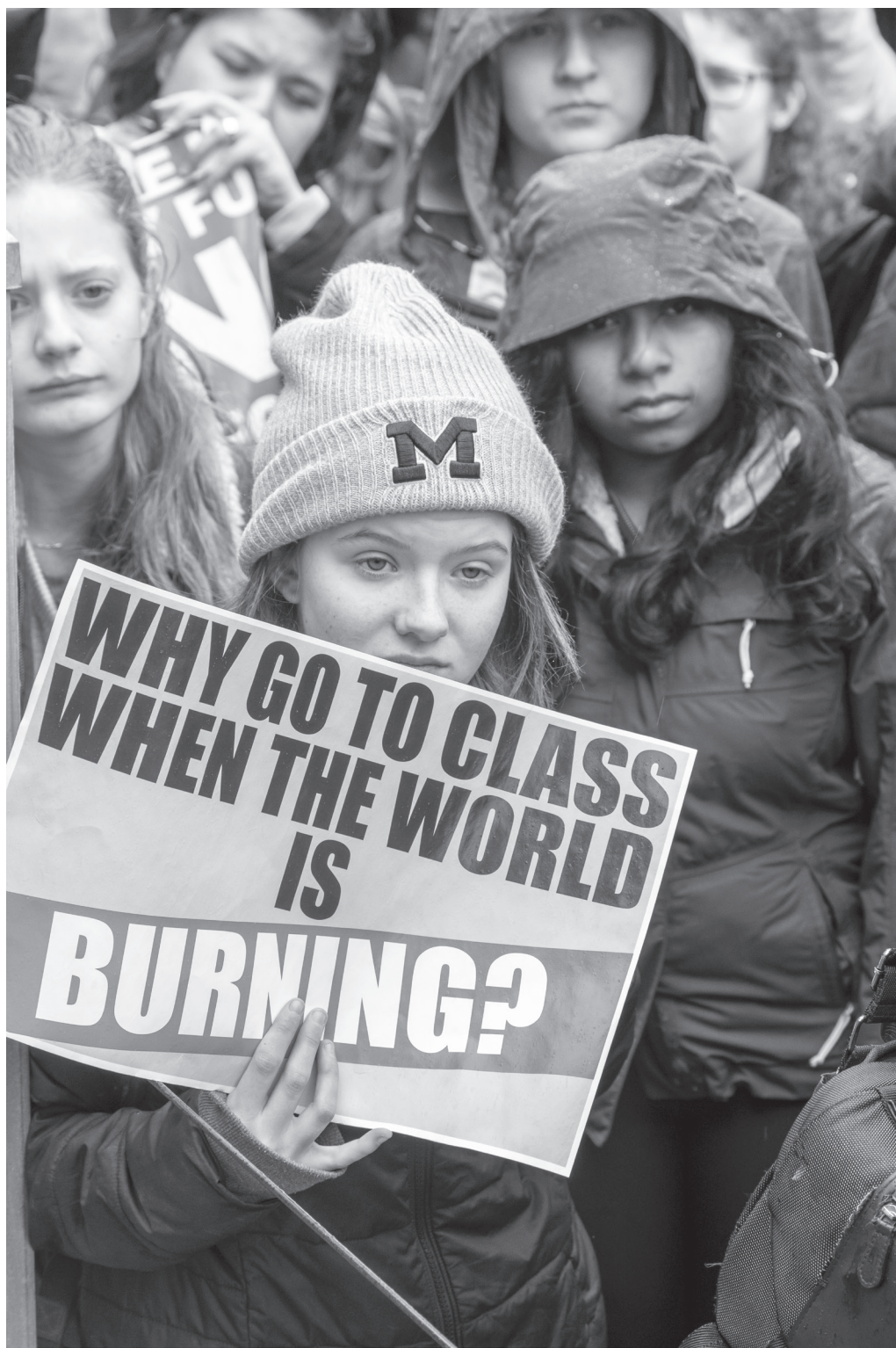


AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL



**What's
Happening in
the Economy?**

♦ ROBERT BRENNER

**Ecosocialism
& the Making
of the Green
New Deal**

♦ DIANNE FEELEY

**Germany's
Revolution:
Hope &
Tragedy**

♦ ROSA LUXEMBURG

♦ JASON SCHULMAN

♦ WILLIAM SMALDONE



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A Letter from the Editors: **ATC Turns 200 (issues)**

THIS MARKS THE 200th issue since the announcement in January, 1986 that with our new series, “*Against the Current* inaugurates a new magazine of socialist theory and strategy,” an occasion to look back at where matters stood then, and how they look now. One contrast stands out sharply: In the middle 1980s, the socialist left at least in the United States was going through one of its driest and most difficult times. To be sure there were dynamic movements, especially in solidarity with the Central American revolutions and the long, bitter struggle against the obscenity of South African apartheid, but the organizations of the 20th century U.S. socialist left were in severe decline.

Today, a very substantial (at least by U.S. standards!) recomposition of socialist activism and organization is underway, with enormous potential as well as many pitfalls lying ahead. The comparison is all the more interesting, given that both then and now mark reactionary and repressive moments in bourgeois politics.

Back then, the Reagan administration was knee-deep in bloody genocidal counterinsurgency wars in Central America, mired in scandal over secret arms sales to its official enemy Iran to finance illegal aid to counterrevolutionary Nicaraguan militias. Among the most vicious criminal operatives in that venture, Elliott Abrams, has now resurfaced in Washington’s drive to instigate a coup or civil war in Venezuela.

Also back then was an incipient crisis over the commander-in-chief’s diminishing cognitive capacities. (“What did the President know, and when did he forget it?” as the running gag of the day put it.) Today, thanks to the awesome technology of social media and particularly twitterworld, the mental imbalance of the occupant in the Oval Office is on open daily display, a staple of the incessant cable news cycle and fodder for long-distance diagnoses by learned as well as amateur specialists in the fields of narcissism, sociopathy and related disorders.

More important is the consequence of decades-long imperialist ravages in Central America, bringing tens of thousands of refugees and desperate asylum seekers today to the U.S.-Mexico border, where they’re subjected to world-class atrocities by U.S. border patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

In the 1980s, the United States covertly aided both Saddam Hussein in Iraq’s war against Iran, and Osama bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda in the Afghanistan anti-Soviet proxy war. Several imperial twists and turns later, the 2003 U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq and now a potential war with Iran, as well as Trump’s open alignment with the brutal regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the extreme rightwing Israeli government, have produced today’s Middle East catastrophe.

Assaulting Labor

In the mid-1980s, following Reagan’s 1981 crushing of an inadequately prepared air traffic controllers’ strike and their union, U.S. labor was in severe retreat; what we now call “neoliberalism” was slashing at living standards and the social safety net. That attack has continued without interruption, although in different-looking forms, under the administrations of both capitalist parties, and in even more extreme measures enacted by reactionary gerrymandered state legislatures.

The 1980s witnessed an economic restructuring at labor’s expense, with “lean production” and just-in-time management systems, high-stress work environments, higher productivity and stagnant real wages, all chronicled — along with worker resistance — in the pages of *Labor Notes*

and the books it’s published. In the 1990s and since has come the “two-tier” plague pioneered in the auto industry, slashing established wage norms by as much as half.

This economic and political regime known as “neoliberalism” has served to enrich the top income levels and especially corporate elites, while producing little but austerity and stress for most and immiseration for the working poor and people at the bottom of the racialized and gendered capitalist heap.

The decline of organized labor has also been largely continuous, with defeats vastly outnumbering victories. Yet just when things looked bleakest for working-class America, a spreading strike wave by teachers has breathed new life into what looked like a dying labor movement. It’s a revolt triggered by the vicious attacks on public education — we’ve covered it in *ATC*’s recent issues as well as the current one — and by extension, the corporate drive to cripple practically the entire public sector. (The interview with Robert Brenner in these pages discusses the factors behind it.)

The teachers’ strike wave has been for higher wages, certainly, but even more about dignity and decent working conditions, supporting students and building alliances with communities. Here again, the processes that capital unleashed have led to today’s profound social crisis — but also to a popular reaction, and none too soon!

It was a distorted quasi-populist revolt against the misery and insecurity that corporate neoliberalism has imposed on working people, and on whole regions of the country, that produced the semi-accidental election of Donald Trump. Under two years of hard-right Republican control of Congress — something that didn’t exist in the Reagan era — the most extreme reactionary anti-worker as well as anti-women, anti-immigrant, anti-environment and racist politics have flourished.

That’s the less reported story underneath the sleaze and scandal and amazing corruption of Trump’s family, cronies and Cabinet and the filth that spreads to everything he touches. But the 2016 election also saw the campaign of Bernie Sanders, which galvanized a huge layer of young people as well as working-class voters, despite the fact that the Democratic Party establishment had no intention of letting him upset the Hillary Clinton coronation the way Trump “hijacked” the Republican machinery.

We know how that worked out in 2016 — but Sanders’ campaign played a large role in the U.S. socialist revival, including the explosive growth and sharply leftward evolution of the Democratic Socialists of America. As

continued on the inside back cover

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A Manifesto for Society and the Planet: Making the Green New Deal Real By Dianne Feeley

THE GREEN NEW Deal resolution introduced into Congress by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey is a manifesto that has changed the terms of the debate over the country's future. Cutting through the Trump administration's denials about who is responsible for the extreme weather we already face, it unites the issues of climate change with that of eroding workers' rights, racism and growing inequality. (At the end of March, the Senate voted against the GND in what has been called a ceremonial stunt.)

The resolution affirms the overwhelming scientific consensus that these are human caused. Further, since the United States is responsible for a disproportionate amount of greenhouse gas emissions, it demands that this society must take the lead in "reducing emissions through economic transformation."

Noting that climate crisis is just one of many crises we face, it points to declining living standards, wage stagnation, a large racial divide and gender gap. It states that we now have the greatest income inequality since a century ago. It then proposes a 10-year national mobilization to tackle these issues comprehensively. But in offering a way forward, the details are nonetheless vague.

Corporate politicians ranging from centrist Democrats to the Republican establishment have commented that the proposal is too broad, too expensive, too utopian. Trump labelled it socialist and therefore "un-American."

A video posted by Sunrise, the group pushing for passage of the Green New Deal resolution, shows an exchange between Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and a group of 14-17 year olds.

When told that scientists have given us a decade to drastically cut carbon emissions, she replied "Well, it's not going to get turned around in ten years."

Feinstein then lectured them about the art of the possible. They responded by pointing out they would be living with the consequences of a devastated planet. The video of their encounter was viewed 1.4 mil-

Dianne Feeley is active in Autoworker Caravan, a caucus in the UAW that advocates all closed and closing plants be converted to manufacturing for mass transportation systems.



The March 15th student strike, inspired by Greta Thunberg, demanded an end to a fossil fuel economy. Jim West/www.jimwestphoto.com

lion times within its first few hours online. Most viewers saw a seasoned politician challenged by young people who know only a bold plan has a chance of averting disaster.

It's clear that a broad political debate has opened. In fact, it is clear that politicians running for office in 2019 and 2020 will be forced to discuss what must be done to drastically reduce fossil fuels and at the same time reduce inequality.

This is a sea change from the 2016 election when Bernie Sanders raised climate change as the most important issue facing the country, the only "major party" candidate to do so.

A People's GND

Since the introduction of the GND resolution, other manifestos and statements have emerged. The recently revived activist scientists' network, Science for the People, calls for a "People's Green New Deal" campaign, issuing a short statement of support but warning that there will be pressure to water down the heart of the resolution. It proposes five points in order to maintain and strengthen such a mobilization:

- "We promote solutions and struggles that educate, organize, mobilize and directly empower working class people, Indigenous Peoples, historically oppressed communities, and migrants displaced by climate disaster, in their everyday lives.

- "We aim to collaborate with all of those who have developed the core ideas of the Green New Deal over the years and decades, particularly to ensure we understand the role of militarism in the climate crisis, and to fight for globally just solutions.

- "We stand with frontline communities demanding equitable solutions to the climate crisis, so that no member of our society will be forgotten or unjustly bear the costs of climate change.

- "We stand with trade unions demanding a Just Transition and the creation of millions of green jobs, so that all people may be able to support their families with dignity.

- "We call for a transformation of the economy which redistributes resources from those who led us into this crisis in the first place." (See <https://scienceforthepeople.org/peoples-green-new-deal/>)

This statement introduces into the discussion several important issues. First, it emphasizes that change will come through working people and their communities rather than from on high. In fact, it is the corporate elite and their buddies in Congress who have caused this crisis. It is highly unlikely, in the words of the resolution, that businesses will be "working on the Green New Deal Mobilization."

Second, there is necessary humility about where the core ideas come from — they were not invented by politicians, but come from an environmental justice movement that drew the connections among environmental degradation, the workers who suffer severe health conditions as a result of their unsafe jobs and the communities in which these mines, factories and agricultural industries exist. (See <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>)

Third, the statement calls for deepening the GND resolution's commitment to frontline communities and workers by calling for a serious discussion about the role of the military. It underscores the resolution's introduction of the idea that there must be a "just transition" for workers and

their communities. The economic transition cannot demand sacrifice from workers and communities.

The articulation of these principles broaden the GND resolution and point a way forward by emphasizing the need to deepen the political discussion. It takes us beyond the “art of the possible” to the values of solidarity, equality, justice and democracy. Although the “People’s Green New Deal” doesn’t raise specific demands around immigration or U.S. responsibility to the Global South, the ideas it raises challenge us to do so.

Likewise, it doesn’t specifically call for a drastic reduction or abolishing of the military budget and the militarization of neighborhoods and schools, but calls for a discussion. Many Americans believe the military is necessary, although they are not aware that it consumes the lion’s share of the discretionary federal budget, supports authoritarian rule around the globe and prevents the possibility of social programs.

This can’t afford to be a leisurely discussion because without dismantling the 700 U.S. bases around the world, along with junking nuclear weapons and the military machine, there is no possibility for a transformation. Just eliminating U.S. military production would reduce CO₂ by 70-80 million tons a year.

Not only does the military budget hamper our ability to take on a Green New Deal campaign, but military production is where we can begin to whack carbon emissions.

The People’s Green New Deal Campaign notes the danger of watering down the resolution. Rather than pledging to “keep the coal in the hole and the oil in the soil,” the resolution fails to define specific energy sources. It refers merely to “clean, renewable and zero-emission” energy and seemingly suggests that efficiency by itself will bring us close to our goal. Further, the resolution qualifies the goal by stating “as much as is technologically feasible” four separate times.

Making It Real

In contrast, the Green Party’s plan, first developed nearly a decade ago, calls for 100% renewable energy by 2030, with renewables defined as wind, solar, tidal and geothermal, not gas, biomass or nuclear power. Given the United States’ responsibility as a leading industrialized society, eliminating greenhouse gas emission has to be a serious priority. It also means giving preference to the public sector.

Many cities and towns own their own water and lighting systems; these are the basis for moving to 100% renewable energy. In order to accomplish this task, profit-making utilities will have to be quickly phased

out. Again, the Green Party plan is specific: a Renewable Energy Administration would treat energy not as a commodity to be purchased but as a public good. (See https://www.gp.org/green_new_deal)

Since the Congressional GND resolution is simply a statement, not a bill, watering down can occur by proposing technical fixes, whether through carbon fees or employing carbon-capture technology to solve the problem. But there is no quick fix to greenhouse gases and the broader issue of pollution.

As the Climate Justice Alliance points out, “to truly address the interlinked crises of a faltering democracy, growing wealth disparity and community devastation caused by climate change and industrial pollution, we must reduce emissions at their source.

“Allowing for neoliberal constructs such as Net Zero emissions, which equate carbon emission offsets and technology investments with real emissions reductions at source, would only exacerbate existing pollution burdens on frontline communities.

“Such loopholes for carbon markets and unproven techno-fixes only serve to line the coffers of the polluting corporations, while increasing (not reducing) harm to our communities. Our communities can no longer be used as sacrifice zones.” (See <https://climatejusticealliance.org/gnd/>)

This means saying “No” to the construction of new fossil fuel systems — pipelines, coal ports, etc. It means moving quickly to build public mass transit and ending production of gas guzzlers. It means prioritizing community and worker participation in redesigning and repurposing our manufacturing capacity.

Such a drastic reorganization of the economy requires a full-throttled campaign. It may involve not only retraining workers to new jobs, but the reduction of the work week to 30 hours for 40 hours pay.

AFL-CIO Labor Councils in Alameda, San Diego and Imperial Counties in California have called for support to the GND along with a few local unions. However, most unions are terrified that that in the transition, workers and their families will get the short end of the straw.

That’s how every other restructuring in U.S. history has occurred. There must be a commitment to compensate for job losses and to extensive retraining. “Just transition” must be a guarantee.

Another issue that is rarely discussed in U.S.-based statements is the reality that we must reject the mantra of “growth.” We do not need more things every year!

Hopefully, through this mobilization of our energy we discover happiness is in having control over our lives. This means not only democratic planning and a guarantee against displacement, but having quality pub-

lic services — housing, health, transportation and education for starters — available to all.

The Democratic Socialists of America’s ecosocialist statement of guiding principles notes, “The future is a public good, not a private luxury.” (See <https://ecosocialists.dsausa.org/2019/02/28/gnd-principles/>)

Some of these statements and manifestos raise the issue of a radical redistribution of the economy, but while this is certainly true, in fact we must go even further. *Capitalism is built on profit, exploitation and growth for its own sake.* To change this dynamic, it will be necessary to develop an economy based on new, fundamental ecosocialist principles.

“The capitalist destruction of the environment and the ecosocialist alternative,” a Fourth International statement which Solidarity members participated in writing, was adopted in April 2018. It is a wide-ranging summary of the issues we face: <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5452>. It ends by noting:

“These urgent ecological demands can favor a process of radicalization under the condition that we refuse to limit their objectives by obeying the capitalist market or accepting the ‘competitiveness’ argument.

“Each small victory, each partial advance can immediately bring us to a higher and more radical demand. These struggles on concrete problems are important, not only because partial victories in themselves are welcome, but also because they contribute to the growth of an ecological and socialist consciousness, and promote autonomy and self-organization from below.

This autonomy and this self-organization are the necessary and decisive preconditions for a radical transformation of the world. This means a revolutionary transformation is only possible through the self-emancipation of the oppressed and the exploited: workers and peasants, women, indigenous communities, and all stigmatized because of their race, religion or nationality.

“The leading elites of the system, retrenched behind their barricades, are incredibly powerful while the forces of radical opposition are small. Their development into a mass movement of unprecedented size, is the only hope to stop the catastrophic course of capitalist growth.

This will allow us to invent a desirable form of life, more rich in human qualities, a new society based on the values of human dignity, solidarity, freedom and respect for Mother Nature.” ■

OUR EDITORIAL BOARD member and columnist Malik Miah’s regular “Race and Class” column does not appear in this issue as he recovers from an illness. We look forward to his rapid return!

Balance Sheet, Lessons, and What Next? View of the Oakland Teachers' Strike

By Jack Gerson

ON FRIDAY MARCH 1, a powerful seven-day strike by the Oakland teachers' union (OEA) came to a sudden halt when the union's bargaining team agreed to a tentative contract settlement falling far short of the expectations of many Oakland teachers, their student and community supporters.

At cluster meetings the next morning, disappointed teachers made bitter accusations. Heated debate carried into the afternoon, when a divided Representative Council (delegate assembly) voted narrowly (53 to 50) to recommend ratification. On Sunday, OEA members ratified the contract, but with an unusually big "no" vote: 1141 to 832 (58% yes, 42% no).

Why this division on an agreement hailed by the union leadership as "historic" and "a total victory"?

Many teachers (and supporters) were stunned by the way the strike ended. They felt that it was shut down from the top down, with zero notice. The leadership's constant message had been, "We're winning." Why was the strike shut down? And for such a meager settlement?

OEA had demanded no school closures. Earlier this year, OUSD announced plans to close 15 schools and consolidate nine others. The OEA leadership said "no closures" was a critical demand. But in the tentative agreement, they settled for a five-month "pause" in closures. That's not worth much: the pause will end at the beginning of August, in time for OUSD to close schools before next school year starts.

Many teachers spoke out against the "pause." It will be much harder to fight those school closures in the summer, with teachers and students on vacation, than it's been during the strike. And if the schools are closed, we can expect the available school properties to be disposed by some moving to charter schools, some to real estate speculators who will drive housing costs still higher — resulting in more teachers leaving Oakland, more homelessness.

School nurses said that their overwhelming need was for OUSD to lower their workload and hire more nurses. But the

Jack Gerson is a retired Oakland teacher, and former OEA executive board and bargaining team member.



Marching in downtown Oakland against corporate criminals and school privatization. Oakland Education Association

tentative agreement provided no change in nurses' workload — just cash bonuses, for which the nurses had repeatedly told the union's bargaining team they didn't want to settle. Several nurses told the Saturday meetings that "We were thrown under the bus."

OEA had demanded a reduction of maximum counselor workload to 250 students, from the current 600. But they agreed to 550 next year and 500 the following year. Every little bit helps, but this will only help a little bit.

OEA had demanded a reduction of class size maximums, by four per class in high needs schools (about half of Oakland schools) and by two elsewhere. But in the tentative agreement, they settle for reductions of two in high needs schools and one elsewhere, phased in over three years — better than nothing, but far less than what's needed, as many teachers said.

OEA had demanded a 12% pay increase over three years, starting retroactively on July 1, 2017, to bring the lowest-paid teachers in

Alameda County a bit closer to the county median.

The agreement covers four years, but the final increase won't take effect until the school year following the contract's expiration, so the **total increase is 11%, spread over five years.** And because of the timing of each raise, **the total income (including a one-time 3% bonus) during the contract's four years is equivalent to a 1.5% pay increase per year.**

The Bay Area's cost of living rises about 3.5% annually. So, the real wages of Oakland teachers will fall over the life of this contract. Young teachers will be still less able to make ends meet, and the exodus of teachers out of Oakland will continue (70% leave within five years).

OEA had made solidarity with other school worker unions a main theme. Indeed, on March 1 OEA called for a picket with community members and SEIU Local 1021 (representing OUSD classified workers) to block the school board from meeting and adopting a budget which would cut over 140 jobs, mainly of SEIU members. But at about 2 pm, OEA President Keith Brown told the pickets "We have a TA! We Won!" and urged them to disperse. The optics of this are very bad and were not lost on SEIU members. One wrote on Facebook:

"As a SEIU member who has been picketing in the rain or shine for the past seven strike days, I feel betrayed. I feel used... I thought our collective goal Friday was to shut down the Board Meeting."

Fortunately, several hundred OEA members ignored the leadership's request and stayed to picket with SEIU and community until after 6pm, when the school board meeting was cancelled. It's critical to not let the school board play divide and conquer, pretending that they have to cut SEIU work-

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Demonstrating before the actual strike day.

What We Won, and Looking Ahead Evaluating the Oakland Strike

By Tim Marshall

I WANT TO talk to you about the political lessons of the seven-day strike that we just came out of — and first to thank everyone who contributed in myriad ways on the picket lines and in the marches — every aspect of what I consider to be a victorious strike, and let me explain why, even though some members voted against our contract agreement, and I respect that.

We might discuss that here, as there are probably teachers here who voted either way. Forty-two percent of our members voted against, and 58% in favor of the tentative agreement.

I call it unequivocally a victory, because I've been in OEA long enough to know what a defeat is. Defeat is when you get imposed upon, when your leadership fails to organize, to mobilize, to do the things you know are right for your community and your students and your own members. *That's* a defeat.

The question that will probably be debated here is whether it's enough of a victory. We didn't get everything we hoped for and we didn't win the schools our stu-

Tim Marshall is a 22-year teacher and activist in the Oakland Education Association (OEA). This account is an edited transcript of his presentation to the local Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) branch.

dents deserve, but I believe we are on good footing for the next round — and this is a long battle that we are going to continue organizing around. That's political lesson number one.

This wouldn't have happened without new rank and file leadership in the Oakland Education Association that came forward last year. Last May, our union election brought in Keith Brown, Ismael Armendariz and Chaz Garcia, and those three leaders transformed the union by opening it up to a kind of rank and file participation we hadn't seen in many years. That in itself is one of the great victories of this strike.

We've transformed OEA from a more passive, bread-and-butter unionism with no real organizing approach, to a fighting union. Even if the strike had lost we would have won something because we organized and mobilized those members — and because we punched a bully in the nose [applause]. Sometimes, even if you think you're going to get your ass kicked, you have to punch back.

We ran a principled and democratic organizing campaign. We had inherited a giant mess. We had inherited a passive membership. Our bargaining demands were very limited, and to be frank, the charter school horse has been out of the barn in Oakland

for a very long time. Thirty percent of our students go to the charter schools, so we had been asleep at the wheel watching charters decimate our local public school system.

We had a lot of work to do, so put that into perspective when you analyze the gains of the teachers' strike. We had been offered a one percent raise as recently as last May, with increased hours — if you can do sixth grade math as I do, that's actually a loss. We now have an 11% raise, and significant additional support for our students, including some class size reductions — not everything we hoped for or deserve, but definitely a win.

Reconnecting with Members

We took responsibility, including myself, along with the new leadership, for developing an organizing model, carefully following the example of the Los Angeles teachers and other successful strikes around the country — doing their research — bringing OEA in six months up to speed in what other unions like UTLA had done over four years. We worked hard, we worked fast, we built solidarity.

We rebuilt something that was vital to maintaining our strike, the "cluster system."

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ers and student support programs to pay for the OEA contract.

The attempt to disperse the pickets on Friday played into the school board's hands. That needs to be corrected. It's important that OEA leadership makes clear that it unambiguously stands with all OUSD workers and stands fully in solidarity and support with them.

Those cuts need not happen: much of the money is already there, and more can be found by cutting down on OUSD's outrageous shoveling of revenue to private contractors and to redundant and overpaid top administrators.

What Went Right, and Didn't

On balance: The new OEA leadership, elected last spring, laid a solid foundation for the strike by reorganizing the union at the site level, strengthening its site connections and reaching younger teachers and teachers of color more effectively than has been done for decades. This groundwork enabled Keith Brown and his team to lead a spirited strike supported and carried out by over 90% of OEA members.

In contrast, OEA's punishing 27-day strike in 1996 was beset by divisions within the union and within the community, as some charged that it deprived Black students of essential schooling. None of that this time — the union was unified throughout the strike, and had substantial support from students, parents and community.

It's not helpful to characterize the contract as "a sellout," nor to say that the bargaining team or the officers are "sellouts." I believe them when they say that they're convinced that this was the best deal that could be had at this time. I believe them, but I don't agree with them.

Why not?

First, the leadership was influenced by their state parent, the California Teacher Association (CTA). CTA is overly legalistic and cautious, and it is closely tied to the state Democratic Party. For years, CTA had cautioned against "strike-happy" militants.

Over the past several months, CTA has adapted to the heightened energy and expectations of teachers triggered by the red states teacher strikes: its adaptation is to favor limited strikes — short in duration, limited demands, and looking to Democratic politician "friends" to deliver modest gains. CTA wants to make sure things don't get out of hand by establishing means of influencing and, where possible, controlling strike strategy from the top down.

Under CTA's influence, the OEA strike was carried out with far less transparency and control from below than it should



A union membership mobilized for action.

Oakland Education Association

have been. Decisions were made by a small "strategy group" of CTA staffers and OEA officers, rather than an elected strike committee — even the OEA executive board was largely cut out of the loop.

The OEA communications committee was reorganized on the eve of the strike — the reorganized committee had no OEA members and was run by CTA. Although OEA's Representative Council had voted overwhelmingly for members to receive daily updates, during the strike such updates were not made.

Consequently, many if not most members were taken by surprise when, after days of strong picket lines and reports from leadership that "We're winning," the strike leadership, with little advance notice to the membership, yielded to pressure from state superintendent of public instruction Tony Thurmond and agreed to the disappointing tentative agreement (more later on Thurmond's role).

One lesson is: more transparency is needed; also especially needed is an elected strike committee to work directly with the officers, the executive board and, as often as possible, Rep Council and picket captains.

Second and related, I think that there was a reluctance to aggressively confront corporate targets physically with militant actions. To overcome the intransigence of the corporate-funded and controlled school board, it's necessary to convince corporate Oakland that the union is prepared to see that there's no business as usual.

Hesitancy to do that was evident in the reluctance of the OEA leadership to vigorously pursue a proposal to rally and picket at the Port of Oakland, which could and should have occurred several days ago and would have had the support of dockworkers (ILWU Local 34 had already voted its support).

Instead, CTA staff and OEA officers expressed fears that the union would be

legally liable if it picketed at the port (it wouldn't: the park and roads at the port are public property, picketing there is legal and that right has been exercised numerous times, including more than once by OEA).

Finally, on what would be the next to last day of the strike, Thursday February 28, Rep Council voted overwhelmingly to picket at the port on March 5. It's no accident that OUSD improved its offer and rushed to settle when they did: one big reason was to preempt the port action.

Had OEA not settled on March 1, and especially if it followed the Port action with militant rallies and sit-ins aimed at the big real estate and financial interests in downtown Oakland, I think that the corporate masters would have told state and city politicians to cough up some money, and told their school board puppets to settle up.

Settlement and Aftermath

The union leadership repeatedly credited OEA's militant and spirited picket lines and mass rallies with what they proclaimed as an "historic win" and total victory. But then, shortly before announcing the tentative agreement, they turned around and said that the meager tentative agreement is "the best that can be won at this time" because, they claim, support was beginning to ebb.

I saw little evidence of that. Thousands of teachers turned out to picket, march and rally on rainy days all week. I think that there's another reason: the union leadership is for the most part close to liberal Democrats like state superintendent of schools Tony Thurmond, who was invited in by the OEA leadership to mediate the dispute and broker the deal.

Thurmond had been elected only a few months earlier with massive support from CTA and teacher union locals (including OEA), who hailed him as a friend of teachers and public education in contrast to his opponent Marshall Tuck, the charter

school executive heavily backed by corporate billionaires. But Thurmond and other Democrats represent corporate interests and the state, both of which wanted an end to this disruptive strike.

After Thurmond was invited in, he pressed the OEA bargaining team and leadership to settle quickly or risk losing “public” (meaning his) support.

On Monday, March 4 — the morning after the OEA contract was ratified — hundreds of students and several teachers called in sick to protest at an emergency school board meeting called during school hours to try to minimize student and school worker presence.

Despite impassioned speeches from scores of students and several teachers and other school workers, and over the protest of virtually all of those present, the school board voted to make \$22 million in cuts: to school libraries; to restorative justice programs; to the Asian Pacific Islander support program; to the foster youth program; and to lay off well over 100 classified school workers.

On Friday, March 8 — five days after the OEA contract was ratified — state superintendent of public instruction Tony Thurmond facilitated the first meeting of a “Charter Task Force.”

As part of the settlement of January’s Los Angeles teacher strike, the Los Angeles school board adopted a motion calling on the state of California to declare a moratorium on charter school growth. California Governor Gavin Newsom agreed to this but tagged on the need for a study to assess the impact of charter schools. Newsom asked Thurmond to name the study panel.

All along, the question has been: who would Newsom and Thurmond name to the panel? Would this be a fair study, or would it be rigged in favor of the charter schools and the charters’ billionaire backers (who are also major donors to the California

Democratic Party).

One glance at the panel’s makeup answers that question: Of the eleven panelists, seven are either charter school industry executives or have strong ties to the charter school industry (four charter school executives; plus two leading supporters of Marshall Tuck’s failed bid for state superintendent of public education (Tuck’s campaign received \$30 million from corporate billionaire foundations); plus the superintendent of schools of the charter-friendly El Dorado County office of education.

Tony Thurmond says “Trust me. California will have charter school reform.” Well, no doubt there will be some minor regulatory reforms — there’s plenty of room for that in California, which is the lawless Wild West when it comes to charter schools, with perhaps the laxest regulation in the country.

But will there be meaningful regulation? Not from the panel appointed by Thurmond. It’s past time to determine: who are the friends of public education and school worker unions, and who are our opponents? Tony Thurmond is just the latest Democratic Party politician to show where he stands.

Conclusion

There’s a growing movement to fight back against the decades-old corporate assault on public education. The OEA strike was part of that fight; the organizing and spirit shown during the strike were both outgrowths of that movement and in turn can help move it forward. The settlement was not a defeat: it was more than the school board had long held out for, and the school board would not have even given the modest settlement to which it agreed had it not been for that fight.

But we need to be clear, and we need to be honest: This was an opportunity lost. The fight could have continued, and it should have continued. Had that fight continued,

more would have been won, and just as importantly, the ill feeling and incipient divisions among union members would have been avoided.

And it’s important to not just cheer and announce triumphantly “We won! Total Victory! Historic Victory!” This was not a total victory. And teachers and teacher unions everywhere need to hear and assimilate the lessons: the need for more transparency; the need to physically confront corporate power; and especially, the need to not put our trust and reliance in Democratic Party politicians.

It’s important to move forward now. To rebuild the fighting spirit and unity so manifest during the strike, it’s critical to do what wasn’t done during the strike — a complete end to the school closures; a full moratorium on charter school growth; restoration of all the cut programs and all the jobs that were cut.

Teacher militants should look for specific opportunities to take job actions such as sick-outs. There have already been several in Oakland, both before and since the strike. These can and should spread to citywide job actions, with calls for statewide actions and for support from the community and from all of labor.

Take the spirit that dominated the strike and rekindle it into a militant movement that confronts corporate Oakland — at the Port, in the City Center, at all the seats of corporate power. Confront them, and demand that the priorities be set straight. Immediate targets: rehire the 150 laid-off classified school workers; an immediate moratorium on charter schools; no school closures.

And beyond this: Restore and expand all jobs and programs cut by OUSD since the state takeover of 2003. Restore adequate funding for quality public education and for essential social services, not for privatization and corporate profit. ■

Evaluating the Oakland Strike — *continued from page 5*

Oakland is divided into seven city council districts, which we replicated for the school system. I was the head of Cluster 6, a gigantic cluster containing 15 schools.

The cluster system revitalized rank and file organizing. We brought connections from the OEA leadership to the school sites, which in some cases had been struggling and may not have seen anyone from the union out at their sites in years.

We reconnected with those members, and in a hurry-up fashion brought them up to speed on the OEA’s demands and what was at stake in this struggle. And we were super-successful.

We *shut the thing down*. Los Angeles didn’t shut down as hard as we shut this

thing down [applause]. Ninety-seven percent of our students did not come to school; 95% of our teachers were on strike. That was crucial (better than LA too) [laughter].

We also extended our outreach to community groups with which we had tenuous if any relationships previously. We built things — with the solidarity schools we offered students a safe and productive space during the day, instead of those same students going into the schools and undermining our strength against our bosses. So our ability to get a decent contract, a foothold against the privatizers, was due to these efforts both internal and external.

We had some serious unevenness at our sites. There were sites where I would go in

the morning, and people were getting furious because they wanted to know why we were talking about school closures, which we’d never talked about before.

There was a lot of unevenness in our ranks — we have 2500 members, and not all of them read *Majority* (an East Bay DSA online publication). We were educating on the picket lines about the charter schools, why they’re bad, what the billionaires had at stake in them, — and it worked.

At my site, we had people at the beginning of the strike who didn’t understand why we would protest at GO (Great Oakland, a pro-charter advocacy group) Public Schools. By the end of the week everyone was more sure, but it took days

and it took education — and articles about these issues from different socialist publications were flying around the schools, and I didn't put them there, so that's good [applause].

Membership education was another problem we had to overcome. The relatively passive period of the previous leadership created a distance between younger, more militant rank-and-file teachers, people who called themselves “the wildcatters” and the union leadership, even though their aims and tactics were not really that different. There were people who felt alienated from the OEA. We inherited that challenge as well.

One of the things that affected the contract approval vote, and why some felt the victory wasn't as solid as it could be, was where you sat. In the high schools there was a lot of strength for continuing the strike. In the elementary schools teachers feel closer to and more responsible for the students and their families — we're there *in loco parentis* for them every day.

I have two high school daughters who don't care if they go back to school ever again, so they were going to the protests and having all kinds of fun — so high school teachers may have felt that we could stay out a long time, while more elementary school teachers felt it was time to go back. And that was real.

Transforming What's Possible

Reasonable people can disagree about the vote, but nobody should disagree that we now have a foothold in our own union, in the community, and we aren't going to waste that.

We've shown what was once just a slogan, “When we strike we win,” is real and we've shown that the politics of what is “possible” one day can completely transform — not just in terms of socialist articles and analysis, but as measured by new leaders stepping up at my site who hadn't been the slightest bit interested in the union before, now coming forward in a variety of ways, and they are going to be the next generation of leaders in Oakland.

Hopefully our new contract will allow them to afford to stay in Oakland. If they can stay we can build union power, in a way we haven't ever seen for a long time. We have just tapped into the potential of these young teachers who are ready to fight.

The same thing is true with student activism. Many high school students were involved in supporting our strike. The connections we built are the real manifestation of solidarity.

We've received so much love from the students and the parents that we have to do right. We did that on the Thursday immediately following the strike by coming back without a break, without hesitation, to set new goals for the OEA and its community



Marching in the streets on the first day of the strike.

Oakland Education Association

allies, starting now through the month of May and beyond, which will be crucial for mobilizing and for the fight against the privatization of our schools.

We are in a good place now with a more educated membership, and we are going to be pushing that membership to stay active and be vigilant about what's at stake. We had to educate people about the Board of Education. They are obviously terrible, exposed now almost to a person as being bought and sold by the privatizers and billionaires. That took some work. Most of our membership hadn't been obsessively watching the school board members as I had, and now some of them are like “Who are those people? They're bad!” [laughter]

So OEA is transforming itself. The highlights of this strike weren't just the big marches, but they were the dance lines, the joyful militancy on the picket lines, the putting of demands back where they should be on the state to solve the funding crisis which is all through the state of California, and a disgrace, and of course on the school board.

Rebuilding and Moving Forward

We teachers are rebuilding the tradition of the strike. It's been more than 23 years since our last real strike here in Oakland. We set up picket lines on the day of the protest at the school board and some of us went around and showed people how to form unbreakable picket lines, and we held those picket lines.

The working-class tradition of picket lines has been largely broken for a generation, so we literally went around and bugged people. We said that “if you're sitting around having coffee you're not really on the picket line.” We insisted that this has got to be a really strong strike picket line that you hold so that the school board can't come in and do their dirty business. We did hold those

lines all day and ultimately we turned the school board members away.

We feel that we've taken a step forward also as an organizing union. Now we are going to keep organizing around these key issues: dismantling the corporate loopholes of Proposition 13, going to confront the charterizers and privatizers when they come into Oakland, obviously transforming the school board, running democratic socialists and activists [applause] in place of those bought and sold board members.

What we are going to continue to do is socialist education, to make sure people know that the privatizers and charterizers aren't just some nice people with bad ideas. They are people implementing a strategy of class rule and class domination, which includes the dismantling of public education in the United States.

We have planted the seeds of that struggle and resistance among our members and the communities that supported us during the strike. And when we won we gave people a new energy — to come back and fight against the policies of austerity.

Now we can take up the issues of what the teachers' union does at the state and national level, and the contradictions of relying on the Democratic Party — and all of those things are more possible now than when we started.

We are part of a strike wave and a winning movement. If the strike had lost it would have been a crushing defeat. Since we won, we've kept the pressure on the politicians in Sacramento.

We are going to create a crisis in the state of California in which we will make these schools unmanageable until they start to tax the rich to pay for quality schools, and to demand equity for Black and Brown students, for the working-class majority in California. [applause] ■

The Fight Over Ilhan Omar: Phase I By David Finkel

“THE VICIOUS, DIRTY — and bipartisan — smear campaign against the first two Muslim women in the U.S. Congress, Ilhan Omar (MN) and Rashida Tlaib (MI), is just beginning.” That’s the opening of a statement by the Steering Committee of Solidarity, posted February 14, 2019 (<https://solidarity-us.org>).

That’s still true, following the big fight over a House of Representatives resolution that was first intended to isolate and humiliate Ilhan Omar, and potentially to lead to stripping her House Committee on Foreign Affairs assignment (where she already effectively grilled Elliott Abrams over his role in the U.S. genocidal Central American wars of the 1980s).

While the Democratic Congressional leadership might initially have been prepared to throw her under the bus over malicious and false charges of antisemitism, it blew up in their faces when a huge outpouring of support for Ilhan Omar came from a wide progressive swath of Black, Arab-American, Muslim, Jewish and civil liberties sectors outraged that a newly elected Muslim woman, who came to the United States as a refugee from war-devastated Somalia, was being singled out.

Instead of the original draft resolution, a new text was hastily constructed that calls out all kinds of bigotry and the way white supremacist forces have “weaponized hate for political gain, targeting traditionally persecuted peoples, including African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other people of color, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and others with verbal attacks, incitement and violence.”

Pretty strong stuff, and clearly not the kind of thing that Donald Trump had in mind with his presidential tweets demanding that Ilhan Omar be condemned and forced to resign. (In fact, Trump’s antics may have made it harder for the Democratic leadership to condemn her as some of them wanted.)

There was some rather weasel-like debate over whether Rep. Omar had “adequately apologized” for earlier tweets about “the Benjamins” (hundred dollar bills), when



it’s far from clear that she had anything to apologize for in the first place. In any case, among the 23 Republicans who voted “no” on the grounds that the resolution was “diluted” and Ilhan Omar not condemned by name, a typical example was Jeff Duncan of South Dakota.

Duncan previously posted a Facebook cartoon of a white man labeled “Europe” with a noose around his neck, watering a tree labeled “Islam” with the other end of the rope tied around it. (Shouldn’t the resolution have named *him*?)

The attack is not over by any means. The backlash against Ilhan Omar continues in the media, and not only on the right — Chris Cuomo on CNN being a particularly nasty example — and we can expect a tsunami of “Benjamins, baby” pouring into her and Rashida Tlaib’s districts to oppose them in the 2020 primaries (while there will undoubtedly be activist outpourings coming to counter the attack).

Curiously in view of its supposed intended focus, the resolution is actually weak in its discussion of real, factual antisemitism. It references the infamous Alfred Dreyfus trial — nothing to do with the United States or today, that’s from France in 1895! — but doesn’t mention U.S. corporate and government actions such as Henry Ford publishing *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, or the U.S. refusal in 1939 to admit the refugee ship *St. Louis*, forcing it to return to Europe

where many of its passengers died in the Nazi genocide, or Father Coughlin’s 1930s anti-Jewish syndicated radio tirades. Funny thing not to mention any of that!

In fact, this whole episode was never a serious exploration of antisemitism or anything else. It was a weapon of political destruction that didn’t work.

A Truth Too Far

The crux of the issue was actually pinpointed by “a visibly upset Representative Lois Frankel” (D-FL), for whom Ilhan Omar crossed an inviolable line “by criticizing the motives of Israel’s supporters instead of the policies of the Israeli government.” (Emphasis added. *New York Times*, March 11, A12: “Democrats’ Fraught Question: How Far Is Too Far?”)

Exactly. Harsh criticism of Israel must now be tolerated, at least grudgingly. Israel has become an open wound in the U.S. Jewish community, especially for young people, and even more so among progressive folks in general.

Israel has normalized mass murder of Palestinians at the Gaza border, including hundreds of children in the past year; everyone knows that prime minister Netanyahu is a venal crook, who brought the overly genocidal “Jewish Power” group onto an electoral list to boost his chances in the April election; and Israel’s brutal treatment of civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is a daily routine.

Netanyahu has now explicitly stated that the new “nation-state” law makes Israel not “the state of all its citizens,” but “the nation-state of the Jewish people only.” That reduces 21% of Israel’s own citizens, Palestinians along with their Arabic language, to official second-class status, and there’s no way to cover that up.

Under these circumstances, and with Israel’s open embrace of the white-nationalist-loving Donald Trump, the curtain of silence on Israel’s behavior has been partially torn open and can’t be repaired. The third rail of discourse now is *open political discussion of the U.S.-Israeli relationship*, in particular the role of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and related organizations in terrorizing U.S. politicians.

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David Finkel is an editor of Against the Current and a member of Jewish Voice for Peace in Detroit.

Boycotting Normalization, Building Popular Power: A View from Lebanon

By Julia Kassem

ON OCTOBER 22nd, 2018, the American University of Beirut's Bashar Haidar, a philosophy professor, extended an invitation to Oxford University Professor and visiting Hebrew University advisor Jeff McMahan for a talk, "Rethinking the Ethics of War." In view of McMahan's capacity of service to an Israeli academic institution, the University's leftist, Southern Lebanese and Palestinian student groups staged a protest.

In practice this invitation, which is in violation of the country's academic boycott of Israel, highlighted the dispensation for Israeli discourse even in a country that has had an official ban against Israeli products, goods and services since the Lebanese Israeli Boycott legislation was enacted in June 1955. Indeed, it provides a shining example of how the rhetorical normalization of Zionism routinely finds its way into the discourse of academic institutions.

Why Academic Boycott?

The international call for an academic boycott movement was launched in Ramallah, West Bank in 2004 as part of the greater international Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) campaign. In this context the campaign calls for BDS activities against Israeli academic institutions, which provide a great deal of ideological and material support to the occupation and to its legitimization. It also aims to force an isolation of Israel that will prompt it to change its policies against the Palestinians.

The principle of boycott is made more difficult by the economic concessions capitalist society makes towards corporations and large industries. Companies that have a direct hand in the occupation, from Pepsi-Cola and Nestle to Caterpillar and G4S, widely permeate every sector of the global economy, and Lebanon's weak economy prevents both popular and political support for a complete and successful nationwide boycott.

Yet the importance of the academic boycott is crucial, as Israeli academic institutions have not only been the tools to strengthen

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and solidify racist ideological hegemony in academia, but routinely provide concrete military research and support to the Israeli military (IDF) in its ongoing campaigns to brutalize Palestinians (in particular Gazans), and Lebanese.

The infamous "Dahiyeh Doctrine," an IDF doctrine justifying bombardment of civilian areas, put into practice in Beirut in 2006, was developed in Tel Aviv University.

Hebrew University in particular has been whitewashed of late for its eventual accommodation and cooptation of the U.S. student Lara al-Qasem [who was detained when she entered Israel, because of her previous support for a Students for Justice in Palestine campus group — ed]. This institution gives extra credit to students for going on "settlement tours" with far-right groups.

In view of the Zionist state's continued expansion and settlement building, we don't care about the crocodile tears from neoliberal professors over particularly egregious "actions of the Israeli government," when their legitimization of these institutions every day offers more support, in reality, to a 70-plus-year occupation and over 100-year colonization project.

Capitalism: Boycott's Kryptonite

Lebanon's boycott of Israeli goods and services has ironically and increasingly become a tool of enforcing, rather than challenging, colonial and Zionist political and economic power. In March 2018, Gaza-born Anan Abusereya, a Romanian national of Palestinian descent, was denied entry into Lebanon. She was one of many Palestinians detained at the Lebanese airport for hours without access to a lawyer.

The attendees were on their way to a Palestine solidarity conference, and were ironically receiving treatment at the hands of an Arab neighbor, supposedly an enemy of "the Zionist entity" as it used to be called, no different than what they would have gotten at Tel Aviv.

Meanwhile Israel's business thrives in Lebanon with Nestle, PepsiCo, and Lebanon's strong dependence on Western and Saudi finance capital, all inextricably linked to the occupation.

When an academic currently working in a Zionist institution is allowed to speak

in institution in an Arab country while a Palestinian-Romanian cannot enter the country for a Palestinian solidarity conference — as was the case last March for at least a few other Palestinians who were raised abroad — we can see how boycott laws ironically become divorced from their intended objectives to serve, today, very adverse power-serving ones.

Unfortunately, even Lebanese university students are all too accustomed to the discourse of normalization that is routine to American institutions. Earlier in September, the American University of Beirut selected 2016 Chemistry Nobel Laureate Sir Fraser Stoddart, who recently visited and celebrated Israel's Zionist "Independence Day" festivities, to deliver the 2018 Makhoul Haddadin Lecture.

AUB has had no reservations against advertising job opportunities with Israeli firms. And it came under fire in 2012 when the University awarded an honorary degree to Donna Shalala, possessor of honorary degrees from three Israeli universities and whose 2010 visit to Israel — ironically, to oppose academic boycott and support academic and institutional cooperation with Israel! — resulted in her own humiliating two and a half hour detainment at the Tel Aviv airport.

Adherence to academic boycott is a necessity in Lebanon's present economic and political conditions, which have caused massive street protests and movements such as 2015's YouStink (against the collapse of garbage collection services). Most recently economic protests in January drew nearly 20,000 to the streets of south-central Beirut.

On the other hand, the growing severity of the country's overall economic problems threatens to marginalize the battle against normalization as an increasingly peripheral and overlooked issue — capitalist "kryptonite" for the boycott struggle.

A Common Struggle

The joint statement by the leftist Red Oak Club, the Palestinian Cultural Club, and the Cultural Club of the South against AUB's McMahan invitation received the endorsement of multiple student groups reinforcing their collective stance against academic

cooperation.

Just two months later, in the United States the University of California became the first university to condemn implementations of a campus academic boycott of Israel. Students in the United States and in Lebanon are battling the same adversary — global capitalism — on two fronts: against both debilitating austerity and the superstructures of imperialist power. Normalization is an agent of that power.

To date, over 250 universities across the United States have been pushed to reject academic boycott, despite Israel's banning, deporting and detaining numerous academics, including Richard Falk, a Jewish American professor of international law; Frank Romano, a humanities professor detained for trying to block Israeli forces from destroying Palestinian tents in Khan al-Ahmar last September; or Norman Finkelstein and Noam Chomsky, both banned from the country around a decade ago.

American students are also too familiar with the harassment and targeting that befalls them in speaking out against the occupation. Numerous blacklisting outfits, including Canary Mission and Campus Watch, run smear campaigns on students, professors and organizers against the occupation who are specifically active on college campuses.

[Of related interest: See Alan Wald's article on University of Michigan faculty "Punished for Acting with Integrity," *ATC* 198 — ed.]

"We are the students, we choose who comes to speak in our University," one student at the American University of Beirut protested during the lecture speak-out.

From Lebanon to the USA, the message stays consistent: Zionism is a superstructure that bypasses student agency in order to position itself as the dominant narrative, like whiteness, that American students are indoctrinated to identify with, and to which Lebanese students are increasingly tantalized

Background on the Boycott

THE BOYCOTT OF Israeli academic institutions is a subject of controversy, in terms of both principle and application. We refer our readers to two sources in particular. The website of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel is now located at <http://bdsmovement.net/pacbi>. For a detailed discussion of the argument in the U.S. academic context and some of the nuances involved, see Alan Wald's article in *ATC* 169, "A Political Witch-Hunt in the Name of 'Academic Freedom: In Defense of the American Studies Association," <https://solidarity-us.org/atc/169/p4114/>.

to aspire.

Normalization

The academic boycott is imperative to rejecting the normalization of Israeli discourse into institutions, and to ensure that the rhetoric and ideology of apartheid, ethnic cleansing and genocide are not given a respectable platform.

Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci coined the term "hegemony" in his *Prison Notebooks* while locked up in Mussolini's prisons, to refer to the ideas and dogmas exerted by a ruling class or power. In the Arab world's case this is represented by imperialist and colonialist powers and their agents that rule members of society.

Through the willing consent of the people made possible through control over ideological superstructures, Gramsci suggested, economic and political control can be maintained. By confronting Israeli ideological superstructures, the superstructure of Israel's brute assumption and dominion of power in the Middle East, we defend our sovereignty as an a proletarian and liberationist intellectual community.

We resist the language, ideas, logic and notions that justify the occupation and threaten our own ideological integrity. There are a few who think that defending the legitimization and normalization of the Zionist Israeli state — whether through institutions, in the adoption of its discourse, or in any

way accepting its myriad twisted narratives — somehow empowers or enriches them as academics. In Arabic, the root word for "to make peace with" (*Aslam*) matches the same word as "to surrender" (*Istislamu*).

For those committed to maintaining respect for Palestinian and Lebanese resistance, material action must be taken to ensure that a commitment to the Palestinian cause goes beyond empty rhetoric and that we, as the Palestinian Arab brothers and sisters also affected by the problems of imperialism and colonization, affirm our commitment to this ideological resistance and do not cede to Israeli violence.

In Lebanon in particular, students are no strangers to the occupier's brutality. In the United States, students and academics are all too accustomed to its hegemony. Israeli ideas infringing upon Lebanese academic space are parallel to the routine military infringements upon Palestinian and Lebanese air, ground and water spaces.

As their allies and pupils in peace, U.S. students are increasingly acting upon their sense of accountability to this fight from within the belly of the beast. Internationally, students as agents of intellectual and scholarly inquiry must be stewards of education that is truly anti-colonial and liberationist, accountable to the good of the national and international proletariat, against the discourses of colonization and power. ■

The Fight Over Ilhan Omar: Phase I — *continued from page 9*

Ilhan Omar was pilloried for stating that AIPAC enforces a pledge of "allegiance to a foreign country," the Israeli state. This supposedly "crossed that line" into antisemitism and the so-called "dual loyalty" smear leveled against Jewish U.S. citizens.

There are three essential points here. First, what Ilhan Omar said is *simply the truth*: AIPAC and the "pro-Israel" lobby are in business to enforce U.S. support of Israel, no matter what it does. Indeed AIPAC in recent years has become the lobby of the Likud party. Calling out that reality now defines what crosses the border of the unspeakable — a truth too far.

Second, there is *nothing antisemitic* in what Omar said. She never said or implied anything about "the Jews." Indeed, the "pro-Israel" lobby is by no means exclusively Jewish; its most virulent elements are right-wing Christian fundamentalists, and the U.S. military industry is a powerful though silent partner — as of course it was also during the decades of U.S. support of South Africa's apartheid regime.

Even if AIPAC claims to reflect an overwhelming consensus of U.S. Jewish opinion, empirical reality — including the large number of Jewish activists who spoke out

in support of Ilhan Omar — shows that it doesn't, by a long shot.

There's a third point that doesn't get enough attention, in my opinion: For the "pro-Israel" lobby's advocates, *there is no divided loyalty*. It isn't a question of putting loyalty to Israel *above* loyalty to the USA.

In the minds of these folks, backing Israel-no-matter-what is entirely in the U.S. interest. For the fanatical religious zealots, it's America's obedience to divine commandments. For the militarist neoconservatives, it's America's alliance with a reliable partner in U.S. capitalism ruling the world and smashing anything that gets in the way. For a lot of mainstream and some liberal Democrats, Israel may sometimes be embarrassingly brutal but it's "our counterweight against radical Islam."

The U.S.-Israeli axis isn't about divided loyalty — it's ultimately about imperialism. There is no reason to doubt that Israel's partisans in U.S. politics love America as much as Ilhan Omar does. The real difference is that their course leads toward suicide for both Israel and the United States, while hers points toward a sane alternative — one that, as the current struggle shows, is gaining strength. ■



Council on Hemispheric Affairs

Open scars: Canadian-owned mining operations in Latin America frequently displace indigenous communities.

Canada as an Extractive State

AGAINST THE CURRENT interviewed Todd Gordon, co-author (with Jeffery Webber) of *Blood of Extraction: Canadian Imperialism in Latin America about mining operations in Canada and internationally*. He is a socialist activist in Toronto and a member of the Toronto New Socialists.

Against the Current: *It seems that Canadian capital is involved in mining operations — and environmental disasters — around the Global South. Where are these operations located, and who are the main corporate players?*

Todd Gordon: Canada has the largest extractive industry in the world, with operating mines and exploration assets on every continent. Latin America is the region in which Canadian companies have traditionally had the greatest presence.

The industry's internationalism has been facilitated by the regulatory permissiveness of Canadian laws and, connected to this, the central role that Canadian stock exchanges have played historically in raising investment capital.

Perhaps the most infamous Canadian mining companies in recent years have been Barrick Gold and Goldcorp (which was recently purchased by an American company), known for their involvement in rights abuses in several different countries. But there are a lot of Canadian companies, including small junior ones few would have heard of, implicated in human rights abuses.

ATC: *Where have the biggest confrontations with indigenous peoples happened? Where have the biggest disasters taken place — and*

who paid for them in the end?

T.G.: I think it is important first to note that many (though not all) of these Canadian companies had their start in Canada on indigenous land. Here they developed the skills at both legal and forceful dispossession, ecological plunder, and circumventing labour rights.

Internationally, there have been significant confrontations with indigenous peoples in Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Tanzania, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea, among other countries.

A study by the Justice and Corporate Accountability Project [<https://bit.ly/2SOkl17>] at Osgood Hall Law School in Toronto found for the years 2000-2015 that Canadian companies operating in Latin America were implicated in 44 deaths (44 of which it identified as “targeted”), 403 injuries (of which 363 occurred during demonstrations or confrontations), and 709 cases of criminalization.

Canadian extractive companies, and their financial backers, are almost never held accountable. They may wield influence in the country in which the abuses occur, and there is no law in Canada that holds them accountable for violence that occurs in their name abroad.

Currently, there are lawsuits before Canadian courts against two Canadian companies, one for the alleged use of forced labor in Eritrea and the other for alleged involvement in the gang rape and murder of opponents in Guatemala. Canadian mining

an interview with Todd Gordon

and oil and gas companies also had ties to Colombian paramilitaries.

When ecological disaster occurs, such as spills of toxic chemicals, rarely is the Canadian company held fully accountable, if it's held accountable at all.

The most effective challenge to the predatory practices of these companies have come not from the courts, but from the indigenous communities deploying direct action and sabotage. In some cases they've stopped mines from operating, such as in Ecuador.

ATC: *Are there connections between Canadian extraction industries operating globally and the fights inside Canada over pipeline expansion?*

T.G.: There have been connections made around extraction at home and abroad, though it's not especially well developed.

Indigenous people in Canada have participated in solidarity trips abroad, and have welcomed activists from abroad to their territories in the Canadian state. The union movement has also brought activists abroad to Canada for speaking tours.

ATC: *What kind of movements and organizations exist in Canada in solidarity with indigenous movements resisting these global operations? Do any of Canada's political parties, including the Greens, take up these issues?*

T.G.: As I previously noted, indigenous communities have been at the forefront. Unions have also played a role. There are also NGOs that have done important work raising awareness, organizing tours abroad for Canadians, and trying to build support for

international struggles. But I wouldn't say there's a movement per se at this point, even though awareness has grown considerably over the last couple decades.

The New Democratic Party and the Greens have offered more consistent criticism, and the NDP has promoted legal reform targeting the international activities of Canadian companies. But as an opposition party, it's gone nowhere. The Liberals and Conservatives have done nothing in government beyond issuing platitudes around "corporate social responsibility."

ATC: *What about the Trudeau Liberal government, with its environmentally friendly rhetoric and its extractivist policies?*

T.G.: The Liberals are a bourgeois party, uninterested in meaningful reform. They're hypocrites who, unlike the Conservatives, will try to offer a progressive veneer to their policies.

So, for example, they argue that the Trans Mountain pipeline, which they just recently purchased from Kinder Morgan and which will carry natural gas from Alberta to the British Columbian coast through indigenous territory, will help to reduce carbon emissions because Alberta will be more likely to agree to emissions reductions if this pipeline is completed.

They make public efforts at talking about "reconciliation" with indigenous people, and



recognizing past injustices, even appointing an indigenous woman to a top level cabinet post. But then the next moment they'll send paramilitaries to smash a blockade against another pipeline on indigenous territory and jail indigenous activists, as they recently did to the Wet'suwet'en.

Internationally, they talk about "rule of law" and "corporate social responsibility." Yet, just like their Conservative predecessors, they have refused to introduce any law that would hold Canadian extractive companies accountable for any violence or eco-destruction in which they're implicated.

Canadian extractive companies, supported by Canadian (and international) financial investors have a significant global presence, and the Liberals are fully supportive of the industry.

ATC: *One of the problems that progressive*

governments in Latin America face is that the economy is built around extraction. What steps would a country have to take to break from that model?

T.G.: This is a very important question. Extraction appears for many governments (across the spectrum) as a quick way to develop a country, and for some supposedly a way to reduce dependence over time on the Global North. But we know that day doesn't come.

Even if more assertive measures are taken to limit the influence of foreign capital and/or increase taxes and royalties, or even nationalize an extractive sector, there's still the question of the rights of indigenous peoples' in these countries and the ecological consequences of expanded extraction.

While countries may be unable to extricate themselves quickly from dependence on resource extraction, especially without the support of wealthier countries, history tells us that extraction won't lead to greater shared prosperity in these countries.

The solution will have to be greener, planned economic diversity and management, more international, and based on strictly limiting the power of capital (domestic or foreign). And this will only be possible through the building of mass movements from below. ■

Brazil: Trump Ally Celebrates Coup By Eric Toussaint

FIFTY-FIVE YEARS after the overthrow of democratically elected President Joao Goulart, the new far-right President, Jair Bolsonaro has announced a celebration of the 1964 military coup.

There can be no doubt about the active support provided by the U.S. government, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. On 2 April 2014, a U.S. NGO, the National Security Archive publicized an impressive amount of declassified official documents that testify to Washington aiding and abetting the Brazilian army officers who had overthrown Joao Goulart's democratic government (see <https://bit.ly/1k2qGgc>).

President Goulart's government was overthrown by the military in April 1964. World Bank and IMF loans, suspended for three years, resumed very soon afterwards.

A brief time line: in 1958, Brazilian president Kubitschek was about to undertake negotiations with the IMF to gain access

Eric Toussaint is the spokesperson for the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt. This is a brief excerpt from the author's post on Brazil's 1964 coup at www.cadtm.org.

to a loan of \$300 million from the United States. At the end, Kubitschek refused the IMF-imposed conditions and did without the U.S. loan. This earned him wide popularity.

His successor, Goulart, announced that he would implement a radical land reform program and proceed to nationalize petroleum refineries. He was overthrown by the military. The United States recognized the new military regime one day after the coup.

Not long afterwards, the World Bank and IMF resumed their lending policy. As for the military, they rescinded the economic measures the United States and IMF had criticized. International financial institutions were of the view that the military regime was taking sound economic measures.

The regime organized harsh repression, outlawed strikes, caused a dramatic drop in real wages, and eliminated direct ballot voting, disbanded trade unions and made systematic use of torture.

The public reports of the World Bank systematically praised the policies of the dictatorship. Nevertheless, inside the World Bank the discussions took a bitter turn.

When Bernard Chadenet, Vice-President

of Projects declared that the bank's image would degrade following the support to the repressive government of Brazil, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara recognized that there was a tremendous amount of repression — but added that it "is not necessarily a great deal different from what it had been under previous governments, and did not seem to be a lot worse than in some other member countries of the WB. Is Brazil worse than Thailand?"

Some days later McNamara followed up: "No viable alternative to the Government by generals seemed open."

The IMF and World Bank did not hesitate to support dictatorships when they (and other major capitalist powers) found it opportune. The author of the World Report on Human Development says so in black and white: "But rhetoric is running far ahead of reality, as a comparison of the per capita ODA (official development assistance) received by democratic and authoritarian regimes shows. Indeed, for the United States [aid given] in the 1980s, the relationship between aid and human rights has been perverse..." ■



Students demonstrate in support of Jasic workers.

About the Jasic Struggle: The Debate Among Chinese Maoists

By Qian Ben-li

LAST JULY, 2018, 89 workers at the Shenzhen Jasic Technology Co. Ltd. demanded the right to set up a workplace union. Although over the past decade there have been a growing number of disputes and strikes by Shenzhen workers, the Jasic case is unusual because it was openly supported by a group of self-proclaimed Maoists and Marxist university students and recent graduates.

The student activists came to Shenzhen and supported the workers' demands for better working conditions, payment of back wages and social insurance along with severance pay through the establishment of a union. Coming from different parts of China, these supporters organized themselves into a "Jasic Worker Support Group" and went to stand with the Jasic workers who were battling police.

They also set up a website — which has now been removed — called "Vanguard of the Era" to publicize the Jasic case and call for support to these workers' struggles. [Currently the Jasic Workers Support Group official website, probably run from somewhere outside the country, is <https://jishigrsyt1.github.io/>.]

The Jasic struggle quickly escalated from a trade union organizing drive at one plant

into a political struggle against local officials. Suppression soon followed, with many arrests. Four workers are awaiting trial and 34 supporters are under house arrest, forced to repudiate their cause, or have been disappeared. Of the 34, two are from NGOs and had nothing to do with the case other than forwarding news through their mobile phones.

Almost two dozen more, upon returning to campus, have been interrogated, threatened, beaten up and in some cases expelled. As some university Marxist clubs lost their registration, a number of leftwing intellectuals, including Noam Chomsky, issued statements supporting the detained activists and announcing their intention of boycotting China's officially sponsored Marxism conferences.

More than 50 students acted in solidarity with the Jasic workers. This is in sharp contrast to what happened in Tiananmen Square in 1989, when at the very beginning of the protests intellectuals and students cordoned themselves off from the workers.

Both Professor Pun Ngai at the University of Hong Kong and writer and activist Au Loong Yu have called the Jasic case, where students organized and mobilized in support of workers,

of "historic significance." Au has pointed out that while individual students first came out in support of the 2009 Guangzhou sanitation workers strike, in the Jasic case the young Maoists developed "high-profile confrontational resistance," evidence of their commitment in a highly repressive situation.

While these self-proclaimed socialists in China begin from the framework of Maoism, this article's outlining of their internal debates indicate how they are grappling with strategic and tactical problems in the face of sharp repression, differences in regional conditions, and varying levels of workers' consciousness and combativity. The author, Qian Ben-li, is a China labor activist.

To sign a petition calling for the release of jailed labour rights activists exercising rights to freedom of association for the Jasic workers and supporters, go to https://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=4078.

— The Editors

ROUGHLY SPEAKING, CHINA today has two major Maoist tendencies. One has more connections with the establishment of the regime; they favor the nationalist part of Mao's thought and love the current Chinese

Communist Party (CCP) leadership for its tough stand against the West.

Another has a much more critical position on the current regime — they believe the CCP has been controlled by capitalists and the solution is proletarian revolution.¹ This second tendency prefers to identify itself as the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Left (hereinafter referred to as the MLML).²

According to an article published by the Red China website, the MLML emerged as a contemporary political force at the beginning of this century from various online left groups. Initially its members included veteran worker activists involved in the struggles against the privatization of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), old CCP members who did not like the capitalist reform, the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution, etc.

After 2012, the MLML was infused with fresh blood from left-wing campus groups of students and young intellectuals. The Jasic mobilization in 2018 showed that the MLML was bigger and better organized than the other left currents in China, but no evidence shows it to be a unified organization.

In fact, the heated debates triggered by the consequences of this mobilization showed that the older and younger generations of the MLML — for convenience I call them old guards and young guards in this article — have significant political and strategic disagreements.

The Jasic Incident: Brief Time Line

Many reports have described details of the Jasic incident and the related protest, mobilization and repression. This article will not repeat the whole story, but a brief time line is convenient for readers to understand the debates within the MLML.

March to July 2018: Several cases of resistance against illegal factory rules and bullying management occurred in Jasic factory in Shenzhen. Several Jasic workers decided to establish a factory union and went to seek help from the official district union branch. The latter replied that they must first gain consent from management.

July 10-18: The worker activists collected 89 signatures from their colleagues who wanted to join the proposed factory union. But these activists were fired by the management one by one with different excuses.

July 20: Seven fired workers protested outside the factory. The police came and took them away. They were physically and mentally abused in the police station. Later other workers protested outside the police station and demanded the release of the seven workers. The police detained some of these protesters.

July 21-27: Online information and mobilizing started. More protests occurred outside Jasic and police stations. The participants were mainly factory workers in

Shenzhen. On the 27th the police made a mass arrest of 30 protesters, including one student.

July 28 to early August: Propaganda and mobilization escalated. Both the old and young guards of the MLML, other left currents, the labor movement across the country, and students from many universities showed solidarity in various ways. International media started reporting the incident.

The Jasic Worker Support Group (hereinafter referred to as the Support Group) was formed. More and more people came to Shenzhen to join the group, including both the young and old guards of the MLML. The local police became their main target.

August 11: The Support Group published an open letter, begging the central authority of the CCP to investigate the “reactionaries and evil forces” hiding inside the Shenzhen government. One of the on-site organizers of the Support Group, Shen Mengyu, was kidnapped in the evening, sparking another round of bulletins condemning the suppression and appeal for solidarity support.

August 24: Police raided the apartment that the Support Group rented for temporary accommodation. Sixty people were arrested, 50 of them students. Most students were released in the next two days. But some of them are still constantly harassed by their universities and local police. In other cities several MLML-related people were taken away by the police from their offices or residences on the same day.

November 9-11: At least another 18 MLML-related people were arrested across the country.

Recent Update: A number of MLML-influenced campus groups have been disciplined. Many students who joined the Support Group (including those who didn't go to Shenzhen) are under surveillance or have their student status suspended. As of mid-January this year, 36 people who were arrested during the Jasic incident are still not released.

By March 2019 at least 10 members of the Support Group had been forced to shoot confession videos, in which they claim that the Jasic incident was conspired by ultralefts as a plot to incite subversion of state power.

Criticism from the Old Guards

The old guards of the MLML are evidently unhappy about the results of the Jasic mobilization. Initially the criticism was internal, but the young guards posted their response publicly last November. Therefore, on the first day of 2019, the old guards published an open letter to the young guards on the Red China website.

The letter first alleged that the “petty bourgeois” attributes of the young guards

have caused quite serious consequences, shown not only during the Jasic incident.

It stated that they pay more attention to young migrant workers but neglect SOE workers, pay more attention to coastal regions but neglect inland regions, pay more attention to capitalist legal procedures but neglect the more effective methods developed by Chinese workers in previous struggles and pay more attention to propaganda on social networks but neglect longterm organizing work among the masses.

The letter then argues that the fundamental cause of the Jasic failure is what they describe as the petty bourgeois “labor movement” route:

“First striving for the establishment of formal and open trade unions, legalized by capitalist law; then striving for capitalist democracy. In order to establish trade unions, young people who understand Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ‘theories’ must go to work in factories and mobilize workers to carry out struggle. The method of ‘struggle’ is petitioning capitalists; if the ‘struggle’ is suppressed, then petitioning the capitalist state machinery; if it is suppressed again, then appealing to the magical power of public opinion.”

The letter argues that this route might work in the West, but not in today's China. This is because China is a semi-peripheral country in the world capitalist system, and the exploitation of a large amount of cheap labor is the lifeblood of the Chinese capitalism. Thus the capitalist class won't allow workers to organize legal trade unions universally as long as the capitalist rule is still running “normally.”

At a point when capitalist rule is crumbling in the face of a revolutionary tide, the Chinese working class may demand union rights autonomously and universally, but their demands will definitely go beyond this at that time. Therefore, the young guards' basic demand of establishing a union at Jasic with the help of the CCP's official union institution was illusory from the beginning.

The old guards think that the young guards made more mistakes after the initial protest of the workers was repressed by the local police. One error was hoping the pressure of leftwing solidarity and overseas public opinion could change the mind of the capitalist government.

The letter points out that the power of public opinion is very limited in today's China. In most cases, the fate of a workers' struggle decisively depends on the local class power relations at the time. Local capitalists and bureaucrats only make concessions when workers pose real threats to them — such as an effective strike that can cause significant economic losses or affect the promotions of local bureaucrats.

Another related mistake was blaming

other people for not showing enough solidarity after the failure. The letter points out that mobilizing people to show solidarity online and go to Shenzhen did not save the struggle; instead it had exposed the MLML network and let many young lefties become the victims of state repression.

The Old Guards' Suggestions

In their letter, the old guards outline their proposed correct route of proletarian liberation in China. They urge the young guards to shift their focus from trade union and capitalist democracy to the central issue of proletarian revolution — how to take state power.

They argue that China will never rise from a semi-peripheral country to a core country in the world capitalist system. According to their definition, core countries exploit the other countries — since China has the largest population in the world, as a whole it simply cannot exploit the other countries.

Therefore, the Chinese capitalist class will not be able to solve the future economic and political crises. This will create revolutionary momentum, but at that time the Chinese proletariat won't have enough strength to take state power nationally. There will be a transition period of several tens of years. During this period, the proletariat will form its own party and become politically mature. Then they can take power.

However, capitalist rule is now still stable. So the old guards suggest from that the main task of the MLML is to learn the methods and experiences of struggles from the working masses, rather than trying to "inspire," "lead" or "mobilize" workers' struggles.

Furthermore, the young activists should go to inland instead of coastal regions. As China's inland regions are much less economically developed, the power of the capitalist class there is relatively weak, so it will be easier to establish the revolutionary bases of the proletariat during the transition period.

Although the number of migrant workers is huge in coastal regions, they don't have strong bonds with the local residents (in many cases the two sides also have conflicting interests), so it will be hard for them to take state power there even during the revolutionary period.

For dealing with state repression, the old guards also give concrete suggestions. They use the example of the Maoist Reading Group Incident.³ In another article published recently on the Red China website, the old guards claim that the rescue campaign from this incident had been led by them since

January 2018.

Their strategy was to outwardly recognize the legitimacy of the state by citing the words of Xi Jinping in the petition. At the same time to appeal that the "eight youths" were Marxist-Leninists who mainly engage in social welfare activities and do not pose a political threat.

They proposed that after handing the petition to the Minister of Public Security, the four fugitives should turn themselves in to the police publicly, as a way to expand the influence of the MLML.⁴

The article concludes that these strategies had minimized the losses of the MLML in a situation

where the class power balance was not in their favor. Conversely, during the Jasic incident the young guards ignored suggestions and warnings from the old guards and refused to retreat, resulting in great losses in the face of state repression.

Response from the Young Guards

Since last November, the young guards have posted a number of articles to openly respond to the above criticism and suggestions. They argue that the Jasic workers' "union demand" was not instilled by "young leftists from petty bourgeois social background," but self-determined corroboration gained through the workers' daily struggles.

They also deny the old guards' theory that the exploitation of a large amount of cheap labor will always be the mainstay of Chinese capitalism. In their opinion, economic transformation and labor shortage will gradually enlarge the space for the union movement. Thus, more and more workers will inevitably make that demand.

The young guards argue that their own position in supporting the union demand is not reformism or a petty bourgeois route — they have never thought or said that the ultimate goals were establishing legal trade unions or achieving western-style capitalist democracy. They support it because the unionized workers would be more likely to take collective actions as future class conflict becomes intensified.

They insist that protesting against the police after the first round of arrests was also the workers' own choice, although it might have been a wrong judgment or too optimistic. They think that China's working class movement will inevitably develop politically in the future, thus those workers who had taken this step at present should not be discouraged.

On the issue of student mobilization, their arguments are: First, after the mass arrest on July 27, students were the only

force that could continue protesting, and going to Shenzhen was their proactive choice. Second, due to the complicated and fast-changing circumstances in Shenzhen, the actions of the students were not perfect, but this cannot fundamentally negate the progressive nature of the Support Group.

Third, as activists the students will confront the violent machinery of the state sooner or later, thus their experiences during the Jasic struggle and the following repressions are useful lessons.

On the question of the coastal versus inland regions, the young guards also disagree with the old guards. They state that China now has 287 million migrant workers, comprising 70% of the working class; China's workers' struggles are most concentrated in eastern coastal regions, especially the Pearl River Delta; the working class in inland regions is small in number, not concentrated and generally less militant.

They sneer at the idea of "establishing the revolutionary bases of the proletariat inland," calling it the imagination of "arm-chair revolutionaries." In one article, they even denounce such suggestions from the old guards as capitulationism and "stabbing your comrades from the capitalist standpoint."

The young guards believe, although the Jasic struggle has encountered some setbacks, that it is not a total failure — it also has some achievements. For example, the Chinese discussion of social events is predominantly in the hands of the state and liberals, but the Jasic struggle made an important step in shifting it to let the masses hear the voices of the left.

The student mobilization also had proved that the tens of millions of university students are the talent pool of the Chinese left and pointed a bright direction for the left.

Continue the Struggle!

At least in appearance, the young guards of the MLML didn't accept the criticism and suggestions from old guards. In spite of the losses they suffered, they continue the struggle in their own way with great enthusiasm. As described in the Support Group's New Year Message:

"...On December 26th, the 125th birthday of Chairman Mao Zedong, four representatives of Supporting Group went to his birth place, Shaoshan. Their passionate speeches and ringing voices of songs earned the bravo from the audience. People from all parts of the country, fearless of the tricks of the authority, joined the Supporting Group for justice and provided their effort to rescue the arrested comrades..."

"Everyone of JSG (Jasic Support Group) is ready to stand with the comrades in capitalist-backed prison, and to sacrifice everything for the liberation of working class, to get ready to be arrested and put on the shackles by the



dirty police in Guangdong who stand with the capitalists!" (The English version quoted here is the official translation posted by the Support Group.)

As an observer from outside, I agree that some of the criticism and suggestions from the old guards do not make sense and understand that activists cannot publicize all their strategies and tactics in an authoritarian regime. Nevertheless, some issues are still debatable.

First, social discourse in today's China is very reactionary. Chinese "Liberalism" is far from the worst part of the right — the ideas of racism, sexism, nationalism, patriarchy and bureaucratism also have stronger influences than the left-wing ideas in general.

In this environment, ultraleft slogans may turn off some of the left-leaning youths. For example, how many young students or workers are sincerely ready to "sacrifice everything for the liberation of working class" or "be arrested and put on the shackles by the dirty police" — especially so when they are aware that their sacrifice would not have brought any benefit for the workers whose interest they are committed to serve?

Moreover, since many of those who want to make such sacrifices are in jail now, who is going to recruit and train more left-wing youths? Articles on social media probably won't be able to substitute the offline organizing work.

Secondly, if the Guangdong government

is controlled by capitalists and reactionaries, is the one in Beijing our comrade? I think we have to realize that regardless of the factional fights within the ruling class, they share a common ground that all working class resistances in all parts of China should be suppressed.

The central government in Beijing sometimes poses the "we-love-workers-and-poor" gesture, but this is just its division of labor in the "good cops and bad cops" game. The left should not send a message to the masses that some Big Brothers are on our side to the masses, even when it is for the purpose of rescuing your comrades.

Thirdly, the coastal-or-inland debate is not a black-or-white question. If some people can organize or establish contacts with workers in inland regions, just do it; if the others find it is easier to build groups in the Pearl River Delta they should go ahead with it.

This is not a matter of principle. There are many universities in inland cities that are also industrialized, such as Wuhan and Chongqing; there are also big SOEs and traditional type working class in coastal cities such as Shanghai.

Let's imagine a scenario: a leftwing student goes to college in Wuhan and engages in activities in support of local workers; after graduation she moves to Shenzhen to join a group who share the same politics, while some of her leftwing mates choose to stay and keep working with the local

workers.

After some incidents, she is blacklisted by the Guangdong police and constantly harassed there; then she goes back to her hometown where the repression is not so severe, and starts contacting the local leftists... This scenario is probably the more natural and practical answer for the young leftists in today's China. ■

Notes

1. In the past some of them also hoped that the Maoist faction in the party would capture the highest power and turn the country to their preferable path. The fall of Bo Xilai broke this hope.
2. The Chinese liberals and far-right often refer to Maoists as "Mao Zuo." This term can cause confusion. The literal English translation is "Maoist left," which distinguishes Maoists from the other leftists. But people also translate this term into "left-wing Maoists," which indicates there are right-wing Maoists. For the liberals and far-right, "left" is a bad word, so this term is generally used in a disrespectful way. The non-Maoist leftists use this term as well, but the implications are complicated. Some people think all the Maoists are Stalinists, calling them "Mao Zuo" is to hint that they are deceptive. Others treat the left-wing Maoists in a more comradely way and believe that they could be allies in many struggles; thus they refer the left-wing Maoists as "Mao Zuo" to distinguish them from the pro-establishment Maoists. In order to eliminate confusion, in this article I use their own term "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Left," to refer the left-wing Maoists.
3. In November 2017, cops raided a reading group held at the Guangdong University of Technology. Four participants were arrested and another four became fugitives. In their open letters published later, some of them identify themselves as the MLML. A rescue campaign was launched nationally. By March 2018, the Guangdong police had dropped the charges and all of the eight youths had been freed.
4. As it turned out, the Guangdong police dropped the charges before the fugitives were convinced to do so.

Sexual Harassment and #MeToo in China

CHINESE WOMEN STILL face perilous conditions in society and the workplace, often falling victim to sexual harassment and discrimination of various kinds.

• *Women are discriminated against in job applications.* Research conducted by Human Rights Watch found that almost 20% of civil service positions released in early 2018 either required job applicants to be male or expressed a preference for male candidates, whereas only one job post indicated a preference for females.

Since Xi Jinping's coming to power five years ago and the slowing economic growth, the economy has been reconfigured. Thousands of factories have moved away from the Pear River Delta.

Accompanying the rise of new infrastructure, businesses and services in inland China has been the rise of more precarious patterns, particularly in the service industry. By the end of 2016, workers' collective actions in the service industry surpassed those in industry.

Along with the changing economy and lax enforcement of labor laws, the state has cracked down on labor-oriented NGOs and is more likely to shut down

labor protests. Nonetheless, China's labor shortage continues. It is unclear how this change is affecting women workers.

• *Sexual harassment exists in universities and in the workplace.* Since 2018 there have been more than 4.5 million hits on a #MeToo hashtag. This has led to accusations against multiple high-profile men, including activist Lei Chuang, environmentalist Feng Yongfeng, and journalists Zhang Wen and Xiong Peiyun.

Recently, accusations against two other well-known men have emerged — Buddhist Master Xuecheng and billionaire Richard Qiangdong Liu, founder and CEO of JD.com. campaign.

By mid-August, Xuecheng resigned from his tenure as head of China's government-run Buddhist Association. A 95-page dossier, compiled by two supervisory chancellors at Beijing's Longquan Temple, contains several reports of Xuecheng sending sexually aggressive texts to nuns and disciples, with one woman accusing him of rape.

Liu was arrested at the end of August following allegations of rape from a Chinese student at the University of Minnesota. If found guilty, he faces up to 30

years in prison.

The #MeToo movement, predominantly led by student activists, resonated across university campuses throughout the country. At Peking University (PKU) their campaign included the demand for the university to disclose information on a rape-suicide case that occurred two decades ago. Gao Yan, a student at PKU, had committed suicide after being sexually assaulted by Shen Yang, at that time a professor at the university. In fact he would keep the position until 2011.

Having failed to intimidate the activists, PKU pledged to re-investigate the case and introduce regulations on anti-sexual misconduct. It is significant that the #MeToo movement has not been repressed.

Although the movement so far has stopped short of attacking powerful figures in the party-state apparatus, the downfall of such high-profile and influential individuals represents a series of victories for China's #MeToo movement. ■

(Compiled from updates in *Made in China*, a quarterly journal on Chinese labor, civil society and rights.)

An Interview with Robert Brenner Behind the Economic Turbulence

Suzi Weissman interviewed Robert Brenner on February 10, 2019, for her “Beneath the Surface” (https://archive.kpfb.org/index_one.php?shokey=bts_Friday) broadcast on KPFB in Los Angeles, released on her Jacobin Radio podcast (<https://bit.ly/2jUfNu>) on February 12. The transcript has been edited for publication here.

Suzi Weissman: Welcome to Jacobin Radio. Today we’re going to talk about the state of the economy. I’ve invited Robert Brenner back for the hour in conversation on politics and the economy, matters of great confusion if you read the business pages and hear the politicians all touting record low unemployment, rising wages, and the recovery of the stock market.

Yet the Federal Reserve has stopped raising interest rates, wages are stagnant, precarity and insecurity are the norm — and teachers are striking to force states to stop under-investing and save public education.

So, what’s the real story? Let’s just start with the stock market. To say that there’s extreme volatility is a huge understatement, and at the same time, Fed policy on interest rates is itself very volatile. So what is going on?

Robert Brenner: It’s not really a very pretty story. From the time of the Great Recession of 2008-9 to today, the Fed has maintained a policy of super-low interest rates — in fact, zero or below zero interest rates. If you take into account price increases, the real interest rate has been zero or below for much of the time.

Low interest rates were the government’s main tool to restore order in the markets, and to stabilize the economy in the wake of the financial markets’ crash and the economic slowdown.

In the past, it was common sense to get increased demand directly, through deficit spending, by way of big masses of government spending. But we are in a new era when this is no longer politically in the cards.

With the same goal of stability, the Fed carried out so-called “quantitative easing,” which called for the Fed to buy up huge masses of financial assets with the aim of keeping up their prices, and indirectly keeping down the cost of borrowing.

The result was to create a truly insane asset price bubble — asset price bubbles arose, in fact, everywhere, from artworks to raw materials, to houses, and above all in the stock market. I think everybody knows this because it’s been on the front pages for almost a decade now.

The S&P composite index rose from around 1000 in 2009, at its bottom in the wake of the crash, to close to 2900 at the peak last December, almost tripling in that interval.

The result was to turn just about anyone who could afford to invest in stocks into a successful investor, a financial genius. They borrowed at ridiculously low rates, guaranteed by the Fed, and they kept their money in the market as it went up

and up. People in this audience probably know some people like that; too few of them actually *are* people like that.

But after almost a decade of this policy, which was designed to make the rich richer, whatever else it did, the excuse of stabilizing the economy was wearing pretty thin — especially because the government and the business press were announcing ever more stridently that the official unemployment rate had fallen to record lows, and the economy was experiencing full, even over-full employment.

If that were the case, it was agreed, there would soon be runaway wage growth and, in turn, uncontrollable price rises. Up to this point, wage stagnation in the face of full employment appeared as a mysterious paradox. So the Fed felt enormous pressure to return to normal in order to head off wage-driven inflation before it got out of control.

Rising and Falling

So the Fed began the slow but steady rise in interest rates. At the same time, it began to reverse its quantitative easing policy, selling off rather than buying Fed assets, again pushing down the prices of financial assets — which meant pushing down the stock market rather than driving it up.

In the month of December 2018, after the Fed had told everyone it was continuing with this policy, stock prices fell the greatest of any month in memory, if not in history. As the month progressed, one-day falls became ever huger, and it looked like a total collapse was going to happen.

Would the Fed keep up its policy of slow but steady monetary tightening? This was the question everyone was asking. In the end, the Fed lost its nerve, discontinued its policy of slowly raising interest rates and selling off financial assets. Voila! There was another about-face, and the stock market has already come pretty close to having made up for its recent swoon.

SW: How is it possible? Everybody who was watching in December was thinking that this was going to be another 2007-8 free fall of the stock market and the economy. How could conditions change so much in one month’s time to explain first this new bust, and what now people are touting as a new boom?

RB: I think there are really two closely related things going on here. In the first place, the Fed and many others have believed that the economy is much stronger than it actually is.

In particular, the Fed and others in the government believe that they see in front of them a tight labor market. With the official unemployment rate so very low, they’ve thought that runaway wage growth and runaway inflation are about to break out. They conclude that they have to raise interest rates to cut off this development before it starts.

But in fact the job market is really much weaker than is widely thought. As a result, when the Fed persists in raising

interest rates in the face of what is really a weak economy, it threatens to cause a crash and a recession.

That's what we've seen recently: The Fed persists in tightening, the stock market goes down, and the economy is suddenly in deep trouble, as you would see if you read the *Financial Times* every day.

In the second place, and relatedly, the Fed and others believe that the record run-up of the stock market is ultimately based on a strong real economy. But in fact, the real economy has been unbelievably feeble across the board — the main trends in the economy have been historically, unprecedentedly bad.

The stock market rise is not based on strong fundamentals; its foundation is instead just the Fed's ultra-low interest rates. So when the Fed raises interest rates, as it just did, it tanks the stock market and in turn destroys what little growth the real economy has been capable of providing.

In short, the stock market needs the same artificial policy of "bubblenomics" that was introduced by Alan Greenspan in the 1980s, continued by his successor Ben Bernanke, and continues today under Jerome Powell.

A Closer Look at Employment

What about the labor market? No one can deny the fact that we've seen job creation month after month. This has brought us to full employment, at least according to the figures of the government, and supposedly a great economy. But what is the actual evidence, the actual state of jobs and the labor market?

The unemployment rate, according to the Labor Department and the Fed, is now under four percent, which truly would be super low — if the unemployment rate measured by the government today meant the same thing as that rate did in the past. A below-four-percent rate would have indicated a super strong economy, a super tight labor market, and we would indeed have expected very fast rising wages and accelerating inflation.

But what's the reality? The official unemployment rate, as people might know, measures the percentage of the labor force who are unemployed — but as measured by the government, the labor force itself only includes people who either

have jobs or are looking for work.

The key point is that it does NOT include people who have stopped looking for work because they have become discouraged and thus dropped out of the labor force. In dropping out of the labor force, they cease to be counted as unemployed.

The labor force participation rate — the proportion of the total population ages 18 to 64 who are employed or looking for work — fell sharply at the time when the crisis hit, and is still far from returning to its level then, of 2007.

Put another way, the employed proportion of the actual population capable of working is still a long way from reaching its level before the crash. That percentage was about 63% in 2007, but even now, after so many months of adding labor, it is still between 2-3% below that level. So this is hardly full employment, even if it *looks* like it.

The bottom line is that there's nothing paradoxical about stagnant wages. The demand for jobs has still to come back to what it was in relation to supply of jobs. The labor market is still not all that tight, so wage pressure is not all that high.

In addition, equally important — and this is a very big deal — you can't just look at the numbers hired, the numbers who have been employed, but what sort of jobs they are getting. And if you have an audience, as we probably do, which has been going through this labor market over the last decade, they're having to take much worse jobs than they had before the crisis hit.

That each worker's job pays less than their previous one makes it even more understandable that there's no reason to expect runaway wage gains and runaway inflation.

In following a traditional policy of raising rates to respond to what it believes to be strong labor market, the Fed has been operating under quite a false assumption. It should be no surprise that it eventually disrupts both the financial markets and underlying economy.

Economy and the 2016 Election

SW: *Trump is claiming of course that "the state of the economy is strong," but the Democrats don't disagree. They simply deny that Trump is responsible for it. Democrats and Republicans are both trying to take credit. Are they both wrong?*

RB: This is really a crucial point, not just economically but politically. These claims of a strong economy are, and should be, wearing quite thin. After all, what happened in 2016?

Trump's rightwing advisors, Bannon and Mercer, understood that the economy was weak, that people were not finding work or were landing crappy jobs. This provided the starting point, in fact the ultimate basis, for Trump's so-called populist presidential campaign and for his victory.

I won't belabor this — I've talked about it on your show — still, I can't resist shouting out the fact that the economy has been getting weaker for close to a half a century, outside of the bubbles when it was driven artificially by the great stock market run-up of the 1990s and the equally ill-fated housing price run-up between 2002 and 2007.

First: Wages, as most of us know by now, aren't a lot higher than they were at the end of the 1970s. We've had a whole generation experiencing wage



Detroit: what capitalist "prosperity" did for the Motor City. Jim West/www.jimwestphoto.com

stagnation — and since the Great Recession, it's been even worse.

Second: What about capital accumulation, meaning investment, the driving force of the capitalist economy? The period roughly between the end of World War II to about 1973 is known as the postwar boom, and was indeed a highly expansionary period across the board. But that expansion ended in the 1970s.

Since the '70s, the growth of plant and equipment in the private sector has fallen steadily, decade by decade, business cycle by business cycle, and hit rock bottom in the period since the Great Recession. By the 1990s the growth of plant and equipment had already dropped to half of what it was during the postwar boom.

Third: Most telling of all is labor productivity, which economists focus on for good reason — because it gives us the best measure of how much people can afford, given what their costs of production are. High labor productivity allows for a correspondingly higher surplus available to invest.

Amazingly, since the 1970s growth in labor productivity has been the lowest it's been in a century. Comparing labor productivity growth from the 1970s until today, we find it is significantly lower than the 1920-1948 period, which included the Great Depression.

Another way to look at this is that in the period between 1973 and the present, the growth of labor productivity has stagnated at about 1.5% per year, leaving out the bubble years of 1995-2007.

Stock Prices and Stagnant Profits

SW: *How do we account for a runaway stock market, if the labor market is not tight and the real economy has been weak?*

RB: It's completely in keeping with all the other things we've seen about the economy. Looking at the non-financial sector — because the financial sector is not a very good sector to understand profit-making directly — in the private sector minus finance, profits have been pretty much flat over the last 4-5 years, and in fact going all the way back to 2012.

In 2012, profits outside the financial sector hit \$1.5 trillion, and by 2017 were only around \$1.6 trillion. They've been fluctuating in that range throughout the intervening period. So there has been barely any increase. Profits have stagnated while stock prices have skyrocketed, with the consequence that stock prices have completely lost touch with the underlying values of the corporations they represent.

Robert Schiller, the famous economist, has shown in his calculations that the ratio between prices and profits is higher today than it has been at any other point in recorded history, except for two interesting years — 1929, the year of the great stock market crash that led into the Great Depression, and 1999-2000, which led immediately in to the famous high tech crash of 2000-2001.

What is making the stock market soar, and the rich super-rich, is the Fed's stimulative policy of bubbleonomics: low interest rate and buying up financial assets which we call quantitative easing. But it hasn't succeeded in driving up anything else, especially the productive economy. No wonder that the stock market went into that swoon as soon as the Fed made clear it was serious about tightening monetary policy, then made a recovery when it changed its mind.

SW: *How do we account for this bizarrely weak economy, one in which the rich have been making off like bandits? You've often said it's because of insufficient demand, and that insufficient demand is why capitalists aren't investing and hiring more, why they aren't spending more money, why, in fact, they are still hoarding money. To speak to this question of insufficient demand, you've argued that the answer is the problem of overcapacity on a world scale.*

RB: I'll start with the weakness, and try to move to this pretty weird economy that has now emerged. There's been ever-intensifying competition on a world scale, going from Germany, Japan and the East Asian Newly Industrializing countries (NICs), the East Asian Tigers, and above all this giant of China.

Each new wave of manufacturers is producing ever more cheaply than those that came before, because each in turn has an ever lower-priced labor force but also can imitate the technology of its predecessors. So what's overtaken not just the U.S. economy, but the world economy, is that manufacturing output is growing everywhere, but without reference to the market.

This has meant that everywhere it has become ever more difficult to invest in new plant and equipment, hire labor, and sell on the world market and actually make a profit in so doing. That is not a development that was just confined to the United States and to Europe and Japan, but has overtaken China itself, which is suffering from the same difficulty of over-investment leading to over-capacity.

The fall in the rate of profit is the link between over-capacity and falling or insufficient demand. With low profitability, companies have smaller surpluses to invest, and less motivation to do so. They have to get their costs down in order to remain competitive, so they put downward pressure on wages. The government helps by reducing government services, so that corporate taxes can be reduced.

So you have a combination of lower demand for investment goods (plant and equipment), for consumer goods, and for government services — a problem of falling demand in the aggregate, the immediate cause of the economic slowdown.

Equally to the point, companies come to see, over time, that even if it looks like they can make a profit in the short run, taking account of how things have evolved in the world economy during recent decades, they are likely to come up short in the longer run, because a new set of lower cost producers will come on line and prevent them from realizing their investments.

American policymakers first came up against this problem in the 1970s, and it hit them in the gut in a way they had never thought could happen. After all, American manufacturing had been the world leader and the world model since the Civil War, and especially since the turn of the 20th century, dominating its competitors right into the middle 1960s.

But then, quite suddenly, you have this process of intensified competition leading to a fall in the rate of profit, and government authorities have no answer. They try, on the one hand, to help the capitalist producers by reducing the exchange rate of the dollar, by reducing the cost of borrowing, and introducing measures of trade protection.

At the same time, they make the standard turn to Keynesian deficit spending. But despite their help both on the so-called "supply side," to lower the cost of production in America, and on the demand side — by the end of the 1970s

profit rates had fallen significantly further, by a total of 50% in manufacturing.

So by the time we hit 1980, there is demoralization throughout the entire postwar liberal establishment, comprised of both Republicans and Democrats. The so-called neoclassical-Keynesian synthesis had totally failed, and they didn't really know what to do.

What's New About Neoliberalism

SW: *You're describing an economy that seems to be at an unprecedented impasse. How does the capitalist class get out of it?*

RB: In this unprecedented predicament — what you quite properly term an unprecedented impasse — government policymakers, politicians, capitalists, and the rich fumbled around for something new.

They did in the end come up with something new that did allow them to transcend the underlying impasse — although exactly how this happened is still not entirely clear. Over the course of the 1980s a completely new framework of political economy emerged.

Almost everyone has noticed this, and they've called this new framework "neoliberalism," and I think that's okay. But it is misleading in some fundamental respects.

In the first place, most people talk about austerity, a relentless attack on workers as central to neoliberalism. That's understandable, but there's nothing particularly new or special about austerity and an attack on workers' wages and conditions as a response to falling profitability.

You don't need a new system, neoliberalism, to have that. Every capitalist generation has done that when faced with falling profits. So austerity has been a central fact of our world, our economy, all through this period, but it doesn't define a new period.

Secondly, much more to the point I think, in talking about neoliberalism, people have talked about the freeing up of the economy from any sort of essential regulation or government control — in effect, opening up every possible arena to the intensification of competition.

This is particularly evident when we look at the freeing up of world trade and world investment to international competition. We call it globalization. And this I think is very much worth noting as a new, or relatively new, feature of the period from the late 1970s and early 1980s.

However, there's a real problem with focusing simply on freer markets and increased competition as at the core of neoliberalism. In my opinion, a development even more at the heart of the new framework of political economy goes, in a sense, in the opposite direction of freer markets and more intense competition.

This is the new tendency of the most elite layers of finance, of managers of nonfinancial corporations, and top leadership of the political parties to see to the upward redistribution of wealth to themselves by political means. What's essential here is the opposite of competitiveness: It is access to special privileges that directly yield wealth, thanks to political position or connection.

So we have the forging of an alliance among leading capitalists running corporations, the very rich, and political parties controlling governments, which began with marriages of convenience but soon became an unbreakable chain. It is about

dealing with this problem of low returns on investment — the difficulty of making profits by putting new plant and equipment together with new workers, and selling the product on the market and making a lot of money.

That difficulty has led to skipping, if you will, that process of earning money as the grandparents of today's capitalists did, by way of productive investment in farms, factories, offices. Instead, what we have is a whole series of new institutions and new policies which make possible the upward redistribution of wealth to the top, the absolute top, layer of the economy.

So, these people don't have to go through the complex and risky processes needed to increase the size of the pie and getting a share of that — making profits while paying wages. They can cut to the chase and simply force wealth upward to themselves.

The key here is politics, which allows for upward redistribution of wealth through various political means. What are the ways? We don't have the time here to list them all, but the main channels are very familiar.

First, tax cuts. Every administration, Republican or Democrat, from Carter on has implemented huge cuts in taxation.

The Politics of Financialization...

Secondly, as governments have financed themselves increasingly by way of borrowing, we've seen that rich people are making huge fortunes simply by buying government debt and collecting the interest on it — almost a foolproof way of making money. They buy government debt, and their returns are pretty much certain.

Thirdly, governments have stopped enforcing anti-monopoly legislation, and this has had a particularly "positive" effect in the central segments of today's economy, namely the high tech producers. What you essentially have is a new form of protectionism — the enforcement of so-called intellectual property rights.

Thanks to stronger intellectual property rights, firms are able, for example, to have their innovations protected from competition for much longer than in the past because patents last much longer than used to be the case. It's good to be Apple.

Fourthly, there's privatization, just taking activities that had been carried out by governments — health, education, pension, and so forth — and just handing them over to the capitalists and the rich to make a private profit on them.

Finally — here I'm going to have to foreshorten a long discussion — we have the rise of the financial sector, which is no doubt the main base of the new political economy of upwardly distributing wealth through political means.

Here we have the classic political alliance between political parties and financial firms of all sorts, where the financial firms get privileges from the politicians and parties in government and the financial firms hand over money to the politicians and parties to pay for their political campaigns and make the very top political leaders extremely rich.

So, to put it very schematically, governments deregulate certain financial activities to allow those who first enter to make super-profits, do their best to protect those activities so as to limit competition, and then, when the losses inevitably begin to mount, organize the expected bailouts.

I have to cut very short this story of financialization, but I

do want to get to one key aspect of this rise of finance that perfectly exemplifies the new political economy of making money through the politically driven upward redistribution of wealth, and this allows me to connect with a big theme of the first part of our discussion.

This is what we would call “bubblenomics:” the turn of the Federal Reserve to driving up the stock market through keeping interest rates artificially low. Bubblenomics makes for the most rapid creation of “wealth” — of course, it’s not really wealth, it’s paper — but owners of stock invest in them and ultimately cash them in, and make a fortune so much more rapidly and cleanly than they ever could if they had to go through the whole process of investment in production.

This bubblenomics is at the center of this new upward redistribution of wealth and helps us understand more clearly the Fed’s easy money policy that I was discussing earlier.

So how do we assess the payoffs provided by this new economy of politically-driven upward redistribution of wealth? We now have the epochal research by Piketty and Saez who enabled us to get to the heart of the process by researching what they call top income earners.

Their results are now pretty well known, and extraordinarily revealing. During the postwar boom, we actually had decreasing inequality and very limited income going to the top income brackets. For the whole period from the 1940s to the end of the 1970s, the top 1% of earners received 9-10% of total income, no more. But in the short period since 1980, their share, that is the share of the top 1%, has gone up to 25%, while the bottom 80% have made virtually no gains.

Now, hopefully, we can see the big picture. On the one hand, capitalists and the very rich are not investing much or employing many workers. This is not because they wouldn’t like to, but, unlike the period of the great postwar boom, they can’t do so profitably.

There’s limited opportunity to actually get rich by investing in plant and equipment and software and hiring new people the way their grandfathers did. So, it is understandable that we have the lowest levels of investment, the worst productivity performance, and the lowest wage growth, on the one hand, and the stock market run-up on the other.

It could not be clearer, in my opinion, that what’s making rich people ever richer — and this is the sum of politically sponsored favors secured from the political parties in control of government.

...And Financialization of Politics

SW: So this new economy that we’ve been living in for decades, as you’ve just stated, is literally political to its core. The question then is what this means for society as a whole and not just for the 1%?

RB: I think we can clearly see the payoff today of this way of looking at things, and I mean at this very moment. Most strikingly, there has been — and quite understandably — a loss of interest on the part of the ruling class, the rich, the elites, in any longer securing from governments the things that the state has classically provided for capitalism.

The capitalists classically wanted, and the state has provided, a whole series of services that the capitalists cannot easily provide, and the whole of society, above all the working class, has made sure the capitalists get these: state provision of infrastructure, state support for education, state support



Pensions, wages, communities and lives under attack in the neoliberal era. But the fight for health and welfare.

The capitalist class is not very nice, nor particularly generous, but they need these things if they’re going to have a productive economy. And not only the capitalists but also the population benefits from them.

The case of Korea, where these things get provided as a matter of course, is no accident. Korea is one of the few countries that still maintains and depends on a productive economy, featuring manufacturing.

But if the capitalists, the rich, the elites, don’t depend any longer on a productive economy — if they are not making money, to anything like the extent they once did, on profitable investment in capital and labor — then they don’t depend on the state to carry out its traditional implementation of these functions.

So what we’ve seen is that the capitalists, the rich and the leading politicians have been not just neutral, but pushing actively against the state carrying out these functions. This is because they don’t want the state to “waste” its money on these functions, for the simple reason that they don’t want to pay taxes to finance them.

Throughout the postwar boom, we had quite decent levels of government investment in plant and equipment, fixed assets of all kinds. The construction of the interstate highway system comes immediately to mind. But you also had the impressive growth of public education, including universities.

You even had a massive, if strictly limited, increase in state financed health care, for example through Medicare. Growing government investment made all these things possible.

But starting around 1970, when the international crisis of



back begins.

Jim West/www.jimwestphoto.com

overinvestment leading to over capacity began to bring down the rate of profit in a big way, that investment by the state began a long process of deceleration. The amount of new investment ceased to keep up with this using up and wearing out of government owned fixed assets.

The age of government plant and equipment, remained, on average at around 14 years through the postwar boom — which meant that the state was keeping up new investment fast enough make up for depreciation. But from then on, the age of government capital increased steadily and without cease, and is now, on average, 27 years.

Collapse and Fightback

The collapse of state investment is crumbling before us in every way. It has meant, as people are aware, a deepening crisis in infrastructure. If you go over a bridge, you're likely

to fall into a river; trains are not just regularly late, but going off the track.

Infrastructure in high tech, telecommunications in particular, is far behind that in Asia, where the speed of the internet and quality of mobile phones easily exceed our own.

Then there's basic healthcare, which we hardly need to discuss with this audience. Here, where what's pretty much a right throughout the rest of the capitalist countries is still quite controversial for the American elite, including among declared Democratic Party candidates in the coming election.

Perhaps most prominently, there's been the reactionary bipartisan consensus on public education. Thanks to the Clintons, Bush, and Obama — long before Trump — we've seen a systematically implemented bipartisan disinvestment in public education, the proliferation of charter schools, privatization, and teaching to the test.

In Los Angeles, where we live, it's been hitting us in the face for years, until — it makes me cry, it's so wonderful — the recent victorious LA teachers' strike, which is of course part of a spectacular upsurge of teachers' struggles across the country, from Chicago to the Red States and now throughout California.

SW: *What you're saying has really sobering, if not depressing, implications. But the top 1%, or maybe 0.1% have been able to get away with this for so long because there's been no fightback. The latest Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that we've just been through the period with the least amount of strikes in recorded history. But spectacularly, that has changed in the last year with teachers and public sector revolts which are continuing apace and show no sign*

of slowing down. So what has all that meant for us, and especially in this period of the beginning of a fightback?

RB: The message could not be clearer, and is really very sobering. If people are going to get these services that they need for a decent life — if they're going to get the education or health or infrastructure or new skills training or money for a decent retirement — they are going to have to fight for it, to impose it on a ruling class that emphatically does not want it.

The LA teachers showed the way in their recent strike when they proclaimed that they are fighting for the common good, and that they can get this only by fighting for it, against the powers that be. For most of the people who listen to this show, it means that we're going to have to do it against the wishes of this country's political leadership, not just of the Republican party, but the Democratic party as well.

The Democrats have pursued all these policies designed to speed the upward distribution of wealth by political means, in the same way if not so fast as the Republicans have — they are not even yet agreed on nationally supported healthcare.

SW: *So how does this relate to the Green New Deal that's been advanced by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders and so many others?*

RB: In the past, the government has supported the economy in the most conservative possible way, basically through subsidizing and assuring the profits of private corporations. The limit to this can be found in the dependence on what its supporters call "Keynesian" policy, or the so-called "neoclassical-Keynesian synthesis."

This is also called demand management or deficit spending. What this means is that they have the most conservative, most market-based possible means for supporting demand. They reduce taxes, which means that government deficits rise, and government deficits press indifferently on the economy, supposedly to stimulate it in a neutral manner, allowing the most promising industry to thrive.

But what we know is that this will not work today. Stimulating demand in general does not get us investment, let alone investment that stimulates other investment. As we have seen it is very difficult to invest profitably in this country, or anywhere else, in this period.

To get some indication of this, just look at the historic Trump tax breaks, which are creating ever greater deficits and putting money for free in the hands of capitalist and the rich but eliciting little or no investment or growth.

What is meant by Keynesianism today has no chance to bring about a transformation of the economy that depends on the creation of new industries and imposing the regulations necessary to make it a Green New Deal.

So what we need is — I think we have to pay attention to the rhetoric here — is not really a Keynesian policy (as it is commonly understood). It is *direct state intervention*.

Think of the New Deal, which we now understand had much more government investment than we thought; and think about — sadly, but a good example — what happens during wartime — focused state support and supervision of investment, immediately designed to bring a specific outcome.

We need to move, in other words, against the natural tendency of the private capitalist economy today — and that means we need to force a *state policy of investment* that would never be supported in any other way. ■

On Rosa Luxemburg and Her Murder “Where History Failed to Turn” By Jason Schulman

IT IS ONLY appropriate, of course, that Klaus Gietinger’s *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* be published this year — 2019. It began with one of the saddest centenaries in socialist history, the event that provides his book’s title, as well as the murder of Luxemburg’s comrade Karl Liebknecht.¹

The sadness arises not only because Luxemburg, within the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), and finally the Spartacus League (*Spartakusbund*) and the German Communist Party (KPD), represented the democratic revolutionary socialism that informs the political perspective of *Against the Current* (as well as *New Politics*, which I co-edit).

It isn’t only because she was the author of such Marxist classics as *Social Reform or Revolution*, *The Junius Pamphlet*, *The Russian Revolution and The Mass Strike*, *The Party and the Trade Unions*, all still worth reading and re-reading.

It’s also because Rosa’s murder was the result of collaboration by the proto-fascist *Freikorps* (Volunteer Corps) — who shot her and threw her body into Berlin’s Landwehr canal — and the pro-war, nationalist leadership of the Social Democratic government of Friedrich Ebert.

It’s because her murder, soon followed by the massacre of thousands of revolutionary socialists, effectively foretold the failure of the working class to take power in the German Revolution of 1918-23, perhaps the key “turning point of history where history failed to turn” (as C.L.R. James once said of the outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution).

Because the German working class did not take power, to quote Issac Deutscher’s famous passage from “The Non-Jewish Jew,” it’s fair to say that in Rosa’s assassination “Hohenzollern Germany celebrated its last triumph and Nazi Germany — its first.”

The Politics of Murder

One might ask why the SPD leadership

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was so anxious to see Rosa’s voice silenced, especially since before World War I she “lacked a unique voice and public faction in the party.”²

It may have been in part because of her close association with Karl Liebknecht, the son of SPD co-founder Wilhelm Liebknecht and the first SPD parliamentarian to vote against German support of the war. Karl Liebknecht was subsequently imprisoned after his speech on May Day, 1916 during a mass antiwar demonstration organized by the *Spartakusbund*.

Liebknecht quickly became a prominent and popular symbol of revolutionary socialist opposition to the war — unsurprisingly, he was murdered only moments before Rosa, and by the same murderers.

But before the war, Rosa was already internationally famous within the socialist workers’ movement of the early 20th century, largely because of her role in the “revisionism debate” where she eloquently critiqued the class-collaborationist reformism of Eduard Bernstein’s “evolutionary socialism.”

It was virtually inevitable that she would become a leader of the *Spartakusbund* and then the KPD, even as she was skeptical of what Hal Draper, decades later, would call the attempt by the Bolsheviks to “hot-house-force” a Communist International into existence.

Her status as an internationally known symbol of working-class and Marxist resistance to WWI ensured that Ebert, ally of the Wilhelmine Monarchy and the bourgeois Centre and Progress Parties, a man who openly hated revolution “like mortal sin,”³ could take no chances by letting her live — echoing the German bourgeois press that consistently called for her death.

Yet despite her revolutionary prestige, Rosa lost her first political fight within the new KPD “from the right” — her resolution in favor of running Communist candidates in the new Weimar National Assembly was defeated — just as she had consistently lost “from the left” within the SPD on the question of using a mass strike as an “offensive” weapon to transform Germany.

Rosa had long understood that the SPD’s avowed Marxism had become increasingly *pro forma* even before its leadership

endorsed German participation in WWI. She knew that even Karl Kautsky, the “Pope of Marxism,” was by 1910 adapting to the political representatives of the conservative trade union bureaucracy who had come to lead the party.

But in 1918-19 Rosa also understood that the revolutionary left did not yet have the necessary support to overthrow the new bourgeois Weimar Republic and realize the demand of “all power to the workers’ and soldiers’ councils (*Arbeiter und Soldatenräte*)” that had emerged across the country.

Yet she would not publicly denounce the planned Spartacist Uprising of January 1919, even though she rightly expected it to be a catastrophe. Its failure to lead to working-class revolution was what ultimately led to her murder.

The Aftermath: Luxemburg and Levi

While Rosa’s political devotee (and final lover) Paul Levi led the KPD to fuse, in 1920, with the much larger left wing of the USPD and thereby created a unified party of over 350,000 members, Communism never displaced Social Democracy as the primary party of the German working class.

Levi did his best to work in Rosa’s tradition, but the growth of German Communism during his leadership was accompanied by “new forces [that] increased the weight of impatience and adventurism within the united party.”⁴ As Charlie Post has noted in the pages of *ATC*, Levi, like Rosa,

“...understood that a workers’ revolution could only succeed with the active participation of the majority of the working class. With greater insight and prescience than her own comrades, and most of the Bolshevik leaders prior to 1920, she grasped the majority of workers remained loyal to the SPD — and that a majority of the actual workers’ vanguard remained loyal to the USPD. This revolutionary minority had to be won to the necessity of an independent revolutionary organization, which could, through common activity in the class struggle, eventually break the majority of workers from reformism.”⁵

Marxist historians of the German Revolution and the German socialist movement generally agree that Rosa and her comrades took too long to remove them-

selves from the SPD in order to build a revolutionary opposition⁶ and, as Rosa herself understood, the *Spartakusbund* left the USPD too early, with too few adherents, to build even a quasi-mass revolutionary party.

The result, as stated in a classic book on the German left, was that there was “no central leadership which, like Lenin’s in Russia, pursued a conscious strategy in the interest of the single aim of the seizure of power, no cold political planning in which the masses were viewed not solely as the subjects of politics, but as its objects.”⁷

Levi tried to do exactly this, holding to the sense of “revolutionary patience” that had guided Rosa during her years in the SPD. In January 1921 he led the KPD to adopt what soon became known as the United Front policy, pressuring the SPD and the USPD to join in action for workers’ basic material needs and, in the wake of the Kapp Putsch — a brief military coup in 1920 — for political liberty.⁸

In John Riddell’s words, “This policy did not bring any dramatic victories. It could only have been effective over time. It clashed with the belief of many members that bold action could bring workers’ power in the coming months.”⁹

Those who held to this voluntarist “theory of the offensive” took hold of the KPD leadership in February 1921; in March they instigated the insurrectionary “March Action (*Marzaktion*),” an utter disaster that “launched the Communists into a confrontation not only with the state but with the working-class majority.”¹⁰ Within weeks the KPD lost 200,000 members.

Luxemburg and “Leninism”

Levi had been unpopular within the KPD even prior to the *Marzaktion* and his subsequent public denunciation of it, the pamphlet *Our Path: Against Putschism (Unser Weg: Wider den Putschismus)*, did him no favors in that regard. He lacked Luxemburg’s stature as a long-time representative of the Marxist left in the SPD; while Rosa had taught Marxist political economy at the SPD’s Berlin training center, Levi had been only a lawyer.

Even as Rosa always ended up as a political minority in every party she ever joined, it is at least conceivable that her “revolutionary credentials” might have won over enough KPD members — and leaders — to abandon the voluntarist orientation that led to the *Marzaktion* debacle.

Rosa was a critic of the justifications given by Lenin and Trotsky for suppressing “formal democracy,” for “mak[ing] a virtue of necessity and...freez[ing] into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by [the occupation of Russia by German imperialism] and want[ing] to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics.”¹¹



Rosa Luxemburg organized for workers’ revolution, and paid for that with her life.

World History Archive/Ann Ronan Collection

As such she surely would have objected to the Communist International’s adoption of *Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution* in 1920, which asserted that “The working class does not only need the Communist Party before and during the conquest of power, but also after the transfer of power into the hands of the working class. The history of the Communist Party of Russia, which has been in power for almost three years, shows that the importance of the Communist Party does not diminish after the conquest of power by the working class, but on the contrary grows extraordinarily.”¹²

Of course, for most of these years the Russian Communist Party held a monopoly on political power, and its leaders had no intention of sharing it with any other party during the Russian civil war — or, as it turned out, after the war’s end. Certainty of the inevitability of civil war during the period of proletarian revolution was used to justify “iron proletarian centralism”:

“To lead the working class successfully in the long and hard civil wars that have broken out, the Communist Party must create an iron military order in its own ranks... without the strictest discipline, complete centralism and full comradesly confidence of all the party organisations in the leading party centre, the victory of the workers is impossible.”¹³

Given that Rosa in 1904 had already attacked what she (mistakenly) believed to

be Lenin’s “pitiless centralism” in *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*, she would have fought against approval of the *Theses* with every fiber of her being. Would she have been successful? Most likely not, despite her esteem among revolutionary socialists.

Yet had she been successful, the further bureaucratic centralization of the Communist Parties via the “Twenty-One Conditions” (officially the *Conditions of Admission to the Communist International*) would have been blocked and there would have at least been a chance that the “Stalinization” of the KPD — and perhaps other parties of the Comintern — could have been prevented.

At the very least, the malign influence of Ruth Fischer, the KPD co-leader of 1924 who described the residue of “Luxemburgism” in the Party as a “syphilis bacillus,” would have been obstructed.

Rosa Luxemburg Today

To conceive such alternative history is not meant to inspire a “great woman theory of history.” It is merely to recognize the enormity of the tragedy of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg not only morally but politically.

Thankfully, there is now an increasing interest in Rosa’s life and work, exemplified by Verso Books’ ongoing publication of her complete works in English — a great undertaking — and the flurry of reviews and discussion that immediately followed the release of the first volume, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, in 2011.

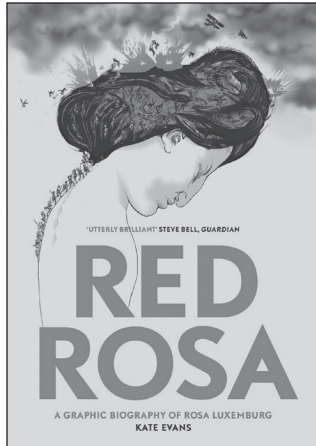
This revival has been building up for some time, presaged by the republication of her economic magnum opus, *The Accumulation of Capital*, by Routledge in 2003; the publication also in 2003 of David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism* by Oxford University Press, which draws from Luxemburg’s work for its theory of “accumulation by dispossession;” the appearance in 2004 of *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (Monthly Review Press), the first one-volume collection of her economic and political writings in English; a conference on *The Accumulation of Capital* held in 2004 in Bergamo, Italy; and an international conference on her ideas as a whole that was also held in 2004 at the South China Agricultural University in Guangzhou.

More recently, *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg* (Verso, 2015) by the British cartoonist Kate Evans has provided an extremely accessible — and enjoyable — introduction to its subject. Then, of

course, there's the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, publisher of books such as *Rosa Remix* (2016) and *Rosa Luxemburg's Ethical Feminism* by Drucilla Cornell (2018).

The current near-universal impotence of the revolutionary left is reason enough to take yet another look at the thought of Rosa Luxemburg, who never failed to emphasize each part of the slogan, "educate, agitate, organize!"

We should continue to read Rosa not because she provides a ready-made model of revolutionary strategy to be emulated, not because she has all the answers to Marxism's current dilemma — of building an ever-more impressive theoretical corpus without a real-world mass movement — but because her democratic, internationalist, antimilitarist, anti-opportunist, and emancipatory socialist principles are the right principles. We need her sense of "democratic consciousness" and "cosmopolitan



pedagogy."¹⁴

We should no more treat her writings as holy writ than she did those of Marx and Engels, but we also cannot do without them. Her importance is not merely historical — she remains essential for those trying not only to understand the world, but to change it. ■

Notes

1. Translated by Loren Balhorn. London: Verso Books, 2019.

2. Spencer A. Leonard and Watson Ladd, "Splits, regroupments, war, and revolution in Germany, 1914-1920: A conversation with Ben Lewis," *Platypus Review* 46 (May 2012), <https://platypus1917.org/2012/05/01/conversation-with-ben-lewis/>. The quote is from Lewis.

3. Quoted in Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action* (London: Pluto Press, 1994 [1940]), 264.

4. John Riddell, "Why did Paul Levi lose out in the German Communist leadership?," *John Riddell: Marxist Essays and Commentary*, July 5, 2013, <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2013/07/05/why-did-paul-levi-lose-out-in-the-german-communist-leadership/>.

5. Charlie Post, "A German Lenin?" *Against the Current* #168 (January/February 2014), <https://solidarity-us.org/atc/168/p4075/>.

6. "Luxemburg and the radicals operated as a rump caucus in the SPD. By the time war was declared, it was too late to form a coherent revolutionary opposition capable of withstanding the military government's repression." Michael Hirsch, "Contra Bronner on Luxemburg and Working-Class Revolution," in Jason Schulman, ed. *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Legacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 176. That said, some argue that "organizing a 'Bolshevik' fraction... would have been impossible in a mass party with a strong bureaucratic and cultural apparatus like the SPD... I'm not sure how much more she could have done other than split. And that she was unwilling to do." Stephen Eric Bronner, "Reflections on Red Rosa: An Interview," in Schulman, ed., 188.

7. Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 14.

8. "Through common actions against capital and the state over immediate economic and political issues, unified working-class struggles would become more widespread, powerful and radical; and the limits of the reformist party and union leaders to even effectively defend the workers' past gains could be demonstrated in practice." Post, *op cit*.

9. Riddell, *op cit*.

10. *Ibid*.

11. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (1922) [1918], Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch08.htm>.

12. Gregory Zinoviev et al., *Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution* (1920), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch03a.htm>.

13. *Ibid*.

14. Stephen Eric Bronner, *Socialism Unbound: Principles, Practices and Prospects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), xvi.

Rosa Luxemburg, from "The Beginning" (excerpt)

THE REVOLUTION HAS begun. What is called for now is not jubilation at what has been accomplished, not triumph over the beaten foe, but the strictest self-criticism and iron concentration of energy in order to continue the work we have begun. For our accomplishments are small and the foe has not been beaten.

What has been achieved? The monarchy has been swept away, supreme governing power has been transferred into the hands of the workers' and soldiers' representatives. But the monarchy was never the real enemy; it was only a facade, the frontispiece of imperialism. It was not the Hohenzollerns who unleashed the world war, set the four corners of the globe afire, and brought Germany to the brink of the abyss.... The imperialist bourgeoisie, the rule of the capitalist class — this is the criminal who must be held accountable for the genocide.

The abolition of the rule of capitalism, the realization of the social order of socialism — this and nothing less is the historical theme of the present revolution. This is a huge work which cannot be completed in the twinkling of an eye by a few decrees from above; it can be born only of the conscious action of the mass of workers in the cities and in the country, and brought successfully through the maze of difficulties only by the highest intellectual maturity

Published in Rote Fahne, November 18, 1918. Accessed at Rosa Luxemburg Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/11/18b.htm>

and unflagging idealism of the masses of the people.

The path of the revolution follows clearly from its ends, its method follows from its task. All power in the hands of the working masses, in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils, protection of the work of revolution against its lurking enemies — this is the guiding principle of all measures to be taken by the revolutionary government.

Every step, every act by the government must, like a compass, point in this direction:

- re-election and improvement of the local workers' and soldiers' councils so that the first chaotic and impulsive gestures of their formation are replaced by a conscious process of understanding the goals, tasks and methods of the revolution;

- regularly scheduled meetings of these representatives of the masses and the transfer of real political power from the small committee of the Executive Council into the broader basis of the W. and S. [workers' and soldiers'] councils;

- immediate convocation of the national council of workers and soldiers in order to establish the proletariat of all Germany as a class, as a compact political power, and to make them the bulwark and impetus of the revolution;

- immediate organization not of the 'farmers,' but of the agrarian proletariat and smallholders who, as a class, have until now been outside the revolution;

- formation of a proletarian Red Guard for the permanent protection of the revo-

lution, and training of a workers' militia in order to prepare the whole proletariat to be on guard and all times;

- suppression of the old organs of administration, justice and army of the absolutist militarist police State;

- immediate confiscation of the dynastic property and possessions and of landed property as initial temporary measures to guarantee the people's food supply, since hunger is the most dangerous ally of the counter-revolution;

- immediate convocation of the World Labour Congress in Germany in order to emphasize clearly and distinctly the socialist and international character of the revolution, for only in the International, in the world revolution of the proletariat, is the future of the German revolution anchored.

We have mentioned only the first necessary steps. What is the present revolutionary government doing? It is leaving the administrative organs of the State intact from top to bottom, in the hands of yesterday's pillars of Hohenzollern absolutism and tomorrow's tools of the counter-revolution....

If the counter-revolution is not to gain the upper hand all along the line, the masses must be on their guard. [T]he realization of the ultimate goal of socialism is on today's agenda of world history. The German revolution has now hit upon the path illuminated by this star. Step by step, through storm and stress, through battle and torment and misery and victory, it will reach its goal. It must! ■

A Revolution's People: Chronicle of Germany 1918-19

By William Smaldone

A People's History of the German Revolution

By William A. Pelz
London: Pluto Press, 2018, \$24 paperback.

THE FLOOD OF new books that followed the centennial of the Russian revolutions of February and October 1917 reflects the continued widespread interest in those world historical events.

Paradoxically, the popular focus on Russia has also tended to obscure the revolutions sweeping across Central Europe just one year later in the fall of 1918, destroying the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires and, for a brief time, appearing to open the way to the socialist transformation of much of Europe.

These upheavals have inspired relatively few new historical works. William A. Pelz's study of the German Revolution, completed in 2017 just days before his death, is a welcome exception.

A committed socialist activist and model scholar-teacher, Pelz spent many years in the academic "trenches" teaching at Elgin Community College outside of Chicago and serving as the Director of the Institute of Working Class History. During his career he produced a number of works on the history of the European labor movement noted for their rigor and accessibility to general readers.

His first book, *The Spartakusbund and the German Working Class Movement*, appeared in 1989 to be followed over the next 25 years by works on Karl Marx, Wilhelm Liebknecht and Eugene Debs as well as general histories such as *Against Capitalism: the European Left on the March* (2007) and *A People's History of Modern Europe* (2016). *German Revolution* represents a return to his earlier interest in the crucial events of 1918-1919.

Pelz's goal in this "people's history" is to critically examine the German Revolution from the perspective of average people, workers, rather than that of political or

William Smaldone teaches European history at Willamette University, is a member of Solidarity, and a member of the board of community radio KMUZ in Salem Oregon. With Mark Blum he has recently published Austro-Marxism: The Ideology of Unity (Brill, 2015 and 2017), a two-volume collection of documents.

social elites. Using the lens of social history, he aims to challenge three commonly held notions about the 1918-1919 revolution: (1) that it was less a revolution and more of a collapse; (2) that it was a period of mere chaos before the normal progression

of Germany into a republic, guided by Woodrow Wilson and the Western Allies and; (3) that revolutionary failure was solely caused by Social Democracy and the lack of a vanguard party. (xxi)

To tell the story, Pelz divides his work into eight chapters that trace the social and political development of the working class during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the coming of the First World War and its impact on German workers' living and working conditions, the growing resistance to the war culminating in the popular upheaval of November 1918, and the factors that led to the radical left's defeat in the winter and spring of 1918-1919.

Drawing on the most up-to-date secondary literature in English and German as well as a wide range of primary sources that give voice to everyday people, Pelz provides a compelling, eminently readable narrative that will interest anyone who picks up the book.

Workers' Lives and Resistance

In his discussion of late 19th century German industrialization and the rise of the working class, Pelz draws a clear picture of workers' variety of experiences in the factories and service industries of Germany's burgeoning cities and towns. He shows that although standards of living improved, the process was slow, work was often dan-



The German Revolution began with the Kiel Mutiny. At the end of October 1918 sailors refused to obey orders for a naval attack against the British Royal Navy in the North Sea. After some mutineers were arrested, a mass meeting was called around the demand "Bread and Peace." By November 3, sailors' councils such as this one on the Prinzregent Luitpold were established and the revolt was spreading.

Wikimedia Commons

gerous, and most people endured long working hours and abysmal living conditions.

For many, life under the class-bound German monarchy offered little opportunity for upward mobility: the only way out was emigration. For those who stayed, however, there was also the possibility of resistance.

In a chapter on the rise of popular radicalism, Pelz argues that with notable exceptions,

working-class people responded to their condition not by doubling down on religion or turning to conservative, liberal or anarchist political alternatives. Instead they turned to Social Democracy.

This was a mass social and political movement promising to replace hierarchical capitalism and the autocratic German state with an egalitarian social order in which people would have real democratic control over their lives. Pelz succinctly describes the rise of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and its ancillary organizations ranging from trade unions to workers' bicycle, singing and sport clubs along with libraries and mass circulation newspapers.

He shows not only how the movement gave millions of workers the chance to organize themselves politically, but equally important, how its organizations represented an alternative cultural milieu for people excluded from bourgeois institutions.

Pelz makes clear that not all socialist workers were united about how the movement should achieve its aims. While a minority hoped that class war would result in the capitalists and aristocrats being "mowed down to the last man," most expected to achieve social and political equality and the creation of a socialist order via gradual reform. (26)

There are two problems with Pelz's

analysis. First, it should be emphasized that at no time did the SPD win the support of a majority of Germany's working class. The movement attracted the support of millions, but even at its pre-war peak in 1912 it only won one-third of the electorate and some of its supporters were not "working class."

For many workers, such as those who supported the popular Catholic Center Party, religious loyalties trumped class interests, and the Catholics also created a sizable trade union and cultural milieu of their own.

Others were put off by social democracy's radical egalitarian goals, such as the emancipation of women, the end of discrimination on the basis of race, and its calls for the elimination of private property. They stuck with more conservative, liberal or nationalist parties.

Second, Pelz's laudable focus on social history lacks a thorough analysis of the German Empire's political context as well as an adequate discussion of the SPD's internal politics in the pre-1914 period.

The decades of the party's parliamentary political praxis under the empire, the emergence of social democracy's trade union and party apparatus, and intense disputes among the movement's radical and reformist factions had enormous influence on its wartime politics and the outlook of its leadership after the November 1918 Revolution.

Historian Mario Kessler's brief introduction provides some background, but the book's overall analysis would be stronger with more attention to the political sphere.

From War to Revolution

The First World War, of course, was crucial to the outbreak of the German Revolution. Pelz provides a compelling description of how suffering at the front and at home fueled antiwar opposition.

Drawing on the most recent scholarship, he shows how antiwar sentiment among workers was much more widespread at the war's outbreak than traditional histories assert, how experience at the front and in the fleet soured many soldiers and sailors on the war, and how the declining supplies of food and fuel caused widespread unrest behind the lines.

Class tensions intensified as the black market allowed the rich to supplement their rations, while the poor went hungry. As a result, opposition to the war grew, especially among women who were increasingly drawn into production to replace drafted men and who were also responsible for feeding their families. Pelz reminds us that as resistance to the war intensified within Social Democracy and on the streets, women were at the forefront of the struggle.

By 1917 the war of attrition was grinding Germany down. Millions of casualties, widespread hunger and disease, and declining

working conditions undermined morale and led to many forms of protest. Food riots, demonstrations and mass strikes, including in the armaments industries, became commonplace and the government responded with repression.

The majority of the SPD leadership, which had betrayed its internationalist principles in 1914 by supporting the war, answered intensifying criticism of its policy by expelling the opposition in January of 1917. The dissidents then organized a rival, antiwar Independent Social Democratic Party (the USPD). Its radical left wing — the Spartakusbund — led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, would later take its inspiration from the Bolshevik revolution and form the nucleus of the German Communist Party (KPD).

Pelz's discussion of these political developments is adequate but he is at his best in describing the onset of the people's revolution on the ground beginning with the sailors' mutiny in the port city of Kiel in October of 1918.

Furious at maltreatment by their officers and with the war's end clearly in sight, angry that the admiralty planned to preserve its "honor" in a last suicidal foray against the British fleet, sailors in Kiel rebelled against their superiors, won the support of the local garrison, and sparked a revolution that soon toppled the monarchy.

Across Germany armed sailors, soldiers and workers rose up against the local authorities, organized themselves into councils and took control of the country's towns and cities. On November 9, with huge crowds filling the streets of Berlin, the Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland.

But this "revolution from below" was only a part of the story. Well before the revolt in Kiel, Germany's military leadership — which had effectively sidelined the civilian government and established a dictatorship — had concluded that the war was lost.

Rather than accept responsibility for the defeat, however, the generals urged the Kaiser to create a representative democracy by appointing a new government that for the first time would be responsible to parliament rather than to him. That government, which would also include the formerly excluded SPD, could then arrange for the surrender and bear responsibility for the defeat.

This "revolution from above" had been executed in October, but the new government, led by the liberal Prince Max of Baden, had been unable to negotiate an armistice as long as the Western Allies insisted on the Kaiser's abdication.

The revolution from below resolved the issue. With the Kaiser's departure, Prince Max also resigned as Chancellor and handed power to Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the

SPD, the largest single party in parliament (the Reichstag).

Social Democracy, once despised, was now in power. The question was what would the party do. How would it relate to the workers' councils and how would it seek to transform society along socialist lines?

SPD Against the Revolution

Like most historians, Pelz makes clear that the SPD leadership was not interested in carrying out a socialist revolution. Instead, Ebert and his colleagues aimed primarily to end the war, to establish a parliamentary system and to revive the economy.

They feared that radical inroads against private property (socialization of industry) or even a thorough purge of the state bureaucracy, the courts or the officer corps of reactionary elements could prolong the catastrophic Allied blockade or even invite an Allied invasion. They also worried that radicalization would fuel the spread of Bolshevism and unleash a civil war.

Determined not to become another Kerensky, Ebert decided to neutralize the more radical USPD by inviting it to join his Provisional Government. He then sidelined the revolutionary councils as centers of political power through promoting speedy elections to a National Assembly that would draft a new constitution.

Most importantly, Ebert cut a secret deal with the army officer corps in which he promised to protect its interests if the military backed his government. This pact, which targeted the radical left as a particularly dire threat, had disastrous consequences for the labor movement.

As politics became more polarized in the winter of 1918-1919, the USPD quit the coalition in December. Now in sole control, the SPD did not hesitate to use the army to bloodily suppress leftwing uprisings in Berlin, Bremen, Munich and elsewhere, murdering Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in the process.

Meanwhile the army did nothing to protect Ebert's government from counter-revolution by the right. In March 1920 the army leadership refused to take action when a reactionary clique of officers and conservative politicians seized power in Berlin (the Kapp putsch). It was a nationwide general strike — one of the most successful in history — rather than the army that saved the new republic.

Pelz examines these developments from the perspective of workers in the streets. He shows how the revolutionary crowds, including large numbers of women, pushed for radical change in the months following the Kaiser's fall. The workers' and soldiers' councils, for a moment, represented a real political alternative to the parliamentary vision of the SPD and its bourgeois demo-



German women on the way to work during World War I. Earning half of male workers, their wages were so low they could not feed their families. With blockades by the Allied Forces, urban areas found even potatoes and bread in short supply by 1915 and food riots broke out.

cratic allies.

The Spartacists, along with some radical elements in the USPD, and the “revolutionary shop stewards” in the unions, were disorganized, lacked a coherent strategy, and did not have a unified, clear vision of what the revolutionary government should strive for. Despite that, their demands for the socialization of industry, the concentration of power in the workers’ councils, and a thorough purge of counterrevolutionary forces in the institutions of the state were pulling largely in the same direction.

Their efforts failed, Pelz argues, for a variety of reasons. External factors, such as the continuing Allied blockade and the very real threat of invasion should the revolution become radicalized, certainly influenced the SPD leadership’s attitude. But internal factors were more important.

Crucially, unlike the Kerensky provisional government in Russia, the SPD moved quickly to end an unpopular war that had undercut the legitimacy of the monarchy. At the same time, the Social Democrats did little to pursue real changes in gender and class relations in the country.

They pacified a society deeply rooted in patriarchal values by marginalizing women politically, sending them home from the factories and replacing them with returning soldiers. They resisted any radical purge of monarchists or nationalists from public institutions, left the aristocracy intact on its lands, and did not have a coherent policy to

win peasant support.

Rather than socializing industry, the SPD and the trade union leaders cut deals with big industry to achieve some reforms — such as the eight-hour day and collective bargaining rights — but left the industrialists strong enough to fight another day to overturn those gains.

Finally, the Social Democratic government’s reliance on massive violence helped it retain power in the short run but it also irrevocably deepened the split in the labor movement and made the later struggle against fascism much more difficult.

A Vanguard Party?

Would a vanguard party modeled on that of the Bolsheviks have achieved better results? Pelz, quoting Rosa Luxemburg’s critique of the Bolshevik leadership’s monopoly on power in 1904, does not think so. Lenin’s party arose under Russian conditions and these were very different than those in Germany and it, too, failed to create an egalitarian and democratic socialism.

Pelz’s analysis here lacks certain elements that were also important for understanding why the revolution failed.

For example, while it is true that the SPD made promises to workers about socialist reforms that it did not keep, the evidence is also quite strong that most workers sympathetic to socialism favored the creation of a parliamentary republic because Social Democracy had favored such

a development for over forty years.

Most saw the councils as temporary institutions to secure the revolution. Relatively few had any idea about what it would mean to establish a system based solely on the councils.

Pelz acknowledges that the workers were factionalized but he often wields terms like “the working class” much too cavalierly. More nuance in his analysis of what workers wanted and more discussion of what other social groups may have wanted in the revolution would have strengthened his analysis.

Further, Pelz gives little attention to the fact that in 1918 socialists of all stripes lacked any clear models of what the transition to socialism would look like.

Workers’ councils — soviets — had appeared for the first time in the Russian Revolution of 1905 and then reemerged in the upheavals of 1917. Information coming out of Russia in 1918 was sparse, few had any idea of what “soviet power” meant, and the Russian Civil War — accompanied by the massive use of terror on both sides — did little to clarify matters.

The same lack of clarity dominated the debates about the “socialization” of industry. What did socialization actually mean? Should the state or the workers’ councils control industry? What should be the role of the trade unions? Where should the interests of consumers be represented?

If the revolution concentrates political and economic power in workers’ councils, then how will non-workers be incorporated into the polity? To what degree should the propertied classes be expropriated and excluded from participation in the new system? Would not excluding them raise the possibility of civil war?

These were among the many questions that divided the myriad leftist forces in 1918-1919 and Pelz could have done much more to elucidate them.

Nevertheless, Pelz’s people’s history is a valuable introduction to the German Revolution. He shows how average people participated in the overthrow of a mighty empire and proceeded to build something new, however flawed.

He makes a strong case that the SPD was the core of the “extreme center” which, along with its bourgeois democratic allies, succeeded in keeping the radical social revolution in check.

The Social Democrats did create a constitution that was among the most democratic in the world and also included the framework of a welfare state, but they failed to fundamentally alter Germany’s social and economic hierarchy. For that failure, they would pay a heavy price when the resurgent right would later mobilize to carry the Nazis to power. ■

REVIEW

The Fate of the Pink Tide By Samuel Farber

The Ebb of the Pink Tide: The Decline of the Left in Latin America

By Mike Gonzalez
London, U.K.: Pluto Press, 2019, 199 pages,
\$29 paperback.

This is a welcome book by Mike Gonzalez, an historian and veteran contributor to *International Socialism* (Britain) and other publications, with a long record of writing about Latin America. Ambitious in scope, the book provides a valuable analytical synthesis of the left turn in Latin America, the so-called Pink Tide, its ascent and its decline, over the past two decades.

The author's central focus is on Venezuela and Bolivia, the countries at the center of this turn, which for him is characterized by the adoption of an extractivist and developmentalist orientation as an alternative to neoliberalism. His analysis has important implications for understanding the dynamics of international capitalism and the limits of reformism.

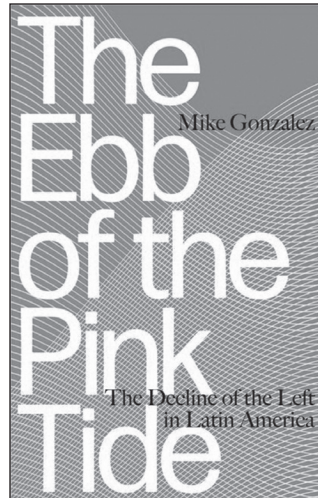
It also brings to the fore the consequences for those sectors of the international left ignoring political realities, or even lying to paper over the failures and abuses of Pink Tide governments.

To contextualize this Pink Tide, Gonzalez describes neoliberalism's main traits, which in Latin America, as in the rest of the world, have included the massive movement of capital to the financial sector; reduction of the welfare state and state regulation of economic activity under the pressure of growing debt and the policies of the IMF (International Monetary Fund).

As a result, in Latin America and elsewhere a great deal of the public assets on which the states or governments counted for welfare and other economic and social purposes were privatized and the economy became widely open to foreign capital.

This led to powerful exporters, agribusiness, and especially soybean cultivation acquiring much greater economic weight and importance. Thus, Gonzalez reports,

Samuel Farber was born and raised in Cuba and is the author of many books and articles dealing with that country. His books include The Politics of Ché Guevara: Theory and Practice (Haymarket Books) and Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy recently reprinted by Verso Books.



export agriculture and extractive industries attracted new external investment through the 1990s, from China in particular, at the expense of manufacturing and services. (12, 13)

One important feature of neoliberalism in Latin America was the transformation of the

labor market that led to the loss of many labor rights and job permanence, leading in turn to the increase of part-time labor and the growth of the informal economy with the consequent big rise in poverty levels.

With the rise in countries like Mexico of cheaper imports produced by highly mechanized U.S. agriculture, peasants had to abandon or were forced out of their lands. This led to their displacement and migration either to the city or abroad, especially northward to the United States. (3)

Neoliberal economic policies, avers Gonzalez, also had a substantial political and cultural impact with the growth of the politically conservative Protestant evangelical groups, based on the communitarian and material assistance they provided to people who had been abandoned by the state.

Along parallel lines was the growth of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), designed to compensate for the absence of state public agencies in providing welfare services which, as Gonzalez points out, have basically involved emergency responses rather than mechanisms for the dependable, continuous delivery of services and resources and did nothing to promote social and political structural change. (15)

The Power of Resistance

It wasn't long before resistance to neoliberalism developed in various Latin American countries, opening the way for the election of center left and left governments.

The earliest mass explosion marking the resistance to the imposition of a program of IMF structural adjustment policies was the

Venezuelan *Caracazo*, an urban uprising that began on February 23, 1989. It resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives at the hands of the authorities.

That event marked the starting point of a process that eventually led to the rise of Hugo Chávez to power in 1998. The following year, in Ecuador, the indigenous organizations under the leadership of the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE) rose up, in coordination with the trade unions, in the battle against the dollarization of the economy in 1999.

On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista insurrection and its occupation of San Cristóbal de las Casas, the capital of the Mexican state of Chiapas, exploded on that same day as the militant answer to the implementation of NAFTA, responding to the long history of land dispossession by the cattle interests in the Lacandon Forest and its likely growth under the terms of that agreement.

Six years later, in January 2000, the Cochabamba Water War broke out in Bolivia in protest against the privatization of water; a massive protest that shut down the city for several days and became part of the process that eventually led to the election of Evo Morales in 2005.

Focus on Venezuela

The Pink Tide in Venezuela came in with Hugo Chávez. It was based on his strategy of using oil — Venezuela being one of the world's larger oil producing countries — then at its highest price, to finance the growth of a Welfare State through which to reduce poverty.

As Gonzalez recounts, the rise of Chávez originated in the political turmoil engendered by the *Caracazo* in 1989 that effectively ended the over 30 years-long pact that established the peaceful alternation in power between the Social Democratic (Acción Democrática) and Social Christian (COPEI) parties.

While this agreement had provided for relative political stability, it maintained an unjust socio-economic status quo, a good deal of corruption, and significant repression of the groups and individuals who rebelled against it. It was when Carlos Andres Perez from Acción Democrática, the president elected on an anti-austerity platform, betrayed his promises and accepted an IMF austerity program in 1989, that the "Caracazo" broke out.



Hugo Chávez, with his successor Nicolas Maduro at right. What caused the revolution's failure?

Chávez, a military officer of humble background, had led a failed military coup in 1992 but was democratically elected president in 1998. Shortly after his election, Chávez called for a Constituent Assembly that in 1999 produced a democratic but socially moderate constitution.

That document was characterized by Douglas Bravo, well known former guerrilla leader, as neoliberal in its economic planks for failing to include labor rights and or to challenge globalization and its impact on Venezuela, while promising to comply with the country's international financial obligations. (37)

Chávez's government became radicalized in response to two 2002 events. The first was a failed coup against him in April, supported not only by the primarily white middle class right wing with its growing street violence, but also by Fedecámaras, the employers' organization, and by the leadership of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation, a bastion of the Acción Democrática Party.

This short-lived coup, which was welcomed by Washington, was defeated by major mass action that came out in support of Chávez, in great part due to his identification with the poorer and darker Venezuelans.

The coup attempt was followed by a rightwing political strike in PDVSA, the Venezuelan oil giant, launched in December of the same year. The strikers were the corporation's white-collar employees, technicians and managers who, according to Gonzalez, also engaged in extensive actions of physical sabotage of the plant. The strike was squashed and three months later PDVSA, free of its striking managers and technicians, was able to resume production.

For Gonzalez, an important manifestation

of Chávez's radicalization was the extensive nationalization that his government undertook of strategic economic sectors, which eventually accounted for a substantial portion of the economy. This included the banks, the oil industry, the generation and distribution of electricity, telecommunications, cement, extractive industries such as mining, steel and aluminum manufacture, all taken over in the 2006-2007 period.

It should be added though, that in contrast to other revolutionary governments like Cuba, Chávez's nationalization was *sui generis* in the sense that his government bought, often at inflated prices, the capitalist enterprises instead of confiscating them.

Attempts at Popular Power

The 2002 events also radicalized substantial sections of the population. Expressions of this were the emergence of forms of workers' control in certain industries such as aluminum and of cooperatives in other sectors. Popular grassroots organization, such as the *consejos comunales* and the *comunas*, emerged to administer a number of tasks at the community level.

The Chávez government initially supported many of these popular initiatives. One example was the Missions, created as the first stage of the participatory democracy promised by the 1999 Constitution. They were expected to function as organs to distribute government resources particularly in the areas of health, education and welfare based on direct and grassroots democratic participation to bypass the ossified structures of the pre-Chávez state bureaucracies.

As Gonzalez points out, however, these new institutions such as the Missions became organs of patronage, conduits for state investment and government decisions. (43) Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro,

announced the formation of new Missions, all of which would be placed under the control of a single new ministry.

The community-based *consejos comunales* and the *comunas* followed a similar fate. All are administrative arms of the state with neither autonomy nor economic independence. (127-128)

As the Venezuelan Marxist social scientist Edgardo Lander has noted, these popular organizations generally do not include all the people living in a neighborhood, but only the supporters of Chávez (and Maduro). This conception points towards clientelism rather than towards a grassroots, participatory democracy inclusive of all people and not just the adherents of a particular political point of view.

By 2007, the number of people in cooperatives had fallen dramatically and attempts at developing forms of workers' collective ownership and establishing workers' control of factories dwindled. In Alcasa, the aluminum factory originally under workers' control, production devolved into a number of coops that became essentially small businesses.

For Gonzalez, Chávez's insistence on maintaining control from above was particularly visible in the government itself: highly placed functionaries were replaced and appointed by Chávez with no publicly accountable mechanisms for hiring and firing. (43-44) The new appointees formed a new layer of young state functionaries who came from poor backgrounds, were unconditionally loyal to Chávez and his inner circle, and were trained and politically educated in Cuba.

For Gonzalez this underlines the substantial influence of the Cuban government in Venezuela in moving the PSUV — the United Socialist Party that Chavez formed after he came to power — towards the highly centralized and bureaucratic model of the Cuban Communist Party, and particularly in the areas of intelligence, policing and social control. (111, 115)

Yet Chávez's government achieved an important reduction in poverty and was undoubtedly quite popular. He (along with Maduro) was nevertheless opposed by a heterogeneous political coalition disproportionately composed of the whiter and more economically prosperous sections of society and animated, to a considerable extent, by conservative, if not outright reactionary political impulses. The more right-wing sectors of the opposition have also been willing to resort to illegal methods of street warfare and even coups to obtain power.

For this reviewer, however, the regressive politics of this internal opposition does not negate, nor does it justify, the authoritarian tendencies of Chávez's (and Maduro's) rule.

Chávez's re-election, for example, ran

contrary to the long Latin American democratic and progressive tradition that goes back to the Mexican Revolution's slogan of "sufragio efectivo, no reelección" (effective suffrage, no reelection).

More ominous was the fact that the Chavista-dominated legislature willingly gave up a substantial part of its responsibility and power by allowing Chávez to rule by decree even in non-emergency situations. Even worse was Maduro's decision to bypass the democratically elected National Assembly in December 2015, where the opposition had just gained a majority in the elections, in violation of the democratic rules that the government had committed itself to respect.

Maduro called instead for a Constituent Assembly. In violation of the constitution approved under Chávez, there was no preceding referendum to approve the call for a new constitution.

To assure his control over the Constituent Assembly, Maduro introduced the undemocratic corporatist provision to have one-third of the members chosen by seven social sectors he selected, which were favorable to the government, such as pensioners. Mike Gonzalez points out that this election excluded five million voters from participating and favored the rural areas where Chávez had done best in previous elections. (131)

An Explosive Crisis

Maduro, certainly a less charismatic and politically talented leader than Chávez, was confronted soon after his accession to power in March, 2013 by a catastrophic economic crisis that led to an uncontrolled skyrocketing inflation, growing government debts, low monetary reserves, a serious scarcity of consumer goods and the departure of millions of Venezuelans for abroad — primarily for economic reasons, and to a lesser degree due to the lack of physical security in what has become one of the most violent countries in the world.

The crisis is surely connected with the precipitous fall of the price of oil — the cornerstone of Chávez's developmental strategy — in the world market, although prices have recovered somewhat since the worst of the crisis.

In addition, Washington has been economically harassing the Venezuelan government at every turn, as in the series of sanctions that Donald Trump decreed against Venezuelan functionaries and the government. These include the freezing of U.S. assets of Venezuelan individuals, barring U.S. companies from buying debts or accounts receivable from any Venezuelan government institution, and adopting restrictive measures against Venezuelan international transactions in oil, gold and crypto currencies.

The political offensive organized by the

so-called Lima Group composed of several, mostly conservative, governments in the western hemisphere that refuse to recognize Maduro's new presidential term, is very worrisome too, particularly as it creates fertile ground for an internal coup in Venezuela with U.S. support.

Yet as Gonzalez points out, the current economic crisis is to a great extent the outgrowth of the seeds planted by Chávez's chaotic and corrupt oil-dependent government involving elements of the traditional bourgeoisie and the *boliburguesía* that he created. Much of what Maduro's government has described as an "economic war" inflicted by his opponents on Venezuela is thus the outcome of a variety of economic problems that are to a large extent self-inflicted.

As a major form of capital flight, Gonzalez points out to the many dollars that Chávez's and Maduro's governments provided for imports that ended up being banked in the United States. These were used for the private purposes of both the traditional bourgeoisie and Chávez's *boliburguesía* in order to exploit speculative opportunities that have been far more lucrative for them than productive investments. (117)

To that effect, Gonzalez cites the specific case mentioned by Venezuelan Marxist economist Manuel Sutherland involving the increase of meat imports by 17,000% between 2003 and 2013, while in the same period meat consumption fell by 22%. As with many other consumer items, it is likely that the meat was diverted to the Colombian market, where a lot of consumer goods intended for Venezuelans end up in the search for illegal private profit.

Besides corruption there is the problem of economic chaos: Oil production has seriously declined due to a lack of investment in plant and infrastructure, particularly after a big fire at one of the plants, which some believed was caused by sabotage.

Other state-owned industries, such as iron, steel and aluminum are paralyzed by the lack of spare parts for machinery, the absence of raw materials, and the failure to invest over time. (125)

In addition, there has been much waste as a great deal of capital has been invested in ill-conceived infrastructural projects or, for example, in the sugar refinery in Barinas province that never opened, while leading Chavistas enrich themselves at state expense. (119)

In a desperate move to solve the growing economic crisis, Maduro has begun the large Arco Minero plan, an enormous extractivist project to attract foreign capital in an area equivalent to 12% of Venezuelan territory. This area is the country's principal source of fresh water. In addition it has large quantities of minerals, oil and gas.

Chávez himself had years earlier rejected a similar proposal, on environmental grounds and in recognition of the right of the indigenous peoples in the area. (130)

To top it all, agriculture is doing very poorly due to a shortage of expensive fertilizer, lack of state investment, and neglect by the large landowners. (124) This is an all too typical situation among oil-dependent states that don't develop other economic activities to compensate for periods of low prices in the inevitable cycles of the international oil market.

The Case of Bolivia

The Pink Tide in Bolivia reached a peak with the 2005 election of Evo Morales as President with 54% of the vote. This was the result of the dramatic succession of large-scale massive struggles from below during the preceding decade, animated by a popular ideology described by Gonzalez as regional, nationalist, communal, and in many cases syndicalist. (73)

This wave of struggle came in response to the onslaught of a series of neoliberal policies introduced in Bolivia in the eighties and nineties that privatized much of the economy, including the selling off of all publicly owned utility companies such as electricity, telephones, railways, and especially the Bolivian national oil company YPF.

Initially there was little resistance to these changes for a number of reasons, including the fact that the power of the very influential miners' union and COB, the trade union federation under its influence, had greatly declined with the dismantling of the mining industry and the migration of its social base to other parts of the country.

The vacuum was filled by the peasant federation CSTUSB (Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia), much influenced by the politics of ethnic identity (54-55), which assumed the leadership of the resistance with the active participation of the new militant teachers and workers in small factories.

Their struggles were often successful, such as the one against the privatization of water in the city of Cochabamba in 1999, which included indigenous and community organizations, market traders, coca farmers, organized workers, students and civil servants.

There was also the Gas War of 2003, caused by neoliberal President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada's decisions to export and hand over control of Bolivian gas to foreign multinationals, and to arrest an important community leader, which provoked a virtual insurrection centered in the city of El Alto (located near the capital of La Paz) and a call for a general strike.

Barricaded highways stopped all traffic into the capital and protesters blockaded



Conflicts within the Pink Tide: Thousands of indigenous people organized a 2012 March for Life, Water, and Dignity of Peoples in opposition to the Ecuadorean government's plans for large-scale mining. The march went from the southern province of Zamora Chinchipe to Quito.

the airport located in El Alto. The Lozada government used tanks and helicopters against the mass protest. But the government began to fracture under the overwhelming popular pressure and was replaced by Carlos Mesa, who opted for a policy of compromise and concessions to appease the rebellion.

Evo Morales, the leader of the coca growers and of the broad-left party MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) initially supported Mesa. He withdrew his support in March 2005, as a second water war developed in El Alto over a new government contract to a private water company, and after Congress approved a new Hydrocarbons Law that stipulated low royalties and taxes. The law failed to meet the expectations of even the more conservative section of MAS.

Eventually, in the midst of a climate of popular mobilization, elections were held on December 18, 2005 and Evo was elected president with an absolute majority. In contrast to the left wing of MAS that argued for the full nationalization of the oil and gas industries, Morales pushed for legislation that fell short of nationalization and instead gave the state more power over these industries in order to extract more income through increased prices, taxes and royalties. (78)

This policy, combined with the new government's fairly orthodox fiscal and monetary practices successfully produced significant economic growth and welfare services. The power of the indigenous groups was also expanded and the social mobility of the Bolivian Indians grew.

As Gonzalez points out, however,

Morales' extractivist and developmentalist strategy has recently run into a wall as a result of the decline since 2016 of oil and gas prices in the international market. As a result, imports have declined by 20% leading to a substantial decline in economic activity and consumption.

In addition, his indigenous and environmentalist platform has become burnished and lost credibility. His government's decision to build a highway through the indigenous territory of the Isidore Sécuré National Park (TIPNIS) provoked an important protest by Bolivian indigenous groups.

Morales is also confronting serious political problems: having lost his bid to run for a third time for the presidency of his country in a national referendum called by his government in 2016, the recently established Electoral Tribunal (clearly dominated by Evo Morales) overruled the results of the 2016 referendum to allow Evo to run for President again.

As Mike Gonzalez observes, in the context of the Bolivian process this is a betrayal of the revolutionary impulse and radical democratic practice of the movement that brought Evo to power. (90)

Conclusion

Mike Gonzalez criticizes the general failure of Pink Tide governments to divert part of the surplus from their export of commodities, especially when prices were high, into expanding alternative areas of production instead of having them totally channeled into consumption.

He notes that the same failed strategy continues even now that the expansion

of mining and other extractive industries has slowed down with the decline of the Chinese economic boom in recent years. And while there has been a gradual increase in internal trading within Latin America, there has not been much interest on the part of those Pink Tide governments in economic integration to complement each others' economies in a more effective way and independently of imperialism — possibly because they perceive such integration as a surrender of their national sovereignty.

In any case, Gonzalez concludes that the extractivist developmental strategy of the Pink Tide governments has essentially worked to renegotiate neoliberal terms of their relationship with international capital and the imperialist powers rather than to create a new economic rationality and order. (163-165)

Gonzalez laments much of the international left's failure to offer positive criticism of extractivism. He finds an important part of the left, instead of learning how to transform this strategy into one capable of constructing socialist economies that are democratic and that work, intent on apologizing for Pink Tide governments.

Gonzalez shows how the exaggerated claims made by the left on behalf of the Chávez and Maduro governments proved to be ill-founded and a serious misreading of what was happening in Venezuela. That is why he insists that "truth is the first guiding principle of any revolutionary theory." (44)

This apologetic tendency has been equally disastrous in the case of corruption in Brazil. Much of the left has upheld the images of Brazilian presidents Lula and Dilma Rousseff as activists of the original PT (Workers Party) arguing for a revolutionary transformation of Brazil that would be untainted by Stalinism.

The PT in power, however, did not attempt any kind of fundamental social transformation. At most, PT governments established a system of individual payments for the poor, without having stemmed the sources and causes of their poverty, while making deals and protecting the interests of those in power.

The left, argues Gonzalez, must defend progressives and socialists against attacks from the right but not cover up their mistakes and corruption. There is no such thing as right or left wing corruption, he notes — just corruption — and corruption may in fact be successfully used by the right to discredit the left, as in the election of the Brazilian far right president Jair Bolsonaro.

The main issue underlying corruption, Mike Gonzalez concludes, is the absence of transparency and accountability as measures of public office, features that are always critical to democracy. (173-74) ■

REVIEW

Canada vs. USA:

Why No Labor Party Here? By Meredith Schafer

Labor and the Class Idea in the United States and Canada

By Barry Eidlin

Cambridge University Press, 2018, 349 pages, \$29.99 paperback.

WHY HAS UNION membership been on the decline in the United States since the early 1950s? Why is the dominant culture in this country one that values ideas of “free enterprise” and individual economic mobility rather than the idea of class interests and struggle? How can we build working-class power and reverse economic inequality and in the process change our political discourse and culture to one that is not hostile towards working class solidarity?

Barry Eidlin, a leftwing labor sociologist, tackles these questions by asking a different question: Why do fewer U.S. workers belong to unions compared to Canada, a country that has weathered some of the same industrial changes? *Labor and the Class Idea in the United States and Canada* investigates the different outcomes of the labor movements of the 1930s and 1940s by comparing the two countries over the course of the 20th century.

The comparative approach is useful because until the early 1950s, labor union density tracked very closely in both countries. Yet Canadian union density, at 28.4% in 2016, is nearly three times that of the U.S. rate.

Eidlin contends that there are many incomplete explanations: Canada has different labor laws, employs a different (parliamentary) political system, and historically racial divisions are of a smaller scale than in the United States. Labor unions in the U.S. context are treated as “special interests” vying for favoritism rather than representatives of the broader working class.

What made the United States this way? How and why is Canada different?

Essential Data

The book presents some very compelling data culled from valuable archival research to help filter the many causes from the ripple effects, effectively exposing key aspects

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of U.S. and Canadian political history that we still contend with today.

Eidlin focuses on periods where measurables like union membership and independent left third-party political support tracked similarly in both countries but then dramatically diverged. He also examines contextual data around strike activity, public opinion concerning how industry should be managed, public support of unions and changes in employment and industry in both countries.

The data are essential for peeling away various incomplete narratives for why union density has not declined nearly as much in Canada as in the United States and what this tells us about the working class and the U.S. political system. The book takes the reader through a process of eliminating explanations by testing them with data and includes an investigation of the stories behind the data — the people, organizations and institutions that grappled with an unprecedented capitalist crisis, mass unemployment, and rising worker unrest during the 1930s Great Depression.

Rather than a detailed historical examination of social forces, however, the aim of the book is to compare how and when the data diverge in the two countries and then look to history more broadly for the events that coincide. This approach has its limitations. A more detailed historical analysis alongside the data would have been desirable to fully investigate the complexity of the period of social upheaval that produced such different outcomes. Nonetheless, the analysis of this data is very effective at eliminating various incomplete explanations.

Coercion vs. Cooptation

Eidlin's primary conclusions rest in how workers' movements and class interests came to be represented and then articulated in political party systems in very different ways at different moments in history and how articulation later undermined or supported class organization and interests over the long-term.

Class interests were incorporated into political parties in vastly different ways, primarily, the book poses, because of how ruling class interests chose to respond to labor uprisings.

Specifically in Canada, the ruling class refused to incorporate labor into their

parties during the rising labor unrest of the 1930s and only much later became willing to support voluntary labor law regimes.

This was part of a response meant to coerce labor into submission. Left with no establishment political party to take up their demands, workers eventually formed their own party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF, later the New Democratic Party), to challenge the ruling parties, particularly the Liberals.

In contrast, in the United States the Democrats under the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration saw an opportunity to bring labor unions into the fold by co-opting key economic demands (leaving out many other social demands) and making them part of a coalition of a plurality of interests, interests which included racist southern Democrats and capitalists from key sectors.

Through their support for FDR, U.S. unions benefited greatly from the establishment of labor laws in the 1930s that included rights to organize and outlawed company unions. As the book very effectively details, however, the labor law regime put in place was focused on the adjudication process of individual worker rights, not resolving class conflicts between employers and groups of workers.

In fact, this regime immediately caused more intra-class strife by pitting unions against each other in battles for jurisdiction. A key feature was that rather than being overseen by representatives from employers (capitalists) and unions (working class) as in Canada, labor relations boards were chosen from the legal community by elected officials. Their decisions were therefore heavily determined not only by the party in power, but by the capitalists who could influence those parties.

By the early 1950s the Democrats were no longer in control — something that might seem inevitable to readers today, but clearly was not well anticipated by labor leaders and even the functionaries of the left at the time. By then unions had grown tremendously under the new rights, but also transformed themselves into bureaucracies focused on the adjudication process.

U.S. labor leaders had completely abandoned the idea of a labor party long before the Democrats lost control of the

government. The merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955 was a defensive move, the first of many. In contrast, in Canada during this time, labor law was just being established, and it was superior in many ways to the U.S. in part because it was more insulated from party influence.

Employers on the Offensive

The book is very effective at exposing how the employer offensive was always going on, even immediately following the 1935 passage of the Wagner Act (which protected union organizing), countering the narrative that this offensive against labor began in earnest only in the 1970s. Through the comparative data, Eidlin bridges the time period leading up to the New Deal with that of the steepest decline in union density.

The coopting of trade union demands at the height of labor militancy in the 1930s was clearly capitalist-class interests at work. The unions and the Communist Party USA, believing they had a seat at the table, supported a no-strike policy during the second world war. The postwar Taft-Hartley Act (outlawing secondary boycotts and allowing state “right-to-work” laws) and McCarthyism followed.

It becomes evident that it is important not to reduce labor’s success at growth to external factors: the lack of an employer offensive or a particular labor law regime.

To do so is to overlook the other significant kinds of power: workplace, organizational and political that drove union growth in the late 1930s and 1940s. Workers were radicalized, striking and occupying workplaces, and a socialist and communist left were more organized in the workplace than at any point in history. Unions were therefore well-positioned to take advantage of legal recognition procedures.

Canadian politicians and capitalists were not more enlightened or reasonable than their U.S. counterparts. Despite intense strike activity and labor upsurge in the same period leading up to WW II, a labor law regime was not established until the 1950s.

When it eventually was won, it was modeled in a way that accepts and reinforces class interests — overseen by labor and management representatives, with processes in place to bring both sides to compromise more even handedly than in the politicized U.S. setup.

Canadian unions, although impacted by similar redbaiting and global political and economic changes as in the United States, had established a party, the NDP, that was not a coalition with capitalists. By doing so, their political party could pose enough of a political threat to force the capitalist-dominated parties to accept reforms.

Unions were also more allied with other segments of the working class, more influ-

enced by the socialist left, and later more integrated with social movements for civil rights in the 1960s, which were conversely more rooted in class struggle than movements in the United States.

This enabled the labor movement, through a labor-controlled political party, to preserve its ability to independently contest for power against Liberals and other ruling class enemies, even after labor laws and contracts had tamped down worker unrest.

Of course, since that time the NDP itself has been somewhat corrupted by neoliberal tendencies. The difference is that U.S. unions never achieved political articulation independent from the Democratic Party and were limited from the start by employer interests within their coalition. FDR and his party were credited with the New Deal and its many programs while unions are often seen as merely the beneficiaries.

Southern racists got what they wanted too: a labor law that excluded domestic and agricultural workers, overwhelmingly Black workers at the time. Today, even if Democrats have power over all three branches of the federal government — as they did in the first two years of the Obama presidency — passage of reforms that benefit unions and workers is very modest.

Party leaders consistently seek market-based solutions for problems of inequality and do not want to be associated with anything on the scale of the New Deal that could be characterized as redistribution or class warfare.

Why Not a Labor Party?

The debate over whether to form a labor party within the various factions of the U.S. labor movement in the 1930s is not really the book’s focus. Nevertheless, its conclusions are a compelling case for why a labor party is necessary for a strong labor movement.

Proving that a labor party is necessary is not the same as fully understanding why it didn’t happen at a rare time when it was arguably quite possible. Perhaps it was out of the purview of the book, but there was not much discussion of why the left of the labor movement, before McCarthyism, did not prevail in launching a labor party.

One limitation of looking primarily at structural changes and outcomes is that it assigns most of the agency for what happened (or did not happen) to the capitalists. With a more in-depth historical analysis as a counterpart to the data, we could better understand the complex agency of unions, communists, and other social forces.

For example, the Communist Party went through a change in leadership prior to the New Deal (as well as many other internal battles around labor work), and William Z. Foster, a long-time agitator in many unions, then organizer for what became the CIO

and proponent of a labor party, was no longer in leadership. He was replaced by Earl Browder, a bureaucrat.

Browder enthusiastically supported the New Deal coalition. He also supported the no-strike policy during the war and in 1945 was removed (at Moscow’s direction) for moving toward dissolving the party itself.

This all transpired, amazingly, during the peak membership of the party — much of its growth having been spurred by anti-fascism, civil rights struggles and labor organizing.

This disconnect inside the largest left organization in U.S. history — between party officials and the movements they had helped organize — seems very significant in the face of what the book lays out. Foster and Browder are mentioned at various moments in the book, but very briefly, and they are not included in the index (although the CPUSA is).

It is important to note that the conflicting perspectives of Foster and Browder reflected larger forces inside and outside the Communist Party. While they did not shape the trajectory of the party so much as reflect it, they did so through very different orientations to the ruling class, labor officialdom, and rank and file.

The book mentions how the agricultural policy of the Roosevelt administration encouraged the absorption of farm-labor groups into the party, particularly by excluding Blacks and immigrants from labor laws. But there isn’t a discussion of farm-labor populist movements also being fertile ground for fascist organizing.

Civil Rights and the fight against segregation were particularly set back by many New Deal policies, including racist housing policies that would impact Black families for generations. William Z. Foster, in an essay titled “The New Political Bases for a Labor Party in the United States” published just a couple weeks before the Wagner Act was passed in 1935, described the situation:

“A severe struggle will be necessary because the bourgeoisie, which has no intention of granting the demands of the workers and poor farmers, will not sit idly by while they create a broad labor party to fight for these demands. Already, indeed, it is vigorously attempting to make use of these discontented masses so that they may be used for their own further enslavement. Fascism, supported by the big capitalist elements, is now growing with great rapidity in the United States. A whole crop of well-financed fascist and semi-fascist leaders, with the wildest demagoguery and reckless promises, are working to confuse the discontented masses and to secure organized control over them. And, unfortunately, they are only too successful—undoubtedly millions of oppressed workers and farmers are already looking to them for leadership and

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REVIEW

State Murder Revisited:

The Kent State Story

By Rick Feinberg

Death and Dissent in the Long Sixties:

A History of What Happened at Kent State and Why, Written by One Who was There

By Thomas M. Grace

University of Massachusetts Press, 2016, 384 pages. Photographs, appendix, acknowledgements, notes, index, \$29.95 paperback.

MUCH HAS BEEN written about student protests of the 1960s and the fatal shooting of four students at Kent State University by Ohio's National Guard on May 4, 1970. *Death and Dissent in the Long Sixties* fills an important niche by contextualizing antiwar activities and the Kent State killings in relation to other movements for political and social change. In doing so, it recounts key events dating to the 1950s and brings them forward into the present century.

Author Tom Grace is a historian, and his book is a thoroughly documented historical treatise; but it is equally an ethnographic and ethnohistorical monograph. Anthropologists, since the early 20th century, have relied on "participant observation" for data collection. They live in the communities they wish to study, take part in local activities, and learn to see the world from the perspective of their interlocutors. Grace was a Kent State activist in the late 1960s and early '70s. For a time he roomed with protest leader Alan Canfora, and the roommates were among the nine students wounded on May 4th.

Also in good anthropological fashion, Grace's research includes interviews with scores of fellow movement participants, eliciting their recollections and assessments of assorted organizations, key actors, and critical occurrences. He explores diverse perspectives on how to build an effective movement and the sometimes-rancorous debates as well as points of unity and cooperation.

An activist who knew many of the principals and has maintained social contact with some of them, he was well positioned to follow up with detailed conversations. His extensive network is evident in a four-page "Acknowledgements" section and a nine-

Rick Feinberg is professor emeritus of anthropology at Kent State University. He was a member of the Kent State faculty from 1974 through May 2018.

page appendix summarizing what eventually became of dozens of the story's protagonists.

One might expect a writer with Grace's background to produce an angry diatribe against the power brokers, law enforcement officers and National Guard. Instead, he adopts an academic voice, examining events coolly and analytically. He tries, with some success, to understand the perspectives of actors on all sides. Not only does he explore the biographical background, experience, and political and intellectual orientation of movement participants; he inquires into the mindset of Guardsmen, university administrators, and political leaders. He examines their internal conflicts and ambivalences, how their ways of thinking evolved, and the actions they produced.

Involvement in Events

It is atypical for a historian to write about events in which he was an active participant, and it is equally unusual to review a book about events in which the reviewer was involved, directly or indirectly. From 1965 through 1969 I was a student at the University of California, Berkeley. I was active in the movement to end the Vietnam War and represented Berkeley's Vietnam Day Committee at a 1966 national conference, held at Cleveland's Case Western Reserve University, which led to creation of the Spring Mobilization Committee and the massive antiwar demonstrations of April 1967. I took part in a sit-in to preserve an experimental class taught by Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, was suspended for my support of the Third World Liberation Front student strike in spring of 1969, and covered the events of "People's Park" for *The Militant* newspaper.

In spring of 1970, I was completing my first year of graduate school at the University of Chicago when news arrived of the Kent State shootings. At a mass meeting that evening, U of C students resolved to strike in solidarity with the Kent activists. One consequence was that a midterm scheduled for May 5th was changed from in-class to a take-home, and I'm certain my performance benefitted from that change. In that way, Kent State played a role in my graduate career and its successful outcome.

Still, I never imagined that Kent would be my academic home for 44 years, from 1974 through my retirement in 2018.

While working there I came to know many leaders of the local antiwar movement, several of whom Grace discusses in his book, and in 1977 I was actively involved in the effort to keep the university from constructing a gymnasium annex on the site of the shooting. In short, I have first-hand knowledge of the people and events that fill the pages of Grace's book. Thus I'm fairly well positioned to assess the accuracy of many of his observations, but I am not an unbiased observer.

Death and Dissent begins with a discussion of Grace's personal experiences at Kent State as a student and participant in SDS and the antiwar movement. He reviews Ohio's labor movement of the 1950s, focusing on successful resistance to imposition of a "right to work" law. He considers the history of Kent State University as it evolved from a teachers' college in a small Ohio city during the early 20th century to a full-scale university by midcentury and ultimately a significant research institution.

He looks at the sometimes fraught relationship between the university and other local residents as well as the complex relations among state and local political leaders, the business community, area newspapers, the Board of Trustees (led for many years by the publisher of the local paper, the *Ravenna-Kent Record Courier*), and how those pressures affected actions of the university administration.

In that context Grace considers the civil rights movement, which developed in the 1950s and blossomed in the 1960s. Locally, African Americans and their supporters organized to oppose discrimination in housing and to integrate a popular downtown bar. The middle to late '60s saw the formation of Black United Students, which pushed to increase minority admissions to the university, hire more Black faculty and staff, and establish a Black Studies program (which eventually became Kent's Department of Pan African Studies).

Antiwar Momentum

By the mid-'60s opposition to the Vietnam War was gaining national momentum. Early on at Kent, as in many other plac-

es, hecklers and counter-protesters severely outnumbered the antiwar activists, but within a few years the dynamics were reversed.

Grace examines the complex relationship between Kent's Black Power and (mostly white) antiwar movements. Each was generally sympathetic to the other's objectives, and they sometimes supported one another's demonstrations. Their immediate goals differed, however, and the administration was occasionally able to exploit those differences to drive a wedge between the two.

At the outset Kent's antiwar movement was spearheaded by members of the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), youth arm of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Later, a chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was organized on campus and played a major role in the runoff to the events of 1970.

As the war in Southeast Asia dragged on, opposition grew increasingly widespread. The draft, which disproportionately targeted young working-class — especially African American — men, accounted in part for the decline in support for the war effort. KSU predominantly served students from working class families, leading to a connection between antiwar and pro-union sympathies.

As antiwar sentiment grew, power brokers on and off campus sought to discourage activism. SDS was banned from the Kent campus, and the chapter disbanded. When the war continued despite massive protests, activists became frustrated and angry, and many engaged in increasingly militant actions.

In that light Grace examines the

sometimes violent protests at the 1968 Democratic Party convention, and SDS's 1969 split into a Progressive Labor Party-backed faction called the Worker-Student Alliance and the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM). A little later, RYM split into the adventurist Weathermen and Maoist RYM II.

The book's greatest strength is its careful assessment of the strategies and tactics advocated by different branches of the student movement while maintaining empathy with all sides and avoiding moral judgment.

For the most part, I agree with Grace's assessments. For example, he observes in several places that attempts by political leaders and university administrators to suppress dissent had the effect of building support for movement activities. That corresponds with my observations at Berkeley and elsewhere.

One area of mild disagreement is Grace's characterization of the YSA/SWP's "cautious" approach vis-à-vis the "more militant" approach of SDS. I understand the logic behind that contrast: The YSA/SWP never advocated acts of arson, smashing bank windows, or building bombs, while at least a few SDS members or former members did pursue such actions. The SWP's goal, however, to build a democratic workers' state based on collective ownership of the means of production, was not less radical than that of SDS. The difference was that SWP members believed a fundamental reconfiguration of society could only be accomplished by convincing ordinary working people that such

reorganization would substantially improve their lives. Detonating bombs and burning buildings, in their view, would only alienate those whose backing was critical.

The SWP's strategic outlook, in turn, led it to advocate creation of single-issue antiwar coalitions. The logic, which Grace does not spell out, was that it would be self-defeating to exclude opponents of the war unless they also accepted a full-scale critique of capitalism. Rather than reject the support of individuals who failed to agree with them on everything, the approach was to welcome all comers, introduce them individually to a revolutionary socialist perspective, demonstrate responsible, effective leadership, and ultimately to recruit new members to the party. That approach made sense to me at the time, and it still does.

Counterculture and Politics

Another minor disagreement is Grace's characterization of 1960s counterculture and the antiwar movement as separate undertakings. In my experience, hippies generally shared activists' critique of the war as well as many other aspects of the extant social system. They spoke against imperialism, militarism and domestic injustice and, when the offending practices continued, they became frustrated. Then, instead of dedicating themselves to a long-term strategy of building support for their goals, they opted, in Timothy Leary's words, to "turn on, tune in, and drop out." They did not need to be convinced to oppose U.S. involvement in Vietnam; rather, when they saw large numbers of their fellow citizens engaged in public protest, they gladly joined the action.

Death and Dissent is thoroughly researched and detailed. If anything, it may contain too much detail; it is easy even for a reader familiar with many of the people and events to get lost in all the names, dates, organizations, and acronyms. Still, for a historical document, it is better to err on the side of too much detail than too little.

I did find a few errors but most of them are slight. For example, Grace reports that emeritus history professor Ken Calkins "continues to reside in Kent." (276) In fact, he moved to the nearby town of Garrettsville shortly after retirement. The volume could have benefitted from more careful copy editing. Happily, however, the small miscues rarely interfere with the reader's ability to follow the text.

Death and Dissent is an important contribution to our knowledge of the 1960s student movement and, particularly, the antiwar movement at Kent State. It is well written and in places truly engaging. I learned a great deal from reading it — even with respect to people I have known for years and events I witnessed. This book should be high on the reading list of anyone who seeks to understand the politics of "the long sixties." ■

Why No Labor Party Here? — continued from page 35

organization."

The same essay discusses many of the questions in Eidlin's book — why there was not already a labor party in the United States and even how countries where working class demands had not yet been coopted had developed more militant class struggles leading to revolutionary movements and articulation via labor parties. Foster also touches upon the particular character of U.S. working-class political struggle up to that point, which clearly could have figured into FDR and the Democrats' political calculations in forming a New Deal coalition:

"The grievances that pressed them most, and often these were very severe — chiefly long hours, low wages, bad working conditions — were mainly of an economic character. Hence, historically, the struggle of the American working class has almost always been limited to that for economic demands, and did not go beyond the bounds of simple trade unionism, which did not, however, prevent it from often being extremely bitter in character. And hence, also, for two generations all attempts to found

a strong Socialist or labor party resulted in failure."

Just as the cooptation was in process, Foster was vehemently trying to make the case for the feasibility and strategic need for a labor party that would take up much broader classwide political demands — including equality for Blacks, fighting white supremacy, the cost of housing, cost of living, and the plight of poor farmers.

I can only conclude that his experience as an organizer helped him understand firsthand why this was strategic and why narrow economic interests or demands — even if widely felt by the working class — are often the easiest for capitalists to coopt or neutralize, avoiding bigger contests for structural change to power relations and decision making (those other demands).

The political demands of a movement capable of competing with capitalist parties would need to unify the fragmented working class in a country like the United States, which at the time was far more predisposed for such divisions than its neighbor to the north. ■

REVIEW

Infinite Use of Finite Means By Matthew Garrett

What Kind of Creatures Are We?

By Noam Chomsky
New York: Columbia University Press, 2016,
xxiv, 167 pages, \$14.95 paperback.

Who Rules the World?

By Noam Chomsky
New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016, x, 318 pages,
\$18 paperback.

On Anarchism

By Noam Chomsky
New York: New Press, 2013, xvi, 170 pages,
\$15.70 paperback.

Optimism Over Despair: On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change

Noam Chomsky and C.J. Polychroniou,
Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017, 207 pages,
\$16.95 paperback.

The Instinct for Cooperation: A Graphic Novel Conversation with Noam Chomsky

By Jeffrey Wilson
Illustrated by Eliseu Gouveia
Lettered by Jay Jaco
New York: Seven Stories Press, 2018, 112 pages,
\$13.95 paperback.

Decoding Chomsky: Science and Revolutionary Politics

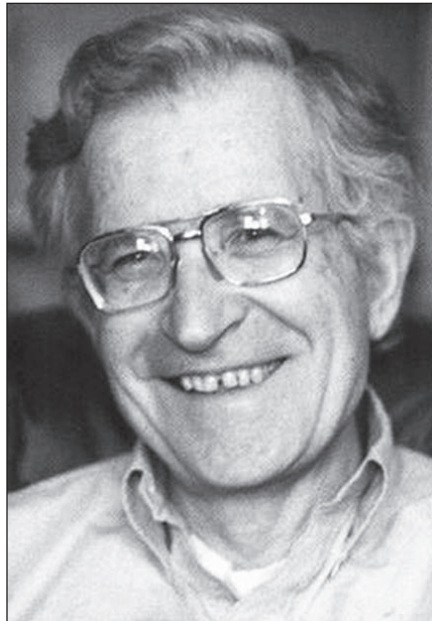
By Chris Knight
New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2018, xiv,
285 pages, \$18 paperback.

NOAM CHOMSKY WOULDN'T like it, but let's begin with dialectics. Ideological mystification inheres not in the answers given to a particular problem, but in the questions that constitute the problem in the first place.

The insight is Marx's, of course, and it's integral to the historical-materialist method of immanent critique. We lift ourselves out of an ideological bind by discovering its limits, and we find those edges by rigorously elaborating the ideology's own logic, showing how and why it cannot adequately answer even its own queries.

To approach a problem in this way is to identify how class struggle conditions knowledge. The boundaries are set not by some intrinsic shortcoming in our cognitive circuitry, but by the relational conflict between dominant and dominated classes. That conflict is inscribed within thought

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itself, as a relational social practice, and the only way to solve problems of consciousness is to reanimate them within the field of social power.

Hermetic, rationalist systems can only reiterate the problem, since they are incapable of the dialectical movement between the system and its social ground. Rationalism thus revolves around a core of irrationality, of material it cannot understand because it cannot situate itself in relation to it.

In a weirdly Ptolemaic way, the irrational kernel determines what the rationalist can and cannot understand. We confront a version of this dilemma in the work of Noam Chomsky, which is both enabled and constrained by the closure of its system.

The Kernel of Linguistics

The rational kernel of Chomsky's linguistics is the observation that language makes infinite use of finite means. Every speaker can produce an endless array of grammatical sentences, although they have a limited experience of the language.¹ At the core of this curious circumstance is Chomsky's concept of the generative grammar, a "system of rules that in some explicit and well-defined way assigns structural descriptions to sentences."

Every speaker has "mastered and internalized" the generative grammar, of which the speaker obtains no consciousness; generative grammars are "beyond the level of

actual or potential consciousness," beyond what a speaker knows she knows.²

Crucially, the accent in Chomsky's linguistics is on practice. Or, in the words of Chomsky's beloved thinker Wilhelm von Humboldt, "language is peculiarly confronted by an unending and truly boundless domain, the essence of all that can be thought. It must therefore make infinite employment of finite means, and is able to do so, through the power which produces identity of language and thought" (quoted in *What Kind of Creatures Are We?* 7).

Chomskian linguistic theory has undergone many changes since its emergence in the late 1950s, but this insistence on the infinite use of finite means and the centrality of the generative grammar remain foundational.

The Freedom Principle

Although not always recognized as such, Chomsky's politics are consistent with his linguistics. His is not a deterministic perspective on human capacities, but instead a theory of human freedom.

As he writes in a commentary on Rousseau, there is "no inconsistency in the notion that restrictive attributes of mind underlie a historical evolving human nature that develops within the limits that they set; or that these attributes of mind provide the possibility of self-perfection; or that, by providing the consciousness of freedom, these essential attributes of human nature give [human beings] the opportunity to create social conditions and social forms to maximize the possibilities for freedom, diversity, and individual self-realization." (*On Anarchism*, 127)

In short: without formal limits, there is no freedom. It is precisely the "intrinsic and restrictive properties of mind" that provide the precondition for "creative acts." (128) Thus, no freedom without constraint.

Once you commit yourself, as Chomsky does, to the notion of the generative grammar and thus to an intrinsic and universal human capacity (biologically given!) for language — once you identify the hard substance of "human nature" in this way, then any domination of any person by any other way is illegitimate until proven otherwise.

Chomsky's standard-bearer in this regard is the anarchist Rudolf Rocker, who held to what he saw as the historical tendency

of “the free unhindered unfolding of all the individual and social forces in life” (*What Kind of Creatures Are We?* 62). For Chomsky, social restrictions on human development must be subject to the simplest, most reasonable of imperatives: “Justify yourself.” (63) If justification is not forthcoming, social relations must be reconfigured — always from below.

Though accused often by enemies (and some purported comrades) on both the left and the right of obscurantism in both politics and philosophy, Chomsky’s pedagogical theory is no less egalitarian (and no less indebted to Humboldt).³

Education is not a matter of “pouring water into a vessel,” but rather of “laying out a string along which learners proceed in their own ways, exercising and improving their creative capacities and imaginations, and experiencing the joy of discovery.” (71)

Egalitarianism and Argumentation

Foregrounding his egalitarianism, one comes to understand Chomsky’s pugnacious, often intolerant style of argument and explanation. Given the universal human capacity for language, and therefore for reason, every interlocutor must be treated as an equal.

For Chomsky, that precisely does not mean that intellectual disputes should be artificially polite. On the contrary, what matters most is rational argument, clarity of expression, and declaration of one’s commitments. One should never try to persuade. Instead, one should “lay out the territory as best one can so that others can use their own intellectual powers to determine for themselves what they think is taking place and what is right or wrong.” (*Optimism over Despair*, 51)

Given Chomsky’s role as a kind of guru for all manner of left and progressive political people (the one who thinks so that they don’t have to), we may be both heartened by and wary of statements like these. But as

so often, one suspects that Chomsky would fail even to identify the problem: for him, the fact that everyone can think for themselves means that there’s no reason for anyone not to. Get it together, people.

Indeed, that basic position — use your intelligence! — has been Chomsky’s watchword, within and beyond linguistics. Although his commentaries on the historical conjuncture have been read religiously by leftists and others since the late 1960s, he has functioned more as a clearinghouse for radical and anti-imperialist arguments than as a theorist or historian in his own right.

That is, by his own reckoning, just as it should be. The few exceptions are telling, perhaps most obviously the monumental *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), co-authored with Edward Herman. Taking its title from *Propaganda* (1928), by the public-relations

man and junior-imperialist Edward Bernays, the book demolished the U.S. press, showing it to be gleefully supine before power and thoroughly integrated

into the nexus of capital and empire.⁴

The crime is double: not only the original obscenity of (for example) the counterrevolutionary slaughter in Indochina, but the further violation of human intelligence by the cunning camouflage operations of the “free” media, which reduce the rational animal to a spectator. Brutality, murder, and exploitation are both routinized and hidden from view.

In their analysis, Chomsky and Herman offer nothing of the dialectical richness of Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), who might have been a valuable fellow-traveler in chronicling the nauseating transition from active intelligence to passive consumption; nor do they dabble in other modes of systemic analysis (focused on the way the relationship between the media and capital and empire is itself mediated) that might satisfy a more discerning Marxist readership.

Yet to offer up that predictable complaint at this point seems uncharitable. For what remains as clear as a thunderbolt is Chomsky’s dogged fidelity to the human

mind: to an irreducible ingenuity that sustains our ties to one another and provides a materialist basis for optimism against despair.

The Meaning of “Mind”

What is this “mind”? At a minimum for Chomsky, it is what remains after Isaac Newton showed that the material, physical body had no basis in physics: following Newton, there could be no mechanical account of the physical world.

For Chomsky, Descartes’ concept of mind was unaffected by Newton’s revolution. So while “it has become conventional to say that we have rid ourselves of the mysticism of ‘the ghost in the machine,’” it is in fact correct to say that “Newton exorcised the machine while leaving the ghost intact.” (*Optimism over Despair*, 192)

The ghost is the generative grammar, the capacity to produce sentences with unbounded creativity from a limited means (grammatical procedures plus the lexicon). That unbounded creativity however, is not linked to an intrinsic purpose, what the philosopher Baruch Spinoza would call a “conatus.”

Assuming a thoroughly biological materialism, Chomsky sees language as a “biological object,” not a tool of human design. Languages are “like the visual or immune or digestive system.” (*What Kind of Creatures Are We?* 15) Language is not even “for” communication, which Chomsky sees as a kind of secondary development out of its function as “essentially an instrument of thought.” (16)

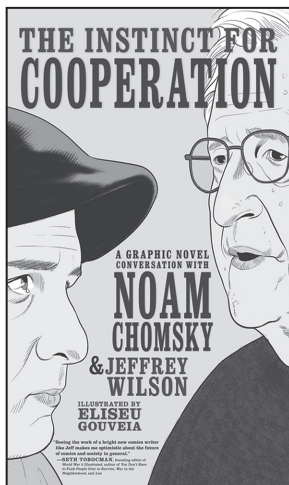
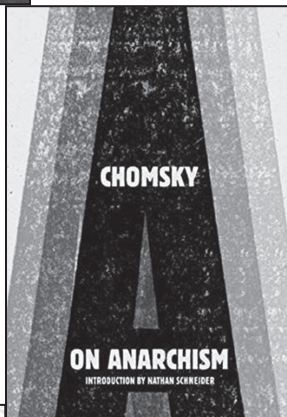
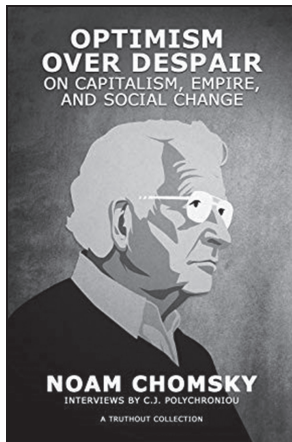
Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that a specifically social and historical conatus (infinite use, tending toward freedom) is admissible within Chomsky’s framework, so that our biological capacities are historically activated at different levels based on social circumstances.

A classic example within literary history is the emergence of so-called “free-indirect discourse” in novels in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Mixing the language of a character with the grammar of a narrator, free-indirect discourse has become ubiquitous in novelistic narrative, instantly recognizable to, say, any reader of thrillers or detective fiction. (“He checked his watch again. Three o’clock. The killer would arrive on the 3:17 from Oakland.”)

But since these are strictly “unspeakable sentences,” they require a substantial social infrastructure (printing presses, relatively large-scale readerships, the use of italic typefaces, the underlying institutions of fiction and novel-reading, and so on) before they can be historically actualized.⁵

The same goes for any number of linguistic phenomena: they are grammatically (which is to say, structurally) possible but require historical “activation” to appear.

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REVIEW

When in Doubt, Sit Down! By Martin Oppenheimer

How We Win:

A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning

By George Lakey

Melville House, 2018, 215 pages plus resource list and footnotes, \$16.99 paperback.

HOW DO YOU slow down coal mining corporations that despoil the earth through mountain-top removal? You get a group together, invade the lobbies of banks that fund the corporations, and sit down. That's what George Lakey's Earth Quaker Action Team did when it got the PNC bank to stop financing the industry.

PNC's change of heart followed sit-ins inside bank lobbies, disrupting business and at the same time educating the public about what this form of mining does to the environment and to nearby communities. This did not happen spontaneously. It followed research into corporate links, training, prior publicity, and careful organization.

George Lakey has been an advocate for using nonviolent tactics and strategies in the furtherance of progressive causes for some sixty years. He is an activist, author, community organizer, trainer and teacher and has a distinguished rap sheet going back to civil rights days.

The core of *How We Win* is the Global Nonviolent Action Data Base (GNAD) that Lakey and his Swarthmore College students began in 2006. At this point it consists of 1100 campaigns, not all exclusively nonviolent and not all successful. A number are used to illustrate various tactics described in this book.

Lakey is not a fan of on-off rallies, which he considers venting. Nor does he think much of instant mass protests triggered by social media, arguing they don't build long-term challenges to existing oppressive structures. And he is not for investing energy in major party electoral campaigns. Their results aren't worth using up valuable resources.

Yet rallies do build morale, and perhaps he should be more open to at least some carefully selected electoral work after November 2016. And he does tell us that organizing a march beats calling national

Martin Oppenheimer is a member of Central N.J. DSA and a retired Rutgers sociology professor. He was a member of Philadelphia CORE and a delegate to two national conventions in the early '60s.



and staff strike is a good illustration of how winning depends on getting allies involved and changing neutral parties into allies.

Unlike many public sector strikes, the workers were supported by their communities. State officials then saw themselves increasingly isolated and gave in on all of the strikers' demands. Those demands were clear and focused on targets with the power to change policy. The ever pragmatic and down-to-earth community organizer Saul Alinsky would have cheered.

Lakey's objective is for campaigns to grow and escalate, leading to real transformations in society. He warns against being coopted with minor window-dressing reforms, which happens not infrequently.

Nonviolent Action

Lakey's book describes some of the more interesting strategies used in nonviolent campaigns. One is that of "action logic," where "the action is the message."

North Philadelphia neighbors lacking garbage service collected the trash themselves and sent the bill to City Hall. When nothing happened, they next collected the trash and deposited it there. Very soon garbage collection was resumed.

Southern Black students modeled good behavior and did not hit back when sitting in at lunch counters, which highlighted the thuggery of those harassing them. The contrast of images was a significant plus in media coverage.

But it is critical that disruptions not hurt those not responsible. Blocking commuter

conferences. Unity, he believes, is built around the walk, not the talk.

Lakey leads us through nonviolent campaign stages from the initial grievance through (hopefully) success. The 2018 West Virginia teachers'

traffic to protest the war in Vietnam just turned people off to the message. Blocking ICE detention center buses, on the other hand, focuses directly at the appropriate target.

The Data Base lists Gene Sharp's 199 methods from picketing to such tactics as exposing the identities of infiltrating agents.² The list is wide-ranging, suggesting a very generous definition of nonviolence that includes a great deal of what most people would consider simply a lack of violence (as in most labor strikes and even plant take-overs).

What happens when some demonstrators get violent? Lakey's rule is that a campaign will always be portrayed in the media and perceived by much of the public as if it were its most violent part. Violence gets media attention — and turnout shrinks if some demonstrators get violent.

Add to the mix provocateurs sponsored by private organizations or police, and then violence even against property (breaking windows, etc.) leads to campaigners being smeared as violent people requiring violent restraint. Of course both police and vigilantes attack nonviolent demonstrators too, but the data, Lakey insists, show that casualties will be fewer and that overall campaigns not tainted by violence have a far higher success rate.

But does this hold at the macro level? Lakey claims that since 1970 "dozens of dictatorships have been brought down by strategic nonviolent campaigns" despite the protection of the military. (83) The Data Base lists 27 cases but there is no "control group:" cases where dictatorships are brought down by violent means.

While many of these cases do hold up well as examples of nonviolent overthrows, a number did involve some violence. Nor is there much attention to the later history of even successful overthrows. The New Jewel Movement in Grenada overturned the Eric Gairy dictatorship following years of nonviolent protests, but only after the NJM leadership voted for armed action in March 1979.

The People's Revolutionary Government that was established was overthrown in 1983 by a military junta, followed by an invasion by the United States. A parliamentary government took over after troops were withdrawn. This was hardly a clear-cut success for nonviolence.

It is hard for some advocates of nonviolence to see the numerous social factors that might limit or inhibit its success. It works less well if at all when a campaign confronts a dictatorship that is able to “black out” knowledge of it. Or when a campaign confronts attackers like Nazis who are violent, organized, believe in the inherent inferiority of the campaigners, and have a significant base of support.

Like many other utopian ideas (including socialism!) nonviolence is not susceptible to scientific proof. If a campaign fails it must be because it has not been promoted long enough, or it wasn’t carried out properly.

Nonviolence and Self-Defense

Nonviolence is not the same as pacifism, which has more to do with a basic personal commitment than “just” a set of tactics in campaigns.

George Lakey is a pacifist and as such abjures the use of arms even in self-defense. However, he agrees with Gandhi that if you can’t think of a way to defend yourself nonviolently, it’s okay to get rough. He opposes the use of armed self-defense in the civil rights movement not just on moral but also on pragmatic grounds: he believes it will increase violence by white supremacist organizations such as the Klan.

This point is surely debatable. Charlie Cobb, who was an organizer with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1962 to 1967, makes a strong argument that “although nonviolence was crucial to the gains made by the freedom struggle of the 1950s and ‘60s, those gains could not have been achieved without the complementary... practice of armed self-defense.”³

Contrary to Lakey, Cobb states that “There was no meaningful difference between white responses to armed resistance by blacks and white responses to non-violent resistance by blacks.” (Cobb, 241)

Lakey claims that SNCC survived against all odds in Mississippi without violent defenders. He quotes Bob Moses (now Parris): “It’s because we don’t have guns in our freedom houses, and everyone knows it.” (70)

This is contradicted by any number of participants. Cobb quotes Willie Peacock at a SNCC staff meeting in June, 1964: “...I placed guns (in the house) so that we could at least guard the Freedom House at night.” (Cobb, 178)

Then there is the testimony of several women SNCC volunteers. Janet Jemmott Moses tells us that in a Freedom House in Natchez, Mississippi, volunteer Annie Pearl stood guard at night with her .22.⁴ Or Annie Pearl herself, describing what happened when a white telephone installer came: “We

had the guns sitting out, the shotguns over here and the rifles over there, and he had to take note of that...” (Holsaert, 458-459)

The editors comment further: “After the summer of 1965, SNCC workers, their community supporters, and organizational allies were more public in their use of self-defense. Some SNCC field secretaries (organizers — M.O.) regularly carried weapons and displayed weapons in freedom houses... On the Meredith March SNCC workers insisted on being protected by the openly armed Deacons for Defense.” (Holsaert, 527)⁵

The Deacons were organized around the strategy of armed self-defense and provided armed guards at numerous civil rights events in the South. It is well established that many of the Black farmers who hosted volunteers owned guns and when they stood armed guard SNCC workers could hardly argue. Although there is no record that SNCC workers ever fired a weapon, some did take their turn on armed guard duty.

After a January 1956 bombing of his home in Montgomery, Alabama even Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. had firearms in his house. According to Charlie Cobb, the journalist William Worthy, King’s adviser Bayard Rustin, and Glenn Smiley of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation all said they had seen guns in King’s home. (Cobb, 7)

Unity and Intersectionality

In the final section of *How We Win* we come to the questions of how to create a unified movement and which sector “is the number one contradiction that drives other systems of oppression.” (192)

Lakey thinks the way to unify our movements is to “give up the rigid wish to rank issues and oppressions...” because “the compulsion to put one form of domination first” supports ranking everything, even men’s and women’s looks.

But no one on the left any longer proposes that class, race or gender is paramount as an organizing principle. Intersectionality (the idea that different oppressions intersect) is generally accepted. Yet intersectionality should not be a substitute for trying to determine where the levers of power are located. This is critical in developing strategy no matter how much we might wish to sidestep it in order to attain unity.

In the anti-mountaintop removal campaign Lakey locates the levers of power (the interlock between banks and coal companies), so it is puzzling when he suggests that “middle class” activist groups would be more effective if they had working-class and “owning-class” representation. I doubt that including PNC Bank directors in the campaign’s decision-making would have been

helpful.

Is it really true, as Lakey believes, that the U.S. civil rights movement “at its best” showed how cross-class leadership produced successful direct action campaigns? The 1960s interactions between gradualist, more bourgeois elements often identified with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and militant younger students and workers such as those in SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) were more often conflictual than not.

Figures such as Rev. King and Ella Baker spent immense amounts of energy in attempting to overcome these divisions, ultimately to fail. Yes, a great deal was achieved despite these problems, but by the early 1970s SNCC was gone and CORE had become a Black Capitalism organization. Much of the Movement’s leadership was soon either dead or coopted into mainstream political structures.

How We Win contains many useful evidence-based lessons about what works and what doesn’t in campaigns. Lakey warns against adopting a “security culture” that obsesses about infiltration because it paralyzes activity. The answer is to do actions that don’t depend on keeping them secret.

He shows that it is better for a campaign to learn from the example of others whenever possible than to start from scratch. He warns against overly distinguishing one’s views from others (sectarianism?) while too much agreement doesn’t move a discussion forward (opportunism?).

The book emphasizes the importance of imagination in tactics including “stunt actions” that generate publicity. He reminds us that even as some campaigns fail, the movement as a whole can still win.

Lakey’s GNAD looks at specific civil rights campaigns in the 1960s and finds that while 17 failed, 39 succeeded and this dynamic led to national legislation forcing states to cease obstructing efforts to integrate public facilities and (when enforced) stop blocking the right to vote.

Many readers will find in *How We Win* a host of tools useful in local campaigns, even though they might not buy into all of Lakey’s formulations concerning nonviolence. That would probably be just fine with him. ■

Notes

1. *Reveille for Radicals* (Vintage, 1969, orig. 1946); *Rules for Radicals* (Vintage, 1972).
2. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Porter Sargent, 1973).
3. Charles E. Cobb Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed*, Duke University Press, 2016, 1.
4. In Faith S. Holsaert and others (eds.), *Hands On the Freedom Plow*, University of Illinois Press, 2010, 268.
5. The march, organized by Rev. King and the SNCC leadership, continued James Meredith’s solitary “March Against Fear” after he was wounded in an assassination attempt in Mississippi June 6, 1966.

Alasdair MacIntyre, Marxism and Morality Ethics & the Conflicts of Modernity By Joe Stapleton

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE (b. 1929), the renowned Scottish moral philosopher, began his career as a critic of modern capitalist morality when he was a young doctoral student active in the British Left. Beginning with the Communist Party of Great Britain in the mid-1950s, and adopting first orthodox Trotskyism as a member of the Socialist Labor League, then heterodox Trotskyism as a member of International Socialists in the early 1960s, MacIntyre finally took his leave from the Marxist organizing scene in Great Britain in the late 1960s.*

MacIntyre's lifelong project was the discovery, and later recovery, of what he believed had been lost in modern society: some coherent idea of what it meant for humans to live a good life. At least one factor behind his abandonment of the Marxist discourse was his disappointment with Marxism's inability to recognize the deficiencies of its own moral life.

Eventually, MacIntyre found the resources necessary for his project not by looking forward to communism, but by looking back to ancient Athenian society — to Aristotle and his theory of virtue ethics, specifically. This does not mean, however, that MacIntyre ever made his peace with capitalism — something his more conservative adherents find very confusing.

While he may have abandoned revolutionary politics, his criticism of capitalism moved from critique of the economic system (the focus of his early Marxist writings) to a relentless critique of its moral system. MacIntyre spent much of his career in the 1980s and 1990s critiquing what in *Ethics and the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (ECM) (Cambridge University Press, 2016) he refers to as capital-M Morality.

This Morality is the Morality of modernity, or capitalist society. Its three main schools derive from the deontological theory of Immanuel Kant, the utilitarian doctrines of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and the contractarian theory of Thomas Hobbes, which was later developed by both liberal and conservative thinkers such as

John Rawls and Robert Nozick, respectively.

MacIntyre believes that all of these theories, insofar as they build upon similar assumptions at their base, ultimately fail as moral frameworks. They are doomed by their own internal contradictions, much like the economic system whose philosophy they are. (In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre's magnum opus, he treats in brilliant detail the historical, social, and philosophical conditions for the failure of Morality as a system.)

In *ECM*, his primary focus is two competing critiques of Morality: that of expressivism, a school of thought that could arguably claim Friedrich Nietzsche as its founder, and NeoAristotelianism, MacIntyre's own system.

Ethics and Reason

Ethics and the Conflicts of Modernity is broken up into five chapters. In the first chapter, MacIntyre introduces a theoretical impasse between expressivism and NeoAristotelianism. In the second, he asks how our ability to make ethical judgments is frustrated by the political and economic structures of modern societies.

The third chapter gives an account of expressivism's critique of Morality and its limits; the fourth gives an account of the NeoAristotelian critique and how it moves us past the limits of expressivism. Finally, the fifth chapter tells the story of the ethical lives of four public figures and asks what we can learn about practical reasoning from each.

According to MacIntyre, the calling card of Morality is its presumption that it can specify universal moral norms binding on individuals *as such*, abstracted from the social structures and historical conditions that, to a great extent, form them into the *specific people* that they are.

In this way, Morality insists it can essentially "solve" moral issues once and for all — its moral precepts simply need to be "applied" to specific situations. Thus John Rawls would have us evaluate the justness of our institutions based on whether they are the sorts of institutions we would construct with others if none of us knew anything

specific about the status of ourselves or the others.

Kant would have us make moral decisions according to rules such as "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham would break down all moral consideration into the cold utilitarian logic of which option would be most satisfying to the most people.

In chapter one, MacIntyre introduces the expressivist critique of Morality. Nietzsche held that all systems purporting to be founded on some universal concept — whether it be "the good," God, or "reason" — were merely an expression of the inner desires and sentiments of the moralists whose systems they were.

The expressivists attempt to construct a moral theory based on this critique by asserting that the individual is the starting point and sole standard for evaluating ethical decisions — in other words, that moral terms do not refer to objective situations in the real world but to personal mental states.

All our ethical choices are expressions of more or less deeply held sentiments and desires. The key to evaluating those choices is asking to what extent they are true expressions of who we are, and not expressions of outside constraints imposed upon us. For the expressivist, there is no independent standard outside the individual's feelings and desires according to which they might consider their judgments correct or incorrect.

The second critique is MacIntyre's own perspective, what he calls NeoAristotelianism. From this point of view, the claims of universal norms binding on individuals as such fail to understand themselves for what they are: ethical systems arising out of a specific society under particular historical conditions.

NeoAristotelians understand humans as members of particular communities, with social roles and ethical standards occupied by and shared by members of such communities. Through rational deliberation and moral inquiry, these communities come

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* For an excellent and detailed account of MacIntyre's experience in the British New Left, see Neil Davidson's "MacIntyre and Trotskyism" in *Virtue and Politics* (Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight, Eds., South Bend, University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

to understand themselves in terms of human flourishing. It is according to this standard — objective in the sense that it is formed in community with others — that NeoAristotelians are able to evaluate their ethical judgments.

NeoAristotelians and expressivists can recognize a certain kinship as critics of Morality, but they soon understand that their systems are, in the end, incompatible. They differ in how they make decisions between competing desires, how they deliberate about such decisions, and how they would narrate the personal history of their moral decision-making. (112)

Good Ethical Choices Frustrated

If we take the NeoAristotelian critique of Morality seriously and agree that it is the moral system of modern capitalist society, rather than a discourse concerning universal moral norms, we must understand how and why this society frustrates our ability to make good ethical choices.

To investigate this question, MacIntyre turns to Marx. According to MacIntyre, it was Marx's Aristotelian way of understanding capitalism that allowed him to see capitalism in a way closed off to those bourgeois economists he critiqued — that is, he understood not only capitalism's essential properties but also its potentiality, or what it must by its nature become.

Marx's critical standpoint allowed him to see capital for what it was: unpaid labor, or appropriated surplus value. Not only could Marx see what capitalism actually was, he could also see how it *concealed* what it actually was, through the "contractual" relationship between capital and labor.

From a NeoAristotelian standpoint, moral theorists ought to be able to draw upon the resources of their society in order to critique and move beyond it, but this is precisely what Morality disables. MacIntyre uses the example of the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume to illustrate this point.

Hume imputes what he calls "avarice" (what we might call *greed*) to "all persons" in all places and times. In fact, he asserts that power and riches are universally admired by all people, for various reasons. Hume himself did not take positions like this to be mere addenda to his moral philosophy but following directly from it, based as it was on what he took to be universal "sentiments" and "affections" rather than reason.

Of course, what these supposedly universal sentiments happened to be were full-throated endorsements of the political and economic hierarchy of Great Britain in

the 18th century.

What MacIntyre draws from this is that we are liable to go wrong as practical reasoners if we fall prey to the prejudices of the dominant society of which we are a part. To avoid this, one must have what MacIntyre calls "sociological self-knowledge," or an ability to see oneself and one's society from an external point, or, he remarks importantly, "from the very different perspective of those deprived and marginalized in one's society." (112)

Sociological self-knowledge involves knowing how you and those around you stand in relation to the distribution of power and money in your society, and what about that standing is consonant with or frustrates the exercise of rational agency.

Although he doesn't say it, it is within the boundaries of MacIntyre's argument to assert that he's suggesting we do what Marx was able to do: reason from the standpoint of working-class consciousness.

Moral Reasoning and Community

In chapter three MacIntyre returns to his account of expressivism to see if we have learned anything about its impasse with NeoAristotelianism.

What MacIntyre finds compelling about expressivism is its assertion that rational agents must in some prerational sense *identify* with their moral choices if those choices are to be truly *theirs*. Rather than assuming that agents simply follow the dictates of reason straight to the universal rules characteristic of Morality, expressivism points out that there are forces within us other than reason — our emotions, sentiments, desires, etc. — that deeply affect how we make decisions.

This is something Morality by and large overlooks, and why the expressivist critique is necessary. What expressivism can't give us, however, is just as instructive.

If we consider the situation of an expressivist who must make a decision regarding two equally legitimate but conflicting goods, they will first of all understand their decision-making process as an internal conflict at the end of which they must figure out which desire is a *truer* reflection of themselves. Therefore, their reasons must be particularly theirs — they cannot be considered binding on any other person, even if the other is encountering a similar situation.

MacIntyre asks, what could an expressivist say to someone who asserts that they are actually deceived about what truly

reflects them? The expressivist, whose reasons for acting are purely subjective, cannot respond in a way that would be convincing to someone else.

For MacIntyre, this points us to the truth of the NeoAristotelian position, that good moral reasoning can only occur *within a community* that has some shared conception of what it means for human beings to flourish. It is necessary, if we are to be good practical reasoners, that we are accountable to and that we learn from others who can see when we are wrong.

MacIntyre begins chapter four with an account of what it means to be a good practical reasoner from the perspective of the dominant social order. In capitalist modernity, to be a good practical reasoner is to be what economists call a preference maximizer — someone whose moral (and other) decisions are based on what will make them happy.

The NeoAristotelian cannot take happiness as a legitimate end for human beings, because in order for human beings to be considered "flourishing" they must have good *reasons* for being happy. If someone is perfectly happy making five dollars an hour cleaning floors with dangerous chemicals, we would say they have a poor understanding of their actual situation.

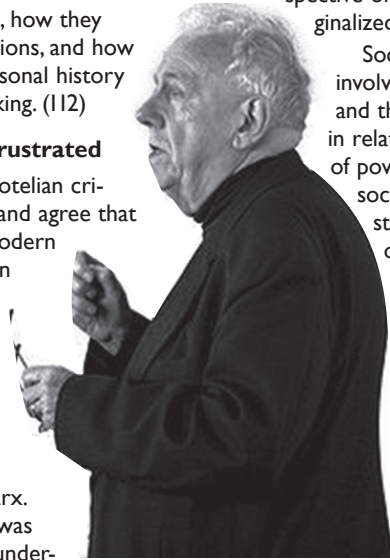
How people evaluate their reasons for being happy has a great deal to do with how they have been schooled by others in their community in the virtues, or the skills, necessary both for discerning between genuine and apparent goods, and discerning the best way to pursue those goods.

MacIntyre identifies families, workplaces, and schools as those communities that have practices proper to them that function to instruct their members in the virtues. Knowledge of the individual and common goods of those communities, and developing the skills for navigating situations in which those goods conflict, allows individuals to convincingly justify their moral choices in a way expressivists can't.

In pursuing the individual and common goods proper to their families, workplaces and schools, the question inevitably arises for the individual as to how these goods are to be ordered in their lives as a whole.

This is the move from understanding what it means to flourish as a student or as a union member to what it means to flourish as a human being.

This process, if it is to be pursued rightly, inevitably entails rational deliberation with others concerning how to achieve both individual and common goods. In most times and places, there are aspects of a society that enable this deliberation, and aspects that frustrate it.



Much of the content of chapter four is a restatement of ideas MacIntyre has worked out in earlier works, but the addition of “sociological self-knowledge” to the requirements for rational deliberation is something new. I believe this crucial addition to MacIntyre’s account of practical rationality is a result of a prolonged re-engagement with Marx over the past few decades.

The Necessity of Struggle

ECM ends with a series of brief biographical sketches of certain public figures: C.L.R. James, Vasily Grossman, Sandra Day O’Connor, and Denis Faul. Three of these four figures spent much of their lives in close contact with the problems of Marxism.

For readers of this journal, I venture that the account of the pan-Africanist Marxist and one-time Trotskyist C.L.R. James will be

especially compelling. In it, MacIntyre not only traces key life decisions of one of the most important critical Marxists but also gives his own (brief) account of the questions Trotskyists at that time did not ask and should have, such as “What kind of human being do I need to become, if in struggling for the replacement of capitalism and imperialism by a more humane order I am to achieve my own good?” (282)

There is a moment, in the tenth section of chapter four, when MacIntyre offers an uncomplicated endorsement of the necessity of the class struggle. When it is the case, he says, that a powerful group of people has defined itself as “enemies of any rationally defensible conception of civil and political order,” and when it has been proven that the preservation of this order rests on the inability of others to achieve their individual

and common goods, the virtues developed in our communities call not for understanding their point of view, or rational debate with them.

Instead, disagreement with this group and with the theorists who prop them up must be “pursued as a prologue to prolonged social conflict.” (220) But actually, this whole book — indeed, most of MacIntyre’s career — can be read as a call for struggle against the ways that capitalist modernity attempts to define us, through defining what actions are open to us as practical reasoners.

Whether in building local communities of resistance (MacIntyre’s preferred option) or building mass movements (the Marxist option), capitalism is worth fighting against, on grounds that Marxists tend to cede to it — that is, on moral grounds. ■

Infinite Use — continued from page 39

Once again: infinite use of finite means.

Force and Fragility

Understanding language as Chomsky does produces a certain political pathos, as one recognizes both the force and the fragility of human thought. Chomsky sees this dynamic in parallel with the long class struggle between producers and exploiters, and is admirably insistent, in characteristic anarchist fashion, on a definition of “class struggle” that already assumes feminist, queer, anti-racist, and Indigenous politics.

Chomsky proceeds with full recognition of the precariousness of our intelligence, and the voraciousness with which those in power feed on the distortions of our capacities.

On one side, there are the exploiters — and not just the capitalists. Chomsky’s deeply anti-Bolshevik standpoint is rooted in his commitment to human freedom; he quotes Marx to discredit (yet again) Leninism in its elitist modes: “The Leninist intelligentsia [...] fit Marx’s description of the ‘conspirators’ who ‘preempt the developing revolutionary process’ and distort it to their ends of domination.” (*Optimism over Despair*, 180)

On the other side, we see human freedom flourishing wherever it finds the chance, whether Occupy in 2011 or Barcelona in 1936: “Whenever you have a glimpse of freedom people start acting like free, sensible human beings. They break out of these chains of indoctrination and privatization.” (*The Instinct for Cooperation*, 81)⁶

But again: freedom exists only in relation to constraint.⁷ For Chomsky, there is a severe limitation on the human aptitude for understanding and self-knowledge.

Perhaps one reason for Chomsky’s hostility to dialectical thought (beyond his devotion to Descartes) is an allergy to Hegel’s

basic argument that self-consciousness may take shape through thought’s dynamic and ever-unfolding encounter with the world — and more significantly, Marx’s avowal of the unity of theory and practice.

“Whenever you have a glimpse of freedom people start acting like free, sensible human beings. They break out of these chains of indoctrination and privatization.”

In contrast with the dialectic, which operates as it were “without” us, Chomsky’s notion of mind is of a faculty that is limited like any other biological organ.

The natural sciences are for him our best instrument — both for grasping the world and for recognizing that *we can never grasp it all*: “There is no reason to believe that humans can solve every problem they pose or even that they can formulate the right questions; they may simply lack the conceptual tools, just as rats cannot deal with a prime number maze.” (*What Kind of Creatures Are We?* 105)

One may be forgiven for an abrupt surge of solidarity with the rats in this sentence, who do not pose for themselves the problem of the prime-number maze but instead find themselves entrapped within a nightmare designed by their human torturers. That sudden, interspecies camaraderie is a vertiginous, allegorical reminder that humankind poses for itself those problems for which it can find a solution, and that the real mystification lies with the ruling class: not just in the answers it produces, but in its very questions.

Yet how refreshing it is to read, for those very reasons, the great rationalist reminding us of our limits. And how welcome his uncompromising scrutiny of power, his fero-

cious denunciation of our rulers and their servants, and his invitation to make free and infinite use of our miraculous and feeble finite means. ■

Notes

1. “Speaker” refers to a language user generally, as sign language and other modalities of use indicate that vocalization is merely contingent.
2. Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 8.
3. The groaning of Chris Knight’s *Decoding Chomsky* provides a few pleasures, including an informative précis of Chomsky’s intellectual and institutional background, but its attempt at character assassination is unconvincing, even for a reader (like the present writer) who is by no means Chomskian.
4. Bernays himself is a great historical monstrosity: nephew of Sigmund Freud and great-uncle of a Netflix founder, in uniting the highest and lowest of human capacities he may be the “missing link” of lowest degeneration under late capitalism.
5. The standard, Chomskian account is given in Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1982; reprinted 2005).
6. The Spanish Civil War is, obviously, a historical inflection point for Chomsky, one of the defining political events of his anarchist formation. His anti-Bolshevism is wound together with the anti-Stalinism learned from that historical episode. Chomsky’s readings of Lenin can be insightful, particularly his more sympathetic treatment of the left Lenin of *State and Revolution*, but one also looks in vain for a rigorous account of the state in Chomsky’s work: that is, a situation in which he would have to take Lenin seriously as a political figure rather than a morally objectionable figurehead.
7. For Chomsky, constraint is first and foremost a matter of the internal, intrinsic capacities of the individual organism: in short, the language faculty or generative grammar. It seems reasonable to regret the absence within his work of a more historically nuanced coordination of that internal economy of freedom and constraint with Marx’s account of the dialectic of freedom and necessity (given in volume three of *Capital*), according to which a material basis must be secured in relation to (and as the precondition for) any historically actualized realm of freedom.

Photo Credits:

Table of Contents page: Oakland teachers’ strike in action Oakland Education Association

Front cover: March 15 Student Strike for Climate Justice; Back cover: UAW retirees demand attention to their issues

Jim West/www.jimwestphoto.com

Tim Marshall's account of the Oakland teachers' strike in this issue makes clear, socialist activists and press were a dynamic and significant factor in supporting that struggle. It's always true that socialist and class struggle ideas come alive in their intersection with living movements — then and now.

What might "Bernie 2020" mean for the next election and beyond? That's a topic for much future discussion, but the central unresolved contradiction remains: the entrapment of progressive and left electoral activism inside the corporate capitalist Democratic Party, in the absence of a strong visible alternative political vehicle.

What's Really New

These are some of the continuities between what we were living in 1986 and what confront us today. There are also some major differences, real historic turning points, from these intervening years that need to be taken into account.

First, back then as we know now but didn't at the time, oil industry scientists were doing secret, excellent research on the climate impact of their corporations' greenhouse gas emissions. The fossil fuel industry already understood — and made sure not to reveal — the implications of anthropogenic global warming.

Today the world is living through the devastating, escalating consequences of these crucial decades of neglect of the causes of climate change. As these lines are drafted, the overwhelming flooding of Mozambique, Malawi and eastern Zimbabwe — and of the U.S. upper Midwest — is the environmental catastrophe of the moment. Before this issue reaches our readers, there will probably be yet another. But whether or not its manifestations are in the headlines, the climate crisis that could become irreversible within the present century, creating hundreds of millions of refugees within decades and quite possibly bringing human civilization to an end, is a daily reality.

Second, in 1986 when this series of *ATC* was launched it was evident that the Soviet Union and the bureaucratic states of Eastern Europe were in sclerotic decay. What lay ahead and couldn't be precisely foretold was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, ending the East German regime and cracking bureaucratic rule in Eastern Europe.

Those of us on the anti-Stalinist left held hopes that this leap toward freedom would open up a powerful democratic and social transformation, but the reality has generally been more nationalistic, often reactionary especially in regard to women's reproductive rights, and recently viciously anti-immigrant.

The Tiananmen massacre of the same year opened the era of China's explosive rise as a capitalist power under the auspices of a brutal repressive state. The ultimate dissolution of the Soviet Union followed in 1991, with the ensuing crises and chaos that would produce today's gangster-run, but economically fragile and oil-dependent, capitalist Russian state. On the other hand, China's emergence, from semi-peripheral status to today's brutally autocratic but leading *economic* rival to the United States, marks the opening of a new stage in imperialist competition for world domination.

Third came the world-shattering terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. These were blowbacks from the United States' 1980s intervention in Afghanistan and

the 1991 "liberation" of Kuwait from Saddam Hussein's Iraqi occupation. September 11, 2001 set in motion "a whole new world of shit," as one of our readers who was working as a flight attendant in Boston accurately foretold that night in a phone conversation.

What followed was George W. Bush's "USA PATRIOT ACT;" the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (only Representative Barbara Lee heroically voted against it in Congress) and then of Iraq. That crime of aggression under international law is now also recognized as the United States' worst strategic miscalculation, with consequences of violence and destruction that the Middle East and the world will suffer for decades. Among the U.S. troops who returned from Iraq physically and mentally damaged, some eventually explode in domestic violence, suicide or mass shootings while many more suffer silently outside of public view.

Fourth, resulting from this cascading disaster, from the "birther" backlash against the Obama presidency and from the cesspool of the Trump presidency, there's been a massive growth of white-nationalist organizing and violence, Islamophobia on both government policy and popular levels, and a general rise in racism.

Trump's Muslim travel ban, like the murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia, the massacres at the African American church in Charleston, South Carolina and the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh — these are symptoms and symbols of the times we live in now.

Against and with the "Current"

"Against the Current" implies, of course, swimming in the face of the ideological consensus that capitalism is the final, best and only conceivable system for producing prosperity and security. From the beginning, of course, this magazine — and our predecessor series from 1980-85 — have been against *that* current.

We are so thrilled that we're now able to swim *with* an emerging, countervailing current that sees the horrors of actual, existing capitalism and looks toward the potential for a society of self-emancipation, of social justice, of what Karl Marx called "a free association of the producers" without classes of exploiters and exploited, of sustainable democratically determined production for human need — what we call, in short, ecosocialism.

The tasks are enormous, the time to avoid catastrophe is limited — but the possibilities are open. Wherever you are, however you can, join the fight for a socialist future and help swell that new current. ■

THE WHITE-SUPREMACIST terrorist massacre at the mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand occurred as this issue of *Against the Current* was in preparation. Beyond the revulsion we share with everyone over this sickening crime, it's necessary to reflect deeply on the conditions and social pathologies that produces killers who exult in gunning down people simply for being Muslims — or Jews, or members of another religious, cultural or national community. This slaughter, and others like the Pittsburgh synagogue and Charleston church mass shootings, are not "aberrations" so much as symptoms of a sick society. We join in mourning the irreplaceable lives lost, and pledge our participation in the struggle for a decent, democratic socialist future. An analysis and background discussion of this horrific event from activists in New Zealand is posted at <https://fightback.org.nz/> and elsewhere, including at <https://solidarity-us.org>.

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