Puerto Rico's Crises ◆ Health Care Racism ◆ Today's Detroit Police

#211 • MARCH/APRIL 2021 • $5

AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

WHO VOTED, WHO BENEFITS? ANALYZING THE 2020 ELECTION

— KIM MOODY

Experiences of Socialist Feminism

◆ NANCY ROSENSTOCK ◆ SUZANNE WEISS

New York Teachers' Speak

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A Letter from the Editors:

Transition, Trauma, Troubled Times

JANUARY 6 CERTAINLY marked a highly original way of showing "the celebration of America's sacred peaceful transition of presidential power," and a signal of continuing troubled times. It was a spectacle for the ages — a final futile grasp at retaining power by the outgoing president, morphing from an absurdist quasi-putsch into a deadly aspiring lynch mob inside the Capitol, followed by the late-evening reconvening of Congress for the ritual of ratifying the Electoral College vote for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

It will take quite a while to assess the lasting impact of these events and their likely aftershocks. The second impeachment trial of Donald Trump ended as everyone knew it would: with overwhelming proof of his guilt, and his acquittal with Republican Senators refusing to convict. But multiple ironies and contradictions remain, as the continuous criminal enterprise of the Trump administration finally gives way to the "normal" workings of the U.S. capitalist state under the centrist neoliberalism of Biden, Harris, Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer.

Consider the striking contrast between progressive uprisings in so many countries against anti-democratic repression and corruption, which we plan to discuss in their own right — in presidents-for-life Putin's Russia and Alexander Lukashenko's Belarus, in Hong Kong, in Peru, in Poland and Argentina with women mobilizing for abortion rights, in India with farmers mobilizing against the regime's attack on their survival, in the revival of the Arab uprising in Lebanon, Sudan and Algeria, and now in Burma protesting the military coup — versus the spectacle of the Trump-and-QAnon-fuelled white-supremacist riot of January 6.

Most dramatic as we go to press, the resistance to the coup of the generals in Myanmar (Burma) has become a potentially world-shaking event — a mass strike, including walkouts and road blockades as well as daily street mobilizations by an outraged population. Although the movement is unarmed in the face of the coup regime's tanks, the military is vulnerable: Its mafia-like control of the country's economy can be crippled if the internal revolt wins support from international sanctions. Most important of all are signs that the popular movement is overcoming its devastating weakness — its long silence on the military's brutal war against the Rohingya people and other oppressed ethnic minorities.

Another contrast is Biden's headline-making executive orders undoing some (not all) of Trump's most cynical and vicious moves, despite his almost entirely conventional roster of top Cabinet appointments. The picture of a fast-moving "first 100 days" of the new presidency reflects partly its sheer contrast with Trump — but also Biden's relatively large-scale relief and economic stimulus and vaccination proposals.

These moves are forced by the monstrous scale of the objective crisis: The U.S. economy shrank by 3.5% in 2020, with recovery still far off — especially for African-American and Latina women whose jobs and income have been devastated. The normal slow, cautious "bipartisan" approach would be a guaranteed failure.

Another irony lies in the contradictions besetting the Republican Party in Trump's wake. The big twit-now-without-twitter expanded the size and enthusiasm of its voter base, building his personality cult and energizing the ugliest nativist and white-supremacist elements in U.S. society, and tens of millions now living in a reality-free alternative universe where Trump's "landslide reelection" was "stolen."

This now renders the party hostage to a far-right and conspiracy-sotted cohort that makes up about half its voting base — as shown in polls by the 45% of Trump voters who approved the Capitol invasion, and 50% of Republicans favoring a large continuing role for him in the party — making it a somewhat less reliable and useful instrument for capital. The "Grand Old Party" is in the early stage of a vicious internal war.

The infighting among Republican politicians, operatives and donors reflects this interesting dilemma of a party trying to hold together two visions of American greatness. One is a degraded form of so-called "traditional conservatism" — mainly upholding austerity and service cuts for the populace, tax cuts and gilded opulence for corporate elites, U.S. military might to rule the world, and reverence for the "institutions" that both administer and disguise those policies. Against this so-called traditional conservatism has arisen is an undisguised cultish white nationalism that regards those very institutions with contempt, along with whatever democratic substance exists in political life.

Left's Difficulties

Most important for those of us on the socialist left, however, is the problem of our own situation, on which we'll focus in most of the remainder of this statement.

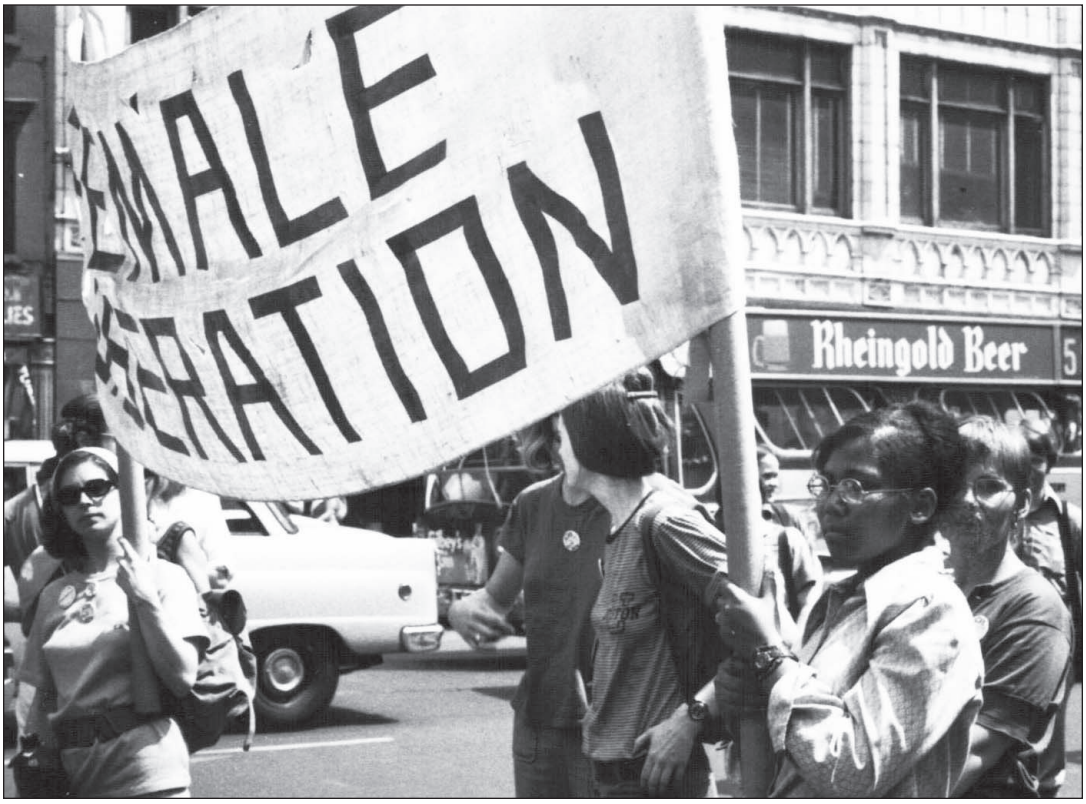
Like most of the country and the rest of the world, we were relieved by the end of the disgraced Trump reign, and inspired by the African American and Latinx organizing that overcame voter suppression in critically important states. But we have no illusions that the Biden-Harris election brings anything like "unity" or overcomes the racist polarization that's poisoning the U.S. working class.

The roots of the toxic politics in this country are aptly summarized by Jackson Lears (*New York Review of Books,* January 14, 2021, in a sharply critical review of Anne Applebaum's *Twighlight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*): "The Democratic Party's turn toward market-driven policies, the bipartisan dismantling of the public sphere, the inflight marriage of Wall Street and Silicon Valley in the cockpit of globalization — these interventions constituted the long con of neoliberal governance, which enriched a small minority of Americans while ravaging most of the rest."

The electoral consequences of those dynamics are discussed in considerable detail in Kim Moody's essay on the 2020 election in this issue of *Against the Current.* And If the initial energy of Biden's initiatives goes somewhat beyond what might have been expected from this background, that reflects the gravity of the crisis much more than any

continued on the inside back cover

AGAINST THE CURRENT
March / April 2021 — Volume XXXVI, Number 1



Front Cover: Count Every Vote demonstrator, November 4, 2020, Detroit https://jimwestphoto.com

Above: Female Liberation demonstrators with their banner at Gay Pride Day, June 1971

Back Cover: August 26, 1970 demonstration. Howard Petrick

AGAINST THE CURRENT is published in order to promote dialogue among the activists, organizes and serious scholars of the left. We promote the vision of socialism from below, of a revolutionary, working-class, multinational and multiracial, feminist and antibureaucratic socialist movement. *ATC* is sponsored by Solidarity, a socialist organization founded in 1986, together with a group of advisory editors who believe that this magazine can contribute to building an effective U.S. socialist left.

"Say My Name: Dr. Susan Moore"

Health Care Inequalities, Racism & Death

By Malik Miah

DR. SUSAN MOORE died of COVID-19 in December after making a video and declaring; "I put forth and I maintain: If I was white, I wouldn't have to go through that."

The headline of a *Washington Post* Op-Ed (December 26, 2020) written by four female African American medical professionals put it bluntly: "Susan Moore's death underscores the racism embedded in the U.S. health care system."

Aletha Maybank is chief health equity officer at the American Medical Association. Camara Phyllis Jones is a family physician, epidemiologist and past president of the American Public Health Association. Uché Blackstock is founder and CEO of Advancing Health Equity. Joia Crear Perry is president of the National Birth Equity Collaborative.

They wrote regarding the doctor's self-video:

"That was Dr. Susan Moore, family physician, University of Michigan Medical School graduate, Black woman. She described how the white doctor treating her 'made me feel like I was a drug addict,' refusing to prescribe her additional narcotics when she complained of pain — even though he knew she was a fellow physician.

"She related how he rejected her plea for additional doses of remdesivir; how 'he did not even listen to my lungs; he didn't touch me in any way'; how he suggested she should just go home.

"'This is how Black people get killed, when you send them home and they don't know how to fight for themselves,' Moore said."

Racism in Medicine

The deeply racist way Blacks are still treated in medicine and by the medical system is rooted in the structural discrimination based on 401 years of national oppression. Black professionals, including medical doctors and nurses, continue to face treatments that are inferior to white men and women.

COVID-19 has exposed the devastating realities of longstanding structural inequities experienced by Black and brown people. They are more likely than whites to be infected and more likely to die.

As the Op-ed authors wrote: "If anyone knew how to fight for herself, it would have been Moore. Still, she was sent home. Less than three weeks later, she was dead, at 52."

If Dr. Susan Moore, a University of Michigan Medical School graduate and family physician can't get medical care, what Black person in the United States can?

"Her experience," they continue, "offers stark confirmation that there remains a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on skin color in this country. That system has a name: racism.

"No matter how well-intentioned our health-care system is, it has not rooted out the false idea of a hierarchy of human valuation based on skin color and the falser idea that, if there were such a hierarchy, 'White' people would be at the top.

"This white supremacist ideology has long shaped our values and practices, even in the health-care sector. Moore's educational background makes her experience slightly more nuanced: Her being a physician brings the privilege of credibility and attracts the attention of many who do not believe that such mistreatment is pervasive."

Serena Williams' Case

Being famous and wealthy doesn't protect you if you are Black and a woman. Take the example of tennis superstar Serena Williams. After the birth of her daughter, "I almost died after giving birth to my daughter, Olympia."

Her story illuminates what less well-known and working-class Black women face in medicine and treatment by the racist system.

Initially, Williams said, the doctor did not listen to her concerns about a possible blood clot. She pressed her case and finally action was taken.

She told *The Guardia*n in September 2018, "the pregnancy had gone smoothly before she encountered problems: "First my C-section wound popped open due to the intense coughing I endured as a result of the embolism.

"I returned to surgery, where the doctors found a large hematoma, a swelling of clotted blood, in my abdomen. And then I returned to the operating room for a procedure that prevents clots from traveling to my lungs."

Williams said that she was lucky to have received excellent medical care, but others are not so lucky:

"According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black women in the United States are over three times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes.

"But this is not just a challenge in the United States. Around the world, thousands of women struggle to give birth in the poorest countries. When they have complications like mine, there are often no drugs, health facilities or doctors to save them.

"If they don't want to give birth at home, they have to travel great distances at the height of pregnancy."

A study in 2016 showed that many white medical students and residents believed false race-based metrics and narratives, such as that Black people experience pain less than whites.

This is the same false belief held by J. Marion Sims, considered the father of modern gynecology, who performed vaginal surgical procedures on enslaved women without anesthesia.

Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments

The most notorious mistreatment of African Americans was the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments. The following information is taken from the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Malik Miah is an advisory editor of Against the Current.

In 1932, the Public Health Service, working with the Tuskegee Institute, began a study to record the natural history of syphilis in hopes of justifying treatment programs for Blacks. It was called the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male."

The study initially involved 600 Black men — 399 with syphilis, 201 who did not have the disease. The study was conducted without the benefit of patients' informed consent.

Researchers told the men they were being treated for "bad blood," a local term used to describe several ailments, including syphilis, anemia, and fatigue. In truth, they did not receive the proper treatment needed to cure their illness.

In exchange for taking part in the study, the men received free medical exams, free meals, and burial insurance. Although originally projected to last six months, the study actually went on for 40 years.

In July 1972, an Associated Press story about the Tuskegee Study caused a public outcry that led the Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs to appoint an Ad Hoc Advisory Panel to review the study.

The panel had nine members from the fields of medicine, law, religion, labor, education, health administration, and public affairs. It found that the men had indeed agreed to be examined and treated; however, there was no evidence that researchers had informed them of the study or its real purpose.

In fact, the men had been misled and had not been given all the facts required to provide informed consent. The men were never given adequate treatment for their disease. Even when penicillin became the drug of choice for syphilis in 1947, researchers did not offer it to the subjects.

The advisory panel found nothing to show that subjects were ever given the choice of quitting the study, even when this new, highly effective treatment became widely used.

The advisory panel concluded that the Tuskegee Study was "ethically unjustified" — the knowledge gained was sparse when compared with the risks the study posed for its subjects.

In October 1972, the panel advised stopping the study at once. A month later, the Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs announced the end of the Tuskegee Study. In the summer of 1973, a class-action lawsuit was filed on behalf of the study participants and their families.

In 1974, a $10 million out-of-court settlement was reached under which the government promised lifetime medical benefits and burial services to all living participants.

Is it any wonder why African Americans don't trust white doctors or the medical care industry?

Covid-19 Vaccines Distrust

Are the coronavirus vaccines really safe for African Americans? Many tens of thousands of Blacks aren't sure. The case of Dr. Susan Moore simply reinforces that concern.

Ask any African American about basic treatment by most white medical providers, there is suspicion. Pain care especially is suspicious as I know from my long experience. You are forced to do your own research so the right questions are asked and hopefully the best treatment given.

I will never forget my experience with extreme pain in my 20s in my right foot. I went to several doctors who said it was in my head. One doctor yanked my foot. I lived on 24 aspirins a day for years.

There were few Black doctors at the time. Dr. Moore's treatment proves it doesn't matter if the provider is operating under a racist mindset.

There remains a "color line" in vaccine distributions. Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Latinos and the undocumented are generally last in line. Some of the disparity is due to lack of health care providers and insurance. Another cause is simply skin color.

Must Act to Dismantle Racism

To fight systemic racism in these communities requires learning the history of racism and medicine and forcing the authorities to take steps to provide free vaccines and health care to these essential working-class communities. It begins with truth in education and ends with mass political action.

"If a physician can't be heard by her own peers to save her life, then who will listen?" wrote Maybank, Jones and Blackstock in their Op-Ed. "Who will be held accountable? What actions are necessary to ensure that no one feels that their only way to survive and be heard is by posting a cellphone video on Facebook?

"Over the past several months, since the public killing of [George] Floyd, many health-care institutions and associations have made important commitments to acknowledge that racism is a public health threat and to pledge efforts to dismantle racism in the health care system.

"This is an important step forward. But these commitments are meaningless if not matched by urgent and sustained action. As a nation, we need to understand four key messages about racism: Racism exists. Racism is a system. Racism saps the strength of the whole society. We must act to dismantle racism.

"Say Susan Moore's name. Heed her message. Do not let her death be in vain." ■

Support Kshama Sawant

A DELAYED RULING by the Washington State Supreme Court will determine whether a recall petition campaign against Seattle City Council District 3 representative Kshama Sawant is allowed to proceed. Sawant, first elected in 2013 as an at-large member and then as District 3 council member in 2015 and 2019, is a member of Socialist Alternative and outspoken supporter of a $15/hour minimum wage, renters' rights, a city tax on Amazon, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

In her reelection campaigns, Sawant has defeated candidates backed by corporate powers including Amazon's Jeff Bezos, one of the world's two richest men. The recall effort launched in 2020, ostensibly by one Ernest Lou who calls himself "a bleeding heart liberal," is believed to be backed by a few big capitalists including developers. The pretext is Sawant's allegedly "improper" behavior, such as opening the doors of city hall to a mass meeting of BLM protesters.

Sawant appealed to the state Supreme Court after a lower court ruled that the recall petition could proceed on the basis of four (out of six original) charges.

The decision has been pending since the first week in January. If allowed to proceed, recall petitioners would need some 10,700 signatures, 25% of the votes cast in the previous District 3 election, to get on the ballot.

Kshama Sawant was the first socialist elected to Seattle City Council in 97 years, and deserves the support of everyone on the left. ■

The editors of *Against the Current* would like to thank our readers, who generously contributed a total of $17,145 this year. This is the best fundraiser we have had! Last year we built our website (https://againstthecurrent.org) to house all our issues. In addition, our opening page includes additional articles from *ATC* friends. We could not have done this without your support!

Detroit Police, Image & Reality

By Dianne Feeley

FOLLOWING THE POLICE murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, at least 100 street demonstrations occurred in Detroit, led by a newly formed group Detroit Will Breathe, sometimes in coalition with other organizations. Unlike many actions, DWB's marches continued for hours winding through the streets and venturing into neighborhoods where they passed out leaflets and encouraged people to join. Most wore masks and tried to socially distance.

Detroit mayor Mike Duggan and police chief James Craig labeled demonstrators, particularly white youth, as troublemakers from the suburbs intent on damaging the city. (Given that Duggan himself lived in a mostly white suburb until he decided to run for mayor, this almost seemed a joke.)

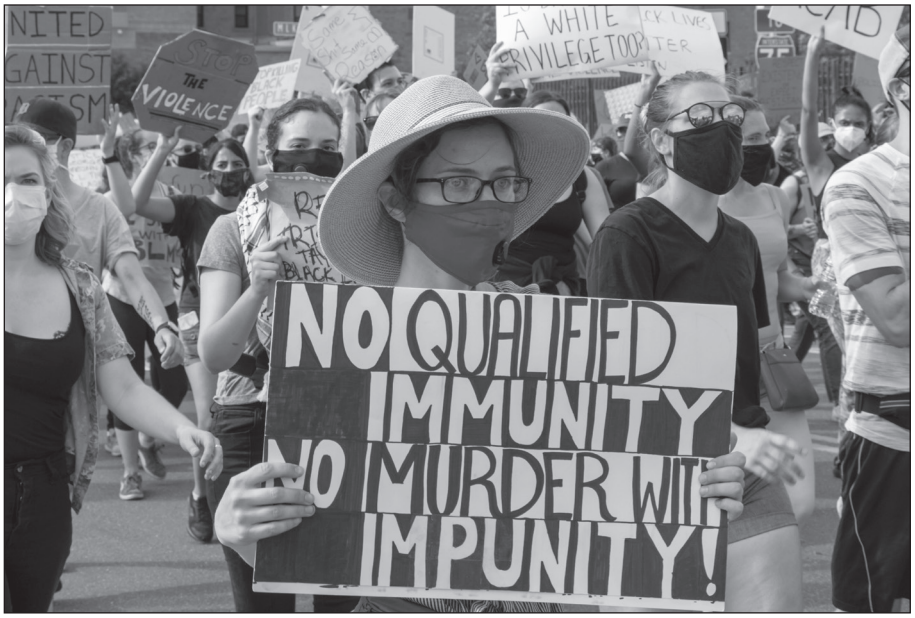
In reality what was happening in Detroit, as elsewhere, was the emergence of a Black-led movement that attracted white youth whether or not they lived north of Eight Mile Road (the city's northern boundary).

Chief Craig said that police used force on six occasions during the first three nights of protests, in response to projectiles thrown at officers. Later he admitted a level of force was also used when a police scout car was twice "vandalized." He also supported the use of force when marchers tied up downtown intersections, saying the police thought they were going to set up a police-free zone as had happened in Seattle.

Along with his hostile rhetoric, Craig stood behind his troops when they physically attacked, arrested and teargassed marchers. He denied that police used chokeholds, even when photographs captured the action.

At the beginning of September, attorneys representing the demonstrators filed a lawsuit to stop the use of teargas, chokeholds, rubber bullets, sound cannons, riot gear, and batons. Teargas was of particular concern since it is banned in war and causes respiratory problems even when an airborne virus is not raging. They won a temporary restraining order.

Dianne Feeley is an editor of ATC *and active in Detroit Eviction Defense. The information in this article is from Detroit newspapers and Detroit Board of Police Commissioners website. She would like to thank Kim Hunter and Susan Newell for their helpful suggestions.*



Detroiters protest police brutality — and get sued by the city. https://jimwestphoto.com

Chief Craig underplayed the order by remarking that just the week before, the Board of Police Commissioners banned chokeholds. He denied all the accusations outlined in the lawsuit, claiming that protesters "repeatedly turned violent, endangering the lives of police and the public."

In a stunning development, the city has filed a countersuit, claiming that demonstrators organized a "civil conspiracy," defaming the mayor and the Detroit Police Department (DPD). It refutes the accusation of using a chokehold, claiming that the officer "lost her hold, which caused her arms to momentarily touch Wallace's neck." It continues by comparing the officer's account to the dictionary definition of a chokehold, concluding that the time period was too brief for it to be so labeled.

The suit also claims that DWB promoted a "false narrative to rile the public" about the fatal July shooting of Hakim Littleton, which is discussed below.

To move forward on its countersuit, the city attorney requested $200,000, which was approved by the City Council in late January by a 5-4 vote. Meanwhile a judge dismissed 28 disorderly conduct charges against demonstrators; the city's law department followed up by dropping misdemeanor charges against most of the other arrestees. Despite their determination to chill dissent through this suit, Craig and Duggan's suit may come back to haunt them.

The Historical Background

Like many cities, Detroit spends about 25-30% of its budget on police. But unlike many other, Detroit has a majority Black police force and a police oversight commission with substantial powers. Unfortunately, these reforms have not proved adequate.

In the aftermath of the 1967 rebellion, which was set off by a police raid on an after-hours celebration, police only intensified their stop-and-frisk policies. The Michigan Civil Rights Commission and the Kerner Report outlined what needed to be done to end racial profiling and police violence, but the department pushed back and by 1971 initiated STRESS (Stop The Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets), a specialized police unit.

STRESS teams were undercover for surveillance and decoy operations, supposedly arresting muggers and robbers. Over the two years of its existence, STRESS teams murdered 22 civilians, all but one African American, with six shot in the back.

Opposition to the repressive police grew

until a broad coalition organized for the abolition of STRESS. When Coleman Young ran for mayor in 1973 against the then current police chief, he promised to create "a people's police department."

Once elected — one of the first African-American mayors of a major U.S. city — Young abolished STRESS and issued an executive order to recruit more Black officers. At that moment Detroit was about 45% African American yet had a police force that was 85% white. [For historical background, see https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/home]

In response to the demand to end police violence, in 1974 the new City Charter created the Detroit Police Commission for civilian oversight with broad powers. Currently seven of the 11 commissioners are elected by district, with four appointed by the mayor. All are Black or Mexican American; four are women.

Today 55% of the police are African American and 5% are Latino; 25% are women. Because of a state law, police are no longer required to be city residents. Of the 39% of the force who are white, only 3% live in the city. This contrasts sharply with the 62% of African-American cops who are Detroiters.

Over the last 50 years police chiefs have been African Americans; the latest is James Craig, who has held the job since 2013. Many other top administrators are African American as well.

Craig has guided the department as it emerged through some rough patches. In 2011, when Detroit was forced into bankruptcy, the department's budget was cut by $75 million. This meant a 10% pay cut and the layoff of 380 cops.

Craig had to rebuild his department and successfully end federal monitoring. While going to bat for his staff, he's also had to confront internal corruption, an historic problem. Craig's still ongoing investigation of narcotics officers uncovered evidence that some have been taking money from crime scenes, planting drugs on suspects, securing false affidavits to obtain search warrants, and embezzling money meant for confidential informants.

So far Michael Mosley, a 19-year veteran of DPD, is the first to plead guilty to taking $15,000 in cash bribes from a drug trafficker and awaits sentencing.

Police Killings

Between 1995-2000 a total of 47 civilians were killed by Detroit cops, of whom 14 were shot in the back. Another 19 died in police custody. The prosecutor brought charges in only five cases, resulting in one conviction. Over that same period, six successful lawsuits forced the city to pay out $8.6 million.

In 2003 then mayor Dennis Archer asked the federal government to step in. A federal monitor was appointed to oversee the department with the objective of reducing the number of excessive force and civil rights abuses, along with ending a culture of covering up misconduct.

Lasting from 2003 to 2016, the oversight cost more than $50 million, including $87,825 a month for the monitor.

The result of the federal oversight has been touted as successful in reducing police killings of civilians, increasing accurate record keeping, implementing a policy that police warn civilians before using sprays, and upgrading fire prevention in the jail.

Perhaps the most disturbing civilian death during that period was in 2010. Officers of the city's Special Response Team, looking to make an arrest, threw a flash-bang grenade through the window of a house. Kicking in the door of the wrong home, lead officer Joseph Weekley fired a shot, hitting and killing 7-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones, who was sleeping on the couch as her grandmother watched TV.

Weekley had been featured on "The First 48," a true-crime TV show, and the crew was on the scene, filming for an upcoming episode. Five years later, after two mistrials, Weekley was reinstated; later he served as co-chair of a committee on racial equity the department set up.

A second crucial case occurred in 2015. A multi-agency task force, the Detroit Fugitive Apprehensive Team, came to the home of Terrance Kellom's parents with a warrant to arrest him for armed robbery.

The newspaper account reported that when the team entered the house, Terrance was upstairs. He jumped down through an opening in a bedroom closet, a hammer in his hand. Mitchell Quinn, a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent (ICE) on the team, shot and killed Terrance, claiming he feared that Kellom was going to attack.

Terrance's parents were outraged, saying he was shot while surrendering. Their story was that he had been brought downstairs by two police officers and was kneeling in the hallway when Quinn fired.

Shortly afterwards, as neighbors gathered, Chief Craig showed up and attempted to defuse the situation by promising a community-police meeting held in the neighborhood within 24 hours. Indeed, the meeting took place, with Craig aggressively defending the task force. He rattled off statistics proving how many violent felons they've caught by pooling multi-agency resources.

Craig painted Kellom (age 20), his parents sitting in the front row, as one more dangerous criminal they'd apprehended.

Although Mitchell Quinn, the ICE agent, was never charged, we do know he had been a Detroit cop who had been fired for threatening his wife with a police gun. Six months later he had a job with ICE.

Kellom's parents have lost their suit against the city and in federal court. But they do have a deposition by Detroit police officer Darrell Fitzgerald, who admitted that Kellom "was on his knees" at the time he was shot and had nothing in his hands.

Between 2009-2014 police killed 18 civilians, with another five dead between 2015 and June 2020. During the last six months of 2020 five more were killed.

Although police minimize the number and importance of lawsuits filed against the department and the city's financial settlements, between 2015-2020 a total of $31.5 million was paid out, including $8.25 million to the family of Aiyana Stanley-Jones. Ten more lawsuits were filed last year.

The Role of Police Chief Craig

In comparison to 2019, last year Detroit homicides were up by 19%. When asked why, police chief Craig suggested "It could be any number of reasons, but it could be the anti-police rhetoric that's permeating our country." He then added, "The fact that there's bail reform and some individuals being released, and frankly suspects feel emboldened."

He and current mayor Mike Duggan see eye to eye on most issues. The mayor applauded Craig's performance last summer, saying "Chief Craig has the kind of job approval ratings politicians only wish for. I think he is doing an outstanding job and we haven't seen any looting or fires every other major city has seen."

Craig is a "hands on" chief with a shining image, who is on hand to make sure the department's version of what happened gets out to the neighbors and larger community.

Last July an African-American teenager was stopped by several police. His friend Hakim Littleton, (age 20), walked by and ended up dead. Neighbors quickly came to the scene and demanded answers.

Craig promised to show the police cameras at police headquarters that same day. The videos showed Hakim walking by as his friend is stopped. He appears to size up the event, fumble around in his pocket, take out a gun, aim and fire at the cop closest to him as he turns to run. The officer is not hit, runs after him, and either Hakim tripped or was knocked down. Three cops fire their guns and Hakim lies dead.

Craig explained that there had been eight bullets fired, four from Hakim and four from the officers. Later the police found a ninth shell, so Craig revised the story based on the discovery of the additional bullet. He made a point of saying that the police were restrained in firing so few bullets. Craig maintained Hakim was an alleged gang member with a record.

Many activists have seen another video that shows once Hakim is on the ground,

his gun is kicked away and the officer who ran after him keeps him pinned down. Yet another officer walks over and shoots him once in the head. But even if I hadn't seen that video, I ask why should that young person be dead.

I will disclose that I know Hakim's uncle and attended the repast. I heard the family say that Hakim was on parole because of a teenage spat in which someone stole his friend's cell phone; he retrieved it and was reported to have stolen it. It seemed simpler at the time to plead guilty and agree to probation.

But even had Hakim stolen the cell phone, does that mean he should end up dead? Youth make mistakes, that's what being young is all about, but African American youth who misjudge may lose their lives, as Hakim did.

Surveillance and Police Militarization

As Detroit emerged from bankruptcy and the police budget was increased, Craig made sure to convince the mayor and City Council that Detroit needed to install a surveillance system. Currently Detroit has the most advanced system of any police department in the country.

In 2016 the City Council approved Project Green Light for "real time" monitoring of crime. Over 700 businesses have gone in with the police to install cameras at their store or gas station.

Craig secured an initial $8 million to open the DPD's "Real Time Crime Center." This 24/7 center monitors camera feeds from various public and private camera networks, including Project Green Light. Within a year it had a staff of 60. One third were officers, functioning as "crime analysts, video surveillance analysts and intelligence specialists."

In 2017 the City Council approved a $1.05 million contract with DataWorks for software and in September 2020 another $220,000 for upgrades. This facial recognition software measures certain elements of a person's face to create a template that is then compared to other images, including a mugshot database. But it misidentifies non-white faces 96% of the time!

While cities such as Los Angeles decided not to use this technology, Detroit's Police Commission decided it could regulate its use, limiting it to first-degree home invasion or "part 1 violent crimes" (robbery, sexual assault, aggravated assault, or homicide.)

During the 2020 City Council hearings Craig asserted that despite the drawback, the technology was helpful for investigations. How he could justify a $1.3 million contract to Dataworks, given that at least 85% of city residents are Black or Brown, remains a puzzle.

Further, the technology was used for a year and a half before any oversight was established. During that time, police "solved" two larceny cases based on matching facial technology, but both Robert Williams and Michael Oliver could prove their innocence. In the process Oliver lost his job, his apartment and his car; the two are now suing the department.

For his part, Mayor Duggan stated:

"I strongly oppose the use of facial recognition technology for surveillance…. DPD is not permitted to use facial recognition software for surveillance and I will never support them doing so. The technology is just not reliable in identifying people from moving images and research has shown it is even less reliable in identifying people of color….

"I have spoken to several members of the Detroit Police Commission and have encouraged them to continue this practice by formally adopting a 'no surveillance' policy for facial recognition technology and providing for serious discipline for any DPD employee who violates this policy."

Indeed, the commission requires that the department report to it weekly how many times it needed to look at Project Green Light cameras to see if it could find a match. In the first nine months of 2020, it looked for matches on 106 occasions, producing 64 to aid the police in bringing 12 charges.

Again, this seems like an enormously expensive technology for the return. Yet in 2019 the City Council voted another $4 million to expand the center and set up two smaller ones on the city's east and west sides.

The City Council also approved a $3.9 million contract for 300 cameras mounted on traffic lights at intersections. These cannot be used to identify people or even license plates, only similar-looking vehicles. They can, however, be an "aid" in police investigations.

Meanwhile the police haven't decided whether they have a use for drones. Nonetheless they have signed a $1.5 million contract with ShotSpotter to install a sound sensor system that detects gunfire, alerting the police.

Another source of police surveillance is through the federal government's 1033 program. Since 2012, DPD has purchased about three-quarters of a million dollars in equipment, including two helicopters and much digital computer equipment. Maybe this is where they got their piercing-sound cannons.

We also know the Detroit police have a tank, which they brought out last summer onto Michigan Avenue to intimidate Black Lives Matter demonstrators. All this gear teaches both police and residents that the police are warriors ready for battle — and this culture continues to drive the use of excessive force on individuals and demonstrators.

Why have shields, batons, teargas, guns, rubber pellet guns and the training to use them if you never employ them? It's just the logic of the police tool kit.

De-escalation Teams

Four of the five cases where people were shot dead by Detroit police in the last half of 2020 were mentally unstable:

• Darien Walker (age 28), an African American had a sword and two knives as he stood in the middle of the street, threatening to use them. When cornered, he threw a dagger at one of the officers, striking him just below the eye. Walker was then shot and killed. Described as being obsessed with weapons and becoming a knight, Walker had, over the previous month, been taken

What About the Shootings?

POLICE CHIEF CRAIG announced that in 2020, homicides were up 19% in Detroit, almost one a day. There were 327 homicides and 1173 people who were shot but didn't die.

The number of shootings, the police department maintains, is why the police must be heavily armed. But social scientists point out that shootings aren't random and unpredictable, rather the majority are part of networks.

Sociologist Andrew Papachristos explained the public health model that suggests how to deal with gun violence: "The idea is to identify the social network of an infected person and provide treatment as quickly as possible to that person and others in their network. The swift and rapid response to the infected individuals will hopefully stop or slow the spread of the disease…."

Fortunately Detroit has the beginning of such a program, D.L.I.V.E. Independently funded, it focuses on reaching young adults hospitalized after an acute trauma injury, seeing this as a "teachable moment" in which it is possible for the individual to choose the possibility of another path. A trained violence intervention specialist partners with the person over the next six to 12 months as they collaboratively develop a plan that includes educational and employment options, legal help and the opportunity for peer groups to gather and share experiences.

Of course this public health model takes resources, but so does the infrastructure of the police, court and jail/prison system. The outcome, however, not only can reduce gun violence but begin to deal with the trauma that many of today's youth face. ■

by police twice to a psychiatric unit but discharged.

• Michael Moza (age 30), who was schizophrenic, had gone to a hospital but was released. Driving at high speed on the freeway, he evaded a police chase but when they later found his car, he led them on a second chase. He was killed after he fired shots at them.

• Kevin Fox, a 28-year-old African American, with a history of domestic violence, killed his ex-partner, attacked a police precinct with an AR-15 and then drove away, only to park nearby and remain seated in his car, where he was killed by police.

• A 42-year-old African American described as bipolar, kidnapped his girlfriend, and barricaded them in her family's home. The siege lasted nine hours, ending when a police sharpshooter killed him.

According to DPD figures, in the first 11 months of 2020 there were 6654 calls that can be attributed to mental issues, 1000 of them armed. Craig reported that 911 gets at least 20 such calls each day. And from a national study we know that mentally unstable people are 16 times more likely to be killed by the police than other civilians. They are also 23% of Detroit's jailed.

Getting these calls out of the hands of the police seems to be the most important first step we can take in saving lives. We need to re-route calls about mental instability, homelessness, domestic violence and issues such as noise abatement to de-escalation teams comprised of social workers, nurses and community members, all trained and able to access resources.

Similar teams have been in operation in cities such as Eugene, Oregon where CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets), a crisis intervention program staffed by health clinic personnel and has been in place for almost three decades. (These teams are unarmed and not dispatched if a gun is involved.) [See https://www.eugene-or.gov/4508/CAHOOTS]

For his part, Craig is exasperated by the problem of getting mentally-ill people to a hospital only to find them back on the street within a day. As a result, the department started a Crisis Intervention Team that provides 16 hours of de-escalation training. Fifty officers have completed the program; another 20% will be trained in 2021.

However, recognizing that the CIT program is not much of a proposal, Chief Craig, with the mayor's support, is launching a more ambitious one with the Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network. Called the Mental Health Co-Response Partnership, it will hire two behavior health specialists to take 911 calls that involve issues of mental stress or homelessness. (It is estimated that 30% of homeless people are mentally unstable.)

To answer these 911 calls the downtown police precinct launched a trial run in 2020, pairing an officer with a behavior health specialist. In 2021 a second team will work out of another precinct in northwest Detroit. But each team will be armed, a signal that may well set off people who are unstable.

Funding from the police budget will be supplemented with $800,000 from the health network. There will be additional funding from the city's already meager housing department.

A friend of mine who is a bilingual social worker told me that Wayne County once had an innovative team of a six (nurse, a psychiatrist and four mental health workers) assigned to a maximum of 60 mentally unstable people frequently desperate for help. The person was able to call 24/7 and two team members would meet up with the individual work through the specific problem. This is important because many mentally-ill people are repeatedly in need of help.

However, the state government, which funded the innovative program, decided it was too expensive to dispatch two team members, so only one would be allowed. Social workers of course felt that was too dangerous an assignment for one person, especially at night, and the program was disbanded.

This "evidence-based program" could be adapted to develop a dozen or more de-escalation teams necessary for Detroit. A particularly innovative program would use not only experts, but trained members from the community. Having unarmed de-escalation teams as first responders would be an essential component in building community trust.

Landis Spencer

Who Is in Charge?

For his part, Chief Craig projects an image of efficiency and reasonableness, reassuring Detroiters that their safety lies in supporting the police department. He likes to have community organizations visit the Real Time Crime Center with all its technology. He tries to convince community organizations that he and the police commission will weed out "bad" and corrupt cops; he promotes surveillance as an important police tool.

How much safety does this expensive surveillance technology provide for a city in which 40% are living in poverty? Statistics about police spending in Detroit, from the 2017 Center for Popular Democracy survey across 12 cities, says it all: for every dollar of police spending, Detroit's budget allocated 14 cents for housing and nine cents for health. *This is a price tag Detroiters can't afford.*

Between 2009 and 2015, the city over-assessed homeowners by approximately $600 million. As a consequence, many lost their homes to foreclosure while others saved them by foregoing other necessities. Yet when the city admitted what they had done, it claimed there were no available resources to compensate Detroiters.

Similarly while Detroiters have the highest water bills in the country, from the bankruptcy to the pandemic people more than two months in arrears had their water shut off. This repressive austerity functions to bred a sense of hopelessness.

While nearly 50 years ago, the establishment of police commissioners to create civilian oversight of the department was an important reform. Today the commission has become more of a rubber stamp for the police chief. Yet the commission does have the authority to set policy, discipline, and approve the police budget; it can and does propose changes in police procedures.

Last June, partly in response to the George Floyd murder and local protests, the commission established a series of changes: building a de-escalation continuum, record-keeping in every case when police use force and requiring that police report when other officers use excessive force. But changing the culture of the department requires a commitment from within the department, a reinvigorated police commission, as well as a buy-in from the city administration.

About half of the 11 police commissioners are former police officers or strong advocates of surveillance programs. But the crisis people are facing calls for providing resources, not criminalizing those suffering from trauma. It would be impressive if Detroit could elect a younger, African-American commissioner in the next election, reducing the ex-police presence.

Landis Spencer, 24, a member of the Black-Brown Alliance of Metro Detroit DSA, has decided to enter the race. His campaign could help Detroiters see more clearly how we need to set different priorities. In a welcome development, his election campaign coincides with a discussion and vote on revisions to Detroit's City Charter.

As the charter commissioners finalize their draft, it includes eliminating the mayor's ability to add commissioners as well as rerouting cases of mental instability to de-escalation teams. These proposed revisions may unleash a long-needed change in the city's responsibility to its residents. ■

Analyzing the 2020 Election: **Who Paid, Who Benefits?**

By Kim Moody

WHATEVER THE ULTIMATE outcome from the chaos of January and the Republicans' own internal problems, the Democrats will have won a majority in Congress as well as the presidency. With the focus on Trump and his followers, it's possible that the commentariat will fail to notice that this was not only a close contest, but also the most expensive election in history.

According to OpenSecrets, it cost about $14 billion up and down the ballot, which was over twice what was spent in 2016.

For their narrow victory, Democrats outspent Republicans $6.9 billion to $3.8 billion. Deregulated "outside" donations mostly from wealthy individuals, not including those to party committees, came to $3 billion of which two-thirds were via Super-PACs. The two major parties themselves raised another $3.6 billion much of it from wealthy donors as well.

In contrast, "social welfare" and union spending combined scarcely passed the $100 million mark. OpenSecrets calculated that only about 22% of funds raised by all candidates came from small donations of $200 or less.[1] The nation's rich paid for the election, and they will be its major beneficiaries.

Spending on congressional contests almost equaled that on the presidential race at a record of nearly $7 billion. Of the 537 congressional candidates that OpenSecrets reported on in 2020, only 12 got half or more of their contributions from small donors while only 37 got a third or more from that source. The other 500 relied primarily on larger donations.[2]

So the well-to-do and the super-rich gave generously to both parties. This was really a culmination of trends in which wealthy individuals play a bigger role in politics and, due to changes in just who the richest denizens of the ruling class are, in the Democratic Party in particular.

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The turbulent dynamics that have characterized capitalism during the neoliberal era have changed not only its industrial and financial structures over time, but the very class that bears its name.

Silicon Valley, today's nonstop political money volcano.

A perusal of the Fortune 500 list of top companies for the years 2000 and 2020 reveals major changes not only in the rankings of familiar corporate giants of the 20th century, but a host of new players.

Such current familiar giants at the top of the present list as Alphabet (Google), Amazon and Facebook did not appear on the 2000 list, while Microsoft was number 83 and Apple ranked a mere 285th. By 2020 such older giants as General Motors, General Electric, Ford, etc. had moved down the list to be replaced by significant numbers of newcomers.[3]

Billionaires and Bottom Feeders

As Doug Henwood has pointed out, beginning in the 1980s there was the rise of a new ruling-class fraction of billionaires "made up of owners of private companies as opposed to public ones, disproportionately in dirty industries."[4] This includes the "alternative investments," hedge funds, and private equity outfits. Henwood emphasizes the role of such capitalists in the rise of Trump and the right and, indeed, as Mike Davis pointed out more recently:

"Trump's key allies are post-industrial robber barons from hinterland places like Grand Rapids, Wichita, Little Rock and Tulsa, whose fortunes derive from real estate, private equity, casinos, and services ranging from private armies to chain usury."[5]

Many of the new, more urban "entrepreneurs," notably the Silicon Valley crew, hedge funders and asset managers of alt-finance, however, support the Democrats in disproportionate numbers.

The rise of billionaires is one of the most striking characteristics of the changes in the U.S. capitalist class in the neoliberal era. In 1987 there were a mere 41 billionaires in the United States. By 2020 there were 623 by Forbes count, a leap of 1,420% in 23 years, a far greater increase than can be accounted for by inflation.[6]

There were, of course, ups and downs as some of these bottom feeders lost their shirts and many Silicon Valley start-ups failed. Not only are these new billionaires associated with private companies as opposed to publicly-traded corporations, but their fortunes have originated outside the traditional 20th-century corporate sectors.

A look at the 2018 "Billionaires List," which includes brief descriptions of where they made or inherited their money, reveals very few of the corporate giants that dominated the Fortune 500 even as recently as 2000. There is one Rockefeller and Sanford Weil from Citigroup representing old corporate wealth on this list of 585 billionaires, but none of these billionaires got super-rich from GM, Ford, or even that perennial Democratic favorite, Goldman Sachs, and many were associated with "alt-finance" and high-tech, real estate and retail.[7]

This billionaire fraction of the ruling class also brought about a change in the way capital funds political parties and candidates. Back in the days of the 20th century, corporate giants' business money came mostly from corporate PACs, which frequently contributed to candidates of both parties, often slightly more to the party in control of Congress in order to influence legislation.

Since the early 1990s, however, individual contributions have outweighed those from

all PACs. By 2016 all traditional PAC donations accounted for only nine percent of all election spending. In 2020 it was down to just five percent. For Democratic House candidates, the percentage of PAC money, including labor and social issue PACs as well as corporate PACs, fell from 47% in 1992 to 23% in 2020.[8]

Part of this change came initially from the rise of small donors individually and through crowdfunding outfits like ActBlue for Democrats or WinRed for Republicans, that hold your credit card information and forward your donation to the candidate of your choice.

In the 2008 presidential elections small donations of $200 or less outstripped large donations of $100,000 or more. By 2016 and 2018, however, the small donor boom was eclipsed by large donations of $100,000 or more that composed a much larger portion of total individual contributions, about 40% for 2018 midterms and over 50% for the 2016 presidential cycle.[9]

Of course, those millions of small donations are essentially anonymous, while big ones are more easily recognized by their grateful recipients.[10] The billionaires were spending big and were also highly partisan in how they contributed.

According to OpenSecrets' listing, 58 of the 100 top individual political donors in the 2020 election cycle gave to Democrats. The smallest Democratic donor in the top 100 gave just over $3 million compared to the smallest Republican funder who gave just under $3 million, while the largest Democratic contribution came to $107 million — that being, of course, Michael Bloomberg's.[11]

Comparing these Democratic donors to the "Billionaires List," of those that could be identified by source of wealth, 22 or nearly half were in alt-finance, not traditional banking much less any sphere of the real economy.

The Rich Get Richer, So do Democrats

It is perhaps not surprising that so many of these particular super-rich donors should be Democrats, since it was the Clinton Administration that abolished financial regulation, opening the door to these alt-financial bottom feeders. Others were from Silicon Valley and the media. None of these Democratic donors derived their billions from the big 20th century corporations.[12]

The story of the Democrats' absorption of the new billionaires and of capital in general would not be complete without a look at how they won Silicon Valley. There is more here than humble suburban garage origins or (designer) t-shirt and jeans style of these high tech entrepreneurs.

Bill Clinton gave them what such innovators always want: patent and copyright protection for their income, along with the completion of financial deregulation that played no small part in the rise of high tech venture capitalists who funded Silicon Valley. Despite the resistance of some Democrats, Bill Clinton and Obama also gave them free trade deals to enable their international expansion.[13]

The presence of Biden cabinet appointees from BlackRock, the largest asset management firm in the world, is an indication of the dependence on alt-financial newcomers in particular.[14]

It is worth mentioning as well Biden's pick for Secretary of the Treasury, former Fed chair Janet Yellen. Praised by many liberals, between 2018 and 2020 Yellen took at least $7 million in speakers' fees from financial institutions, ranging from a mere $67,500 from Democratic old-timer Goldman Sachs to $292,500 from hedge fund Citadel, whose boss Ken Griffin is a top Republican funder.[15]

Yellen appears to be a friend to all financiers, and few in government have more to say about economic policy than the Secretary of the Treasury. The pressures on the party apparatus and its office holders up and down the ballot to keep within what the wealthy and their financial enablers consider the acceptable center have also increased as the party has also become more and more dependent on well-to-do voters, while losing some of its traditional working-class electoral base.

A High-Class Realignment

In mainstream political science, political realignment or the shift of groups of voters from one party to another is generally seen as something that emerges more or less suddenly, often in a "critical election," such as 1896 or 1936.[16] There have been elections that seemed to indicate a realignment, such as 1964 where Republicans voted Democratic to defeat Goldwater, 1968 where significant numbers of white working-class voters cast a ballot for George Wallace, or 1980 when the "Reagan Democrat" was invented.

It is perhaps debatable whether the volatile 2020 election was such a "critical election." Whatever internal turmoil impacts the Republican Party, possibly sending more well-to-do voters to the Democrats, will only strengthen both the political impasse of the last few of decades and the centrist tendencies within the Democratic Party.

What has actually occurred in U.S. politics over the past few decades, however, is more of a stealth realignment in which voters of different social classes have switched from one party to another. Two trends in particular affect the Democratic Party and

The First Fourteen Days

IN A DAZZLING display of top-down governance in the new administration's effort to reverse the top-down governance of the previous administration, Joe Biden signed a record 45 executive orders in his first 14 days in office.

To be sure there were some good things among the 45: a halt to evictions, a pause on new oil and gas drilling licenses on public (though not private) lands, a stop on the Keystone pipeline, opening the door (just) to reversing Trump's immigration policies, and a few more.

Many are meant to undo Trump's more outrageous acts such a separating immigrant families. Most are steps toward changing policies that involve temporary measures, "guidelines," pauses, and promises that are aimed at a return to the Obamaesque *status quo ante* — despite the very different contemporary context.

Biden's cabinet and staff appointments of those who will "execute" these orders and any legislation that might get passed in the coming months can be summarized in three words: Clinton, Obama, corporate. We might add long-time associates passing through the revolving doors of Congress, business, and bureaucracy. Truly an exercise in *déjà vu* all over again, as Yogi Berra allegedly put it.

Things are no better in Congress where those masters of moderation, the Representative from Silicon Valley, Nancy Pelosi, and the Senator from Wall Street, Chuck Schumer, rule the roost — again.

The impeachment of yesterday's nightmare-in-chief and the stimulus *de jour* compose the totality of their visionary horizons. Despite their best efforts and continued visibility, Bernie, AOC and "The Squad" have been allocated to the periphery, perhaps to be brought back into service in 2022.

In comparison to the Trump years, this all might seem like a return to "normal." In comparison to the scale of the pandemic, the climate crisis, the deepest slump in decades, massive joblessness, increasing overwork, the persistent racial segregation of our cities, the crisis of education, the continued decline of union membership, and the increasing astronomical economic and social inequality in general, it looks criminally inadequate.

But that is the essence of 21st century centrism in power. While I wouldn't suggest storming the Capitol as the best way to get things done just now, it is time to organize, strike and go into the streets in unprecedented numbers. —KM

its electoral prospects: the relative decline in the working-class and union household votes that began long ago, on the one hand, and the Democrats' more recent increased dependence on well-to-do and wealthy urban and suburban voters, on the other.

Most pundits and polls provide two ways of identifying working-class voters: by education and by income. The most common blue-collar identifier is the lack of a college degree or "high school or less" of formal education. Looking at this measure in the AP VoteCast survey, we see that Trump won 52% of these voters to Biden's 46% in 2020.

Even more starkly, in the Edison exit poll Tump took the "White noncollege graduate" cohort by a huge 64%.[17] This amounts to 34,498,533 voters — a lot.[18] From this we are supposed to conclude that Trump and the Republicans have taken a majority of blue-collar votes. The class picture, however, is more complex.

There are approximately 22 million white small business proprietors in the United States, about 60% of whom don't have a college degree, and estimates of their average income ranges from $62,000 a year to $70,000. Some 60% of all small business people said they approved of President Trump, and Republican small business owners outnumber Democrats by about two-to-one.

According to the Edison polls Biden took the $50,000 to $100,000 cohort 56% to 43%, though the more comprehensive AP polls has it for Trump 50% to 48% in 2020.[19] Either way, if we could adjust those figures for white owners only, the Republican voting rates would be significantly higher.

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So we can estimate that there are about 13 million white small business owners (about three-fourth male) who lack a college degree, make more than the $50,000 limit often used to identify workers, and who tend to approve of the president, about eight million of whom are Republicans.[20]

Most of these petty capitalists have spouses who are likely to share their opinions more often than not, so we can estimate that there were about 16 million petty bourgeois Republicans in Trump's column.

There are also millions of white managers, police, and other non-working class people without college degrees more likely to be Republicans than Democrats. Though an exact estimate is impossible, this reduces, by as much as half, Trump's actual working-class voter support among the 43.5 million "less educated" who voted for Trump.

In geographic terms, Trump carried the nation's exurban counties by huge margins. This prosperous new frontier of reaction, composing 34 million people whom the American Community Project described as "relatively wealthy" and "among the most educated," voted 54.9% to 43.3% for Trump in 2020. Interestingly, Trump's 2020 margin was slightly less than the 55.5% to 38.0% Trump vote in 2016, indicating that the Democrats made some gains even in this most Republican of well-to-do territory.[21]

None of this is necessarily good news for those who seem to believe, as a fund appeal from "Team AOC" put it, that the Democrats are "a multi-racial working-class party."[22] The Democrats do consistently win majorities among voters in the less than $50,000 household income cohort, which is disproportionately Black and Latino.

But this working-class cohort has shrunk as both a percentage of the total vote and that of the Democrats, as this cohort has declined in the population. In 2000 these lower-income voters composed 47% of the voting electorate and of the Democratic vote. By 2020 this had shrunk to 34% of all voters and 40% of those voting Democratic.[23]

More of the Democratic vote necessarily moved into the $50,000-$100,000 income range, which would include not only better paid workers such as nurses, skilled workers, and many teachers, but also many of the small-business owners and managers discussed above as well as middle-class professionals. While as many as two-thirds of these petty bourgeois voters went to Trump, some would go to Biden as well. So even when the Democrats do win this cohort, their working-class vote has been getting watered down.

The other stalwart of the Democrats' working-class electoral base is the union household vote. In 1948 fully 80% of union household members voted Democratic in the presidential election. This turned out to be the last gasp of the New Deal electoral coalition. With the sole exception of 1964 when confronted with blatantly anti-union Barry Goldwater, the Democratic union household vote rose to 83%, it never reached that level again.

This union Democratic vote collapsed to 56% in 1968 as George Wallace took some of the union vote in the wake of the white "backlash." Since then, for most years it has gone Democratic in the middle-to-high fifty percentages. In other words, the drift of union voters to the Republicans began a long time ago, well before Trump. Trump did reduce the Democratic union household vote to 51% in 2016, but it returned to 57% in 2020.

While the numbers of union household voters have held up in more years than not since 2000, as a proportion of the electorate they have fallen from 26% in 2000 to 19% in 2020 and as a percentage of the Democratic vote from 32% in 2000 to 21% over those years.[24]

If it is fair to say that the working-class vote is most dependably represented by the overlapping union household vote and those in the $50,000 or less income cohort, then the Democrats' New Deal working-class base has shrunk and the class composition of its electoral coalition altered.

This is not simply a matter of the defection of some white blue-collar workers. Even some of the Democrats' strongest supporters among African American and Latinx voters have ceased to vote for this party of the wealthy.

The African American Democratic vote dropped from 95% in the Obama election year 2008, when a high percentage of Black voters cast a ballot, to 87% in 2020. Similarly, while the Latinx turnout rose significantly, playing a key role in winning battleground states and the Georgia Senate election, the proportion who voted Democratic fell from 71% in 2012 to 66% in the 2020 election.[25]

Blacks and Latinos are key mass components of the U.S. working class, and even their marginal disaffection from this party that has taken them for granted is yet another indication of the Democrats' declining proportion of support from the class that represents the vast majority of Americans.

On the other hand, the Democrats have captured more of the upper-income groups over the last few decades. Using the top income levels in the major exit polls and adjusting them roughly for the impact of inflation, in 1980 the Democrats won only 26% of voters in the $50,000 level, the highest at the time. By 2000, the Democrat Al Gore took 43% of the $100,000 top cohort.

In 2008, Obama tied McCain for 49% of the $100,000 level. In 2016, however, Clinton won 51% of the $150,000 cohort and in the 2018 midterm, when upper-income groups always play a disproportionate role, the Democratic candidates for the House took 59% of that top income group.

The most astounding aspect of this stealth realignment, however, is the turn of the very wealthiest to the Democrats. The first exit poll to record this was in the 2008 election when Obama beat McCain in the $200,000+ income cohort by 52% to 46% — well before the Trump phenomenon encouraged Republicans to flip to the Democrats.

In 2016 Clinton beat Trump in this income range by a narrower 47% to 46% and in 2020 Biden beat Trump among the wealthiest by 47% to 43%. It is not simply that these rich people have turned to the Democrats in the last decade, but that they are courted and pursued by the Democratic Party, its operatives and politicians.

Congressional and Political Demographics

This trend is important in Congressional elections as well. In 2018, the Democrats pursued and won 41 of the 50 wealthiest Congressional Districts in the country.[26] The richest 15% of districts are now represented by 56 Democrats and only 10 Republicans, according to a conservative source.[27]

As Matt Karp described the trend from 2016 to 2020 in *Jacobin*, "Though the Democratic turnout rose everywhere in the wealthy suburbs, from Silicon Valley to Metro Boston, a clear pattern was visible: the richer and more conservative the suburb, the more dramatic the increases."[28]

Indeed, in the 2018 midterms, while the $200,000+ figures was not available, the Democrats carried the $150,000+ cohort by 59%, a bigger proportion than any other group except those making less than $30,000.

The growth of the wealthy, Democratic vote, however, is not limited to wealthier suburbs. One study of the urban-rural voter polarization demonstrates that the denser the urban area, the more Democratic it is — even in small cities and metro areas where Democrats lose elections.

While this is typically the result of Black, Latinx and white working-class voters, the author states, "many of these dense places that vote for Democrats today are not poor. Many of their voters are in high-tax brackets, relatively few make use of means-tested antipoverty programs, and public sector union members represent only a small portion of their voters."[29]

This study mentions San Francisco, Philadelphia, Boston and Seattle in particular as sites of newer high-tech industries where highly paid and educated "knowledge" workers live in the center city. In a facetious

expression of the Democratic strength among these up-scale urbanites, The Cook Political Report noted that "Biden carried 85% of the counties with a Whole Foods Market."[30]

A look at Manhattan in New York City reveals the same high proportion of well-to-do voters. The median household income in Manhattan (New York County) grew from $48,000 in 1999 to $94,000 in 2019, nearly doubling as inflation grew by only half. By 2019 those households earning $100,000 or more composed 48% of the total in that borough, while those making $200,000-plus alone accounted for a quarter.

In this borough the Democratic presidential vote rose from 73% in 2000 to 81% in 2004, then to 86% in 2016 and 2020.[31] Very few U.S. counties vote Democratic to that extent and very few are this wealthy. While Manhattan is not typical of most urban counties, it nonetheless demonstrates the rise of the wealthy Democratic vote is by no means limited to wealthy suburbs.

Despite suburban gains in 2018 and 2020, the Democrats obviously did less well in 2020 Congressional contests. Whereas in 2018 their average share of the total congressional vote was 56.1%, in 2020 it fell to 50.6%.[32] Furthermore, they lost 12 House seats in 2020. Only two of these, however, were in the top 50 income districts. Indeed, with a couple of exceptions, most of those lost were in districts where the median household income was around or below the national average of $62,843.

Moreover, 2020 saw the Democrats make further gains in the suburbs. Trump did better in the more solidly white exurbs, which have been expanding and growing in population.[33] According to a *New York Times* analysis of results in the nation's 373 suburban counties, however, Biden did better than Hillary Clinton. As the authors summarized the 2020 results:

"Suburban counties that were already Democratic-leaning before 2020 tilted more so. And many that were deeply Republican nudged several points away from the president."[34]

In other words, if anything, the average income of voters in Democratic Congressional Districts most certainly rose somewhat in 2020.

Nor did the 2020 election alter the ideological balance in the 117th Congress significantly. All three "ideological" caucuses in the House lost some members. The Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) slipped from 97 House members to 94, while the centrist New Democrat Coalition fell from 103 to 96. The conservative Blue Dogs, who represent more Southern and rural districts rather than prosperous suburbs, fell from 27 to 18.

The numbers, however, hide the pull of the political center in the new congress. Despite talk of tightening up the CPC politically, fully 15 of the 94 members of the CPC also belonged to the militantly centrist New Democrats, indicating how porous the term "progressive" is.

Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, old/new neoliberal centrism back in charge of Congress.

The New Democrats, in turn, contributed 18 of the 25 Democrats, one of whom was also a member of the CPC, to the even more insistently moderate bipartisan, 50-member "Problem Solvers Caucus." This outfit was founded in 2017 with 36 members, 20 of whom were Democrats, in order to break the legislative gridlock by proposing legislative compromises acceptable to "moderates" in both parties; i.e. to the Republicans.[35]

State level elections were just as disappointing for the Democrats in 2020. Like congressional districts, those for state legislatures favor rural areas where the Democrats have failed to make any breakthroughs, despite the existence of working-class people throughout these areas.

Ten percent of those employed in the nation's "rural" counties work in manufacturing, twice the percentage of farmers, and more than the national average of eight percent.[36] Nevertheless, they failed to flip any state legislatures, while the Republicans turned Montana and New Hampshire from divided government to Republican trifectas (governor and both state houses).

The Republicans now completely control 24 state governments compared to the Democrats' 15.[37] This is particularly problematic because the states will redraw the already distorted election districts in 2021 and the gerrymandering of congressional and state legislative districts will get worse.

The 2022 midterm elections will not only be affected by Republican redistricting, but since turnout among working-class voters is always lower in midterms, the well-to-do Democrats will have even more proportionate influence as the party seeks to hold on to or even expand its suburban base.

The "Working-Class Party" Myth

It is simply no longer tenable, if it ever was, to consider the Democrats as a party representing the working class, much less as a "working-class party." While it has always been a cross-class party, today the Democratic Party is also the party of the majority of wealthy voters funded by a majority of the new billionaire class fraction as well as a good deal of the old corporate elite, for example, defense contractors.[38]

The trek of the Democrats toward the political center can be traced back to the 1970 as in response to the Republicans' move to the right and to changes in the rules for political funding.

The resolute centrism of Biden, Harris, party operatives, campaign consultants, and the increasing majority of office holders stems in part, however, from the need to expand beyond the concentrations of Democratic voters in the urban cores.

Their choice of the more prosperous suburbs and their disdain for the working class in making this choice were well expressed by Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer in 2016 when he said,

"For every blue-collar Democrat we lose in Western Pennsylvania, we will pick up two moderate Republicans in the suburbs in Philadelphia, and you can repeat that in Ohio and Illinois and Wisconsin."[39]

The 21st century method of campaigning via polling, digital targeting and messaging is based on the assumption that the party's or candidate's politics are shaped to win the sought-after voting constituency, mostly moderate and suburban as the party already has the urban vote in most cities. That has meant seeking centrist candidates to match the political preferences of the prosperous suburbanites and even exurbanites whose votes they have sought.

The Democrats are not some kind of old-fashioned workers' party that conducts political education to raise people's consciousness. They, like the Republicans, appeal to the voters existing instincts, prejudices, and preferences — in this case a combination of moderate social liberalism and reforms that avoid economic redistribution, higher taxes, or implied threats to private property, property values, or privileged school districts. They are the party of alt finance, Wall Street, the media, Silicon Valley, much of the military-industrial complex, and the prosperous.

Former president of the Communications Workers of America and a current chair of Our Revolution, Larry Cohen, summarized the outcome of the Democratic "victory" of 2020 as many political activists experienced it:

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No One Is Coming to Save Us an interview with MORE activists

A GROUP OF New York City teachers formed Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) in 2012 as a fusion of a few oppositional groups within the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). The UFT represents teachers and several other categories of school employees. It has roughly 110,000 active (still working) members and roughly 60,000 retiree members and is the largest American Federation of Teachers (AFT) local in the country.

At the beginning of 2020 MORE had roughly 100 members, fewer than half of whom were active. But their membership exploded in March 2020 when the pandemic broke out and ultimately forced schools to close in New York City. Today MORE has more than 750 dues-paying members. (See https://morecaucusnyc.org/)

Kit Wainer, *a recently retired NYC teacher active in MORE, interviewed four members of its steering committee: Shoshana Brown, Ellen Schweitzer, Michael Stivers and Annie Tan on January 18.*

Shoshana Brown *is a social worker who began working in the criminal defense office at The Bronx Defenders. Her objective is to tear the walls down brick by brick of every prison in the United States. That's taken her to being both the director at a harm reduction agency, which often is the last step before long-term prison sentences, and now to schools, which is the beginning of the school-to-prison pipeline. She has been teaching full time for a total of nine years, six of those in the New York City system.*

Ellen Schweitzer *teaches at Stuyvesant High School, where she has worked since 1998. She is currently a delegate to the city-wide UFT Delegate Assembly (roughly 3000 delegates) and has been for years. For three years she served on the UFT Executive Board — the bi-weekly elected leadership body of 100 members — when she was a member of the Teachers for A Just Contract Caucus. She has also been a chapter leader — the school-based union representatives who handles grievances and runs union meetings at the school — for six years.*

Mike Stivers, *who is a special education teacher at Brooklyn High School, joined the discussion midway through. Both he and Annie Tan work in the specialized education district, District 75.*

Annie Tan *is a special education teacher in Sunset Park in Brooklyn. She has been a part of the NYC public school system since 2016 but started teaching in 2011, as part of Teach For America at a charter school in Chicago. As soon as possible she transferred to a public school and started organizing with Chicago's CORE caucus, which won leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union in 2010. She was co-chair of the special education committee of the CTU for two years.*

Kit Wainer: *Although there was an attempted reopening of the NYC schools in the fall and some elementary schools have now reopened, how do most members of the UFT, at least in your experience, feel about the responses to this crisis from the Department of Education (DOE) and from the UFT? Now that we've completed half a school year some elementary schools are open, but middle and high schools are all closed.*

Annie Tan: Currently, "My school is open." I'm putting that in quotations because as of December elementary and District 75 in pre-K and K-3 opened. But my school is closed tomorrow and through the rest of this week because we have COVID-19 cases.

That's true in over 300 buildings in the DOE. Because many schools are located in the same school building, this means upwards of 400-500 schools are actually closed tomorrow, which is also the highest number of school closures since last fall's reopening.

At my school, members are resigned to the fact that Mayor De Blasio will keep schools open as long as possible. The ones that can't take it anymore have gotten individual accommodations if they can. For example, I was teaching in-person until about November 5th. Then I took a medical accommodation after determining it was not safe to be in the school building.

I think a lot of elementary school teachers I've talked to feel there's no one coming to save us, that we're just babysitters, that the union has gone along with this plan to keep schools open indefinitely regardless of whether it's safe or not.

Part of it is because Trump refused to fund schools if they don't attempt to reopen in-person. That's one calculation. Another is that our union doesn't want members to get laid off, so they've negotiated directly with the mayor and other government officials to reopen in-person, regardless of whether it's safe or even effective.

I've also seen many, many staff changes. I'm currently teaching in-person and remote students at the same time.

We've given out a MORE survey to over a thousand educators. Many are saying that they're teaching multiple modalities right now because of staff shortages across the school district. But you can't teach both in-person and remote students at the same time without compromising in some way on instruction or materials or resources.

Inevitably it's the in-person students who are going to get the attention. Millions and millions of dollars are being spent on PPEs, temperature checks and staffing to ensure that the 20% of students who are in-person and only part-time are getting the resources and time they need to actually be in-person.

Just to say very clearly that most schools have students in-person part time; right now most students in my school only get instruction two to three days a week. This means that maybe only 5-10% of the school system is in-person at any given day.

The vast majority of our learners are fully remote. The staff in my school has said truthfully we've focused so much on in-person issues that the remote learners are not getting the attention they need.

And the staff is not getting the training needed to help their remote learners, who make up 80-90% of students on any given day. I know that's a lot because there's a lot here with the reopening. It's been really complicated, but I know my staff is very, very demoralized right now.

My staff is very, very worried that the COVID-19 testing that's happening within school buildings is completely inadequate. The mayor promised we would not open if our COVID-19 positivity threshold was at 3%. But after we reopened in December that figure was quickly discarded.

We're almost at 9%, I believe, and staff at my school isn't getting tested right now inside the school building. New York City contact testing and tracing is completely overwhelmed, and cannot test more than a 20% randomized sample of students and staff.

Also, we aren't getting results in a timely manner. I got tested at school at the end of October, and still haven't gotten that result.

There are lots of issues of non-timely tests, or people losing tests. The *NY Post* reported that a staff member was called saying they tested positive for a test they had taken earlier that week. But it was a different staff member who tested positive.

Currently to close the school right now there needs to be two or more "unlinked" cases. But the word unlinked doesn't mean what you think it means. Last week before my school was closed, one case was linked because it was traced to a household member. Another person had an "unknown" case. Even though we had two cases, we still didn't close until there was a third case. Who knows whether we were safe?

Ellen Schweitzer: I want to echo something Annie said early on about the rank and file having the idea that nobody's coming to save us. If there's one takeaway lesson a lot of people have, that's it. One of the challenges for MORE is to realize people can take that in one of two directions, or maybe more.

As rank-and-file members, we can start to reach out to each other for solidarity and support, and to move toward the goal of making sure schools are safe.

On the other hand, it can go in the direction of people just withdrawing and isolating and assuming, "Well, there is no social network — not from the DOE, not from the UFT — that I can work with in order to pursue these outcomes. Instead, I'm just going to do what I feel I can do as an individual teacher. I'm just going to hunker down and try to support the students as best as I can."

It's also important to keep in mind that those who are working remotely full-time are working more than they usually do. Converting instruction to remote instruction is not just a turnkey operation.

I've been very impressed by the number of people who have wanted to come together around MORE, or just as rank-and-file members in schools supporting each other and fighting for safe conditions. I also understand that though a large number of people out there would possibly be more active under other circumstances, people are overwhelmed and burned out.

Once we get back into the buildings safely eventually, not this school year, people won't forget the experience of being neglected by the DOE and UFT leaderships; MORE can reconnect with those folks.

Shoshana Brown: I want to add two things. One is that I agree about people feeling resigned and powerless, as well as scared in this moment. I happen to be working in a school that is relatively prepared to be flexible and nimble in their programming.

I don't want to say that they are totally prepared, but they're flexible enough. However, I know that that is a very, very privileged position to be in; it's not the majority of school experiences facing teachers across the city.

The school I work in has a number of particular privileges that allow them to have that kind of flexible schedule. For example, my school is a shared campus. Before anyone knew the gravity of the situation, the principals of the building apparently had a conversation and the principal of my school bid for access to the roof.

So we have access to the roof five days a week. When it was warm outside, our in-person students were able to have a number of classes outdoors. There's a bunch of layers of privilege there!

The frustration for me is knowing this is not the case for the majority. Certain schools, certain principals, and even certain districts are allowed different kinds of leverage for what education looks like today. I know of other districts and schools that are completely micromanaged by the superintendent all the way on down. Teachers can feel strangled in their ability to be creative, which is what this time calls for.

My second point is about how do I, as a school social-worker in a high school, ally myself with K-5 elementary school educators and special-education educators across the city. They are forced to go into unsafe buildings, while I'm not. I'm constantly searching for what it means for me to be a strong ally and activist in this moment.

KW: *A year ago, MORE was fewer than 100 members; now we have about 750 members. The vast majority of our membership has joined within the last eight or nine months. However, we're also up against the largest, probably most sophisticated bureaucratic organization, in the leadership of the United Federation of Teachers that you would find in any union local in the United States. What would you say is our strategy for eventually transforming our union into one that will fight for our rights, especially in pandemic times like these?*

SB: That's a big question — there are a number of prongs that we are using. First and foremost, I think the foundation is critical. We are working to build long lasting, meaningful relationships. Relational organizing is a strategy to build leadership amongst the rank and file. It's not just relying on people's membership or commitment or passion about the issue, but building strong relationships with each other.

I would also say that we are working hard to encourage more leadership. We want more activists and members to run for chapter leader and delegate, and we're putting significant energy and effort into the campaign to develop more leadership amongst the rank-and file-members, building by building and district by district.

Last summer, we did a great job at organizing districts across the city, which is something that hasn't been done by the UFT. We were able to have people develop relationships, not only within their own school, not only city-wide, but also within their own local districts. That's important. Building by building and then district by district, building leadership and confidence.

Also, we're teaching people how to organize. That means teaching how to put together a power analysis, how to strategically plan, how to think long term. That is not something that teachers are taught nor is it something that comes naturally. These are learned skills, including how to phone bank and facilitate meetings.

I think in all of these practical things we are positioning ourselves to be in a more powerful place. That way, when opportunities come up to move the larger UFT in a different direction, we will better placed.

It's like playing chess. You don't go for checkmate on the first move. You position yourself and you use long-term strategies. These are some of the things that I'll say that we're working on to build leadership.

ES: MORE's membership grew so quickly because we were giving voice to serious concerns and objections that people had about schools being open during the deadly pandemic. This goes all the way back to March, before the schools were closed.

So many people were really upset that the schools weren't closing and then of course, upset that there was an aggressive move to reopen them, supposedly safely, even though we know that was garbage.

The UFT leadership was not really articulating objections. Yes, to some extent in March, they did say, "Okay, the school should be closed." But they weren't organizing any action to make that happen.

MORE was doing that. MORE was saying, "This is unacceptable. This is terrible. Schools need to be closed now, and here's the action that we're going to take to make that happen." I think people gravitated around MORE because it was the only place where this was being talked about publicly.

As far as the longer-term strategy for transforming the UFT, I think that the biggest distinction between the current UFT leadership and MORE is that we want the rank and file to see how they are contributing to our own victories.

People can experience victory by acting together to win at the workplace. Even if it's around small issues, that experience of being a part of mobilizing for something with your coworkers is crucial. That's what makes a union strong and effective.

The current UFT leadership, over the decades, has carefully constructed a service organization of union staffers who do the work, whatever they imagine it to be, on behalf of the rank and file.

In so many ways the rank and file are dis-

couraged from participating in building the union's power. This has also contributed to the fact that so many people don't even understand what the union is or their potential role as members. The rank and file are shut out of all kinds of negotiations.

That practice was prominently on display this last year during the pandemic. We were constantly finding out about agreements that UFT President Michael Mulgrew made. The union knew that there would not have been broad rank-and file-support for these had there been a more public discussion.

Even if we examine the UFT's strike threat, we see there was no attempt to organize the rank and file or encourage them to organize themselves in order to make the threat credible. It was performative. It was to help the UFT leadership in their behind-closed-doors-negotiation technique.

Genuine leadership tries to encourage people to take an active role in their union, starting from the workplaces where they are with their coworkers. That's one of the reasons why we're also focusing on building chapter leaders.

One of the reasons we were focused on chapter leader and delegate elections this spring is because that's one of the few places where it's possible for dissidents to win election. Those positions are elected by the rank and file in the schools, directly and locally.

City-wide elections for the top leadership are harder to win for various reasons. One reason is that retirees vote and, secondly, slate elections make it more difficult to win those leadership positions.

As a chapter leader, you can transform how the union runs at your workplace by simply having regular meetings. You'd be shocked by how many schools, even ones that have chapter leaders, don't have meetings on a regular basis. The initial step of having an active chapter needs to be implemented in the majority of schools.

AT: This is my fifth year at my school, and there have only been one or two chapter meetings the whole time. I wanted to add that solidarity across groups is also a defining feature of MORE with our Black Lives Matter schoolwork.

We work with parents' groups like Alliance for Quality Education. Some have tried to work officially with the UFT, but you can't work with UFT when it's so service-based; it's not democratic at all. The union doesn't want to hear concerns, period. So it is impossible for the union to work on the ground with other stakeholders.

No school reopening without safety!

Because we were able to elevate safety concerns and protest last summer, we were able to delay or stop school openings this fall. Eighty percent of the students are remote right now because of our work with parent and community support, and which the media picked up on. That was a major victory. That made school safer.

The Department of Education didn't make school safe, by but reducing the number of students and demanding safety protocols we definitely made them safer. It's those alliances that make MORE unique.

I learned that too from the Chicago Teachers Union that declared, in 2014 when it was not popular yet, Black Lives Matter. The union said it forcefully and encouraged their membership to speak out; it made other unions across the country realize they needed to speak out too.

It's not just rank-and-file educators who are affected by schools. We say, in MORE, that our students' learning conditions are educators' working conditions.

I also think MORE has started to branch out. Shoshana could share about how it's not just teachers being involved.

The UFT refused to organize and mobilize us, but paraprofessionals and related service providers like speech pathologists, social workers, and other entities that haven't been as organized in the past are on board. They had a chance with the *Janis* case not to join us, but they did. [In this case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public sector workers who choose not to belong to the union do not have to pay a fee when union negotiates or enforces the contract.] Now we have to organize ourselves and have a say.

We're going to release MORE's survey report. We asked the rank and file "What are your main concerns?" I believe two of the top three concerns were both the students' and staffs' social-emotional needs right now. [This report was released on February 2nd and can be found on the MORE website.]

It's clear that educators are on the side of students in thinking about all of these issues. That's made deciding whether we go in-person or stay remote a tough decision. We know there are students who benefit from in-person. But at the end of the day, it's about keeping us all safe, especially with this crazy COVID variant and people dying.

KW: *Now Mike Stivers has joined us. Mike, I want you to join our conversation to lay out our caucus' strategy. How can we transforming the union given that we are up against a historically large and sophisticated bureaucratic leadership at the top.*

Mike Stivers: Sure. I just walked by a school where there's a hawk on top of the school sign and it's eating a rat alive. I feel that's some sort of metaphor for the school system right now.

What's our caucus' long-term strategy? I guess some context is necessary. Before I was involved, the caucus was founded almost like a coalition, or an organization of organizations. Around 2016 it was becoming clear that there were serious disagreements about what the caucus should do or what its strategy should be.

By 2018 the conflict came to a head and a bunch of people left. I thought it was an interesting period because there was growing agreement that the caucus should involve itself in social justice struggles. That

might not seem controversial, but it was.

Beyond that, there were still unanswered questions, about whether a dissident caucus should run in elections if we're only going to get 5-10% of the vote or even 20%. Another problem was figuring out the relationship between building power at individual schools while trying to engage the broadest possible activist layer.

Then in 2020, the shutdown and reopening campaign took off. At the time we were still in the process of cohering a strategy amongst the 30-50 active caucus members.

That task is actually a lot harder now because there are 750 members, with maybe 100-200 active members and a huge range of activity. We have a lot of people new to organizing, but who have stepped into leadership roles. Our biggest challenge is developing a clear strategy that is shared amongst a wide layer of the caucus.

In my opinion I think that we have to accept that we are not going to win leadership of our union in a way that we've seen in Chicago, or LA, or Milwaukee, or Baltimore or Boston. None of those cities has the level of bureaucratic leadership we do; they have a very different history.

Our strategy has been to prioritize building at the school site; it has to prioritize a much longer-range strategy. I don't think we're going to be able to win a surprise election in the way that CORE did in Chicago.

That's one aspect of it. It has to look different. When we look to caucuses in these other cities for inspiration, which we should, it's also important to understand how radically different our circumstances are, not only in the school conditions, but in the nature of the leadership of those unions.

AT: I'd add that it is not because our union leadership is awesome and that's why we can't be elected. It's that retirees can vote.

Also, the size means we would need a vast amount of organizing on the ground. Right now we have about 40 something chapter leaders in MORE. We're aiming for 100 this school year with chapter leader and delegate elections coming up, but that is nowhere near the infrastructure needed to win a city-wide election.

It will not be possible within the next few years to win the leadership of the local. That's a long game.

I encourage people to see that's not happening next year, and it's not likely going to happen in five or 10 years honestly. It's a long game on the ground of organizing and empowering our membership and helping them feel powerful. That's really what our organization is about, democratizing our union in a way that matters for ourselves, our students and our families.

Additionally in the UFT, there is a link to the Democratic Party and to the AFT that makes us feel there's a huge incentive for our union nationally to be the way it is. It is not just that our union is super powerful but it's political machinations that make it this way.

Pay attention, save lives!

That doesn't exist for any other union. I was an AFT delegate at the 2016 AFT convention in Chicago. New York City had 750 delegates and outvoted us every single time. While LA, the second largest district, split their votes, Chicago, the third largest, had 150 delegates — only a fifth of New York's. Even if all the other little locals came together, no one could outvote New York City, unfortunately. There is an incentive for larger powers that be to keep our union the way it is.

SB: I'm really glad Mike brought in the historical aspect along with Annie's reality check, I think that's really important. I want to add that MORE is a social justice dissident caucus. It's critical to name the role that racism plays in the union.

Historically the UFT has been extremely racist. It is especially important to understand the reactionary role the union played in Brownsville, Brooklyn in 1968 when the community demanded control over the schools, and the UFT went out on strike in opposition.

The fact that we take an anti-racist stance and push for social justice and Black Lives Matter in schools is part of what makes this an uphill battle. I think we'd be remiss not to name it as such. This is institutional and historical racism at play.

That same mechanism plays out for workers' rights inside the UFT. While the UFT is the United Federation of Teachers, and the teachers are the majority of the union, the other professionals and staff represented don't get the same level of support. And surprise, surprise, these are the jobs people of color have. I think that racism plays a huge role in the way the union resources are distributed.

AT: Especially since our union is, majority white. That means MORE is mostly white as well. That definitely plays a role within the caucus work. The fact that we have educators of color within our caucus is good, but we definitely need to build on this.

Shoshana and I are from New York City and are people of color. We still need to prioritize recruiting and training people of color in the caucus, and support their work.

SB: It's no surprise that a lot of the teachers of color are often burnt out. When as another person of color, I call on them, "Hey, can you step up?" here's this opportunity, but folks are tired. It's about the opportunities available, it's about the way that we're treated in the workplace that compounds the burnout and hardship.

MS: A lot of people come to MORE out of an understanding about social and educational issues. What's most visible to people is that the UFT takes terrible positions, right?

They are in favor of mayoral control over the schools. Until this year, the leadership opposed the Black Lives Matter resolution every single year. There are so many good reasons for people to be angry at them all the time.

When we talk about the leadership, sometimes it gets couched as if they have bad political positions, and ours are the right ones and this is what the leadership should be doing. While those criticisms are basically true, one of the two or three most important distinctions between MORE and the current leadership is that *we want member democracy.* We think a union should be led by its membership, and controlled by its members.

They pretend to think that, but they don't even try very hard. The rhetoric, just like Annie was saying, is that "We know how to do things. We're acting in your best interest; we've got this under control."

Really, anytime that there's a dissident resolution brought from a MORE member at a delegate assembly, this is exactly what they say, "We were elected to represent you. Let us do our job." Anytime we're advocating for a referendum amongst the entire membership they say "Well, the delegates were elected to do this."

It's so important to keep hitting home that the Department of Education is not a great place for people who work in it and the students who attend it. And the UFT is not powerful, because the members aren't empowered. The UFT has to be that way in order to keep control, but the cost of locking down the membership is that you can't then activate members to win fights. Who controls the union and what it's for is just as important.

AT: How do we build a caucus where all members have access? What are the different points of access?

We're still not great at drawing people in, but we're trying to improve. In order for members to feel valued and heard, and able to participle fully, we need an organizing culture.

KW: *I want to thank everybody very much for participating in this discussion.* ■

Puerto Rico's Multi-layered Crisis

The 2020 Elections and Beyond

By Rafael Bernabe

THE RECENT ELECTIONS in Puerto Rico produced some startling results: both a surge in the vote for progressive, including pro-independence, forces and a status plebiscite which has been hailed a "mandate" for statehood. In order to interpret these results, it is best to start with an overview of Puerto Rico's recent past.

Puerto Rico's present situation can be described as a multi-layered crisis. Its main features are the chronic problems arising from the colonial and dependent nature of its economy; the crisis of that colonial economy since 2006; the debt crisis, officially recognized in 2015, resulting from the government's response to that crisis; and the policies imposed by the Federal Oversight and Management Board since 2017.

Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana *rally, Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, recently elected Senator for the MVC (left) and Alexandra Lúgaro, MVC candidate for governor (center), who got 14% of the vote with author, Rafael Bernabe (right).*

On top of this, we must add the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Maria in 2017, a series of earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the inadequate government response to these disasters.

A Colonial Economy

Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States in 1898, as a result of the Spanish-American War. Since then Puerto Rico has been burdened with a typical colonial and dependent economy. Its main productive sectors have been controlled by U.S. capital and its market flooded by U.S. imports. Its economy has shifted from one form of overspecialization to another, from the sugar industry before the Second World War, to light manufacturing during the postwar boom and capital-intensive operations (such as pharmaceuticals) since the mid-1970s.

External control has meant that a sizable portion of profits generated on the Island are not reinvested there. At no point has this colonial economy generated enough jobs for the insular labor force: mass unemployment and underemployment (registered as high unemployment rates and low labor participation rates) have been a feature of Puerto Rican society even during the periods of rapid economic expansion, such as the postwar boom.

Mass unemployment tends to depress wages, which have remained the lowest in any U.S. jurisdiction, even after the extension of the federal minimum wage to Puerto Rico in the late 1970s. By the end of the postwar boom — half a century ago — its per capita income had reached half of that of the poorest state (Mississippi). It has remained in that relative position since then.

More than 45% of the population, and more than 55% of children, live under the official poverty line. This makes a large portion of Puerto Rico's inhabitants eligible for federally-funded welfare programs, which compensate (inadequately) for the failings of dysfunctional colonial economy.

Lack of employment and poverty have also propelled Puerto Ricans to migrate to the United States, which as U.S. citizens they can enter without legal restrictions.[1]

Puerto Rico's Long Depression

Despite its colonial limits, economic growth in the postwar period, and less spectacularly in the 1990s, resulted in palpable progress in living standards for most Puerto Ricans: health, education, housing conditions, access to drinking water and electricity were considerably improved. Wages in manufacturing and many service operations rose, compared to the meager levels of the formerly dominant agricultural sector.

Such improvements are now far in the past: beginning around 2006 Puerto Rico slid into a crisis that continues to this day. The economy has not grown for the past 15 years. Around 20% of the jobs that existed in 2006 have vanished. More than half of the close to 180,000 better-paid manufacturing jobs that existed in the mid-1990s have vanished as well.

Migration has accelerated since 2010. Puerto Rico's population has fallen from close to 3.8 million to an estimated 3.1 million today (some estimates go lower). This affects all sectors of its working class, but young people in particular have little hope of economic security — not to speak of a meaningful and satisfying application of their talents and abilities.

The causes of this long depression are varied. Briefly put, Puerto Rico's official

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economic policy has centered on three elements: a tax-exemption policy which allowed U.S. capital to operate in an almost tax-free environment; low wages, compared to the United States; and unimpeded access to the U.S. market.

Beginning in 1996, Congress began a ten-year phaseout of the federal tax exemption for U.S. corporations operating in Puerto Rico. This exemption had never generated adequate economic progress for the Island, as we saw, but Congress replaced a faulty incentive with nothing.

At the same time, free trade policies in the Americas and globally granted low-wage areas freer access to the U.S. market, reducing Puerto Rico's advantages in this regard. The long recession of 2008 dealt another blow from which Puerto Rico's colonial economy has never recuperated.

Debt Crisis, Austerity and PROMESA

As Puerto Rico's economy stagnated and shrank, government revenues fell. Successive administrations responded with slight revisions in corporate-tax policies and, above all, increased borrowing and austerity policies. Beginning in 2006 these measures were combined —– for example, through the issuing of the new debt known as COFINA — to be paid by increased sales taxes.

This was followed by Law #7 in 2009, which led to mass firings of more than 20,000 public employees. In 2014 Law #66 curtailed benefits, labor rights and collective bargaining in the public sector. This was combined with the reduction of public employment through attrition, and increases in the cost of services (fees and tuition at the University of Puerto Rico, for example), among other measures.

But borrowing also grew at a rapid pace: public debt expanded by 64% from $43 to $73 billion between 2006 and 2014. With a shrinking economy and stagnating government revenue combined with the rapidly growing debt burden, no matter how harsh the austerity policies, it was only a matter of time before Puerto Rico's government defaulted on its debt payments.

By late June 2015 Governor Alejandro García Padilla officially recognized that Puerto Rico´s public debt was, as he put it, "unpayable" and would have to be renegotiated. To aggravate Puerto Rico's economic, social and debt crisis, in September 2017 the Island was hit by Hurricane María, killing more than 4,000 and causing material damages estimated at $80 billion.

This was followed by a series of earthquakes in early 2020, which disabled important installations (including an important thermoelectrical plant) and left many homeless. In turn it was followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which paralyzed most of Puerto Rico's economy for several months.

Back in late 2016, after Puerto Rico's default and recognizing that part of the debt would have to be renegotiated, Congress adopted the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), which created the Federal Oversight and Management Board, better known in the Island as the Control Board, or *la Junta*, for short.

While recognizing that part of Puerto Rico's debt would not and could not be paid, it set out to make sure that as much as possible would be paid, at the cost of increased sacrifices by the Puerto Rican people. To achieve this *la Junta* supervises the adoption and revision of five-year fiscal plans by the government of Puerto Rico and its annual budgets to make sure they fit the objectives fixed by the fiscal-plan. PROMESA, it should be pointed out, provides no funds for Puerto Rico's economic reconstruction.

To formulate its budget policies *la Junta* contracted the firm Mckinsey and Company, a global consulting outfit known for ruthless anti-labor policies.

The *Junta*'s diagnosis of Puerto Rico's problems can be briefly summarized: the debt crisis is attributed to "big government," and excessive regulation and labor rights are blamed for economic stagnation. This neoliberal dogma leads to the usual prescriptions of cuts in government spending, privatization and attacks on labor rights and benefits.

Even mainstream economists have pointed out that these policies are socially destructive and counterproductive, since they have what they describe as a deflationary impact, in other words, they prolong the present economic crisis.

A study conducted by Joseph E. Stiglitz and two associates concluded that Puerto Rico's debt had to be reduced by 80%, if the Island was to pay for its essential services and adopt measures to revive its economy. That figure surely went up as a result of the impact of Hurricane María, earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A considerable part of Puerto Rico's debt has been bought at a heavy discount by hedge and vulture funds, who now seek payment at face value, which would ensure them extraordinary profits.

There is also ample basis to suspect that a considerable portion of Puerto Rico's debt is unconstitutional or illegal, which has fueled the demand formulated by labor and other organizations that no agreements be reached and no payments be made until the debt has been fully audited.[2]

Nevertheless, negotiations with Puerto Rico's creditors, conducted by the *Junta* on behalf of Puerto Rico under Title III of PROMESA, resulted in an agreement very favorable to the COFINA creditors. The agreement with the holder of general obligation debt (GOs) under discussion at the time of writing also fails to reduce debt to a sustainable level, while imposing new sacrifices on the Puerto Rican people.

Presented as a means of liberating Puerto Rico from PROMESA and the *Junta,* the agreement will probably result in a new bankruptcy when it proves to be unworkable. Puerto Rico is faced with a dire choice between the agreement favored by the *Junta* and the even worse terms favored by some bondholders and some of Trump's recent appointees to the *Junta*.

The debate and the fight over this agreement, which should be rejected, will be major issue inside and outside the legislature in the early months of 2021.

Fragmented, Discontinuous Resistance

Austerity and the policies of the *Junta* have not gone unchallenged. Unfortunately, however, resistance has been fragmented and sporadic.

The adoption of Law #7 in 2009 provoked widespread mobilizations and a one-day general strike (*paro general* or *paro nacional*) of largely public employees. But the fight was led by two rival coalitions (linked to different sectors of the labor movement), a division which hindered effective action and contributed to the movement's collapse after the *paro general* in October 2009.

Law #66 in 2014 also generated strong resistance, above all by public corporation unions. (Public corporations are government-owned entities that have financial autonomy and issue their own debt.).

The movement failed to reverse Law #66, as the government succeeded in falsely portraying the unions as defending their "privileges." The lack of a united front bringing together union, social and community organizations again weakened the resistance by part of the working class.

Students at the University of Puerto Rico have been at the vanguard of the fight against austerity measures imposed by the *Junta* and the collaboration of university administrators (through tuition hikes, for example). A prolonged student strike in 2010 won considerable support beyond the university. But other *paros* and strikes in 2017 and later years failed to generate the same degree of support.

Meanwhile, groups large and small kept up the fight around other issues including women's rights, environmental struggles, the demand for an audit of Puerto Rico's debt, and the need to address the needs of those affected by Hurricane Maria and the earthquakes and the pandemic. Vital as these initiatives have been, they were separate and dispersed actions: no coordinating body or common program emerged to bring them together as parts of broad united front.

Then, in July 2019 Puerto Rico was hit by a different kind of hurricane. In a momentous week, former Secretary of Education

Julia Keleher, who had presided over the closing of hundreds of schools, was arrested by the FBI and indicted on corruption charges. At the same time, long portions of a shameful Telegram chat between Governor Ricardo Rosselló and his inner circle were made public.

The conversation was full of sexist and homophobic comments. It included vile attacks on political opponents and journalists, and even joking references to the bodies of those who died as a result of Hurricane María or its aftermath. Indignation swept the Island and soon led to protests demanding Rosselló resignations.

The Summer of 2019: Social Explosion

In a few days, pickets grew from a dozen, to hundreds and then thousands of participants. On July 15 close to 30,000 demonstrated in Old San Juan. Daily and nightly protests often concluded in confrontations with the Police, who regularly cleared the streets with massive use of teargas.

On July 17 more than 200,000 marched demanding Rosselló's resignation. Protests of all sorts (marches, pickets, vigils, roadblocks, etc.) spread across the Island. On July 22 more than 500,000 filled Puerto Rico's widest highway, the largest gathering of any sort in Puerto Rico's history.

Close to midnight on July 24, Governor Rosselló announced that he would resign his post as of August 2. It was an exhilarating and invigorating popular victory, truly unforgettable for those who experienced it. For the first time in Puerto Rican history, under Spanish or U.S. colonialism, a ruler had been removed from office through mass mobilization.

The social explosion of the summer of 2019 cannot be attributed merely to Keleher's arrest or the reaction to the infamous Telegram chat, offensive as it was. It was rather a concentrated expression of the anger and frustration accumulated over a decade of uninterrupted economic crisis, austerity policies and the incapacity of often corrupt politicians to provide alternatives.

Some have described these extraordinary events as a "spontaneous" insurgency, while others argued that they indicate how traditional forms of organization, such as labor unions or political parties, are now obsolete. This is wrong on two counts.

The road to the Summer of 2019 was prepared by dozens of deliberate initiatives by all sorts of activist organizations: feminist groups, environmental campaigns, student organizations, labor unions, LGBTQ coalitions, collectives opposed to the *Junta*'s policies, socialist organizations, and many others.

People knew what a *paro* was and how it works, not spontaneously but thanks to many previous struggles and initiatives. The speed with which the call for a one-day *paro* spread through social media, and was embraced overnight by hundreds of thousands, can only be explained by the fact that years of labor and student actions had familiarized the public with the notion and practice of *paros*, which they could thus readily understand as a tactic appropriate to the fight for Rossello's resignation.

Similarly, far from being superfluous, labor unions provided much of the material and personnel required to carry out the largest mobilizations. One cannot gather several hundred thousand persons without deploying sound trucks, route guides, vehicles for the press, portable johns, first aid teams, and speaker platforms, most of which were provided by unions.[3]

Grand as the Summer of 2019 was, its aftermath was marked by the problem of fragmentation. Those who wish to build on that experience now have the challenge of creating some kind of broad coordinating body, capable of attracting labor, feminist, student and environmental organizations, and able to adopt a shared set of demands or program.

Electoral Terrain and Coming Battles

The discontent that exploded in the Summer of 2019 undoubtedly had an impact on the 2020 electoral results. Rosselló in 2016 had won the governorship with 42% of the vote. Close to 20% of those who voted supported forces other than the two historically dominant political parties, the *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD) and the Partido *Nuevo Progresista* (PNP).

Those new forces included independent candidate for governor Alexandra Lúgaro, who obtained 11% of the votes cast and the *Partido del Pueblo Trabajador*, which had also participated in the 2012 elections.

In early 2019, on the eve of the Summer of 2019, a group led by Representative Manuel Natal who had abandoned the PPD, independent candidate Alexandra Lúgaro, the *Partido del Pueblo Trabajador* and labor, feminist and LGBTQ activists joined to create the *Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana* (MVC).

The MVC adopted a clear-cut anti-neoliberal program, committed to the defense of working people, women and the environment and opposition to the PROMESA policies imposed by the *Junta*. It called for an end to the existing colonial relation but was open to the participation of supporters of different status options, including independence, statehood or some form of sovereign free association.

Five parties participated in the 2020 elections: the PNP and the PPD, the *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (PIP), the MVC and the new rightwing religious-fundamentalist party, *Proyecto Dignidad*. In the last four elections the PIP had obtained less than three per cent of the vote.

The November 2020 elections registered a new reduction in support for the traditionally dominant parties. PNP candidate Pedro Pierluisi won the governorship with a mere 33.24% of the vote. The PPD, whose gubernatorial candidate received 31.75% of the vote, won majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. But the most salient fact about the elections was the encouraging result for the more progressive forces, the PIP and the MVC.

The MVC and PIP candidates for governor each received 14% of the vote. No pro-independence candidate had received a comparable portion of the vote since the 1950s. The MVC elected four legislators (two representatives and two senators), which again, no "third party" had achieved since the 1950s. The PIP elected one senator and one representative.

The MVC delegation is composed of Afro-Puerto Rican feminist and LGBTQ activist Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, social activist and civil rights lawyer Mariana Nogales, young lawyer José Bernardo Márquez, and the author of this article. The elections were marred by an unprecedented number of irregularities through which the MVC was quite likely deprived of two additional victories: the election of a fifth legislator and of the mayor of San Juan.[4]

MVC and PIP legislators are now in a better position to introduce legislation to audit Puerto Rico's debt, block the policies of the Junta, reject the proposed agreement with the holders of Puerto Rico's debt, restore labor rights, revert privatization measures and strengthen women's rights among other objectives.

Most of these measures, however, have little chance of being adopted unless they are supported by significant mobilizations outside the legislature. This is the main task posed for the coming months: to connect legislative initiatives with an intensified and, hopefully, better coordinated activism by labor, women's, student, pensioners', environmental, LGBTQ and other movements.

A Mandate for Statehood?

The "status issue" is at the center of Puerto Rico's politics. Should Puerto Rico become a state of the United States, an independent republic, or a republic (or sovereign entity) associated with the United States? Those are the options incessantly debated as alternatives to the present colonial status.

The November 2020 elections included a referendum on this issue, which some have hailed as a "mandate" for statehood that liberal and progressive persons and forces in the United States should embrace.

The question posed in the plebiscite was basically "statehood, yes or no." The referen-

dum was enacted by the legislative majority of the pro-statehood PNP, against the opposition of the PPD and the PIP. Indeed, the objective of the PNP was to obtain a clear mandate for statehood.

The referendum result was 52.52% for and 47.48% against statehood (a difference of 63,000 of 1,248,176 cast). This can hardly be described as a decisive endorsement for statehood. If anything, it reflects a rather evenly divided opinion on this issue.

Put otherwise, in the referendum close to 48% of those voting opposed statehood. This is all the more remarkable since proponents of the Yes vote had ample funding, enabling them to run slick TV ads, for example, while the No campaign had far fewer resources.

Since voter participation in 2020 was 54.72%, statehood's vote represents 27.8% of the registered voters. As indicated, this was also the election in which the vote for the PIP's candidate for governor jumped from 2.13% to 14%,

Thus, although statehood has significant support in Puerto Rico, there is no mandate and the issue is far from settled.

Statehood and U.S. Progressives

At first sight, support for statehood for Puerto Rico may seem like a logical position for U.S. progressives. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, federal legislation and presidential decisions apply to them, yet they have no voting representatives in Congress and cannot vote in presidential elections. Statehood thus would be a way of doing justice to this disenfranchised community.

The problem with this reasoning is that it ignores the fact that to escape its present colonial status Puerto Rico has at least two other alternatives besides statehood, namely independence and some form of sovereign free association with the United States. Who then should decide which road Puerto Rico should take?

The only democratic answer is that *this is something for the Puerto Rican people to decide.* Therefore, U.S. progressives should demand, not statehood, but a fair self-determination process for Puerto Rico.[5]

A more elaborate defense of statehood as a progressive goal points out that Puerto Rico's colonial status was enabled by the doctrine of non-incorporation formulated by the U.S. Supreme Court in the early 1900s.

In a series of decisions known as the Insular Cases, the doctrine established that the United States could control territories which were possessions but not part of the United States. In contrast with other past or then existing U.S. territories, these were non-incorporated territories.

This policy of non-incorporation was adopted by basically the same Supreme Court which a few years earlier embraced the infamous "separate but equal" doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and thus validated racial segregation across the U.S. South. While *Plessy v. Ferguson* was revoked in 1954 and official segregation ultimately dismantled, the Insular Cases are still in the books and the colonial relationship that they enabled remains in place.

From this unobjectionable historical account of the links and parallels between racial segregation and colonialism, some conclude that the U.S. Supreme Court should revoke the doctrine of non-incorporation. This would presumably redefine Puerto Rico as not a possession but part of the United States, and thus as a future state.

But this would mean that Puerto Rico's future would be determined by the U.S. Supreme Court and not the Puerto Rican people. In other words, from the undeniable fact that racial segregation and colonialism were linked historically, it does not follow that the solution of the colonial problem can be imported lock, stock and barrel from the dismantling of segregation.

Despite some problems, a bill recently introduced by representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nydia Velázquez is a step in the right direction. Instead of seeking statehood, the bill provides for the election of a Status Assembly that in collaboration with a commission designated by Congress would elaborate non-colonial status options for Puerto Rico.

One of these options would then be presented to the Puerto Rican people in a plebiscite. If it receives majority support, it may be enacted by Congress. As can be appreciated, this leaves the final decision in the hands of Congress and may keep Puerto Ricans voting pointlessly for an option that the former is not willing to enact.

This could be remedied if the bill instead mandated that, after the consultation between the Status Assembly and the Congressional commission, Congress would adopt legislation enunciating the options it is willing to enact. Puerto Rican people would vote to choose between those options.[6]

Voting No

But even while embracing the demand of self-determination for Puerto Rico, U.S. progressives are entitled to ask why some of us oppose statehood and voted against it on November 3.

Support for statehood in Puerto Rico is based on the calculation that U.S. living standards are significantly higher than living conditions in Puerto Rico. From this, the conclusion is drawn that making Puerto Rico a state would equalize Puerto Rico with the United States.

But there is an evident flaw in this argument. Statehood would perpetuate the conditions that have perpetuated its colonial dependent economy, with all its limits and consequences.

Statehood implies the free flow of goods, money, capital between Puerto Rico and the United States, but these are the conditions under which Puerto Rico has evolved over the past 120 years. They have not led to a leveling of Puerto Rico with its metropolis, nor a minimally coherent or balanced evolution of its economy.

It is true that statehood should lead to an increased inflow of federal funds. But Puerto Rico already receives a significant amount of federal funds. They compensate for the limits of its colonial economy. Increased funding would mean increased compensation, but the conditions making such compensation necessary would remain in place.

What best fits the needs of the Puerto Rican people would be their political organization as an independent republic, capable of determining the economic and social policies best adapted to a socially just and ecologically sound development, in collaboration with other peoples, and in particular, in collaboration with the people of the United States.

U.S. progressives must struggle for such an outcome, while supporters of Puerto Rican independence cannot be indifferent to progressive struggles in the United States.

The struggle for Puerto Rico's right to self-determination, for independence under just and adequate conditions for its people, and the fight for social change and justice in the United States, are convergent struggles that should jointly be embraced by progressives in the United States and Puerto Rico, including of course Puerto Ricans in the United States. ■

Notes

1. For further background about Puerto Rico under U.S. rule see César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
2. For more background on Puerto Rico's economic and debt crisis see Rafael Bernabe, "Puerto Rico: Economic Reconstruction, Debt Cancellation and Self-Determination," *International Socialist Review*, 111, Winter 2018-19. https://isreview.org/issue/111/puerto-rico-economic-reconstruction-debt-cancellation-and-self-determination
3. For a more detailed account of the Summer of 2019 and the ensuing debates see Rafael Bernabe, "The Puerto Rican Summer," *New Politics*, XVII: 4 (Winter 2020). https://newpol.org/issue_post/the-puerto-rican-summer/
4. For more on the elections results see Jorge Lefevre Tavárez, "A Reflection on the Puerto Rican Elections," *Democratic Left,* November 7, 2020. https://www.dsausa.org/democratic-left/a-reflection-on-the-puerto-rican-elections/
5. For further considerations on this see Rafael Bernabe and Manuel Rodríguez-Banchs, "Solidarity without Erasure: Responding to Trump on Puerto Rico," *Counterpunch*, April 9, 2019. https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/04/09/solidarity-without-erasure-responding-to-trump-on-puerto-rico/ and "Open Letter to the NAACP on Puerto Rico," July 10, 2018, published in several websites including https://solidarity-us.org/puerto_rico_naacp/
6. For a more detailed discussion of this bill see Rafael Bernabe, "On the bill for a 'Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2020' by Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nydia Velázquez" https://rafaelbernabe.org/proyectoacs/

Second-wave Feminism: ***Accomplishments and Lessons*** By Nancy Rosenstock

"Today is the beginning of a new movement. Today is the end of millennia of oppression." — Kate Millett, feminist author, speaking to 50,000 in New York City, August 26, 1970.

AUGUST 26, 1970 marked the public emergence of second-wave feminism, coming 100 years after the winning of women's suffrage.

The women's liberation movement of the 1960s and early 1970s had a profound effect on society. It also had a profound effect on those of us who were a part of it. Working collectively for women's liberation, reveling in the joy and sisterhood that comes from that, was a life-changing experience.

I had the good fortunate to be one of those women, as a member of Boston Female Liberation — one of the first and most widely respected radical feminist organizations of that time. I was also on the national staff of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC) in 1971.

What is second-wave feminism? What did it accomplish? What can a new generation learn from it?

Coming on the heels of the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement, women began to fight for their rights as part of a broader radicalization of youth that was unfolding, starting in the late 1960s.

To assess the accomplishments of second-wave feminism, it's helpful to take a quick look at the status of women at the time. As a whole, women were second-class individuals with limited opportunities.

Women were channeled into "female" jobs that paid less than those of men. We had no control over our bodies, with lack of accessibility to birth control and abortion.

Many of us were denied the possibility of furthering our education if we so desired, and were told over and over that motherhood and the home is where women "belonged."

Second-wave feminism was part of the radicalization of the late 1960s. Howard Petrick

Marching into History

Following years of consciousness-raising groups — where women came together to discover that their "problems" were not individual ones but rooted in society — and years of attempts to legalize abortion, second-wave feminism came into public view with the massive women's rights demonstrations on August 26, 1970.

On that day demonstrations took place in ninety cities, the largest being in New York City with 50,000 women marching down Fifth Avenue. The actions had three demands: free abortion on demand, no forced sterilization; free community controlled 24-hour childcare centers; and equal opportunities in jobs and education.

A diverse coalition of groups came together around these demands, including Church Women United, National Organization for Women (NOW), Redstockings, Socialist Workers Party, Third World Women's Alliance, High School Student Alliance, and National Welfare Rights Organization, to name just a few.

Prior to the day of the march, numerous imaginative actions occurred. "Women of the World Unite" and "March on August 26 for Equality" were two forty-foot banners hung from the Statue of Liberty. "Freedom trash cans" were placed all over the city, into which symbols of women's denigration were thrown.

Ruthann Miller, the official coordinator of the New York City march, described what happened that day in an interview published in *Jacobin* in November 2020.* The police had assumed few would march and had refused to block the street, saying that "the girls" could march on the sidewalk with their signs.

Miller explains: "Very early before the scheduled time, it was clear that large numbers were amassing."

With the urging of participants yelling "turn around, turn around" to the police to view the size of the crowd, "I gave the signal, and the fifty-thousand-strong March for Equality began. Women once again marched into history."

A major focus of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and early 1970s

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*"How the Strike for Equality Relaunched the Struggle for Women's Liberation in the US" appeared in the November 1, 2020 online edition of *Jacobin*; it is an interview Rosenstock conducted with Ruthann Miller, the strike coordinator of the August 26, 1970 march in New York City.

was the issue of abortion, which was illegal at the time. Upwards of 5,000 women died each year from back-alley or self-induced abortions. The mortality rate for nonwhite women was 12 times that of white women.

The Abortion Struggle

Those of us in Boston Female Liberation realized that we didn't choose the abortion issue on which to focus. It chose us; it was literally a life-and-death issue, one that struck at the very foundations of women's oppression under capitalism. We demanded full control of our bodies. Without this, women could never be free.

We also realized that one group alone could not win legalization of abortion. So in July 1971, 36 members of Boston Female Liberation, the largest representation of any single women's group, joined the 1,000 women who came together in New York City to form the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition.

The conference came out of a call from women in New Haven, Connecticut, who were proposing a united nationwide campaign for the repeal of all abortion laws and no forced sterilization.

The New York City conference adopted a plan of action that included mass demonstrations, abortion hearings, testimonials, caravans, speak-outs, and legislative and judicial actions. "No forced sterilizations" and "Repeal of all contraceptive laws" were the demands adopted by the conference.

WONAAC reached out far and wide and gained endorsements from women who were members of NOW, Planned Parenthood, notable feminists and lawyers such as Black feminist Florynce (Flo) Kennedy, and others.

Local women's liberation groups, campus groups, socialists, and many others all united around repealing abortion laws. "Abortion, a woman's right to choose!" was our rallying cry.

One of the brochures put out by WONAAC explained: "A woman's right to control her own body — to choose when and if she will bear children, to have access to safe, effective means of contraception, and not to fear forced or coerced sterilization — is a fundamental right restricted or denied by law and by custom in every state in the United States."

As the movement was still gaining strength, a major victory was won in January 1973, when the Supreme Court legalized abortion in the historic *Roe v. Wade* case. This victory is the biggest achievement of second-wave feminism.

Other Accomplishments

In addition to the abortion victory, second-wave feminism accomplished many other things. Avenues opened up for women in both education and employment. Women broke into "non-traditional" jobs and became electricians, plumbers, machine operators and more.

Others pursued career paths that most women before them could only dream of — engineers, architects and doctors, to name just a few.

The passage of Title IX in 1972, which prohibited discrimination against women in any educational program receiving federal funds, had a huge impact on women in sports.

One of the major achievements of the women's liberation movement, and perhaps one that may be hard to recognize today, is the change in cultural mores — most fundamentally in the family structure and marriage.

In the early 1960s, two-thirds of all children were raised in the "traditional nuclear family," i.e. father as breadwinner, with mother and father as a married couple. Today, that pattern is no longer the dominant one.

A reflection of this change, coming after years of protests, was the Supreme Court decision in June 2015, legalizing same-sex marriage. According to a study done in 2019 by the Pew Research Center, almost one-quarter of all children in the U.S. now live in a single-parent home. In addition, it is now more common to live with a partner to whom you are not married than with one to whom you are. In another study done by the Pew Research Center in 2019, 59% of people aged 18-44 have lived with an unmarried partner at some point in their lives. And 69% recognize this living arrangement as acceptable.

Second-wave feminists organized not only around the issue of abortion, but also viewed the issue of childcare as important.

For example, in 1971 Boston Female Liberation participated along with other groups in a coalition that succeeded in placing a referendum for free, community-controlled childcare up to 24 hours per day on the Cambridge, Massachusetts ballot. Despite the fact that 76% of the vote was won, the Cambridge City Council refused to implement it.

In 1971, then President Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act, which would have created a national network of federally-funded childcare centers. Along with this veto came an ideological campaign against childcare, claiming that advocates wanted the government to rear children, asserting that child labor would rise, and stressing that women's place "was naturally in the home."

ERA Stalemate and Gay Uprising

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), also a major issue at the time, remains one of the unresolved issues coming out of the women's liberation movement of that time.

August 26, 1970, New York City. Fifty thousand answered the ca

First introduced in Congress in 1923, the amendment simply stated "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." In 1972, the ERA was finally approved by both houses of Congress. The amendment was then sent to the states for ratification, with a seven-year deadline that required an extension that was granted by Congress in 1982.

In response to a right-wing campaign attacking the ERA, thousands took to the streets. In Springfield, Illinois in 1976, 16,000 marched, some coming from the East Coast in an ERA Freedom Train, to demand ratification by the Illinois legislature. In 1978, 100,000 marched in Washington, D.C.

Nevertheless, anti-woman forces were able to block the ERA ratification. The ERA is still not part of the constitution.

Related to the rise of second-wave feminism was the emergence of the gay rights movement. In 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village, a bar frequented by gay people.

Police harassment of gays was a common occurrence at the time. However, on June 28, 1969, the actions of both regular cops and riot police were met with street battles and demonstrations involving thousands. The Stonewall Rebellion, as it has been called, marked the public emergence of the gay liberation movement, a movement hailed by many feminists at the time.

Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian rights organization, grew rapidly in the aftermath of these events. While some conservative feminists were initially opposed to the involvement of lesbians in the women's movement, that opposition gradually disappeared.

Over the decades, many myths and misconceptions have arisen about second-wave

ll put out from a coalition of 54 groups. Howard Petrick

feminism. One such myth is that it was a movement exclusively of white middle-class women.

Myths and Misconceptions

While white women were certainly the majority, Black women were an integral part of the movement from the beginning. Black women, triply oppressed — due to the color of their skin, as women, and as workers — were able to raise specific class-based issues.

They were able to point out that while many white middle-class women could remain in the home, Black women needed to work to support their families. And since Black women faced special attacks from the government due to racism, they, along with Puerto Rican, Chicana and Native American women, raised demands that spoke to their needs, such as "no forced sterilizations."

Black women often formed their own organizations to fight for their demands.

The Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA), founded in 1970, had its origins in the civil rights movement, specifically the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the major organizations in the fight for Black rights in the 1960s.

TWWC's newspaper, *Triple Jeopardy,* printed its first issue in the fall of 1971. It issued a poster with the heading: "Smash capitalism, racism and sexism."

The Combahee River Collective formed in 1974 in Boston. In the Combahee River Collective statement published in April 1977, it states clearly: "Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start."

A groundbreaking article written by Maryanne Weathers in 1969, titled "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force," is today still used in women's and gender studies classes. Weathers was both a member of Boston Female Liberation and the Black and Third World Women's Alliance.

Other misconceptions about second-wave feminism actually stem from attacks on feminists at the time from reactionary "pro-family" and "pro-life" forces. Some of these caricatures still resonate today in popular depictions of the movement as consisting of bra burners and man-hating lesbians.

Experiencing the never-ending attacks on women's rights — especially attacks on the right to abortion — some have come to the false conclusion that second-wave feminists "dropped the ball." One important lesson coming out of the women's liberation movement of these years is the understanding that no right is secure; that we must continue to fight.

Women's oppression is so fundamental to the workings of capitalism that it should be no surprise that the movement meets such opposition from those who benefit from the second-class status of women.

Another aspect, however, needs to be kept in mind — the struggle for women's liberation in the 1960s and early 1970s was not monolithic. Different political perspectives were present, from conservative feminists in the leadership of organizations such as NOW who wanted a bigger piece of the pie under the present system, to radical feminists such as many of us in Boston Female Liberation who believed that full women's liberation can never be won under capitalism.

The radical wing of the movement also understood that *if we don't fight for our rights, no one will.* We must be independent of both capitalist parties, and organize a movement that refuses to subordinate women's rights to anyone or anything.

Some women like me, initially a radical feminist, became socialists. We saw no contradiction in being both a feminist and a socialist. And we took the lessons we had learned in organizing to the new women's movement.

Ruthann Miller is a good example of this. She was an active socialist who had worked prior to August 26, 1970 in the fight to legalize abortion in New York state, and had participated in the anti-Vietnam War movement. She understood the importance of uniting as many forces as possible around agreed-upon demands.

Masses of people in motion are what makes change, and building coalitions and alliances with organizations and individuals with varying political perspectives is necessary to do this.

Lessons and Challenges for Today

Noting the accomplishments of second-wave feminism provides the opportunity to draw some lessons for today. First and foremost, fighting for the liberation of women is not some secondary struggle.

If women are not free, no one is free. An independent women's movement that draws in as many people as possible is necessary. Seeking alliances with others around key demands is essential.

As Ruthann Miller explained, "Today as new young women organize, it does seem important to see clearly that we need to organize politically the largest number of women from different walks of life — different groups in coalitions around what we can agree on — and leave our disagreements for another time."

In the 48 years since the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the attacks on the right to abortion have been relentless. Having control over our bodies — whether or not, or when, to bear children — is fundamental to our liberation.

The focus on abortion rights in the early days of second-wave feminism was the correct decision. The centrality of abortion rights internationally has recently become clear, as women from Ireland to Poland and Argentina have been in the streets in massive numbers, culminating in some recent victories.

The situation facing women today highlights our second-class status in society and cries out for immediate action.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the unfolding recession, 800,000 women left the work force just in the months of August and September 2020. Many of these women face the effects of the pandemic on their families: children being home due to schools and childcare centers closed.

The *Washington Post* headlined an article in July, 2020: "Coronavirus childcare crisis will set women back a generation," and added "one out of four women who reported becoming unemployed during the pandemic said it was because of a lack of childcare — twice the rate among men."

This crisis poses serious challenges for those of us fighting for women's rights. Right-wing forces, fueled by the government and with wind in their sails, will continue with their attacks on our rights.

In these challenging times, all women — from those of us who were involved in second-wave feminism to those just entering the struggle — need to come together as equal fighters and chart a course forward.

Chanting "We will never go back," we continue to march for our rights. From Poland to Argentina, the women of the world inspire us! ■

A Memoir of Life in the U.S. Socialist Workers Party

A Socialist Woman's Experience

By Suzanne Weiss

1. Barriers to Women's Participation

FROM ITS BEGINNINGS in the 1800s, modern socialism has embraced equality and liberation for women. The socialist movement has made a major contribution to political, cultural, and intellectual changes challenging women's second-class status. For many women, joining a socialist movement opened the road to developing their talents, achieving social influence, and contributing to social change.

At first, the socialist movement was almost entirely male. Beginning in the late 1800s, women socialists played an increasing role, including in leadership positions. Although few in number, their involvement ran far ahead of women's participation in mainstream political life.

Mapping out a SWP campaign in '68.

During the early years of my socialist activity, the Second Wave of feminism brought large numbers of women into leadership positions in the socialist movement as in political life as a whole. Nonetheless, all socialist groups and their members carry, to varying degrees, the imprint of the sexist world in which they exist. Women in the socialist movement face continuing barriers, some specific to these groups.

My text is a meditation on how this deformation affected me and the organizations of which I was a member, the U.S. Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its youth movement, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), from 1959 to 1993.

The SWP grappled with the challenge of assuring a full and equal role for women in the party's theoretical and policy discussions as well as in its endeavors. The efforts of women members to dismantle barriers to their equal participation in the organization were unrelenting. Women in the SWP made great gains, some of which were later lost.

The account that follows is based on my personal experiences and therefore has unavoidable limitations. I cannot reproduce the perspectives of women of color, women whose experiences took place in geographical or social contexts different from mine, women who supported one of the oppositional currents in the party, women whose contact with the party was more fleeting than mine, women who came from different religious and social backgrounds than mine, women who wanted to or had already raised children.

This text is inspired by Abigail Bakan's article, "Marxism, Feminism, and Epistemological Dissonance."[1] Bakan's basic thesis is that socialist organizations, although programmatically committed to women's liberation, typically harbor a political culture that obstructs full and equal participation by their women members.

In my experience, this is still true in many socialist groups today. My text provides a case study based on my experience; I strove to meet this challenge head on.

When I encountered the SWP in 1959, it had about 300 active members in fourteen local branches. Battered by repression and blacklisting in the McCarthy years of the 1950s, the party remained deeply influenced by labor struggles, the African-American freedom movement, the existence of the Soviet Union, and worldwide uprisings against colonialism.

The SWP held to its roots in classic Marxist literature. Its members were steeped in the works of Marx, Engels, and the leaders of the Russian Revolution. It campaigned for racial equality, democracy, international solidarity, and women's equality and right to choose in family planning, which the SWP identified as integral to the goal of socialism. Even in the 1950s, a low point for women's rights advocacy, the SWP championed what later became known as women's liberation.

Women's Survival Before "Me Too"

Activism is not sustained by program alone. Political culture is also decisive, and here influences from the surrounding sexist world can cause great harm. For me, that started with the threat to my personal safety as a woman.

As a young woman, I faced dangers not then discussed in Marxist literature nor in any texts that I saw on women's rights. Like each and every woman, I coped with the inescapable threat of sexual assault and harassment.

For women, this danger is omnipresent. It was a constant hazard of my younger years. The need for safety from sexual attack shaped decisions on where I lived and with whom, where I worked, and whether I felt able to speak and act freely. All told, I underwent more than a dozen specific sexual assaults, threatened or attempted. I suspect that this count is not unusual.

As I approached my teen years, my adoptive mother spoke

A socialist activist since the late 1950s, Suzanne Weiss was a member of the Socialist Workers Party from 1959 to 1993. Her memoir, Holocaust to Resistance: My Journey *(2019), is available from Fernwood Publishers. It was reviewed in* Against the Current *207 (July-August 2020). Suzanne now lives in Toronto, Canada, where she is active in movements against racism and for Palestinian freedom. My thanks to the many comrades who contributed in various ways to the writing of this text, including: Abigail Bakan, whose analysis inspired this study; Dianne Feeley and the editorial collective of* ATC *who provided encouragement and valued editorial proposals; and Paul Le Blanc, Laurie Burke, Linda Loew, John Riddell, Nancy Rosenstock, and Alan Wald.*

about a case of wife-beating within a family with which we were acquainted. I was startled because these friends, like my adoptive family, were sympathizers of the pro-Moscow Communist Party. My mother counseled that "just because they are Communists doesn't mean they practice communism in their homes."

Nor did my mother propose to intervene. U.S. law had made wife-beating illegal a few decades previously, but police did not enforce the law except, possibly, in cases of permanent injury or death. It was generally thought at that time that wife-beating was a private matter between husband and wife.

I encountered this same attitude after I joined the Socialist Workers Party in 1959 at the age of 18. Physical assault by a male party member was not only a violation of socialist morality; it was an immense barrier to a woman's participation in the party's activity.

This was brought home to me at a socialist educational encampment a couple of years later, which I attended with an intimate male friend. In our dormitory room one evening, he flew into a rage. He bellowed and whacked me, with furniture and props flying around. This took place behind a closed door, but the uproar was heard outside the room, and the assault left visible bruises on my face. Yet the next day, my socialist friends averted their eyes and showed no concern.

After another such episode three years later, in which I was slammed and knocked around, a male comrade, seeing the bruises on my face, threatened to retaliate in kind against "whoever did this to you."

Leading figures in the SWP learned of this incident and proposed to take action — but only if I gave consent. I felt that my attacker was greatly pained by having been the cause of the unpleasantness. I had now left him and did not want to wound him further. Still, my party comrades' more vigorous response revealed a change in outlook, reflecting the inspiration of the now ascending feminist movement.

My case may well have helped push the SWP, a few years later, to take action on violence in the party against women, as described later in my text.

Recent gains of the feminist movement have demonstrated that violence against women permeates society, bearing down most harshly on racialized women. In Canada, where I live, Indigenous activists obtained a comprehensive and authoritative National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.[2]

The Indigenous people of Canada have particularly made us aware of the pervasive misogynist crimes against women. The entire female gender suffers, but the heaviest burden is borne by women of color.

Joining the Socialist Movement

When I joined the Young Socialist Alliance in Los Angeles in 1959, I faced a different barrier to women's involvement. The local YSA was a small group, largely male in composition. It was a problematic milieu for a young woman seeking to be heard.

In fact, I found it hard to get a word in edgewise. I would make a suggestion and get ignored — and then that same suggestion would be made a few minutes later by one of the guys and welcomed as great new insight.

I could only deduce that I wasn't heard because I was a woman and young. In addition, the guys held forth *ad infinitum*. Today it's called "mansplaining." I was indignant, but this situation, as I was well aware, only reflected the "male" character of society as a whole.

In U.S. political life the president at the time, Eisenhower, had only one token woman among 22 cabinet members. After that ended in 1960, it was almost two decades before another woman held a cabinet-level post.

I stuck around the YSA because its global view of politics spoke to my heart and explained the world. In addition, the YSA was for equal rights for women. Looking back, I now recognize those views as an inheritance from the feminism of the early Communist International, from Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Clara Zetkin, and their generation of women leaders.

Kollontai had challenged the tyranny of the patriarchal family and defended woman's control of her body including with respect to choice on abortion and family planning.

Great gains for women's equality were won in the early Soviet republic, many of which were later reversed under Stalin's rule. I also learned of Antoinette Konikow, a leading founder of the SWP, who was a pioneer of the US birth control movement.

I was introduced to what Bakan terms the "classic texts of the Marxist canon."[3] Our YSA group studied Engels' book *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which explains that for most of human existence, women had been equals of men and in some ways had played a leading role.

Women's subjugation came with the rise of private property and the state — the burden of class oppression. Only with the advent of the socialist revolution would women finally begin to be recognized as equal partners.

Curiously, we paid no attention to a crucial point in Engels' work: what he had to say about violence against women. In class-divided society, Engels says, "… [The wife] is delivered over unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his rights."

Thanks to Sharon Smith's book *Women and Socialism*, for highlighting this passage, whose importance became clear to me only much later, as we entered the "me too" era.[4]

I also learned in the Los Angeles Young Socialist discussion circle about the roots of racism and its connection with fascism, and the subjugation of women under fascism.

The role of women in capitalist society changes, I discovered, according to the demands of the economy. During World War I and II, the male workforce decreased and employers were compelled to enlist women in industrial jobs.

Women got out of the prison of the house and proved their mettle; they joined unions and took part in battles for workers' rights; they maintained the country's economy.

After the war, however, women were pushed out of industries back into the home. Newspapers, radio, films, and later television — all claimed that this was where women belonged. I rejected all that.

Women Facing Male Predominance

Even so, as the only woman in my Young Socialist discussion circle, I felt like a stranger, an imposter. The males in the organization agreed with me in opposing the fact that women were treated as of less value than men in our society, and that, as socialists, we strive for equality of opportunity and respect. But by and large, their understanding was intellectual,

discussed but not translated into action.

They didn't know, and I didn't know either, how to include women and make them feel welcome and appreciated for their potential and for what they could contribute.

Although among the youngest YSA members, I was a committed activist, and wanted to join the affiliated party organization, the SWP. Attending a number of their weekly public educational forums, I was attracted to its members' seriousness, experience and knowledge, especially in the trade union movement.

Still in my teens, unschooled and naïve, I was new to socialist politics. Both male and female members were courteous, but they did not engage with me and seemed dismissive. The party did not pass out membership application forms; activists joined the party only on invitation. And I was not asked to join the SWP.

So I forced the issue. I requested membership, an almost unheard-of initiative. I was then summoned before a special subcommittee for a searching discussion. I had no industrial working-class experience — certainly a mark against me. I felt unsure, insecure, and somewhat insulted but did not let them dissuade me, and I was voted in.

Many years later, George Novack, a party leader and friend, admitted that when he knew me as young woman, he had not considered that I could be genuinely interested in the party's politics. I was glad to hear him say he had learned better.

I reflected on how, when I came on the scene, the SWP comrades were focusing their attention on a couple of young men of no outstanding intelligence or experience, obviously judging them by another measure.

In 1959, the men and women in the SWP were well versed in Marxism and had much experience in the labor movement. But it was primarily the men who spoke in branch discussions.

The SWP program stood on the history and experiences of the socialist Internationals and labor and socialist organizations in the United States. And on the issue of women's rights, it stood on the program of the early Communist International, which went further than that of the friends of the Soviet Union of my youth. The SWP integrated women's emancipation into the goal of socialism, which would unite men and women on an equal basis in organizing society.

However, I doubted the motives of some male party members who acted, I thought, in a questionable manner. For example, as a new young recruit, I expected to be inundated with political discussions. After all, that's why I was in the group. But male comrades assumed that as a "girl" I was fair game. Their brash come-ons were belittling and disruptive. This behavior contradicted their professions of support for equality in the political arena.

Yes, there is a place for socializing, flirting, and parties, but many of their come-ons were intrusive and out of place. Their posture and actions towards me and other women reflected society's patriarchy and male privilege. I searched for a way to raise this point.

2. Women in Party Controversies

Women in the SWP, while a minority in the party, were relatively more numerous than they were in mainstream political life. They had helped keep the organization going on a daily basis since the U.S. Trotskyist movement's inception in 1928, leading the subscription campaigns, fund drives and organizational campaigns, and they did a lot of administrative work. They made a great organizational contribution — that was evident.

Most of the women were tough, experienced, and strong-willed. Yes, they tended to do "women's tasks." However, they were socialists not as "wives" but as independent fighters.

These women were well educated in Marxism, opinionated, and integrated in trade union work. Yet branch discussions reflected the social repression of women. Few women spoke in branch debates, and when they did their comments were brief, but with distinctive viewpoints.

Listening attentively, I could make out three different areas of concern to women:

- Women's place in the socialist movement.
- Women's place in society.
- Women's historical evolution.

These discussions, which lasted many years, were conducted mostly informally, in occasional statements in branch meetings, and — in one case — in a voluminous written debate in the SWP newspaper and a mimeographed internal discussion bulletin.

Such exchanges showed that women were not peripheral to the party, but at the center of its intellectual life. The issue of women's place in the socialist movement, however, was not addressed frankly and honestly until the party felt the impact of the women's liberation struggles of the 1960s-70s.

Grace Carlson

When I joined the SWP, women were scarce in party governing bodies. There was a celebrated exception: Grace Carlson, who had been elected to both the National Committee (responsible for long-range policy) and the Political Committee (the day-to-day leadership).

She maintained close contact with the party's most influential leaders: V.R. Dunne, Farrell Dobbs, and James P. Cannon (the party's founder). Carlson had won her spurs as the only woman among the members imprisoned by the government in 1941 under the thought-control Smith Act. She was sent to Alderson Federal Penitentiary for Women for 16 months.

Women were prominent in assuring the survival of the organization at the time of imprisonment of Carlson and the party's core leadership.[5] Carlson's role in the party is honored by an article in Cannon's *Notebook of an Agitator*. A newly published biography, *The Fierce Life of Grace Holmes Carlson*, throws more light on her life.[6]

The SWP routinely ran women members for public office, then a rare occurrence in the political system. Myra Tanner Weiss (no relation), a prominent SWP leader, was nominated in the 1950s for mayor of Los Angeles and the U.S. vice-presidency (twice) and also served on the leading policy-making committees.

Another woman of note was Evelyn Reed, who wrote on feminism and anthropology for SWP publications. Rose

Karsner, the lifelong partner of Cannon, although politically wise and greatly respected was, I thought, insufficiently valued as an independent thinker and did not win election to the National Committee. This was true of other wives who were pioneer members such as Karolyn Kerry and Reba Hansen.

There were a wide range of talented women in the SWP who were not only well-versed and knowledgeable on a variety of political and historical issues but also talented public speakers who sought to play leadership roles.

Among them were Frances James, respected for her knowledge of Africans' insurgency and its parallel in the U.S. Black rights movement; and Jean Tussey, branch organizer and later a leader in the Fair Play for Cuba work.

Joyce Cowley (Maupin) had led several strikes, one of which was over a woman shop steward being fired because she wouldn't go to bed with a petty union official.[7] She also ran as SWP candidate for mayor of New York. Among her works is an article first published in the spring 1955 issue of *Fourth International,* "Pioneers of Women's Liberation," which documents how the women's suffrage movement overlapped and interrelated with the movement to abolish slavery. It was republished as pamphlet by Merit Publishers in 1969.[8]

Among the party's more prominent members, I also recall Hedda Garza, Jeanne Morgan, and Clara Kaye. I did not have any close friends among these comrades, perhaps because they were so much older and not in my branch, but I learned about their contributions.

I do not recall any formal discussion of women's leadership in the SWP, but there was awareness of and respect for their role; the issue of recognizing their contribution tended to come up, even if in guarded and subtle ways.

Bakan suggests that the very richness of the socialist heritage can be stultifying. She warns against those who cling to "historical memory … with a sense of longing and a desire for repetition… with a desire to see moment of an idealized history repeated in the future."[9]

Yet I felt no sense of "rote" or faith in repetition in either the SWP or its cadre of women members. Both were pressing forward into an uncharted future, modifying ideas on the go, and in this process the party's course was altered by its embrace of the new feminist radicalization.

A Brash Initiative

During a few months' stay in New York in 1961, I spent time helping out in the YSA national office. I won a chance to display my organizational skills when I was assigned to be sole organizer of the national conference that was to take place in that city.

Here was my opportunity! As the event organizer, I wrote a circular letter to all its branches, in which I noted that in the previous national conference the exchange of sexual partners seemed to overshadow that of political ideas.

Young male members were coming on to women in an obtrusive way that made it hard to keep one's mind on the discussion. They don't see our ideas, I thought, just our boobs and butt. Males seemed concerned mainly with their little heads. Does a woman have opinions, or is she just sexual prey?

My letter impudently suggested that in the upcoming conference we focus on the politics. I was not opposed to sexual liaisons, I wrote, but felt that the chase should be reserved for social occasions. The conference had political goals that deserved our serious attention.

I tried to make my point tactfully, but it got across, and the letter created a stir. There were some hostile responses. My letter was quoted in an SWP internal document and I was ridiculed for making a prudish comment.

But I won support from in an unexpected quarter. Tom Kerry, a senior leader with long trade-union experience, who was known as gruff and sharp-tongued, wrote in defense of what I had said in my notorious letter. In the end, most members seemed to feel I had a point.

Women's Place in Society

The second level of discussion concerned what it meant to be a woman in a male-chauvinist society.

When I joined the SWP, a discussion that had taken place back in 1954 was still reverberating. It was generally called the "cosmetics debate." The written discussion had been carried on in the letters column of the SWP's newspaper, *The Militant,* and then in a thick and mimeographed discussion bulletin. The controversy echoed in informal discussions through the years that followed.

The exchange had been initiated unexpectedly when the Militant ran a column by Jack Bustelo, pen name of prominent party leader Joseph Hansen, titled "Sagging Cosmetic Lines Try a Face Lift."[10] Bustelo light-heartedly discussed how big business takes advantage of women's second-class status in society and their resulting social insecurities to sell cosmetics for high profits.

He contended that prevailing notions of "beauty" are rooted in capitalist exploitation, the oppression of women, and racism. Women haven't always used cosmetics, he wrote, and a socialist society would create new standards of beauty.

Bustelo's article caused a great kerfuffle and prompted some women members, including several seldom-heard voices, to passionately challenge his thesis. Among those responding were Marjorie McGowan, Jeanne Morgan and — in his defense — Evelyn Reed.[11]

What might seem to be a big fuss over a minor matter actually concerned deeper issues. Marjorie McGowan, for instance, found the article "both offensive and presumptuous," full of patronizing assertions by a "self-appointed judge of what constitutes female strivings."

McGowan gave cogent reasons why women wear cosmetics out of necessity and adorn themselves to be attractive to secure a job, retain one, advance in the company or industry, and compete for adequate pay. In addition, she noted that women are made more insecure as they age and their youthful looks dissipate. McGowan argued that these issues would also be present in a socialist society.

On the other hand, Evelyn Reed responded that "[t]he class struggle is a movement of opposition not adaptation, and this holds true not only of the [male] workers in the plants, but of the women as well, both workers and housewives."[12]

To a great degree, Reed stated, men and women have accepted and adapted to the ideas pressed on us by the ruling capitalists. No one, including those in radical organizations that strive to change society, can escape pressures that demean and exclude women. Reed explained that we must counter this pressure as best we can through ideological struggle.

Not everyone in the SWP concurred with her analysis. It was argued that most women in society, whether workers or

owners, rich or poor, view their needs similarly in the realm of sexual beauty because we have a common identity as women. There is nothing wrong with cosmetics, Bustelo's critics contended, and it is natural for women to adorn the body.

Bustelo's supporters replied that the cosmetics industry abused women's insecurities to extremes to feed capitalism's drive to make profits and objectify women as sex objects. The debate was wrapped up by Evelyn Reed:

"In short, first the capitalist system degrades and oppresses the great mass of women. Then it exploits the discontents and fears in women to stroke the fires of unlimited sales and profits. Our task, therefore, is to expose both the capitalist system as the source of these evils and its massive propaganda machine that tells gullible women that the road to a successful life and love is through the purchase of things."[13]

The cosmetics discussion took on new life with the rise of the movement for women's equal rights in the sixties. Contributions to the debate were eventually published by Pathfinder in book form in 1986 under the title *Cosmetics, Fashions and the Exploitation of Women*.

Evelyn Reed wrote an accompanying essay, and within it, she assesses the political debate in a scientific examination on the roots of women's oppression.

Evelyn Reed.

When I encountered this discussion, back in 1960, I agreed with Evelyn Reed's defense of Bustelo's arguments but somewhat sympathized with the women who had voiced criticisms. I resented disparagement of makeup, which, as a young person, I rarely employed but saw as useful for the reasons outlined by McGowan.

I granted that youthful appearance made a difference on how women are treated. I was also influenced by the barrage of media images of women in two-inch spiked heels, polished faces and perfect hair styles, as well as Hollywood images of women air-brushed to perfection, all of which begged us to emulate their example through media intimidating propaganda.

But in those years of Jim Crow segregation, only white women were recognized in this context. The Black population was not considered in the media contest for profits. And although only young white women were featured in commercial advertisements, women in general were nonexistent as broadcasters or in the professions. I was strongly for resisting women's confinement in stereotyped social roles.

During the years that followed, the "resistance" that Reed advocated became generalized. With the rise of a mass feminist movement, imposed beauty standards were widely questioned or rejected. Working women largely abandoned stiletto heels; many shifted where possible from skirts to slacks; use of make-up in public was no longer compulsory.

This trend infuriated the male bigots, who slandered all feminists as "bra-burners," but the movement was unstoppable.

Women's Role in Human Evolution

The third area of discussion of women in the SWP concerned their role in early society, the period that we SWP members referred to as "the matriarchy." It was Evelyn Reed who opened up this discussion with a lengthy article in the SWP's quarterly magazine, published a few months before Bustelo's column, called "The Myth of Women's Inferiority."[14]

Drawing on Engels' discussion in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,* Reed contended that women's subjugation began only with the establishment of class society. The enormously longer preceding epoch had been characterized by women's leadership: "It was women who pulled humanity forward and out of the animal kingdom," she wrote; "First steps are decisive."

Reed's viewpoint was contested by several SWP members. Self-educated, Reed had no links with Western academic anthropology, where such matriarchal analysis had no support at the time and has little today.

This separateness from academic debate characterized the entire SWP and revolutionary Marxist ideological debate as a whole in that period. Members who joined before 1960, while widely read and articulate, had rarely seen the inside of a university. By the 1960s, however, most new recruits had some college or university training. Then in the late 1960s, with the decline of anti-Communist hysteria, did it become possible at last for young Marxists — including some women — to contemplate academic careers.

Meanwhile, with the rise of Second-Wave Feminism in the 1960s, Reed's ideas won wider attention. It is thus significant that Bakan's "Epistomological Dissonance" cites, in another context, relevant writings on women's role in indigenous societies that echo the central theme of Evelyn Reed's thesis.

Bakan highlights "lessons from indigenous, Third World, or anti-racist feminists that have direct bearing on socialist politics," including with regard to women and men's equal positions of social respect in Indigenous societies.[15]

She quotes Joyce Green's edited collection, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*: "[A]boriginal women claim that aboriginal cultures do not have a history of unequal gender relations; in fact… Aboriginal women occupied positions of authority, autonomy and high status in their communities."[16]

3. A Transformative Feminist Radicalization

Soon after I read the "cosmetics" bulletin, the party's convictions on women's emancipation were reinforced by powerful new feminist stirrings in society as a whole. Two books in particular made an impact.

Two years after I joined the SWP, I learned of a monumental study of women's oppression, *The Second Sex,* by the celebrated French socialist and existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. An English translation running to 705 pages was published in 1961.

The review by Hedda Garza, "Still a Man's World," was published in the SWP journal the following year. Garza strongly recommended the book, which identified capitalism as the barrier to women's equality.[17]

The Second Sex was not an easy read; Garza noted the difficulty of its existentialist terminology. Still, as a manifesto of socialist feminism, it was a breakthrough — a harbinger of a shift in the thinking of women in their masses that began the following year.

Two years later, excited discussions were taking place among my Los Angeles friends of a much-heralded new book, *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan.

Friedan's book confirmed what I already knew and what was commonly agreed in the SWP: existing society confined women into a narrow, limited, soul-destroying social role in society. Even so, the book had a big impact on SWP women and certainly on me. I touted it widely to my friends outside of the SWP and the YSA.[18]

Friedan, who came from a Communist Party environment, wrote for a privileged, middle-class, white readership, and regarded women's oppression from that point of view. She didn't talk about how the feminine mystique was related to segregation against Blacks and immigrants, or about laws violating women's reproductive rights, issues so important to my generation.

But what counted for me was that Friedan's confirmation that my teenage conflicts, including an experience in juvenile detention, reflected not some personal weirdness but immense pressure bearing down on women in their millions right across the society.

During the next few years, I witnessed a rapid increase in discussion of and interest in women's equality across society and in the party. The term "women's liberation" began to catch on.

A year after Friedan's book appeared, I read a review of it by Evelyn Reed that told me more about the link of the feminine mystique and right-wing ideology.[19] The postwar program of pushing women back in the home, Reed explained, was the very one that Hitler promoted in the 1930s with his stress on the "three K's: *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*" (children, cooking, church).

Reed called on us to honor the progressive middle-class women in North America who "led an inspiring 'feminist' struggle for women's rights during the previous two centuries. Out of those battles, they won the right to higher education, participation in production, professional careers, independent ownership of property and the vote."

The history of pioneer fighters for women's rights had been falsified, Reed said. "Fighters for women's rights were portrayed as 'embittered sex-starved spinsters' incapable of fulfilling their 'femininity' as wives and mothers." These had been inspired and "spirited women" who had the "unforgivable traits" of "enjoying their participation in the struggle for social change," Reed wrote.

What Friedan identified as the "feminine mystique" had set a "pattern of behavior and aspiration" for working-class housewives, Reed explained. Working women were convinced after World War Two that they could have a better life as full-time housekeepers and mothers. But now Friedan's book was feeding into a new rise of feminism affecting all women in society, not just the middle class.

In portraying the history of women's rights struggles, Reed helped us to think of ourselves as feminists as well as socialists — or better, as socialist feminists. This broke down an incorrect stigma against the term "feminist" found in our inherited Marxist tradition.

During the subsequent decade, a significant number of young people, many of them students, joined the YSA and the SWP. They had courageously bucked the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and fought for the freedom to speak their mind.

The women among them were strong feminists, and they won sympathy from most of the male activists. Above all, these young people were attracted to the YSA and SWP for our defense of the Cuban revolution, and subsequently through our work in the movement to end the U.S. war in Vietnam.

Women made up a much larger proportion of these new recruits than they did among older members. The young women members did not accept a gendered division of labor; they were in the forefront of party's participation in radical struggles. They took the organizations by storm and began to change them profoundly.

First and foremost, they attracted more young women into the party, which accelerated the transformation. Among other things, the young women insisted that more women, especially those seen with substantial leadership assignments such as Karolyn Kerry, Bea Hansen and Evelyn Reed, be recognized and integrated into the National Committee.

The young women led a change in the SWP's commitment to women's rights: words were now translated into action. It was an amazing transformation, embraced with joy by the veteran women members — and accomplished in such a very short period of time!

The new young women members were also leaders in the activist women's liberation movement, especially NOW (National Organization for Women, CLUW (Coalition of Labor Union Women), and WONAAC (Women's National Abortion Action Coalition).

This feminist generation within the SWP began to open up for discussion issues that had previously been raised among party members only in small private discussion, such as sexual assault, abortion, and freedom in sexual relations.

For a portrayal of how the feminist upsurge became a mass movement, see Nancy Rosenstock and Ruthann Miller, "How the Women's Strike for Equality Relaunched the Struggle for Women's Liberation in the US."[20]

The feminist radicalization also inspired many working-class women to seek jobs in "non-traditional" lines of work, that is in higher-paying fields previously largely closed to them: in law, medicine, and other professions, and also in industrial jobs with equal pay. I took part personally in the latter effort, first in the party's New York printshop and later in oil refineries in Louisiana and Virginia.

Women in the SWP Printshop

I spent the mid-1960s in Chicago, where I now had no problem speaking up in branch discussions with my own ideas and sentiments. I garnered a reputation as a party stalwart.

Meanwhile, the party embraced the spirit of affirmative action, that is, encouragement for selection of women and racialized members for leadership assignments.

As a result, I was chosen in 1965 to assist in launching a party's national print shop, located in New York, as the only woman in a four-person team. It soon grew substantially. I had substantial responsibilities until my departure. My inclusion was regarded as a high honor but, if truth be told, the preponderance of attitudes in the print shop was quite male oriented.

Although I had leadership responsibilities in the shop, I was sometimes the butt of ridicule. For instance, I had written an article for the YSA newspaper in 1960. Some years later, it was discovered by happenstance by young co-workers who were doing some research.

The director of the shop challenged me: "Did you really

write that article?" He suggested in front of everyone that in fact it had been written by my partner of the time. His point seemed to be that my partner was well educated while I was not — a curious approach in a workers' organization.

I assured him that I wrote the article but admitted that my partner had helped with editing. It was a moment of discomfort and shame. (For more on my print shop years and my seven-year stint in the rail, chemical, and petroleum industries, see my book *Holocaust to Resistance,* chapters 17 and 19-20.)[21]

At that time, the director of the shop was under pressure from the momentum of young women's leadership in the SWP to adjust his attitude. It had been difficult to recruit new blood, men or women, into the shop, perhaps because it was viewed as an oppressive and male-dominated area of work.

He emphasized to the young men in the print shop, who in my opinion were actually more in tune than he was with the changing face of the SWP, that we needed to integrate women in the workforce.

Insisting on the need to show the rest of the party that the print shop was in step with women's rights, the director announced he was launching a search for a woman to help operate the large new web press. Having no success, he decided on me as a last resort.

My new assignment in the print shop became a point of pride for the party because I was the first woman operator of a web press in New York State. I led an investigating committee into how other left-wing print shops were organized and discovered they integrated women only as cleaners but not in the operation of the shop.

The four-unit web press was a gigantic machine, some 60 feet long, requiring a team of four operators. We made do with two. It was built for big men; I was a little squirt of five feet. For me, it was really hell, simply crazy.

I was the butt of much banter, which would not have been tolerated elsewhere in the SWP. When I suffered mishaps, I did not get support. I stuck it out. But the entire experience left a bitter taste, and I began to look for an alternative. After seven years in the print shop, I took my leave in 1972.

Embrace of New Feminism

In the early 1970s, the U.S. SWP stood out among socialist organizations for its full embrace of the spirit of the mass feminist upsurge that sought to unite all women in the liberation struggle. The party bubbled with discussion led by young members, such as Dianne Feeley, Pat Grogan, Cindy Jaquith, Linda Jenness, Susan Lamont, Carolyn Lund, Andrea Morell, Nancy Rosenstock, Betsey Stone, Mary-Alice Waters, Judy White, Matilde Zimmerman, and many more.

These women courageously pushed themselves to the fore, with the SWP's encouragement, and that made all the difference. Women's increasing leadership role helped the party exemplify women's equal rights and opportunity and work for those goals within women's organizations. We joined women working for equal treatment in unions, civil society, media, and governmental bodies.

The impact of feminist radicalization prompted the SWP to flesh out its assessment of women's status under capitalism as an "oppressed sex," a concept far from universally accepted among Marxist currents. Evelyn Reed commented:

"Despite the hypocritical homage paid to womankind as the 'sacred mother' and devoted homemaker, the worth *of women sank to its lowest point under capitalism.... Only three justifications for their existence remain under this system: as breeders, as household janitors, and as buyers of consumer goods for the family."*

Ending this oppression will require "a worldwide struggle for socialism by the working masses, female and male alike, together with every other section of the oppressed," Reed stated. But "women have to lead and organize their own independent struggle for emancipation."[22]

Women in the Black Liberation movement made us aware that they were not well represented in the mainstream women's movement. Some Black women felt alienated by middle-class feminists' stress on women's right to work outside the home. This was hardly the problem faced by Black women.

A very high proportion worked outside the home already, simply due to poverty. On the job, they routinely faced starvation wages, lack of childcare facilities, and both sexist and racist harassment, and racist barriers to promotion.[23]

Similarly, while all women were subject to unwanted pregnancies and the dangers of clandestine abortions, Black women also suffered most from widespread compulsory sterilization.

In addition, Black women, who had been routinely raped by their slave masters throughout slavery years, continued to face this treatment afterwards, as domestic labor, by male employers — a fact not widely acknowledged in dialogue about reproductive justice. The SWP sought to engage with these issues, embracing the approach that we now call "intersectionality." (See 1971 SWP resolution, "Toward a Mass Feminist Movement") It also published a series of pamphlets by Black and Hispanic women authors such as Nan Bailey, Pamela Newton, Willie Mae Reed, Olga Rodriguez, Mirta Vidal, Maxine Williams and others.

In 1963, the SWP had confirmed its longstanding position for Black self-determination, affirming that our goal in the USA was to help carry out a "combined revolution," comprising a struggle of working people against class exploitation and also the freedom struggle of African-Americans.

The women's movement was deeply influenced by the resurgent African-American struggle for "Freedom Now," which preceded it by about a decade. The term "women's liberation" was itself inspired by demands for "Black liberation." In fact, women were leaders in the fight for civil rights, the anti-war movement, and civil liberties campaigns. I could see that women, as an oppressed sex, were seeking liberation for themselves and for all other victims of oppression.

Previously, Marxists had described women as "doubly-exploited;" of course, for women of color that meant triple exploitation. We stood by that definition but heightened the emphasis on women's oppression. Women, like Blacks, have allies whose help is essential to women's victories.

The SWP, learning from the social movements in the 1970s-80s, emphasized that women in the struggle, whether for Black rights, Chicana or Puerto Rican demands, were also part and parcel of the struggle for socialism. These women were fighting for women's rights in general, but particularly for recognition of their rights as women in their own communities.

Through all this upheaval, members remained under the pressure of sexism in the surrounding society. By the late 1970s, right-wing opposition to women's rights was on the march, blocking ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and carrying out mounting and often violent harassment against women seeking to exercise their right to choice on abortion as well as against the health professionals who assisted them.

Within the party, women now had much higher status and greater scope — although, in my experience, these gains were uneven from one branch to another.

The Impact of Broad Movements

The SWP was reshaped by the rise of a Black movement for social justice, the anti-Vietnam war movement, a mass feminist movement, the mass movement for gay rights, and the international struggle for national self-determination. The party strove to exemplify the political ideas of these movements and translate them into action. The members did this to the best of their abilities.

The SWP led its work in the social movements — whether against the Vietnam war, for Black liberation, against the witch hunts, for civil liberties, in the labor movement, and in the women's liberation movement — seeking solidarity and united actions to educate and gain victories for the working class as a whole. Our participation was crucial in pointing the road forward with slogans — whether it was "Out Now," "Bring the Troops Home," "Our Bodies, Our Lives," "Pro-Choice," "Freedom Now!" and "Self-Determination for Blacks."

We built the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition with other women around a reproductive-rights agenda that called for repealing all legal barriers to abortion and contraception while ending forced sterilization. The first women's liberation teach-ins were led in San Francisco by a team including Dianne Feeley, author of *Why Women Need the Equal Rights Amendment* published by Pathfinder in 1973.

We encouraged sister organizations in the Fourth International, a world organization of revolutionary socialist parties, to build international days of action around the right to abortion expressed through impressive actions in many countries. We were the only socialist group that participated in NOW and encouraged the development of Black and Latina caucuses in that organization to bring issues of concern to women of color.

We were also among the few socialists who campaigned for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and organized not only in the women's movement but also in unions on this issue. We covered the women's movement and its debates in *The Militant* and the party's magazine *International Socialist Review,* and, as well, published many books and pamphlets on this topic. [The SWP's magazine at the time is not related to the *ISR* published more recently under the auspices of the International Socialist Organization — ed.]

We understood, however, that the SWP could not escape the deep prejudices of a racist and patriarchal society. We regarded women's issues from the point of the view not only of the working class but also of oppressed women in society as a whole, stressing that misogyny, super-exploitation, and oppression of women bear down most fiercely on women of color, immigrants, economically deprived and working women, but to an extent they affect women as a whole.

Issues of discrimination and equal opportunity were taken up within the party itself, opening doors for women to develop and display leadership capacities. This was also the case for racialized members. These policies were driven through by a large and growing body of assertive women members. A culture of debate on women's oppression and related issues came to embrace the entire organization.

The SWP Bans Violence Against Women

In 1971, the party declared it would not tolerate violence against women, whatever the circumstances. This was interpreted to encompass domestic conflicts, whether by wife-beating, other forms of direct violence, or intimidation as in throwing furniture and objects at a partner. The rule barred violence between men as well.

We stressed that violence against women is part and parcel of oppression by the sexist ideology derived from the capitalist society. The party codified its opposition to violence by men against women, including wife-beating, in the 1971 SWP resolution, "Toward a Mass Feminist Movement;" in 1977 the SWP reinforced its position: "Violence against Women Is Incompatible with Party Membership.")[24]

How strictly was this non-violence policy enforced? No reports were given, but I know of two cases of expulsions of male members for intimidating conduct, both of whom made political contributions seen as important to the party. However, interviewing female friends who had been in the SWP, I learned of a few violations that were not acted on.

That was also true in my own case. Many years after the period described here, I experienced an instance of attempted sexual assault by a fellow SWP member — the only such incident in my 33 years in the party.

I repelled the attacker and made no report to the party. I felt I had taught the guy a lesson and he was unlikely to try anything like that again. So even though the socialist organizations had a policy of no violence, it was not so easy to enforce. We needed a "Me Too" movement — but that was many years in coming.

Nonetheless, the no-violence code in the party had an impact. The young women leaders who pressed for it were reflecting a new understanding in society as a whole. That is what made this norm effective, although to a limited degree.

We needed to change our attitudes to one another both in the realm of society as a whole and in political and social movements for change. We wanted to display an attitude of respect and appreciation for one another as human beings, and especially as people striving for a socialist world of love and mutual respect.

But physical safety was only a precondition for a woman's socialist activism. We also had to cope with continuing distortions within the party created by the pressure of surrounding male-chauvinist society.

Down with the Patriarchy!

During these years, Evelyn Reed was encouraged to speak, write and educate on a wider scale. Her manuscript *Women's Evolution,* presenting her interpretation of women's role in the origins of humanity, was finally published in book form.[25] I helped organize a tour in which Reed presented her ideas on dozens of universities across the country.

The SWP did not formally adopt Reed's approach to anthropological theory, instead leaving the question open as

an area of discussion. In 1978, the party published an extensive critique of Reed's views by Stephanie Coontz, then a prominent party member and former leader of the national anti-Vietnam-war movement, alongside a full response by Reed (see "Two Views of Women's Evolution" in *The Militant,* February 3, 1978.)

The party did argue for the goal of overthrowing the patriarchy, the system of male supremacy established during the consolidation of private property and class exploitation. Capitalism profits from women's subordination but does not create it.

The SWP proposed socialist revolution as the requirement for women's freedom, but fully overcoming patriarchy — and racism — will require continued efforts in post-capitalist society. We will have to overcome patriarchy even as socialism is being constructed.

The SWP regarded itself as a leading component of the coming revolution, in alliance with the Blacks, unions, and other social mass movements. The party integrated women's liberation into its strategy for revolution with concept of women as an oppressed sex taking part in a combined revolution with oppressed nationalities (African-Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans) and the working class.[26]

Lesbian and Gay Liberation

One aspect of the feminist radicalization had particular resonance for me: the advocacy of human rights and respect for lesbians — that is, for same-sex relationships among women.

In my youth, the broader issue of what we now call LGBTQ rights was entangled with that of McCarthyite repression against suspected Reds. Communism and homosexual relations were treated as related forms of deviltry.

I had encountered anti-Queer extremism as a teenager, when I spent time in a correctional institution in part because my adopted parents suspected me of lesbian involvement. They insisted that homosexuality is "sick and decadent" and "borders on criminality."[27]

After my release from jail in 1958, now living in Los Angeles, I became acquainted with "homosexuals" in Hollywood who explained that the McCarthy witch hunt, although somewhat abated, had not ceased to pursue the LGBTQ community, forcing it into covert existence. U.S. laws banning homosexual relations were not fully repealed until the 1990s.

When I joined the SWP, its members had a variety of personal opinions on same-sex relationships. I heard SWP members reject talk of homosexual "perversion" or "illness," and accept same-sex relations, and I learned that the Russian revolution had abolished anti-gay legislation. Yet there was fear in the party of contact with gays, which was thought likely to attract government harassment and victimization.

Between 1962 and 1970, the leaderships of the YSA and SWP sought to exclude open homosexuals from their ranks. There were also worries in the party apparatus that "hippy" styles would alienate American working-class recruits to the socialist organizations.

After 1970, the party welcomed queers to membership and advocated gay and lesbian rights. It published a pamphlet on the question, *Gay Liberation: A Socialist Perspective*, by Kipp Dawson.[28] The party stopped short, however, of establishing LGBTQ rights as a work area and preserved a conservative stance toward demonstrative cultural displays by its members, whether LGBTQ or not. For writings of critics of the SWP position, see footnote.[29]

4. The SWP Loses Its Way

By 1975 the SWP had about 1500 active members, of whom 40% were women. Toward the end of the decade, the organization began to pull back from its participation in feminist struggles.

Rightist capitalist forces had gained new strength and were driving back the trade unions, Blacks, and women's resistance. The SWP now resolved that the vast majority of its members would seek unionized industrial jobs. In the process, it turned away from united work in broad movements, from whom we had learned so much, and from which we gained our numbers and diversity.

To a certain degree, the party adapted to the inevitable: Black and women's movements were no longer so massive and were more class divided. But the "turn to industry," as we called it, was extreme, misconstrued, and narrow in focus.

We entered the industrial work force as a body, with a limited vision and a focus on selling *The Militant* and books, and recruiting individual workmates. On the whole, we seldom intervened in social campaigns in the unions, which in any case in the 1980s were in retreat — we called it a "rout."

At the same time the democracy of the organization, of which we had been so proud, was deeply compromised. The party's commitment to feminist goals remained on a programmatic level but was no longer connected to living engagement.

To be sure, the onset of neoliberalism in the 1980s created a more challenging political environment, but still, other far-left currents survived and even grew, while the SWP ultimately plummeted to only 5% of its former membership. During this process, women in the party lost ground in terms of their leadership role and integration into feminist advocacy.

In my opinion, this development was speeded by aspects of a political culture, experienced by a wide spectrum of socialist currents, that reinforces patriarchal leadership and obstruct women's involvement and leadership. And here Bakan's discussion, based on her experiences, in a different political current functioning in a different country, is quite suggestive.

Patriarchal Dysfunction

The SWP in decline was now no longer led by a collective team of leaders. Its democratic complexion drained away; it obeyed the directives of a leadership exemplifying in Bakan's words, a "certain type of masculinized personality idealized as a model of stature and authority in activist left circles."

Drawing on a study by Lara Coleman and Serena Bassi,[30] Bakan describes an activist group shaped by "a certain type of masculine performance" by a "Man with Analysis" who projected:

"'Black and white' (sic) reasoning about objective matters, with little room for self-doubt in claims to knowledge, or for reason to be coloured by emotion. Argument was constructed as competition, where one analysis could only be credibly challenged if an alternative Man with Analysis entered the ring. The authors identify how the hegemonic masculinity of the Man with Analysis led to exclusions of other forms of knowledge, including among those with experience in the [field of work], women, and men with alternative masculinities who did not want to compete with the alpha males."

Bakan couples this sketch with a portrait of another type of "masculine performance," that of "Communist Urgent Man," a leader who is perennially impatient:

"This persona often displays little interest in collective process development, where questions or challenges that are not universally obvious could be addressed. Certain discussions are seen to risk wasting precious time, distracting from the task considered by Communist Urgent Man to be particularly pressing. In fact, those who do not share the same singular priority, or affective sense of immediacy in the task, are considered as potentially obstructionist."[31]

Bakan's amusing sketches bear an uncanny resemblance to the mode of leadership that predominated as the SWP fell into decline. The party also came to display an extreme form of small-group socialist sectarianism: denunciation of rival radical currents as reactionaries in service of the class enemy.

Suzanne Weiss speaking at a demonstration in Toronto, 2019.

Over many years, the SWP world socialist vision withered and the party ceased seeking new opportunities, interventions, and activities in the women's and Black struggles. Waiting for a fantasized workers' radicalization, members were imprisoned in a shrinking strait-jacket. In the process, many of the party's feminist gains in previous decades were lost.

The SWP experience lends support to Bakan's suggestion that this type of small-group socialist meltdown may be caused, in part, by uncritical acceptance of patriarchal modes of political leadership.

To counter such dangers, lopsided reliance on theory and analysis in decision-making needs to be balanced by weighing lived experience in social struggles — the field in which women activists tend to predominate.

In reviewing my experience in the SWP and surveying the socialist organizations of today, I agree with Bakan's basic thesis, that today "socialist organizations typically harbour a political culture that obstructs full and equal participation by their women members."

Conclusion

The challenge of women's liberation remains a troubled issue for many socialist groups today, and they often lag behind the spirit of women's radicalism in social movements today. Despite all the progress of recent decades, in my experience, many women continue to be alienated regarding participation in Marxist organizations.

It could be that the political program, affirming the goal of women's liberation, is undercut by the reality of practice, that is, day-to-day political culture. Women, generally, are still slow to intervene in discussions concentrated on Marxist theory and strategy. Yet in some mass movements for social change, women play an equal role among the organizers and spokespersons or — today — even predominate.

Conversations on Marxist strategy and tactics tend to repel women and other disadvantaged social layers when they are not linked to the experience and wisdom gained in social and political movements.

This deficiency is being rectified through the social movements of today, which typically comprehend and combine ambitious goals with bold initiative. We see evidence of this today in the hundreds of thousands who have come out in demonstrations for women's rights, African American and Indigenous freedom, and against racist police brutality.

Such resistance strikes blows against the underlying source of women's oppression, which is capitalism. As the struggle for our rights has shown, women's oppression will be abolished not by women alone but by alliance with every section of the exploited and oppressed, including males who seek to eradicate patriarchy and capitalism, the system that shackles and imprisons us all.

Young women fighters for social justice stand courageously on the shoulders of prior achievements of freedom struggles. They will forge new leaderships that are inclusive regarding gender, race, and nationality. ■

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"Southernism or Socialism — Which?"

White Supremacy & Labor's Failure with Michael Goldfield

CODY R. MELCHER INTERVIEWED Michael Goldfield about why the U.S. South failed to unionize and why this is the crucial to understanding the evolution of American politics. In his new book, The Southern Key: Class, Race, and Radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s *(Oxford University Press, 2020) argues, primarily, that this failure to fully confront white supremacy led to labor's ultimate failure in the South, and that this regional failure has led to the nationwide decline in labor unionism, growing inequality, and the perpetuation of white supremacy.*

Michael Goldfield is a former labor and civil rights activist, Professor Emeritus of political science and a Research Fellow at the Fraser Center for Workplace Issues at Wayne State University. He has written numerous books and articles on labor, race, and the global economy, including The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States, The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics, *and most recently,* The Southern Key.

Cody R. Melcher is a PhD candidate in the sociology department at The Graduate Center, CUNY. He teaches at the City College of New York.

Cody R. Melcher: *During the past few months, Alabama has seen a marked increase in labor militancy. From a Steelworkers strike in Muscle Shoals to a planned union vote among Amazon warehouse workers in Bessemer, this working class activism in a region perceived by many to be intrinsically — some might even say "culturally" — hostile to class solidarity has surprised many on the left. How does your work — particularly* The Southern Key *— inform how we should interpret labor militancy in the South generally and the case of Alabama more specifically?*

Michael Goldfield: In *The Southern Key,* I argue that the South is the key part of the country to organize for social change in general and for building a socialist movement. Working-class people are worse off in many parts of the South than anywhere else in the country; most of the executions (over 80%) since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976 have taken place there.

This lack of respect for human life is perhaps reflected in the low levels of support for those in need, including children's health care, unemployment insurance, workman's compensation, and disability benefits.

Even a relatively affluent southern state like Texas has among the highest percentage of people in the country with no health care insurance.

Mike Goldfield

While the heritage of slavery, as the 1619 Project emphasizes, is certainly central, the defeats of labor and civil rights struggles also play an important role, including the defeat of Reconstruction in the 1870s, the smashing of the southern interracial Populist movement in the 1890s, and the failures of the highly promising interracial labor organizing of the 1930s and 1940s, which my book explores.

So the South remains today the least unionized part of the country, where birtherism (the myth of Barack Obama's birth in Kenya) is most adhered to among whites, where ignorance and superstition, anti-science irrationality (including COVID and global warming denial, rejection of evolutionary biology) are strongest.

I suggest that the low level of unionization and the resulting atomization of the population allows for the greater ability for people to be manipulated in their attitudes by southern elites.

Now, virtually all academics and liberals trace the low level of unionization in the South and the failures of union organizing to cultural attitudes, individualism, religiosity, submissiveness to elites. In *The Southern Key* I question these explanations, and focus on more material causes.

Difficulties in labor organizing have rather been a result of the availability of cheap labor (often from agricultural labor surpluses), the strength of racial oppression, and more violent unified repression at the hands of southern political elites and capitalists, especially when those organizing have been Afro-American or interracial.

Yet contrary to the accounts of most investigators, I trace a rich history of southern labor organizing, sometimes interracial. When given the opportunity, southern workers have been as militant, at times exhibiting strong racial solidarity, as those anywhere.

The Power of Organizing

Alabama was at the center of successful interracial labor organizing in the 1930s and 1940s. Coal miners, half of whom were Black, led the way, joined by tens of thousands of steel workers, iron ore miners, wood workers, textile workers, longshoremen, and countless others.

By 1945 Alabama, with over 200,000 union members, was over 25% organized. To put this in perspective, no U.S. state today has that high a percentage.

The labor movement helped elect in 1946 and 1954 "Big Jim" Folsom as governor, who was well outside the Dixiecrat southern consensus, opposing the poll tax, inviting and shaking hands with Blacks at his rallies, denouncing those in 1954 who opposed the Supreme Court *Brown* decision.

The Nation magazine at the time called Alabama the "most liberal state in the South." This successful interracial organizing suggests what is possible and offers some lessons.

The southern economy and Alabama in particular has changed dramatically since that time. Coal, iron ore mining and textile are gone, as mostly is steel. Alabama today is a center for auto assembly and parts production and has some important warehouse and logistic distribution hubs.

The pandemic has made clear both the centrality of food production and distribution, and e-commerce in general, especially in places like Alabama that have low wages and low levels of worker protection, as well as highlighting how central these things are to society as a whole. These industries are highly profitable, even more so during the pandemic, while becoming more dangerous and stressful, leading to renewed attempts by workers to organize.

This appears to be happening across the country. Now it may be something of

a coincidence, but both Bessemer (where coal and iron ore miners were strongly unionized) and Muscle Shoals where the unionized Tennessee Valley Authority was centered, have a heritage of successful labor struggle. This was long ago, but West Virginia teachers' militancy has seemed to explicitly draw on the historic solidarity of coal miners there from many decades ago.

So I wish to suggest that in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as today, it was not culture which held workers back in the South. When conditions worsened and opportunity presented themselves, workers then and now organize.

CRM: *Highly-skilled engineers at Google recently announced the formation of a union. These workers, it seems, have extraordinary leverage, or structural power, as you put it. Can you explain what structural power is and why it is important for successfully organizing workers?*

MG: Workers in capitalist societies have varying amounts and types of leverage. One kind of leverage that I discuss in *The Southern Key* is structural power, based on workers' relation to the economy.

There are several types of structural power. One is their position in the labor market. How easily can they be replaced? Certain highly skilled workers are difficult to replace at any time. This is true of skilled electricians and plumbers on construction projects, but also all-star home-run hitters and pro-bowl quarterbacks.

This is the type of leverage to a certain extent that high-end engineers and software employees have at Google. Yet even workers with lower-level skills may be difficult to replace when they stick together in full solidarity. When President Richard Nixon attempted to replace striking New York City postal workers in 1970 with National Guard troops, and no workers crossed the picket lines, the ineffectiveness of the Guard in handling the mail forced Nixon to capitulate.

The skills of coal miners are also difficult to replace, except by other miners. When coal miners struck during World War II, they declared correctly that one could not mine coal with bayonets.

These examples indicate the necessity for the broadest type of solidarity. Thus, it is a good sign that the highly skilled permanent workers at Google are organizing alongside less secure contract workers and others with more easily replaceable skills.

The even more important type of structural power is workplace bargaining power based on the location that workers, when fully organized, have in the economic system. Certain groups of workers have the ability when they stop work to cause their employers or even the whole society a great deal of grief.

Highly unionized manufacturing workers often have the ability to shut down a whole employer or even a whole industry, something that the Google workers are not yet able to do. Workers at Boeing in Seattle have had this type of leverage, giving them the ability to postpone the delivery of the latest aircraft, which is why Boeing developed a nonunion backup facility in South Carolina.

Then there is the even higher degree of workplace bargaining power whose strikes can threaten to bring the whole economy to a halt. Railroad workers in the 19th century occasionally exercised this power, also coal miners in the 1930s and 1940s. Truck drivers and airline employees today have this power, but have never used it.

At the other end of the spectrum are university professors who — though they may have irreplaceable skills — have very little workplace structural power. When they go on strike (on the off-chance they all stick together), they might shut a university down, but the main people they inconvenience at least in the short term are their students, who are not themselves the most powerful economic actors.

Legislation and Militancy

CRM: *A major debate among academics — from political scientists to lawyers to labor historians and among the left more broadly — has centered on the role of legislation and worker militancy. The standard story, especially popular among liberals, is that pro-working class policies always precede upsurges in working class militancy, not the other way around.*

Your work since the late 1980s has sought to reject this standard account. Since this debate has become increasingly relevant to political activism on the left — whether the left should pursue pro-working class policies through the state to awaken an inert working class, or engage more directly in the class struggle — could you explain your position and discuss its contemporary relevance?

MG: This is an extremely important issue for us today, not merely of historical interest. The question really involves how working-class movements grow, and where activists should be putting their energies to facilitate and support these movements.

Most liberals, including the leaders of the labor movement, believe that what holds back unions are the unfavorable laws. If one could only elect more union-friendly Democrats, pass more favorable laws (like card check, and increased penalties on employers who violate labor laws), then union decline could be turned around, and the working-class movement would grow substantially.

In order to support this argument, these leaders and liberal academics completely distort the historical record. First, it is clear that the biggest increases in union membership and strikes have not happened incrementally, but in enormous, often unforeseen upsurges.

For example, such upsurges happened during World War I and its aftermath, with virtually no enabling legislation. The upsurge in public sector union growth, involving many millions of government workers in the 1960s and 1970s, took place *before* public sector bargaining laws were passed, as I have tried to document in the past.

I argue that these laws were a consequence of enormous union growth and strikes, especially by public school teachers, led by the successful 1960-1961 New York City strike of 50,000 teachers. At the time New York State had perhaps the most draconian anti-public sector bargaining law in the country, the Condon-Wadlin Act, which not only failed to stop the teachers' strike, but which politicians were afraid to invoke, given the unanimity of the teachers.

A virtually unanimous academic literature (despite some erroneous recent claims that my argument here is not new) states that the early upsurge in the 1930s, especially that of the coal miners was caused by the inclusion of the symbolic pro-union section 7(a) in the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act.

I show in *The Southern Key,* based on archival evidence, that coal miners were effectively organized on the basis of a massive upsurge *before* the legislation was passed.

It is largely ideological blindspots that have led to the opposite interpretation, i.e. liberal, reformist, "fake news" so to speak, on how change actually takes place. I make a similar argument with respect to the 1935 Wagner Act (which only became effective after the Flint strike, when the law was then upheld by the Supreme Court in 1937).

The historical lessons are simple. Unions today abandon organizing and put huge amounts of energy and resources into electing Democrats, in what has proven to be the futile attempt to gain more favorable labor laws.

Many who call themselves Socialists do the same. I would argue that these energies, especially ours, should be put into organizing and supporting labor struggles, especially those in the South.

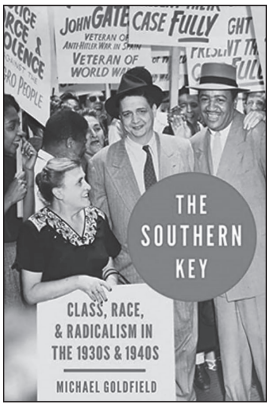
Why No U.S. Socialism?

CRM: *Black socialist and "Father of Harlem Radicalism," Hubert H. Harrison, often wrote that the United States had two choices: "Southernism or Socialism — which?" Can you explain how the labor movement has confronted this question, both practically and theoretically, since the 1930s?*

MG: Since the beginning of the Republic, the southern ruling classes have been a bastion for supporting racial oppression (white supremacy), promoting racist ideology

(white chauvinism), and anti-labor activities.

Southern states are the major site of the anti-union so-called right-to-work laws. They have been successful to varying degrees of promoting and supporting these activities to those in the South and in the rest of the country.



As W.E.B. Du Bois argued, the real answer to why there is no socialism in the United States (by which he meant no mass socialist, social democratic, labor, or communist party) boils down to why there is no liberalism in the South. So in order to build a mass socialist movement in the country, we must win workers (and radicals), especially white workers, to anti-racist, solidaristic goals.

This struggle of course needs to be nationwide, but it is most important in the South, which remains the bedrock of these values. So Harrison was right, the choice is between socialism or the values of the old South, something the Trump supporters see clearly, while taking the opposite side.

Workers and radicals have a choice today, as they did in the 1930s and 1940s. When conditions get bad — living standards, income inequality and racial oppression were bad enough before, now accentuated by the pandemic — workers, especially white (and male) workers have a choice to make.

Do they band together in solidarity, fighting for common goals, but also against the special forms of oppression faced by Blacks, other non-whites, women, immigrants, LBGQTs? Or do they turn to narrowly racist, male supremacist, anti-immigrant approaches, which seem less risky, and which employers are often happy to oblige?

Certain unions and left groups in the 1930s and 1940s took the path of solidarity and were at times successful, as I try to document in *The Southern Key*. Communists were very often aggressive at taking this approach, but so were coal miners at times, who were not left-led.

Many times the battles for solidarity were hard-fought, and the ability to convince or at times restrain or isolate racist white workers, especially in the South, but also in the North (where even the auto workers in Detroit saw their share of hate strikes during World War II) were not necessarily easy.

The importance of leadership was often crucial. The CP-led Farm Equipment Workers union had many majority white, civil rights oriented locals, including at the Louisville International Harvester plant. The Packinghouse (UPWA) workers in Fort Worth, Texas, fought a long struggle against the Armour company to integrate their facilities, battling and eventually isolating the racist forces in the local.

The UPWA, in its attempt to launch a national anti-lynching campaign, not only supported Emmett Till's family in 1955 in Chicago, but was the only union to send a delegation to the trial of his lynchers in Mississippi, the group of eight being interracial, southern, and gender mixed.

Yet many mainstream union leaders in the CIO either capitulated to racism in their unions, or worse, as I argue were the leading enabling forces, including Philip Murray of the Steelworkers, head of the CIO, and Walter Reuther, president of the auto workers. I have attempted to document these things carefully, since they go against the still standard interpretations that leaders like Murray and Reuther were pro-civil rights liberals who were hamstrung by the rank-and-file.

So this is a battle to be waged, not only for the hearts and minds of workers but against mainstream union leaders, and even many of those on the left, who would capitulate to racist forces.

Looking Forward

CRM: *In much of your work, you emphasize the catalyzing role of radicals in the labor movement and the fight against white supremacy. What lessons do the successes and failures of the left, especially that of the Communist Party, in the 1930s and 1940s hold for the current generation?*

MG: I spend a good bit of time in *The Southern Key* examining the role that various left groupings played in building solidarity, in particular the activities of the Communist Party, who were at times the most aggressive at pushing these issues. At other times, especially during the Popular Front period (roughly 1935-1939, 1941-1945), they often undermined this stance because of their desire to maintain alliances with Democrats or class collaborationist union officials, even capitulating to them on racial issues.

In particular, during this period, they apologized for President Roosevelt's unwillingness to support anti-lynching legislation, and gave unrestrained praise to Murray as he was consolidating a white racist union regime.

I also look to a lesser extent at these issues surrounding the Musteites and various Trotskyist groups, including the SWP and the Workers Party. So we need to learn from the best of these struggles, what radicals did right, and avoid the pitfalls that were faced ineffectively.

CRM: *How might the left and the labor movement of today rekindle the militancy of the 1930s and '40s?*

MG: The enormous amount of energy spent by both the labor movement and many who consider themselves socialists to elect more liberal Democrats is, in my opinion, completely wasted, and could better have been spent elsewhere.

This is not simply a question of being anti-electoral, which I am not. Even Lenin's Bolsheviks had elected representatives in the Tsar's Duma. Yet the goal of Socialists, certainly revolutionary socialists, has never been that winning elections was the key to substantial change.

As the pre-World War I German Social Democratic leader Karl Liebknecht argued, his role was to talk *auf dem Fenster* (out the window) using his elected position in the Reichstag as a megaphone to talk to the working class. Reforms in general, then and today, are a byproduct of struggle, not of parliamentary maneuvering.

So I would agree with the liberal iconoclast writer Gore Vidal, who said that America has one party, the party of business, and "it has two right wings." Those of us who call ourselves socialists have no business, as the great Socialist leader Eugene Debs taught us long ago, in supporting either of the two capitalist parties.

Those who are ready and able should be at the workplace helping organize workers to build unions, to develop solidarity and lead struggles, something I attempted to do for a good while in my younger days. Others of us should be spending our time building support, financially, with our bodies, publicizing, etc. those struggles taking place that we can aid.

In talking earlier about leverage that workers have, I want to mention what I call in the book associational power, outside support from other unions, community groups, political organizations, many different groups.

This type of support can give a dramatic boost to any labor struggles. It was central in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly prominent in the 1934 left-led strikes where unemployed and community groups played such a decisive role.

It was true in many other organizing campaigns of the 1930s, especially in auto, here in Detroit where I am, where the left-wing National Negro Congress played an important role in mobilizing support for the 1941 Ford organizing campaign.

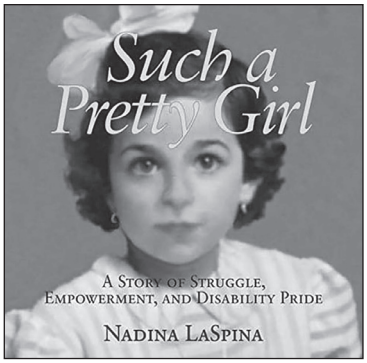
So there is a role for all of us to play. I thought it was striking how little attention was paid to these issues, even by the Bernie Sanders campaign which claimed to be interested in unions and working-class issues. Nevertheless, this is where, I believe, our energies can most fruitfully be spent. ■

REVIEW

A First-Generation Disability Story

By Brenda Y. Rodriquez

Such a Pretty Girl
A Story of Struggle, Empowerment, and Disability Pride
By Nadina LaSpina
New Village Press, 2019, 338 pages, $19.97 paper.



SUCH A PRETTY Girl, Nadina LaSpina's memoir describes the life of a girl brought to the United States from Italy by her religiously and culturally Catholic Italian parents in the hope of finding a cure for her polio. If she could have surgery that would enable her to walk, they felt she could live "a normal life."

As a child growing up in her Sicilian hometown Riposito, she also understood that neighbor women viewed her mother as a "sorrowful woman," burdened by having a child who could not walk. With her mother carrying her everywhere, she too accepted their negative view.

While her family was able to fulfill their dream of migrating and getting her to the Hospital for Special Surgery, LaSpina began a journey toward an independent life quite different from her parents' expectations.

Much of the memoir recounts decisions she makes that her parents find difficult to understand. Although she develops confidence, lives independently and teaches Italian and French at the university level, she eventually realizes she is unable to fulfill her father's dream of being able to walk. Even with the aid of crutches, she was continually falling and breaking her legs.

She came to the decision to have her legs amputated and be fitted with prosthetic legs. After all that her parents had done for her, she wondered how could she let them down. Her mother explained that it is particularly difficult for her father, "because of experiences he had in the war, seeing soldiers with their legs blown off…."

Brenda Y. Rodriquez is a San Diego native with Mexican roots. After living in Detroit, Michigan for four years, she now lives in the predominantly Mexican neighborhood of San Jose where she has become involved within the community where she lives via MAiZ. She remains an advocate for disability rights through her involvement with the Michigan Disability Rights Coalition as a bilingual woman with disabilities.

In both Sicily and the United States doctors had focused on healing her legs with unworkable treatments. She was determined put that dream behind her, along with its pain and suffering. With this decision she embraced her disability as her identity; she saw herself most at home within the disability community.

Yet it was also an identity of fierce independence. When a fellow teacher fell in love with her, she eventually rejected him because he wanted to take care of her in a way that seemed abusive. She was capable to taking care of herself — and instead she found a life partner within the disability community.

Sometimes it is difficult for a person to understand decisions another might make, particularly around how to measure "quality of life." LaSpina mentions that her partner was asked, by a hospital social worker, if he would want to be resuscitated if his heart stopped during surgery. When he said he'd want to live no matter the limitations, the social worker seemed surprised. LaSpina notes that "ableism" is one of the norms capitalism imposes.

At a Disability Independence Day rally, in her speech LaSpina explained what demonstrators meant when they shouted "We Shall Overcome:"

"We just want to make sure everyone understands that, when we sing 'We Shall Overcome,' we are not saying: we shall overcome our disabilities. For too long, we were made to believe that we had to get over all the obstacles that were put in our way with our willpower. If we couldn't be cured, we had to make our disabilities as inconsequential as possible in order to fit in. That was called 'overcoming.' No more of that! We do not overcome our disabilities, we just live with them. Some of us not only accept our disabilities but we embrace them, because we know, even if they cause us pain, our disabilities are a very important part of who we are. We are no longer willing to minimize, camouflage, suppress that important part of ourselves..." (253-4)

Founding Disability Studies

Nadina savors the identity of an individual with disabilities with pride. From the beginning of her successful teaching career, she noticed how students saw her as different because of her disability. By 1996 she decided to approach Sondra Farganis, head of the Social Sciences Department at the New School, at a faculty party with her idea:

"Disability studies examines and theorizes the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that define disability. It is comparable to women studies. I'd read her book Situating Feminism *and made a reference to it. She sipped her wine and nodded. 'Write me up a course proposal.'*

"I couldn't believe my ears. I was thrilled to be given the opportunity, but also to have found someone who seemed to 'get it.' More than once at the New School I'd been bitterly disillusioned when a colleague I admired showed little understanding of disability. The most enlightened seemed to think it all boiled down to the need for accessibility." (280)

As she developed her classes she shared her life experiences through the courses she taught under the disability studies discipline. These courses made her feel exposed, unlike when she was the "Italian teacher." Language and its grammar are very different from disability studies in its discussions of ableism and identity.

The author explains how she went from teaching in the Languages and Social Sciences departments to devoting herself to teaching courses on disability studies (both in-person and online) in the Social Science department. This was the moment when her life seemed revolved around disability activism as she assumed leadership roles along with her partner. She had not realized what a strong advocate she could be and was amazed to see how it had become her focus!

As a first-generation American with physical limitations, I found in reading *Such a Pretty Girl* that it was not only a very familiar story, but a memoir projecting possibilities. Similar to Nadina's parents' hopes, mine have always been hopeful that I could achieve full hearing and perfect vision. I enjoyed learning about her determination and resistance to the ability quo and see her as a role model. ■

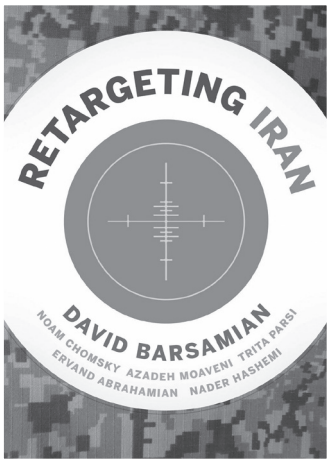
REVIEW

In the Imperial Crosshairs

By David Finkel

Retargeting Iran

By David Barsamian with Trita Parsi, Ervand Abrahamian, Noam Chomsky, Azadeh Moaveni and Nader Hashemi
San Francisco: City Lights Books/Open Media Series, 2020, 184 pages, $14.95 paperback.



"AMERICA IS BACK," proclaimed Joe Biden in his first presidential foreign policy address. It never actually left, of course; the imperial ambition to rule the world is a constant. But among the many challenges the Biden/Harris administration faces — as it seeks to restore stability and predictability to foreign policy — is what to do with the regional political, military and humanitarian mess that team Trump has created around Iran and its neighbors. The disaster includes the continuation of a war in Yemen that has virtually destroyed that country.

The multilateral Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, known as the Iran nuclear deal), from its inception in 2015 until Trump's withdrawal in 2018, successfully constrained Iran's nuclear development program and promised lifting of crippling economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic — promises that were never really fulfilled. At the present moment, Biden is making the first exploratory attempt to restore it, but refusing to lift the sanctions that make life in Iran close to unbearable.

"It's ironic," says Noam Chomsky, "that when Iran was a loyal client state under the shah in the 1970s, the shah and other high Iranian officials made it very clear that they were working to develop nuclear weapon. [Henry Kissinger when later asked] said, very simply, 'They were an ally then.'" (75)

As one participant in David Barsamian's new collection of interviews acidly observes, it's doubtful that Trump could have located Iran on a map. But Trump's trashing the JCPOA and imposing "maximum pressure" with devastating effects on Iran's economy and population appealed to the hardline militarist, rightwing evangelical and militant Zionist components of his political support.

"In addition, a big part of Trump's opposition to the Iran nuclear deal is simply that it has Barack Obama's name on it," suggests Nader Hashemi. (158) The effects have been appalling for the Iranian population, while also seriously damaging U.S. global standing among its imperialist allies.

Trump himself never wanted a real U.S.-Iran war — unlike Israel's prime minister Netanyahu and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who didn't want to attack Iran themselves but hoped the United States would do so.

In fact, a series of provocations and counter-provocations ensued with U.S. and Iranian drones shot down, and a serious Iranian-backed attack on Saudi oil facilities.

These culminated with the U.S. assassination of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani at Baghdad's international airport, followed by Iran-backed militia rocket attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq, causing no confirmed deaths but multiple serious brain injuries. And then the catastrophic, apparently accidental shootdown by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps of a Ukrainian civilian airliner taking off at Tehran.

At one point, a U.S. air strike against Iran was called off by Trump shortly before the planes were to reach their target. The possibility of a regional war jumping off by accident or miscalculation was not trivial. "In my view," says Hashemi, "had American troops been killed [in the retaliatory attack following the Soleimani assassination], Trump would have likely retaliated against Iran, and there goes the Middle East." (182)

That many of these events barely remain in our memory attests to the chaotic state of current realities, where one week's disaster is superseded by the next — and how easy it is to forget the sheer human damage that U.S. "foreign policy" inflic**ts.**

Understanding the Crisis

In *Retargeting Iran,* a followup to his earlier collection *Targeting Iran* (2007), the prolific interviewer and Alternative Radio host David Barsamian presents a set of conversations that put the present situation in context. The discussions and the book's publication preceded the U.S. election, but they greatly help us understand how we got here.

Trita Parsi is co-founder of the National Iranian American Council and author of the definitive work on the JCPOA, *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy.* Ervand Abrahamian, professor emeritus of Iranian and Middle Eastern history and politics at Baruch College, City University of New York, is author among other works of *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S. –Iranian Relations*.

Noam Chomsky, of course, hardly needs an introduction. He's been interviewed by Barsamian on numerous occasions and topics. Azadeh Moaveni, now Senior Gender Analyst at the International Crisis Group, is a veteran journalist, expert on social justice struggles in Iran and co-author with feminist activist Shirin Ebadi of *Iran Awakening*. Nader Hashemi is Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, and author or co-editor of several books including *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East.*

I cite these credentials in order to make the point that these expert observers are hardly obscure or difficult to find. Yet with rare exceptions they are hardly if ever seen on mainstream U.S. media, including the liberal cable CNN and MSNBC channels with their endless hours of coverage of Trump's antics, Ted Cruz's aborted Cancun vacation, or the latest pseudo-events in the life of the British royal family.

Is their absence perhaps because they're partisans or apologists for the Iranian clerical dictatorship and its brutal human rights record? Not at all.

I'd particularly recommend Nader Hashemi's review of the popular democratic movements in recent Iranian history — the Green Movement following the 2009 rigged election, the hopeful 2013-15 period with the election of Hassan Rouhani and negotiations leading to the JCPOA, and the protests of 2017-2019 of the poor and unemployed against rampant corruption and disastrous economic conditions. As to the brutality of repression, Hashemi notes, "When it comes to regime survival, the Islamic Republic observes very few moral limits." (166)

Equally notable is Azadeh Moaveni's careful discussion of both advances as well as setbacks for women since the 1979 revolution in areas of education and employment, health and divorce, going beneath the sur-

continued on page 42

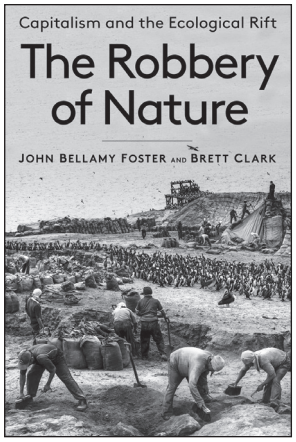
David Finkel is an editor of ATC *and member of Jewish Voice for Peace in Detroit.*

REVIEW

The Deadly Metabolic Rift

By Tony Smith

The Robbery of Nature:
Capitalism and the Ecological Rift
By John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark
New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020,
384 pages, $23 paperback.



VARIOUS CRITICAL ISSUES are examined in this collection of previously published essays, revised for this book. It won the 2020 Deutscher Memorial Prize.

Monthly Review editor and University of Oregon professor of sociology John Bellamy Foster has written several books and numerous articles, beginning with *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (2000), exploring the relevance of classical Marxist thought to grasping today's existential environmental crises. Co-author Brett Clark is professor of sociology and sustainability studies at the University of Utah.

A small subset of the authors' main claims will be highlighted here.

(1) There is indeed "an existential crisis in the human relation to the earth." (1) Over the last 10,000 years planetary conditions fluctuated within relatively narrow and stable boundaries. The entire history of settled human civilizations has unfolded in this "Holocene" period of our planet's life.

This period has now concluded. In a number of areas crucially important to humanity, these boundaries have been (or are about to be) transgressed: climate change, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, global freshwater use, changes in land use, biodiversity loss, atmospheric aerosol loading, and chemical pollution. (244)

Human activity is the main causal factor explaining this development, leading earth scientists to refer to the new period as the *"Anthropocene."*

The authors of an important study cited by Foster and Clark warn that if the upper-range of projections of global warming were to occur it *"would severely challenge the viability of contemporary human societies."*[1] When we recall how little has been done to prevent increased global warming, and how y-it is only one of the numerous planetary transformations imposing comparable risks on human societies, talk of an "existential threat" is fully warranted.

(2) There is no "technological fix" for this existential crisis. The more intelligent representatives of capital do not deny that serious environmental challenges must be faced. For them, however, this is best done by working with capitalist markets and not against them.

A carbon tax on polluting firms would give companies a strong market incentive to lower their costs by using technologies requiring fewer carbon emissions. Having to purchase rights to release carbon into the atmosphere in carbon markets would supposedly have the same effect, in their view.

There are also calls for the state to support firms undertaking massive geoengineering projects, such as sending aerosols into the upper atmosphere to reflect away the sun's rays before they increase the planet's surface temperature. Another proposal is to install technologies capable of extracting and sequestering significant amounts of carbon from the atmosphere.

As Foster and Clark remind us, technological change in capitalism tends to develop "greener" technologies without any special spur. Over the course of the industrial revolution, for example, each succeeding generation of steam engines became "greener" over time, burning less coal per unit of output than the one before. The total amount of coal burned in England increased nonetheless. (245)

This "Jevons paradox" (named after the British political economist who first brought it to attention) is easily explained: the increase in the number of units produced overwhelmed the reduction of coal use per unit, leading to *more* coal being burned overall.

Is there any reason to think that introducing technologies "greener" than those employed today won't have a similarly paradoxical result? Investors in the stock market, whose pricing of oil companies' stocks assumes that the last drop of oil in the ground will be profitably extracted, do not seem to think so. (243-4)

Engineering Disaster

Regarding geoengineering projects, Foster and Clark repeat the warning of many scientists that such unprecedented technological experiments would almost surely have pernicious consequences as harmful as the harms they are supposed to alleviate. (278)

Further, their massive scale would leave few resources for other social needs. An infrastructure capable of handling annual throughput 70 percent larger than that handled currently by the global crude oil industry would be required, along with ridiculous quantities of water — 130 billion tons annually just to capture and store U.S. emissions. (280)

Far from being a step towards socialism (as some techno-utopians of the left hold), government funded geoengineering would simply solidify an environmental industrial complex alongside the military industrial complex, the pharmaceutical industrial complex, and other complexes of big capital. (281-2)

Finally, once again, climate change is only one way in which present environmental trends will soon *"severely challenge the viability of contemporary human societies."* In all the other cases too the sorts of technologies that have been developed, and the ways they have been used, have been part of the story of how we got to the present "existential crisis."

Unless we figure out why that has been the case and eliminate that reason, to think we will be saved by technologies is to indulge in fantasy.

(3) Capitalism is the fundamental cause of the existential crisis in the relation between humans and the earth. All living beings appropriate resources from their environment and all generate wastes back into their surroundings. For a species to successfully occupy an environmental niche, the rate at which it depletes resources from its ecosystem must correspond to the rate they are replenished, and the rate it generates wastes must be aligned with the rate wastes can be processed.

When the social forms of capitalism are in place, neither condition is met, creating the metabolic rift between human society and its environment.

Tony Smith is professor of philosophy and political science, Iowa State University (emeritus). His books include Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism: Marx and Normative Social Theory in the Twenty-First Century *(2017).*

Capitalist market societies are distinguished from other societies in that products generally take the form of commodities sold for a profit. Any capitalist producers who do not attempt to make as much profit as possible, as fast as possible, will find themselves losing market share to those who do, if not forced out of existence altogether.

Making as much profit as possible, as fast as possible, generally means producing and selling as many commodities as possible, as fast as possible. This accelerated temporality is in tension with the temporality of our environment; resources tend to be depleted at a faster rate than they can be replenished, and wastes generated at a faster rate than they can be processed.

From this standpoint the "Jevons Paradox" is less a paradox than a general description of how capitalism works. Any environmental benefits from technologies using fewer natural resources or generating fewer wastes per unit of production necessarily tends to be overwhelmed by the increase in the number of commodities produced in response to the "Grow or die!" imperative so ruthlessly imposed by the demands of capital accumulation.

From Local to Global Destruction

In the early phases of capitalist development, environmental destruction was relatively localized. After a handful of centuries of global expansion, it has sucked in resources from the natural world and spewed out wastes on a global scale, creating a fundamental rift in the metabolic relationship between human beings and the earth that is our home.

The term *Anthropocene* might be taken to misleadingly suggest that humanity in general has pushed conditions beyond previous planetary boundaries. This is not the case. The historically specific society subjected to capital's profit imperative bears primary responsibility.

As Foster and Clark write: "Driven to transcend its external and natural conditions of production, and treating them not as boundaries but as barriers to overcome, capital constantly seeks to expropriate what it can from its natural and social environment while also externalizing its costs onto realms outside its inner circuit of value." (90)

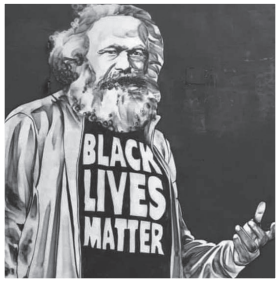
And within global capitalism, some regions have played a far more pernicious role than others, benefiting from what Foster and Clark rightly refer to as "a historic system of ecological robbery":

"The very size of the ecological footprint of a rich economy such as the United States is an indication of its heavy reliance on unequal ecological exchange, extracting resources from the rest of the globe, particularly underdeveloped countries, in order to enhance its own growth and power." (258-59)

(4) The metabolic rift between capitalist society and its natural environment is only one of many ways human flourishing is undermined by the reign of capital. From the standpoint of capital and its representatives, nature is a source of "free gifts" — resources to plunder, sites for dumping wastes. (26, 91, 200)

Foster and Clark's essays offer a comprehensive overview of other forms of plundering and dumping that have also been — and also continue to be — essential to capitalism's functioning.

One obvious example was the seizing of lands and peoples. Following the English conquest of Ireland, aristocrats expropriated the best agricultural lands, lending it to Irish tenants at exorbitant rents ("rack rent") that could only be paid by selling their crops to England.



Capitalist development in England was spurred by the income extracted by English landlords and the cheap food for English workers. When the potato famine hit, rents and crops continued to flow to England as impoverished Irish farmers starved. (72)

In the so-called "New World" Indigenous communities, overwhelmed by violence and disease, had their land transformed into vast colonial plantations, farmed by slave labor forcibly transported across the Atlantic. (25)

In the name of racist and other supremist ideologies, the colonized and enslaved were simply resources to be plundered. They may not have prospered, but capitalism did: "These expropriations enabled the launching of the Industrial Revolution and the growth of both the United Kingdom and the United States as hegemonic economic powerhouses." (49)

A parallel dynamic accompanies capital's relationship to households. The wage laborers upon whom capital depends are not produced by capitalist firms. They are raised and nurtured by unpaid care labor in households, most often provided by women. Capital treats this labor as yet another "free gift," heedless of the constraints to human flourishing imposed by this gendered social division of labor.

At first glance, capital's relation to wage laborers appears quite different from its relationship to colonized indigenous communities, enslaved populations, or those undertaking unpaid care labor. In this case, after all, isn't there an equivalent exchange of wages for work?

But as Foster and Clark (following Marx) explain, wage laborers would not be hired by capitalist enterprises unless their efforts were foreseen to create economic value exceeding what they receive back in the form of wages.

Workers are forced to accept this arrangement because the goods and services they and their dependents require, as well as the means of production to produce those goods and services, generally take the form of commodities owned by others.

To obtain what they and their dependents need, money is required, and for most people, selling their labor power for a wage is the only feasible option. What on the surface seems a free agreement to exchange things of equivalent value is on a deeper examination a coerced exploiting of workers. (40)

The surplus labor producing profits is yet another "free gift" to capital. Here too what would be good for human beings is systematically sacrificed for the sake of what is good for capital:

"The exploitation at the heart of the system, whereby surplus value is extracted from labor (variable capital), can ultimately proceed only through the destruction of the life and body of the laborer."

Marx in Our Time

(5) The work of Karl Marx remains an indispensable aid to comprehending our social world. Many progressive theorists and activists today consider Marx an outmoded 19th century thinker. Prominent ecosocialists have complained of Marx's alleged anthropocentrism, supposedly manifested in a worldview seeing nature as there for us to dominate, and in a labor theory of value ignoring the economic contribution of natural forces.

Numerous feminists have made an analogous complaint, arguing that Marx's focus on wage labor led him to downplay the central role of non-waged domestic labor in social reproduction.

As Foster and Clark point out, it is simply incorrect to assert that Marx held an instrumentalist view of nature as there for humans to dominate. Far too many texts from throughout his life unequivocally reject that view. (204 ff.)

As for the "anthropocentrism" critique, it is true that Marx did not see human beings as just another part of nature. He would never have agreed with those contemporary ecosocialists who insist that humans are so inseparably united with the natural world that any talk of a tension between the two is nonsense.

But neither did Marx regard nature as irredeemably "other." As Foster and Clark rightly insist, here, as elsewhere, Marx thought dialectically, rejecting both monism (human life is simply "inside" nature) and dualism (nature is "outside" us, there to be used). He believed both that human beings are as much part of nature as any other ani-

mal, and that natural and social evolution has produced beings with the power to create a metabolic rift between their society and the natural world that envelops it. (203)

Regarding the labor theory of value, Foster and Clark rightly insist that Marx's value theory is not a theory of the physical process whereby inputs are transformed into outputs, as it was for classical political economists. For Marx, value theory is a social theory constructed to comprehend the historical specificity of capitalism.

In stark contrast to other modes of production, capitalist production is undertaken privately by producers who do not coordinate their activities with either other producers or the users of their products.

Privately undertaken labor hired by capitalist units of production must then be validated to some degree or other as (indirect) social labor though sale. When this occurs the product acquires the "purely social" property, value (226), and the labor hired by capital to produce the product is retroactively confirmed to have simultaneously produced value to some degree or other.

Even if it were possible to reduce concrete laboring to abstract physiological units of physical and mental exertion, comparable to the units of energy of natural processes, the result would not be the abstract labor that produces value, since those units of energy could well have been socially wasted wholly or in part. As Foster and Clark note, "The economic relations of society can no more be explained by energetics than they can be explained by 'selfish genes.' Both are forms of reductionism that neglect the distinctive nature of historical reality." (228)

Wage Labor and Value

Marx develops a labor theory of value in Volume I of *Capital* not because the labor of human beings is the only important force in the transformation of inputs into outputs. Nor did he focus on wage labor because he denied (or simply did not see) the incalculable importance of unpaid care labor in social reproduction. "For Marx, there is no doubt that non-commodity-producing labor (contrary to capital's own accounting) is also social labor." (93)

Marx stresses wage labor because his theoretical goal in *Capital* was to understand what capital is, and capital is defined first and foremost by an endless drive to "valorize" the monetary value initially invested in production (M) by transforming it into a greater monetary return (M').

Wage laborers hired by units of capital are "internal" to this process. M must be invested in the purchase of their labor power, and for a monetary return to be appropriated, the production privately undertaken by wage laborers must be socially validated as (indirect) social labor through sale.[2]

When validation occurs the social relationship between capital and wage labor takes the alien form of a property of a thing, the value of a commodity. When this value exceeds the monetary value initially invested, it represents in alien form the social relationship between a class that undertook surplus labor and another that profited from it.

By definition, "free gifts" to capital like the forces of nature, unpaid care labor and so on, do not have a monetary value requiring monetary investment by capital. By definition, then, they are not "internal" to capital's valorization process. But that is precisely why Marx "distinguished between real wealth consisting of use-values, representing what he called the 'natural form' within production, and value/exchange value, that is, the 'value form' associated with specifically capitalist production." (220)

This distinction between value and wealth is not an arbitrary feature of Marx's thought; capital is essentially defined by both the accumulation of monetary value and the systematic neglect of wealth.

This may be irrational, since valorization depends on the "free gifts" from nature and care labor expropriated without having to invest monetary value in their purchase. But the irrationality is capital's, and not Marx's:

"Capitalism's failure to incorporate nature into its value accounting, and its tendency to confuse value with wealth, [are] fundamental contradictions of the regime of capital itself.*" (163)*

Foster and Clark are well aware that immensely important matters regarding the environment and domestic labor were not examined adequately (or at all) in Marx's writings. Their essays cite a vast range of works by contemporary ecosocialists and feminists that go beyond what we find in Marx.

Yet credit must be given where credit is due. Marx's theory goes beyond the theory of exploitation found in the first volume of *Capital.* It was Marx who first worked out an explicit theory of the metabolic rift between society and the environment, rooted in capital's limitless drive to accumulate.

Marx also explicitly acknowledged how that same drive puts relentless pressure on households, leaving them bereft of the time, energy, and material resources required for properly nurturing the next generation of human beings.

In this context we also need to recall that the three volumes of *Capital* are only the first part of Marx's projected system. His project included a *Book on Wage Labor* that surely would have examined the role of households and care labor in capitalism, had it been completed. (89)

(6) A Marxian theoretical framework is indispensable for comprehending historical developments in recent centuries.

Pointing Toward Ecosocialism

Foster and Clark discern a general pattern in the historical development of capitalist societies: capital, defined by its relentless drive to accumulate, will push any given form of exploitation or expropriation to its limits, forcing a transition to new structures and practices enabling renewed exploitation and expropriation. They in turn will then be pushed to their limits.

The history of capitalist agriculture is one illustration of this pattern discussed at length in the book. As agrarian capitalism was introduced in England and Ireland, its first colony, agricultural production intensified, greatly profiting English landowners. Capitalist development in England benefited as well from the populace in England's industrializing cities being cheaply fed.

The more production intensified, however, the more the soil became depleted of essential nutrients, reducing yields. When disease struck potatoes, the food source workers in both Ireland and England depended upon, Ireland suffered horrific famine, food costs increased in England, and profits were threatened by prospect of wage increases to cover the higher costs.

In response to these limits the Corn Laws, imposing tariffs on agricultural imports to England, were removed. Industrial workers in England were now fed in part by imports from grain producers in the United States and continental Europe, dispersing the environmental harms of capitalist agriculture ["In effect, a large part of the British metabolic rift was transferred abroad." (118)]

Massive quantities of guano imported from Peru provided fertilizer to compensate for lost nutrients on British farms — 12.7 million tons were exported from Peru between 1840 and 1879! (16) More macabre yet, catacombs and battlefields were harvested for human bones for use as fertilizer in England.

Many agricultural estates in Ireland and England, unable to compete with imports from more efficient crop producers, shifted to raising livestock for expanded meat consumption, forcing tenant farmers off the land. Marx spoke of a "fiendish war of extermination" against the Irish tenants by the Anglo-Irish landlord class. (75)

With the separation of livestock from the remaining land devoted to crops, the latter lost access to manure that could have helped replenish the soil. Again, an environmental limit was approached, overcome this time by synthetic fertilizers and other elements of industrialized agriculture. (103)

Today, nitrate runoffs from fertilizer use have created an oxygen-deprived "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico as big as Connecticut. It is past time to wonder

whether the historical development of capitalist agriculture is fast approaching an absolute limit.

Pushing Beyond the Limits

Foster and Clark's overview of the history of women's participation in the paid labor force exhibits a similar general pattern. As Marx noted, a very high percentage of workers in early capitalist factories were women. (80-2)

Capital pushed this arrangement to the point where next to no time or energy remained for maintaining working class households, threatening the reproduction of the workforce capital depends upon. (96) The "family wage" system was introduced to avoid that limit to capitalist development. In principle, at least, the wage income of the male "head of the household" was sufficient to enable wives and daughters to spend their lives in unpaid domestic labor, although poorer households, especially those defined as racially "other," did not have this option.

Arrangements in the Global South took a quite different trajectory. There "capital engaged in the superexploitation of labor and the extreme expropriation of social reproduction work, relying on the position of 'semiproletarianized' households, such as families with access to small parcels of land to grow food, to help meet the reproduction needs not met by wages." (99)

In the Global North, the family wage system remained in place for many households for decades. Its limits were reached with the severe erosion of male wages with the end of the post WWII boom, and with the increasing number of women demanding to participate in economic and social life outside the house.

Capital has benefited, as two members of worker households must now put their labor power at the disposal of capital for these households to maintain their standard of living. And once again, an arrangement favorable to capital accumulation is being pushed to its limit by "declining real wages for working-class families and increasing household debt" while "working-class women are caught in the double day, whereby they bear the responsibility both for earning wages and for unpaid domestic work." The result is a "continuing, if shifting, care crisis in the realm of social reproduction." (100, 101)

A Movement of Movements

(7) The struggle for a world beyond the limits of capital must be a movement of movements.

Foster and Clark show that the exploitation of wage labor in the capitalist production process is essentially tied to the expropriation of the natural world, the refusal to socially acknowledge care labor as socially necessary labor, the privatization of our common cultural heritage, the treatment of non-white communities as places where the social pathologies of capitalism (unemployment, poverty, and so on) can be concentrated, and so on.

From this perspective workers, environmentalists, feminists, community activists, and anti-racists have good reason to make common cause. As they write, "the age-old revolutionary principle of the masses, 'I am nothing and I should be everything,' be extended to the world of life itself, merging calls for substantive equality with ecological sustainability in a universal struggle for human development." (9)

Few books convey more clearly than Foster and Clark's about why this is the case. And few convey more strongly why the common cause must be to construct a socialism making the flourishing of all, not profits of some, its ultimate purpose.

There is some repetition, as is to be expected in a collection of separately written essays on closely related topics. This is more a strength than a shortcoming; important points warrant repeating. And there is no more important point than Foster and Clark's main thesis:

"Ultimately, the crucial issue today is how capital as a system engages in the creative destruction of the entirely of the social and ecological conditions sustaining human existence — including the family, the constitution of human beings (identity, the body), culture, the economy, and the environment — and how this makes the revolutionary expansion of human freedom through the reconstitution of society at large an absolute necessity for present and future generations." (79)

Notes

1. Rockström, John *et al.* 2009, "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Nature,* 24 September, 473, emphasis added.

2 .The other part of M is invested in means of production, purchased from other units of capital. The privately undertaken labor that produced them has already been socially validated with that purchase. The question regarding them now is simply whether their value will be successfully maintained (when the newly produced commodity is successfully sold) or destroyed (when it is not).

In the Imperial Crosshairs — *continued from page 38*

face issue of repressive dress codes which, she says, "has always been weaponized by the West against Iran. This has undermined the Iranian women's movement, because it has encouraged the government and the security services to view women's activism around dress codes (and even more broadly) as a security concern." (119)

To Break the Logjam

Indeed, a recurring theme throughout the discussions is how U.S. aggression and Iranian regime repression are mutually reinforcing. As Trita Parsi points out of the "hard-liners" who control much of Iran's economy, "their opposition [to president Rouhani and the JCPOA] was ultimately rooted in fear that an opening up of Iran to the West entirely would be very detrimental to their interests. They are not incorrect in that analysis." (25)

Ervand Abrahamian, in the chapter surveying "four decades of hostility" between the United States and Iran, states: "Donald Trump and the people around him are mistaken to think that economic pressure from the U.S. is going to unravel the Iranian system. In fact, it might even strengthen the hard-liners in Iran against moderates who believe in negotiating with the West." (45)

This highly readable collection will illuminate how the malignant U.S.-Iran conflict emerged, but also what needs to be done to break the logjam. Nader Hashemi (175-6) concisely lays out the program for ending the war drive as well as constructively assisting human rights and democratic struggles inside Iran.

For U.S. activists it must begin, of course, with demanding the *immediate end of sanctions imposed on Iran and its people.* On this critical necessity there can be no compromise or "honeymoon" with Biden's administration as it seeks to bring back "stability" and "normality" to imperialist policy. As Noam Chomsky characteristically puts it, "what is needed is for the population of the U.S. to 'normalize' their own country, and matters can then proceed from there." (93)

Who Paid? — *continued from page 12*

"For those of us who focus on government and economics and social justice, this election is a dismal rubber stamp of the unacceptable status quo. Black, brown, and white working Americans see their hopes of real reform evaporate for now, even while cheering the victory over Trump."[40]

As Samuel Farber has recently argued, Trumpism with or without Trump is not going away. The decline of relative prosperity of much of his petty bourgeois base and its merger with continuing white "backlash" will drive this movement and such inroads as it has made among working-class whites for some time.[41]

The centrism of the Democrats, on the other hand, will offer little to stop the economic carnage faced by workers. Left to their own devices, the Democrats in power will not deliver Medicare-for-All, a Green New Deal, the pro-union Pro Act, or much of anything else. So long as labor and social movement activists pin their hopes on this "other" party of the rich and richer, the outcomes will be more rubber stamps of an unacceptable status quo — or rather a rapidly deteriorating status quo. ■

Gabe Gabrielsky: A Radical Affirmation

By Promise Li

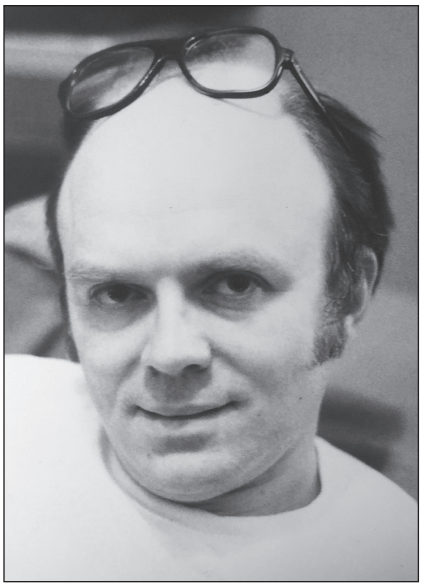
ROBERT (GABE) GABRIELSKY was one of my earliest and most important political mentors. In fact, my first-ever meeting with a political organization was in Gabe's flat in Highland Park in the summer of 2015. As a college student newly exposed to Marxism in my studies, what struck me first about Gabe was not only his firm conviction in the movement in which he was embedded for his whole life, but also his dedication to emphasizing every new socialist's independence of mind. He spoke dynamically about his politics — the importance of workers' self-activity and thinking and creating mass democratic, socialist organizations.

But he also said to me that young socialists always tend to fall in line with the first organization they encounter, but that actually it's best for us to shop around, to learn about each and think for ourselves. It was this sense of principled openness of mind that drew me not only to socialism, but to Solidarity, which would become my first political home. Little did I know then that this sentiment is largely absent in the case with most smaller left formations in the U.S.

In a sense, how Gabe treated me as a new socialist captures a fundamental aspect of his politics that I hold dear to this day: socialists must take the question of what it means to build democratic, working-class organizations seriously. We must always look to building and organizing mass movements and organizations, with clear democratic processes and without coercion.

As a staunch anti-authoritarian, informed by his "third camp socialist" or "independent socialist" background, and perhaps also by his dealings with colorful characters from 1970s New York bohemians to radical Quakers, Gabe stressed that we do not base our politics on leaders, states, or party dogma.

I quickly inclined to Gabe's ideas of "socialism from below," guided by the everyday self-activity of workers, not the hagiographies of "Communist" states, especially as I'm someone who grew up in Hong Kong — a city whose identity and way of life have been shaped by Communists with a big "C" appropriating colonial and capitalist paradigms.



He often lamented that young socialists are more enraptured by the Russian Revolution than American working-class history. He was always more interested in talking about how we can learn from the Minneapolis teamsters' strikes in the 1930s or the organizational pitfalls that wracked the SDS than Lenin's exploits.

Above all, he emphasized learning about the history of socialist and mass organizations; why it was important to recognize and remember individuals like Hal Draper, Max Shachtman, and Stan Weir; and organizations from the Independent Socialist Clubs (later the International Socialists) to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Many of these distinct traditions ultimately have important pitfalls, but I am inspired by him to believe that they are nonetheless invaluable products of rigorous political conversations about what a socialist future can look like and how we should get there. Many of the people who he looked up to were "blue-collar intellectuals" — Draper, Stan Weir, Mike Parker. Gabe rejected both Marxist arm-chair academic philosophizing and an anti-intellectual dismissal of rigorous political and theoretical thinking.

The key for Gabe was to study carefully and remember the tangled sectarian splits in socialist history, neither to simply reproduce them nor reject all ideological conflicts within an organization, but to understand why certain principles are worth fighting for and how certain struggles can either build or destroy promising organizations.

I remember the intensity with which Gabe treated everything I said that was factually incorrect or that he disagreed with — when I forgot which year the Shachtmanites rejoined the Socialist Party, or when I expressed too much sympathy to some "actually existing socialist states." "Fuck all states," he once exclaimed, slamming the table in agitation when I once tried to defend the Soviet Union and Cuba.

In a way, Gabe was the opposite of a sectarian. When I met him, he and other local Solidarity members like the late Gene Warren were actively building a number of organizations: Socialist Party USA, Solidarity, (later) DSA, the Eastside Greens, etc.

In line with his maverick streak, he had an instinctive distaste for democratic centralist formations — something I have indeed inherited. For him, it was important to maintain an open attitude to the ecosystem of social movements and organizations while staunchly holding fast to one's basic principles and remembering those who have held those same ones in the past. Gabe saw early on that DSA had the potential to become a genuine mass socialist organization on the eve of Trump's victory and did not hesitate to call for others to help him build it.

Gabe understood that his firm allegiance to the "third camp socialist" tradition should not preclude him from the messy landscape of unions, coalitions, and organizations. And furthermore, he demonstrated his politics with his life: he practiced "the rank-and-file strategy" that Solidarity holds as a core value from workplace to workplace.

He worked in the Delco Battery plant in Central Jersey (not far from where I live now incidentally) as he helped lead the local IS branch and organized with young militant workers in the local UAW union. He helped organize one of the longest strikes Atlantic City's casino industry has seen in 2007, not as a union staffer or non-profit worker, but as a rank-and-file worker and shop steward

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of UNITE HERE's Local 54.

Of course, that is not to say Gabe and I did not have disagreements. But Gabe always encouraged political debate, for people to vigorously think with and against each other. This is the unruly, yet crucial practice of socialist democracy, for people and organizations to determine their road to liberation through collective intellectual work, just as we ought to live in a world where we should be able to democratically determine our own material conditions with one another.

For one, Whiteness is an issue with which I don't think Gabe ever fully grappled in his political practice — nor does Solidarity or the "third camp" tradition. This is not to say that this tradition of political thought has never amounted to much for socialists of color. On the contrary, one can point to James Baldwin's friendship with Weir and his brief flirtation with the Young People's Socialist League (also Gabe's first socialist organization).

Its values also live on in *Labor Notes* and "the rank-and-file strategy" — influencing important multi-ethnic labor struggles in recent years from the teachers' strikes in Chicago and West Virginia to the "New Directions" rank-and-file caucus in New York City's Transport Workers Union Local 100.

Though Gabe's socialist tradition never amounted to its own "brand" of mass organization, its radically anti-authoritarian and democratic spirit enabled me to understand the complexities of the immigrant experience and my home city without giving in to the Third Worldist paradigms that are often uncritically rehashed by leftists.

Especially among diasporic Asian American radicals, there is an easy tendency to base one's politics on the simple rejection of the American identity and nostalgic recovery of "the homeland," to neglect class solidarity in favor of a politics based on a dangerous valorization of regimes that are "socialist" in name only.

Don't get me wrong: the U.S. is an illegitimate, settler-colonial state built on the backs of Black and Indigenous peoples. But Gabe's politics has always reminded me about Baldwin's nuanced sentiment on the country that alienated him: "I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually."

I remember Gabe recalling the history of Chinese American workers who once waved the American flag in solidarity with white workers during an action. For someone who had almost never traveled outside of the U.S. at all, his subtle perspective on the American identity, neither an uncritical left-chauvinism nor an ultra-left rejection of multi-ethnic class solidarity, always productively intrigued me. As Barbara Smith recently reminded us, Black feminist formations like the Combahee River Collective were important because they "dealt with class oppression as well as gender, sexuality and race" — not in spite of it.

Gabe's politics never quite gave me a coherent theory on race politics, but did he need to? Gabe, quite representative of many of my mentors and comrades in Solidarity, empowered and trusted me to think for myself, to bring and adapt independent socialist values to my own milieus.

My earliest political education was listening to Gabe's fiery ramblings over pupusas and coffee for many Saturdays at a mom-and-pop Salvadorean restaurant in East L.A., and his long, attentive, and consistent email replies to both large and minor questions I have had about socialism. Being able to be critical about the political tradition that he insisted I remember is perhaps the best testimony I can give to Gabe's character and politics. He was someone who never hesitated to challenge me and always someone who forcefully reminded me to own up to my political stances, even if they differed from his own.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, he lived his life to the fullest. As I write this in the "dark winter" of a pandemic, watching my hometown's mass movement being snuffed out by state repression, I sometimes forget how to live my life well outside of politics. Then I remember that what Gabe and his comrades fought for is a world of joy and spontaneity — something he demonstrated in his vibrant life — hanging around the bohemian and jazz scenes in 1970s Lower Manhattan.

Even far-left politics — for all its failures, fractions, and gloom — was full of life for Gabe. The last time I saw him in person, I encouraged him to mind his health and suggested that he can slow down his political work a bit. He quickly retorted: "Why should I?" His last time at a public event was at a Bernie event, and the last email he sent to me and his comrades asked for conversation and banter about any of his interests — jazz, politics, movies, and etc. — anything but his declining health. This was not a denial of existential finitude, but a radical affirmation of the vigors of life. ■

ROBERT PAUL GABRIELSKY, but Gabe to everyone, was born March 1, 1943 in Camden, New Jersey and grew up in Haddonfield. His was the only child of Elizabeth Bartholomay and Irvin Gabrielsky. Although he lived in the New York-New Jersey area most of his life, he moved to Los Angeles after Hurricane Sandy destroyed his home eight years ago. He was in hospice when he died on November 19, 2020.

Like many of his generation, Gabe became a political activist in the 1960s and was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. He joined the Young Peoples Socialist League and later the International Socialists. Over the course of his life he joined a number of organizations and movements, always identifying as a democratic socialist. At the end of his life, he was a member of Solidarity and DSA.

For many years he worked with the Campaign for Peace and Democracy in New York City and Peace Activists East and West in Western Massachusetts. These organizations brought together human rights and peace activists from Eastern Europe, the United States, Latin America and the Middle East in dialogue and activism.

He identified as a democratic socialist and avidly participated in the political movements including Occupy Wall Street, the Green Party, Black Lives Matter and Fight for $15 campaigns wherever he lived.

In the early 1990s, under the auspices of the Massachusetts Foundations for Humanities and Public Policy he curated the "Shifting Gears" program in North Adams, Massachusetts. The program placed scholars at six formerly industrialized communities to study "the changing meaning of work" from 1920-1980. This enabled him to record the oral histories of the workers.

Gabe had an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz that he enjoyed sharing with others. As his daughter, Terry Hempfling, wrote:

"My dad gave me my middle name, Rosa, after Rosa Parks, Rosa Luxemburg and Rosie the Riveter. He told me to follow my dreams, no matter what anyone else thought of them — including and most particularly himself.

"My dad taught me I wasn't alone by showing me music, art, film and theater. He started training my ears when I was four or five years old, playing jazz records for me and having me identify which instruments I was hearing (once I mastered this test he took it to the next level and asked me to identify the musician who was playing each instrument).

"My dad made me feel like I was pursuing the most important thing a person could pursue by being an artist. He taught me that Martin Luther King Jr. Day was more important than Christmas, that the working class was the only class with a future and to never, ever stop being a student.

"My dad is one of my most important educators. The last months before he died I was his primary caregiver and the last thing my dad said to me was 'you're the tops, you're the best.'"

He co-parented Terry and her brother John with his close friend Judith Hempfling and was also the grandfather of Terry's children, Rocket and Imogene Copperthwaite. ■

pressure from the Bernie Sanders and "the squad" wing of the Democratic Party.

Certainly, the farther the Biden-Harris administration can be pushed — on stimulus and relief, on immigration and the catastrophe of detention and family separation, on the environment and mass incarceration and so much more — the better. But the capacity of the left to meaningfully intervene in today's crises is sharply limited, not only by the small size and fragmentation of our organizations but even more by the grim fact that a sizable fraction of white working-class people have been attracted to the nativist, racist rightwing authoritarianism of "Trumpism."

By no means is it appropriate to paint all working-class Trump voters with the same broad brush, as hardened racists or "deplorables" or anything else. Nor are workers the majority of Trump's hardcore supporters. But while people vote the way they do for many diverse reasons, it's still true that some of the ugliest politics in this society have sunk deeper roots in the working class than the United States has seen in a long time — and at this moment, considerably stronger than the socialist left can claim.

Any notion that today's U.S. left can be the leading force in mass working-class and social movement "united fronts" to confront and physically defeat far-right forces on the ground is, in most places, rhetorical delusion. That doesn't mean that we can or should be silent or retreat — far from it. It does mean beginning with a sober appreciation of where we are.

Moving Forward

We offer the following observations and suggestions to contribute to the vital discussions unfolding in various organizations and online platforms.

First: Social movements are the key forces in combating the right and pressuring, and ultimately resisting, the Biden/Harris administration, as they were in resisting the atrocities of the Trump regime and responding to serial police murders of unnamed Black and brown civilians. The most successful protest actions have been resolutely militant and tactically disciplined, with clear demands and democratic decision-making.

In these movements as well as in some of the promising resurgent labor struggles, left activists have a significant presence and make important organizing contributions. For example, in multiple cities these activists are at the core of housing rights and anti-eviction movements.

Second: The eruption of rightwing violence, which now directly targets political figures and government institutions, has compelled the FBI and Justice Department to openly recognize "far-right and white-supremacist domestic terrorism" as the "greatest security threat we face." The drive to find and arrest perpetrators of the January violence, and perhaps shut down some of the white-supremacist nexus, is underway.

There's no doubt that these ultra-reactionary forces pose a clear and present danger. It remains true nonetheless that the institutions of this capitalist, imperialist state are the greatest threat to civil liberties and democratic rights. The "domestic terror" legislation to be introduced in Congress will aim not only at the violent ultra-right, but also — probably sooner than later — against Black Lives Matter protesters, Indigenous and environmentalist water protectors, and others including the BDS (Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions) movement for Palestinian freedom.

A great many Democratic liberals and centrists have demonstrated an astounding ability to learn nothing from history and experience — as shown by the "unity" of response to the September 11, 2001 attacks that brought about the PATRIOT Act, Guantanamo, the Department of Homeland Security, and going further back into the 1980s and 1990s, the "war on drugs" and "tough on crime" legislation leading directly to racialized mass incarceration.

The necessity to fully investigate and dismantle the white-nationalist armed and dangerous network must absolutely not be allowed, in the name of achieving bipartisan consensus, into an even more dangerous expansion of police and FBI surveillance and infiltration powers when existing laws are already more than sufficient.

Third: Even amidst the raging coronavirus pandemic that not only exposes but widens the brutal race and class stratifications in this society — and powerfully contributed to the growth of irrationalism, climate change denial, QAnon, the radicalization of Trumpism and widespread economic despair — a number of promising labor struggles have emerged.

These include actions by teachers and nurses on the pandemic front lines, organizing by Amazon and grocery workers, the victorious Hunts Point produce market Teamsters strike, and others. There's also a movement in the United Auto Workers, in the context of the jaw-dropping corruption within the top union leadership, seeking direct member election of top officers. In the current climate, that would be an enormous advance.

Working-class struggles, whether they're on the rise or retreat at a given moment, must always lie at the center of socialist attention and organizing. That's not because they substitute for other crucial movements — and certainly not because they put instant revolution on the agenda — but rather it's because the workers' movement ultimately makes it possible to win and keep serious democratic and social changes.

That is especially true now in this pivotal time of upheaval and crisis. Even though the capacity of the socialist movement is constrained, there are sites of struggle where it makes a material difference. It's of enormous importance that for a large percentage of young people, "socialism" is no longer a forbidden word and, in fact, represents an increasingly attractive notion, even if in imprecisely defined forms.

Today's socialist U.S. left, however, is by no means a mass organization or capable of acting like one. The key to moving forward isn't by overestimating the left's strength, and certainly not by illusions in progressives permeating the Democratic Party to "push Biden to the left." The first-100-days flurry of executive actions will likely give way soon enough to the restoration of centrist ideology and sordid "bipartisan" compromise in conditions of political gridlock.

The most important place for activists is on the ground, building movements and grassroots forces that can force "the institutions" to address the mammoth crises facing us, and in the process fight to expand a democracy based not on ritual form, but substance. ■

AUGUST 26, 1970 was a “march into history” for women’s liberation. Read about second-wave feminism and socialist women in this issue, stay informed with your subscription, follow our website https://againstthecurent.org/ and Facebook page SolidarityUS.