Tsarist times and that were advanced by the White movement during the Civil War. These ideas include that “Great Russia,” “Little Russia” (Ukraine), and Belarus are three branches of a singular Russian people, Russian language and culture being their shared achievement. Moreover, there are the claims that Little Russia is an inseparable part of a unified Russia, and that the notion of a distinct Ukrainian identity is manufactured by foreign powers

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to weaken Russia.¹

Contemporary Russian leaders base their interpretations of the Ukrainian question on these principles in acting as heir and guardian of Tsarist Imperialism. The reburial of General Denikin in 2005 with military honors in Moscow was an apt symbol of this reconnection with Empire. That Denikin secured Western sponsors for his war to reconstruct the Empire is understandable; that Putin can harness support of the far-right is no surprise. What is significant is the support and appeasement of sections of the international left for Russia's war of colonial reconquest against Ukraine.

In this context the publication of Yurkevych's analysis holds relevance today. It offers a unique perspective—one that comes directly from a Marxist within the oppressed periphery—on challenges and issues that have resurfaced in our own time.

Lev Yurkevych a Biographical Sketch

Lev Yurkevych (1883–1919), who wrote under the pseudonyms L. Rybalka and E. Nicolet, was born in the village of Kryvoy—now part of the Zhytomyr region—in what was then Russian-ruled Ukraine. His father, Yosyp Yurkevych was a key figure in the development of the cooperative movement and a leading activist in the Hromada movement that played a crucial role in the Ukrainian revival during the 19th century.

During his university years in Kyiv, Lev Yurkevych was engaged in revolutionary student activism. At the age of 19, he became an active socialist joining the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party (RUP) in 1903 after reading their periodical *Selyanyn* (*Peasant*).²

Founded in 1900, the RUP was the first Ukrainian political party within the Russian Empire, playing a crucial role in Ukraine's political life in the early 20th cen-

tury. In the lead-up to the 1905 revolution, the RUP experienced significant growth; the paper *Iskra* noted that RUP leaflets were spread across Ukraine “like snow.”³ In the spring of 1902, Tsarist authorities attributed the mass agrarian strikes to RUP “revolutionary propaganda,” seen by the RUP as the “beginning of the Ukrainian revolution.”⁴

Initially a coalition of various socialists, radicals, and nationalists, the RUP quickly evolved toward Marxism. By the time Yurkevych joined in 1903, it had formally declared its commitment to the principles of international Social Democracy.

During the years 1904–1905, amid the Russo-Japanese War and revolution, Yurkevych agitated in Kyiv's factories and streets. Alongside fellow activist Anastasia Grinchenko, they expanded the Kyiv RUP committee, transforming it from a group primarily of intellectuals into one that included active circles of Ukrainian workers.⁵

This orientation was a major shift from the RUP's focus on rural Ukraine to organizing urban Ukrainian workers, in an environment where the urban centers saw the primacy of Russians and non-Ukrainian minorities.⁶ Ukrainians found Russian not only the language of the state but of the labor regime, of the manager and the foreman, with a division of labor that relegated them to the lower strata, with a high proportion of temporary workers being Ukrainian.⁷ Yurkevych recalled of this campaigning:

Our meetings were mostly about the division of society into classes, the class struggle, socialism, the slogans of the Russian Revolution, current questions, the autonomy of Ukraine and the principle of national organizations. Because of their complexity these last two points were the focus of much attention by our propaganda group. The national character of the work showed in the fact that with Ukrainians we spoke exclusively Ukrainian. At first the workers were a little

ashamed to use their native language, but when we spoke it, they always listened with a cheerful smile. It was clear our conversations aroused pleasant memories of their villages, perhaps of their dear ones.... Sometimes we had to defend the right of Ukrainian to exist as a separate language, arguing mainly that the village proletariat constituted the overwhelming majority of the workers, and to ensure the unity of our movement it was necessary to use the majority language; and that the peasantry only understood Ukrainian, and only through this medium would we be able to revolutionize them. And once we've done that, we'll win over the army—the main support of the tsarist regime, which is primarily made up of peasants.⁸

Yurkevych was to gain some recognition for organizing a strike—not just among ordinary workers, but in the iconostasis workshops, where workers painted icons for the renowned Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.⁹ Yurkevych's success, however, came at a cost, as he faced repeated arrests and

“We demand one thing, namely: we, the Marxists of an oppressed nation, must have the opportunity to freely and independently carry out our social and national activity.”

imprisonment by the Tsarist police, the Okhrana.¹⁰

In December 1905, Yurkevych attended the Second Congress of the RUP in Kyiv, where the party was re-launched as the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party (USDRP). Held on his father's estate, the congress was nearly cut short when police raided the site on its second day. A

few weeks later there were mass arrests, including of Yurkevych, who was incarcerated in Lukyanivka prison. Shortly after his release in May 1906, he was co-opted into the USDRP Central Committee; then after another prison term, Yurkevych, aided by smugglers, fled the Russian Empire in 1907, though he returned several times illegally.

Despite his exile, Yurkevych remained a pivotal figure in Ukrainian Social Democracy, serving as both an organizer and theorist. His efforts in coordinating and funding party publications were crucial to the survival of the USDRP.

At this time, Ukraine was divided between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, with Ukrainian Social Democracy forming distinct parties in each region. In 1899, the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Party (USDP) was founded in Galicia, an autonomous party within the federal All-Austrian Social-Democratic Workers' Party. In 1913, Yurkevych briefly served as the secretary of the USDP in Galicia.¹¹

In the years leading up to the 1917 Revolution, Ukrainian Social Democracy emerged as the most consistent and prolific force in political publishing in the Ukrainian language. The USDRP published more than twenty newspapers and periodicals and republished works by key socialist leaders of the period. Their materials had a significant influence, extending well beyond their own ranks.

The work of Ukrainian Social Democracy was historically significant in seeking to move the Ukrainian movement beyond solely cultural concerns of russification, to see the anti-colonial struggle as simultaneously a social question.¹² The Ukrainian Marxists were represented in both the Tsarist Duma and the Austrian Reichsrat and were active at an international level, submitting regular reports to the congresses of the Second International.¹³ Yurkevych

himself attended the International Socialist Congresses in Stuttgart in 1907 and Copenhagen in 1910.

Yurkevych, Mykola Porsh, Volodymyr Levinsky, Yulian Bachynsky, and Mykola Hankevych were among those involved in controversies with such figures as Otto Bauer, Georgi Plekhanov, and Lenin over the national question. Yurkevych addressed the Congress of the Czechoslovakian Social Democratic Party in December 1911, expressing solidarity with Ukrainian and Czech autonomists whom he defended as internationalists.¹⁴

In the years before the First World War Yurkevych played a key role organizing various USDRP publications. One of the most notable was *Dzvyn* (*The Bell*), which brought together a diverse range of contributors, including figures from different wings of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDRP). The journal also served as a platform for debates on the national question— notably, between Yurkevych and Lenin.

Writing in *Nash Holos* (*Our Voice*) Yurkevych summarized his views on the USDRP and the national question:

The root of the issue lies in the attitude of national passivity of the social democracy. Rejecting that view I decided to argue in our press along the following lines: 1) national consciousness is indissolubly linked with class interests and class consciousness. This constitutes a new form of the expression of the class struggle. 2) The proletariat has no fatherland, but it cannot lack a nationality that it shares with the other classes of its people. It is therefore interested in the freedom and development of national life. This commonality is formal; but the national consciousness and politics of the socialist proletariat cannot be separated from its class interests, nor can they be equated with the national consciousness and politics of other classes. 3) The social-democracy of nationally oppressed peoples must work on developing the national-class

consciousness of the working class in the interests of (a) its own development and its transformation from an exclusively rural organization into a general workers' organization of its nation (b) the clear demarcation of the proletariat within the national sphere through the speech and activity of the organization and its party (c) the intention to speed up and widen the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for national freedom.¹⁵

The Ukrainian Social Democrats' views on the national question, their policy of national autonomy, the subjective forces of the revolution, and the nature of the post-revolutionary order marked a point of demarcation with the Russian Marxists.¹⁶ The RSDRP demanded the subordination of all Marxists in the Empire to a single party—their own. As a corollary Lenin supported the assimilation of workers into the Russian nation as historically progressive and refused to challenge the integrity of the Russian Empire.¹⁷ In contrast the Ukrainian Marxists took up the national question as a task of the immediate, minimum program of Social Democracy, considering that the advent of socialism would promote a springtime of nations and national culture.

There was, wrote Yurkevych, a progressive side to the national revivals, “a creative and cultural energy displayed by separate classes according to their specific social interests.”¹⁸ But the Marxists of the dominant nation were blinkered, they only saw negative attributes “in the national movements of oppressed nations, as a capitalist sees the expansion of the rebellious spirit as the result of the activity of some secret agitators, hostile towards him, in the workers movements.”¹⁹

We demand one thing, namely: we, the Marxists of an oppressed nation, must have the opportunity to *freely and independently* carry out our social and national activity.

This demand seems to be very modest and fully corresponding to a nation's

right for self-determination, recognized by all Marxists.

However, this right is refused to us in practice, because they do not allow us to establish organizations adapted to our national and political objectives.²⁰

Experience proved the necessity of federative forms in the international unification of workers.

The principle of federalism that we, the Ukrainian Marxists, are upholding as a basis for our unification with the Great Russian Marxists, in our opinion ensues from the entire history of the world labor International.²¹

This was reinforced, argued Yurkevych, by the experience of the First and the Second Internationals, which operated on federalist principles.²² In one of Yurkevych's responses to Lenin entitled *Jesuit Politics*, he noted that the "Russian Marxists had a contemptuous and sometimes even hostile attitudes towards us, Ukrainian Marxists, only because we attach great importance to the national question and conduct our activity in national forms."²³ Yurkevych acknowledged the RSDRP had moved from indifference and was now divided, with a minority "trying to understand the nature of national workers' movements in exploited nations." Whilst the majority "with uncommon fanaticism and sectarian obstinacy promulgates old centralist ideas and absolute intolerance towards the national self-organization of workers."²⁴

As the First World War loomed, Yurkevych—like most USDRP leaders—maintained a firm anti-war stance. At the 1912 International Socialist Congress in Basel, the USDRP and USDP submitted a joint appeal. "Raising our voice against the war, against Russian imperialism and its scoundrel policy, ... we call upon the entire Socialist International to raise its cry of protest against the unheard-of criminal policy of the Russian tsardom, which is preparing national death for a numerous people."²⁵

Ukrainians found themselves on opposing sides, three million from the Russian Empire, later along with Ukrainian immigrants in North America, fought for the Entente, while 250,000 from Galicia, Bukovyna, and Transcarpathia served Austro-Hungary. Both sides persecuted Ukrainians. The Russian Imperial government swiftly arrested Ukrainian leaders and suppressed newspapers. Within a month, Russian forces occupied Galicia, launching anti-Ukrainian measures, including arrests, book burnings, the abolition of Ukrainian education, and forced conversions to Russian Orthodoxy. Concurrently, the Austro-Hungarian army interned 30,000, alleging pro-Russian sympathies. In Canada, thousands of Ukrainian immigrants were similarly interned, accused of pro-Austrian loyalties.²⁶

Within Ukrainian Social Democracy, opposition to the war and support for a Russian "defeat" were widespread.²⁷ Only a small minority of leading figures adopted a pro-Russian or pro-Austrian orientation, as seen in the USDP in Galicia, while a handful of figures from the USDRP joined the Austrian-sponsored Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (SVU).²⁸

Yurkevych, along with the USDP leader Levinsky travelled to Vienna, and there tried to publish an anti-war statement in the leading Social Democrat paper *Arbeiter Zeitung*. The editor, Austerlitz, threatened them with arrest. Under surveillance in Vienna, Yurkevych took refuge in Geneva. Under Yurkevych's editorship, the newspaper *Borotba* was launched in Geneva as the official organ of the "Foreign Organization of the USDRP," enrolling the support of various exiled USDRP members across Europe.

Declaring complete solidarity with the anti-war Zimmerwald movement, *Borotba* stated: "Above all, we should not take sides, not besmirch our revolutionary cause in

showing solidarity with the war aims of any of the governments involved.”²⁹ Over the next two years *Borotba* subjected the Russian and Austrian orientations to relentless criticism, whilst exposing the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine as a “lackey of that [Austrian] government,” engaged in “the profitable role of the Emperor’s own revolutionists.”³⁰

At the second anti-war Conference, in Keinthal on 23rd April 1916, Yurkevych submitted an *Open Letter* in French, *Ukraine and the War*.³¹ In a prognosis to be confirmed at the treaty of Brest Litovsk in 1918, Yurkevych condemned Ukrainian politicians of an Austrian orientation. He warned “they have lit the torches of Ukrainian independence—to light up the route of the Austrian armies towards Kyiv”; as opposed to emancipation, they “seek to light the fire of German capitalist exploitation in Ukraine in order to warm themselves by it.”³² Yurkevych warned against illusions in the democratic credentials of the Russian bourgeoisie which would continue the policies of imperialist expansion and Russification. Yurkevych joined in the call for a new international, appealing:

Just as the first International and all European democrats were committed to the liberation of Poland from the yoke of Russian autocracy, we are sure that the liberation of Ukraine will be the watchword of the third International and of the proletarian socialists of Europe in their struggle against Russian imperialism.³³

Yurkevych endorsed the Keinthal policy on the national question as being in accordance with the USDRP “principle of national autonomy,” which “will be a great support to us in our activities and against those who, consciously or not are always trying to blacken us questioning our socialist credentials.”³⁴

Yurkevych faced ongoing efforts to discredit *Borotba* from elements within both Ukrainian and Russian Social De-

mocracy. In response to *Ukraine and the war*, the USDP in Galicia had issued a letter to various socialist parties, expressing astonishment at his views. They argued that due to the “complete atomism of Ukrainian Social Democracy in Russia,” Yurkevych

The publication of Yurkevych’s analysis holds relevance today.

was acting alone and, by opposing an “independent Ukraine” was “serving Tsarism but not social-democracy or the Ukrainian people.”³⁵

This criticism was not unprecedented. In an open letter the previous year, Dyatlov—a member of the USDRP Central Committee—rejected such claims. He argued that the assertion “that the views of *Borotba* are the personal views of ‘Mr. Rybalka’ [Yurkevych] does not correspond to reality,” and affirmed that “the views of *Borotba* truly reflect the traditions of the USDRP.”³⁶

Most prominent in the efforts by Russian Social Democracy to discredit Yurkevych and the USDRP was *Sotsial-Demokrat*, the exiled paper of Lenin’s faction, which had initially expressed approval of their views on the war.³⁷ Yurkevych developed amicable relations with other currents of the RSDRP, including the *Vpered* group and Leon Trotsky’s *Nashe Slovo*. The Foreign Group of the USDRP had solidarized with the Bolsheviks, declaring:

We agree with the Bolsheviks that the defeat of Tsarism in this war will contribute to the weakening of the old Russian State system and make easier the tasks of the coming Russian revolution.... Furthermore, we connect with the Bolsheviks in their decisive fight against social patriotism.³⁸

Despite repeated efforts by the USDRP, the Bolsheviks were unable to reconcile their differences with them regarding the national question and party organization. Yurkevych met with Lenin in Geneva and was perplexed by his unsympathetic attitude toward *Borotba*. Reflecting on this in July 1915, he confided to Leon Trotsky, “Why? I have no idea.” Trotsky was also puzzled replying, “I have to say that I like your Ukrainian articles which you have sent for *Nashe Slovo*.” Indeed, Trotsky expressed disagreement with Yurkevych’s views on the revolutionary potential of the defeat of Russia precisely “because this position brings you together with the followers of Lenin. At first glance the hostile attitude of Lenin towards your periodical seems absolutely inexplicable to me.”³⁹

Independence and Dependence

A key point of contention was the question of Ukrainian independence in the context of the war. Yurkevych distrusted Lenin’s framing of national self-determination as a binary choice: either a centralized union with Russia or outright separation—despite Lenin’s opposition to the latter. Writing in *Borotba* on the significance of the second international socialist conference, Yurkevych reflected critically on this question:

We are not opposed to the idea of an independent Ukraine but the question of our state independence can only be decided when the chains of Tsardom and Russian state centralism are destroyed. When Ukraine is reborn and has reached the level of civic consciousness found for example in Ireland. When the Ukrainian democracy understands the entire awful reaction that goes under the name of the Russian Empire. But now, while even the printed word in Ukrainian is forbidden, while Ukraine is deprived of the smallest civil freedoms and subjected to limitless Russification the only way out for the Ukrainian democracy is a joint

struggle with the working masses of Russia against all the black Tsarist and imperialist forces.

Our Russian comrades will only show themselves to be true internationalists when their organization and press in Ukraine recognizes along with us the need for the struggle for the liberation of our people, and on every occasion along with us in resisting in a revolutionary way any manifestations of national oppression.⁴⁰

Indeed it was from the Irish struggle that Yurkevych took inspiration. Following the Easter Rising of 1916 he wrote in *Borotba*:

The only enslaved nation that has preserved its dignity amidst the general confusion of nations in times of modern war is the Irish, who organized a courageous uprising at the most critical moment for their oppressor—England.⁴¹

Contrasting the situation of the Ukrainian movement in July 1916 to Ireland, Yurkevych looked to a time when “Our working class will not be an exception; it will choose for itself new and more honest leaders, inflamed with hatred of slavery and distinguishing itself among the Ukrainian people against all those that are in a close and sincere relationship with the Russian state.”

Lenin continued his polemics against Yurkevych with all their inaccuracy and invective, when *Sotsial-Demokrata* published a *Sbornik* (anthology) on the national question in October 1916. Though it did not name Lenin as the author, it published his text *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*. In January 1917, Yurkevych responded with a comprehensive critique: *The Russian Social Democrats and the National Question*.⁴²

Yurkevych argued that by holding to two mutually exclusive propositions, the “right of nations to self-determination” with a preference for large states and central-

ism, it “destroys within them the capacity to consider the national question from a genuinely internationalist point of view.”⁴³

With this in mind and as if to confuse the issue once and for all, the authors of the “theses” note that in actual fact, “the demand for free secession from the oppressor nation” “is not at all equivalent to a demand for secession, fragmentation, or the creation of small states.” It follows from this that the program of the central organ of the RSDRP on the national question, consisting in the *recognition* of “the right of nations to self-determination” and in its simultaneous *denial*—equals zero.⁴⁴

Yurkevych’s analysis was dialectical: “the capitalist order, while oppressing nations, simultaneously regenerates and organizes them.” It was as such “impossible not to agree with Bauer that nations will fully develop only under socialism,” with “social progress by means of its peaceful diversity.”⁴⁵ Yurkevych also saw problems in Lenin’s prognosis with regard to the achievement of bourgeois democracy in Russia, instead “considering the reactionary and blatantly imperialist character of the policies of the Russian bourgeoisie, one can say with certainty that it will not only not oppose the weakening of Tsarist centralism, but will strengthen it.”⁴⁶

This assessment by Yurkevych was largely vindicated when Kerensky’s ultra-democratic republic resisted Ukraine’s quest for national autonomy between March and November 1917. The difficulties of the revolutionary process in Ukraine from 1917 to 1921 saw another of Yurkevych’s prognoses arise with tragic consequences.

Posing the question how the Russian workers would respond to a Ukrainian rebellion, Yurkevych contended that Lenin had, for over a decade, educated them to favor a centralized state and oppose “the break-up of Russia,” creating the possibility that if “the Ukrainian workers, believing in

the ‘right to self-determination,’ join the rebellion, the Russian proletariat will call them traitors,” and go to war against them in the name of “emancipation.”⁴⁷

This conflict between the internal forces of Ukraine and external elements of Russia, was to hinder the Ukrainian Revolution’s development, and obstructed the consolidation of a Ukrainian republic shaped by internal social forces.

Thus, in December 1917—on the very day the All-Ukrainian Congress of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants gave its full support to the Ukrainian People’s Republic—the Bolshevik government of Russia launched a war against Ukraine, whose government was a socialist coalition led by the USDRP.⁴⁸

In 1919, a second Bolshevik government was imposed on Ukraine, that provoked a mass rebellion of whole sections of the Red Army and red militia. The uprising was led by a pro-Soviet fraction of the USDRP—the *Nezalezhnyky* (Independents)—who called for the independence of Ukraine with a government of the working people.

When the *Nezalezhnyky* founded the Ukrainian Communist Party, they condemned the fact that “under such conditions, the socialist revolution in Ukraine in both cases took the shape of an occupation by Soviet Russia.” The Bolshevik leaders were “separated from the working masses of Ukraine, who turned against them.” It was imperative, they argued, for internal forces to “gain control over the Ukrainian socialist revolution and shape its course and character.”⁴⁹

The Legacy of Yurkevych

The *Russian Social Democrats and the National Question* was Yurkevych’s final publication. After the February Revolution he attempted to return to Ukraine via Finland and disappeared for a time. His sister, living in Moscow, eventually found him in a

Finnish prison hospital, nearly unconscious due to psychosis following typhus.

Upon his return to Moscow, despite his fragile health, Yurkevych was immediately arrested and imprisoned. Rescued by his family at the end of 1918, he remained

Yurkevych met with Lenin in Geneva and was perplexed by his unsympathetic attitude toward the Ukrainian paper *Borotba*.

largely unconscious until his death on October 24, 1919. Buried at Novodevichy Cemetery, he never returned home—his memory eclipsed by subsequent events. It was not until 1927 that even an obituary appeared, published as a pamphlet by Levynsky by the Ukrainian Socialist Library in Lviv.

Although a lost leader of the Ukrainian Revolution, Yurkevych made a significant and largely unrecognized contribution to the rebirth of Ukraine between 1917 and 1920. Yurkevych's contribution was two-fold: first, during the years of reaction following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution; and second during the First World War.

The strong stance taken by Yurkevych and *Borotba* resonated in the USDRP revival that began soon after the start of the war in 1914. Yurkevych had re-established contact with leading activists of USDRP inside the Russian Empire already in late 1914.⁵⁰ Vynnychenko wrote to Yurkevych in December 1915 stating “we all stand on your side... the word revolution is on everyone's lips.”⁵¹ The strongest wartime organization of the USDRP was in Petrograd, which had a sizable Ukrainian com-

munity and a garrison with many Ukrainian soldiers. Between 1915 and 1917, the local committee published the paper *Nashe Zhyttya* (*Our Life*). On the issue of the war the Petrograd organization stood with the positions of *Borotba*, edited by Yurkevych. It republished *Borotba's* declarations and articles, which were circulated beyond the city and into Ukraine itself.

The USDRP had launched a newspaper *Slovo* in Kharkiv in October 1915.⁵² In the city of Katerynoslav (Dnipro) the USDRP continued to operate and conducted anti-war propaganda. A conference was held there in November 1915, rejecting the position of the Union for Liberation of Ukraine and arguing to focus on preparing Ukraine's own forces for a revolution against Tsarism.⁵³ This view was strengthened by the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland – which found a lively response among the USDRP, as proving “that a national liberation struggle against ‘one's’ metropolis was possible without a general revolution in the entire country, which strengthened the position of supporters of a general national struggle against Russia.”⁵⁴ The Kyiv organization of the USDRP also reorganized, calling “for a fight, not with the Germans, but with our oppressors—the government and the nobility.”⁵⁵

When the February Revolution of 1917 brought the downfall of the Tsarist regime, at the same time it played a significant role in the All-Russian revolution: the intervention of the Izmailovsky and Semenivsky regiments decided the fate of the revolution, whose soldiers were organized by the USDRP.⁵⁶

With the overthrow of the autocracy, the Ukrainian Revolution soon differentiated itself from the wider Russian Revolution, setting as its goal the achievement of national emancipation through establishing a Ukrainian Republic. It was a period of unprecedented mobilization of

the masses. The movement comprised a bloc of the middle class, peasantry, workers, and democratic intellectuals, centered in the Ukrainian Central Rada [Council]. Its very existence was an historic achievement; transforming a situation from one where officially Ukraine did not even exist, to one by July 1917 where the hostile Russian Provisional Government was forced to recognize it as a “higher organ for conducting Ukrainian national affairs.”⁵⁷ In historical terms it represented for Ukraine what the Easter Rising and First Dáil did for the Irish Republic.

The USDRP was pivotal to this achievement. As the only political party in the strict sense of the word, it already had trained activists and organizers, and its name—as well as those of its leading figures—was known among broad circles of Ukrainian workers. As a result, the USDRP was able to assume a leading role in the revolution and in the first Ukrainian government of 1917–18, headed by Vynnychenko.⁵⁸

Yurkevych sought to bring the working class to the forefront of the Ukrainian struggle. In *Ukraine and the War*, he considers the role of the Ukrainian socialist movement as significant in the “national renaissance,” connecting the “the question of national emancipation to all the problems of the emancipation of the proletariat.” From this perspective, his efforts during the years of reaction after 1905 proved crucial to ensuring the survival of the USDRP.

Through his defense of Ukrainian self-organization, his organizing of numerous publications, and his efforts to sustain the USDRP, Yurkevych played a pivotal role in enabling the party to survive—and ultimately to assume its leading role in Ukraine’s rebirth.

That rebirth of Ukraine—achieved despite all the horrors endured by its people has never been reversed, until now, as Russia once again plays the role of a gendarme

of Europe, whose program is to absorb Ukraine and subjugate other nations. It is a timely moment to rediscover the neglected figure of Yurkevych who anticipated many of the challenges and devoted such attention to these problems we face again today.

NOTES

1. Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine, The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army during the Civil War* (Edmonton: CIUS, 1995), 49; and Prince Alexander Wolkonsky, *The Ukraine Question: The Historic Truth Versus Separatist Propaganda* (Rome: Ditta E Armani, 1920).
2. L. Rybalka (Lev Yurkevych): “Pochatok masovoyi roboty sered Kyivskikh obotnikiv,” *Nash Holos* (no. 6-9, 1911), 332, cited in Volodymyr Levynsky, *Lev Yurkevych* (Lviv: Ukrainiska Sotsialistychna Biblioteka, 1927), 6.
3. *Iskra*, no. 80, Dec. 1904, cited in George Y. Boshyk, “The Rise of Ukrainian Political Parties in Russia 1900-1907. With Special Reference to Social Democracy” (PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 1981), 134, note 8.
4. *Haslo* (No. 3-4, 1920), cited in Boshyk, “Rise of Ukrainian Parties,” 137.
5. Anastasiya Hrinchenko, *Sbtrykhy do suspil'no-politychnoyi diyal'nosti v Kyievi 1905–1907 rr.* doi.org/10.28925/2524-0757.2024.23.
6. Vladyslav Verstiuk, “Conceptual Issues in Studying the Ukrainian Revolution,” *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* (Vol. 24, No. 1, Summer 1999), 14.
7. Andriy Richtysky, “Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kumunistichnoi Partii Kongresovi III Komunistychnoho Internationalu,” *Nova Doba* (No. 4, 1920) in *Dokumenty Ukrainskoho Komunizmu* (New York, 1962) 45-66; Bojczun, “Approaches to the Study of the Ukrainian Revolution,” *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* (Vol. 24: 1, summer 1999).
8. *Nash Holos* (Nos. 6-9, 1911), cited in Levynsky, *Lev Yurkevych*, 7. (Trans Mykhailo Kondrashyn)
9. Hrinchenko.
10. *Nash Holos* (No. 6-8, 1911), 338, cited in Dymytro Doroshenko, *Z Istorii Ukrainskoi Politychnoi Dumky Za Chasyv Svitovoi Viini* (Praha, 1935), 28.
11. John-Paul Himka, “Young Radicals and Independent Statehood: The Idea of a Ukrainian Nation-State, 1890-1895,” *Slavic Review*,

Cambridge (Vol. 41, No. 2, Summer, 1982), 219–35; Oleh Zhernokleyev, *Natsional'ni sektsiyi avstriys'koyi sotsial-demokratiyi v Halychyni y na Bukovyni (1890–1918 rr.)* (Kyiv, 2000), 113.

12. Mykola Porsh, *Pro Avtonomiyu Ukrainy* (Kyiv: Prosvita, 1907), 75.

13. We should also recognize a separate Ukrainian Social Democratic Party in Canada that was at the forefront in organizing the labor movement there, with Ukrainian socialist organizations also active in the USA and Australia.

14. Oleh Zherno, *Ukrayins'ka sotsial-demokratiya v Halychyni: narys istoriyi 1899–1918* (Kyiv), 415.

15. Lev Rybalka [Yurkevych, *Nash Holos* (nos. 6–8, 1911), cited in Levynsky, *Lev Yurkevych*, 360–61. Trans Mykhailo Kondrashyn)

16. The antagonism of the Russian Social Democracy towards Ukrainian socialism was deep rooted. It can be traced to the very inception of both movements in the nineteenth century. Indeed it brought Engels into conflict with Plekhanov, when he failed to support Ukrainian national rights. This revealing conflict arose in 1890 over Engels's essay, "The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom." Plekhanov replied criticizing Engels for his consideration of Ukrainians as a nation. Engels had come to believe that one positive outcome of the overthrow of Tsarism would be that "Little Russia [Ukraine] will be able to choose its political connections freely."

The following year Iosif (Osip) Markovich Polinkovsky, a member of the Union of Russian Social Democrats abroad and a supporter of the Emancipation of Labor group alongside Plekhanov, wrote, perhaps with Plekhanov, *O Bezvykhodnosti Uukrainskago Sotsializma v Ros-sii*. (The Dead End of Ukrainian Socialism). It depicted the Russian conquest of Ukraine as an economic necessity and the Ukrainian movement as utopian with no historical basis.

17. There is no complete study of the Ukrainian question in these debates. Works which cover this period include: V. Levynsky, *L'internationale socialiste et les peuples opprimés* (Vienna, 1920); Marko Bojczun, *The Workers' Movement and the National Question in Ukraine: 1897–1918* (Netherlands: Brill, 2021); Roman Rosdolsky, *Engels and the 'Nonhistoric' Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848* (Glasgow: Critique Books, 1987), 189.

18. Lev Rybalka [Yurkevych] "Peredmov," Volodymyr Levynsky, *Narys Rozvytki Ukrain-skoho Rukh v Halychynia, Dzvin* (Kyiv, 1914).

19. Rybalka [Yurkevych], Peredmov, VII.

20. Rybalka [Yurkevych], Peredmov, VII.

21. Rybalka [Yurkevych], Peredmov, X.

22. Rybalka [Yurkevych], Peredmov, XI.

23. Rybalka [Yurkevych], "Yezuyits'ka polityka," *Dzvin* (No. 5, 1914), 461.

24. Ibid.

25. Volodymyr Holovchenko, "Samostiynoyi Ukrayiny" *Do Soyuzu Vyzvolennya Ukrainy: Narys Z Istoriyi Ukrayins'koyi Sotsial-De-mokratiyi Pochatku XX st.* (Kyiv, 1996), 152.

26. Mark Von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland, Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914–1918* (Univ. of Washington Press, 2007), 11.

27. P. Popov, "Moskovs'ka Hrupa "Livykh" V Us-drp, (Z Politychnoho Zhyttya 1915—1917 R. R.); *Litopys Revolyutsiyi*, No. 9, 6 (33) (Kharkiv, 1928), 287.

28. The Central Committee of the USDRP, elected in Sept. 1913, was composed of V. Vynnychenko, P. Dyatlov, M. Trotsky, and Yurkevych. Trotsky adopted a pro-war stance, joining the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (SVU) established on 4 August 1914 in Lviv by Ukrainian emigres from the Russian Empire, various Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. See Roman Rosdolsky, "Do istorii Soiuzu vyavolennia Ukrainy," *Ukrains'kyi Samostiinyk*, May 1, 1969.

29. "Viyna chy revolyutsiya?," *Borotba* (No. 4, Sept. 1915).

30. *Borotba* (No. 1, Feb. 1915).

31. Rybalka [Yurkevych], "L'Ukraine Et La Guerre," Lettre Ouvre adrese a la 2nd conference socialiste internationale tenue en Hollande en mai 1916, Edition du journal social-democrate Ukrainyen Borotba (Lausanne 1916).

32. *L'Ukraine Et La Guerre*, 46.

33. *L'Ukraine Et La Guerre*, 53.

34. *Borotba* (No. 7, Sept. 1916).

35. *Prot'yazacudu Natsinalnoi smerty – za samo-stiinistiu i nezalezhnictu Ukrainskogo Narodu!* Propamiatne pis'mo Ukrainskoi Sotsialdemocratischnoi Partii v Abstrii do Sotsialistichnoho Internatsionalu. 1916.

36. Pyotr Dyatlov (1883–1937), a leading activist in the RUP and a Central Committee member of the USDRP, was deported from the Russian Empire and was living in Vienna in 1914. He was an active supporter of the Foreign Group of USDRP and *Borotba*. He wrote to Levynsky defending the views espoused by Yurkevych:

"Thus, your statement that the views of *Borotba* are the personal views of 'Mr. Rybalka' [Yurkevych] is contrary to the fact. ... But you, comrade, as a person familiar with the program and tactics of our party, undoubtedly know that the views of *Borotba* really correspond to the USDRP traditions" (Doroshenko, 62). Dyatlov later returned to Soviet Ukraine and worked at Kharkiv University. Arrested in 1933 by the GPU, he was executed in 1937 by the NKVD.

37. *Sotsial-Demokrat* (No. 28, Feb. 12, 1915), www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/feb/12.htm.

38. *Borotba* (No. 2, April 1915).

39. Doroshenko, 80.

40. Rybalka [Yurkevych], "Druha Mizhnarodna sotsialistychna konferentsiya ta yiyi znachennya, veresen," *Borotba* (No. 7, Sept. 1916 r).

41. *Borotba* (No. 7, July 1916).

42. Lev Rybalka, [Yurkevych], *Rosiys'ki sotsial-demokraty i natsional'ni pytannya, Suchasnist* (Munich, 1969). The original was published in Russian as *Russkie Sotsialdemokrat'ii i Natsional'ii Vopros*, Geneva (*Borotba*, 1917).

43. Rybalka, *Rosiys'ki sotsial-demokraty*, 8.

44. Rybalka, *Rosiys'ki sotsial-demokraty*, 8.

45. Rybalka, *Rosiys'ki sotsial-demokraty*, 24.

46. Rybalka, *Rosiys'ki sotsial-demokraty*, 11.

47. Rybalka, *Rosiys'ki sotsial-demokraty*, 19-20.

48. The Council of Peoples Commissars declared a war on the Central Rada behind the back of the ostensible Soviet government, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets. It was not discussed at the Bolsheviks' own Central committee, and the local Bolsheviks in Ukraine had never been told of the move to war. See John Keep, ed., *The Debate on Soviet Power, Minutes of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets* (Oxford, 1979), 195-223.

49. Orghanizatsiuhoho Komitety Ukrayins'ka Komunistychna Partiya" (USDRP Nezalezhnyky), *Chervony Prapor*, Dec. 21, 1919.

50. Doroshenko, 83-85.

51. Vynnychenko wrote to Yurkevych that "The Union for Liberation of Ukraine has almost no connections [in Ukraine and Russia] and the 'Russian orientation' expressed by some at the beginning of the war, it was only out of fear and caution... I met only two Russian patriots out of the large number of Ukrainians with whom I had the opportunity to chat." Doroshenko, 85.

52. The USDRP newspaper *Slovo* was published in one issue in 1916 in Kharkiv. It emphasized its position—to defend the interests not only of the workers of all of Russia, but to care "as firmly as possible for the cause of the national rebirth of the Ukrainian proletariat and all of Ukraine" (*Slovo*, No. 1, 1916).

53. Panas Fadenko, *Isaak Mazepa, Borets' Za Volyu Ukrayiny Napysav, Nash Slovo* (London, 1954), 18-19.

54. P. Popov, *Moskovs ka Hrupa "Livyykh" V Usdrp, Litopys Revolyutsiyi, Kharkiv*, No. 9 6 (33), 1928, 289.

55. The Kyiv USDRP declaration stated: "Therefore, we must now gather together so that, having gathered strength, we can rise up against the war, fight for our rights, for freedom, for a better socialist order. Let us be ready, brothers, for an uprising, for a fight, not with the Germans, but with our oppressors — the government and the nobility..." M. Adviyenko, 'Lyutneva Revolyutsiya V Petrohradi I USDRP,' *Litopys Revolyutsiyi*, (Kharkiv, No. 1, 1928), 233-34.

56. Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii, Kyiv-Vienna*, Vol. 1, 252.

57. "Declaration of the Provisional Government," "The Kerensky Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada," Walter Dushnyk, *Ukrainian Quarterly* (Vol. XXIII, No. 2, Summer 1967), 25.

58. Vynnychenko, 251-253.

Ukraine and the War

LEV YURKEVYCH

Translated by Terry Liddle; edited, with notes, by Christopher Ford

Addressed to the Second International Socialist Conference, held in Holland, by the editors of the journal Borotba (The Struggle) and published in Geneva by a group of members of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers Party of Russia.¹

Comrades,

The Ukrainian question is one of the national questions which up to the present time European democrats have shown very little interest in. However, in recent years, after the Russian Revolution and above all during the present World War, this question has started to play a considerable role in the internal life of Russia and Austria—and without doubt will put itself on the order of the day when Europe addresses itself to finishing this present war.

That is why, comrades, our Ukrainian democratic socialist group in Russia says that it is its duty to explain before you, albeit briefly, the Ukrainian question in the hope that you will take note of our considerations in the debates and decisions taken by this conference.

I

The history of Ukraine is far from happy. The Ukrainian lands were on the route of Asiatic peoples moving toward the West. For long periods this prevented Ukraine from enjoying a tranquil life and from organizing itself freely, which let it fall under the domination of neighboring states. Thus

it became part of the Lithuanian state up to the sixteenth century, and then when Lithuania was united with Poland it was annexed by the latter. Polish domination placed a heavy burden on the Ukrainian people and led Ukraine, which during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had increased its territory and organized itself militarily, to revolt during the middle of the seventeenth century, and, after a long war of liberation led by the Cossacks, to separate from Poland and form an independent Cossack republic.² Yet circumstances obliged Ukraine—menaced by its neighboring Turkish and Polish neighbors—to seek an ally. It found this ally in the Muscovite state, which it was tied to by a common religion but which differed from it through its ferocious despotism and extreme centralist politics.

The Union was made in 1654 and Ukraine allied itself to Moscow as a free and independent state, having its own army. Despite this convention, Moscow sought immediately to curtail the freedom of Ukraine and signed an accord with Poland, giving it western Ukraine (the right bank of the Dnieper)—which had just freed itself from Polish domination. The popular uprisings in eastern Ukraine (the left bank of the Dnieper) against the despotism of Moscow were put down by Muscovite force. After a fifty-year struggle, ended by the famous “treason” of the Ukrainian Hetman Ivan Mazepa who allied himself with

Sweden and was defeated by the army of Tsar Peter the Great, one of the last blows struck against Ukrainian independence by the destruction of the autonomous Cossack military organization. Toward the end of the eighteenth century the last vestiges of its political independence were destroyed. After the partition of Poland, eastern Ukraine was annexed by Russia with the exception of Galicia, which went to Austria; Ukraine was divided into governments [*gubernia*] and then crushed by Russian bureaucracy.

Ukrainian culture, which had undergone considerable development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in parallel with Polish culture and under the influence of Western civilization and the Reformation, was destroyed by the despotic Muscovite state. The Ukrainian nobility which during the struggles against Polish domination had shown so much energy and love of liberty did not resist Russian centralism and finally submitted in exchange for hereditary noble titles and landed wealth. The popular masses reacted against this treason by the ruling classes to the cause of Ukrainian freedom by a series of cruel and bloody rebellions known under the name of "Haidamachchyna." This long series of popular social movements was suppressed in the last years of the eighteenth century by the Russian Empire, which introduced serfdom in Ukraine thus condemning them to silence for many years.³

During the end of the eighteenth and the first part of the nineteenth centuries, Ukraine—crushed by the heavy domination of the Russian bureaucracy [and] deprived completely of its past liberties—submitted, resigned to its fate. Yet during the early nineteenth century the libertarian ideas of philosophy and of the French Revolution penetrated Ukraine, where they took a democratic and Slavophile form adorned with romantic Cossack traditions. Eastern

Ukraine in particular produced a number of writers who had concerned themselves with history and ethnography and who bequeathed a great number of scientific works.

But the Ukrainian movement didn't really appear until the so-called liberal era around the 1860s, marked by the emancipation of the serfs and a whole series of social reforms. While Poland was shaken by insurrectionary ideas, libertarian tendencies manifested themselves differently in Ukraine. The Ukrainian ruling classes, who under Polish domination were strongly influenced by its culture and had not successfully created a culture for themselves after liberation from Polish rule, Russified themselves rapidly after the annexation of Ukraine, so that by the middle of the nineteenth century these classes were separated from the people by an insurmountable barrier formed by a culture alien to the people so could not concern themselves with questions of national interest. As a consequence, the Ukrainian intellectuals of this period, who could not take their ideas to the upper classes, took on ideas of a *democratic* nature. Their nationalism, exempt from separatist and insurrectionist ideas, expressed itself above all in their desire to free the serfs, to raise their national consciousness, and to unite them.

Amongst the Ukrainian people the national revolutionary tendencies of the nobility had long since vanished, therefore the Ukrainian renaissance of the second part of the nineteenth century took the form of a bourgeois movement. The romantic Cossack traditions were no more than yesterday's "leftovers," which however held it back from total embourgeoisement and taking this position vis-à-vis the Russian Empire and its regime.

Whereas with other oppressed peoples such as the Czechs, or the Ukrainians of Austria, the transition of national development went from the insurrectional form of

the old nobility to the modern bourgeois democratic form coinciding with the democratization of the ruling state, this was not the case with the Ukrainian awakening in Russia. There this awakening to a bourgeois and democratic form was born under an absolutist regime and remained there for a half century until the Russian Revolution.

This fact gave the Ukrainian renaissance in Russia an extraordinarily passive and powerless character, as for a long period it lacked a *free constitutional regime*, something absolutely indispensable to any modern bourgeois and national movement.

This is why the Ukrainian movement manifested itself so weakly. It was behind in its development compared to the subject peoples of Austria, who long enjoyed their political liberty; the path to this was closed by despotic Russian centralism.

Russian Tsarism was always hostile to the Ukrainian movement and in its struggle against this movement resorted to the most severe means of repression. This can be explained by the role Ukraine played in the foundation of the Russian Empire. The Muscovite state could not transform itself into the Russian Empire until it had annexed Ukraine, from which it took the old name "Rus."⁴ It was not until after it had seized the black earth belt of Ukraine and the banks of the Black Sea that the Muscovite state, which occupied the northern part of Russia proper and which did not possess large natural resources, could take part in world economic life and become the Russian Empire. The Muscovite despotism which knew so well how to exploit Ukraine and disorganize its people, leading an intense and harsh life, knew how to Russify the Ukrainian ruling classes so that finally the Muscovite state succeeded in its official policy: to treat the Ukrainian people as one with the Russian people.

The Ukrainian nation formed with the Russians an overwhelming majority in

Russia, which was a prop to the grandeur of Tsarism and Russian imperialism. But if the Ukrainian nationality came back to life, shaking off Russian bondage and forming an independent entity, the Russian nationality would be a minority of 43 percent in the Empire. It is understandable that Russian Tsarism was frightened of such a perspective, hence it constantly displayed total and thorough opposition to all Ukrainian movements.

We have already said that the modern Ukrainian movement started to develop around 1860. It manifested itself at this time by the pacific desire to organize *popular Ukrainian education*. At this time Sunday schools were founded in different Ukrainian towns, particularly in Kyiv, its capital. Education was conducted mainly by high school students, who at the same time published textbooks for the people in their mother tongue. But Tsarism struck immediately against this inoffensive manifestation of the Ukrainian movement. In 1863 publication of Ukrainian literary works aimed at the people were banned and the minister Count Petr Valuev declared "the Ukrainian language doesn't exist, has never existed and never will exist"! The following year the Sunday schools were closed. This persecution greatly discouraged and weakened the young Ukrainian movement. But the Tsarist government didn't stop there. On the eve of the war against Turkey in 1876—undertaken under the name of "liberation of the Bulgarians"—a decree banned all Ukrainian-language publications.⁵

After this decree, the Ukrainian movement was deprived of printed matter and found it totally impossible to legally display its existence until the revolution; this was for a whole *thirty-year* period. Strange to say, this savage attack on Ukraine did not provoke any reaction on the part of Ukrainian leaders.

Despite the passive nature of the Ukrainian movement, the intellectuals of 1860 were infused with determined political ideals, the best known representative of which was the "Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood" founded in 1840. This association counted amongst its leaders the poet Shevchenko, the writer Kulich, and the celebrated historian Kostomarov. The Brotherhood, the aim of which was the abolition of serfdom, had a Slavophile character. This differed from Russian Slavophilism, which was always imbued with a centralizing pan-Russianism and advocated a Slav federation of which a free Ukraine would be part.

The Russian government quickly discovered the existence of this Brotherhood and persecuted Shevchenko, who was exiled to Siberia for many years and forbidden to write; Kulich and Kostomarov were forbidden to live in Ukraine. But their ideas did not perish; they animated the Ukrainian patriots of 1860, particularly the youth involved in popular education. Yet these ideas were not at all revolutionary and faced with repression, particularly the 1876 law, the Ukrainian leaders renounced their political ideal, capitulating to Tsarism all along the line.

The most powerful of the leaders of the Ukrainian movement of 1860, M. Drachmanov, a professor at Kyiv University, emigrated to Switzerland, dedicating his life to the idea of Ukrainian liberation.⁶

In vain he exhorted his countrymen to struggle against Tsarism, to publish Ukrainian revolutionary papers in free Galicia, to be distributed throughout Russian Ukraine; his appeals were not heeded. The Ukrainian leadership within Russia would do nothing but submit to the censorship of Ukrainian manuscripts, which the government time and again refused permission to print. The watchword was "Conciliate the government." The recognized Ukrainian leaders

sent reports to St. Petersburg, asking the government's permission to engage in popular education, with the assurance that this concession would weaken the revolutionary elements within the Ukrainian movement, which would retain an exclusively legal character. They also expressed the view that political struggle should be left to the Russians in Russia and that the Ukrainians should limit themselves to popular education and remain strangers to all politics.

Despite the humility of bourgeois Ukrainians, Tsarism continued to persecute with a cold and intransigent perseverance any manifestation of Ukrainian nationality, however inoffensive; at concerts singers were obliged to sing Ukrainian songs in French translation.

Thus the bourgeois Ukrainian movement, aspiring to a liberal constitutional regime with a view to organizing a reborn nation, was placed by circumstance in a position where all activity and all political initiative were without result. This bourgeois movement separated itself from the masses and was reduced to ultra-anodyne displays; one such was an edition of a journal published in Kyiv in Russian and dedicated to the Ukrainian past when theatrical representatives enjoyed a little liberty at the end of 1880.

The bourgeois Ukrainian movement distinguished itself in this case and to the highest degree by a trait common to all the modern bourgeois movements of oppressed nations. These movements could not adopt any of the proper characteristics of the bourgeois revolutions of Western Europe. Representing the interests of the *middle classes* at their beginning, the bourgeois movements of the oppressed nations had a policy without principle, a policy of compromise with the existing states which, ultimately, were a factor which ensured the capitalist development of oppressed nations, for the centralism of the great empires

could retard the development of any nation but not ultimately stop it.

The revolution of 1905 was the force that obliged Ukraine to emerge from its inaction. The period before the revolution in the first years of the century performed a great role. Since the end of the last decade of the nineteenth century the workers' strike movement sparked among Ukrainian scholars a growth in hope. This growth, created on the one hand by Russian socialist literature and on the other by the revolutionary works of Drahomanov, caused the youth to indignantly condemn the old tactics of the leaders of the Ukrainian movement. At the university of Kharkiv, where the historical and ethnographic studies of the professors had been the base in the last century of the Ukrainian movement of 1860, there formed at the start of the twentieth century, this time among students, an energetic group of revolutionary and socialist Ukrainians who in 1900 founded the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party, the appearance of which was the starting point of a new period for the Ukrainian movement.

This party broke completely with all the traditions of the old leaders of the Ukrainian movement. It initiated its activity directly amongst the people, making use of an abundant literature published in Austrian Ukraine. This literature smuggled into Russia in dozens of kilos spread very rapidly throughout Ukraine. These journals and pamphlets excited the interest of the toiling masses and were received by them enthusiastically, happy to get the socialist truth in works published for the first time in their *muzhik* tongue; the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party [RUP] was the first to infringe clearly and openly the decree of 1876 banning Ukrainian publications.⁷

Although by its activity amongst the peasants the RUP broke with the traditions of the Russian social-democrats, who at this time were not interested in the toilers in the

countryside but only industrial workers, it did not follow the tactics of the Narodniki, and constantly gave to its propaganda a *class character* addressing itself to the peasants and organized their strike movement.⁸ In this area the RUP had considerable success and it was due in great measure to them that the strike movement in the gubernias of Poltava and Kharkiv became one of the forerunners of the revolution in Russia.

The Revolutionary Ukrainian Party was a socialist party. But it was not so in theory or in its program, though on the eve of the revolution its activity also took place amongst urban workers. A second constitutional congress of the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party took place in 1905 and adopted the maximum Erfurt program of the German Social-Democrats and the minimum program of the Russian Social-Democracy. It demanded extreme democratic autonomy for the territory within the ethnographic boundaries of Ukraine, with legal guarantees for the free development for the national minorities living within its territory. The principle of national organization was based on the organizational model of the Austrian Social-Democracy.⁹

With regard to tactics, the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party took the same position as the left wing of the Russian Social-Democracy (Bolsheviks), and instead of calling itself the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party, adopted the name Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, the name under which it still exists today, and to which the authors of this letter belong.

The role played by the young Ukrainian socialist movement in the national renaissance is very significant. This movement has connected the question of national emancipation to all the problems of the emancipation of the proletariat; it has raised this question to the level of those political problems which can be solved by no other means than democratic struggle,

by the development of class antagonism in Ukrainian society. Thus has progressed Ukrainian socialism, always following the same route, confirmed by the undoubted truth that in all present-day liberation movements, political or national—both being the result of the same evolution which saw the transformation of feudal states into modern capitalist states—the working class appears as the sole revolutionary and democratic power. This in effect is what is happening in the Ukrainian socialist movement, which is developing in struggle shoulder-to-shoulder with the workers' movement in all of Russia.

The bourgeois Ukrainian movement adopted an altogether different position vis-à-vis the revolution. During the preceding period, when the revolutionary forces were organizing, the Ukrainian bourgeois movement, which turned with scorn from Ukrainian socialism, formed, it is true, two liberal parties (democratic and radical), but these parties dissolved at the end of the revolution.

In 1905 there appeared openly the first Ukrainian journal in Russia and although this journal was suppressed (despite the freeing of the press in the Russian Empire) a more or less free Ukrainian press could exist from 1906, although the censor created greater difficulties for it than for the Russian press.

The year 1906 saw the return of reaction and the gradual weakening of the socialist movement in Russia in general and in Ukraine in particular. The bourgeois Ukrainian movement, on the other hand, developed considerably, profiting from the liberties obtained by the revolution which it had done nothing to win. In the autumn of 1906, a large movement arose amongst the youth with the aim of nationalizing¹⁰ higher education and a campaign of petitions was launched which obtained over ten thousand signatures.

In the end the Ukrainian movement became infested with bourgeois ideas, socialism lost its former attraction, and antagonism between parties declined. To make this change the Ukrainian bourgeois parties fused into one and declared in 1907 that their press would no longer conduct inter-party struggle; socialist journalists were invited to work with them.¹¹ The majority of them voluntarily accepted this invitation.

However the Ukrainian movement had acquired such strength during the revolution that it was represented in the first two Dumas by two large groups of a progressive nature. These groups found themselves under the influence of the bourgeois parties without being their direct representatives. The law of June 3, 1909, limiting the rights of voters was applied in such a way in Ukraine that there were no longer any Ukrainian deputies in the Duma. Elsewhere the socialist movement grew weaker day by day. The socialist intellectuals passed en masse into the ranks of the bourgeois movement which after the final victory of reaction had adopted the principle of "limited affairs," that is to say it had entirely renounced political demands. The bourgeois movement always concerned itself with a *cooperation*, which united all the middle classes in seeking to fulfill domestic interests, and in organizing educational bodies whose development was constantly hindered by the government. Alongside this purely utilitarian outlook, the bourgeois movement also showed a modernist literary tendency, seeking to free itself from the conventions of the old Ukrainian "democratism"; this movement had extolled the cult of individualism, with an extreme and undisguised hatred of socialism.

These two new traits of the Ukrainian bourgeois movement contributed to the lowering of the level of its ideas which slowly continued to lose breadth. It reverted

to a method of activity established during the somber period of the second part of the nineteenth century. It again completely submitted to Tsarism with a view to reconciliation and agreement with it. For its part the government reverted to its old ways and in order to destroy the Ukrainian movement it closed the educational institutions on even the weakest pretext, and to stop the Ukrainian press from having any effect in the province it persecuted newspaper subscribers. The well-known minister Stolypin, assassinated in Kyiv, declared that "the national and political tendencies of the Ukrainian movement are at this point so close that it is impossible to distinguish between them" and that the most innocent of educational bodies were at the same time "anti-statist" for "they tended to develop revolutionary tendencies at the very breast of the Russian people."¹² Stolypin's declaration followed a circular to provincial governors ordering them to refuse registration to Ukrainian educational institutions and followed with a redoubling of persecution, which was called by the government press "words of gold."

But the Ukrainian bourgeois press showed an extraordinary indifference to these events. It published articles claiming that the government "did not understand" the movement and the Ukrainian question; that it did not understand its importance from a cultural standpoint, even though teachers from around the world recognized that it was necessary to conduct education in the mother tongue. Only the Russian government, refusing to take account of this truth proclaimed by the entire world, obstructed the development of education amongst the Ukrainian people, contrary to the general interest and its own, and acted as if it were a mistake. In response to these assertions, repeated with an astonishing stubbornness, Tsarism relentlessly employed new repressions, augmenting the

supplications of the Ukrainian bourgeois press. Russian liberals were favorable to this, having become increasingly chauvinistic in the course of the reaction.

In these circumstances Ukrainian Social-Democracy remained impotent, although its press continued to exist and to protest against bourgeois politics. But given the small number of workers' organizations (Kyiv, Katerynoslav, Kharkiv) and the near total lack of intellectual elements, it was difficult for us, despite all our efforts, to break the influence of a bourgeois politics which finally reached complete and shameful political bankruptcy.

This bankruptcy started with the war. The Tsarist government, expecting the conquest of Austrian Ukraine to "liberate" the "Russian" Galicians, suppressed the *whole* Ukrainian press in the first days of the war.¹³ It closed nearly all of the Ukrainian scholarly establishments (at a time when they were nearly all closed already) and arrested and deported the best-known Ukrainian political personalities. The situation remained unclear until the end of 1914, but at the start of the following year the governor general of Kyiv outlawed all publications in the Ukrainian language as well as the use of Ukrainian orthography. It is said that the government saw this ban as the equivalent of imposing the decree of 1876 again, which it remembered and still considered to be in force. In any case, there had already been two years of hard fighting and all the tentative efforts at reviving the Ukrainian press had ended in fiasco.

The only organ actually representing the Ukrainian world in Russia and to the foreign press was the journal *Ukrainskaia zhizn*, published in Moscow in the Russian language. In reporting the war it took an apolitical and loyalist-patriotic attitude toward Russia.¹⁴

Thus it was that the Ukrainian movement in Russia found itself without a way

out of its situation. The bloody conflict of the Great Powers in territory belonging to the Ukrainian people had caused the complete material ruin of the whole of Austrian Ukraine and part of western Russian Ukraine. As well as this the war had struck a hard blow at the Ukrainian liberation movement and had destroyed all it had gained, from both the cultural and the political points of view.

II

The best proof of the eclipse of socialist conscience, provoked by the European war, is the credence widely given in certain socialist circles to demagogic theories circulated among the masses in order to conceal from them the real aims of the war of conquest. The representatives of official socialism did nothing to reveal to the people, sent to the killing-fields, the odious undercurrents of European diplomacy; quite the contrary, they accepted the ignoble theories created by the leaders as their own; they put all their energies, all their goodwill at the service of the government cause.

But the scale of the collapse of official socialism among the socialists of the Entente is vast; witness especially their attitude toward the despot Russia and toward the role which its barbaric government is allegedly destined to play in the "war of liberation." Leaving aside the plight of Belgium and Serbia, which the Allied armies ought fully to restore, only Poland remains to be liberated by the governments of the Tsar and his allies when all this chattering is done. The manifesto of Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich serves as a base on which to re-create freely the triumph of Right and Justice.¹⁵

This blind and limitless confidence with which the Entente democracies receive the promises of the head of the Russian autocracy seems at times paradoxical,

unbelievable even; it is unfortunately too well known to be called into question. The most abject regime in Europe has suddenly become, in the eyes of the democracies of the Entente, the chivalrous defender of the entire Slavonic race; all the miseries inflicted on Poland by the Russian government down the centuries have been forgotten. The prison-house of nationalities, as Russia was frequently called, has won over all those in France and England whose hearts are touched by the love of oppressed nations. The flaw in all this rhetoric about the noble role of Russia is that it hides under the cloak of grandiloquence the vulgar interest of people greedy for conquest. Yet it has lost nothing of its vigor today, even though the Russian government has done everything to tarnish an already suspect reputation and to demonstrate, by its reactionary policy, the emptiness of promises extracted from it at the beginning of the war. Ah, no doubt the Russian ministers risk nothing in raining down tirades of irony on the Germans who founded the Polish University in Warsaw, but their mockery loses much of its value when the Polish deputies in the Duma are not prepared to take seriously the fine promises of the Russian autocracy and reproach it for its hypocritical policy which allows to persist the old inequalities between Russian subjects and the Poles who live within the Empire and pretends to be ignorant of the grievances of the Polish population.

Now, the socialists of the Entente, blinded by their narrow nationalism, are not interested in the betrayal by Tsarism in its engagements toward Poland at the beginning of the campaign. They are still more indifferent to the situation in which the Russian government has placed the Ukrainian people. All that Allied public opinion has wanted to see in the autocracy of Moscow is a great empire, united by the common seal of race and language, with

inexhaustible resources in terms of men, whose victorious troops march like striking lightning across the distance which separates Berlin from Petrograd to deliver a mortal blow to "Prussian militarism." It is no exaggeration to say that it is this false impression which the Allies have nurtured about Russia which has determined their sympathy for the Muscovite autocracy. Even though this dream was not realized, even though the reverse occurred, even though Russia's military prestige was seriously shaken, the West has continued nevertheless to consider Russia as a united country, indivisible, whose vast territory is peopled by one great "Russian" nation. The joy manifested by the French socialist press when the Russian troops occupied Galicia and Bukovyna had to be seen to be believed. They saw the event as the triumph of the Muscovite empire, at long last restored to national unity; the Austrian Ukrainians were seen by the French socialists simply as "Russians" living over the border. The English press of all shades of opinion, which before the war had devoted long articles to the Ukrainian question, thought nothing of remaining silent over the crimes of Tsarism in Galicia. It was only after the defeat suffered by the Russian troops in Austrian Ukraine that the scandalous conduct of the Petrograd government in Galicia and Bukovyna was judged a little more severely by the socialists of the Entente. But this judgment was inspired by other motives than the defense of Ukraine, ruined and devastated by the barbarians from the East. If Russia was reproached for her conduct in Galicia, famously described by the liberal deputy Maklakov, as a scandal of European proportions, it was only because her savage policies had contributed to her military defeat.¹⁶ As for the fate of poor Ukraine herself, the attack on the rights of her people, this left the socialists of the Entente unmoved.¹⁷

This conspiracy of silence organized by the Allies over the Ukrainian question gave the Russian government an advantage in that it left them a free hand in their fight against the national movement in Ukraine, while at the same time disarming the movement by considerably weakening its powers of resistance to the Muscovite oppressor. The politicians of Russian Ukraine had always considered Galicia as a corner of land where the Ukrainian people could have lived confident of freedom. They knew the cost of the efforts of the Tsar's government to seize Austrian Ukraine, they knew about the seeds of corruption sown by the agents of Moscow to achieve this end and finish once and for all the Ukrainian threat. Yet they nevertheless renounced in advance all resistance and, under the menace of the iron fist, comforted themselves with the illusion that the annexation of Galicia by Holy Mother Russia would lead the Russian government to apply the same constitutional guaranties to the whole Ukrainian people as Austrian Ukraine had enjoyed under the domination of the Hapsburgs. They paid dearly for this illusion; unable to raise a single protest, they saw themselves condemned to the role of silent, passive witnesses to the downfall of the Ukrainian people on the other side of the border.

Today's war has revealed the antagonism that exists between the bourgeois movement in Ukraine and the Russian political regime. There is no doubt that some of the goals pursued by Russian diplomacy in this war coincide with the vital economic interests of Ukrainian capital. Ukraine, with its fertile soil, holds first place in Russian agriculture; every year it sends its enormous stock of cereals abroad. According to the Russian economists, the center of economic life has for some time been shifting from north to south in Russia, that is, toward Ukraine. Thus, the young Ukrainian bourgeoisie cannot remain in-

different to the problem of free passage to the Mediterranean. Yet the overwhelming aim of all Russian imperial policy is to be master of the Straits.

However, the aspirations of the Russian government do not end there. Leaving aside its designs on Constantinople, the Muscovite autocracy wants to seize Galicia and Bukovyna in order to do away with the Ukrainian nation. It follows that the Tsar's government, which wants to make itself master of Constantinople, is putting itself and its great army at the disposal of the economic interests of Ukrainian capital; then again, its vigorous thrust toward Austria, having no other aim but the conquest of Austrian Ukraine, threatens the nationhood of the whole of Ukraine. To put obstacles in the way of the national revival of the country is to attack its economic progress and sacrifice the vital interests of Ukrainian capital while leaving intact the colonial status to which Russia has reduced Ukraine. Tsarism thus accomplishes its double task: on the one hand, it protects the economic rise of capital in Ukraine; on the other hand, it jeopardizes its very future, attacking Galicia which it will always consider as its own national Piedmont.

Constantinople and Galicia, Russian imperialism and Ukrainian freedom, these are the contradictions which history sets before the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and which the latter tries to resolve by betraying its national ideal. The bourgeoisie prefers to abandon the vision of a free and independent Ukraine rather than sacrifice the bait of growing riches. Passive and apathetic before the great Muscovite empire, it reaches out to it, ready to accept any compromise, to bend to the harsh demands of its conqueror and its executioner. And, so that our readers may form a true impression of this slave mentality, we take the liberty of quoting a passage borrowed from *Ukrainskaia zhizn*, the only magazine which continues to ap-

pear after the suspension of all Ukrainian press at the beginning of the war:

The Ukrainians [declares this paper, with a certain pride] will not be fooled by suspect manoeuvres or any sort of foreign provocation. They will do their duty to the end. They will do so not only as soldiers on the battlefield, fighting those who have provoked war and violated all the rights of humanity, but also as simple civilians, called *to contribute according to their strength to the great task which has fallen upon the Russian army*.¹⁸

It seems pointless to seek out the nature of this "great task" which the Ukrainian bourgeoisie professes as its civic duty. Constantinople or Galicia? Our own goal, as Ukrainian socialists, is very different. The task of social democracy in Ukraine is to reawaken the socialist consciousness of the exploited so that they may understand the antagonism that exists between their class interests and the aggressive ambitions of Ukrainian imperialism. The only fitting socialist response would be an all-out struggle against militarism in Ukraine, be it "Ukrainian" or "Russian." The triumph of democracy is the only possible guarantee under the capitalist regime against massacres and imperialist wars. This terrible war which has been unleashed on the world must make the Ukrainian workers understand that their own national bourgeoisie is sacrificing the interests of Ukrainian democracy, allowing the Russian government to conduct itself as master in Ukraine and to keep it in the grip of national and political slavery.

However, today's war has brought politicians from the Central Powers into contact with the Ukrainian problem. And while Allied public opinion kept quiet about all signs of national life in Ukraine and even denied the existence of the Ukrainian problem, in Austria and Germany people were very sympathetic to the Ukrainian question; the press devoted long

articles to it; everybody was talking about it. At the very beginning of the war, there was even a league formed under the name of "Union for the Liberation of Ukraine." This was created by a few former socialists, of Russian Ukrainian origin, who claimed the right to represent Russian Ukraine to the governments of the Central Powers. Special funds were put at their disposal by the Austrian government to enlist them in making propaganda in favor of the cause of the Central Powers. It was these somewhat tainted funds which enabled the agents of the "Union for the Liberation of Ukraine" to go on a propaganda tour in Turkey and Bulgaria to persuade these countries to intervene in the conflict on the side of the Central Powers, on the pretext of helping the oppressed Ukraine. Such financial aid enabled the representatives of the Union, acting as paid agents of the Central Powers, to spread the hatred of war among the Turkish and Bulgarian peoples.

The situation of the Union was consolidated by the favorable reception it was given by the politicians of Austrian Ukraine. This is explained by the fact that in Austria (Galicia and Bukovyna), all the Ukrainian parties are united in a single organization under the banner of the "Austrian orientation"—whereas the "Russian orientation" is widespread among the Ukrainians in Russia.¹⁹ But while in Russia the loyalty of the Ukrainian population, persecuted and crucified by the Muscovite autocracy, is purely a matter of form, on the other side of the border, attached by constitutional ties to the monarchy of the Danube, Ukrainian loyalty has taken on an aggressively militaristic aspect, marked by propaganda in favor of the war against Russia, on the assumption that it will lead to the restoration of a free and independent Ukraine.

Yet the constitutional guarantees enjoyed by the Ruthenes in Austria did not stop the Poles taking the Ukrainian popula-

tion under their political and administrative control, with the tacit consent of the government in Vienna. But the Austrian Ukrainians forget this reality in the exuberance of war: they imagined that the only goal of the Central Powers in this war was the liberation of Ukraine, and they put all their goodwill, all their courage at the service of Austrian imperialism. They believed, for example, that two thousand Ukrainian volunteers, enlisted in the Austrian army under the malevolent eye of the government in Vienna, were dying for the cause of Ukrainian independence. But most hideous of all is the energy and enthusiasm which Austrian Ukrainian Social-Democracy has expended on propagating these militaristic ideas, the collapse of the Ukrainian socialists in the face of the bourgeois political parties, even to the extent that the socialist organizations have merged with their class enemies.

However, the latest events have begun to sow seeds of doubt in the minds of the Austrian Ukrainians as to the value of this program. The territories of the Russian Ukraine (Volyn and Kholm), with a population of over two million, occupied by the Austrian army, have, on the orders of the Viennese government, been subjected to Polish and German administration. The latter, without any regard for the legitimate grievances of the Ukrainians, has notably proceeded to found Polish schools and has preferred to use Russian for administrative purposes, rather than the Ukrainian tongue. This example, only one of many, confirms the rumors currently circulating about a secret treaty agreed between the governments of the Central Powers on the matter of the reconstitution of Poland; it is alleged that, by virtue of this treaty, Poland would be attached to Austro-Hungary as a third state in the Hapsburg crown and that she would encompass, besides the former Polish state, Lithuania, together with White Russia, and

the Ukrainian states of Volyn, Podilia, and Galicia.²⁰ It goes without saying that such a solution to the problem of Ukrainian "reconstitution" inspires some fears among the Austrian Ukrainians who would be condemned, along with the Lithuanians, the White Russians, and certain elements of Russian Ukraine, to play the part of puppets in the hands of powerful neighbors within a reborn Poland. This shameful role as a destructive element within the new state does not seem to accord too well with the ideal of a free Ukraine. Moreover, Ukrainian Galicia is obsessed with threats of annexation to Russia. These threats provoke great anxiety among the Ukrainians of Austria.

Nevertheless, the Austrian Ukrainians continue to lend their support to the "Union for the Liberation of Ukraine." This only serves to confuse the Ukrainian question; it is further confused by the fact that the Union's activities have received a cold reception in the Russian Ukraine. Our paper's revelations about the shameful schemes of the "Union for the Liberation of Ukraine" and its financial resources, drawn from the secret funds of the Central Powers, which have been used as an excuse in a certain quarter of the French press and, above all, in the Russian press, to alarm public opinion with noisy rantings about the "treachery" of the Ukrainians, have led the Ukrainian bourgeoisie to declare their loyalty to the Muscovite autocracy.

However, the actions of the Union have had some positive results. It must be given credit for the interest displayed in the Ukrainian problem by military, governmental, and pan-Germanist circles in Germany, and, above all, by the partisans of outright war against Russia.

The movement is led by the German journalist P. Rohrbach, well known outside his own country and the most distinguished contributor to the *Osteuropäische Zukunft*, published in Munich by a group of

clubs recently founded under the name of "Ukraine" for the purpose of contributing to the "liberation" of that country.²¹ The origins of this movement can be found in the economic antagonism between Russia and Germany, which in Germany has given rise to a fierce hatred of Russia. A few big capitalists and military chiefs who support the movement are preaching the necessity for imperialist Germany to crush Russia, even if that costs them a second war in the future. If Germany merely conquered Poland, Russia would not be sufficiently weakened from a military and economic point of view. In order to settle the matter for good, for Russia to cease to exist as a great imperialist state, Germany has to tackle the largest bit; Russia has to be relieved, by military force of her richest colony—the territories situated on the Black Sea coast, that is, Ukraine.

The territories thus "liberated" would constitute an independent state, where German capital could take over. It is true that some prophets of imperialism, like Kleinoff, are already, even now, somewhat worried about this state. They anticipate that the indeterminate national character of Ukrainian high society might be subject to cowardly intrigue and envy on the part of its strong neighbors. But the other advocates of expansion, the most aggressive and energetic, like Rohrbach, claim to see an element in the lack of national consciousness of Ukrainian high society which would favor the "civilizing" influence of Germany, which could provide the good people of Ukraine, free of charge, with "a European prince, schools, finance, engineers, teachers, bankers, generals and ministers."²²

It goes without saying that German democrats play no part in this kind of "liberation." The Ukrainian advocates of such German "civilizing work" have already criticized German Social-Democracy for its indifference to the Ukrainian problem and

for disowning the whole policy of annexation. It is true that the German socialist press has had very little debate over the Ukrainian problem.

As Russian Ukrainian socialists, faithful to the principles of revolutionary socialism, we cannot but applaud this attitude on the part of German Social-Democracy, that is, of its minority, which is leading an energetic campaign against German imperialism. To deem all this rhetoric empty of any sense in its logical relations with the policy of annexation, to reveal to the masses the true intentions of the warmongers, this is the real work of socialists. And when a revolutionary minority of German Social-Democracy is waging a merciless fight on the pan-Germanist clique of "liberators," and reveals their annexationist projects, they are then lending their precious moral aid to Ukrainian democracy.

If the idea of a conquest of Galicia and Bukovyna by Russia seemed more dangerous to Ukrainians than an annexation of Russia's territories in Ukraine to Austria (but not to Poland), that signified that, in colonial politics, there are some very brutal modes of expansion, and others less so; but it is beyond doubt that all expansionist policies end up in brutality. It begins by exporting to the liberated country "European princes, ministers, generals and bankers," and ends by importing modern slavery for the indigenous population. That is why democrats among the oppressed peoples must oppose, with all their forces, the false and hypocritical game of the apostles of capitalist brigandage, as this game can do nothing but change the master, cannot resolve the national question, and is the origin of new international complications and new massacres.

But we must oppose with particular energy the intrigues of European statesmen who seek to conceal their expansionist ambitions by promising political independence

to the oppressed nationalities. With the aid of these unreliable promises the bourgeois politicians deceive the masses, making them believe that miracles are being prepared by bloody weapons on the battlefields of Europe. Unfortunately, the oppressed peoples, obsessed by the memory of their sufferings, readily listen to these false shepherds who promise a regeneration of the peoples as the miraculous effects of their military success. People of good faith, who observed the hope of the Polish, Ukrainian, and other populations at the beginning of the war, are agreed that the belief that the hour of national liberation was at hand reached enormous proportions among the oppressed peoples, who succumbed to a general delirium, regarding the belligerent states with a kind of awe.

No doubt a great deal of the responsibility for the odious campaign of mystification lies with the bourgeois national movement of the oppressed peoples. We have already pointed out the obsession of this movement with its immediate interests, and how much it is concerned with making profits for the national capitalist bourgeoisie. If democrats hope, through the national awakening, to conquer wider political liberties; if the working class sees in these constitutional guarantees a precious seed for realizing its aspirations toward social justice; the bourgeoisie, in contributing to the national regeneration, sees nothing but a means to achieve political and social power for itself, and intensifying the exploitation of labor.

For the democratic movement and the working class the national awakening is a pure and noble idea, a source of enthusiasm and energy; for the bourgeoisie, to the contrary, national liberation is a business like any other, an enterprise which may bring benefits. So the bourgeois politicians, lacking a national ideal, are forced into recourse to demagogic phraseology to undermine the vigilance of the masses,

to distract their attention and betray their national aspirations.

It is the decadence of the bourgeois national movement that explains the conduct of the politicians of Austrian Ukraine. Disregarding the true spirit of Russian Ukraine, which remains alien to all separatist projects, since the beginning of the war, in the midst of the tumult, they have lit the torches of Ukrainian independence—to light up the route of the Austrian armies toward Kyiv. But if one takes an objective view of the nationalist ritual, which is like a sideshow to the imperialist grand drama, one will understand that the Austrian promoters of Ukrainian independence are not really fighting for the liberation of the Ukrainian peoples, but seek to light the fire of German capitalist exploitation in Ukraine in order to warm themselves by it.

We all agree that any people will enjoy the best opportunities for their political, economic and social development when organized in a free and independent state. But for this liberty and independence not to be illusory, in an epoch when democracy plays so important a role, for the state to serve the task of social progress in the full sense of the word, the independent state needs to be brought about by the efforts of the nation itself, by its own will and action. The aspiration of the Ukrainian people for the reconstitution of their own state will have no solid basis unless the Ukrainian nation shows itself strong enough to take advantage of circumstances, to deliver a decisive blow at the same time against Austria-Hungary and Russia and organize a free and independent Ukrainian democracy through its own efforts. In that case the Ukrainian democracy would be forced to conduct a desperate struggle, not only against the Entente but also against the Central Powers, that is to say against the whole of Europe.

At once one realizes the absurdity of

such a scenario. One need only recall that to undertake such a colossal action the Ukrainian democracy would need a powerful army, organized on modern lines. Now, no oppressed nation under the domination of the great centralized powers is capable of creating its own army without first organizing as a state, and since without the state there can be no national army, it follows that national independence, the dream of oppressed peoples, seems to have no chance of realization at the moment when the capitalist world is massively militarized in pursuit of its imperialist goals. Today all attempts to revive nationalist separatist movements end in failure, more or less total; they are condemned to play the game of the great European states, they lose their democratic character and end up deteriorating into dubious adventures.

It can be said that the problem of national wars, which so agitated Europe in the course of the past century, already in that epoch, tied to imperialist politics, has been removed from the agenda of European democrats by the twentieth century and above all by the war that we now witness. Once we accept, as our point of departure, that war today cannot resolve the national problem, indeed that on the contrary the likely annexations will be the origin and source of new international complications; if we accept the idea that the evolution of the major capitalist states toward the centralization of military power excludes the whole possibility of a democratic separatist movement aiming for the formation of new national states; if we leave the scenario of war for the moment, to pose the national question in its full extent; we arrive at the conclusion that the solution to this problem *is the struggle for the complete democratization of states, adding to the democratic gains a struggle for decentralization, in order to liberate the oppressed peoples, establishing an accord between them, and to clear the way for class*

struggle against imperialism and militarism.

Certainly, in the propaganda for the liberation of oppressed peoples, we cannot ignore the fact that their full liberation and real accord will only be possible under the socialist order, when the basis of all national oppression—the division of society into classes—will disappear. But this propaganda cannot shrink from the duty to struggle for reforms which even under capitalism will give nationalities greater guarantees of freedom for national development, and against new annexations and military brigandage.

This is why the socialist International must beware above all of the *Russian Empire*, which to date has been able to preserve the most reactionary regime and, with its vast reach and omnipotent bureaucracy, presents a massive threat to European democracy. It is an error to think that the downfall of Tsarism will profoundly change the political face of Russia. The reactionary tendencies of the Russian bourgeoisie, on one side, the weak development of the working class and the overwhelming mass of the peasant population, on the other, do not inspire real confidence in the future political liberation of the Russian Empire.

If French centralism, created under the *ancien régime* by royal power, remained throughout the nineteenth century an obstacle to victorious revolutions, it is all the more dangerous to create illusions about Russian centralism, whose political heritage will be taken over, after the fall of Tsarism, by the Russian bourgeoisie. Far from relaxing centralism, the Russian bourgeoisie will give it new strength by applying the principles of modern bureaucracy, extending its power base. In the Russian Empire, peopled by hundreds of different nationalities, the Russian bourgeoisie will find an extensive field of activity to Russify all those nationalities by means of centralism. The Tsarist policy of Russification has

always come up against Russia's low level of general culture; it was aimed at a very restricted part of the population, given that the means of civilization at the disposal of the Russian state are very deficient. So the progress in general culture and popular education, to be expected in a free Russia, will open up new horizons for Russification by the bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie will, so to speak, democratize the methods of assimilation, extending them into every sphere of life, making national oppression more methodical and tangible.

We often hear it said that chaos and struggle between nationalities are peculiar to Austria and yet, to be honest, the only great state composed of different nationalities that has been able to assure its people the greatest freedom of development is Austria. And if Russia has, until now, not been greatly torn by national conflicts, if in the words of the Ukrainian poet Shevchenko, "from Moldova to Finland all in Russia is silent," this silence is solely due to the oppression of Tsarist centralism, and the nationalities in Russia being unorganized, unconscious and—so to speak—in a molecular state. But the winning of freedom in Russia will surely help organize the nationalities and provoke a struggle between them. Already the Russian revolution has allowed the peoples of Russia a brief mirage of liberty, has stimulated the development of their national consciousness and national movements. When the hour of political liberation sounds for Russia, the national conflicts of Austria, between seven small nationalities, will seem no more than child's play in comparison with the great struggle that will take place in Russia on the morrow of the fall of Tsarism.

Although Tsarism itself possesses only limited means of assimilation, it has succeeded over the centuries in preparing the ground for the Russian bourgeoisie, which will certainly know how to make use of

centralism, to stir up national passions and poison the whole of social life. This national struggle within the Russian Empire will push the bourgeoisie into feverish imperialist projects, for its domination outside the country will increase its power within. It is sufficient to recall the desire for conquest shown by Russian liberals in the course of this war to be sure that the bourgeoisie, once in power, will push militarism to the limit and transform "Great Russia" from fantasy into horrible reality.

If the Russian and German reactionaries decide not to prolong the conflict, and prefer to turn their hatred against England, the antagonism between German and Russian bourgeois imperialism will grow ever more intense and threaten Europe with new conflicts in the future. The socialist International must take account of all these considerations. Just as the first International and all European democrats were committed to the liberation of Poland from the yoke of Russian autocracy, we are sure that the liberation of Ukraine will be the watchword of the third International and of the proletarian socialists of Europe in their struggle *against Russian imperialism*.

The Ukrainians form a nation which, within Russia, is only exceeded in population by the Russians themselves. This explains why the Russian government treats all Ukrainian organizations or associations wishing to carry out education among the people as organizations contrary to public order and dangerous to Russian unity. It explains also why the German imperialists, seeking Russia's defeat, want to separate Ukraine from Russia and send "a European prince to Kyiv." There is no doubt that the national regeneration of Ukraine will destroy the unity of "Russia" and disrupt the imperialist force of the Empire. This danger has been foreseen with great clarity by the Russian liberals whom while making certain concessions to the bourgeois

Ukrainian movement in the area of culture, have disputed the Ukrainians' right to make political demands and have supported the anti-Ukrainian policy of Tsarism.

We have already had occasion to show how the general atmosphere of hatred against the Ukrainian movement weakened the latter. The passivity and obedience so dear to the Ukrainian bourgeoisie during the war have through force of circumstances penetrated the masses.

This is why we, as Social-Democrats of Russian Ukraine, address ourselves to the International Socialist Conference, calling upon it to take the Ukrainian problem into account, in the course of debates on the international situation and the conditions of the future peace, and to proclaim in the conference motion the necessity for the liberation of Ukraine. Such a declaration from the representatives of revolutionary socialism will be not only a valuable support for all our socialist and anti-militarist propaganda in the Ukrainian working class, but also the expression of the objectivity and supreme justice of the new International. When Tsarism has been destroyed, when the Ukrainian socialist movement can advance freely, this support given today by the young socialist International to Ukrainian socialism shall forever serve the worldwide working class as an example of international socialist solidarity.

In summary, we call upon the second International Conference:

To appeal to the working class for a struggle for the liberation of oppressed nations, by means of revolutionary actions, against the centralism of great states composed of different nationalities, and to address this appeal to the proletarian socialists of Russia, wishing them success in their struggle against Tsarism, with the goal of the political liberation of Russia, and the conquest of democratic and autonomous rights for the oppressed nations.

To protest against Tsarist Russia's proj-

ects of annexation of Austrian Ukraine (Galicia and Bukovyna) because this annexation would result in the spoilation of all political and national liberties in this province, and the more intense oppression of the whole Ukrainian nation. To oppose the projects of Tsarism which seek to stifle Ukrainian regeneration, by demanding democratic autonomy of Ukraine within its ethnographic boundaries in Russia.

With socialist greetings.

By the editor of the Social-Democratic newspaper *Borotba*,
L. Rybalka

NOTES

1. Although the title of the brochure mentions the International Socialist Conference in Holland, Lev Yurkveych was writing to the Kienthal Conference (also known as the Second Zimmerwald Conference) held in the Swiss village of Kienthal, between April 24 and 30, 1916. For reasons of secrecy, the organizers of the Kienthal Conference first issued an invitation for the "Second Zimmerwald Conference" in Holland in the International Socialist Commission *ISK-Bulletin* Nr.3, issued on the 29th of Feb. 1916, participants were only informed later that the conference was actually to be held in the Swiss village. [Editor's note]

2. The Cossacks had various social and ethnic origins, but were predominantly made up of escaped serfs fleeing the oppression in the Polish-ruled areas of Ukraine. They established self-governing communities, one of the largest and most well-known being the Zaporozhian Sich. In 1648, a mass uprising of Cossacks and peasants led by Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1648–57), against the Polish Commonwealth established the Ukrainian Cossack state known as the Hetmanate (the title of an elected Cossack leader), consisting of most of central Ukraine. [Ed. note]

3. B. Noble, *L'Ukraine sous le protectorate russe*. Paris, 1915.

4. "Kyivan Rus," the first state of the Eastern Slavs, lasted from the ninth to mid-thirteenth century, under Volodymyr the Great, it became a pre-eminent state of Europe, adopting Christianity in 988. It fragmented following the Mongol invasion giving rise to three powerful

independent states, including Halych-Volhynia, in central and western parts of modern Ukraine. Russian imperialism has attempted to establish historical continuity between Russia and Kyivan Rus to justify its rule over Ukraine. The Tsardom of Muscovy, founded in 1147, was for two hundred years a Mongol vassal state, renamed the Russian Empire in 1721 by Tsar Peter, who appropriated the name of Kyivan Rus. Catherine the Great declared the empire its successor. In 2022, Putin claimed Russia as the sole heir to Kyivan Rus. [Ed. note]

5. We publish in "extenso" this shameful document:

H. M. The Tsar has deigned to ordain this past May 18/30 (1876):

1. To ban within the borders of the Russian empire under the special authorization of the Higher Administration charged with printing affairs all books or pamphlets published abroad in the Little-Russian idiom.

2 The printing and publishing in the Empire of original works or translations in this idiom are banned with the exception of (a) historical documents and monuments, (b) works of fiction, with the condition that the orthography of the originals is upheld in the publication of historical works, and that works of fiction will not be tolerated in form other than the generally adopted Russian orthography. Publication of works of fiction will not be allowed without the manuscript having first been examined.

3 Also banned are all theatrical events and conferences conducted in this idiom as is the publication of musical texts in this idiom.

Head of the Administration in charge of printing affairs. *Grigoriev*.

Michael Drahomanov, "Ukrainian literature banned by the Russian Government," Report presented to the Paris literary conference, 1878.

6. Mykhailo Drahomanov (1841–1895) was a prominent figure in the secret society Hromada of Kyiv. Dismissed from his position at Kyiv University in 1875, he relocated to Geneva, where he established *Hromada* (Community), the first modern Ukrainian political journal, in collaboration with Serhii Podolynsky and Mykhailo Pavlyk. Together, they founded the Geneva Circle, which became the embryo of Ukrainian socialism. Influenced by figures such as Owen and Proudhon, Drahomanov advocate

an agrarian socialism and a federalist system of self-governing communities and regions. His ideas significantly shaped the Ukrainian political movement in Galicia and influenced populist socialists in Russian-ruled Ukraine. His work had a major impact on the Ukrainian movement in the early twentieth century. [Ed. note]

7. The term *muzhik* means a peasant, particularly in the pre-revolutionary Tsarist period. [Ed. note]

8. *Narodniks*, *narodnits'tvo* from "Narod" — the people or nation, also known as populists, were a radical movement that arose after the Crimean War. The main tenets of Ukrainian populism were federalism, emancipation of the peasantry, and the recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of the Ukrainian people, they saw the peasantry as the key force for change. Ukrainian populists were also known by their contemporaries as Ukrainophiles, most prominent among them were Volodymyr Antonovych and Mykhailo Drahmanov. [Ed. note]

9. Founded in 1889, the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria (SDAPÖ) was reorganized at the 1899 Wimberg Congress into a federative structure known as the "small international," granting national parties greater autonomy. Ukrainian, Polish, Czech, Italian, Slovene, Hungarian. [Ed. note]

10. "Yurkevych" means by "nationalizing" such as the use of the Ukrainian language in education. [Ed. note]

11. Ukrainian Democratic-Radical Party (UDRP) was a liberal party formed by a merger of the Ukrainian Democratic Party and Ukrainian Radical Party in 1905. It consisted mainly of members of the intelligentsia. Its program favored a democratic constitution and a preference for a "socialist order." Half of the Ukrainian caucus in the Russian State Duma were members of the UDRP, in the Second Duma (1907) the fourteen Ukrainian Social Democrats elected did not join the caucus. In early 1908 the UDRP collapsed and many of its members who also belonged to the Russian Kadets joined the clandestine Society of Ukrainian Progressives. [Ed. note]

12. Pyotr Stolypin, the Russian prime minister, was assassinated in Kyiv (then Kiev) on Sept. 14, 1911 (Sept. 1, Old Style). [Ed. note]

13. The Russian army occupied Austrian-ruled Ukraine from Aug./Sept. 1914 until mid-1915. Ukrainian organizations, publications, schools, and churches were closed. There were mass

arrests and deportations; Jewish organizations were banned, and on Sept. 27, Russian soldiers staged a pogrom in Lviv, during killing forty-seven people. [Ed. note]

14. *Ukrainskaia zhizn* (Ukrainian Life) was a Russian-language journal published in Moscow from 1912 to 1917. Edited by Symon Petlyura (1879–1926), a member of the USDRP, along with Oleksander Salikovsky, it served as the unofficial organ of the Moscow branch of the clandestine Society of Ukrainian Progressives. In July 1914, Petlyura published an article criticizing the "Austrian Orientation," stating regarding the Ukrainian population: "May it remain steadfast in its mission, ensuring the unity of Russia and its diverse population—particularly in addressing the urgent resolution of national issues, including the Ukrainian question." "Viyna i Ukrayintsi." Symon Petlyura, *Ukrayins'ka suspil'no-politychna dumka v 20 stolitti: Dokumenty i materialy*, T. 1 T. Hunchak, Suchasnist', 1983, 207–10. [Ed. note]

15. In Aug. 1914, the Russian General Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, issued the "Manifesto to the Polish Nation," addressing the Polish people. The manifesto promised the unification of Polish lands under the Russian Tsar and granted autonomy, including religious freedom, linguistic rights, and self-governance, to those living under Russian, German, and Austrian rule. This strategic declaration aimed to secure Polish support and loyalty during the war. [Ed. note]

16. Vasily Maklakov, a leader of the Russian Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets), served as a deputy in the State Duma. Initially supportive of the war, he later became a vocal critic as Russia faced setbacks. He played a key role in the formation of the Progressive Bloc, a coalition of Duma factions that opposed the government's handling of the war. [Ed. note]

17. In this regard, it is useful to point out that, after the victories of the Russian army in Asia Minor, the question of Armenian liberation was put on the agenda. So, a meeting organized by Anatole France was held in Paris on April 10 at which representatives of the government and parliament made a solemn promise to the Armenian people to assure them of the complete liberation of their country in recognition of the dedication they had shown to the Allies' cause. In order to clearly understand the flimsiness and unimportance of these promises, which express elsewhere the solidarity of the French republican government with the interests of Russian Tsar-

ism, it is sufficient to recall what the representative Miliukov stated to the Duma on March 11, 1916 on the subject of the Armenians: "the fate of Armenia and of her people," he said "is as dear to us and as close to our hearts as that of all peoples who have suffered while fighting with us. Unfortunately, there are reasons for believing that *the fate of Galicia could be reproduced in Armenia*. We can see that people are beginning to be unscrupulous with the properties abandoned by their Armenian occupants. Without knowing the reasons, these properties have already been declared properties of the state." How, then can one not be surprised at the words of Anatole France when he said at the meeting that the allied armies "are fighting for justice and liberty"? 18. "The War and the Ukrainians," *Ukrainskaia zhizn*, No. 7, Moscow.

19. The Supreme Ukrainian Council was established on Aug. 1, 1914, by Galicia's major political parties: the National Democratic Party, the Ukrainian Radical Party, and the USDP. The Council declared, "Victory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy shall be our own victory." In 1915, it reorganized into the General Ukrainian Council in Vienna, advocating for Ukrainian territories under Russian rule to form an independent state, while those under Austrian rule would gain autonomy within a unified Ukrainian region. [Ed. note]

20. On Nov. 5, 1916, the German and Austro-

Hungarian Empires issued the "Two Emperors' Declaration," proclaiming the creation of a "Kingdom of Poland" from former Polish territories of the Russian Empire. This announcement disappointed Austrian Ukrainian leaders, who had been informed just two months earlier that the Crown Council, chaired by Emperor Franz Joseph I, had decided to divide Galicia after the war and unite its eastern part with Volyn as an autonomous Ukrainian province. The establishment of a Polish state was primarily intended to bolster the German Army with Polish troops. While the Austrian emperor reaffirmed Galicia's "special" status, which effectively placed Western Ukrainians under Polish authority, a move that Ukrainian figures viewed as sanctioning their colonization. In response, the Ukrainian parliamentary representation in Austria declared on Nov. 7, 1916, that the Ukrainian people would never recognize submission to Polish rule. [Ed. note]

21. Paul Rohrbach (1869–1956) was a German political scientist and expert on Eastern European affairs. He advocated for the separation of western territories from the Russian Empire and led the German-Ukrainian Society until 1926. During the Weimar Republic, he moved away from pan-Germanic views, joining the liberal Democratic Party of Germany and becoming a critic of the Nazis. [Ed. note]

22. "Durch die Ukraine," *Hilfe*, No. 36, 1915.

Marx's Ethics

An Interview with Vanessa Wills

PHIL GASPER

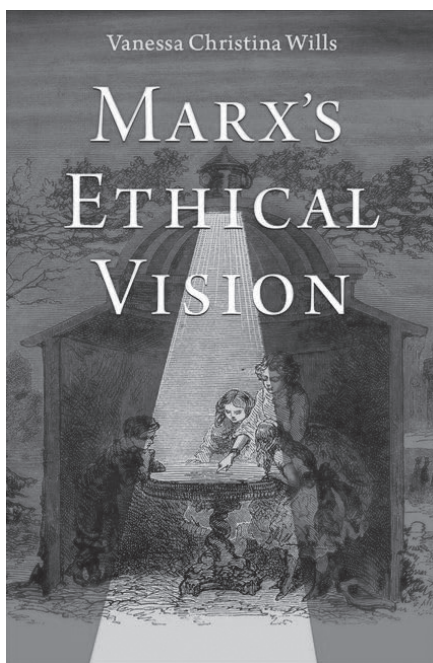
Vanessa Wills is associate professor of philosophy at George Washington University, a founding editor of *Spectre* journal, and the author of *Marx's Ethical Vision* (Oxford University Press, 2024). She discussed her book with *New Politics* co-editor Phil Gasper in April. The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Phil Gasper: *Congratulations on the book. It seems to be getting a lot more attention than most academic publications, because I've seen you've done a series of events and interviews and so on. So that's fantastic.*

Vanessa Wills: Yeah, it makes me happy, especially when I hear about people enjoying the book and learning from the book who are outside of my orbit. I tried to write a book that would hopefully speak as broadly as possible. So often in academia you write these things and it's a very small niche that pays attention to your work. So, it's been fun to see it go much further, beyond me and my circles, and get picked up by people in different disciplines, because it's a philosophy book, but I wrote it in a way that I hoped would be of interest to more than just philosophers.

PG: *What got you interested in writing about Marx's ethical vision?*

VW: It's a question that came up for me during the second Iraq war, at the time of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, because I



was doing antiwar work and that's how I started to learn more about socialism and about Marx and about far-left politics. And I was feeling dissatisfied with so many of the mainstream conversations in the liberal media and liberal press, and liberal morality. I was a philosophy major, and I was a philosophy grad student, and I just felt that I wasn't seeing the resources to help me make sense of the moral harm that was being done and what seemed immoral and unethical about it. It felt like an impulse

that I had, or an instinct, and I wanted to follow that through. Am I off? I don't think I am, but what is there to say about why it is that this is wrong? And as I was learning more about Marxism, I thought, wow, it's got answers for all these other questions that I've been wondering about, maybe it has an answer here. So that's basically become the central question of my whole academic career.

PG: *So it's been a 20-year inquiry for you.*

VW: Yeah, exactly.

PG: *Marx often seems antagonistic to morality, but you've written a whole book about his ethical vision. Can you summarize what you think his ethical perspective is?*

VW: I'll start with the antagonism, because it's absolutely right that he does often speak in very critical ways about morality. And that's actually one of the major themes of my book, because oftentimes he is offering criticisms of specific moral theories, like Kantianism, utilitarianism, various kinds of Christian ethics, and so on. So one thing that's going on is that he often is criticizing some specific moral theory on the basis that the deck is stacked in such a way that it ratifies bourgeois capitalist ways of being and of perceiving the world, and delegitimizes the perspective of oppressed and exploited people. So often that's the criticism he's raising.

But there's also a broader criticism about the role of morality in the world, and whether morality itself is a major tool with which to bring about social transformation, and whether the thing that we need to do is have more moral arguments. And he thinks no, or that it is at least quite secondary to actually taking power and transforming our material circumstances in order to bring about a world that is more conducive to human flourishing.

And that question of human flourishing, I think, is at the center of his ethical

perspective. Because we still see Marx, consistently throughout his work, justifying various kinds of interventions and transformations, or doling out certain kinds of praise, on the basis of what things promote the flourishing of human beings and help to bring about the fully realized expression of their nature as rational creative beings.

So there is this idea of the labor process as the essence of human nature, the essence of human life. And then the question is what kinds of circumstances help human beings to expand their capacity and better intervene into their natural and social environment in such a way as to satisfy their needs and realize their aims, and which circumstances tend to stultify and restrict our ability to develop in that way.

There's a conception of human nature here, but it's important to distinguish it from human nature, as a sort of fixed set of necessary and sufficient conditions to count as a human being. This is human nature as itself the process through which we produce ourselves, through which we intervene into our circumstances and therefore transform ourselves.

PG: *In other words, Marx is a kind of ethical naturalist, both because he sees human beings as part of the natural world and because his ethical views are rooted in a complex conception of human nature.*

VW: I think that's fair to say, yeah.

PG: *A lot of people have drawn comparisons between Marx and Aristotle. Do you think that that's a good way of understanding Marx's perspective?*

VW: I think that it is, if we can call it neo-Aristotelian. That's not a term that rolls off my tongue typically, but I think that is fair as a way of thinking about the reading of Marx that I'm putting forward and arguing for.

Marx seems to think that morality will be abolished in a fully developed com-

munist society and that this is good—he doesn't complain about this. And this is one of the important arguments for the claim that Marx doesn't have anything to contribute to our understanding of ethics, because he seems like he wants to abolish it and get rid of it. But I appeal to a reading of Aristotle's *De Anima*, which Marx was very familiar with—he actually produced the first German language translation of *De Anima*.

You see throughout Marx's writings references to the human senses. So he'll talk, for example, about how the ear is not just a physiological structure, it also has a history. Human beings, over the course of their development, as a species, acquire all kinds of new nuances in this capacity to hear and what it is that we hear. We know that anyone who goes through music appreciation has this transformation. It's the same physiological structure, but the sense changes. And Marx makes similar comments about the power of sight.

I think what we've got is Marx arguing that part of what's gone wrong under capitalism is that the commodity form—the generality of all things as instruments of exchange or objects to be exchanged, always asking “What can I get for this?”—submerges specificity, uniqueness, particularity and difference in the merely quantitative calculation of profit accumulation.

Marx thinks this is a way that commodity exchange ruins our ability to actually apprehend reality, to actually perceive the world that we're in, and that this extends to our relationships to other human beings. Earlier, he called this alienation. One of the things I argue in the book is that he never actually stops talking about alienation, even though he will use different terminology, all the way through his corpus. You got this idea that our senses are dulled, they're stunted, and that what's needed is circumstances that could put us in a position, and

develop within us the capacity, to actually see other human beings. And if we could actually see and perceive other human beings, we might also inculcate in ourselves and develop within ourselves a disposition to respond to them in a different way, to respond to their unique needs, requirements and capacities, instead of having to translate that through a rule book of moral principles.

And so, this is, I think, what Marx is talking about when he talks about the abolition of morality. It's the abolition of what we have, which is a kind of stopgap to help us work around the fact that we don't actually have what Marx sometimes calls a human sense. Recognition is what I'm talking about, really, if we want to get Hegelian about it.

PG: *Yes, that's interesting. In the Anti-Dürhing, Engels doesn't say that morality will be abolished in a classless society, but he says that the abolition of classes will allow a truly human morality to emerge, and what we deal with in class society are various kinds of class moralities. Would you agree with that, or is that a different way of thinking about things? He doesn't say abolition, he says transformation.*

VW: I wouldn't put it in those exact terms because it actually seems to me that Marx really does think of it as an abolition. But I think I would agree with the spirit of Engels' statement. I think of morality as inherently classed, or at least inherently about a kind of gap or misalignment between the world as it ought to be and the world as it is. Once we're talking about a transformation that allows human beings to have an outer outward appearance that is expressive of their essence as self-creating universal beings, then it's hard for me to understand where morality fits in. So I would say I agree with the spirit of it, although I wouldn't put it in those terms.

PG: *In your book you argue that a Marxist worldview is at the same time ethical and scientific. Can you say a little bit more about how you see the relationship between ethics and science in Marx's writings? You've started to talk about this because you've talked about what he says about the senses and the relationship between ethics and human nature. But perhaps you could say a little bit more.*

VW: Yeah. It also relates to some of the things I say early in the book about why the reception of Marx's ideas among analytical philosophers, in particular, has been troubled, to put it mildly.

I argue for a Marx who is set into context with his Hegelian lineage, which he himself was not shy about, even though, of course, he had a critical relationship to that lineage. One way that that matters is the idea that there is a hard and fast separation between what is the case and what ought to be the case, so that claims about what ought to be the case are not deducible from claims about what is the case. This sort of is-ought divide is not universally endorsed by analytic philosophers, but it is analytic philosophical common sense. Marx rejects this—it is just not part of his perspective, and I think that comes in part from that Hegelian lineage.

Marx believes that the world is inherently dialectical, which is to say that it contains contradictions. When we describe what the world is, for Marx a fully scientific accounting of what the world is, includes a tendency toward a certain type of future. I'm trying not to put this too fatalistically. Sometimes people understand this as a kind of gestational picture. Seeing it as fully gestational, would mean the world that is to be is just already here. That's somewhat right—and I do sometimes speak like that—but I think it's important to see that what exists now is a tendency toward a different world. And so I think what exists is both the capitalist world that we know and

loathe, and also the working class.

The working class is not an idea, and its resistance is not an idea. It's happening now. If you have a kind of flattening perspective on the existing world, where you just say that everything is subsumed by capitalism and totally exhausted by capitalism—there are ways to say that and not be wrong *per se*, but it's important to keep in mind that there's also already a struggle for human survival that's ongoing all the time. And for Marx, studying that, analyzing it, taking up the aim of human survival, and then analyzing the existing world to say, well, what is here that tends in the direction away from our survival and what tends towards our survival, all of that is scientific. It is attempting to look at objective reality and say true things about it. But it's also understanding that a full accounting of reality is going to include some contradiction. An important element in that contradiction is a dynamic already existing, already struggling, that is headed someplace. And that's the thing that Marx is tracking and that I'm trying to track when I talk about an ethical vision.

This also relates to something that Marx and Engels say: the communists do not preach morality. And I think that's exactly right, because it's not a question of abstractly developing a principle and then superimposing it onto the world. It is a strategy of looking at the world and seeing what aims are already present within humanity and which of those aims are consistent with the persistence and survival of humanity, and advocating for those and seeking to promote those.

PG: *So there's a moral perspective, but a rejection of moralism in which you put a heavy emphasis on making appeals to abstract principles of some kind. On the other hand, what you said about the future not being preordained in the present, leaves things open to a certain extent. I see Marxism as a theory of potentialities.*

It shows us different possible futures, but it's not determined that one of them will prevail, even though Marx sometimes talks about victory being inevitable. I don't think he really believes that, because history can develop in more than one way.

But as soon as you have the idea that there is more than one possible future—socialism or barbarism, in Rosa Luxemburg's famous expression—that does leave a sort of opening for a certain kind of moralism, if you like. When people struggle to improve their situations, they often think about it in terms of social justice or universal rights. These are terms which have histories, and which may not be perfect for describing what people are thinking about, but they often think about the possibilities in broadly humanistic terms. That's what motivates them. And that can be a strong motivation if you're fighting. You can fight for your immediate material interests, and people do, but if you are also fighting for a conception of justice, that can be an additional motivation. And that that can be important because you may have to do things that require justification. You may have to restrict what other people can do. You may be in a life-or-death battle with other forces. So is there a middle ground between moralism in a sort of strong sense and making these sorts of appeals to notions like social justice? Is there room for that in Marx's perspective?

VW: I think there's room for it. Certainly, if I find out that somebody that can be very helpful to the struggle for human emancipation has the sort of psychology where it's actually very important to make explicitly moral arguments to them, then it would be strange, I think, to stand on principle and say no, I'm not going to do that. Sure, make the moral case for it. But I think what Marx is skeptical of—and I would share his skepticism—is that on the whole, as a general rule, that kind of argumentation is a thoroughly efficacious way of bringing about resistance and of

engaging people in struggle. And it's not because people are just totally indifferent to right and wrong, because you're absolutely right, of course they're not. But it is just a fact about human psychology that the things that are connected in some way to your concrete circumstances, tend to put a fire under people in a different way. And it tends to be that people will be motivated by the concerns that connect to their personal situation, or the things that they value in some way.

And I think this is important for all sorts of reasons, but one of them is that it goes to the ethics and science question. Sure, I can make an ethical argument and do right. One of the aims in the book is to actually spell out what an ethical argument is. But if I only have time to make one argument to a person and I'm trying to impress upon them how important it is that they join the struggle for human emancipation, I'm going to make the argument where I'm able to connect that seemingly abstract aim to the issues that directly impact them.

And this is where Marx, I think, identifies a strength of his perspective as opposed to a number of other moral theories. Marxists have a perspective about good and bad, right and wrong, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, etc., that comes out of the clouds and actually aligns with reality—aligns in a way where I can also say by the way, it's actually absolutely imperative that this be done because otherwise we're not going to survive. You're not going to survive. Your children are going to do worse. The ethical aspiration of Christianity, a brotherhood of men—Karl didn't come up with that one. But he brings it down to earth.

I think this is important too, because there's a tendency to say, well, these things that Marx is advocating for—peace and abundance, and individual freedom, and so forth—why do we need Marx for that?

Doesn't Kant want the same thing? Doesn't John Stuart Mill want the same thing? And the answer is that at a high level of abstraction, sure, but the devil is in the details of how we are going to get there. And I think that's where having an account of history and of politics and of economics and of how it affects you, specifically is important. A shorter way to put this is that Marx thinks the interests of the working class are coincidental with the interests of humanity. So the interests of humanity don't have to become this abstraction that we confront as a demand on us. Our demands as workers are also the demands that are necessary for the good of humanity.

PG: *So there are certainly strands in earlier ethical thinkers that Marx doesn't reject. But there are also important strands that he does reject. And you talk about some of his criticisms of other theories. Take Kantianism, for instance. Kant says we should treat other human beings as ends in themselves. That to me seems to fit very well with Marx's perspective. But there's also an aspect in Kant in which human beings are seen as in need of being disciplined all the time. You have to control desire with reason, and you have to suppress urges to act in various ways. So there's a kind of puritanical aspect to Kant that I think is very alien to Marx's view of ethics. Marx's naturalistic view has to do with human flourishing. You don't want to suppress your desires. You want to find a way in which you can harmoniously develop them.*

VW: Yeah. And it also goes to the question of interests, because Kant thinks your interests are always inherently suspect and such as to lead you away from the good. Marx does have a skepticism about bourgeois interests. But he takes himself to have identified this element within society that doesn't have an inherent and necessary contradiction between their interests and the good—these things are completely coincidental. The working class can be misled about its interests and often is. Racism and sexism and

homophobia and nationalism, these are all ways of doing that. But this again goes to that question of science—the idea that there are nonetheless objective interests, and the more that working people become aware of those and able to discern them, that is the good. That is completely coincidental with the good for humanity as a whole.

PG: *At the beginning of the book, you talk about the way in which Marx has always been rediscovered in times of crisis, and we're in an acute period of crisis today. People talk about a polycrisis because we have economic, social, environmental challenges, all of which are reinforcing each other. So Marx has been rediscovered again and there's a lot of interest in his ideas. How do you think understanding Marx's views about ethics helps us to respond to the crisis? In other words, if somebody picks up your book, will they find it useful to think about the practical tasks facing us in the current situation? Or is it more that this is something that you should think about at some point, but it isn't the most urgent? How does understanding what Marx says about ethics help us as political activists in the current moment?*

VW: The main question of the book for me came precisely out of political urgency, precisely out of crisis. I was in my early 20s, and I thought, the world is going to end. I thought the whole idea of the War on Terror and these invasions were obviously setting the world on a path towards greater destruction, greater suffering. Greater hatred. And in that moment, this question seemed to me to be a really important one. I've continued to be an activist and an organizer and to do whatever I can think of to try to be a force for good, in circumstances that have just gotten worse and worse.

And I think one of the things that stands out to me is that, on the one hand, you hear people saying ethics, that's so abstract, who cares, blah, blah, blah. And yet people have ethical debates all the time and people treat them with real seriousness, and I don't

just mean people inside the academy in an ivory tower. For example, the conversation that has happened around Luigi Mangione, the person who is accused of shooting the executive from United Healthcare. All of a sudden, the whole country, the whole United States, was engaged in this ethical debate about what he is accused of doing, about health care in general.

I think that the skepticism about the importance of ethical discussion and ethical theory is one version of a kind of anti-intellectualism that takes these questions that animate everybody, that everybody cares deeply about, and treats them as though it's some weird obsession of the philosophers, when that's just not really how it is.

Right now, we see Trump taking these people that have had no due process and throwing them into a concentration camp in El Salvador with the assistance of President Bukele. And that's an ethical problem. It's a lot of other problems at once as well, but I think having clarity about ethics and about right and wrong, and about what human beings should demand. I think it

absolutely is incumbent upon us to think that through, and I think that as an academic—as somebody who does have access to that ivory tower, which means I have time and opportunity for now, while we still have academic freedom to some extent in this country—that's a role I can play, to help contribute to answering those questions that people are fired up about and want to know about and want to understand. I think that's a role that I can play.

I think people that pick up this book—even if they read it and say, you know, I don't really agree with Vanessa Wills—will walk away with some new tools and new perspectives and new ways of thinking about the relationship between ethics and our observations of the world, because people's ethical perspectives often get denigrated as mere taste or mere personal preference, and not views that map on to and reflect something that is objectively the case. And that's what I argue for—that there is an objective set of truths about how human beings ought to live, and that we're not doing it right now.

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Communal Villages as Loci of Revolution, in Russia and Beyond

KEVIN ANDERSON

TWO YEARS BEFORE HIS 1879–82 notebooks on communal social forms around the world, Marx begins to see an uprising in Russia as the most likely starting point for a wider European revolution. For example, in remarks on the Russo-Turkish War (the “oriental crisis”) in a letter of September 27, 1877, to the New Jersey communist Friedrich Sorge, Marx views Russia as a cauldron of revolution:

That crisis marks a new turning point in European history. Russia—and I have studied conditions there from the original Russian sources, unofficial and official (the latter only available to a few people but got for me through friends in Petersburg)—has long been on the verge of an upheaval. The gallant Turks have hastened the explosion by years with the thrashing they have inflicted, not only upon the Russian army and Russian finances, but in a highly personal and individual manner on the *dynasty commanding* the army (the Tsar, the heir to the throne and six other Romanovs). The upheaval will begin *secundum artem* [according to the rules of the art] with some playing at constitutionalism and then there will be a fine row. If Mother Nature is not particularly unfavorable toward us, we shall still live

to see the fun! The stupid nonsense which the Russian students are perpetrating is only a symptom, worthless in itself. But it is a symptom. All sections of Russian society are in complete disintegration economically, morally, and intellectually. This time the revolution will begin in the East, hitherto the unbroken bulwark and reserve army of counterrevolution. (Marx-Engels Collected Works [hereafter MECW], 45: 278)

In this period, the last years of Marx’s life, I know of no other consideration of revolutionary possibilities in any other country equivalent to what he is expressing here concerning Russia. This is illustrated in how, in the very same letter, Marx dismisses the prospects of revolution in France, still suffering under the wave of reaction that set in after the defeat of the Paris Commune, and where the republicans were battling the threat of a military dictatorship: “The *French crisis* is an altogether secondary affair compared with the oriental one. Yet one can only hope the bourgeois republic wins” (MECW 45: 278). In the event, Russia defeated Turkey the following year, thus attenuating for the moment the internal crisis Marx foresaw in 1877. But he did not alter his position on the underlying issues eating away at the Russian social order. This is seen in a letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht four months later, in which he remarked that, while Turkey’s defeat had for the moment forestalled a revolutionary outbreak, he continued to

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believe that “all the elements are present in abundant measure” for a “social revolution” in Russia “and hence radical change throughout Europe” (Letter of February 4, 1878, MECW 45: 296).

Fifteen months later, in a letter to French socialist Jules Guesde dated May 10, 1879, which has come to light only recently, Marx writes in a similar vein concerning the world revolution starting in Russia. But, here, he details how it might reach Western Europe and the obstacles it would face there:

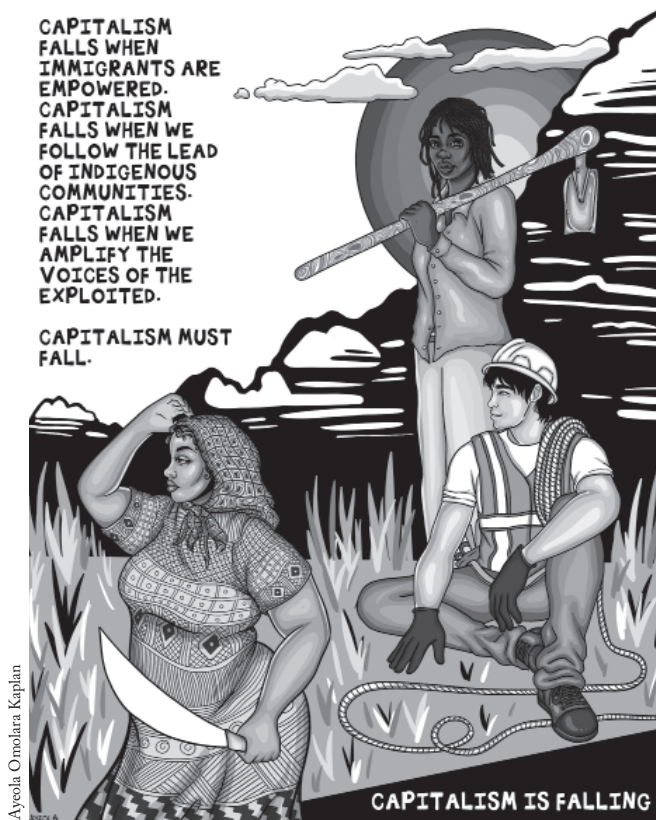
I am convinced that the explosion of the revolution will begin this time not in the West but in the Orient, in Russia. It will first impact the two other harsh despotisms [*illegible word*], Austria and Germany, where a violent upheaval [*bouleversement*] has become a historical necessity. It is of the highest importance that at the moment of this general crisis in Europe we find the French proletariat already having been organized into [*constitué*] a workers' party and ready to play its role. As to England, the material elements for its social transformation are superabundant, but a driving spirit [*l'esprit moteur*] is lacking. It will not form up, except under the impact of the explosion of events on the Continent. It must never be forgotten that, however impoverished [*misérable*] the condition of the greater part of the English working class, it takes part nonetheless, to a certain extent, in the British Empire's domination of the world market, or, what is even worse, imagines itself to be taking part in it.¹

As in the 1877 letter to Sorge and the 1878 one to Liebknecht, Marx sees the revolution breaking out first in Russia.

But, here, sounding notes similar to those in the Confidential Communication on Ireland of 1870, he expresses strong, perhaps even stronger, reservations about the level of class consciousness among English workers, here stressing their affective ties to the Empire. This should not, however, be taken to mean that Marx has given up on the English working class, any more than in the Confidential Communication of nine years

earlier. Also, as in 1870, he sees France in a crucial role but provides more details. His failure to mention the Paris Commune in a letter that would likely have been read by the French police may be due to ongoing political repression of those associated with it. And, in a way, Russia is now a replacement for Ireland, as the land where the revolution is most likely to detonate first. Different, of course, is the lack of Russian working-class immigration, of anything similar to the Irish subproletariat in Britain, and the fact that Russia is not under colonial domination. The letter constitutes a multifaceted sketch of how the next European revolution would likely break out and move forward, written from a seamlessly internationalist perspective that also takes very specific account of local and national circumstances. Editor Jean-Numa Ducange is absolutely correct to refer to “France,” the “Orient,” and the “West” in his title for the article containing the letter. It should also be noted that, in his response, Guesde shows a narrow focus on France, responding only to remarks by Marx about various socialist tendencies in his country, not even mentioning Marx's key point about the European revolution breaking out first in Russia. Here, not only can we discern a Western disinterest in revolutionary movements emanating from the non-industrialized societies to the East, but we are also on the road toward the Second International's focus on socialist parties in each nation operating quite separately from each other, joined together only in a loose federation.

In this 1878–79 correspondence, Marx does not mention Russia's communal villages. It is only in his very last publication that Marx finally combines these two elements, Russia as starting point for a new round of revolution in Europe and the Russian village commune as source of resistance to capital, of revolution, and of communism. He does so in a new preface, coauthored with



Engels, to the 1882 Russian edition of *Communist Manifesto*. This brief preface, drafted in December 1881, adds discussion of both the US and Russia, each of them hardly mentioned in 1848 but since then having risen to great prominence, the US for its surging industrial economy, and Russia for its plethora of revolutionary movements.

Without being aware of the letter to Zasulich and other discussions by Marx of the Russian village commune, all of which lay unpublished in 1882, the reference to these communes as loci of revolution might have been easy to miss, especially given its brevity:

Can the Russian *obshchina*, a form, albeit heavily eroded, of the primeval communal ownership of the land, pass directly into the higher, communist form of communal

ownership? Or must it first go through the same process of dissolution that marks the West's historical development? The only answer that is possible today is: Were [*wird*] the Russian revolution to become the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West [*im Westen*], so that the two fulfill [*ergänzen*]² each other, then the present Russian communal land-ownership may serve as the point of departure [*zum Ausgangspunkt*] for a communist development. (*Late Marx and the Russian Road*, edited by Teodor Shanin, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983 [hereafter SHN]: 139; MEGA2 I/25: 296)

Neither in the above lines in the 1882 preface to the *Manifesto* nor in his correspondence with Russians in his last years does Marx acknowledge a change of position. Still,

the changes since the 1840s and early 1850s are clear. For, in the earlier period, he viewed Russia as an utterly reactionary power, but, by now, Russia had become for him the likely starting point of a wider revolution.

Interestingly, the last clause of the above was altered in the hand-written original, with a different wording crossed out, presumably at the end of the process of writing the preface. With the crossed-out text intact, the preface would have ended with the phrase “communal land- ownership’s ruin may be avoided” (MEGA2 I/25: 974). If, as is then likely, the substitute phrase about the commune “as the point of departure for a communist development” was added at the last minute, this heightens the possibility that

the final wording constituted a theoretical innovation on Marx's part.

The above sentences—in what was Marx's last publication—exhibit a complex and intricate dialectic that needs to be unpacked. It is important to note that the quest for the free development of the Russian commune is not unconditioned, a point that is made explicit here, versus being left only implicit in the 1881 drafts of the letter to Zasulich. Russia can avoid the dissolution of its rural communes and the destructive process of the primitive accumulation of capital if the effort to do so is accompanied by a "proletarian revolution in the West."

There are two contingencies here, which form part of a totality riven with contradictions and various possibilities. Were a Russian revolution to break out ahead of one in the West—likely on the basis of a revolution rooted in the rural communes and their resistance both to the state and to capitalist incursions—then a wider European revolution would be touched off not in Western Europe but in Russia. In this case, Russia's Indigenous form of rural communism would become the spark, "as the point of departure" for a wider revolution and transition to a modern, positive form of communism. Thus, there could be no successful transformation of the Russian communes into a modern communism without a proletarian revolution in Western Europe, but the strong possibility also existed that a revolution in Russia could touch off such an event in the West.

Despite being published in Russian and soon after in German, the 1882 preface was almost completely forgotten. This forgetting—by the "post-Marx Marxists, beginning with Frederick Engels,"³ in Dunayevskaya's pungent formulation—can be seen in Engels's letter to Karl Kautsky two years later, on February 16, 1884:

[In Java] today, primitive communism (so long as it has not been stirred up by some element of modern communism) furnishes the finest and broadest basis of exploita-

tion and despotism, as well as in India and Russia, and survives in the midst of modern society as an anachronism (to be eliminated or, one almost might say, turned back on its course) no less than the mark communities of the original cantons. (MECW 47:103)

In the above, Engels places so much emphasis on the need of these pre-capitalist communes, whether the village communes of Java or the traditional German/Swiss "mark community" or village commune, to be "stirred up by modern communism" that the 1882 preface recedes almost to the vanishing point. Instead, unlike Marx, he seems largely to have maintained their Eurocentric positions of the 1850s, which held that these kinds of communal forms were the foundation of "Oriental despotism." It seems, therefore, that Engels never changed his position on the Russian village commune very much.

The newness of Marx's 1882 formulation can also be seen when compared to the drafts of the letter to Vera Zasulich written nine months earlier, in March 1881. As discussed in previous chapters, in those drafts Marx saw the Russian village commune as something distinct from Western European villages. In the West, individuals and family groups, or agricultural laborers working for wages, worked specific plots of land, which were held as private property or at least with possessory rights held by families. In the Russian village, both work groups and property relations were instead organized communally, with individual families having a share in the commune as a whole but not receiving ownership or even long-term possession of a specific piece of agricultural land.

But the Zasulich texts comprised letters and drafts, not programmatic texts, unlike the 1882 preface to the *Manifesto*. Here, albeit briefly, Marx looks through a wider lens, incorporating the Russian village into the system of global capitalism and

its dialectical opposite, the movements of revolution and resistance by a wide variety of social groups throughout that system, from London and Paris to Saint Petersburg. In this way, he makes his theorization of revolution in Russia and Western Europe clearer than anywhere else, despite the brevity of the text.

Some forty years ago, as the late Marx was being first put forward on an international level as a topic of research by those like Dunayevskaya and Shanin, three different lines of interpretation could already be discerned. First, in Shanin's 1983 volume, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, an essay by the British Marxists Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan took the position that there was nothing really new here, "that Marx's late texts represent not so much a radical break as a clarification of how his 'mature' texts should have been read in the first place" (SHN: 80). This approach continues today among those who acknowledge the originality of the late Marx but see it as simply continuous in this respect with the young Marx and with the mature Marx of *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. In other words, Marx remains brilliant but there are no fundamental changes in the period 1869–82.

A second and seemingly more fruitful approach, also found in the Shanin collection, acknowledges important changes of perspective by Marx after 1869, so much so that they constitute a break in his thought. This is the position of Shanin himself in 1983. This approach is also found in the essay by the Japanese Marx scholar Haruki Wada, who carries out a deep textual analysis. Nearly a decade before the collapse of the Soviet Union and even before the ascendancy of Mikhail Gorbachev, Wada had managed to obtain access to some of Marx's papers in Moscow, something almost invariably denied to researchers from outside the Soviet bloc. Wada begins by discussing some of Marx's statements in the drafts of

the letter to Zasulich about the possibility of a revolution emanating from the Russian village communes—"a Russian revolution is required, if the Russian commune is to be saved"—and contrasts them with Marx's earlier judgments from the 1850s to the effect that the communes were conservative and that radical change would need to come from outside, from the Western proletarian revolution (SHN: 67). Wada also notes that Marx has by now become a supporter of the Russian Populists and their idea of a peasant revolution and direct attacks on the autocratic state. Wada writes that this contrasted with those around Zasulich, who awaited the development of an industrial proletariat for a revolution. Finally, Wada observes that Engels never really changed regarding their old view of Russia from the 1850s, and he notes Marx's declining health by late 1881, when the request for a new preface arrived.

Wada also notes that the surviving draft of their introduction to the *Manifesto* was in Engels's handwriting. From all this, Wada concludes Marx must have "asked Engels to make a draft, and put his signature to it" (SHN: 70). This seemingly rigorous argument is less convincing than it seems. I am aware of no case—as seen most clearly early on in their collaboration in 1847–48 on the *Communist Manifesto*, and for which Engels's early draft has been preserved—in which Marx was not clearly the senior author in any of their joint writings. More substantively, Engels never wrote anything similar to the 1882 preface after Marx's death, even though he quoted it on one occasion, as he continued to view the Russian commune as something backward and without any revolutionary potential. Thus, Marx is almost certainly the author of the 1882 preface.

At a more general level, Wada's argument lends itself to the notion that Marx saw the Russian commune as an autonomous force of revolution that could establish a society that could recede from

world capitalism and build a viable socialism on its own resources, not only without leadership from the “Western” proletariat but also without even their participation or that of already industrialized societies. In short, we do not need the working class for radical, anti-capitalist revolution. Here too, a variety of thinkers, from Maoists of the 1960s and ’70s (as Wada himself was at the time) to radical ecologists in more recent years, have picked up on this strand of argument, not always to good effect.

Dunayevskaya articulates a third kind of argument concerning the late Marx. As a relative outsider to the Marxist intellectual establishment of the time, she was not invited to contribute to the Shanin collection, but, in this period, she addresses not only the late Marx on Russia but also the *Ethnological Notebooks*. Overall, she sees both “new moments” and continuities in Marx’s late writings, writing that, in the *Ethnological Notebooks*, “he was completing the circle begun in 1844” and “was diving into the study of human development, both in different historic periods and in the most basic Man//Woman relationship.”⁴ All this was couched in terms of Marx’s concept of “revolution in permanence,” as put forth in the 1850 “Address to the Communist League,” and which is seen to have marked his entire work thereafter.⁵ The 1844 reference concerns the startlingly radical paragraph from the *1844 Manuscripts* on gender with which de Beauvoir ended *The Second Sex*, as discussed in chapter 2. Whether in Marx’s notes on Morgan, as discussed in chapter 1, or in the late Marx on the Russian communal village, Dunayevskaya stresses not only the ways in which Iroquois clans or Russian village communes offered an alternative to capitalism but also how even these precapitalist forms of communism exhibited social contradictions, including over gender. Moreover, these were, for her, not just historical but contemporary issues:

These studies enabled Marx (*Marx, not Engels*) to see the possibility of new human relations, not as they might come through a mere “updating” of primitive communism’s equality of the sexes, as among the Iroquois, but as Marx sensed they would burst forth from a new type of revolution.⁶

In this sense, Marx’s exploration of gender in the *Ethnological Notebooks* was connected to those on the Russian village commune, and to gender in other clan and communal societies Marx studies in his last years, with all this connected to “a new type of revolution.”

Dunayevskaya also finds deep connections between what was going on in Russia and the capitalist societies of Western Europe. Thus she stresses, with regard to Russia, that it would be

a capitalist world in crisis . . . which creates favorable conditions for transforming primitive communism into a modern collective society: “In order to save the Russian commune there must be a Russian Revolution.” In a word, revolution is indispensable, whether one has to go through capitalism, or can go to the new society “directly” from the commune.⁷

In commenting on the 1882 preface, she writes that it “projected the idea that Russia could be the first to have a proletarian revolution ahead of the West.”⁸ That is, a Russian revolution could surge ahead of one in the West, forming a starting point, but it could not remain alone if it were to be successful. It could not win out in long-term isolation from the Western proletariat.

I took a position similar to that of my mentor Dunayevskaya on the 1882 preface in *Marx at the Margins*, noting that “a Russian revolution based upon its agrarian communal forms would be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the development of a modern communism.”⁹ It would be necessary, though, to shake the Western proletariat out of the doldrums into which it had descended with the defeat of the Paris Commune, and soon after, of

Reconstruction in the US. This amounted to the setting in of a global era of reaction in the West, after the revolutionary period of the 1860s through the early 1870s. That is why I began the present chapter with Marx's Ireland essay on the interrelationship of the agrarian periphery's revolutionary struggles to that of the working class in the metropole. That is also why I took up Marx on the "Western" Paris Commune, also in this chapter, just before considering Marx on the Russian commune. Still, the Russian commune and similar social forms around the world were, in Marx's eyes, crucial "starting points" for global revolution and also points for the conceptualization of an alternative to capitalism. His interest in Russia deepened as it became the first country where *Capital* was translated (in 1872), and where, unlike in Germany, the book was extensively discussed by the intellectuals, and where a vibrant, youthful revolutionary movement—composed of students and young intellectuals who sought to stir up a peasant revolution based upon the village commune—was growing by leaps and bounds.

It must be underlined that Marx, while rejecting unilinear notions of progress and development, was calling neither for the preservation of these village communes nor for their return to a "purer" state than the one presently under capitalist encroachment. Nor was he calling for a revolution based upon rural Russia alone. Instead, all this was part of a broader, global strategic view of revolution, around the "agrarian question," something that dogs the left to this day. This problem is addressed by the French Marxist thinker Isabelle Garo:

Thus, the traditional commune is to be conceived not as a model to be generalized but as the possible social and, above all, political lever of an alliance between the working class and the exploited peasant class, a lever at once indispensable and extremely difficult to construct.¹⁰

The young Brazilian economist Guil-

herme Nunes Pires cautions that for Marx, "only with the Western proletarian revolution and the incorporation in the rural commune of the most advanced techniques of production" could a "transition by a non-capitalist road . . . to a classless society" take place.¹¹ These are valid points, but, at the same time, it should be noted that Marx is reversing the directionality of the European revolution in his 1877–78 letters and in the 1882 preface to the *Manifesto* when he writes of revolution in Russia based on the commune as such as a revolution's "point of departure."

Looking at the problem in this more general, global sense, I would argue that Marx's writings on the Russian village commune and revolution, especially the 1882 preface to the *Manifesto*, are just the tip of the iceberg. They form part of a vast project in which, as we have seen, he made hundreds of thousands of words of notes on anthropological and social history studies of India, Indonesia, North Africa, precolonial and colonial Latin America, Russia, ancient Rome, precolonial Ireland, and a variety of preliterate societies, from the Indigenous clans of the Americas to the Homeric Greeks. These notes also deal extensively with gender, especially in Greece, Rome, Ireland, and the Americas.

These voluminous notes are deeply connected to Marx's new notions of revolution. To be sure, we cannot know what he would have done with this material, including how he would have incorporated it into subsequent volumes of *Capital*. Still, it may be worthwhile to sketch the kind of globalized theory of revolution and of the alternative to capitalism that might have flowed out of these studies in his last working years, 1879–82.

1. As Marx states explicitly, resistance on the part of Russia's communal villages to capitalist encroachment could form the "point of departure" for a European revolution if it developed links to the Western proletariat. This is connected to the fact

that, by the late 1870s, he saw Russia as the country with the greatest level of revolutionary unrest, with the most determined revolutionary movement, with the greatest interest in *Capital*, and therefore the most likely starting point for a wider European revolution. He sees its villages as more communistic in their internal relations than the Western European village under feudalism or capitalism.

2. In his notes on Algeria's clans, communal villages, and their resistance to French imperialism, Marx connects the fear of the metropolitan French ruling classes over this anti-colonial resistance to their fear of the modern communism of the Paris Commune that broke out under their very noses in 1871. Here, something similar to his 1882 preface is evident, the relationship of the Algerian anticolonial and Indigenous struggles against French colonialism to those in the metropole, which, in this period, experienced the Paris Commune, a unique social revolution that moved toward a non-statist form of communism on the largest scale attempted anywhere up to that point. Moreover, Marx singles out the heroism of the women Communards, as well as the ways in which French colonialism deepened patriarchal domination in Algeria, signs of the importance of women's struggles to revolutionary and anticolonial movements.

3. In his notes on precolonial and colonial Latin America, Marx singles out the persistence of Indigenous communal social structures even after the establishment of Spanish colonialism, also noting that Spain's relatively underdeveloped capitalism did not undermine these structures as radically as did British colonialism in India. He also notes that these communal societies were much more resilient than modern capitalism in terms of sustainable agriculture and safeguarding food supplies and other necessities of life in anticipation of natural disasters and crises of other kinds. He singles out as well the prominent position of women in these networks of sustainability.

4. In his notes on the Indian Subconti-

nent, the area of the world he covered most extensively in the 1879–82 research notebooks at the center of this study, Marx writes of the persistence, albeit with important evolutionary changes, of communal social structures that persisted for millennia. Important communal elements remained even after these structures were severely undermined, and sometimes destroyed, by capitalist “modernization” policies imposed in the 1790s under British colonialism. Thus, these clan and communal structures underlay the late seventeenth-century uprising led by Maratha rebel Shivaji against the Mughal Empire, and they continued as the Marathas fought the Mughals and then the British, through Marx's own time. In addition, he points to “rural communes” as sources of resistance to British colonial rule and to its imposition of capitalist social relations. Moreover, despite the longstanding suppression of women's rights on the part of Hindu religious authorities during the precolonial and colonial periods, Marx also notes that women emerged as military leaders during the massive anticolonial Sepoy Uprising of 1857–59.

5. In his 1881 notes on communal and clan structures in precolonial Ireland, Marx emphasizes the persistence of these social forms through his own time. He also stresses how, even before the arrival of British overlords, who imposed feudal social relations, the ancient communal forms were being undermined by incipient class structures among the Celts themselves. He also singles out the social power women held in the days before the British conquest, and how this was expressed in ancient Irish clan law. Had he taken up Ireland and revolution in the 1880s, he would likely have brought this research on communal forms and gender into his theorization of agrarian resistance to colonialism and class rule by aristocratic landlords.

In any or all these ways, Marx may have been intending to connect his research on communal and clan societies to specific areas of the world that were experiencing struggles

against colonialism and class rule, as he did in the 1882 preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*.

Can the extensive notes on Native American societies, especially in the Morgan notes, also be fitted into the framework outlined in the 1882 preface? Here, any relationship would have to be seen at a higher level of generalization. In both sets of notes, gender comes to the fore as a central social category. In the case of Morgan and Native American societies of North America, this involves studying how gender subordination was at the root of many other forms of social hierarchy. At the same time, Marx investigates relative gender equality in Indigenous America, while not adhering to the idyllic portraits of these societies found in Morgan, or, for that matter, Engels. One can say, based on our present evidence, that it is likely that, after grappling with Morgan and critically absorbing his data, Marx would have centered gender in new ways had he ever written up the results of his 1879–82 notebooks more fully.

The notes on Morgan especially, but also those on ancient Greco-Roman society, as well as those on Ireland, investigate the origins not only of patriarchy but also of slavery and of class society. At the same time, these notes, especially those on Morgan, show alternatives to the forms of patriarchy and class rule prevalent in Marx's lifetime. In this sense, they contribute to his theorization of alternatives to capitalism. Löwy addressed this problem nearly three decades ago: "The idea that a modern communism would find some of its human dimension from the 'primitive communism' destroyed by the civilization founded upon private property and the state" was a major theme for the late Marx.¹²

Finally, it should be noted that, in a number of the cases Marx explores—India after Britain's undermining of the communal village, Latin America after the arrival of Spanish colonialism, Ireland under British

rule, Algeria under French rule, or the Russian village commune under pressure from capitalism—he sees the communal forms within these societies as taking on especially revolutionary dimensions in times of social stress and crisis. Thus, it is not the preservation of these communal forms so much as their role in a global revolutionary movement—of English factory workers, of Irish tenant farmers, of impoverished Irish workers in Britain, of Algerians struggling against French domination, of Russian villagers seeking to defend their way of life in the face of capitalist penetration, of Indian villagers and clans using remnants of older communal formations to struggle against dynastic or colonial oppression—that, heterogenous as it was, offered real possibilities of a transformation that was as global as was capitalism itself. It cannot be stressed enough that unrest and uprisings, as in Russia, often broke out only after the communal forms had, to a great extent, disappeared, at least on the surface, and struggles based upon or influenced by these social forms intersected with more modern-facing ones. Thus, it was not so much defense of these forms as they were, as seeing them as elements of revolutionary energy and renewal of society on a totally new basis.

As we have seen in this chapter, in his last years, Marx developed three new concepts of revolution alongside that of a united working-class uprising. First, in 1869–70, he conceptualized a British workers' revolution sparked by an uprising in France and especially by an agrarian national revolution in Ireland, which would shake up the quasi-racist false consciousness of English workers and unite them with their immigrant Irish coworkers. Second, in his writings on the Paris Commune and his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx theorizes working-class forms of revolution against capital that also target and abolish the modern centralized state while moving toward an emancipatory

alternative. Third, Marx writes of revolutions beginning in non-capitalist agrarian societies like Russia that were imbued with communal village systems, which, in resisting capitalist encroachments, could become the base for a large social revolution. These movements could also connect to the revolutionary labor movement of Western Europe and North America, and they would, if victorious, be able to build on their archaic forms of communism as part of the struggle for a modern, democratic form of communism. In each of these struggles, groups subject to super-oppression, whether women or oppressed minorities, would likely play leading parts.

These three kinds of revolutions are a most important legacy of the late Marx, with equally important insights for today. This is the case, whether in analyzing the structures of oppression and domination, in conceptualizing all the multifarious forces of liberation that are in a position to challenge them, including all their contradictions with each other, and in theorizing what a real alternative to the exploitative, racist, sexist, heterosexist world of capitalism and its class domination would look like.

Excerpted with permission from chapter 6 of *The Late Marx's Revolutionary Roads: Colonialism, Gender, and Indigenous Communism* by Kevin B. Anderson. Courtesy of Verso Books.

NOTES

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Marx à Jules Guesde sur la France, l' 'Orient' et l' 'Occident' (1879)," *Actuel Marx* 73 (2023), p. 112.

2. Could also be translated as "complement" or "complete," the latter a stronger term that I have rendered here a bit more colloquially as "fulfill."

3. Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press [1982] 1991), p. 175. This is particularly poignant given the fact that the original manuscript of the 1882 preface is in Engels's hand (MEGA2 I/25: 297). Engels quotes the 1882 preface in full in his 1890 preface to a new German edition but does not discuss its implications, and he otherwise restricts the rest of his preface to Western Europe and North America (MECW 27: 53–60).

4. Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 188, 190.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

9. Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [2010] 2016), p. 235.

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An Historical Analysis of Three-Way Fights

JAVIER SETHNESS

FORMALLY SPEAKING, IMPERIAL Russia ended when the socio-political revolution of February 1917—inspired by the preceding, abortive uprising of 1905—succeeded in deposing Tsar Nicholas II. Although Great-Russian imperialism persisted in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and in the post-Soviet State—especially as reflected in the genocidal assaults on Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine ordered by Vladimir Putin—the overthrow of three centuries of despotic rule by the Romanov dynasty was tremendously progressive. This world-historical opening allowed peasants to launch a “Black Repartition” of the land until then owned by the feudal lords. In parallel, soldiers and urban workers self-organized in councils known as *soviets*.

Beyond the subsequent transitions toward a Provisional Government and Bolshevik dictatorship in the political realm, such vital social aspects of what the Russian-Jewish anarchist Vsevolod Eikhensbaum (Voline) calls the “Unknown Revolution” would not have been possible under Tsarist domination, which banned trade unions up until the 1905 Revolution, and systematically crushed agrarian revolt.¹ Indeed, Boris Mazurin, founder of the

“Life and Labor” Commune (1921–1936), which followed the Christian anarchism of artist Lev Tolstoy, writes that “the powerful stimulus to the formation of independent agricultural communes [... was] the February Revolution.”² Tragically, however, within a decade, these horticultural communes, based on mutual aid, had either been crushed by security forces or forcibly integrated into the State as *kolkhozy* (collective farms).

Still, even before Joseph Stalin notoriously defeated his rival Lev Trotsky and took the reins of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after their leader Vladimir Lenin’s death in 1924, the Bolsheviks in power had nullified the autonomy of the *soviets* (or workers’ councils), repressed the urban anarchist movement, crushed the radical mutineers at the Kronstadt naval base, and destroyed the peasant-anarchists of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine, led by Nestor Makhno. This is not to mention the Red Army’s counter-insurgent war against Muslims of Central Asia (so-called *Basmachi*), waged in alliance with Russian settler-colonists starting in 1918, much less its reoccupation of newly independent Georgia in 1921, or its subsequent disarticulation of the Georgian Democratic Republic, led by rival Mensheviks.³

In this sense, the fall of the Romanovs arguably set off a *three-way fight* involving anarchists, autonomists, and Populists (*Narodniki*) against Marxist-Leninist

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pseudo-revolutionaries and Tsarist-sympathizing reactionaries that persisted through the Russian Civil War (1918–1920) and the rest of the Soviet period (until 1991), though greatly dampened by Stalin’s Terror (1936–1938).⁴ In effect, the model of the three-way fight demonstrates that political struggle is three-dimensional: it is not only waged between either the left and the State *or* the left and the extra-parliamentary right, and the State can both help *and* hinder the cause of the right.

Accordingly, in this essay, I provide a historical spin on Matthew Lyons’s concept of the three-way fight for Russia’s immediate post-revolutionary period, whereby anarchists represent leftists; Leninists, and especially Stalinists, are the newfound “*Sov-bourg*” (Soviet bourgeoisie) denounced by the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist Vilkins; and the “Whites” symbolize the insurgent far-right.⁶ My approach will focus mostly on the struggle between the left and the State, both in Tsarist and Soviet times, as on competition between anarchists and Marxists, both before and after the Russian Revolution, over who would spearhead the left (see figure 1 below).

The tragedy of the Russian Revolution—to ossify into a state-capitalist nightmare—repeats the pattern established by Karl Marx’s expulsion of leading anarchists from the International Workingmen’s Association (IWMA), or First International, in 1872 (see figure 2 on page 114). It also hearkens back to the eclipse of Russian Populism (*Narodnichestvo*) by Marxism at the turn of the twentieth century, due to the

tireless efforts of Georgii Plekhanov and his protégé Lenin (until their own 1903 split). This Freudian repetition compulsion calls out for recognition that Marxism is “part of the very problem of domination,” and that the cause of liberation “necessarily entails a movement against Marx,” in the words of political scientist Isaac Balbus.⁶ Rather than fetishize capitalism and the State “dialectically,” as Marxist theory does, Russian Populists (*Narodniki*) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries proposed that the intelligentsia organize the peasantry *against* the ruling class and State, with the aim of creating a free-socialist society based on the principles of the peasant commune (*mir*, or *obshchina*).⁷

Therefore, in this chapter, I seek to outline the theoretical and historical differences between Marxism and anarcho-Populism (or anarchism), in the context of Imperial and post-revolutionary Russia. Through an in-depth historical account, I will contrast anarcho-Populism from Marxism and Marxism-Leninism in theory, and discuss the intimately related tragedies of the First International and of the Russian Revolution. My guiding hypothesis is that, due to their anti-statist stance, anarchism and anarcho-Populism provide more liberatory frameworks than Marxism and its authoritarian, state-capitalist derivatives—including Leninism, Trotskyism, and Stalinism. Before concluding in the spirit of a critical anarchism, I will consider some objections to my hypothesis, acknowledging that anarchists are in no way exempt from affirming right-wing politics,

FIGURE 1: RUSSIAN THREE-WAY FIGHTS

Actor	Late Imperial Period	Early Soviet Period
State	Tsarist	Communist (Marxist-Leninist)
Left	Narodniki (Populists)	Anarchists
Non-State Right	Marxists	Whites

and connect the argument to a critique of left-wing authoritarianism today, especially over such pressing questions as the Syrian and Rojava Revolutions, the Russo-Ukrainian War, and Israel’s war on Gaza.

Admittedly, some self-described Marxists may balk at my framing here, which accuses their tradition of authoritarianism and conservatism. By contrast, most Marxist-Leninists would not deny such charges. Rather, they openly seek to mobilize domination in the interest of socio-political and economic transformations directed by themselves. Accordingly, in Figures 1–2 in this chapter, the term “Non-State Right” should by no means be taken as suggesting that the corresponding groups advocate anti-statist or anti-authoritarian politics. Instead, this term merely means that the groups in question are relatively more conservative than their leftist counterparts, and not in State power.

**Anarcho-Populism vs. Marxism
in the Russian Revolution
and First International**

Historically speaking, the political and strategic tensions between Marxists and anarchists have played out numerous times, yet perhaps never more significantly than during the struggles that raged between them in the First International (1864–1872) and the Russian Revolution. In both cases, with reference to the framing of the three-way fight in the pre-revolutionary context, anarchists functioned as the left and Marxists as the right, as long as capital-

ism or Tsarism dominated (see figures 1–2 above and below). Anarchists still served as the left after the October 1917 Revolution, when the Bolsheviks seized State power.

In his theoretical critique of the Marxist proposal for a “People’s State” (*Volks-Staat*), made in the 1870’s, Bakunin declares this idea to be nonsense: an “(imaginary) emancipation of the proletariat by means of the State.” This is so, his argument goes, because all States are based on the domination of a small minority over everyone else. As bureaucracies and pyramidal organizations, they seek “self-perpetuation” and the indefinite future reproduction of the “slavery” of their subjects.⁸ Likewise, in his final manuscript, “On Socialism” (1910), Tolstoy criticized Marxian statism and economic determinism, instead avowing Kantian-Christian moral law.⁹ Thus, due to their anti-authoritarian prescience, these thinkers can be likened to Cassandras of the Russian anarchist movement. After all, Marx cynically dismissed Bakunin’s misgivings about using the State to effect social change, and even expelled him and his Swiss comrade James Guillaume from the First International over this disagreement. Marx called these two “rotten” and “feeble-minded elements” who needed to be excluded—even “excommunicated”—from the movement, while Engels defended their decision to keep the International “pure and unadulterated.”¹⁰

Such contempt for other radicals, involving the mobilization of lies and a rejection of pluralism, prepared the ground

FIGURE 2: THE THREE-WAY FIGHT IN THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

Actor	Mid- to Late Nineteenth Century
State	Capitalist
Left	Federalists, Libertarians, Anarchists
Non-State Right	Marxists

for purges in the First International and after the Bolshevik takeover of the Russian Revolution.¹¹ Indeed, Lenin's Communists imprisoned and executed numerous Tolstoyan conscientious objectors during the Russian Civil War.¹² Given how closely the Bolshevik leaders mimicked their master's example, the anarchist critic Alan Carter charges Marx with responsibility for the catastrophic outcome of the Russian Revolution.¹³ In a similar vein, the Christian anarchist Nikolai Berdyaev believes the USSR to have amounted to "the third [historical] appearance of Russian autocratic imperialism," thus mimicking Russia's Muscovite and Tsarist rulers, who themselves had succeeded the Roman, Byzantine, and Mongol Empires.¹⁴ In this vein, Lenin wrote in April 1921 that the Communists should "learn from the Germans how to run state capitalism, [...] doing [so] at an even more rapid pace than the one followed by Peter the First in Westernizing barbarous Russia."¹⁵

Along these lines, the Bolsheviks' fetishization of political centralism, discursive privileging of the proletariat, and rejection of workers' control over production should be understood as severe *reactions* to the decentralism, humanism, and class inclusiveness of Russian Populism.¹⁶ Lenin's dual rejection of utopian socialism and Populism—positions that proved instrumental in the ruthless replacement of the *Narodnik* emphasis on freedom and ethics with statist brutality—was "remarkably consistent" throughout his career.¹⁷ Tellingly, in this sense, Lenin slandered the authentically revolutionary Kronstadt mutineers, whose *Petropavlovsk* program (1921) was remarkably anarcho-Populist, as counter-revolutionary White agents.¹⁸

In reality, what mattered to Marx and Lenin was to defeat one's competitors by any means necessary, including slander and hatred. This would clear the way to

taking power. As the fate of the Kronstadt Commune proved, Marxists converge with the Tsarist "administrative utopia" in proposing and celebrating societies that are "disciplined, united," and organized "vertically [...] by a central authority."¹⁹ Stalin thus merely took Marx and Lenin's critiques of utopianism and anarchism to a higher level through his totalitarian assaults on equality, metaphysical speculation, and social experimentation. After all, the Soviet General Secretary dismissed egalitarian calls for social leveling as "leftish chatter" and "reactionary petty-bourgeois nonsense"—leading to a "fantasectomy" of the collective radical imagination, and the global Communist movement.²⁰ In this sense, the atrocities involved in Stalin's reign built on the Tsarist inheritance and the pre-existing cults to Lenin and Marx. After all, Bolsheviks principally differentiated themselves from Mensheviks through their pledging of allegiance to Lenin, not to mention their less-consistent commitment to democracy.²¹ Although such sadomasochistic political dynamics would prove highly detrimental to the fate of the Russian Revolution, they served Lenin's authoritarian goal of Party domination over State and society.

In fact, just two months after the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, the loyalist Council of People's Commissars raised a political police force known as the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, or CheKa. The CheKa was first based in the headquarters of the Tsarist Okhrana, the successor of Nicholas I's Third Section, or secret police.²² Rather than be designed for accountability to the peasant, worker, or soldier *soviets* that emerged in the Revolution, the CheKa and its successor organizations—namely, the (O)GPU, NKVD, and KGB—were wielded by Red authorities to consolidate power and eliminate adversaries.²³ Grimly, during the suppression of

the Kronstadt Commune, Chekists worked closely with rearguard “Blocking Detachments” to ensure that Red Army soldiers carried out their fratricidal orders—and to swiftly execute anyone who might refuse.²⁴ Such dystopian scenes highlight the extreme risks involved in pursuing the Marxist goal of political domination, which is to be achieved by strengthening “[State] power above society.”²⁵

Marxism, Anarchism, and Left-Wing Authoritarianism, Past and Present

Both implicitly and explicitly, the argument made throughout this chapter has highlighted the intimate overlap between Marxism and left-wing authoritarianism. Fatefully, Marx and Engels preached an authoritarian-centralist strategy for confronting capitalism. As Bakunin and Tolstoy foresaw, and as Carter recognized, Marx’s highly instrumental and amoral attitude toward workers and fellow radicals was readily mobilized by state capitalists and “Red hangmen” like Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin.²⁶ Wolfgang Eckhardt adds that Marxian centralism became reality only in 1919 with the founding of the Soviet-sponsored Communist International, which would outcompete the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers’ Association (IWA, founded in 1922) for two decades.²⁷ It follows that so many Marxist believers fervently defended the USSR while it existed, and that publications like *Monthly Review*, *Jacobin*, and *The International Marxist-Humanist* still champion the Bolsheviks to this day. By so identifying with the despotic authority of the Red State, the editors of these journals continue to illuminate the primary contradiction of Marxist theory, which is to sell out the working classes.

In parallel, it has been neo-Stalinists who have spearheaded the legitimization of neo-fascist “anti-imperialist” States—in-

cluding Syria, Russia, Iran, and China—in the wake of the catastrophic U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. In the U.S., Workers’ World (WW), the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), and their various front-groups and allies have poisoned the well of left-wing internationalism by establishing an orthodox “left” approach which sacrifices our common humanity in the name of “anti-imperialism.” Simply put, WW and PSL function primarily to critique U.S. foreign policy and defend genocidal regimes abroad through dominating the anti-war protest movement and aggressively reproducing gross disinformation about, and inciting racist dehumanization against, those whom many leftists consider “unworthy victims.”²⁸

Socialist writer Rohini Hensman calls such “supporters of Assad and Putin” *pseudo-anti-imperialists*, for they present as trenchant critics of Western imperialism but in reality function to legitimize Russian expansionism and assert “the right [of ‘anti-imperialists’] to practice mass murder in the name of the principle of sovereignty under international law.”²⁹ This same propaganda model has been adopted not only by opportunistic pseudo-radical outlets like *The GrayZone* and *Multipolarista*, but also by Donald Trump and his neo-fascist, isolationist, COVID-denialist followers and congressional minions. What unites these seemingly disparate elements is a common disregard for the truth; a strong aversion to egalitarianism, humanism, and internationalism; and a fetish for violence.

Hence, this phenomenon of the “red-brown alliance” represents yet another instance of left-wing authoritarianism, also known by Jürgen Habermas’s formulation of “Left fascism.”³⁰ Such a noxious alliance corresponds to Marx’s conservatism and naïveté about the State, the related failure to come to terms with Soviet atrocities carried out in the name of Communism,

and the denial of present-day genocide perpetrated in Syria and Ukraine by Russia. Yet, to echo the discussions from the introduction and the previous section, while anarchists are generally less susceptible to pseudo-anti-imperialist and left-wing authoritarian traps, they are not exempt from authoritarian tendencies, and have unfortunately not always provided adequate alternatives to the status quo.

For instance, although Sorel was no anarchist, a degree of Sorelian bloodlust against liberals is evident in parts of the anarchist movement, as “insurrection envy” over Trump’s failed January 6, 2021, coup attempt has revealed.³¹ Plus, in confronting COVID-19, anarchists have responded well with mutual aid, but have drawn less attention to the pandemic’s eugenicist tendencies toward “social murder,” and not prioritized resistance to the capitalist compulsion to return to “normal.”³² That being said, thanks in part to intersectional theory and burgeoning resistance to white supremacy, anarchists have improved on certain archaic forms of discrimination, including sexism, racism, and heteronormativity. Still, the movement’s horizon is very far from the rationalist optimism expressed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as explained below.

Since 2012, Western anarchists have strongly supported the Rojava Revolution,

led by the local affiliate of the formerly Stalinist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in northern Syria, but have sympathized considerably less with the Syrian Revolution against the Ba’athist regime of Bashar al-Assad (see figure 3 below). This is likely due to a number of factors: for one, pseudo-anti-imperialist loyalties, in light of Assad’s place within the pantheon of “resistance” to Western imperialism³³; the prevalence of anti-humanist and anti-Muslim attitudes; and stark ignorance of the reality of Syrian anarchism, from the activist Omar Aziz, martyr of the Assad regime, to the Local Coordinating Committees (LCC’s). Such a puzzling lapse—accentuated, in turn, by most Western anarchists’ sympathies for Palestinians—is arguably anticipated in the Mennonite-Makhnovist conflict in Ukraine a century ago, when “a movement [...] massacred innocents in the name of liberty and justice.”³⁴ This racist dehumanization and exclusion is also sadly consistent with the enthusiasm evinced by some historical anarchists for eugenics.³⁵

Moreover, many Euro-American and Eastern European anarchists boldly denied the threat posed by Putin’s massing of troops on the Ukrainian border before the launching of Russia’s “special military operation” in February 2022.³⁶ Subsequently, a week after Russia’s full-scale invasion commenced, the Serbian

FIGURE 3: PRESENT-DAY THREE-WAY FIGHTS

Actor	Syrian Revolution	Rojava Revolution	Russo-Ukrainian War	Israel-Hamas War
State	Assad Regime	Turkey/Syria	Russia	Israel/U.S.
Left (supported by Western anarchist?)	Civil resistance, LCCs, early Free Syrian Army Units (No)	Party of Democratic Union, TEV-DEM, Syrian Democratic Forces (Yes)	Solidarity Collectives, Resistance Committee, Commons (Yes/no)	Humanitarian organizations Standing Together, Anarchists in the ‘48 Area (Yes/no)
Non-State Right	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	Islamic State	Wagner Group, Azov Brigade	Kahanists, Islamic Jihad

Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative (an IWA affiliate) regurgitated Putinist disinformation about the Ukrainian government being an “undoubtedly nazified regime” that came to power through a “coup.”³⁷ By contrast, Ukrainian Holocaust survivors have belied such distortions.³⁸ In fact, while Ukrainian anarchists like those in Solidarity Collectives organize humanitarian relief and support for anti-authoritarian and internationalist fighters on the ground, too many Western anarchists overlook Ukrainians’ rights to independence, self-defense, and self-determination³⁹—apparently, because Western governments are supporting Ukraine, and whatever these governments are doing, leftists and anarchists must reflexively oppose.

That being said, Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza (October 2023–present), which has been entirely facilitated by Western States—the Biden administration, second to none—lends a great deal of credence to such instincts. After all, many leftists, including anarchists, have sought to save face for their lukewarm or even non-existent support for Ukrainians confronting Russia’s genocidal attack by not only centering the similarly genocidal suffering and mass-death of Gazan Palestinians at the hands of Israel (and, indirectly, the U.S.), but also calling for an immediate ceasefire. In parallel, Russia has aimed at rehabilitating its reputation on the international stage by opportunistically championing the Palestinian cause, even as it intensifies its war on Ukraine.⁴⁰

In turn, after having provided tens of billions of dollars to Ukraine’s defense since February 2022, the U.S. has failed to pass legislation to authorize any additional military aid to Ukraine for several months by the time of this writing. This is due to obstruction by the new Trumpist Speaker of the House. Such delays in critically-needed funding have had dire consequences for

the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which were forced to withdraw from the city of Avdiivka in Donetsk in February 2024 due to a lack of ammunition—presaging a possible general defeat by Russia.⁴¹ This outcome would not only entail doom for Ukrainians, but also greatly escalate the overall risks to humanity by lowering the threshold to World War III and nuclear war.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the major theoretical and historical differences between Marxism and anarcho-Populism in detail, while considering Lyons’s framework of a three-way fight among leftists, the State, and the right during the First International and Russia’s late Imperial and post-revolutionary periods. I have shown that anarchist and anarcho-Populist programs are generally more profound and progressive than Marxism’s bureaucratic, authoritarian, and state-capitalist prescriptions. They are, in other words, more consistent with human emancipation.⁴²

Although anarchism is a uniquely promising approach for resisting the worldwide onslaught of reaction, authoritarianism, and counter-revolution, we cannot overlook the serious contradictions posed by the prejudices and violence perpetrated and re-entrenched by some of the tradition’s most-revered figures and movements, historical or contemporary. To reiterate, by contrast, the equivalent contradictions are much deeper, and likely irreconcilable, for Marxism and Marxism-Leninism. The case of Makhnovists attacking Mennonites, together with the apparent pseudo-anti-imperialist tendencies of many anarchists, underscores the ongoing need for a serious “struggle against authoritarian political relations within a[ll] genuinely revolutionary transformation[s]” and movements.⁴³

In turn, one of the most important lessons of the First International and of the

Russian, Syrian, and Rojava Revolutions is to recognize the imperative need for autonomy and dissent to be respected, even and especially in organizations fighting for collective liberation.⁴⁴ Another major lesson in this vein, acutely reinforced by the Russo-Ukrainian and Israel-Hamas Wars, is to acknowledge the importance of international solidarity in defending the cause of humanity. Following the anarcha-feminist writer Ursula Le Guin, this ever-vigilant commitment to rooting out domination and promoting participatory decentralization across the globe would be a *critical* anarchism, or “an ambiguous [anarchist] utopian[ism].”⁴⁵

From “Three-Way Fights: From the First International and the Russian Revolution to Today” by Javier Sethness Castro, from *Authoritarianism in All its Guises: Perspectives on Right, Left, and Center*, edited by Daniel Burston and Kurt Jacobsen. 1–23. Copyright 2025 by Routledge. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group.

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Red Like Me

ALAN WALD

KARL MARX IN AMERICA IS A BOOK that lives up to the promissory note of its title. Careful, logical, and sober, it aims to restore the continuity of a viable Marxist presence to the imaginary of U.S. intellectual history. On the flip side (spoiler alert!), if your notion of a contemporary Marxist appraisal of Marxist writing is a lot of sanctimonious preachments about race, class, and gender, or eviscerations of backsliders and renegades, you might as well put this doorstep back on the floor. Its 600 pages provide a contextualized genealogy of those who popularized as well as critiqued the theories of the bushy-bearded and stern-looking man affectionately dubbed “the Old Rhineland.”

Marxism in the United States, when capaciously understood, was never constrained to the reiteration of a set of dogmatic principles one associates with party ideologues. Its ideas evolved through intense critical debates and subtle reformulations so that a fresh, expansive exploration of this living legacy requires some cool-headed handling. Happily, we now have in Andrew Hartman an articulate interlocutor

Karl Marx in America
ANDREW HARTMAN
University of Chicago Press, 2025

of that progression, one whose assiduous research is marked by curiosity and open-mindedness. A professor at Illinois State University, Hartman is the initiating president of the Society for U.S. Intellectual

History and best known as author of *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (2015). In hindsight, his earlier volume seems like a preparatory

warm-up to this much-anticipated new work, a precursor that showcases a talent for investigating disputes in the cultural realm as symptoms of deeper social transitions.

To gauge this latest consideration of the ideas of Marxism in the United States, one must recall how unevenly many intellectual historians have recorded the collective picture of its attendances starting in the nineteenth century. Time and again, in surveys (such as the high-ranking work of historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen), syllabi, and academic conference programs, one finds only a handful of episodic references; and these are customarily a sideshow with the implication that U.S. culture possesses a singularly anti-Marxist disposition. Rarely is there a coherent perspective on those diverse thinkers who promoted, rebutted, or creatively reworked the ideas of one of our most momentous interpreters of Modernity.

This has led to an overstated and mistaken perception that Marxism is marginal to U.S. intellectual history. Hartman,

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in contrast, believes that Marxism has always been operative, even when not on public display. Liberals, conservatives, and reactionaries all felt the need to address the challenge of Marxism. And in times of social quiescence, a subset of Marxist intellectuals continued to address the ruthless anti-social logic of capitalism behind the scenes, frequently preparatory to a re-emergence owing to economic or political crisis. What is more, our present Gilded Age state of affairs of vast economic inequality and a billionaire class consolidating state power has brought Marxist thought closer to the mainstream than it has been since the 1930s.

Why We Keep Turning to Marx

In the hands of many of us, the interactive complexity of Hartman's material might augur that the plot of this colossal volume is going to be a mess. Yet the long gestation of *Karl Marx in America* has enabled Hartman's mastery of material so that most of the complications of its scope and breadth are managed with brio. Then there is the virtue of his transnational American Studies approach that allows the use of sources too often siloed in different disciplines; this yields some captivating takes on distinct issues. Such intellectual dexterity in topics a bit afield of standard American Studies is unmistakable as soon as the book opens. We are met with a striking demonstration of what the United States meant to Marx himself, writing from Europe, and how it affected his thinking: "The Civil War, which Marx interpreted as on a par with the American and French Revolutions, provided him with some of the raw materials he needed to complete the painstaking analysis in *Capital*" (14).

Hartman then makes the unexpected announcement that the largest body of Marx's published writings in his lifetime, as well as the most widely read, were his

New York Daily Tribune articles from 1852 to 1861. Moreover, what these and other journalistic pieces reveal is that Marx's study of the United States enhanced his central insight that political emancipation is insufficient for social liberation: "The American Revolution divided the political realm, where citizens were in theory equal before a secular state, from the civil realm, where people were free to be their own religious and economic agents even if impinging upon the freedom of others" (16). In his later coverage of the Civil War for the Viennese *Die Presse*, Marx also pointed to slavery as revealing economic facts that wages conceal, and he argued that "Lincoln was a new kind of democratic leader, the antithesis of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte and the other despicable guardians of the Old Order" (42).

What excited Marx above all was his conviction that abolition was the necessary precursor to throwing off the yoke of capitalism itself, and thus to the realization in the United States of a complete freedom from the mastery of others by means of collective self-rule. This model of freedom becomes the compelling throughline of *Karl Marx in America* that sustains the overall arc of his approach. To wit: Intellectuals and activists in the United States keep turning to Marx, Hartman observes, because something is missing in the available thinking about life under capitalism—a theory of freedom that incorporates but goes beyond formal political rights. In U.S. history, the freedom of some has always required the unfreedom of others, which requires an examination of the forms of power in the hidden depths of the economic system.

Therefore, on the condition that capitalism prevails, versions of Marxism keep being reborn because it speaks to this mysterious contradiction; one embodied in the capitalist system. Simply put, unlike feudalism, capitalism doesn't openly reveal

its actual operations regarding exploitation and oppression. To navigate the pages that follow, one must understand how Hartman employs two complementary strategies. Although the results are sometimes uneven, they effectively map multiple U.S. responses to this paradox of unfreedom in what came to be called “the free world.”

A Triad of Reworkings

First, Hartman parses a large number of iterations of Marxism by pursuing a triad of reworkings: “[T]hree distinct versions of Marx emerged [in the United States]: the Marx who famously centered labor as the driving force of value in a capitalist society; the Marx whose ideas mixed with other American political traditions to form hybrid political tendencies; and the Marx whose repulsive theories helped liberals and conservatives work out their own ideas about America” (7). Accordingly, with his eye always on a materialist frame, Hartman takes us on a journey in which he commendably acknowledges the porous boundaries of this trio of interpretations. Simultaneously, he negotiates the intellectual landscape between the granules of the practice of individuals and the sweep of U.S. history.

Those who prioritized a focus for achieving freedom by centering the exploitation of labor include Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs, union leader A. Philip Randolph, and democratic socialist U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders. Those who sought freedom by cross-fertilizing Marxism with other schools of thought include women’s suffrage and “free love” activist Victoria Woodhull, former Communist Lewis Corey, feminist psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell, and Black radical Cedric Robinson. When it comes to those who confronted Marxism to variously defeat what they perceived to be its concept of freedom in the post–World War II era, Hartman offers the most com-

plicated component of this journey.

Liberals who directly tackled Marxism and sought to correct its limitations by proposing alternatives in an enticing manner, include Jewish émigré political theorist Hannah Arendt, economic historian Walt Rostow, and sociologist Daniel Bell. Such thinkers, of course, were operating in the ambience of a deeply hostile and crude anti-Marxism promoted by ex-Communist spy Whitaker Chambers and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who saw “Marxism as the primary threat to religious and other cherished traditions” (305). Yet there were also more thought-provoking conservative writers Hartman characterizes as “traditionalists,” starting with political philosopher Russell Kirk and Ludwig von Mises of the neo-liberal Geneva School. Another formidable component of this multi-front assault on the New Deal legacy,

Our Gilded Age state of vast economic inequality and a billionaire class consolidating state power has brought Marxist thought closer to the mainstream than it has been since the 1930s.

branding Marxism as authoritarian, was the specialty of political economist Joseph A. Schumpeter and “public choice” economist James Buchanan.

Hartman offers both a fair-minded and compelling assessment of those who sought innovative as well as adversarial ways to address Marxism. His tripartite approach makes sense because the overall dialogic evolution of Marxist thought on the U.S. continent is consistent with the formation

of Marxism itself. After all, the published and unpublished writings of Marx are best understood to be a hybrid of its own; one shaped by decades of scholarly debate with Young Hegelians and economists. And most recently there has been renewed attention to understanding Marxism as a blended political philosophy.

A prime example is Bruno Leipold's *Citizen Marx: Republicanism and the Formation of Karl Marx's Social and Political*

Deradicalization is a persistent
and major problem in the
Marxist tradition...Nothing
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apostates.

Thought (2024), which makes the case that the mature Marxism stood for a “social republic,” one that combined Republican thought—forged in opposition to feudal authoritarianism—with the emergent socialist responses to the new factory system. This perception not only accounts for the readiness with which U.S. thinkers can allocate different emphases to components of Marxism; it also justifies an ampler definition of Marxism itself, more along the lines of a method (historical materialism, dialectical thinking) than a congealed doctrine (insisting on the truth of the falling rate of profit, the dialectics of nature, and so on).

Hartman's second stratagem is to re-litigate the earlier laconic representations of Marxism in U.S. intellectual history through a steady parade of nine rubrics that serve as chapter titles, starting with “American Revolutionary” and closing with “Specter Haunting.” Such a tactic at first seems quite a stretch considering the mas-

sive historical terrain to be embraced—the U.S. Civil War, the Gilded Age, the Russian Revolution, the Great Depression, mid-century liberalism, postwar conservatism, the New Left, academia in the age of Reagan, and twenty-first-century capitalism. Gathering so many events and scores of heterogeneous thinkers under nine snappy headings is a two-edged sword. We know in advance that imposing any sort of narrative logic on the past, and extracting consonance from messy history, tends toward reducing multiplicities to singularities. Experts on specific topics are sure to grimace at some hit-or-miss summaries.

Furthermore, Hartman's introduction of such a massive cast of persons of interest (only a fraction of which can be mentioned here) results in a handful of misidentifications of minor characters, and some political itineraries are a bit fudged. (No, the German-born Benjamin Stolberg was not a “black journalist” [225] even though he corresponded with W. E. B. DuBois; and C. L. R. James didn't break with the Trotskyist movement in 1940, but 1950, despite sojourning in several parties.). Now and then contradictory individuals are jammed under political labels that don't entirely work for me (such as describing right-wing social democrat Sidney Hook as a “cranky neoconservative” [363] and endorsing historian Touré Reed's characterization of writer Ta-Nehisi Coates as “neoliberalism's most visible black emissary” [491]).

Yet this dive into 600 dense pages turns out to be less of a luge ride through a torrent of names, books, organizations, and events than one might imagine. Despite some divergent judgments on episodes that I will discuss, and a recognition that every pertinent issue simply can't be tackled, I find Hartman to be an agile taxonomist. His embedding of the Marxist tradition in episodes of U.S. history is remarkable

because he is shining a light on the past to help us rethink the present. Therefore, instead of experiencing a whistle-stop tour of 175 years of intellectual discourse and engagement, one is continually gripped by a sense that all this is a precondition to the imagining of possible futures. Moreover, his leitmotifs distill dominant trends in Marxist thinking so that he can group his cast of characters around functional labels, ones that capture a perspective in accord with the historical moment.

A Critical Turning Point

As I see it, prior to World War I, the search in the United States for an answer to capitalism's negations of freedom parallels the trajectory of Marx's own development from his concern over political democracy to an awareness of hidden economic constraints. We are initially treated to the earliest varieties of Marxism, which Hartman explores in writings and undertakings of German communist émigrés supporting abolitionism and women's suffrage. As we move into the twentieth century, labor organizers increasingly come into play, along with a series of socialist authors explicating Marxist economics. Things heat up as Hartman approaches the watershed moment of the 1917 Russian Revolution. He explores the growing differentiation between Progressivism and socialism, as well as U.S. non-revolutionary "revisionists" and the prairie radicalism of rural Oklahoma. Then there are early advocates of Black liberation, militant women who variously negotiated gender and class concerns, and a substantial presence of bohemian Marxists centered in Greenwich Village who are especially notable for a militant opposition to World War I.

A critical turning point comes with the October Revolution, which produced nothing less than a Copernican shift in the valence of Marxist politics in the United

States. The result was two-fold: Those on the Far Left breathlessly saw evidence that it was now possible to lead workers to seize state power, while those who felt they had a stake in the existing system became violently fearful of "menacing outside agitators" (146). As we move toward the Great Depression, the Communist Party (CP-USA) found itself at the center of activism. With his eye trained far more on treatments of Marx than "Soviet machinations" (193), Hartman is dismissive of CP-USA leader William Z. Foster's *Toward Soviet America* (1932), characterizing it as symptomatic of "grandiosity and sectarianism," (196). In contrast, Louis Fraina, a former Communist intellectual turned fellow traveler, surfaced to public notice under the name Lewis Corey and brilliantly challenged the ideas of British economist John Maynard Keynes in *The Decline of American Capitalism* (1934).

This was part of an opening salvo in a series of highly engaging Great Depression writings in the vein of hybrid efforts to "re-conceive Marx for America" (204). One was by John Dewey's student and Communist fellow traveler Sidney Hook in *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* (1933). Hook's attempt to defend pragmatist epistemology as compatible with social revolution resulted in a Stalinist condemnation of his work; and it was also challenged by Max Eastman (another Dewey student) as well as by Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). Hartman goes on to make a convincing case for the 1930s as a hotbed of inspired Marxist thinking outside the Communist and Socialist parties as he appraises literary critics such as V. F. Calverton and Kenneth Burke as well as Black communists such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Abram Harris, and C. L. R. James.

This perspective may serve as a wake-up call for those of us on the Marxist

Left who consider ourselves “Friends of Freedom,” because we need to think more deeply about how activist political commitment relates to intellectual ingenuity. After my own experiences in the chaotic Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the late 1960s, I’ve long been a partisan of seriously organized socialist movements (let us say, Leninism lite). After all, many of the achievements that Hartman admires in labor action and fighting for justice for racial minorities could not have come about in the absence of a disciplined organization and a clear political program. Still, I must admit that, if one sees Marxism as a window into new intellectual worlds, the scholarly needle in Hartman’s review points toward a discomfiting conclusion. Confinement within U.S. Communist parties promoted mainly the intellectual dissemination of Stalinist (Marxist-Leninist) orthodoxy, often bound to simple slogans and emotional professions of a religious type of “faith” in the preordained triumph of the working class.

In contrast, those with looser organizational doctrines engaged in more stimulating efforts to update and organize around Marxist principles. Hartman does not pursue the matter in any depth, but the argument is clearly present if one takes note of the writers he discusses and those he ignores (James Allen, Earl Browder, Herbert Aptheker, V. J. Jerome, Max Shachtman). The failure of the latter to gain any traction in Hartman’s narrative implicitly points to a potential weakness in the culture of Stalinist cadre groups. Yes, the daily practice of Party intellectuals may be more effective if they are part of a robust organization, and their loyalty to Marxism can be longer lasting. On the other hand, their parties often created an insular, circumscribed world, one anathema to those who prefer their Marxists to be restless seekers, cosmopolitan, and ecumenical.

The situation is conspicuously different in other countries. Numerous Marxist thinkers of world-class stature have somehow been members even of Stalinist parties and Maoist sects (Eric Hobsbawm, Louis Althusser, Dominco Losurdo), and most “Trotskyist intellectuals” are connected *not* with neoconservative apostasy but the revolutionary Left (Daniel Bensaid, Alex Callinicos, Ernest Mandel). The culture of the organized Left requires far more thought and examination than it has received, especially through transnational comparisons.

Just as disconcerting to militants may be the way Hartman understands elements of the liberalism fashioned in the 1930s, and how even the more “progressive” versions were actually aimed at saving capitalism. First came Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who crafted a new type of liberalism to preserve the system, distinct from that of nineteenth-century Europeans. It was based on the notion “that an activist government was ultimately responsible for guaranteeing an economy that worked for everyone, including the working class” (237). What may be unexpected for some Left-wing readers is Hartman’s next move. That’s because he segues into a discussion of “The Popular Front Against Marx,” in which Communists end up acting “as a junior partner in the New Deal coalition” (246).

In contradiction to the celebration of Popular Front culture that has been hegemonic on the U.S. Left since the decline of 1960s’ radicalism, Hartman argues that the Popular Front promoted a kind of “self-censorship” and “de-emphasizing of Marx” that prefigured and assisted the “mid-century erasure of Marx that would follow” (246). From here the book moves to World War II and then the Cold War. At that time, following the years in which the production of books about Marx seemed to be racing along on all gas with no brakes,

the Left faced something more than a mere speedbump. Marx was now a “bête noir” instead of a “source of positive inspiration” (256). I’ve already noted the strengths of some of Hartman’s coverage of the period, but I wish that the subject of the negative responses to Marxism—especially those by disillusioned supporters—were not restricted to this chapter alone. The matter should have been pursued all the way to the end of the book.

After all, even if such anti-radical intellectual work was sidelined during the 1960s and 1970s, deradicalization is a persistent and major problem in the Marxist tradition. And a continuity of themes and arguments by ex-radicals can be easily traced from the High Cold War moment of the 1950s to the “Second Thoughts” crowd of the late 1980s; and then to the “decent Left” circle of the Euston Manifesto in 2006. This lineage is also evident in present-day post-liberals as well as the former SDSers and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) members denouncing the nonviolent BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement apropos Israel and the Columbia University Gaza protestors. Their impact cannot be ignored, for nothing throws shade like zealots turned apostates.

As Hartman moves closer to the appearance of the New Left, the narrative goes on the upswing. A middle-class movement was starting to emerge after the Second Red Scare (the late 1940s through the early 1950s), years when several beleaguered intellectuals managed to keep the Marxist tradition alive. In the late 1950s and early 1960s there soon came into view reconfigurations of a nascent social movement through intellectuals associated with the Frankfurt School and also radical mavericks filling out an emerging landscape of an innovative kind of Marxism. These pioneering New Left thinkers were joined by a diverse cohort of Black Power

radicals and radical feminists. None of these theorists can be taken as the perfect Leftist; their lives were filled with inner conflicts, contradictions, illusions, and sometimes access to unusual personal privilege. Nevertheless, there were many, like Howard

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delusory.

Zinn and Angela Davis, who devoted their intellectual skills to building admirable social movements that they defended with perseverance and dedication.

Critical Reappropriation

Not just a tourist in Marxist culture, Hartman drops himself into the narrative and introduces his own career trajectory as an illustration of twenty-first-century Marxism in the concluding section. As soon as he became aware of capitalism’s fundamentally exploitative nature, he began searching for a better understanding of freedom and was drawn to Marxist political tropes by the 1990s rock band “Rage Against the Machine.” Hartman then turned to Zinn’s somewhat “moral” and “eclectic” (438) *A People’s History of the United States* (1995) before witnessing a resurgence of mainstream interest in Marx around 1997. This was followed by massive protests at the 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organization that took these ideas “off the page and into the streets” (465).

Working his way through Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000),

Hartman found the political landscape changing before his eyes with the 2008 stock market crash and Occupy Wall Street movement. Now Marxism was truly gaining a foothold in national political discourse in a moment of danger, intimating the restoration of lost futures. Events

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were vivifying the exegesis of *Capital* by urban geographer David Harvey, as was the emerging millennial socialist movement. Most notable was the growth of DSA, the founding of *Jacobin*, the increasingly militant environmental movement, and the mass mobilizations of Black Lives Matter. Hartman ends on a high note with a replenished emphasis on Marx's idea of freedom, a theme already coursing through this book like a fluorescent tracer dye. The centrality of this concept is underlined in the final pages through Hartman's lauding of the centrality of Marxist freedom in Canadian sociologist William Clare Roberts's *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (2018) and Swedish philosopher Martin Hagglund's *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (2019).

Much about this book is so energizing that it tempts me, as a reviewer, toward frequent Caps-lock moments. Still, to build a socialist movement for the future the Left must critically reappropriate all the elements of our history—the good, the bad, and the delusionary. Here the book is not without flaws due to silences

and elisions, and the need to condense so many vast topics, guarantees that aspects will fall through the cracks. Hartman, for example, pays much attention to domestic economic and labor developments, but there are several troubling blind spots. How is it possible that Hartman, who follows electoral matters up to at least 2021, fails to recognize that a normalization of the once-marginalized extreme Right was advancing for decades before the 2016 election of Trump? The Tea Party is dismissed and MAGA never cited, leaving the reader unprepared for a present when the United States could be veering toward a fascism of a novel kind.

It's also rather surprising that the whole topic of Zionism and Palestinian rights never even comes up. Although the Communist movement modulated if not obscured anti-Zionism during the late 1940s and 1950s, it was kept alive by the Trotskyists and Jewish dissident groups. Then, starting in the late 1960s, condemnation of Israel's treatment of Palestinians became a passionate concern of Noam Chomsky, New Leftists, and the African American Left, lasting for decades as a small but persistent commitment. Unexpectedly, this issue, involving a grasp of settler-colonialism as well as Israel's role as a handmaiden of U.S. imperialism, was moved dramatically from the periphery toward the forefront of the U.S. Left after "Operation Cast Lead" in 2008. Nonetheless, words like "Zionism" and "Arab" are absent, as is the name of Columbia University scholar Edward Said, who rocketed to fame as a radical Palestinian scholar as far back as the sensational publication of *Orientalism* in 1978. Palestine is cited only once in reference to a concern of Mexican Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos.

Some of the thorniest issues that have vexed U.S. Marxists are simply evaded by Hartman's tendency to skirt around several

hot topics of foreign policy. Surely the incapacity of much of U.S. Marxism to wean itself from illusions about and apologetics on behalf of self-proclaimed revolutionary regimes and movements outside the United States must be balanced against its remarkable clear-sightedness regarding the inequality and injustice of U.S. capitalism, racism, colonialism, and imperialism. The Marxist debates on the Left among intellectuals about the nature of Stalinism are not well-served in the volume, nor are various responses to the Chinese Revolution, the Korean War, Castroism, and more.

True enough, this is not a book about factions on the Left, although Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps have shown that that topic can be addressed with sophistication and balance in *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left since the Second World War* (2015). Yet the ideas and practice of Mao, Guevara, and many others influenced U.S. intellectual work beyond vague sources of inspiration, while the earlier kind of thinking associated with Soviet apologetics might still be seen in certain aspects of the political views of the highly influential political theorist Jodi Dean.

In the end, though, Hartman's reclaiming of the meaning and memory of Marxism in the United States is essential for at least two reasons. The most obvious one is his foregrounding of Marxism's principle of

freedom as objectively central even though it may be appearing now in more expressive and overt forms; one must have reason to wager that humanity can make a new and better world before acting toward that goal. A second is Hartman's understanding that it is the persistence of capitalism that is the basis for Marxism's continual renewal and reinvention, not any seamless march to the future by a historically predestined class. For me, this latter point is a welcome vindication of a non-teleological usable past, making possible better informed and innovative strategies for a revitalized socialist movement of the future.

What we need more than ever is a Marx for the age of Trump, a time when the brilliance of Marx's understanding of capitalism is widely acknowledged even as the political solution of the Marxist project (working-class revolution) seems to be in question. In Hartman's scholarship we find confirmation that it is in Marxist critiques of Marxism that one can find the most thought-provoking avenues for possible explanations and guidance. In *Karl Marx in America*, this is achieved through a double exposure: A kind of presentation of the past in the present, a process of relearning what we have forgotten or perhaps never knew. After all, if we don't first interpret the world, we sure as hell can't change it.

Activating the Emergency Brake Saito's Degrowth Communism

PAUL MESSERSMITH-GLAVIN

"Capitalist production ... only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker."

KARL MARX, *Capital*, Vol 1, 638

"The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism.... The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical."

WALTER BENJAMIN, *Theses on the Concept of History*, VIII

THE FIRST EARTH DAY WAS OVER half a century ago. For more than thirty years since then, climate scientists have been warning the world about the catastrophic implications of continuing to burn oil, coal, and gas. World leaders have met periodically in climate summits to set goals for reducing and eventually phasing out greenhouse gases, only to then ignore them. Temperatures are rising, as are the

seas and people's anxiety. Wildfires burn in cities like Los Angeles, hurricanes and tornadoes become increasingly destructive, and new phrases like heat dome, bomb cyclone, and atmospheric river enter everyday use. Fairly recently, advocates of a Green New Deal talked about slowly switching out the fossil fuel energy sources of the capitalist economy for one based on renewable energy. Environmentally conscious liberals thought that the climate and larger ecological crisis could be solved by painting the capitalist behemoth green.

When I first began thinking through the role of capitalism in changing the planet's climate almost twenty years ago, I asked several older Marxists I knew and respected whether they thought capitalism is capable of adapting to the ecological crisis it had created. Is green capitalism

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possible, one that employs an energy system not dependent on fossil fuels, one that doesn't endanger human civilization while continuing to exploit human labor? Alternatively, as seems now to be the case, I wondered, would capitalism continue seeking to maximize profit and accumulate as much capital as possible while viciously running humanity and the rest of nature further into the ground? I really struggled with the question of whether a significant enough percentage of the ruling class had the foresight to reform capitalism so as not to destroy society and the natural environment, the very sources of its vast wealth? I was deeply disappointed in my Marxist elders' responses.

Some of them had obviously never really thought about this, seeming to be confused and a bit flustered by the question; after stumbling around, reciting various maxims about the falling rate of profit and primitive accumulation, they had no answer. Others dismissed environmental issues as simply being "bourgeois concerns," presumably not worth considering, a distraction from class struggle at best.

In sharp contrast, Kohei Saito, the Japanese Marxist scholar and author of several books, including *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto* and *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*, has thought a great deal about these very questions. He addresses this conundrum directly:

... capitalism can keep going beyond these natural limits and accumulate more wealth. In contrast, the current level of civilization cannot sustain itself beyond a certain point *precisely due to objective natural limits*. As far as the logic of capital's accumulation is being estranged from human life and sustainability of the ecosystem, the capitalist system might continue to exist, even if all the planetary boundaries are exceeded, but many parts of the earth will be unsuitable for civilization.¹

So far, this is the best answer I've heard.

Saito stands against those Marxists who advocate a kind of Marxist Prometheanism. Prometheus is a Greek Titan known for stealing fire from the Olympic Gods, giving it to humans in the form of knowledge, technology, and civilization. Qualifying Marxists as Promethean indicates that they share a belief that capitalist productive forces and technological innovation, controlled instead by the hands of workers, will bring about the good life for all. It is the same type of worldview that guided the project of really existing socialism, or state capitalism, that led its designers to embrace rapid industrialization in its competition with the West, but largely failed to be less environmentally destructive or provide the type of human freedom Marx envisioned. In his opposition to this belief, Saito joins other Marxists who take ecological issues seriously, such as John Bellamy Foster, James O'Connor, and Jason Moore.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union, Marxists grouped around both *Monthly Review* and *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* have examined Marx's late-in-life research into the natural sciences, elaborating its implications for a different understanding of Marx. With contemporary concerns for the state of the natural world in mind, these thinkers went back to Marx to see what insights could be achieved in analyzing capitalism's impact on non-human nature. Saito correctly concludes that both camps "demonstrated convincingly that a Marxist approach is useful to comprehend the ecological crisis as the manifestation of systematic contradictions of the capitalist mode of production" (15). O'Connor and his cohort brought us the "Second Contradiction of Capitalism," while Foster and his colleagues introduced the concept of "metabolic rift." Both concepts are helpful to those thinking through the causes and possible solutions

to the increasingly threatening ecological crisis in which we are enmeshed.

The Second Contradiction of Capitalism

Starting with his 1988 theoretical introduction to the journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, James O'Connor theorized what he called the "Second Contradiction of Capitalism." The first contradiction is that between the forces of production and capitalist social relations: in essence, the historic struggle between workers and capitalists. This contradiction, O'Connor points out, "is internal to the system, it has nothing to do with *conditions* of production, where these are interpreted economically or in sociopolitical terms."²

The second contradiction, intimately related to the first, involves the conditions of production: the opposition between capitalism and nature. As capitalism continues to exploit natural resources and human labor, the costs of doing so become increasingly prohibitive:

... when individual capitals defend or restore profits by strategies that degrade or fail to maintain over time the material and social conditions (hence raising the health bill), degrading soils (hence lowering the productivity of land), or turning their backs on decaying urban infrastructures (hence increasing congestion or policing costs).³

This second contradiction leads both to increasing prices for commodities and the proliferation of struggles outside the workplace:

The combination of crisis-stricken capitals externalizing more costs, the reckless use of technology and nature for value realization in the sphere of circulation, and the like, must sooner or later lead to a "rebellion in nature," that is, powerful social movements demanding an end to ecological exploitation.⁴

O'Connor sought, in part, to theorize

the rise of the so-called New Social Movements in the 1960s and 1970s. His formulation is the basis for further investigations presented in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, while establishing Ecological Marxism, or ecosocialism, and providing a jumping-off point for John Bellamy Foster's work.

Metabolic Rift

Reading Saito, one has to conclude he would agree with Michael Löwy that "reading Marx from an ecological perspective, there is a before and an after to Bellamy Foster."⁵ Foster's significance to ecological thinking is due to his exploration and development of the concept referred to as the "metabolic rift." Quoting volume one of *Capital*, Saito explains that

Marx employed the concept of a "rift" in the metabolic relation between human beings and the earth to capture the material estrangement of human beings with capitalist society from the natural conditions which formed the basis for their existence—what [Marx] called "the everlasting nature-imposed condition[s] of human existence" (163).

Marx uses the metaphor of metabolism in *Capital* in part to talk about human's relationship with the rest of nature, a relationship mediated by the activity of human labor. Humans act upon and transform nature, while being in turn changed by nature. It's a kind of dialectical relationship that is fundamental to what it means to be human. Interestingly, in the human body, metabolism generates heat, as it does under capitalism. For Marx, this fundamental human process of transforming nature through labor has been captured by the capitalist class, resulting in alienated labor and the exploitation and disregard for the natural environment. Hence, a rift exists in the metabolic relationship between humans and nature that is in dire need of repair.

For Foster and his colleagues, Marx employs the concept of metabolism to

refer to “the complex, dynamic interchange between human beings and nature.” In their reading of Marx, “humans interact with nature through the exchange of organic matter. In this metabolic relationship, humans both confront the nature-imposed conditions of the processes found in the material world and affect these processes through labor (and the associated structures of production).”⁶ One can point to how Marx relies in *Capital* on Justus von Liebig’s 1862 *Agricultural Chemistry* in which von Liebig outlines how modern agriculture seeks to maximize short-term profit without a view toward sustainability or care for the land, which Marx characterizes as “robbery agriculture,” as an example of how the concept of metabolism guided his work (25).

For Marx, the rift in this metabolic relationship, caused by capitalist relations of production, would be repaired through the abolition of class society and the creation of a free, communist one: “Hence under the society of associated producers it would be necessary to ‘govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way,’ completely beyond the capabilities of bourgeois society.”⁷ This is assuming that the “society of associated producers” is guided by an ecological consciousness. They would need to understand the place of humans in nature, no longer endangering the delicate and symbiotic relationships that sustain life. They would also have to commit to no longer treating non-human nature as simply constituting natural resources for production or as a place to discard waste. Ecological consciousness needs to be cultivated as part of the class struggle.

Saito’s Project

Walter Benjamin was an unorthodox Marxist and Jewish mystic. When faced with the prospect of imminent capture on the Spanish border in Nazi-occupied

France, he penned his well-known “Theses on the Concept of History” on the back of postage paper, presumably not expecting them to be published. Benjamin’s thoughts speak directly to us in the odd and terrifying historical period in which we find ourselves. In his supplement to those theses, Benjamin questions Marx’s assertion that revolution is the “locomotive of world history,” suggesting instead that “revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely, the human race—to activate the emergency brake.”⁸ Activating the emergency brake is precisely what Saito calls for.

Working in the tradition of Benjamin, Saito takes the concept of metabolic rift as his jumping-off point while engaging in a radical and controversial reading of Marx. For Saito, the common understanding of Marx as an advocate of the notion of historical progress is incorrect (2). Saito believes that if Marx’s work is to help contribute to solving the ecological crisis, his ideas concerning the contradictions between capitalist productive forces and the relations of production need to be reformulated. This is what Saito sets out to do in his 2022 book *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*.

Saito acknowledges many environmentalists’ disdain for Marx and Marxism, due in part to the horrible environmental record of places like the former Soviet Union and many Marxists’ apparent disregard for understanding and responding to ecological struggles, not to mention their tendency toward Prometheanism.

To help overcome this Red/Green divide, Saito relies on the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, the ongoing publishing project of the complete works of Marx and Engels, particularly Marx’s notebooks. For Saito, these notebooks, along with various letters and rewrites of later editions of *Capital*, as well as changes to subsequent transla-

tions, indicate that “Marx quite intensively studied two fields after the publication of *Capital*: natural science and pre-capitalist or non-Western societies” (172). For Saito and others, this indicates that Marx, in his later years, was concerned with both the environmentally destructive effects of capitalism, as well as the lifestyles of people who lived in non-capitalist fashions. For Saito and Foster, Marx’s work, particularly *Capital*, needs to be revisited with this perspective in mind.

Saito identifies Marx’s analysis of the “real subsumption,” the process by which the means of production themselves are transformed to extract surplus value from workers, in his *Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63*, as a place that Marx problematizes the productive forces of capital themselves. Saito suggests that Marx came to question whether the existing capitalist productive forces would be a viable means to achieve communism. Saito believes that, through his reading on the natural sciences and non-capitalist, non-Western peoples, Marx “realized that productive forces do not automatically prepare the material foundation for new post-capitalist society but rather exacerbate the robbery of nature” (177). Instead of grabbing hold of these existing productive forces, Saito argues that Marx turns his attention to “the radical abundance of ‘communal/common wealth’ [as discussed] in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*,” a focus that Saito believes can help us actualize “a safe and just society in the face of global ecological crisis in the Anthropocene” (8).

Marx, the Communalist?

Though Marx supported the populist People’s Will in Russia, he corresponded with Vera Zasulich, who was in the Russian revolutionary group Black Repartition. The two groups were at odds. Marx wrote various drafts of a response to a question

of Zasulich’s, namely, what his views on rural communes were, and whether “every country in the world [must] pass through all phases of capitalist production” on the way to communism.⁹

Looking at the draft responses in which Marx worked out his thinking on Zasulich’s question, Saito concludes that,

Marx’s view of history changed by 1881 in that he explicitly acknowledged the power of Russian rural communes to make their own history by leaping to socialism based on existing communal property without going through the destructive process of capitalist modernization. Marx discovered the possibility of a Russian Revolution by focusing on the active elements of resistance to capitalist expansion in non-Western societies (195).

Saito supports this conclusion by presenting the preface to *The Communist Manifesto*’s second Russian edition, in which Marx and Engels say, “If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West ... then Russia’s peasant communal landownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development.”¹⁰

Saito gives the various drafts of this letter to Zasulich a great deal of weight in his interpretation of Marx’s views, believing it “... needs to be reinterpreted as the crystallization of [Marx’s] non-productivist and non-Eurocentric view of the future society, which” according to Saito, “should be characterized as degrowth communism” (8).

Saito also argues that the delay in publishing the second and third volumes of *Capital* was due to Marx’s immersion in studying and thinking through the implications of natural science and non-Western, non-capitalist forms of social and economic organization for his theories of capitalism and its overthrow. Marx spent time looking at communal life in places like Russia and India in his final years: “By the 1880s,

Marx recognized that the persistent stability of communes without economic growth is the underlying foundation for realizing sustainable and egalitarian metabolic interaction between humans and nature.” Thus, “After 14 years of research, he concluded that sustainability and equality based on a steady-state economy is the source of power to resist capitalism, and it would be no wonder should Russian communes skip the capitalist stage to arrive at communism” (208).

Is Marx a Degrowth Communist and Does it Matter?

Saito’s assertion that Marx advocated for degrowth communism is contested by many. Saito’s is but one of many readings of Marx. One can certainly find evidence to support the suggestion that Marx favored this late in life, yet it’s open to interpretation. But does it really matter?

In constructing theories and strategies, we draw on various ideas to engage in political practices that are relevant and effective in changing the world. For Marxism to continue to be relevant, it needs to apply methods developed by Marx to analyze today’s economy and society. In this regard, what Saito teases out of Marx’s late research, correspondence, and various changes to new translations and editions of his work are helpful. But what’s most important is what we think. In part this involves interrupting the aspect of Marxism that treats Marx’s work as a “science” or worse, a religion, one in which one must refer to how various priests historically have interpreted the word of Marx.

It is essential to do the work that Saito does, untangling those aspects of Marx’s work in which he seems to endorse the view that the productive forces of capital are necessarily progressive, and even that there is progress in history, from his later apparent questioning of these premises.

Saito’s belief that Marx became increasingly aware of this problem while writing *Capital* can aid us in advocating for a different vision of the future than one in which “the maximal acceleration of the existing tendencies of capitalism could ultimately realize a final leap to communism” (171). In light of an examination of attempts to change the world made by those embracing this type of Prometheanism, for instance the former Soviet Union, we can illuminate how simply seizing the productive forces of capitalism will only continue to destroy the delicate ecological relationships humans are immersed in, while not offering genuine human freedom; along with Saito’s version of the later Marx, we too can reject this strategy as inadequate.

Degrowth Communism: But Won’t We All Starve?

Saito advocates for a reconceptualization of what we mean by wealth, developing an understanding closer to Marx’s discussion of the abundance of “common wealth,” as he discussed in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (218). This is consistent with what Marx wrote in the *Grundrisse*, where he “maintained that the full realization of human creative potentialities requires stripping away the ‘bourgeois form’ of wealth as commodity” (222). The way wealth is conceived in capitalism is unsustainable from an ecological perspective, as wants and needs are manufactured through advertising to keep selling otherwise useless commodities, destroying the natural environment that sustains human life in the process. Saito asserts that “Marx argued that this narrow capitalist conception of wealth inevitably turns out to be incompatible with the material conditions for a sustainable development of human metabolism with nature” (218). Hence the existence of a metabolic rift that needs to be resolved.

Those of us on the left know that wealth, though created by the working class, is exponentially accumulated by the ruling class as capital. Through a revolutionary process involving seizing the means of production and expropriating the expropriators, there will be more than enough to go around. Wealth in a degrowth communist society would be the abundance of the common wealth available to all. Through the democratization of workplaces, neighborhoods, cities, regions, and countries, a redistribution would take place based upon the principle of collectively providing for each of our needs, according to each of our abilities.

In their 2022 manifesto “For an Eco-socialist Degrowth,” Michael Löwy, Bengi Akbulut, Sabrina Fernandes, and Giorgos Kallis state that

Ecosocialist degrowth requires the social appropriation of the main means of (re) production and a democratic, participatory, ecological planning.... This means that people, at various scales, exercise direct power in democratically determining what is to be Ensuring equitable well-being for all does not require economic growth but rather radically changing how we organize the economy and distribute social wealth.¹¹

Saito points to a section of *Capital* Marx modified shortly before his death, in which he advocates “co-operation of free workers and their possession in common of the land and of the means of production produced by labour” (227). In a world without economic growth and the imperative of capital accumulation, the “realm of necessity” (all those things we do to survive by providing shelter and food, for instance) will be reduced and the “realm of freedom” (everything we can do once our basic needs are met and our labor is not alienated) vastly expanded. Thus, “Marx’s degrowth communism aims to repair the ‘irreparable’ metabolic rift and to rehabilitate the non-

consumerist ‘abundance’ of the social and natural wealth” (226). Therefore, degrowth communism would be “a post-scarcity society without economic growth. It aims to rehabilitate the abundance of common wealth against the artificial scarcity created by capital” (249-50). Saito argues that the radical abundance of sharing communal wealth will replace the type of wealth defined by capitalism as the endless acquisition of commodities.

Activating the Emergency Brake

Saito suggests that “the planetary crisis provides a material basis for constituting a universal political subjectivity *against* capital,” suggesting, alongside Foster and O’Connor, “that capital is creating a global environmental proletariat, whose quality of life is increasingly degraded by capital accumulation” (4, Saito’s emphasis). Winning the class war requires uniting the majority—the working people of the world—against the ruling class. Only through confronting and overthrowing those profiting from the continued burning of fossil fuels in the service of accumulating vast amounts of wealth can we hope to achieve a different society.

O’Connor recognized that “Most problems of the natural and social environments are bigger problems from the standpoint of the poor, including the working poor, than for the salariat and the well-to-do.”¹² The liberation of humanity from class domination needs to walk hand-in-hand with the creation of an ecological society, as the ecological and climate crisis becomes ever more dire, threatening the health and well-being of working people while bringing the future of human civilization into question.

It’s easy to give in to despair or fatalism, as Saito points out, since despite the social and ecological crisis, “the capitalist system does not offer an alternative to the juggernaut of overproduction and

overconsumption" (1). It is imperative that a revitalized left offer sound critiques of the capitalist system and all interlocking systems of exploitation and domination, as well as offer compelling visions of how we can organize ourselves differently as a society. As importantly, we need to build a social movement with explicit demands; generalize practices of mutual aid; cultivate community resiliency through urban gardens, renewable energy, and alternative transportation; confront and blockade the mechanisms of extraction and the burning of fossil fuels; while creating affinity groups, political collectives, and directly democratic revolutionary organizations. As Che Johnson-Long, a longtime Atlanta, Georgia, organizer says,

Everyone needs to be in a group right now. Everyone. I don't care if it's a local mutual aid group, if it's a base building organization, if it's national, if it's your neighbors on your block, but we all need to be in a group. And if you can't find the group that's right for you, then start a group, because that's what allows for us to coordinate with each other better and to be able to consolidate power.¹³

Generating social, political, and economic power together, cultivating social relationships of solidarity with our neighbors, coworkers, and comrades, lays the basis for militant direct action and fundamentally transforming the structures of society and the economy. The authors of the ecosocialist degrowth manifesto are correct about what this kind of organizing involves when they say, "A new social and ecological consciousness will emerge through the process of self-organization and active resistance of the exploited and oppressed."¹⁴

We all need to put ourselves out there, talk to everyday people, and together make sense of this world while building a movement. As fossil fuel extraction and burning accelerates and human labor continues to be exploited, we need to collectively take

Benjamin's advice to view revolution not as the locomotive of history but rather as activating the emergency brake: to make this runaway train finally stop, engaging in direct action to create a fundamentally different classless, ecological society.

NOTES

1. Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 128 (emphasis in original). All notes to this book hereafter are given in parentheses in the text.
2. James O'Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism* (New York: Guildford Press, 1998), 176.
3. O'Connor, *Natural Causes*, 242.
4. O'Connor, *Natural Causes*, 171.
5. Michael Löwy, "From Karl Marx to Eco-Marxism," *New Politics* (Vol. XX, No 1, Whole Number 77, Summer, 2024).
6. John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (Monthly Review Press, 2010), 124.
7. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, (Monthly Review Press, 2000), quoting *Capital*, Vol. 1, 283 (New York, Vintage, 1976), 141.
8. Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History,'" *Selected Writings* (Belknap Press, 2006).
9. Saito, *Anthropocene*, 193, quoting Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the 'Peripheries of Capitalism'* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 99.
10. Saito, 195, quoting Shanin, 1983, 139.
11. Michael Löwy, Bengi Akbulut, Sabrina Fernandes, and Giorgos Kallis "For an Ecosocialist Degrowth," *Monthly Review*, Apr. 1, 2022.
12. James O'Connor, "The Second Contradiction of Capitalism," accessed via www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/second_contradiction.html.
13. "We Live in Fearful Times. Our Safety Comes Through Preparing Together," interview with Che Johnson-Long by Kelly Hayes, *Truthout*, May 15, 2025, accessed via truthout.org/audio/we-live-in-fearful-times-our-safety-comes-through-preparing-together/?ref=organizingmythoughts.org.
14. Löwy, et al, 2022.

What Is Marxist-Feminism?

FRIEDA AFARY

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In this collection of essays, she offers her key contributions to feminist theory over a lifetime. While *The Socialist Feminist Project* (2002), a collection of essays she edited was broader in scope, this book identifies what she thinks distinguishes Marxist-Feminism from Socialist Feminism. Marxist-Feminism, the perspective that she identifies with, she defines as the centrality of the mode of production: “The idea that the capitalist mode of production sets the terms, if you will, of degrees of freedom and unfreedom, again in historically particular ways different from other modes of production.” The capitalist mode of production is seen as “foundational but not determinative” (3).

This view can be better understood by

From a Marxist-Feminist
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Freedom, Rationality and
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exploring Holmstrom’s articulation of the Marxian concept of human nature. It is also especially relevant to the current debates on queer theory and identity, which challenge

an essentialist and unchanging concept of human nature.

Holmstrom’s essay “A Marxist Theory of Women’s Nature” argues that according to Karl Marx’s philosophy, human needs and capacities are ex-

pressed, shaped, and created through labor (an activity of satisfying needs). Thus, it is labor, not biological determinism, that is the key to an explanation of social life and social change. She demonstrates that for Marx, biological differences between men and women cannot explain or justify any talk of distinct natures, because his effort is aimed at examining the nature of people as social groups not as biological groups. Thus, “Marx is denying that there is a human nature in the traditional, transhistorical sense. On his view, however, there are historically specific forms of human nature ... specific to feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism and so on” (232).

Furthermore, Holmstrom adds that human nature, and even biological nature, can change through sociohistorical factors and through evolution. Thus, she states that “in Marx’s view, the contrast of the social with the natural and unchanging is particularly inappropriate to human beings since they

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are by nature social beings with a history” (233). While biological differences cannot be discounted, it is the social factors not the biological ones that are the primary determinants. Hence, from a Marxist standpoint, psychological differences between women and men would be related to the sorts of labor that they do and the resulting social relations. “[T]he Marxist view is not that there is a direct causal connection between the type of labor people do and their personality structure. Rather, the type of labor people do puts them into certain social relations and those relations are institutionalized into sets of practices, institutions, cultural agencies and so on” (237).

It is not primarily biology, but mostly the oppressive social, economic, and historical conditions that determine the sexual/social division of labor. Thus, even women who have non-traditional jobs and do not have a family to take care of are still influenced by dominant patriarchal, social, and cultural institutions.

Holmstrom emphasizes that while Marx did not have an essentialist view of human nature, he did believe that humans have a unique potential for free and conscious activity that can only be fully developed in a socialist society free of alienated labor. On this basis, she argues that while there will always be some differences in men’s and in women’s experiences of themselves as physical beings, the meaning of those experiences will be different depending on how society develops. Furthermore, in a society not based on alienated labor, “the sexual and reproductive choices women make would not have the kind of profound social consequences for women as opposed to men that they do now” (246).

Holmstrom’s articulation of a non-essentialist concept of human nature, further explained in an essay entitled “Humankind(s),” can also be illuminating for those engaged in debates on trans

identity. While she does not agree with “formulations of the sex/gender distinction that present the biological as an underlying substratum untouched by society, and gender as pure culture, laid on top of an inert biology,” she also does not agree with the view that collapses the sex/gender distinction and claims that gender is merely a performance (257). She helps us see that while there are some sex-based differences that can never be eliminated, there is no essential human nature rooted in biology. Current entrenched views about masculinity and femininity are rather deeply rooted in a set of economic, historical, and social relations in our capitalist epoch.

Although women and LGBTQ people in various parts of the world have made great gains, large numbers of the general public in the United States and globally still cling to traditional gender norms. The fact that authoritarian and fascist rulers are currently using transphobia as one of the elements in their effort to gain mass support, means that misogynistic, patriarchal, and homophobic views are still very much entrenched in all societies. Holmstrom’s work shows that overcoming these views cannot be done through simply cultural and performative work but needs deep economic, social, and political transformations. In this regard she shares some of the views of Rosemary Hennessy (2000), an important queer theorist.

In an essay entitled “Sex, Work and Capitalism,” Holmstrom offers a unique perspective on the current feminist debates on sex work. Among socialist feminists, there are differences about what it means to have a queer and sex-positive movement that opposes all forms of sexual exploitation, all oppressive gender norms, and all forms of instrumentalization of ourselves or others (Goldberg, 2021; Srinivasan, 2021). Some advocate the full legalization and normalization of sex work and argue that

it can be “creative” or “satisfying” (Smith and Mac, 2020). Others, who also defend the rights of sex workers and their efforts to self-organize for safety, view sex work as a practice of commodification and instrumentalization of one’s body and feelings. While they support the decriminalization of sex workers, they emphasize that sex work in addition to being exploitative and abusive, does terrible long-term physical and psychological damage to those who perform it, whether they are forced to do it or do it “voluntarily.” As a proponent of the latter view, Holmstrom writes: “Thus selling sexual services is not like selling other services. Selling intimate bodily experiences is a kind of ultimate alienation” (37).

The challenge for socialist feminists therefore is how to support women working as prostitutes without giving up our critique of the work and the institution of prostitution. But support for the women in the business must always be conjoined with struggles to change the political economic conditions that push so many into it. We should fight for jobs with living wages, affordable housing and childcare, substance abuse programs, help with immigration problems, and whatever else sex workers say they need (39).

I agree with this view and would argue that rather than channeling our organizing efforts into legalizing sex work, it would be best if we helped expand the message of the #MeToo Movement to challenge the normalization of sexual abuse and assault in all spheres of life (Boussedra, 2017; Mock, 2014). The facts indicate that extending the legalization of sex work to pimps and clients facilitates further exploitation of women and children and increases sex trafficking (Harvard Law School, 2014). Adding sex work to the list of normal service sector jobs also means that unemployed women who receive assistance from the state would not be able to refuse sex work as employment.

Normalizing sex work means that more and more young women, men, and trans people would consider sex work as a full-time or side job to make money.

Holmstrom has also contributed to feminist debates on Social Reproduction Theory. She believes that while women’s oppression did not start with capitalism, women’s oppression under capitalism cannot be explained simply on the basis of domestic and reproductive labor. Domestic labor, she argues, can be phased out under capitalism in order to further facilitate capitalist exploitation of labor. However, capitalist alienated labor and its separation of mind and body, affects our psyche and diminishes freedom in all spheres of life (281).

What enables Holmstrom to offer deep illumination on current socialist feminist debates and genuine solidarity with oppressed people is her socialist humanist approach. Unlike post-structuralist thinkers who define freedom as the struggle for power and domination, she views freedom as human flourishing or self-realization rooted in solidarity and rationality. Her concept of rationality is not about capitalist calculation and maximization of utility. It is about cooperation and collective struggle rooted in human control over the means and process of our labor. That labor is what Marx called the human potential for free and conscious activity, not mechanical and mindless work. Free and conscious activity is also about the protection of nature/the environment and the creation of a sustainable future.

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A Queer Classical Marxism

PETER DRUCKER

THROUGHOUT THE DEVELOPMENT of queer Marxism over the past fifteen years, Alan Sears has been a constant presence in the field—in fact since even before queer Marxism took coherent shape. He has engaged in constructive dialogue with all its leading figures and their different approaches from a wide range of angles, from Kevin Floyd's pioneering application of György Lukács's concept of reification to gender and sexuality, to my focus on the periodization of capitalism and its different "same-sex

Eros and Alienation: Capitalism and the Making of Gendered Sexualities

ALAN SEARS
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formations," to Holly Lewis's use of social reproduction theory to illuminate the role of gendered bodies and especially transgender bodies.¹

Going back to the start of the twenty-first century, Sears himself has consistently linked the study of sexuality to the foundations of Marxism. He has explored the sexual implications of neoliberalism in "moral deregulation." He has shown how struggles for sexual liberation are an integral part of the endeavor to found the "next new left," following the faded lefts of the 1920s/1930s and 1960s/1970s.² He has also increasingly foregrounded his debt to racialized queer scholars, with a particular emphasis on Indigenous activism and theory in the Canadian state. Throughout his work he has been distinguished by a steadfast commit-

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ment to a classical though contemporary Marxism.

Alienation

Sears's latest book, his major contribution to queer Marxism to date, evokes in its title Herbert Marcuse's still-crucial *Eros and Civilization* and deserves a place alongside it. Sears's book shows its classical credentials above all through its focus on alienation. Despite the prominence of alienation in Marx's own work, the concept was eclipsed in the Second and Third Internationals. It reemerged in Marxist debates from the mid-twentieth century in efforts to move beyond social democracy and Stalinism, particularly following the rediscovery of the young Marx. Yet it remained controversial, notably because of Louis Althusser's insistence that the concept predated Marx's "epistemological break" and had no place in Marx's mature scientific thought. While Sears does not go into these old Marxological debates, he implicitly upholds a vision of alienation as central to the entirety of Marx's work, including *Capital* itself.

While past Marxist discussions of alienation were mainly philosophical—about human beings' alienation from nature and one another—or economic—about workers' alienation from the process and product of labor—Sears makes the concept broader, including people's alienation from their bodies and sexualities. "The project of this book is to locate making love within the broader panoply of human making," including sexual alienation, he writes. The "everyday compulsion and violence shaping the contemporary organization of gender and sexuality" is an "anti-queer logic set deep in ... the alienation of labor at the heart of the system" (3). Linking sexual alienation to productive alienation may seem "at first sight ... a bit of a stretch," he concedes, but not when alienation is

seen not just in paid employment but also in unpaid reproductive labor ("caregiving, cleaning and cooking") (4).

Sears describes the organization of sexuality under capitalism as "erotic enclosure" (40). Sex is "confined to the margins of the day" (42), "often under cover of darkness, fueled by only the depleted energy left over after completing the work required to sustain survival" (6). To fuel consumption while sustaining production, "[t]he moral regulation of the working class in capitalist societies involves a complex and shifting balance between constraining and unleashing desire" (89). The resulting sex is like processed food, a poor simulacrum. Its truth is to be found in pornography and sex work. The "money shot" in pornography reflects the "orgasmic imperative" imposed on sex in these conditions (78). Sex work is "one of a range of survival strategies in conditions of alienation that compel the dispossessed to trade on their human capacities" (52).

Neoliberalism—here *Eros and Alienation* draws on insights Sears has been deepening for twenty years—specifically, intensifies the capitalist alienation of sexuality, in which laboring, disabled, and racialized bodies are seen as lesser and non-erotic. Yet it has also been a period of growing gay normality. A fair proportion of gay men and lesbians can manage today to fit into the pattern of sexual liberalism, which assumes a "contract frame" of fake equality (61). In this frame formal consent ignores and flattens out the complexities of desire that "can flare up and be followed by a change of heart in the space of a single breath" (to quote Jacqueline Rose) (77). As long as both partners say "Yes" to sex and neither stops consenting, they are both supposed to be going along with whatever happens. This is assumed to override the realities of racism, power differentials, and other forms of inequality, and if a participant is left feeling used and unfulfilled, well,

they should have remembered to “let the buyer beware.” Real human desire gives way under capitalism to trading in “sexual allure as alienable property” (66), and once the bait has been swallowed the deal is done. In the absence of a community bound together and sustained by a commitment to love as a dimension of collective life-making, people are left to their own devices and frequently disappointed by sexual encounters’ failure to lead to the dreamed-of, enduring romantic partnership.

Nature

One of the most outstanding parts of *Eros and Alienation* is its pathbreaking foundation of a queer ecology. Sears relies for this on Neil Smith’s distinction between “first” and “second nature.” In both cases humans are part of nature, and human production and reproduction are a metabolic interaction with the rest of nature. In first nature, however, an “ecology of intimacy” knits together household, workshop, and language in a cohesive way of life (to quote Indigenous theorist Leane Simpson) (18/105). In second nature, capitalism undermines this harmony, producing a “metabolic rift” (a concept ascribed to Marx by John Belamy Foster).

Sears queers this concept of second nature by citing New York’s Central Park Ramble and other urban “natural” spaces as examples of a kind of romanticized human creation (described by Marxist ecologist Andreas Malm as “relative wilderness”), well suited as gay male cruising grounds and “erotic oases” of white masculinity (114–15). Without “networks of mutuality [this is] a new kind of loneliness,” inhabited by new kinds of bodies. In capitalist second nature, bodies are valued that look like products, and people are shamed when their bodies are not “shaped by training, diet and fashion” (107). In this world, Black feminist Roxane Gay has described her own

real body as “wildly undisciplined” (120). But disciplined hot bodies, Sears notes, “are literally unsustainable, captured at a transient moment of aesthetic peak” (121). The gyms that turn out desirable bodies reproduce the logic of factories and depend on unhealthy practices, “beating nature out of their physique” (127).

We can no more return to first nature than we can live sustainably in second nature, Sears concludes. He endorses Edward Said’s concept of a third nature, in which connection to the earth (and our bodies) is recovered on a new basis, including reparation for ecological destruction, redress for theft of land, and newly sustainable relationships with our bodies. Only in this way can reciprocity be reestablished among humans and with the natural environment.

Utopia

This utopia of third nature is also, for Sears, a queer utopia. Citing José Muñoz, he sees queerness “as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (3). Not merely a synonym for LGBTQ, queer is “a way into seeing a better world we have not yet attained” (143). “This liberation needs to go beyond transgression to transformation,” Sears contends (21). He draws on a range of thinkers to define his utopian vision. For example, he embraces Dennis Altman’s injunction to “take enjoyment from the total body” (142). Drawing on M.E. O’Brien’s excellent book *Family Abolition*,³ he envisions a world of love as “shared practices of mutual care” (136). Given the increased role of family in capitalist hegemony under neoliberalism, this necessarily entails abolition of the actually existing family: in O’Brien’s words, “The family’s horrors are vast, its abuses widespread, its logic coercive” (26). Journeying from Edward Carpenter to sci-fi utopias (Ursula le Guin, Marge Piercy, Samuel Delany) and from Rosemary Hennessy to

bell hooks, Sears continually reaffirms that love is crucial. And sexuality can provide “tastes of freedom” (29), especially once we break with a transactional approach to it.

Beyond that, Sears makes no claim to having a road map toward a glorious future of sexual liberation. Instead he embraces a perspective of “permanent sexual revolution” (151), in which a society-wide seizure of power from below can open the way to finding new ways of life through ongoing debate and experimentation.

Meanwhile...

The timing of *Eros and Alienation*, completed before Trump’s re-election, prevented Sears from tackling more than glancingly the newest immediate threats and challenges to LGBTIQ liberation. He acknowledges in his introduction that the rise of the far right, especially the current deluge of transphobia and racism, makes LGBTIQ normality “fragile and embattled” (2), and the gains of LGBTIQ movements very much contested. Responding to this challenge will require extensive discussion, since the survival and refoundation of the queer left is at stake in this fight.

As I have argued elsewhere,⁴ a full-fledged queer contribution to the fight against the far right will require a sharp break with the homonormativity defined by Lisa Duggan: the mimicry of the gender divide and straight families that allows the right to hold out the possibility of toleration to *some* gays and lesbians, but banishes trans and nonbinary people to outer darkness. Fighting the far right also demands a no-holds-barred battle against the

homonationalism—LGBTIQ complicity with imperialism—defined by Jasbir Puar.⁵ This break with homonationalism is being splendidly exemplified in radical queer participation in solidarity with Palestine. Since Sears has himself been active in Palestine solidarity, I’m confident that he would agree with me on this. I have no doubt that he can make a major contribution to this discussion, linking up with and deepening his analysis in *Eros and Alienation*. I very much look forward to reading and engaging with his reflections along these lines.

NOTES

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2. Alan Sears, “Queer in a Lean World,” *Against the Current* 89 (Nov.–Dec. 2000), againthecurrent.org/atc089/p965/; Alan Sears, *The Next New Left: A History of the Future* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 2014).

3. M.E. O’Brien, *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care* (London: Pluto Press, 2023).

4. Peter Drucker, “Far-Right Antisemitism and Heteronationalism: Building Jewish and Queer Resistance,” *Historical Materialism* (Vol. 32, No. 1, 2024), www.historicalmaterialism.org/article/far-right-antisemitism-and-heteronationalism/.

5. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

“Throwing Out the Baby”

JUDY COX

“THE WORLD IS ON FIRE,” says David Camfield. We are living through a “polycrisis” of entangled and mutually reinforcing crises. Enthusiasm for capitalism is fading away, to put it mildly. One of the things that undermines resistance to the system is the idea, the common sense, the feeling that there is no alternative. Capitalism may be far from perfect, it may generate inequality, climate crisis, imperialist conflict, but all attempts to create a radical society have not only failed—they have made things worse. As Camfield writes, “Defenders of the current social order can still marshal an array of arguments to support the idea that, whatever its flaws, there is no alternative” (2). One of the most important of these arguments is “anti-Communism” (2).

Anti-communism is not simply a relic of the Cold War. In 2023, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution that denounced all forms of socialist policies. The resolution included the claim that “Socialism has repeatedly led to famine and mass murders, and the killing of over 100,000,000 people

Red Flags: A Reckoning with Communism for the Future of the Left

DAVID CAMFIELD
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worldwide ... many of the greatest crimes in history were committed by socialist ideologues, including Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, Pol Pot, Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un, Daniel Ortega, Hugo Chávez, and Nicolás Maduro” (3). Communism is portrayed as the most murderous force in human history. It is deemed “criminal as both ideology and reality, and always identical in all times and in all places,” as historian Enzo Traverso puts it in his critique of anti-Communism (3). Anti-Communism deepens and gives ideological edge to the idea that trying to create a more egalitarian and peaceful world will only lead to extraordinary horrors.

In this context, socialists may be tempted to see something hopeful and progressive in the long-defunct USSR and in similar societies in Cuba and China. This does not imply an uncritical celebration of the Actually Existing Socialist (AES) societies, but it does suggest confusion about what is and is not socialism. In her 2018 book *Why Women Have Better Sex under Socialism*, which has been translated into over a dozen languages, Kristen Ghodsee argues that although “state socialism” ultimately failed, for much of the twentieth century it “presented an existential challenge to the worst excesses of the free market.” “There was a baby in all that bathwater. It’s time

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we got around to saving it," Ghodsee concludes (7).

Lea Ypi's acclaimed memoir of life before and after the collapse of Albania has also been translated into over twenty languages. Ypi is scathing about the society in which she grew up, but she emphatically rejects all attempts to deny that Albania was a genuinely socialist society. As Campfield notes, the soil of what he calls "anti-anti-Communism" can provide fertile ground for a growing enthusiasm for AES societies as a flawed but existing alternative to capitalism. There are young people in Europe and the United States who want to sound like the old Communists. So, debates about the nature of AES societies are not confined to history books, they are not doctrinaire and obscure—achieving clarity on the nature of the AES societies is vital for shaping resistance to capitalism today.

Camfield's book is an indispensable intervention in those debates. He argues that transition toward real communism is both possible and desirable, but it will not be achieved by strategies rooted in confusion about what socialism is and is not. Camfield cuts through both sentimental nostalgia and the cherry-picking of progressive policies associated with AES societies. Analysing the nature of these societies is not served by excusing or denying the widespread repression carried out by Stalin's regime in the 1930s when some 1.5 million were executed or died in prisons and labor camps. Camfield argues that AES societies must be interrogated. Were workers exercising direct democracy? Were capitalist social relations being replaced by socialist organisation? If the answer is no, then these societies were not really socialist, whatever rhetoric they used.

Red Flags gives a clear and compelling account of the democratic and liberatory impulses of the Russian Revolution that were stifled by the dire economic situation

that immediately confronted the workers' state and the civil war. Hundreds of highly democratic soviets (councils) of workers, soldiers, sailors, and peasants were created. Delegates were accountable to their electors and recallable at any time. Having toppled the Tsar, workers also became "determined to overthrow 'autocracy' on the shop floor" (23).

The state that began to take shape under the pressures of this civil war became "a sprawling and ramshackle edifice, the product of no architect's design" (28). The workers' state faced severe objective problems: backward economic development, the aftermath of war, foreign invasion, and counterrevolution. However, Camfield argues, there were also subjective factors at play. The Bolsheviks had long believed that the coming revolution would be a bourgeois revolution. This revolution would destroy feudalism, establish a capitalist democratic republic, and open the road to the unimpeded development of capitalism in Russia and to a future socialist revolution. This outlook changed only at the Bolshevik party conference of April 1917. This meant, Camfield contends, that the Bolsheviks were unprepared for the task of pushing forward to establish socialism.

It could be added that such a lack of preparation is inevitable in a workers' revolution as workers must take power before they can develop their own methods and organizations. A degree of experimentation, trial, and error was both necessary and welcomed by Lenin. And Camfield is absolutely right to emphasize that, "We must not lose sight of the fact that the main reason working-class rule came to an end in 1918 was the catastrophic social conditions" (29).

The Soviet Union was locked into competition with the West under Stalin's doctrine of building "socialism in one country." The industrialization of the USSR

was driven through by Communist Party officials who increasingly acted as a distinct social class. This process culminated in the Great Break of 1928, which stamped out the remaining embers of the revolutionary blaze lit by workers and peasants in 1917. It marked the triumph of counterrevolution in a form never seen before: instead of the overthrow of the Communist Party-State by open opponents of the socialist revolution of 1917, a new ruling class was consolidated that used the language and symbols of that revolution. This was not inevitable. It was a product of the isolation of the Russian Revolution and the failure of other countries to emulate the success of the Bolsheviks (36).

Camfield's account of the dynamics of the Russian Revolution, the counterrevolution of the late 1920s and the establishment of state capitalism is accessible, convincing, and necessary for all other analysis of AES societies. His account of the histories of the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions is equally compelling and necessary. By centering the role of working-class self-activity, Camfield is able to demonstrate that neither in China, nor in Cuba, did self-emancipation drive the revolutionary process forward, and in neither case was the post-revolutionary society shaped by working-class people through their own democratic institutions. Revolutions can inflict severe blows against the dominant imperialist powers, but that does not mean they are socialist revolutions that are beginning a transition to communism. Camfield's analysis arms socialists to resist the widespread idea that it is state

ownership that defines socialism (100).

I found some of the later sections on the alternative tradition to AES societies a little less satisfying. This was not because the arguments were misplaced or unconvincing. On the contrary, the ideas Camfield discusses are fascinating and relevant and deserve more space. I would have liked to read more about the contributions made by Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, William Morris, and Rosa Luxemburg and about the debates associated with the analysis developed by thinkers like C. L. R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Karl Korsch.

That does not in any way detract from the power and importance of Camfield's research and his analysis. Camfield is surely right to emphasize how, "In spite of the mighty currents against which it has been forced to swim, anti-Stalinist communism has survived as a diverse living tradition" (131). His book is an important contribution to that tradition. Socialists must refuse all attempts to associate socialism with the Soviet gulags of the past or the dormitories housing Chinese workers today. Painting these societies red discredits the revolutionary project that is based on democracy, freedom, and abundance. Our aim is to overthrow global capitalism, not find ways to compete with it. As Camfield writes, "Communism is a compass with which to navigate, not a map," and crucial to that navigation is the need for meaningful action, action that will build the fight for reforms as part of the achieving the final goal of socialism (141).

On the Barricades for Social Justice

STEPHEN R. SHALOM

WALDEN BELLO HAS LONG BEEN one of the Global South's most important intellectual and activist figures. His written output has been prodigious, featuring heavily researched works on development economics, war and peace, and social justice. At the same time, he has led countless protests, been a prolific speaker, organized numerous public spectacles, obtained and released internal classified documents, testified before government committees, and debated all manner of opponents on behalf of a multitude of good causes.

In this autobiography (given the unfortunately rather pompous subtitle "memoir of a legendary public intellectual"), Bello describes both his intellectual and his activist contributions, offering some reflections on the relation between the two and the interaction of these with his democratic and humanistic values. In a touching chapter, he relates the story of his wife's unsuccessful battle with cancer. And in a moving final section he grapples with the question—as so many of us of a certain age do—of the legacy of his political engagement.

From his first major research project—on political dynamics in Allende's

Chile—he found that the simplifications of left analysis don't always correspond to reality. That the overthrow of the Popular Unity government was fully attributable to U.S. intervention has long been an article

of faith on the left; Bello found, however, that it was not just CIA machinations, but a reluctance of the left to try to address the disaffection of the middle classes that led to the disaster.

Bello was in the United States when

martial law was declared in his native Philippines, and he became a leader of the anti-Marcos movement. He led two Washington, DC, human rights lobbying organizations, co-authored a major report on U.S. military aid to the dictatorship and an exposé of how the World Bank helped in propping up Marcos, and revealed a significant classified State Department document showing U.S. thinking on the future of the regime.

After the fall of Marcos, Bello worked as executive director of Food First and then founded and led Focus on the Global South, leading anti-globalization organizations. In 2009 he was elected to the House of Representatives of the Philippines as a party list representative for the left-wing Akbayan political party, where he championed women's rights, the protection of exploited overseas workers, and land reform. He resigned from his seat in 2015

Global Battlefields:
Memoir of a Legendary
Public Intellectual from
the Global South

WALDEN BELLO
Clarity Press, 2025

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over the failure of the government—with which his party was in coalition—to adhere to its anti-corruption pledge and take responsibility for a botched police operation. (He notes that this was the only resignation on principle in the history of the Philippine Congress.) He later ran unsuccessfully for vice-president as part of a new left-wing formation. And he has continued working for progressive causes in the Philippines and for social justice on a global scale.

There are two aspects of this memoir that raise questions for me. First is Bello's relationship to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Bello tells us that he was a secret member of the party from 1974 to 1989, but he is by no means a CPP apologist. He had grown increasingly critical of the party, disillusioned with "Marxism's lack of appreciation for individual rights." He documented and harshly condemned a Stalinist purge in the party in the mid-1980s in which several thousand members were killed at the orders of the party leadership. And he sharply criticized the party's decision to stand aside when Marcos was overthrown by a popular uprising in 1986, thus absenting itself from the crucial moments of the struggle it had been part of for decades. If these disagreements were not enough, in 2004 the party put out a list of people it accused of being "counter-revolutionary," including Bello. This was not just sectarian rhetoric—some of those listed had already been assassinated by party operatives. Bello and an ally responded by publicizing the hit list and mobilizing public opposition to CPP thuggery. Hugo Chávez was one of the figures of the international left expressing concern for Bello's safety, making it difficult for the CPP to go ahead with its plans. Bello's subsequent political activities in the Philippines involved working with left parties of a democratic socialist orientation, pursuing electoral change, supporting

agrarian reform and labor rights, but also women's, LGBTQ, and indigenous rights, and environmental justice.

So the gap between Bello and the CPP is massive. Nevertheless, despite these deep differences, one of the four people or groups of people to whom Bello dedicates his book, astonishingly, is Jose Maria Sison, the founder and leader of the CPP. He calls Sison "a towering figure despite our differences." But it is hard to understand how the differences can so easily be set aside. Sison presided over the mid-1980s party purge that Bello decried. And "it is impossible," Bello writes, that Sison "did not have anything to do with my designation as an enemy of the people." How then could the book be dedicated to him?

Bello's memoir reprints the bulk of a lengthy article he published in January 1986 (when he was still a party member) praising Sison's strategic judgment and the CPP's internal democracy (the party is "said to enjoy a vibrant inner party democracy that would be the envy of other Leninist organizations").

On the occasion of Sison's death in 2022, Bello wrote a short obituary, crediting him with playing a key role if not the decisive one in the rebirth of the Philippine Left in the mid-1960s, and calling him "from beginning to end a true revolutionary." Acknowledging that Sison's legacy is contested, Bello also reprints a brief critical response to his obituary by Joseph Scalise, a student of the Philippine left, who commented, "No figure in the past half-century was more instrumental in the betrayal of the Filipino working class and oppressed masses than Joma [Jose Maria] Sison." But Bello doesn't summarize some of the key evidence Scalise provided in his definitive history, *The Drama of Dictatorship: Martial Law and the Communist Parties of the Philippines* (Cornell University Press)—and thereby makes Scalise's criticism seem like

simple name-calling.

In 1971, hand grenades were thrown at a Plaza Miranda rally of the Liberal party—the party opposed to then-president Ferdinand Marcos—killing nine and injuring about a hundred. Marcos claimed that communists were responsible for the bombing and he used that as one of his major rationales for imposing martial law a year later. To those of us in the anti-martial law movement, it was beyond obvious that Marcos had been behind the bombing. Scalice, however, has conclusively shown that in fact it was Sison who ordered the attack in hopes of heightening the contradictions in society. Whatever one thinks of Sison's strategic brilliance, this certainly displayed no concern for democracy (internal or external) or basic morality. Bello cites Scalice's book in his notes, but he never discusses the Plaza Miranda bombing.

One wonders whether Bello's experiences and friendships in the CPP during his politically formative years made it personally difficult for him to offer the needed full-throated critique of the party.

The second issue that raises questions for me in Bello's memoir is his discussion of China. He is certainly not reluctant to criticize China: he describes its system as "state-directed capitalism," faults its environmental policies, notes its oppression of the Uighur minority, and calls for the people of Hong Kong to have a say in how they are governed (but why not the rest of China's population?). And he is extremely opposed to China's policy of claiming as its own all of the South China Sea and its islands, violating the rights of several countries, including the Philippines. Indeed, in 2011 when he was in Congress, Bello introduced a resolution renaming the South China Sea as the West or Western Philippine Sea and delivered a morale-boosting speech to Philippine troops at a flag-raising ceremony on one of the islands. He sup-

ported the Philippine decision to file a case against China's claims with the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague. China refused to recognize the legitimacy of the legal proceedings, but Bello considers that the Philippines won a moral victory in 2016 when the Court ruled that China's claims were invalid.

At the same time, Bello has remained a committed opponent of U.S. military bases and intervention in the Philippines and in the Western Pacific more generally. He quite rightly calls for the Philippines to pursue a foreign policy independent of the superpowers and aiming toward a demilitarization and denuclearization of the entire South China Sea.

But yet he insists that China's behavior is "understandable as strategic defensive moves" while that of the United States is aggressive. Such a claim seems problematic on several levels. First, we know that many aggressors have justified their foreign conquests by asserting the need for extended defense (think of the USSR in Eastern Europe or Israel in the Middle East). Second, Chinese military force structure has been increasingly designed for offensive, not defensive purposes, sea control instead of sea denial, building aircraft carriers instead of submarines. Studies of Chinese acquisition, doctrine, force posture, and training confirm that Beijing is not simply acting defensively. (See Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* [Oxford U.P., 2021].) And, third, U.S. actions, like sailing the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait, are provocative, but hardly less so than China's live missile launches around Taiwan, military incursions into the island's air defense identification zone, and frequent large-scale war games.

China, not the United States, seeks to expand its territory in the Pacific. Bello is quite right, of course, that internationally Taiwan is recognized as part of China, but

for socialists the self-determination rights of the people of Taiwan trump any historic claims. So, by all means, we should oppose aggressive U.S. actions and support peaceful resolution of conflicts. But it is hard to see why Beijing's aggressive actions should be deemed "defensive in intent."

Despite these disagreements, Bello's contributions to movements for social justice in the Philippines and globally have been extensive, and this memoir provides a valuable summary of his distinguished career.

Time to Grieve, Time to Act

SEAN K. ISAACS

CAPITAL IS AN ABSTRACT, IMPERSONAL form of power. It is the subsumption of living, concrete labor to dead labor, to the abstraction of capitalist labor time. Under capitalism, our creative activity is directed toward the production of value rather than the development of a flourishing human community. Quantitative accumulation takes priority over qualitative acts and our labor becomes a means to make profits for our bosses.

But the violence that capitalism enacts on the world is not abstract, it isn't impersonal. It is felt in the most personal and horrifying ways: in the grief of the mothers who have lost children to the ongoing genocide in Palestine, of the families and friends of those murdered by the police, of the workers who have lost jobs to factory closures. So, while it is necessary to

theorize and understand the abstract logic of capital, it is just as necessary to confront the all-too-real ways we experience the devastation it brings.

In *From the Ashes*, Sarah Jaffe centers these experiences as a way of countering "the violence of abstraction" and of making space for grief and mourning in a world that does not give us the time to feel. We don't have time to mourn because we have to keep working

From the Ashes: Grief
and Revolution in a
World on Fire

SARAH JAFFE
Hachette Book Group, 2024

to survive and we aren't given the space to grieve because we are often told that personal loss and mourning are secondary to political struggle. In one of the reflections on the death of her father that break up the book's chapters, Jaffe describes grief as a "fog," a temporal and spatial disconnection from the world. *From the Ashes* highlights the relationship between the structural logic of capital and the subjective experience of grief. And while grief mourns the past, Jaffe highlights its relationship to the future, pointing to the possibility of using grief

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as the starting point for political struggle. Grief, for Jaffe, is something that exceeds the logic of capital, of productivity, and of work. While this, at times, makes the relationship between grief and labor—particularly social reproductive labor—somewhat unclear, *From the Ashes* shows the importance of making space for grief as a way of healing from, and fighting against, the forms of violence that we experience under capitalism.

Jaffe consistently highlights the ways in which the structural, abstract logic of capital and the subjective experiences of grief and mourning are related. Drawing on Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, Jaffe shows how emotional labor—grief, love, and care—are commodified and appear to be results of capitalist exchange. This is exemplified in a service called “Dove Actually,” where one is able to pay to have a dove released “in memory of a loved one.” This alienates the act of mourning and the feeling of grief from the one experiencing loss; these feelings are only valid if they are mediated by the market, if they are experienced through things. Yet, at the same time, this commodity is dependent on real human emotions. Just as Marx shows that the production of value under capitalism relies on concrete human labor, Jaffe shows how capital increasingly profits from grief and care through the financialization of life insurance and other sites of social reproduction. This contradiction between human life and capital is at the heart of capitalism: “it needs us but it kills us” (18).

It is in this contradiction between life and capital that Jaffe identifies the possibilities for revolutionary transformation that might arise from grief. Drawing on the “specter of communism” from the *Communist Manifesto*, *From the Ashes* uses the term “haunting” to describe the persistence of humanity despite capital's desire to subsume everything to the law of value.

While we are haunted in our grief by the violence of capital, capital is haunted by its need for human activity. These “cracks in the structure are where the ghosts hide, and they can help us figure out how to bring the thing down” (17).

These fissures represent the persistence of multiple and differential temporalities, potential sites of rupture with the linear time of capitalist progress. This “sudden, abrupt, even violent break from the status quo” (5) is opposed to the time of capitalist production and contains the possibility for revolution. Revolution, like grief, is a sharp and violent break with the norm. For Jaffe, grief, love, and rage are all excessive of the productivist, work-oriented logic of capital, and it is for this reason that she links them with revolutionary rupture.

But grief also requires healing, and this requires a slower form of time. *From the Ashes* contrasts both the sharp, violent time of revolution and the abstract, clock-oriented time of capital with the patient, deliberate time of grief and care. Hannah Proctor's recent book *Burnout* similarly emphasizes the need for “patient urgency” in our political organizing. While the need for change is undeniably pressing, Proctor insists that healing from the trauma of capitalist violence and past political defeats takes time, and a single-minded focus on revolutionary change ignores the need for care work within left-wing organizations. *From the Ashes* likewise affirms the need for collective care and healing by reclaiming time from capitalist work and directing it toward human life. Like Proctor, Jaffe shows the importance of social reproductive labor to political struggle and the relationship between collective forms of healing and revolutionary change. But unlike *Burnout*, *From the Ashes* explicitly connects grief to revolutionary politics by emphasizing the slow and quick nature of grief time.

This relationship between grief and

struggle is developed in *From the Ashes* through an examination of “deindustrialization.” This process, which has closed factories in the global North and replaced workers with machines, is described as a type of haunting, both because it is part of capital’s effort to replace living labor with dead labor and because, despite these efforts, capital still depends on workers to produce value. Thus, deindustrialization has not eliminated the contradiction between capital and workers, but it has transformed the working class, creating new possibilities and challenges for working-class organizations.

From the Ashes examines these developments through the stories of workers who have seen their factories close and their jobs disappear. Jaffe documents the 2022 Miners’ Gala in Durham, England, a “festival of labor” in which community members celebrate their working-class culture and mourn the loss of their jobs. While an element of nostalgia can be found here, the Miners’ Gala is primarily an example of how *current* working-class movements are materially built on the struggles of the past. It is an example of the commitment to building a new future without forgetting past defeats. As Walter Benjamin—a central figure for Jaffe—saw it, revolution is a redemption of the past, a realization of past struggles through the creation of a different future. This “critical nostalgia” is exemplified by events like the Miners’ Gala and in the stories of the British mineworkers who Jaffe interviews. These workers mourn the loss of community that was built around these jobs, not the actual job itself. This form of nostalgia, which Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre identify in *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity* as part of the revolutionary current of Romanticism, does not desire a wholesale return to the past. Rather, it is an attempt to selectively recover elements of the past and use them to build

a different future. These “relationships that were built on the backs of necessity and struggle” (166) can be the building blocks for organizing in the present.

But, as Jaffe rightly points out, grief is not only revolutionary, and nostalgic appeals to the past can also take reactionary forms, the desire for a return to an idealized version of the past, ignoring the uneven power relations that allowed the so-called golden age of industry to exist in the first place. Jaffe highlights the heteronormative and patriarchal relations that were central to the “traditional” nuclear family while also pointing out that this version of the family is very much a modern creation, tied to the rise of capitalism. Likewise, nostalgic appeals to an idealized period of workers’ struggle are often constructed around the white masculine worker, ignoring relations of colonialism and white supremacy that these false views of the working class are rooted in. This reactionary form of nostalgia reifies the past and takes the form of resentment for all those who do not fit this idealized vision. Alberto Toscano has made similar points in the book *Late Fascism*, in which he shows that fascism appeals to feelings of discontent that exist within those who have been negatively impacted by capitalist development. This has been expressed as the desire for what Toscano calls a “racial-national rebirth,” the repetition of a past that was not fully realized, a past built on colonization, racism, and the oppression of women.

Opposed to this purely nostalgic and reactionary view, Jaffe seeks to “re-enchant” the past by making the time to heal from grief and recommitting ourselves to revolutionary struggle. This, for Jaffe, requires going beyond a politics of labor because grief is at least partially non-agential—it is beyond our direct, conscious control. But rather than ignoring labor, Jaffe’s interviews with workers highlight the

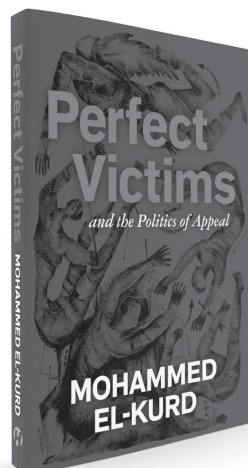
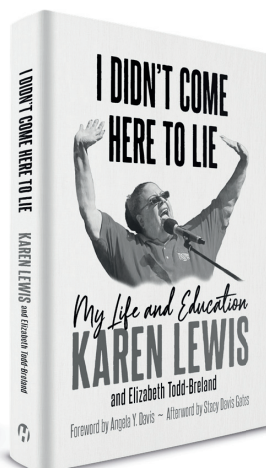
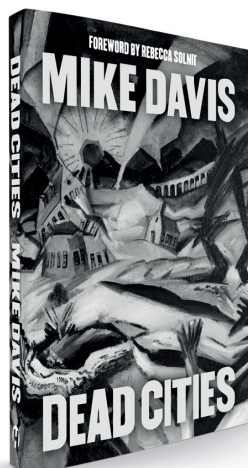
ongoing centrality of the working class to capital's reproduction, even as capitalism increasingly tries to make these workers expendable and replaceable through the flattening and homogenization of labor. This tension between the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of workers has been highlighted by Marxist social reproduction theory (SRT). But while Jaffe often points to the limits of labor and the need for a politics beyond work, SRT proposes a revolution *through* labor, by reclaiming the time in which we work and directing it toward individual and collective fulfillment, rather than the production of value and profit. Jaffe similarly insists on the need to reclaim the time in which we live our lives when she states that "[g]rief doesn't happen on the clock of capitalism" (211). Capital seeks to direct all labor—including the labor of care—toward its own reproduction. But the reproduction of capital requires the reproduction of human beings; capitalism needs workers to create value, and the less time we spend producing for capital, the more time we have for ourselves. As Jaffe puts it, "[i]n the seizing back time from capital, there is time for everything else that has been denied us" (264).

But what would we do with this time? Jaffe asks workers what they would like to do with their time and is given answers such as "being a fishing guide, running a small business, winning the lottery and buying

the plant themselves" (167) and concludes that these desires are best expressed as demands for "free time, the right to be human, to enjoy life off the job" (168). But as Marx shows in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, what makes us human is precisely our ability to consciously and creatively act on the world—in other words, our ability to labor. While reclaiming free time would certainly be opposed to time spent working for our bosses, it is not opposed to labor as such. A struggle over free time represents an attempt to regain control over our labor, our ability to create and produce for ourselves and our communities, to fulfill our social needs at the same time as we fulfill our essentially human capacity to create. As Marx states in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, labor would become "not only a means of life but life's prime desire and necessity."

By explicitly developing the relationship between grief and revolutionary politics, *From the Ashes* highlights the need to include grief, love, and rage in our analysis of capitalism. While these feelings cannot be quantified or calculated, they can, and do, act as the basis for revolutionary struggle seeking to reclaim the time in which we spend our lives. And while this struggle is over the present, it is also an effort to redeem past movements, to realize their revolutionary aims through the creation of a different future.

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CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE



Mahmoud Khalil *A pro-Palestinian protest leader at Columbia University, and a graduate student at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs, Khalil completed his master's degree in December. He was arrested in March without a warrant and not accused of any crime, the first person to be arrested under Trump's crackdown on protestors against the war in Gaza. Khalil testified that deportation would put him in mortal danger. His wife, Dr. Noor Abdalla, is a US citizen. Khalil was denied a visit with his newborn son for over a month.*

"I am a Palestinian political prisoner in the US. I am being targeted for my activism."

My arrest was a direct consequence of exercising my right to free speech as I advocated for a free Palestine and an end to the genocide in Gaza.

Parents in Gaza are once again cradling too-small shrouds and families are forced to weigh starvation and displacement against bombs. It is our moral imperative to persist in the struggle for their complete freedom.

The Trump administration is targeting me as part of a broader strategy to suppress dissent. Visa holders, green card carriers, and citizens alike will all be targeted for their political beliefs... students, advocates, and elected officials must unite to defend the right to protest for Palestine. At stake are not just our voices, but the fundamental civil liberties of all."

*—from a letter by Mahmoud Khalil
to family and friends, March 2025*