

AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL



Songs & Flowers for Ukraine

♦ Oksana Briukhovetska

A People's War

♦ Suzi Weisman

interviews

Vladislav Starodubtsev

& Jeremy Bigwood

Palestine & Ukraine

♦ David Finkel

The
Crisis
Is Now



A Letter from the Editors

Desperate Journeys, Sick System!

THE CONVERGING CATASTROPHES of global capitalism have landed on multiple communities, peoples and nations — but nowhere harder than on displaced populations, refugees and asylum seekers. There are by now an estimated 100 million people globally who have fled their homelands or become internally displaced by war, political repression or ethnic violence; by environmental destruction or economic collapse; or in many cases, by lethal combinations of these modern plagues.

In just very recent incidents, here are only a few of the horrific stories that made headlines:

Forty-nine asylum seekers from multiple Latin American and Asian countries, in detention in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico because of the U.S. border shutdown, burned to death when guards left them locked in their cells — apparently on orders from the government of “progressive” president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

Two families including young children, reportedly from India and Romania, drowned when their boat capsized in the St. Lawrence River attempting a deadly dangerous crossing from Canada to the United States. The Romanian family was seeking to join relatives in New York to avoid imminent deportation. This comes in the wake of refugees freezing to death trying to cross into the U.S. in a Manitoba border wasteland — AGAIN, hoping to reach relatives living in the United States.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have cemented their friendship summit by closing an “unofficial crossing” into Quebec at a place called Roxham Road used by hundreds of asylum seekers whose cases have little or no chance in the nightmarish U.S. immigration system.

The Biden administration has resumed the unspeakable practice of deporting Haitians back to the collapsing country virtually destroyed as result of more than a century of imperialist exploitation and interventions. Notoriously, it was U.S. insistence on getting rid of the popular Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide (not once but twice!) that contributed directly to the chaos over the past 20 years.

We don't even know the numbers who have perished in the Darien Gap wilderness between Colombia and Panama as they made their northward journey. In the first three months of 2023 alone, an astounding 87,000 migrants have braved the Darien Gap crossing. (*AP News*, April 12, 2023)

The Mexican-U.S. Sonoran desert in recent years has become increasingly treacherous. According to *Latino USA*: “Over the last two decades, more than 4,000 remains of people believed to have died attempting to cross the border have been recovered from this region. And many more people have disappeared. Last year, 225 deaths were recorded in this stretch of southern Arizona. The actual death toll is unknown, but experts say it is likely much higher than has been reported.”

Behind the death count, it's important to try to grasp the extreme daily misery that makes these incredible treks, and the enormous risks, a rational calculation. That's a window not only onto the cynicism of government policies, but the systemic collapse that gives rise to them.

Gross Statistics

During the past decade, reports the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the global refugee crisis more than doubled. In 2022, the UNHCR announced that the world had surpassed the 100 million mark for total displacement, meaning that over 1.2% of the global population have been forced to leave their homes. This includes some 70 million internally displaced, an often overlooked dimension of the disaster.

The deadliest of all the desperate refugee journeys are the Mediterranean crossings from North Africa to Europe, where 25,000 people are believed to have died during the past decade, according to Human Rights Watch. The response? The government of Italy criminalizes the rescue ships that pull survivors from the water or from sinking rafts.

European states subsidize the government of Morocco and Libya to accept refugees who are forced back. Those who do reach European shores are often warehoused indefinitely on islands or detention camps. Australia's policy toward refugees has been equally brutal.

Even with the cruelty of government immigration policies in the richer countries, racist and rightwing backlash politics are rising in response to the influx of refugee populations. Even when the refugees are white and European, as in the case of millions of Ukrainians who fled early in the Russian invasion, the warm initial welcomes are wearing thin in neighboring eastern European countries — let alone the travails faced across Europe by Middle Eastern and African refugees subjected to racist abuse as less “desirable” arrivals.

As in the United States, conservative and far-right parties exploit the fear of immigrants to promote their racist agendas. It's contributed significantly to the Brexit movement, the growth of the Le Pen “National Rally” party in France and *Alternativ fur Deutschland* in Germany, the ascendance of Viktor Orban's self-described “illiberal democracy” (white-supremacist Christian nationalism) in Hungary, the Polish government acclaiming Ukrainian refugees as “people like us” while those from Africa are distinctly unwelcome, bans in Switzerland on construction of minarets, and other expressions of xenophobic illness.

We shouldn't imagine that Europe or the United States have any monopoly on reactionary prejudices. In the case of Tunisia, *The Legal Agenda* (March 21, 2023) notes the growth of a “great replacement” conspiracy theory — targeting what the Tunisian president calls “hordes of irregular migrants” from sub-Saharan Africa, committing alleged crimes and “unacceptable practices.”

Not only Black foreigners but also Black Tunisians (10-15% of the population) have subsequently been subjected to “violence, arbitrary arrests based on skin color, humiliation, vandalism, workplace dismissals, evictions, and incitement to violence...in a climate reminiscent of the White man's colonial paranoia about Black people.”

The crisis is international, and systemic, and only marginally ameliorated by those countries that have relatively liberal, or at least less blatantly cruel and sadistic, policies. To understand the deep roots of a global dilemma, it helps to look at one set of circumstances — those closest to home in the western hemisphere.

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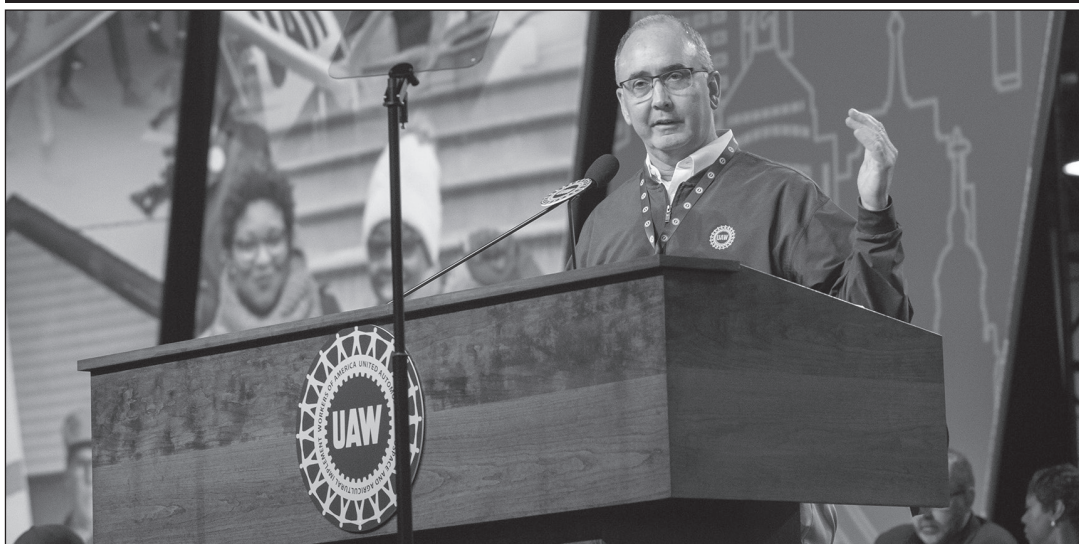
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Front Cover: The Ukrainian house is burning.

Above: UAW Bargaining Convention, with newly elected President Shawn Fain presiding.

Back Cover: Police start a riot outside Carnegie Community Center, Vancouver, August 9, 2022.

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In Defense of Being Awake

By Malik Miah

WE LIVE IN a surreal reality. Those of us who argue for truth-telling about history are attacked as practicing a nonexistent “wokeism” as described by Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis and followers of former president Donald Trump.

“Anti-Wokeism” is attack on both racial justice and gender equality. It ignores the genocide of Native peoples, violence against gays and lesbians (Florida passed a “Don’t Say Gay” law last year), and scores of state legislation against Trans youth.

It accelerated with broadsides against women’s rights after the overturn of abortion legality by the Supreme Court in June 2022. It is a reminder of the sexist and anti-woman history of a country based on patriarchy and white male domination.

The country’s wealth creation, moreover, was always bloody including slavery that created early capitalist accumulation. DeSantis and others downplay that violent history by attacking those who teach the historical facts. He and others want to rewrite history, or example by banning the mention of the words “race” and “racism.”

The goal is to reproduce a country where not only Black people have difficulty to vote, but women are set back. The state of Idaho legislature is in the process of passing an anti-abortion law that criminalizes “abortion trafficking,” making it illegal to take minors across state lines for abortion care while concealing it from their parents.

“Woke” to History

DeSantis says, “Wokeism is dead in Florida.” Only the story told by the European settlers will be allowed.

The real story harks back to the 1800s and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 where runaway slaves had to be brought back to their owners even from non-slave states.

That law, upheld by the courts, spurred the abolitionist movement in the North that led up to the Civil War a decade later.

That history must be whitewashed. Of course, U.S. colonialist and imperialist policies (past and present) are also largely off limits in school curricula — which includes not explaining why there are some 800 U.S. military

bases around the world.

Worse, DeSantis has adopted laws to ban books and to fire teachers, librarians and even weaken corporations (like Disney) who refuse to do what he says. Big Government’s full power is alive in Florida and the other Republican led states in the South and West.

But what is the dangerous concept of wokeism in the first place? It is simply being aware about history based on facts.

African Americans have used that word, “Wake,” or similar words and phrases like “Black Pride” and “Black Lives Matter, for decades. Malcolm X said:

“The greatest mistake of the movement has been trying to organize a sleeping people around specific goal. You have to wake the people up first, then you’ll get action.”

Wokeism is democratic, and radical. It should be proudly said and defended.

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s Warning

Understanding intersectionality and critical thinking about race is explained succinctly by academic and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw. She is an important defender of Black Pride and Black empowerment today and an opponent of the lies advanced by anti-wokeism.

She discussed her views with *The Guardian* (Britain) in the March 4 issue. Under the headline, “Kimberlé Crenshaw warns against right-wing battle over critical race theory” she took up the attack on being awake,” the reporter writes:

“The Columbia University and UCLA law professor and co-founder of the African American Policy Forum thinktank believes that the escalations against racial history teaching, in Florida and elsewhere represent ‘the tip of the iceberg’ of rightwing efforts to retract the progress since the civil rights era and push America towards authoritarianism.

“Are [schools] on the side of the neo-segregationist faction? Or are [they] going to stick with the commitments that we’ve all celebrated for the last 50, 60 years?” Crenshaw asked, referring to headway made on equal opportunities since the 1960s.”

If anything, professor Crenshaw actually understates the right-wing drive against progress and the fight for racial justice and equality. The more devastating truth is that conservatives and their corporate backers

seek to roll back all social progress of the last 60 years.

In other words, this campaign by DeSantis, Trump and their supporters is not just about what’s taught in public schools but really about where Black people fit into this so-called democracy.

Historically, Black Africans were first enslaved with no representation in the Constitution, and after the end of slavery, and the defeat of Reconstruction, white supremacist states used violence to take back all the gains won in the Civil War (except bringing back slavery which was no longer economically feasible).

What was ratified as “separate but equal” by the Supreme Court (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896) spread the segregationist legal system across the country, not just in the southern former slave-owning states.

The Past As Present

DeSantis won reelection as Florida governor in 2022 in a landslide by targeting African Americans’ rights. He specifically attacked African American History AP college credits in high schools. DeSantis also targeted Gays and Trans people. He passed the “Don’t Say Gay” law and pushed to limit rights to women’s bodily autonomy.

Crenshaw told *The Guardian*, “The College Board [that oversees AP content] fiasco, I think, is just the tip of the iceberg. There are a lot of interests that have to make this decision.”

As *The Guardian* reports:

“The College Board, the organization that administers college readiness exams and AP courses for high schoolers to earn college credits, denied bending to political pressure amid accusations that the curriculum has been watered down.

“But in what many viewed as a response to DeSantis’s ban, the work of Crenshaw and other high-profile progressive Black figures, such as Ta-Nehisi Coates, were relegated from required reading to ‘optional’ within the course....

“Making such core topics optional ‘is exactly the same structure of segregation,’ she said. ‘It’s like (saying) we’re going to create this so that the anti-woke [camp] will permit states to decide whether they want the segregated version, or whether they want a more fully representative

Malik Miah is an advisory editor of *Against the Current*.

and inclusive version,' said Crenshaw."

Crenshaw observes that "one of the most sustained features of segregation in the past was the fact that businesses were not only enablers, they facilitated segregation.

"So, when businesses and segregation were aligned, it was a chokehold on Black freedom aspirations."

History can repeat itself when citizens are not informed of that history. The past can become the present.

The Example of Mississippi

The case of Mississippi, the poorest state in the country, highlights how central the issue of voting rights is for white supremacists and their allies.

A case waiting to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court, but not yet on its docket, concerns whether ex-felons can vote after serving their sentence. Mississippi is not the only state that denies that right, but is unique because of the origins of the state's Constitution.

In 1890 Mississippi adopted a Constitution that was explicit in denying freed Blacks the vote. It came 25 years after the Civil War and end of slavery. Its purpose was to keep the "Negro" in his place. What became known as Jim Crow segregation laws were enacted.

Not every felony conviction in Mississippi involves people losing their voting rights, but 22 of them do. Some legal groups say that constitutional provisions in the state must be reviewed and struck down.

"Mississippi is keeping a provision of the 1890 constitution in place that everyone agrees was racially discriminatory when it was adopted," described Deputy Director of Impact Litigation for the Mississippi Center for Justice Paloma Wu.

That the 1890 Constitution provision

AP African American Studies in 2023

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Amiri Baraka | Darlene Clark Hine |
| June Jordan | Sylvia Wynter |
| Fabio Rojas | Cathy Cohen |
| Audre Lorde | Roderick Ferguson |
| Alice Walker | Er. Patrick Johnson |
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| bell hooks | Jacqueline Grant |
| Gloria Naylor | Michelle Alexander |
| Nikki Giovanni | Lois Kay Jones |
| Manning Marable | Ta-Nehisi Coates |
| | Robin D.G. Kelley |
| | Tiffany E. Barber |

has never been struck down, even after the Court declared Jim Crow illegal in the late 1960s, shows how entrenched systemic and institutional racism is.

The fact that Florida, Georgia, Texas Mississippi and other Republican states seek to advance racially motivated voting laws is not an accident. If you cannot vote, it is difficult to make legal changes.

Health care reforms are opposed by these same reactionary forces. Ten states, all with Republican majority legislatures, refuse to expand Medicaid for the poor. This leads to more illness and deaths among Black and brown people as well as poor whites. It is also a major reason why this country has the highest infant and maternal mortality rates of any industrialized country.

The attacks on basic rights that began against African Americans and extended to other oppressed national minorities, women, the disabled and LGBT-plus communities is not an accident. It is outrageous, but the far

right does not care. Their plan is to eliminate these safety net programs.

Recovering History for the Future

Just as the idea of Make America Great Again harks back to the time of racial tyranny, far-right forces attempt to end the teaching of fact-based history so that future generations have no ability to critique the present as a reflection of the past.

In Crenshaw's view, this is all with the goal of transforming the "decades-long journey towards greater social justice" into what the right admonishes as "wokeness" — which is in fact the encouraging of racial justice and equity.

"Wokeness has become the oppression, not the centuries of enslavement and genocide, and imperialism

that has shaped the lives of people of color, in ways that continue into the present," said Crenshaw.

Resistance to this reactionary ideology by the public must start in the streets. Slaves rose up repeatedly. The early civil rights movement was against the institutions and elected officials of the major parties.

That resistance led first to partial reforms, and finally the downfall of legal segregation across the country.

There can be no reliance on electoral politics. Black and liberal faces in high places are a buffer for the ruling class, not a base to lead mass legal as well as extra-parliamentary actions.

The new generation must lead the fight back by returning to the resistance roots of Black history, where basic rights didn't exist. To fight back successfully will come in many forms, but going to the streets and being proud to be Awake is top of the agenda. ■

"Tennessee Three" and Beyond

THE PEREMPTORY EXPULSION of Justin Jones and Justin Pearson from the Tennessee state legislature has widespread implications, despite their rapid interim reinstatement by the Nashville and Shelby County governing bodies. (Their committee assignments have not been restored.)

Malik Miah discusses the "Tennessee Three" case in an article posted on the ATC website (<https://againstthecurrent.org/the-tennessee-three-for-democracy-against-gun-violence/>).

It's important to view this episode in a broader context — even beyond the ghastly multiple mass shootings that have occurred in this country in the short time since the protest on the floor of the Tennessee legislature that provoked the "violation of House order" charges against them.

A multiple-front war that can be called "state capture" and "judicial capture" is being waged by the far right. Its many aspects — from racist vote suppression and gerrymandering, to vicious attacks on Black Lives Matter, "wokeness" and public libraries, to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* and now the incredible attempt to ban medical abortion pills by judicial fiat — cannot be viewed in isolation.

What might have seemed incredible only yesterday is on today's agenda. In Texas, state Republicans have advanced bills designed to target one county alone — Harris County, which has turned Democratic with measures to enable the GOP secretary of state to replace its local election administrator, invalidate election results and order a rerun on dubious grounds. It's a case of what we've

called "the long January 6 riot."

It is not coincidental that Black legislators and protest organizers are particularly targeted at the same moment that hundreds of bills are introduced in state legislatures against Queer people and especially transgender youth.

It's gratifying that Fox News is paying a nearly \$800 million price for getting caught in the act of deliberately spreading election-denial lies. That won't stop the spread of the poison it spews — along with Alex Jones, QAnon and rightwing talk radio — into the political and social blood stream.

The far right, fully aware that they can never win a majority, are quite consciously manipulating the archaic, judicial and legislative mechanisms of what's called "our democracy" — in order to destroy them. ■

Strange Career of the Comstock Law By Dianne Feeley

WHAT DOES AN 1873 “anti-obscenity” law have to do with women’s rights today? It may be a zombie, but the Comstock law lives on.

U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, in his April 4, 2023 decision, cites the law half a dozen times when challenging the Federal Drug Administration’s rule that medication abortions are safe and certified pharmacies can mail the prescriptions. The FDA, having loosened restrictions during the pandemic, determined it is unnecessary to pick up the prescription in person.

Earlier this year 21 rightwing state attorney generals threatened pharmacies who announced they would apply to be certified to distribute mifepristone. The 21 cited the Comstock law as the bedrock for their case.

Mifepristone, a drug approved by the Federal Drug Administration in 2000, is used in the United States as the first of a two-part medication abortion. It blocks the hormone progesterone from sustaining a pregnancy and dilates the cervix. The second pill, misoprostol, is taken one or two days later causing the uterus to contract and expel the pregnancy tissue.

This medical procedure is used in a growing majority of all U.S. abortions. It is safe — meaning no additional medical intervention is necessary for 95%-99% of all cases within the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. Over 100 studies have confirmed the safety of this two-part medication.

However Judge Kacsmaryk wrote an opinion that asserts mifepristone is unsafe. He accepts the plaintiffs’ alternative reality that medication abortion is overwhelming the medical system and placing “enormous pressure and stress” on doctors.

He is absolutely certain that the Comstock law excludes the possibility of mailing any medication that could lead to an abortion, quoting the reactionary law:

“[e]very article or thing designed, adapted, or intended for producing abortion, or for any indecent or immoral use, and [e]very article, instrument, substance, drug, medicine, or thing which is advertised or described in a manner

Dianne Feeley is an ATC editor. She first became active on reproductive justice issues in 1968. She is currently a member of Michigan Coalition for Reproductive Liberation and was active in the campaign that added reproductive freedom to the Michigan Constitution in 2022.



“Your honor, this woman gave birth to a naked child.” —Robert Minor, The Masses, September, 1915.

calculated to lead another to use or apply it for producing abortion, or for any indecent or immoral purpose.” (Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine vs. U.S. Food and Drug Administration, p. 32)

The conservative Fifth Circuit Court (two Trump-appointed judges out of the three), when partially overruling Judge Kacsmaryk ruled that given the Comstock law, mifepristone should not be mailed.

What Is the Comstock Law?

The 150-year-old federal law is named after Anthony Comstock (1844-1915), a leading member of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. While the law forbids distributing obscene literature by the U.S. Postal Service or by handing out these materials, it does not define what is obscene.

Nonetheless Comstock, in upholding “Christian morality,” saw these as including any book, manual or ad on aspects of reproduction (anatomical drawings, or books, pamphlets or devices for contraception and abortion) as well as about prostitution. There were no exceptions, even for nurses and physicians.

Comstock was then named special agent to enforce the law, serving from its passage until 1915. During that time he made 4,000 arrests and confiscated several tons of literature — much of it found stored in his home after his death.

Interestingly enough, a recent biography of a successful 19th century abortionist, Ma-

dame Restell, describes her use of both pharmaceutical and surgical methods. Arrested by Comstock in 1878, Restell slit her throat just before her trial.

More than a dozen other abortion providers, most not as wealthy as Restell, chose suicide as well. (See *Madame Restell: The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Old New York’s Most Fabulous, Fearless and Infamous Abortionist*, by Jennifer Wright.)

The Struggle for Voluntary Motherhood

In the early 20th century, as both single and married women increasingly worked full-time outside their home, women’s need for knowledge about their bodies grew. A few nurses and doctors, particularly those affiliated with the Socialist Party, organized classes for women through the party’s women’s committees. These then led to producing the talks as articles in socialist newspapers.

Margaret Sanger, a nurse, authored a series of articles, “What Every Girl Should Know” for the *New York Call*. When her article on venereal disease was declared obscene by the post office, her column ran with its title and a box underneath saying “Nothing, by order of the Post Office Department.”

By March 1914 Sanger launched an independent monthly, *The Woman Rebel*. The paper discussed various problems working women faced and was distributed primarily at political meetings and workplaces. That August Sanger was served a nine-count indictment.

While awaiting trial, she wrote a 16-page pamphlet, *Family Limitation*. This was a direct challenge to Comstock Law — and she ordered 100,000 copies printed. Then she left the country, and through her speeches generated a favorable wave of international publicity. When she returned home the following year, the charges were dropped. Sanger savored her victory by launching a national speaking tour.

On her return she set up a birth control clinic in a working-class area of Brooklyn. Ten days later the clinic was raided; she and her sister were arrested. Charged under a state law similar to the provisions of the Comstock law, they served a month in prison. But by the end of World War I she had moved away from radicalism to focus on birth control.

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Anti-Trans Legislation: A Form of Brutal Injustice

By Shui-yin Sharon Yam

ON MARCH 4 at the Conservative Political Action Conference, right-wing commentator/Michael Knowles called for transgenderism to be “eradicated from public life entirely.” His violent remark dehumanizes trans people and promotes gendercide.

Knowles’ deeply transphobic speech came on the heels of a slew of anti-trans bills introduced by the G.O.P. As of March 2023, 105 bills have been introduced to attack trans rights. These bills render gender-affirming care and education inaccessible or outright illegal for trans youths.

By criminalizing life-saving treatments for trans youths, these laws significantly disrupt their lives — especially the lives of trans youths of color who are already more likely to be targets of violence.

While anti-trans bills are promoted by the right as an attempt to “protect the children,” they do just the opposite: gender-affirming care has been shown to lower the rate of depression and suicide among trans and non-binary youths by respectively 60% and 73%. These proposed bills and legislations have palpable negative effects on the mental health of trans and nonbinary people.

In addition to causing direct harm to trans youths, anti-trans legislation and sentiments uphold a white supremacist framework and perpetuates reproductive injustice.

The gender binary is a social construction deployed by white colonizers and slaveholders to dehumanize Black, Indigenous, and people of color. While this was not universal, many non-Western precolonial societies did not abide by a rigid binary sex/gender system. Their multi-gender or gender fluid systems were weaponized by white colonizers to justify domination.

According to the white supremacist colonial framework, only white people possessed distinctive binary sex and gender differenc-



es. Black, brown, and Indigenous people meanwhile, were portrayed as animalistic and primitive for their lack of differentiation between the sexes.

Indigenous communities that embraced gender and sexual fluidity were violently forced to conform to the colonizers’ racial and gender hierarchy. Indigenous people who did not identify as either man or woman, and did not perform gender the way settlers expected were brutally persecuted; some were even targeted for extermination.

As a racially specific category, gender had also been used during to support chattel slavery: seen as not conforming to the white gender binary, Black people were deemed less-than-human, and thus exploitable. Anti-trans violence —including the current onslaught of anti-trans bills — therefore, cannot be separated from the sordid history of colonialism, racism, and antiblackness.

Preserving Status and Privilege

While anti-trans right-wing politicians and activists claim to protect America’s children, their goal is to preserve the primacy of middle-upper class cishet white families.

As demonstrated by the arguments made by author Abigail Shrier and the like, anti-trans activists are most concerned with preserving the assigned sex and fertility of

white trans boys from middle-class families. Their concern is based on the white supremacist and heteropatriarchal concept that wealthy cis white women ought to be producing more white babies to sustain the nation.

Meanwhile, people of color — especially those who are poor, queer, and trans — are marked as “unfit” parents. Their reproductive desires and family configurations are either not

recognized by the state, or violently denied. Anti-trans legislation and sentiments, hence, are intricately tied to a white nationalist agenda. Defending trans rights is a matter of reproductive justice (RJ). The reproductive justice framework, championed by Indigenous women, women of color, and trans and queer people, maintains that it is a human right to maintain one’s personal bodily autonomy, to have children, to not have children, and to parent one’s children in a safe environment.

In addition to violating trans people’s right to bodily autonomy, anti-trans legislations that deny gender-affirming care and render schools a hostile space make it difficult for parents of trans youths to keep their children safe. Gender-affirming care and education is not a threat to children — rather, it is lifesaving.

We need collective and coalitional actions to fight against anti-trans legislation, as trans justice is intimately connected with reproductive and racial justice. Supporting grassroots reproductive justice organizations such as the Kentucky Health Justice Network, Forward Together, and SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective is now more important than ever. ■

[Links to references appear in the online text of this article.]

Shui-yin Sharon Yam is an Associate Professor of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies at the University of Kentucky. She is the author of Inconvenient Strangers: Transnational Subjects and the Politics of Citizenship.

Another Restructuring of the Auto Industry: A Challenge for the UAW

By Dianne Feeley

WITH THE NEW UAW International Executive Board (IEB) sworn in and the 2023 UAW Bargaining Convention concluded, the union must focus on the upcoming negotiations for its Big Three auto contracts.

For their part, Ford, General Motors and Stellantis (formerly Chrysler) are gearing up as the industry pivots toward electric vehicle (EV) production. The 2023 contract will set a pattern for this *new world of vehicles*.

By 2025, in order to restructure their corporations, GM will spend \$35 billion and Stellantis \$35.5 billion to set up battery plants and reorganize assembly plants. Ford upped its commitment to EV production from \$30 to \$50 billion by 2026. By 2027, Ford promises to produce two million EVs, representing one-third of their world-wide production. By 2030, half will be electric.

However, most of the batteries have been manufactured overseas, primarily in China. Other Asian corporations with expertise in research and manufacturing are South Korean and Japanese. For U.S. production this has meant long supply chains, which became more precarious during the pandemic — just as EV production took off.

Passage of the Inflation Reduction Act changes the equation. The act supports domestic manufacturing of batteries, setting maximum percentages of foreign components. The act also provides a substantial \$7,500 tax subsidy to the EV customer. This carrot-and-stick approach, combined with state and local subsidies, makes building battery gigafactories near plants very attractive.

Since the American Recovery Act of 2009 U.S. auto companies have been setting up domestic battery plants, small joint ventures with Chinese and South Korean corporations eager to expand. But this relatively slow growth took off in 2021 with 15 new or expanded plants costing \$40 billion. Last year U.S. companies invested \$73 billion more.

General Motors worked with LG Energy Solution to build three battery plants. Now the Warren, MI plant is up and running with 1300 workers. The Lansing, MI plant — at a cost of \$7 billion — will be in operation in 2024 with four sites and 4,000 workers. The third plant will be located in Spring Hill, Tennessee. The partnership, Uitium Cells,

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consists of LG producing the battery cells while GM builds the pouches. However, the partners were unable to move ahead with a fourth plant. GM is now finalizing details with Samsung SDI to identify a fourth site.

Meanwhile LG is continuing its work with Honda and Stellantis. Volkswagen is working with the South Korean firm, SK Innovations.

Ford has set up joint ventures with the Chinese corporation CATL (Cotemporary Amperex Technology Company, Limited), which has 13 plants in Asia and Europe. Ford and CATL is developing BlueOvalCity in Stanton, Tennessee for 6,000 workers and another in Glendale, Kentucky with a projected workforce of 5,000.

Ford's latest venture is a wholly owned subsidiary in Marshall, MI, where CATL will provide the research and technological innovation — mere consultants in the ever-changing process of battery production. The \$3.5 billion plant will employ 2,500 employees when it opens in 2026. Much of its infrastructure will be subsidized by a \$1.86 billion grant from the Michigan Strategic Fund and other state funding sources.

This subsidy, like others given to set up battery plants, has been questioned by groups such as Good Jobs First, both for its size as well as for a lack of transparency.

Given this new phase of restructuring, plants assembling EVs will have 30% fewer parts, requiring less storage space, more robots and fewer workers.

Stellantis has already idled its Belvidere, IL assembly plant, putting 1300 workers out in the street within minutes of its surprise announcement. Its Sterling Heights Assembly Plant was put on notice that reorganization will downsize the work force.

Analysts predict battery production will create 150,000 direct jobs, while others will be lost by reducing assembly work. This might not seem to be a problem if the industry were what it was in the 1950s and '60s. Workers would have transfer rights. But that's no longer to be expected.

In reality, the concessions that the UAW has taken over the years, starting from the crisis of 1979 and accelerating in the crisis of 2008, have left autoworkers with insecure jobs. Workers have lost equal wages and benefits, endure the intensification of work along with strict absentee policies, and have

been robbed of cost-of-living increases.

Skilled tradespeople have been de-skill, expected to work on jobs for which they were not trained. Autoworkers have been pitted against each other nationally and internationally as companies whipsawing one plant against another to extract further concessions.

The Backstory

This decline in the working lives of autoworkers was justified by UAW officials who have controlled the union's leadership positions through an Administration Caucus (AC). Over the years the AC began to see things more from the company's point of view. They administered the union as a fiefdom, demanding loyalty from local officials if they expected the union to service their grievances.

The AC has been challenged by formations opposed to giving in to management. Most important was New Directions, which formed after Jerry Tucker, an assistant regional director, organized locals to win contracts that other officials claimed were unwinnable.

While New Directions was a militant response to the concessions the UAW took in the aftermath of the 1979-83 recession, it was still around when GM and Chrysler sold off some of their parts plants in order to downsize. This move enabled the corporation to place conditions on the supplier, including on-time delivery of a quality part as well as requiring documentation on the rate of worker absenteeism.

Although UAW officials promised to maintain the master contract for these supplier plants, they eventually told members to accept the introduction of two-tier wages and benefits in order to save their jobs. The lower rate would only apply for new hires and wouldn't affect them. Those who opposed the deal were branded as unreasonable. Solidarity was just a song.

Two-tier contracts became the norm in the supplier plants and spread throughout the industry during the 2008-09 economic recession. The bailout of GM and Chrysler came with the Obama administration's demand that both employers and employees sacrifice to keep the industry afloat. UAW officials testified in Congress in support of the company's bailout.



The seven elected UAWD-backed candidates are (from left), Brandon Mancilla, Region 9 Director; Mike Booth, Vice President; Margaret Mock, Secretary-Treasurer; Shawn Fain, President; Rich Boyer, Vice President; LaShawn English, Region 1 Director and Daniel Vicente, Region 9A Director.

Dissidents set up an Autoworker Caravan and drove to Washington, DC to demand that in exchange for the bailout, government-owned facilities could move toward building a mass transportation system with trains, electric buses and trucks.

Instead, UAW officials sold assembly workers on the need to sacrifice by accepting two tier. Ford, which didn't need a bailout, also demanded two tier, and officials sold that to the membership as well.

In all subsequent contracts autoworkers have prioritized getting rid of the tiers, but despite some improvements, the tiers remain.

Democratizing the UAW

Not until more than a dozen high-ranking UAW officials were caught red-handed — taking favors from company officials or stealing \$3.5 million from union funds — did members realize how our own officials had completely failed us. A federal monitor was appointed to see that the union strengthened its institutions to prevent corrupt practices from continuing.

Since the delegate system for electing top officers was a crucial mechanism for the AC retaining its control Unite All Workers for Democracy had been campaigning to elect top officers by “one member, one vote.” With the monitor in place, the UAWD recommended holding a referendum on the voting method. The monitor agreed and a referendum held in 2021. One member, one vote won, and the UAW constitution amended.

Having won the vote for a direct election, UAWD put together a slate of seven (half the total IEB positions). Our campaign slogan was “No Corruption, No Concessions, No Tiers.” Most UAWD members would have been pleased if one or two candidates won but in fact all seven, plus one independent, won.

Under UAW rules, the winner must receive more than 50% of the vote, consequently three out of the 14 offices were in a runoff. Counting the ballots began on March 1st, less than a month before the 2023 Bargaining Convention opened.

By March 4th most of the votes had been counted and two of the three candidates won. But the office of the president was still too close to call. Shawn Fain, the UAWD-

backed candidate ran ahead of Ray Curry, the Administration Caucus-backed candidate who had been serving as president. But 1800 ballots remained unopened until their eligibility was verified just two days before the opening of the convention. Fain won a narrow victory (50.2%) but ran first in seven of the nine UAW regions.

Although the convention had been planned by Curry and his team, with delegates elected a year beforehand, Fain was able to establish a more open atmosphere. Previously staff had been deployed to patrol the convention floor, providing canned speeches to select delegates. This time they were instructed not to intervene in the proceedings. Gone, too, were the noisemakers that belittled those who dared to make a critical remark.

The AC still has an army — particularly a large number of appointed officials. They are in the habit of following orders rather than representing the membership. They made their feelings known at the convention — as one delegate opposed to changing the procedure so that more resolutions could come from the convention floor — argued, “The rules have worked for us in the past and we need to keep them the way they are.”

Surprisingly the most interesting convention discussion occurred over a resolution brought by UAW graduate students at Harvard University. They explained that the university was attempting to outfox their local by reducing the number eligible to be covered under the UAW contract. Pointing out how this tactic was similar to what autoworkers faced with tiers, they asked for the convention to adopt a resolution for “wall-to-wall” organizing.

Members of the Administration Caucus, angry about the election results, decided to table the motion. But a few minutes later, 9A Regional Director Brandon Mancilla invited all delegates and guests to join the makers of the motion for a discussion after the session. The following day a slightly amended resolution was introduced, discussed and passed.

In accepting this invitation, some AC delegates were able to react positively. Given that both Chuck Browning — one of the three vice presidents and now the top AC official — and Shawn Fain stressed the importance

of unity in the upcoming negotiations, hopefully this will be possible.

The reality is that the AC sided with the companies for so long that the union is unprepared to organize the fight needed for this transition. The battery workforce may not see a reason to join a union if the concessions continue. So the task of the new leadership, including those from the Administration Caucus, is to organize a campaign around contract negotiations that can engage the entire membership.

Preparing for the 2023 Contract

The fight for a decent contract must break through the long-established union culture that views membership as an insurance policy. A successful member-based campaign strategy needs to be a beehive of activity with “all hands on deck.”

Empowering workers can bring forward new leaders to build the coordination necessary. This is our challenge — it's an enormous responsibility and a short window.

Traditionally UAW strike preparation was asking the membership for a strike vote but keeping a tight lid on the state of the negotiations. That's considered top secret until negotiations have produced a contract and the “highlights” are distributed to members.

An informational meeting is held, which is about the only place a question might be answered, and sharp debates have happened there, but it's very late in the game.

When negotiations are stalled and a strike proceeds, workers are instructed not to talk to the press — authorized UAW spokespeople will do that. Even the printed signs strikers carry are standardized and uninformative.

Given the stakes for the 2023 contract, Fain and the IEB understand that a routinist approach is deadly. They want to build a contract campaign, but many of the appointed representatives and local leaders, even if won over to doing something differently, haven't been learned to listen to members and don't necessarily have the required organizing skills.

Nor has the membership been encouraged to consider how it's possible to win a better contract. We've been schooled in putting forward demands only to learn months later they have been discarded because they

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Berkeley, CA: One of the 24 UC campuses that carried out a six week strike in 2022. Several campuses, including Berkeley, are in the most expensive housing markets in the country, leaving a majority of UC academic workers “rent-burdened.”

The University of California System: The Future of Academic Unionism

By Barry Eidlin

ACADEMIC WORKERS ARE on the move. Just in the past year, academic workers at 25 campuses including over 25,000 workers unionized, including MIT, Northwestern, Yale, Johns Hopkins, University of New Mexico, and Boston University.

After decades of haggling over whether they were actual workers or just trainees learning their craft, and by extension whether they were entitled to basic labor protections like the right to join a union, academic workers are rendering the question moot by unionizing in ever greater numbers.

Importantly, given how difficult the NLRB election process makes it for workers to unionize, along with a string of failed academic worker organizing attempts in the not-too-

distant past, these were not nail-biter elections. Blowout margins upwards of 80-90% were common. More elections are scheduled or imminent at the University of Chicago, Dartmouth, USC, Caltech, and more.

The scope of who counts as an academic worker has also expanded far beyond the standard image of a graduate student teaching assistant. It now includes larger groups of research assistants, adjunct instructors, and undergraduate workers at campuses like Kenyon, Grinnell, and the University of Oregon.

Meanwhile, already-unionized groups of academic workers are taking action, with Bloomberg reporting a post-pandemic higher education strike wave. The Cornell ILR Labor Tracker documented 15 strikes involving academic workers since the beginning of 2022 — the most in at least 20 years according to Bloomberg.

Notably, most of these strikes were offensive strikes with workers were trying to expand gains, as opposed to defensive strikes

where workers were trying to beat back concessions.

Familiar Issues

The issues driving the uptick in unionization and strikes should sound familiar to workers inside and outside of academia: wages not keeping pace with the rising cost of living, eroding job security, lack of support for families, lack of access to comprehensive health resources, and more.

This is partly due to factors affecting all U.S. workers, like out-of-control housing markets and lack of paid family leave or universal health care. But it is also the result of the growing corporatization of the university.

As public funding of higher education has eroded over the past several decades, university leaderships have drawn increasingly from the managerial handbook of private corporations to run their institutions. Expensive, secure tenure-track faculty have been replaced by cheap, contingent adjunct,

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lecturers and teaching assistants, who now account for more than 70% of university instructional staff.

As a result the job market for tenure-track faculty has virtually collapsed, making it increasingly unlikely that many current graduate students will end up in those types of jobs. Meanwhile an ever-expanding administrative bureaucracy has grown ever more concerned with identifying university “profit centers” and “revenue streams” to replace state funding, all while relying on questionable metrics and rankings to quantify performance in pursuit of that amorphous goal, “excellence.”

In this context where academic labor is both essential and undervalued, the promise of more secure, tenured employment down the road rings increasingly hollow, and university administrations behave more like corporate management, it makes sense that academic workers are organizing.

The trends have been apparent for years now, but the pandemic crystallized them for many academic workers, driving the recent upsurge.

The UC Strike

In a year of momentous labor actions on campus, one in particular stood out: the six-week strike by 48,000 academic workers at the University of California (UC), members of United Auto Workers (UAW) Locals 2865, 5810, and Student Researchers United (SRU), at the end of 2022.

While every strike or campaign has its own peculiarities, a closer look at the UC strike can tell us something about the state of academic labor more generally.

Bringing together a wide array of classifications including teaching assistants, research assistants, postdoctoral fellows, academic research staff, and more, this was the largest strike by academic workers in U.S. history. It was the result of an unprecedented mobilization effort across the UC system, culminating in a 98% strike authorization vote on the eve of the walkout, with over 75% of eligible workers voting.

The big issue was substandard pay, with most UC academic workers making around \$24,000 annually.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many UC campuses are in some of the most expensive housing markets in the country, leaving the vast majority of UC academic workers “rent-burdened,” meaning that over 30% of their income goes to rent.

Many in fact qualify as “severely rent-burdened,” meaning that over half of their income goes to rent.”

Academic workers at UC Santa Cruz put the rent burden issue on the map with a wildcat strike that gained national attention, and spread to several other UC campuses. Their core demand was a cost of living

adjustment, or COLA, of \$1,412 per month, with subsequent increases automatically tied to the rising cost of living.

COVID-19 cut the 2020 strike short, but the COLA issue only became more urgent as mobilizations got underway for the 2022 statewide contract negotiations.

Addressing the rising cost of living became a central issue, with workers demanding a minimum annual salary of \$54,000 for graduate workers, and \$70,000 for postdocs, along with annual cost of living adjustments and experience-based increases.

After weeks of mass rallies, pickets to block shipments of critical lab material, direct actions targeting university leaders, and more, UAW union leadership could rightly point to significant gains. Most notable were wage gains of between 20-80% over a two-year contract for teaching and research assistants, and between 29-57% over five-year contracts for postdocs and academic researchers, with higher percentages for workers at the lower end of the pay scale.

This will result in minimum annual base pay of \$34,000 for teaching assistants after two years, and \$85,734 for postdocs after five years. Workers also won increases in parental and medical leave, medical coverage for some dependents, and childcare subsidies, among other improvements.

The strike is also making waves beyond the UC system. Inspired by the UC strike mobilization and the gains it won, academic workers at other campuses are stepping up their organizing efforts. In the weeks following the strike, workers at USC and Caltech announced new organizing campaigns, and others are following suit.

“These big actions in higher ed don’t just raise the bar for those institutions; they raise the bar everywhere for all grad students and postdocs,” said Sam Ponnada, an astrophysics graduate student researcher and union organizer at Caltech, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. “It’s kind of forcing a race to the top...to match the better pay, benefits and workplace conditions that academic unions are winning across the country.”

Why the No Vote?

Yet despite these real gains, nearly 40% of academic student employees and nearly one-third of student researchers voted to reject the contracts, with nearly 70% turnout. (By comparison, fewer than 20% of members voted to reject contracts following other major education worker strikes like the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike or the 2019 United Teachers Los Angeles strike.)

What explains the significant No vote? The result is all the more surprising given that union leadership put as much effort into campaigning for a Yes vote as they had in mobilizing for the initial strike authorization vote, according to reports from UAW members

and staff.

Simply put, many workers thought they could win more. Those who voted No saw the sizable percentage wage increases, but noted that the actual dollar amount behind those percentages would still leave most workers rent burdened by the end of the contract. The final agreement also jettisoned the COLA provision, which would have automatically indexed future wage increases to the cost of living.

Many “Vote No” proponents saw the wage demands not simply as an economic question, but a political struggle over the nature of wage determination: should wages be a function of “what the market will bear,” or should they be determined based on what is necessary to provide for human needs?

More concretely, tying wage increases to the rising cost of living, which in California as elsewhere is largely driven by the cost of housing, would have created incentives for the UC to use its substantial power as an institutional investor and large landholder to intervene in the housing market to keep costs down.

But beyond wages, “Vote No” organizers highlighted what else was missing in the contract: There was little progress on addressing non-resident supplemental tuition (NRST) additional fees of up to \$15,000 per year charged to non-U.S. citizens.

As state funding for the university has eroded, NRST has increasingly served as a core funding mechanism to make up the shortfall. But with the University of California attracting top scholars from around the world, union activists charge that NRST serves as a form of tuition discrimination, balancing the UC’s budget on the backs of international students.

The new contract codifies existing practice, which exempts international students from NRST for three years after they have fulfilled all graduation requirements except for researching and writing their dissertation.

Childcare was also a sore point. The contract increased childcare subsidies by 27%, from \$1,100 per quarter to \$1,400 per quarter by the end of the agreement. But with quality childcare in many California cities easily topping \$1,400 per month, the increase still leaves parents with significant childcare expenses.

Many also expressed concern about the “special wages” negotiated for workers at the Berkeley, San Francisco and Los Angeles campuses. This will result in an annual wage premium of roughly \$2,500 for each of these campuses.

Union leadership argued that the new agreement creates greater wage standardization across campuses than existed previously, and that codifying existing inequalities in the contract subjects them to the bargaining process going forward, creating a means

to reduce them over time. Critics charged that these “prestige tiers” would entrench cross-campus inequalities and create dangerous precedents for negotiations with other UC unions.

Language around improving workplace accessibility for disabled workers also fell short for many. “Vote No” proponents argued that the new provisions left university management with too much power to determine what constituted “reasonable” accommodations.

The Upside of Conflict

In the aftermath of the contract ratification vote, there is heated debate within the UC academic worker unions about whether it would have been possible to win more.

Some argued that a “long-haul” strike that would have withheld grades into the next term could have exerted more leverage on the university, while those advocating a Yes vote contended that such a strategy would have dissipated the union’s power, leaving the door open for UC management to backtrack on previously agreed-to provisions.

With the contracts ratified, it is impossible to know who was right. What is certain though is that there are radically different perspectives within the UC academic worker locals about strategy, tactics, and organizational functioning.

Media reports on the ratification focused on the internal divisions within the UAW locals. But while intra-union conflict can be unpleasant, and rhetoric can get overheated, it is important to recognize that there are some real upsides to this internal conflict.

Most fundamentally, the controversy surrounding the UC contract settlement is symptomatic of rising expectations among academic workers. After years of being told to accept low pay and exploitative working conditions in exchange for the ever-vanishing possibility of a secure, tenure-track future, they are demanding the respect and pay commensurate with the value of the work they do for the university right now.

The internal disagreements center around how best to advance those demands, and how far to push them. Rather than seeing the substantial No vote as a sign of fragmentation and weakness, we can view it as a sign that there is a sizable constituency within the union that remains unsatisfied with the current state of affairs, and is willing to fight for more.

After decades of workers taking concessions and being told to be thankful for what they have, this is a welcome development. Indeed, the kind of internal debate and disagreement we have seen is a sign of a healthy organization — especially in a high-participation context like in the UC system.

Labor organizer A. J. Muste famously described unions as being “part town hall

meeting, part army.” As organizations of individual workers whose power can only be exercised collectively, unions must deliberate in order to determine common interests and shape a course of action — the town hall part. But then they also must act with unity of purpose in the fight against the employer — that’s the army part.

These two functions are in tension but can also feed off each other. Deliberation over demands, strategy, and tactics, even when heated, can spur members’ engagement, increasing their willingness to fight.

Likewise, the experience of fighting the boss can transform workers’ sense of what they want — and what they’re capable of winning. This can increase members’ commitment to the union and increase their desire to shape its strategic vision.

We have seen this dynamic unfolding at UC. To its credit, UAW local leadership put considerable time and resources into the 2022 contract campaign, building in part off the energy and issues that emerged from the 2020 UCSC wildcat strike. This translated into record high participation in the strike authorization vote and the strike itself. The army came out in force.

But as the broad organizing and large-scale strike mobilizations escalated, they took on a life of their own. Despite leadership efforts to stage-manage picket lines through attorney-approved chants and picket signs, members found ways to express their issues in their own words and actions. Picket lines created forums for political discussion of the issues surrounding the strike and union strategy — something like a town hall meeting.

But efforts to translate these small-scale discussions into a broader dialogue between leaders and members sat awkwardly with union leadership. There were few union-organized mass forums to discuss bargaining issues and strike strategy.

Leadership opted instead for regular informational updates combined with “one-on-one” discussions between staff/officials and members. These were effective means for disseminating leadership talking points, and miles ahead of many other unions’ internal communication efforts during bargaining. But the fact remains that they left little room for engaging in substantive discussion of core issues as a collective.

Frustration at the lack of deliberation over strike strategy and bargaining demands bubbled up at campus-level organizing meetings among workers energized by their experiences on the picket lines.

This came to a head on a November 21 Zoom call where Local 2865 bargaining team members announced the withdrawal of the COLA demand to loud protests. It spilled over into independent teach-ins and strategy sessions about the strike.

This kind of dissent and debate is the

lifeblood of a healthy union. Indeed, it’s the kind of contentiousness that characterized the UAW in its formative years, when it grew from virtually nothing at its founding in 1935 to one million members by 1944. The challenge is how to balance the “town hall” and “army” elements.

Again to its credit, UAW leadership did respond to member pushback on occasion, most notably in modifying a November 30 wage proposal that would have dropped annual base pay from \$54,000 to \$42,000, after more than 2,000 members signed a petition opposing the move within half a day. But even then, the response was grudging, raising the base wage proposal to \$43,000.

Disagreement or Disloyalty?

For the most part, UAW leadership paid lip service to the idea that “disagreement and debate are important parts of this union,” while meeting actual dissent with defensiveness and derision.

When a reporter for *In These Times* sought comment from UAW leadership about internal disagreements on bargaining demands and strategy, the response came not from leadership, staff, or even a well-rehearsed rank-and-file member. Rather, it came from a PR firm, which followed up with a prepared statement from Local 2865 President Rafael Jaime.

Jaime’s statement stressed that the union’s actions were “guided by the majority,” and that the democratically elected bargaining committee was executing the will of the majority at the bargaining table.

This argument had some validity, in that the union does operate according to majority rule, and the bargaining team could not be expected to go back to the membership with every single proposal. But it also sidestepped the fact that many controversial bargaining team decisions were passed with razor-thin 10-9 majorities.

In such cases, one might expect that being “guided by the majority” might also include some acknowledgment of legitimate disagreements within the membership. Instead, UAW leadership interpreted disagreement as disloyalty.

As talk of a Vote No campaign gathered steam, an open letter signed by 153 UAW 2865 and SRU-UAW members appeared on Twitter on December 10, titled “Against an Anti-union No Vote Campaign.” While the letter itself had no direct connection to union leadership, the union’s PR firm had informed the aforementioned *In These Times* reporter on December 9 that such a letter would be forthcoming, and sent the reporter a copy upon its release.

The letter presented some well-reasoned defenses of contract gains, and called for “diversity of thought and tactics,” all while criticizing efforts to organize a No vote as

divisive and anti-union. While this goes against basic democratic practice and decades of labor history, those familiar with UAW history will recognize this rhetorical maneuver as classic Administration Caucus (AC) behavior.

For those unfamiliar, the AC has functioned since 1947 as the single party in the UAW's one-party state. It has maintained its hold on power by portraying itself as the defender of progressive union values, while denouncing those offering a different vision for the union as anti-union extremists.

It used this rhetoric to crush Black-led wildcat strikes against shop-floor and internal union racism, and against internal opponents concerned with the union's embrace of concessionary bargaining and labor-management partnership.

Over time, the AC's progressive veneer crumbled into outright corruption, culminating in a massive scandal that has unfolded over the past five years. More than a dozen UAW officials have pled guilty and gone to prison for embezzlement and other crimes, including two presidents.

The scandal also resulted in federal oversight of the UAW and the implementation of a system for direct election of top union officers. In elections held while the UC strike was underway, reformers critical of the AC-aligned leadership won nearly every leadership position they contested. (See Dianne Feeley's report on page 6 of this issue).

In fairness, current UAW leadership at UC and the open letter signatories bear no resemblance to the literal crooks who have led the international union in recent years. Indeed, many have been part of the recent efforts that have seriously weakened the AC's hold on power.

Similarly, levels of transparency and accommodation of dissent are greater than in many other UAW locals and other unions. Notably, Local 2865 leadership tweeted both pro and con statements prior to the contract ratification vote, even as it mobilized major resources behind the Yes vote.

Still, old habits die hard, and the UC UAW leadership's prickly response to criticism during the strike suggests that the AC's culture of conformity remains difficult to dislodge within the union.



Would it have been possible to win more?

Conflict and Growth

With the UC contracts now ratified, the focus now turns to enforcing the gains won in this contract, and laying the groundwork for the next contract campaign in 2025. Internal disagreements aside, it's clear that the strike has transformed the UC unions, which are now positioned at the head of a new wave of academic worker organizing.

Member participation is at an all-time high, and it will be critical to watch what happens with that member participation in the months ahead. Will those who mobilized for a No vote continue organizing for their alternative vision for the union, perhaps mounting a leadership challenge? Or will they dissipate and disengage?

For its part, will the current leadership follow through on its post-ratification promises and continue fighting to win issues that were left unresolved in the 2022 negotiations? Or will it focus more on taming internal opposition?

A lot can happen in two years, but initial signs point to a promising synergy in the UAW at UC. Following the ratification vote, leaders at UC Santa Cruz, where the No vote prevailed by a wide margin, called on those disappointed with the ratification results to resist the urge to withdraw, "and instead redouble our commitment to the organizing that has taken us this far."

Maintaining that commitment will be essential to build a culture of democratic debate and dissent within the union.

The main concrete action UAW leadership has taken since ratification has been

to merge SRU-UAW into Local 2865, creating a 36,000-member mega-local. While the size of the new local may be unusual among academic worker unions, it is common for researchers and instructors to be in the same local.

On a more substantive level, union leadership has been focused on combating post-strike retaliation against workers and pushing back against UC management's efforts to pay for negotiated improvements for academic workers by drastically reducing the number of academic worker positions.

As academic worker unionism continues to sweep across campuses in the months and years ahead, the UC strike offers important lessons for the path forward. At a basic level, it has shown how transformative a strike can be, even when workers don't win all their demands. The strike set a new standard for academic labor, raising workers' expectations in the process.

Those raised expectations stoked member involvement, ensuring mass participation in the strike. But they also sparked debate and dissent. While that debate and dissent could get heated, even vitriolic at times, it's important to recognize that it is a necessary source of dynamism within the labor movement.

Periods of growth are also periods of conflict, as workers figure out who they are, what they want, and how they want to get it. You can't figure that out through surveys and carefully managed focus groups. It has to be debated.

If academic worker unionism continues to grow, we should expect to see more of the conflict we saw on the picket lines and meetings during the UC strike. And we should welcome it. ■

AS WE GO to press, the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO) strike at the University of Michigan, which began March 29, continues as classes end.

In preparation for negotiations, GEO members called for a living wage and developed proposals for smaller class size, affordable health and child care, and a community-based, unarmed emergency response team instead of police. But the University bargaining team dismissed most proposals, and its pay offer did not even take inflation into account.

When GEO voted overwhelmingly to strike, the University attempted to get a court injunction forcing an end to the walkout. That was not granted. Pickets and solidarity rallies are continuing. ■



Left to right on guitar, banjo and guitar the three vagabonds who hitchhiked through the South collecting songs in the 50s: Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Frank Hamilton, and Guy Carawan. Taken at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, TN. Coal miner Lee Tom plays fiddle. Perry Horton, father of the founder of Highlander, Myles Horton, listens in.

Knoxville Mercury

Frank Hamilton, the People's Musician David McCullough

"DON'T THINK," Frank Hamilton said when asked how to improvise a jazz solo.

How did a man who co-founded the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago 65 years ago, which remains today the largest folk music school in the country with 13,000 students a year; a man who knows as much music theory as any Juilliard graduate; a man who likes to rearrange and reharmonize both folk and jazz tunes come up with the advice "Don't think?"

As it turns out, once you know where Frank is coming from it sounds as natural as Lenin's "Every cook can govern" does to a Marxist. I can't speak for Frank, but I can tell what I derived from playing and talking with him for many years.

Frank was raised in Los Angeles. His father, a hobo-philosopher sidekick of Jack London, rode the rails, joined the IWW, and organized a Marine Cooks and Stewards strike in Oakland. He died just before Frank was born. At Fairfax High and in city college bands Frank first played trombone, going for a Kid Ory sound, next to future stars like jazzman Horace Tapscott. Like Nashville, L.A. is full of musicians like the Wrecking Crew who play rock, pop, movie and tv music, whatever it takes to make a living, but play jazz for pleasure.

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Frank, now a skilled guitarist, also absorbed the folk music scene like a sponge. At left-wing parties, he would hole up in a corner with Woody Guthrie and jam. Frank was shy and Woodie didn't like to talk politics.

Young Frank and folksinger Guy Carawan hung out at Black Baptist church services to learn the gospel sound. Frank joined The Weavers, America's popular folk ensemble of the '40s and '50s, when his mentor Pete Seeger left the group to go solo. Pete said that if you pushed Frank Hamilton out of an airplane, by the time he landed he would be singing the songs of that land.

Frank taught at the Old Town School and at Barney Kessel's Music World in the '60s. Some of his students, like Roger McGuinn of the Byrds, went on to fame and fortune.

Fame and fortune to Frank meant abandoning music in favor of business. Playing clubs in L.A. and on the road soured him on commercial music.

Ed Pearl, who ran the folk music club The Ashgrove, told me of his frustration with Frank for not capitalizing on his talent. But Frank saw being a star in folk music as a contradiction. His comment on fame: "Fame and money: two illusions that fade like mist. Emily Dickinson wrote a poem 'I'm nobody. Are you nobody too?' Why the hell not [be nobody too]?"

Frank turned 88 in the summer of 2022, having spent his entire life eking out a living

with music while avoiding the music business. As I write, in September, 2022, at the Frank Hamilton School of Folk Music in Atlanta he is teaching a class called Protest Songs.

Frank Hamilton and the Folk Revival: from Woody Guthrie to We Shall Overcome (<https://vimeo.com/811044489>), a one-hour documentary and oral history, will premiere on Georgia Public Broadcasting. Created by Bert Elliott, Chris Moser and Bob Judson it may also air on national public television. Musicians like Don McLean, Roger McGuinn and Sparky Rucker describe Hamilton's influence on American Folk Revival and today's Americana music. Frank recalls his friends Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger.

Photos and music clips take us from the protests of the '50s to today. Check out Frank Hamilton and the Folk Revival website for updates. (See <https://frankhamilton.net>) I'm not going to tell that history here because the video does it much better. Wikipedia lists a fair number of his credits.

For Frank Hamilton, music is the provinance of the people, like breathing or talking. He thinks everyone is a musician, everyone can sing. It just needs to be brought out.

Music — folk, hip hop, jazz, whatever — is a language, Frank and his late wife Mary used to say. You learn it mostly by mirroring, they thought, listening to others then imitating it for yourself, as we learn English. It is passed down over the generations and diasporas.

The African diaspora gave us blues, gospel and jazz. The Roma diaspora gave us hundreds of ethnic musics, most built around back beats. As in science and math, you can take music structure as deep or specialized as you want, as “classical” composers and bebop players have, and non-Western musics do. Frank’s son, Evan, is a guitar wizard in the complex stratosphere of bebop, but he jams with the rest of us swing musicians and we with him. Music is a universal language with many streams and eddies.

So when it comes your turn to play a solo, you just say what’s in your mind using musical notes, adding your bit to the general conversation. When you sing to yourself in your head, your fingers will find the right notes, Frank said.

From each according to their ability. Bert Elliott told me that he comes to our jam sessions just to see what chord Frank will pull out of the air to end a tune.

We improvise, respecting the context. Respecting the speaker in a conversation, we nod our heads, move our bodies, keep it going.

Jamming

In a coffee shop conversation no one thinks what they are going to say, they just say it. There is a context that constrains the back and forth. In a jam session, that might be a standard tune, or it might be a riff someone plays to kick things off.

We improvise, respecting the context. Respecting the speaker in a conversation, we nod our heads, move our bodies, keep it going. The ground rule of a jam session whether folk or jazz is “Do no harm.” What people want to hear is you. You are unique, even if everything you have is borrowed or handed down.

That’s why musical quotations can be so much fun: you’re singing “Goofus” but throw in another tune. “Can’t read notes but I play anything by ear... ‘Lullaby of Birdland’ whisper... that I used to hear...” Ella Fitzgerald was a master at that and flying away from the lyrics altogether to scat singing. Just Ella being Ella. And you and I being us. Frank tells us that what he heard ordinary people, not professionals, sing about in their folk music catalyzed his commitment to socialism. You can sing about exploitation even without having to define it.

Music for Frank Hamilton is folk art, a collective activity created from the bottom up by people who are not taking orders or trying to be someone else. It’s socialist, made for use not for profit.

The civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome” is a case in point. It has been a church

Let Julian Out Of Jail

Words and music by Frank Hamilton

Inst. Intro.

1. Here's the stor-y of a Man-ning re-

5 jour-na-list in our coun-try's dark-est hour who lit the lamp of cord-ed the ar-my's mur-der-ous crimes and sent it to the

9 lib-er-ty by speak-ing truth to power. Wash-ing-ton Post and the in-fa-mous New York times, but

12 Jul-ian the jour-na-list was known both far and they would not re-ceive it nor would they save the

15 wide. He was in com-mand of Wi-ki-leaks and day, and "All the News That's Fit to Print" would

18 nev-er known to hide. *Chorus:* Fight for the First A-mend-ment and nev-er find it's way.

22 nev-er let it fail. We'll light the lamp of

25 lib-er-ty, let Jul-ian out of jail. Pri-vate jail.

song, a chant of tobacco workers, and universal protest song. It belongs to no one.

The copyright lists Zilphia Horton, Pete Seeger, Guy Carawan, and Frank Hamilton. Zilphia, music director of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, brought the song to the school from striking Black women in a South Carolina tobacco factory and taught it to Pete Seeger, who took it north.

New England grammarian that he was, Seeger changed the lyric “We Will Overcome” to “We Shall Overcome.” Seeger credits Carawan and Hamilton with giving it the rhythmic pulse we all know today, African 12/8 beat. Frank crafted the chord structure, Guy took the song to SNCC organizers in North Carolina, and they told him “Thanks, white boy, we’ll take it from here.”

The four musicians copyrighted the song to prevent commercial exploitation. Royalties from the song went for 50 years to the “We Shall Overcome” Fund to support grassroots African American organizing. Now the song is

in the public domain.

Though I started by talking about jazz solos in jam sessions, with their undeniable hierarchy of skills the musicians bring with them, solos are not their main use value. Jams are all about interaction, give and take. A dialectic where the emergent whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

As a socialist brought up in the Hal Draper and Stan Weir tradition of organizing from the bottom up, jazz jams and folk jams as I learned them from Frank Hamilton and friends are my microcosm of what socialist life could be. Everyone contributes at their own level, which improves over time.

Leaders now are alternately followers. Everyone can lead. Every cook can govern. Little kids can dance around, clap their hands, learning the rhythms and melodies. Participation is dynamic. We never step in the same river twice. That’s why jam sessions are such fun. They exemplify my definition of socialism: less work and more fun. ■



Earthquake Aftermath in Turkey

By Daniel Johnson

In the aftermath of the Gaziantep-Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, Hatay.

Hilmi Hacaloğlu, <https://www.voaturkce.com/a/hatayda-buyuk-yikim/6953285.html>

ON FEBRUARY 6, 2023, an earthquake with a magnitude 7.8 struck the southeastern Turkish province of Kahramanmaraş. About nine hours later, a M 7.5 quake hit about ninety miles north. At the time of writing the quakes have killed close to 50,000 in Turkey and more than 7,200 in northwestern Syria. Millions have been displaced.

The affected region is an earthquake zone, a triple junction between Anatolian, Arabian and African tectonic plates. The quakes of 2023 were caused by the Arabian plate's movement northwards and grinding against the Anatolian plate.

While the February quakes were massive, Turkey has experienced similar events in the past. In 1939 a M 7.8 earthquake struck the eastern province of Erzincan, killing 33,000 and injuring 100,000. In 1999, an earthquake

in Kocaeli province near Istanbul officially killed 17,000 — the actual number was likely considerably higher.

Then-mayor of Istanbul Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was among the most vocal critics of the government's flawed response to the catastrophe. It might therefore have been expected that the current Turkish government under President Erdoğan and his AK Party would be prepared for such a disaster.

Instead, in the critical 48 hours after the quakes the government was slow to respond and coordination efforts were often botched. As the scale of the catastrophe became evident, videos went viral of people left to their own devices and unable to find loved ones in the middle of winter.

Cronyism and Ideology

The Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) has received much scrutiny and criticism. While the military was not immediately mobilized for search-and-rescue efforts, AFAD responded confusedly and lacked coordination. This was all the more unforgivable considering the agency had conducted an earthquake drill in the region less than four years ago.

In addition to alleged internal divisions, the agency appears to have been another casualty of AKP cronyism and ideology. İsmail Palakoğlu, head of the agency since 2018, was previously an administrator in the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*). Palakoğlu is a graduate of Ankara University's Faculty of Theology with no training in disaster-related subjects.

AFAD's budget was reduced by a third in 2022-23; that of *Diyanet* increased 56.6%, its 36 billion Turkish *liras* more than the Foreign and Culture Ministries combined.

Surprisingly, Erdoğan acknowledged problems in the government's response, going so far as to ask for forgiveness from the population for inevitable "human" errors. Perhaps less surprisingly, he attributed the disaster to "fate" (*kader*) in a manner similar to mining disasters in recent years that have killed hundreds of workers.

Attributing preventable disasters to fate absolves employers and the state of responsibility while urging resignation and passivity on victims. In reality, much could have been done to minimize the earthquakes' impacts.

Construction has been central to Turkey's

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economic growth in recent decades. Yet Turkish architects — the professional association of Turkish engineers and architects, TMMOB, seen by the AKP as a political enemy — have long pointed to the skirting of building regulations by politicians and developers. Codes for earthquake engineering standards are rarely enforced.

The government has sought to place blame for collapsing buildings during the earthquakes (while those up to code fared far better) on corrupt contractors — more than 200 have been arrested at the time of writing. However, as many have pointed out, the Turkish state regularly issues so-called construction “amnesties” that allow illegal buildings to be certified for a fee. Millions of structures have been built this way: in 2018 the Urbanization Ministry acknowledged that half of the structures in Turkey did not meet building and earthquake regulations.

Videos from 2019 of Erdoğan boasting about such construction amnesties in earthquake-hit provinces of Kahramanmaraş, Malatya and Hatay went viral after the earthquakes. Though providing cheap housing (and thus votes), the catastrophic consequences of such short-term thinking were made brutally clear in February.

This was recognized at the time by MP Garo Paylan of the People’s Democracy Party (HDP), who argued in 2018 that a proposed zoning amnesty was putting millions of lives at risk.

Political Fallout?

The social and psychological effects of the earthquakes will be felt for many years. What the political fallout from the disaster will be is uncertain.

After initial rumors that elections scheduled for May would be delayed, Erdoğan has confirmed they will be held as planned. He has promised to compensate relatives of the deceased with 100,000 Turkish *liras* [about \$5,000], and has also promised to resolve all housing issues within a year. For him to fulfill his promise, of course, he will have to win the election.

Prior to the earthquakes, the election was widely seen as the biggest challenge for Erdoğan since coming to power in 2002. The Turkish economy has been in crisis for five years, as the value of the Turkish *lira* has collapsed and record-breaking inflation is the highest in Europe. According to the official Turkish Statistical Institute inflation hit 85.5% in October 2022; independent analysts have

put the figure as high as 176%.

In early March, a six-party opposition coalition known as the Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*) named People’s Republican Party (CHP) leader Kılıçdaroğlu as its candidate for president. Although the leader of the nationalist “Good” Party (İYİ) Merel Akşener cause a mini-crisis by withdrawing her party’s support for Kılıçdaroğlu (a moderate social democrat), widespread outrage — including within her own party — forced her to rejoin the opposition alliance.

The AKP still needs the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) to maintain its majority in parliament (though support for the MHP in polls has been falling precipitously), and has in recent weeks displayed its desperation by reaching out to fringe Islamist parties like the Welfare Party (RP) and the Free Cause Party (*Hür Dava Partisi*), a kind of Kurdish Hezbollah.

While things look grim for Erdoğan and his alliance, as authoritarianism grows, liberal democratic niceties like elections decrease in significance. The widespread demonstrations of solidarity and autonomous organization that have emerged in the state’s absence, both nationally and internationally, have provided inspiration in a very dark time. ■

Strange Career of the Comstock Law — continued from page 4

Sadly, she embraced eugenics as the rationale for her work.

Other radicals, including Dr. Antoinette Konikow, Rose Pastor Stokes and Emma Goldman, also wrote and spoke about women’s right to control their bodies. Konikow published “Advice to Mothers” in English, Italian and Yiddish (1923) and a pamphlet for physicians, *Voluntary Motherhood* (1923, 1926, 1928). Her 1931 book, *Physicians’ Manual of Birth Control*, contained text, drawings and tables.

During the 1920s Konikow gave an annual series of five classes on sex education and birth control to women only. She was arrested under a Massachusetts version of the Comstock law but found not guilty in Boston Municipal Court. (Her attorney pointed out that she had lectured but had not distributed contraceptives.)

To a certain extent the economic hardship of the depression legitimized contraception. By 1930 the American Birth Control League operated 55 clinics; eight years later there were over 500.

Sanger’s ABC worked to put together the National Committee on Federal Legislation for Birth Control. The committee, made up of 1,000 organizations with a combined membership of 20 million, sued in federal court to lift restrictions on contraceptives.

At the 1936 trial Dr. Hannah M. Stone, medical director of the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau in New York, testified that

she had prescribed the use of contraceptive devices when it was not desirable for a patient to become pregnant. The United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit rendered a decision that the Comstock law did not apply to the legitimate activities of physicians. The government’s attorney chose not to appeal.

However, through most of human history birth control and abortion were not separate categories but various forms of control over one’s reproductive life. The Comstock law, like the Hyde and Helms amendments, needs to be buried

This decision knocked out a key provision of the federal law and swept away all but three state laws. (The three exceptions were Connecticut, Massachusetts and Mississippi.)

It was only in 1965 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Griswold v. Connecticut* that married couples have the right to privacy and the use of contraceptives. That right was extended to unmarried people in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972).

But now that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in *Dobbs v. Women’s Health Group of Mississippi* that there is no federal right to

abortion, a law that most people don’t even remember is being dusted off to oppose abortion by limiting its access.

Perhaps the Comstock law will also come in handy for banning books that Moms for Liberty types find “sexually explicit” and therefore inappropriate in libraries. With no explicit definition of obscenity, the law remains a valuable tool for the morality police. So far, the only exceptions that have been legally carved out are around birth control or when a book’s dialogue reveals the mind of a character — as in the case of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (*U.S. v. One Book Called Ulysses*, 1936).

Although the battle against disseminating birth control information may seem won, in fact it is also under attack. We find rightwing legislatures demanding that birth control be excluded from mandatory insurance coverage. Some employers have successfully fought against including coverage under the plan they provide their employees. Another area of dispute is that right wingers falsely assert that some forms of birth control are abortifacients.

However, through most of human history birth control and abortion were not separate categories but various forms of control over one’s reproductive life. The Comstock law, like the Hyde and Helms amendments, needs to be buried. Today the struggle for reproductive justice demands that all these repressive laws be swept away. ■

From Ukraine to Palestine: The Poisons of Denialism

By David Finkel

EXPLODING OVER THE past year, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel's escalating violence and ethnic cleansing in Palestine have become two centers of a deepening global crisis. For the international left, the Ukraine war and Palestine catastrophe, both on their own and together, pose very big tests of theory and more importantly, of *politics*.

A question has bedeviled the left: Is it possible to support both the Ukrainian and Palestinian struggles, and oppose imperialism, at the same time? Actually, the question should be reversed: How is it possible for a genuinely internationalist left *not* to support both of these struggles for self-determination and national survival?

Obviously, the degenerative bloody spiral in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Russia's drive to destroy Ukraine are both international emergencies. Beyond that, the situations are very distinct of course. I will argue, however, that there are also important parallels and connections.

On the face of it, the biggest difference lies in the stance of U.S. imperialism and its allies — giving massive military support to Ukraine's war of defense and applying economic sanctions against Russia, while at the same time, for more than five decades now, enabling the Israeli state's drive to crush the Palestinian people's aspirations for survival and self-determination.

For some of the left, sadly, global struggle revolves only around the crimes of U.S. imperialism and its allies — to the point that not only the role of other imperial oppressors, but the agency of real people and oppressed peoples fighting for their own freedom, fades to irrelevance. From that point of view, for the left to simultaneously support both Ukraine and the Palestinian struggle seems like a hopeless contradiction.

The hypocrisy of Western rhetoric about the “rules-based international order” and “democracy against authoritarianism” is, of course, overwhelming. But this is neither new nor surprising in the light of centuries of colonial and imperial history.

For those of us striving to be consistent

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anti-imperialists, the starting point isn't which imperialist camp happens to be stronger or “the main enemy” in some global schema, but rather *the rights of nations and peoples and their legitimate struggles*.

That's why I begin this discussion with a vital parallel between the Ukrainian and Palestinian struggles — the *denial* of Ukrainian nationhood by Vladimir Putin, calling it an artificial creation of the godless Bolsheviks, and the *denial* of Palestinian nationhood by all the Israeli and Zionist movement ideologues who maintain “there was no such thing as Palestinians” (Golda Meir) and “there was never a Palestinian state.”

Ideologies of Denial

Are we equating Ukraine and Palestine? Certainly not — *denialism* is what we're talking about. In each case it's about denial of the right of self-determination. This kind of twisted ideology has consequences, up to and including de-humanization that paves the road to mass murder.

In the case of Palestine, denialism facilitates a myth — absurd on its face and long discredited, but still widely circulated — that the native Palestinian population was mostly comprised of recent arrivals drawn by the prosperity generated by Zionist settlement. Although factually vacuous, it serves as a convenient ideological backstop for the continuing confiscation of Palestinian land and property for the sake of “rebuilding the Jewish homeland.”

This narrative stretches across time and politics from the Labor Zionist Golda Meir to the present Israeli Finance Minister, the extreme religious-nationalist Bezalel Smotrich: “There is no such thing as a Palestinian nation. There is no Palestinian history. There is no Palestinian language.” (See March 21, 2023, *Haaretz*.)

Rightwing U.S. Christian nationalists pick up the theme: “There's really no such thing as the Palestinians,” says former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee.

This attempted erasure of the Palestinian people's reality reached its climax, at least in U.S. circles, with the publication of a screed by Joan Peters (or ghostwritten for her), *From Time Immemorial* (1984). It was debunked *in toto* by Norman Finkelstein, and discredited by scholars including Israeli historian Yehosh-

ua Porath who called it a “sheer forgery,” but as a useful Zionist narrative it has continued to circulate.

Peters' thesis took a new lease on life when its falsehoods were lifted, without attribution, by Alan Dershowitz for his 2003 book *The Case for Israel*. (Norman Finkelstein again debunked both Peters and Dershowitz in his 2008 book *Beyond Chutzpah*. Dershowitz later denied pressuring University of California Press to not publish Finkelstein's book. In retrospect this episode illustrates some aspects of Dershowitz's character that ultimately drew him to Donald Trump.)

For many liberal (Jewish and other) friends of Israel, the brutality of the Occupation, when it's impossible to ignore, becomes a cause of alarm and handwringing, but the idea that Palestinians are something less than a “real” nation serves as a partial anesthetic. They can rationalize the “violence on both sides” as the result of Palestinians' unreasonable “rejectionism” (i.e. refusal to accept the theft of 80 percent of their homeland). It also has debilitating consequences for Israeli politics, as we'll see below.

In the Ukraine war, Putin's claim that Ukraine is naturally part of “the Russian heartland” is historical myth, but doesn't need to be backed up by facts. The myth puts a gloss on Moscow's annexationist claims on the provinces of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, as well as Crimea.

In his July 2021 essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” Putin wrote regarding the “time bomb” planted in the Soviet Union at its founding:

“The right for the republics to freely secede from the Union was included in the text of the Declaration on the Creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and, subsequently, in the 1924 USSR Constitution. By doing so, the authors planted in the foundation of our statehood the most dangerous time bomb, which exploded the moment the safety mechanism provided by the leading role of the CPSU was gone, the party itself collapsing from within.”

Back in April 2008 at a NATO summit in Bucharest, Putin reportedly claimed: “Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? A part of its territory is [in] Eastern Europe, but part, a considerable part, was a gift from us!”

The noted scholar of European history, Donald J. Trump, was reported to have



U.S. tax dollars subsidize “persecution and apartheid” (Human Rights Watch) by the Israeli state.

exclaimed in an August 2017 briefing that Ukraine “wasn’t a ‘real country,’ that it had always been part of Russia.” (*Washington Post*, November 2, 2019, “A presidential loathing for Ukraine is at the heart of the impeachment inquiry”)

Denial of Ukraine’s nationhood helps enable the dishonest sectors of the global left to label Ukrainian nationalism as led by “Nazis” worthy of extermination, while more pacifist-oriented elements regard Ukraine’s territory as bargaining chips to be negotiated in order to stop the carnage.

If Ukraine is regarded as an artificial construct — regardless of what Ukrainians may think — how much then should it really matter if Donetsk is part of Ukraine, or Russia, or semi-independent? Thus we see, for example, how CodePink and allied groups calling for “peace” systematically refuse to answer the simple question, “Is Ukraine a ‘real country’ and does it have the right to defend itself?”

This refusal makes it more comfortable for those who sympathize with Ukrainians’ suffering, but don’t understand the popular depth of Ukraine’s resistance, to plead for “peace negotiations” that would amount to Ukraine’s territorial amputation. They also seem blind to the reality that such a “peace” would lead to massive re-arming on all sides for a next, bloodier round.

The issue here isn’t what terms the Ukrainian people might decide to negotiate — which is their right, and theirs alone — but the political and moral bankruptcy of “peace” advocates lecturing them about the need to surrender.

Whether or not western imperialist powers, which we know are infinitely treacherous, will ultimately move to impose some “solution” in the name of “realism,” remains an open question. For the left, that shouldn’t affect a principled defense of Ukrainians’ right to determine their own future.

The Main Differences

The parallel denials of Palestinian and Ukrainian nationhood and rights to self-determination don’t mean that these struggles themselves are identical. Obviously, Ukraine is not Palestine — and much less is it Israel, as Ukraine’s president Zelensky claimed when he was hoping to get more support from that quarter. Liz Fekete writes that:

“In 2020, Zelensky took Ukraine out of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and, in a speech to the Knesset, he linked the existential right of the Ukrainian nation to that of the Israeli nation, both fighting an enemy bent on the ‘total destruction of the people, state, culture.’ In a passionate response, the Palestinian university of Haifa professor Asad Ghanem accused Zelensky of reversing the role of occupier and occupied. While expressing Palestinian support for the Ukrainian people’s resistance to the brutal Russian invasion, he said that Zelensky’s words were a ‘disgrace when it comes to global struggles for freedom and liberation.” (Liz Fekete, “Civilisational racism, ethnonationalism and the clash of imperialisms in Ukraine,” *Race & Class*, April- June 2023)

Geopolitical pundits can explain all the differences between the war in Ukraine and the so-called Palestine-Israeli “conflict.” At their core, the differences between these modern states and nations are clear enough. Please note: we say “modern” states and nations, because we are not speaking here of wars of European kingdoms and state borders from past centuries, let alone the medieval “Kievan Rus” or the myth-encrusted history of ancient Israel. All of these are of interest, but belong to separate discussions.

The main difference between Ukraine and Israel is that *the modern Ukrainian state was not founded on the dispossession and the land of another people*, whom it expelled *en masse* and proceeded to impose a brutal occupation regime with colonial and apartheid-like features.

On the other hand, the big difference be-

tween Ukraine and Palestine is that Ukraine is a nation-state with the well-demonstrated capacity to defend its territory against an imperial invader. Being in the middle of Europe has also enabled it to get necessary military assistance. Palestinians do not have state institutions, or an army, or any strategic military option to win their freedom.

More than that, Palestinians have no great-power friends, and U.S. imperialism in particular is entirely indifferent to their fate as long as things stay relatively “quiet” (i.e. invisible). In fact, Palestine is essentially collateral damage in every international crisis, including the present war in Ukraine.

The Palestinian people attract a great deal of important global popular solidarity, but no support from “geopolitical” actors in the region or anywhere else. They are an essentially unarmed population confronting, on their own, the enormous power of the Israeli colonial state.

For its own reasons, of course, U.S. imperialism assists Ukraine’s war while simultaneously enabling Israel’s crushing of Palestine. That’s an illustration of cynical great-power policy, but no reason for the left to simply turn that policy inside out. The widely acclaimed heroism of the Ukrainian people, and the generally unrecognized heroism of the Palestinian people, are equally deserving of solidarity from those of us who oppose all imperialism and colonialism. That’s *all* the more important now.

Reactionary Feedback

A further parallel is that the invasion of Ukraine and the disaster in Palestine cannot be separated from the internal political crises in Russia and Israel respectively. In each case, the regimes’ efforts to crush another nation feed back directly into their societies.

Too many liberal “friends of Israel” can’t grasp the reality that the Jewish-supremacist amalgam of rightwing nationalism and religious extremism in the new Israeli governing coalition represents the authentic destination toward which political Zionism has been heading for a very long time.

One can have a long and complex discussion over whether a different destination was possible — if the post-1967 Occupation had been quickly ended — but that possibility is long dead, along with the zombie “two-state solution.”

While Israeli military and settler murders are a daily reality in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, at the same time an unprecedented confrontation has exploded in Israeli politics over the government’s peremptory move to seize control over the nomination and powers of the country’s judiciary. Israeli state president Herzog’s warning of “civil war” shows the extent of the crisis.

The “reform” threat has brought hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens (almost

entirely Jewish) into the streets, blockading highways and ports, openly calling the government scheme “fascist.” They see the fight as a life-and-death struggle to save Israel’s democracy. Amjad Iraqi of the Israeli online +972 magazine calls the spreading revolt, ironically, “one of the most impressive BDS campaigns ever witnessed.” (“Israelis, welcome to BDS,” +972, March 17, 2023)

Democracy does exist, for Israel’s Jewish citizens; to a much more limited degree for the country’s Arab citizens; and not at all for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories who live under military-apartheid conditions. A movement for Israeli democracy is inevitably strangled so long as the denial of Palestinian nationhood remains in place either openly or by default.

For prime minister Netanyahu, judicial “reform” means exempting himself from criminal prosecution on multiple corruption charges. Netanyahu is effectively a captive of his religious-extremist coalition partners, for whom it’s about seizing control of “Jewish identity” issues and removing any (weak) restraints on murderous military and settler assaults on Palestinian towns, unlimited settlement expansion, and power to ban Arab-led parties from future elections (as parliamentary electoral commissions have previously attempted but have been overruled by Israel’s Supreme Court).

Palestinian and progressive critics have accurately pointed out that the fight to “save Israel’s democracy” is essentially over maintaining a *status quo* that’s already lethally anti-democratic for Palestinians. Given such limitations, its prospects for substantive success are clouded — although the prospect of weakening judicial authority is causing serious capital flight, while Israel’s supreme protector, the United States government, now seems seriously concerned by the implications of Religious Zionist cabinet ministers’ overtly genocidal appeals. Both these factors are bad for business and “stability.”

One interesting comparison between Israel and Russia has been the public indifference of most of their populations — in the Israeli-Jewish case, to the disaster unfolding in the Occupied Territories, and in Russia’s case to the horror in Ukraine.

For many years now, most of the Israeli-Jewish public has been conditioned to ignore the facts of the Occupation, even when they’re freely available. In Russia, state media and police repression keep the war’s brutality hidden. The degree of freedom inside Israel makes possible a civic arousal, while inside Russia the invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied by the disappearance of the remaining vestiges of democracy.

The Putin regime is now the global motherhood of white Christian Nationalism, for which it is so admired by much of the MAGA faction of the U.S. Republican Party. As is

widely discussed, Russia is moving increasingly toward some form of fascism, a trend which is only likely to accelerate unless its invasion is defeated. (We’ve discussed this trend in Zakhar Popovych’s recent article “Russia’s Road Toward Fascism?” in *ATC* 222, January-February 2023.)

As for the impasse of Russian society itself, it’s deepened by the catastrophe of Putin’s war-of-choice. As sociologist Boris Kagarlitsky writes:

“The year that has passed since the beginning of the war has clearly shown that the political system needs a radical change. An alternative to reforms can only be the growing disintegration of state institutions and the degradation of an already sick economy, which does not suit anyone. But the only way to change course is to remove Vladimir Putin from power.” (“On the First Anniversary of the War,” <https://russiandissent.substack.com/>)

Prospects

Indeed, any prospects of a democratic future for Russia are inseparably connected to the outcome of the war — in particular, they depend on the defeat of its imperialist, annexationist ambitions in Ukraine. Ukrainian democracy is equally dependent on the war’s results — but in its case, on the victory of its resistance to the invasion. And the outcomes of these events will have ripple effects for all of us.

While Ukrainian labor and left forces are fully engaged in the war, they are also forced to resist the Zelensky government’s anti-worker policies. A Ukrainian victory would open the *possibility* (there are no guarantees) of permanently overcoming the vicious oligarchic factional politics that dominated the country following its 1991 post-Soviet independence. On the other hand, a tragic defeat or amputation of Ukraine is more likely to shatter its emergent national unity and bring on a resurgence of far-right forces.

For Israel, preservation of its *formal* democracy depends on its *substantive* expansion. That means first of all, a movement that confronts the reduction of Arab citizens’ rights — and apartheid-colonial rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories — in law and practice. This requires nothing short of a political revolution to shatter the doctrine of the “nation-state of the Jewish people” that the current governing coalition is guiding toward its ultimate unspeakable conclusions.

As under any other ethno-religious



The mass expulsion of Palestinians in the Nakba (1947-49) was planned, and prepared by the denial of their peoplehood. What is happening to civilians and thousands of children in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory right now?

IMEU

regime, Jewish supremacy and democracy will not peacefully coexist. The violent settlers who carried out the pogrom in Huwara, and commit daily atrocities that don’t make the international headlines, understand this perfectly.

The question for Israeli society is whether it can confront the consequences of the Zionist movement’s denial, from its very inception, of the Palestinian nation. That struggle requires assistance from the outside, through the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions(BDS) campaign and other actions of solidarity for Palestinian rights.

At the same time, Russian denialism of Ukrainian nationhood can only be defeated on the battlefield, and that requires international solidarity, including support for weapons, with Ukraine’s war for survival. Russia and NATO may be waging an element of a “proxy war” — which thanks to Putin, NATO is winning — but what’s of decisive importance is that Ukraine is fighting a *people’s war* that every left force should support.

Contrary to Biden’s shambling rhetoric, the issues in this war aren’t about global states standing for “democracy versus authoritarianism.” That’s a struggle that exists not between states but *within* every society, including (especially) our own. Let alone is it about the pious fraud of a “rules-based international order,” where the United States makes the rules and gives the orders.

The left must not be diverted: First and foremost in Ukraine and Palestine, the struggle is about the rights of peoples and nations, and the poisonous consequences when those rights are denied. ■

[On the unfolding Palestine/Israel crisis, I highly recommend the Israeli online magazine +972. For the Ukraine Solidarity Network, a mission statement and many useful references are posted at <https://linktr.ee/ukrainsolidarity-network>.]



The artist's grandmother, Halia, with her class, 1948.

Songs and Flowers for Ukraine By Oksana Briukhovetska

MY HEART IS bleeding for my country Ukraine, and searching for mourning, for the possibility to bring flowers of my grief to infinite graves that emerge every day on Ukrainian soil. The question "Why war?" was discussed by intellectuals a century ago in between the two World Wars, and was not resolved neither then nor now. Destroyed buildings in Ukraine today remind us of Ukraine in flames during the Second World War. New wounds hurt on top of old ones.

My grandmother Halia survived an artificially inflicted famine in Ukraine known as Holodomor in 1933 at the age of ten, and the occupation of her village by the Nazis in 1941. Just married, she gave birth to her first child under occupation. After the war she took part in rebuilding a burned village school in which she taught children the rest of her life. Listening to her stories I was sure that

Oksana Briukhovetska is a Ukrainian artist who works primarily in textiles. This statement was the introduction to her show at the Stamps Gallery in Ann Arbor, Michigan in March-April 2023. The art work on the front cover, on this and the following pages are from that show.

the horror of war would never happen to us again. I was wrong.

She is young and not smiling in these photos. She and her fellow teachers and children who survived war don't smile. But they are holding flowers. They are witnessing trauma outside and inside themselves. My ancestors are silently mourning not only victims of their time but those of the next generations, who are dying today on Ukrainian land which is soaked in blood.

I refer to Ukrainian folk culture by recreating its language from materials found far from home, having home in my heart. Ukrainian poet Lesia Ukrainka said more than a century ago, "I have in my heart something that doesn't die." And it is Ukraine which is in our hearts. My grandmother Halia taught me a folk song about a bird flying through the house, who is not a bird but a mother. This bird for me today represents a motherland, wounded by Russian rockets.

*A cuckoo flew through my house
And it's not a cuckoo, it's my mother
If she knew about my sorrow
She would pass a piece of bread by*

*a sparrow
A piece of bread by a sparrow
A bit of salt by a tit
Oh mom, oh mom, how hard is my fate.*

The red viburnum berries which are a symbol of Ukraine are bleeding here as well. Another song, which has become symbolic during this war emerged a century ago through the struggle of Ukrainians for their freedom. It makes us believe today that Ukraine will win, and that red viburnum will thrive again as a symbol of life, beauty and love.

*Oh, in the meadow the red viburnum
bent down
Our glorious Ukraine is grieving
But we will raise that red viburnum
And we will cheer up our glorious Ukraine!*

Someone said in the year of 2022 that Ukrainians should look at the flowers while taking breaks in watching the news, that the beauty of flowers can heal. War kills beauty. But beauty can be used as a tool of resistance, and despite all the destruction, flowers will grow the next year again. ■

A Discussion with Eyewitnesses: People's War in Ukraine

with Vladislav Starodubtsev & Jeremy Bigwood

SUZI WEISSMAN conducted this interview for broadcast on her program "Beneath the Surface" on Jacobin Radio, March 9, 2023. It has been edited and abridged for publication here.

Suzi Weissman: *This is Jacobin Radio. Russia's war in Ukraine marked its first anniversary on February 24th. It's a brutal, horrible, destructive disaster causing human suffering and economic devastation not just in Ukraine, but also in the lives of ordinary Russians who are cannon fodder in Putin's war. The war has also had an impact on global hunger and energy supplies and the world environmental crisis. It's no exaggeration to say that this war changed the trajectory of the 21st century.*

Russia's response has been to double down on destruction since it cannot accomplish its war aims. Millions of Russians have left to avoid being conscripted or because they oppose Putin's war. Some are fighting Russians in Ukraine. Ukraine, fighting for its survival as a nation, insists peace can only be achieved through their successful resistance to Russia's invasion. Calling for "peace" in the abstract is meaningless in these circumstances.

We're going to get our guests' perspective. I'm really pleased to have with us Vladislav Starodubtsev, a historian of Central Eastern Europe and an activist in the Ukrainian Democratic Socialist Organization, Sotsialni Rukh (Social Movement). He is based in Kiev.

We also have back with us Jeremy Bigwood, an investigative journalist and a photojournalist with a background in science. Jeremy has covered the wars in Central America and was in Russia when the war started. Over the last year he has traveled in Ukraine three times, returning just a few days ago. He's now writing a series of portraits of Ukrainians on his Substack Bigwood site.

Ukraine has a rich socialist heritage dating all the way back to the 1860s and 1870s, but Putin has maintained that his goal to "denazify" Ukraine and its history. Vladislav, please tell us about how your organization developed.

Vladislav Starodubtsev: Sotsialni Rukh started out as a small Trotskyist organization in 2014, supporting the Maidan protest and calling for the democratization of Ukrainian society against the corrupt pro-Russian President Yanukovich. In Maidan we participated in the popular resistance, trying to connect trade union workers and different civil society organizations with the protests. We emphasized the social demands raised by protesters.

Over time we evolved into a broad, democratic, anti-capitalist organization, the largest leftwing Ukrainian group. We call ourselves the New Left or Democratic Socialists. uniting different struggles, feminist struggles, trade union struggles, LGBTQ struggles, worker struggles into one big push for the socialist transformation of society.

SW: *Is there cooperation between Ukrainian leftists and Russian*

leftists in the wake of this war?

VS: There are often problems in communication, because often Russian organizations don't understand the Ukrainian context. Russian society promotes a chauvinism that creates misunderstandings and stereotypes. That said, we cooperate particularly with the Anti-war Feminist Movement and Socialist Alternative. They have strong positions against the invasion.

SW: *Would you characterize Putin's war aims as imperialist?*

VS: In colonial studies there is a debate about whether Russia is an empire and whether its imperialism is unique. Russia primarily colonized lands on its border rather than overseas.

This is a very specific and understudied type of imperialism. It enabled Russia to crush any anti-colonial rebellion just by crossing the border. This created an ideology as the Russian state developed through imperial time, through Soviet time and through the current moment of the Russian Republic.

During all these periods the idea of Russian supremacy dominated. Usually, it's a cultural domination. It's a very structural racism that sees the Western world as an enemy, but copies the Western notion of success. During the Khrushchev era. This was reflected in the announcement that the Soviet Union will be better than the USA. Putin, too, always compares Russia to the West.

Then there is the Russian state's thesis of the "brotherly nations" of Ukrainians, Belarussians and Russians. This very paternalistic identity projects the notion that the "big" Russian nation will protect the "small" Byelorussians and Ukrainians – that they are one people and Russia should defend them, even defending these nations against themselves. The ideology of the Russian state, its propaganda and imperialist identity, has existed through time.

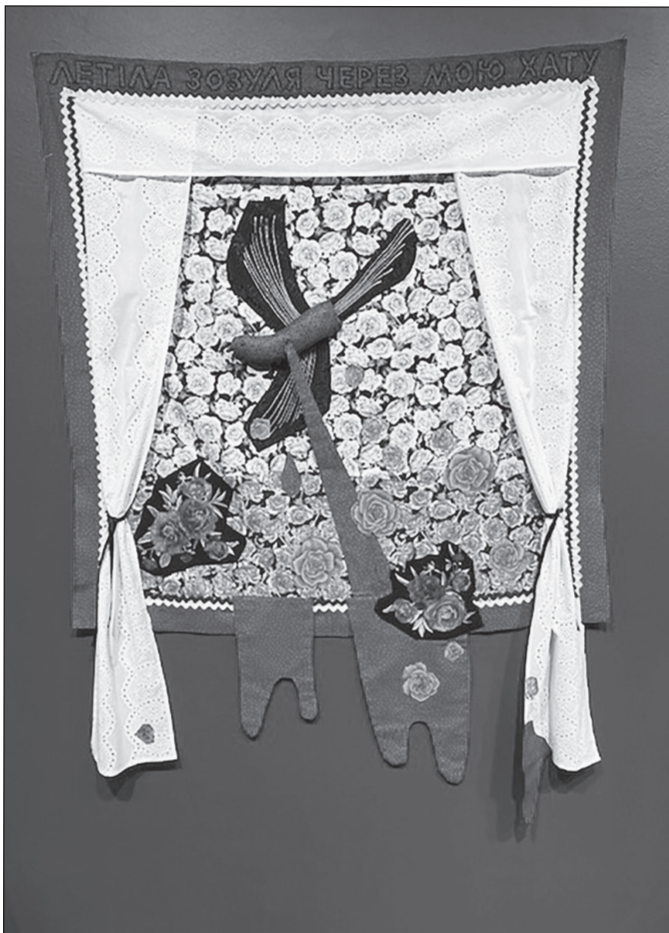
Russian Imperialism Reborn

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Russian imperialism didn't disappear. It was reborn with new strength. We can trace its action to the two invasions of the Chechen Republic as it brutally crushed the Chechen fight for its independence. This was the first major invasion that the newly independent Russian Republic took against an independent state.

It is important to point to this beginning because there was no NATO in Chechnya, there weren't Nazis in Chechnya, and there weren't any of the justifications used for invading Ukraine. Clearly the sole reason was to capture territory and occupy the land — this is classical imperialism.

Friedrich Engels remarked that a nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free. And following the Chechen wars (first war 1994-96; second war 1999-2000 ed.), there were a lot of "anti-terrorist" campaigns in the Russian Federation.

The police developed their surveillance and employed vari-



The cockoo, representing Ukraine, is wounded by the Russian rockets.

ous tools to suppress the opposition and especially the media. The first bricks to building an authoritarian regime are to be found in suppressing all democratic values.

This invasion of the Chechen Republic cannot be traced to any perceived threat from NATO. Western forces tolerated the invasion and brutality because they wanted to include the Russian Federation in their New World order.

At the time of the second invasion of the Chechen Republic, British prime minister Tony Blair was visiting St. Petersburg, talking to Putin about trade agreements. Clearly the West gave a green light to Russian imperialism and the building of modern Russian authoritarian state, even supplying it with weapons.

SW: *I'll also add that Chechnya was seen as another front of the war on terror. Both Yeltsin and Putin unleashed the war on terror to boost their popularity at home. Russians have a traditional enmity against Central Asians, typically portrayed as money changers and cheaters.*

I'd say that Yeltsin was trying to emulate George H.W. Bush in his Gulf War, creating a quick and dirty war that would boost popularity for electoral purposes. And Putin did it to burnish his war credentials when he was first in office.

Jeremy Bigwood: I think it helps when looking at Russia to understand this concept called Russky Mir. Russian society is better than anyone else. The concept of Russky Mir goes back to Tolstoyan times, It seems to have survived very well in the Soviet Union.

To a large extent I think that is driving this war. I don't think it's about Putin. I think Putin is just a manager. He could

leave and I think Russians would continue the war. My view of Russia has been quite diminished by this invasion and what has happened afterward.

Imperial Ideologies

SW: *I'm reading blog posts from Russians that there is an economic dimension to this war. Even though there have been sanctions and projections that this war will further disintegrate Russia — even destroy it — people are writing that Putin is developing a war economy, similar to Washington's permanent war economy. How might this fit in with the political economy of Russia? How might this fit in with your comments about cultural supremacy?*

VS: I would say the invasion is not driven by economic factors, at least not immediate ones. The main political factor is based on a Russian identity that tries to self-recreate empire.

Mostly this war is a serious hardship for the Russian oligarchy. For the capitalist class in Russia, for practically everyone, the war leads to economic collapse. Not even the bureaucracy is profiting. But a second political motivation lies in Putin's elite using the war to strengthen their grip on society. Russia is a police state with a distinct policing class, which controls private companies. Putin's bureaucracy would like to reduce the military's power over the economy.

I'd say the U.S. invasion of Iraq was connected with the general rise of Islamophobia and police terror. The same was going on in Russia. Russia tolerated the invasion of Iraq, and the United States tolerated what was going on in Chechnya. This ideological imperialist cooperation meant "We will not mention your imperialism and you will not talk about ours."

Both imperialist invasions provided the ideological grounds for states to continue. Putin is now pointing out that the United States invaded Iraq. Russia will justify its invasions by pointing to those of U.S. imperialism.

I agree with Jeremy about the Russian war. I would say that Russian society and the Russian state structurally developed out of colonialism and racism. It's a big part of the Russian imperial state's identity. Its colonialist vision is hard to imagine Russia without Ukraine. An independent Ukraine, especially a democratic Ukraine, is a threat.

In Russian ideology, the Russian nation remains a dominant colonial power. Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Georgians were all second-class citizens used by Russian imperialism to oppress other nations while oppressed by Russians. These structural hierarchies continue to exist. In fact, this dynamic of supremacy needs to be strengthened. Racism develops more racism and more expansion. That motivates and feeds imperialism.

Before this podcast, I looked at the one story that reported 47% of Russians would continue the war even if Putin proposes a peace plan. There's a backlash among those thinking that Putin doesn't go enough and isn't aggressive enough against Ukrainians.

SW: *There are many myths about this invasion and many about who Ukrainians are. Could you address some of these charges?*

VS: Even with Russia on its borders, Ukraine (after 1991) demilitarized and denuclearized itself to a very great extent. Yet Ukraine and other Eastern European countries felt threatened by the Russian imperialism that destroyed Chechnya and built a police state.

The charge over the official Russian TV channels is Ukraine being "all Nazis" as the reason for the invasion. There was a

great article released by my anarchist friend, who has been busy monitoring fascist violence in Ukraine. He monitored 58 cases of violence against people in 2021 by the far right. There were 120 incidents of violence against property. Comparatively, these are not big numbers.

Far-right forces are on the streets and in some military structures. Their influence is certainly less than in Western countries where street violence is strengthened by their parliamentary influence: Alternativ fur Deutschland in Germany, the Swedish Democrats, Le Pen in France or Trump legislators in the United States. These are more serious cases around the globe than what's going on in Ukraine.

We should acknowledge the existence of far right nationalists in Ukraine. They are fighting in the army, and we as the left have a temporary truce because we are engaged in a people's war. Everyone sees that the main target is to destroy Russian imperialism.

Afterwards, there probably will be problems with the far right. But for now far-right violence is exceptionally low and their influence lower. As history unfolds there will probably be new conflicts, but the question remains open about whether they will gain or lose strength. There is a problem but not a unique one — the far right exists in most states to a greater or lesser extent.

Democratic Rights and Language

SW: Another question: Are leftist parties being banned in Ukraine?

VS: The parties that have been banned were not left wing although some had leftist-sounding names. The largest of these was the Communist Party of Ukraine, which is directly connected to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Both supported the invasion and were participating in efforts to sabotage the Ukrainian military.

The banned parties clearly stated their support for the Russian invasion or had strong contacts with Russian economic circles. They are Slavic supremacist, racist and homophobic parties. They were banned the same way as fascist parties were during the Second World War in different countries.

We have a few functioning left-wing parties in Ukraine. A leftwing party can easily register, subject to two conditions. No totalitarian symbols (including the hammer and sickle) are allowed, and "communism" not allowed in the name.

Legally existing leftwing organization do not face persecution and can freely carry out their activities, even organizing protests. In Ukraine, this alleged totalitarian state, we had a successful strike. In this time of war, we held a successful protest against neoliberal reforms.

We had trade union demonstrations. We protested against

cuts in education. The myth about leftwing parties being banned is absolutely false and used to strengthen Russian propaganda.



*"Oh, in the meadow the red viburnum bent down/
Our glorious Ukraine is grieving..."*

SW: Vladislav, one myth about Ukraine to debunk that we hear a lot about is that Russians had to invade because Ukrainians were suppressing the Russian language. And that ignores the fact that there are major cities that are Russian speaking, even though they're turning toward Ukrainian. Could you address some of these major myths?

VS: This is a complicated issue, especially for those who don't understand the history of colonialism. Ukraine had been under the heavy pressure of assimilation into Russian culture and had experienced the destruction of their culture and language.

In the times of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian language was seen as the language of peasants, as that of second-class citizens. If you wanted to get a good job, to get a good education, to get a career, you should speak Russian.

Russian was the language of civilized people and Ukrainian was the language of peasants. This was true in independent Ukraine until 2014. Before then it was hard to buy a Ukrainian book. You would go to a bookstore and every book except a few was in Russian. In the cities everyone spoke Russian, and there were no translations into Ukrainian.

Between independence and the Maidan protests there were some who were really strong on defending their Ukrainian language and culture. But afterwards there was an active push by civil society to revive the Ukrainian language and save Ukrainian culture. People started to speak in Ukrainian, more books were printed in Ukrainian and there was more interest in Ukrainian history.

As all of this was happening, not everyone was happy. Russian-speaking people were feeling threatened as the dominant status of Russian was collapsing. At the same time there was, on the part of some, a growing defensive nationalism by those who, in defending Ukrainian culture attacked Russian culture.

There were tensions, but it wasn't violent. After Maidan, along with a Ukrainian cultural renaissance, some prejudice developed against the Russian language. Ukrainian has become the more dominant language. Certainly, prejudice against the Russian language has been strengthened by the war.

SW: I can see that this language conflict will be a continuing issue, and an important one. I'd like to turn to Jeremy, who just returned from Kyiv. Can you tell us of your impressions?

JB: One of the things that was striking to me is that most Ukrainians who speak Ukrainian also speak Russian. Many Russian-speaking people in the eastern or southeastern part of the country have a hard time speaking Ukrainian, but it doesn't really make much difference when it comes to the war.

When I was in the front line area between Kherson and Mykolaiv last summer, I found lonely soldiers speaking Russian.

The military chain of command was talking in Russian. They were fighting Russians, but they were all speaking Russian because everyone knew Russian.

There were Russian speakers who didn't speak Ukrainian, but the Ukrainian speakers all spoke Russian. So this is how it was done in a very difficult situation where we were actively being attacked by the other side.

When I was in Kherson, recently liberated at the end of last year, all the soldiers I talked to there were speaking in Russian too. My interviews were entirely in Russian.

But it is an issue. I was just talking to someone today from Kyiv whom I interviewed a couple of weeks ago. She's all pissed off because she doesn't want to have to learn Ukrainian. Well, sorry. You are living in Ukraine after all.

SW: *We saw this in the Baltic states, by the way, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. There were people in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia who did not speak those languages because they were Russians who had moved there.*

JB: It might help to learn the country's language a little bit. Russian was Zelensky's first language. Before the election he actively studied Ukrainian. He spoke Ukrainian, but he wanted to get it perfected.

I've also spoken with people from western Ukraine who really do not like having to get into a taxi in Kyiv and have to speak Russian. So this is an issue that will continue. The new law states that unofficial business transactions such as banks should be conducted in Ukrainian and not Russian.

Ukraine is an independent country and will continue to be. I want to point out to Americans that the people who are bleeding in the war are Ukrainians, and they're often left out of the equation.

In the United States, some talk how the big, bad United States and NATO are beating up on poor little Russia. Meanwhile Ukrainians have become invisible. They should not be. They're really suffering. They're really fighting hard. I've covered wars in a lot of places, and I've never seen anything like this one.

Ukrainian soldiers have high morale, but they are still very much outnumbered. And when you're outnumbered, that's a problem. And when you don't have the right kind of shells for your artillery, that's a problem. And this is a major issue in Ukraine.

High Costs and People's War

SW: *Do either of you have figures for the number of soldiers on either side, or the number of wounded and dead?*

JB: I don't have access to the numbers, but what I hear from people on the front lines is that the Russians have much more troop strength, especially when you count the Chechens and the others coming in to fight. This is something I hear all the time.

VS: I am not a military expert, but usually the battlefields are going on in more than one place. In concrete battle usually Russia has more troops at its disposal, and it still has major reserves. Ukraine already mobilized everyone it could mobilize.

I would say it is good that Jeremy noted that on Ukraine's side there is high morale and a lot of self-organization, society and cooperation. It's really a people's war. I had never before experienced something like this.

The only similar event was during the Maidan revolution,

when people were self-organizing. People then helped each other, crafting some shields, organizing medical help developed but on a small scale in comparison to now. Everyone is at the free kitchens, helping internally displaced people, and providing clothes and weapons for the military.

Well, except for the bourgeoisie; they are not involved. They're just living somewhere in Western Europe, enjoying a luxurious life. They are not involved.

Reading Franz Fanon really helps you to understand this war. He said in such times of war, of national liberation, people understand that they are ruling the country and not the capitalist class. Why? Because they are organizing everything; the country can't run without them. That is the general feeling of the Ukrainian population.

There are also problems that are usually not spoken about, and that we need to discuss. The Ukrainian government is carrying out ultra-Thatcherite-style politics. Its anti-social policies create pressure on civil society.

We have had big cuts in social spending, passage of anti-worker legislation and a deregulation of the labor market. Workers are securing the country against the Russian invasion, and labor rights should not be undermined during this period.

We cannot repel the invasion by ourselves, we need financial and material aid from beyond our borders. Without European and American anti-aircraft systems, I probably wouldn't be speaking with you.

SW: *Jeremy, can you also report about the morale of ordinary Ukrainian people you've met. How do you see this war going?*

JB: I see the war more or less going on for at least another year. I think that the Russians have at least another year's worth of war in them, and they want to conquer Ukraine. I think the Ukrainians, as long as they're well supplied, can hold the Russians off and eventually force some peace negotiations at some point. Right now it is way too early to do such a thing.

If the Chinese truce plan froze the lines where they are, Russia would take advantage of the pause and resume attacking in another couple of years. So that's a non-starter.

People have adapted to the situation. A friend who lives on the sixth floor of a building walks up and down now; there is no running elevator but she tells me she's healthy and can adapt.

Luckily, it has been a fairly warm winter in Kyiv. People are starting to feel a lot better with spring around the corner. That's something that I hear from everyone.

People are very concerned about the amount of blood that they're expending on the battlefield. That is something I also hear all the time. They say there's really no alternative -- if you stop and have a ceasefire now, the Russians will just keep going.

It's the Russky Mir issue. The Russians are not going to stop until they are stopped militarily. Nothing else will work. After nearly a million Russians fled their country, those who are still there live under repressive conditions and have no access to the media. It's a totalitarian state.

But when I was recently in Kyiv, I could see people determined to fight back in whatever way they can. I see people volunteering, including taking medicines and food to people who can't go out and get them themselves. I see great community spirit there; I've never seen that anywhere in my life. As Vladislav said, this is like completely new territory.

SW: *What about the huge number of refugees that have fled*

Ukraine? How has that affected the world, not just the world economic or global situation, but how have people's perception of the war changed because of contact with refugees?

VS: Refugees forced to flee their countries face a number of problems, particularly racist attitudes. That's even true with Ukrainians, but even more so with those from other nations. I think it's important for the left to address that.

All refugees should be equally accepted. Some people express hatred toward Ukrainian refugees because we are "accepted" while others are not. We need to criticize the system that creates a porous border for white people, only letting in people with blue eyes and white skin color.

There are still refugee camps on the Polish-Belarusian border, and on the Lithuanian border, to prevent Syrian refugees getting into the European Union. People are dying.

For the left and for Ukrainians, we need to build connections with different communities of oppressed people and fight for their rights too. We should not allow walls to be built around ourselves, as if to say, "Okay, Ukrainians should pass but everyone else should be barred."

But Ukrainian refugees able to enter Western countries often find it difficult to adapt. For example, many who were raped by Russian soldiers and have become pregnant want an abortion. But if they are refugees in Poland, they face a law that criminalizes abortion. It is an absolutely absurd law and should be addressed.

What's At Stake

Progressive struggles, struggles for inclusion of all people, are interconnected. The left needs to bring the topic of Ukraine and the humanity of its people to this universalist point of view. This is not only around the topic of refugees, but in confronting the increasingly authoritarian alliance of different leaders and movements.

We see the convergence of far-right movements and their connections to Putin. They are bonding together against Ukraine and against human rights and democracy. The struggle against Putin is connected to the struggle against all authoritarians and imperialism.

This is a global struggle. Authoritarian leaders are increasingly dependent on each other in their crusade against what they call the liberal world order. They are doing this to justify their attacks on democracy, attacks against minorities, attacks on abortion rights.

It is important that the defeat of Putin be a defeat for authoritarians such as Modi and Trump. Winning one struggle will strengthen other struggles against totalitarian tendencies. In this context it is disappointing to hear Russian propaganda spouted by supposedly left-wing people. They mischaracterize the popular uprising of Maidan as no more than a U.S. coup.

I'm also thinking of Germany where Sarah Wagenknecht, a prominent representative of the left-wing Die Linke party, calls for abandoning Ukraine because having secure Russian gas supplies is more important. Her speech was received to the delight of the right-wing AfD, but fortunately not with her party. But this split in the international left is disturbing.

SW: There's this rise of a so-called left, which hides its support for authoritarian regimes like in China and Russia, giving backhanded support to the Syrian regime. They call themselves socialists but neglect to talk about bottom-up democratic socialism. For those



Ukrainians have known war on their own land. How much longer?

of us who consider ourselves socialists, it is our understanding — going all the way back to Marx — that socialism and democracy are inseparable.

How do you address those who only see this war in terms of U.S.-NATO intervention, who don't seem to consider Ukraine?

VS: I think the left should realign itself on the platform of securing democracy and fighting for its extension and inclusivity. The problem with the left did not begin with Ukraine; we saw it with Syria.

What are leftwing values? Does it mean geopolitics, does it mean anti-Americanism or does it mean supporting a fight for equality for oppressed people, for solidarity between borders, for democracy? It's a possibility to rethink and realign to push human rights, social and political rights, democratic rights.

In the context of Putin's brutal war in Ukraine, it's absolutely necessary to fight for Ukraine to have a just peace, which is achievable only with a Ukrainian victory. That means supporting Ukraine's right to obtain weapons.

As someone who has learned from the U.S. left, I think that now people can learn from oppressed people like us and the Syrians. If we don't, I think the left won't survive internationally. It will collapse because of its lack of a coherent ideology based on the indivisibility of human rights.

SW: I want to thank you both for joining me today on Jacobin Radio. Thanks to producer and director Alan Minsky, and to Jacobin Radio's Micah Utrecht and Bhaskar Sunkara, the founder and editor of Jacobin magazine. Special thanks to Robert Brenner and thanks to you for listening. ■

[To link to the Ukraine Solidarity Network in the United States, visit <https://linktr.ee/ukrainesolidaritynetwork>. The Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign is at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/307530784861174/>. The European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine (ENSU) is at <https://ukraine-solidarity.eu/>.]

On the Peripheries of Chinese Imperialism: The Belt and Road Initiative in Jamaica

By Robert Connell

SINCE ITS FOUNDING in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructural development project of the People's Republic of China (PRC) that stands as a major plank of its diplomacy, has been at the center of debates about the Chinese government's political orientation and intentions.¹

For socialists, these debates cut to the heart of the class nature of the Chinese state and its implication in processes of imperialism. Apologists for the Chinese Communist Party have gone so far as to frame the BRI within the ideals of socialist internationalism, "genuine compassion," and "building humanity," albeit within the dynamics of global capitalism.

More critical and robust assessments find that the BRI is an intensification of global capital accumulation, marked by state capitalism and public-private partnerships mobilized to facilitate the rise of a new multipolar imperialism for the benefit of Chinese capitalists and political elites. As socialists analyzing the geopolitical and economic ramifications of China's entrenchment in the global neoliberal system, we must not lose sight of the on-the-ground impact of China's overseas investments.

Indeed, such a viewpoint is a necessary component of critiquing the claims of the Chinese government and its defenders that the BRI is a win-win program of mutual development driven by socialist ideals. If such were the case, it would result in rising prospects and power of local workers' movements and facilitate the reversal of structures of inequality and exploitation. The case of Jamaica demonstrates the opposite.

When I first went to Jamaica in 2012 as a graduate student studying the environmental politics of the Maroons, an Afro-Indigenous community who freed themselves from enslavement in the 18th century and established an autonomous society in the mountainous interior of the island, Chinese overseas development policy seemed irrelevant to my work. Yet as my field research progressed over the following eight years, first as a doctoral student in African diaspora studies and then as a post-doctoral researcher, the impact of Chinese infrastructural development and extractive industry on the Jamaican people and environment became increasingly apparent.

The timing of my field work overlapped with an unprece-

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Maroon community and visitors celebrate in Accompong, 2017.

Robert Connell

ented surge in Chinese economic and diplomatic engagement with Jamaica and the Caribbean as a whole.

Between 2005 and 2021, the China Development Bank and the China Export-Import Bank loaned USD\$2.1 billion to the Jamaican government and state-owned enterprises (SOE), a significant proportion of the estimated \$9 billion loaned to the nations of the Caribbean Community in the same period.

In 2014, as I became well-immersed in the daily life of the Maroon village of Accompong, the state-owned China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) made front page news for opening the historic cross-island North-South Highway (also called Highway 2000) at a cost of over \$700 million.

In 2016, the Jiuquan Iron & Steel Group (Jisco), another major Chinese SOE operating under the aegis of the BRI, purchased a bauxite (aluminum ore) mine and refining plant near Maroon territory. Increasingly, my daily conversations with my research respondents became peppered with concerns and experiences dealing with the Chinese economic power sweeping the country. Then in April 2019, Jamaica formally joined the BRI under circumstances of increasing domestic concern about the mounting debt to China.

With these experiences in mind, this article will discuss and analyze the consequences of the BRI in Jamaica within the context of the island's historical experience of neocolonial debt, environmental exploitation, workers' struggle and Indigenous struggle.

Drawing from my ethnographic, political and ecological research, I take a grassroots view of the BRI in Jamaica, cen-

tering the experiences of those directly affected by the development projects of the BRI. As such, this article will focus less on analyzing the BRI as grand geopolitical strategy, and instead emphasize how Chinese development initiatives have acted to further increase the precarity of Jamaican workers and farmers while leaving the country in an economically dependent and indebted position.

Empire and Debt in the Making of Jamaica

Jamaica's encounter with the PRC long predates the founding of the BRI. In 1972, Jamaica was among the first group of countries in the English-speaking Caribbean to establish diplomatic relations with China. The first Chinese diplomats on the island would have found a country still reeling from the legacies of colonialism, with British rule only having ended in 1962.

Over 400 years of genocide, slavery and plunder by European empires (first under the Spanish and then the British) left the country underdeveloped and dealing with immense socio-cultural traumas. A rigid and racialized class system² persisted after British rule, and what infrastructural capacity the country had was geared toward facilitating resource extraction, the main exports being sugar throughout most of the colonial era and bauxite upon independence.

Furthermore, Jamaica in the 1970s was a nation rapidly descending into mass violence and chaos as the United States further entrenched its role as the regional hegemon, taking over from the defunct British Empire. A self-described democratic socialist Jamaican government, upon introducing much-needed wealth redistribution and social welfare programs, faced a violent backlash from right-wing forces in the form of gang warfare, allegedly fueled by the CIA.

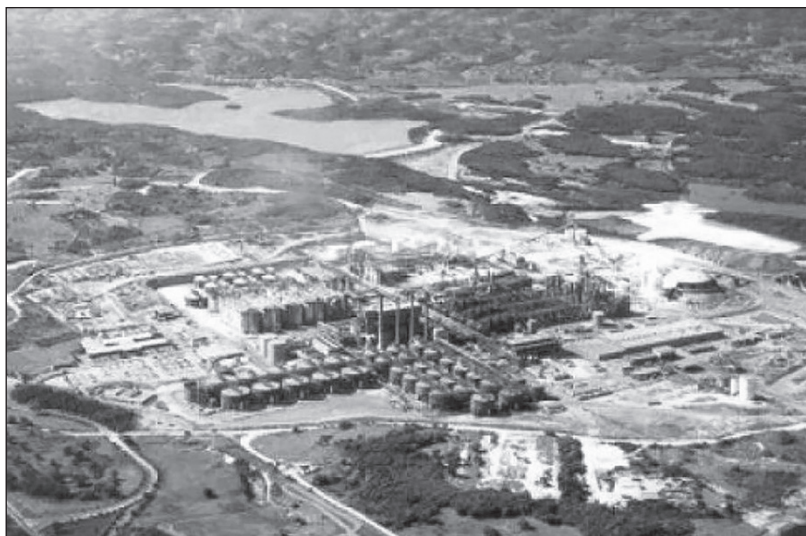
Tit-for-tat street battles, an exodus of professionals and skilled workers, and rising import prices due to the 1970s oil crisis, paved the way for the unsustainable debt for which Jamaica would become famous in the 1980s and '90s and into the 21st century.

It is beyond the scope of this article to detail the political economic dynamics and immense social impact of debt in Jamaica over the last 40 years.³ Suffice it to say that the island became a byword for structural adjustment during this period, with every new loan from the World Bank, or default on payments thereof, coming with International Monetary Fund-mandated austerity.

Health and education were notable casualties of this socio-economic assault. By the start of my field research, Jamaican child mortality had almost doubled over the span of a single decade while completion of primary school dropped from 97% to 73% in the same period. This despite the fact that Jamaica had already repaid more money than it had been lent, with continuing debt servicing accounting for a 106% debt-to-GDP ratio according to the latest World Bank figures.

All this is only a small snapshot of the catastrophic outcomes of debt wielded as a tool of neocolonialism.

With the island's status as one of the most indebted countries on the planet, Chinese infrastructural development was received with fanfare from Jamaican elites, a possible economic lifeline out of the debt trap. The aforementioned highway opened by CHEC in 2014 was greeted by then Prime Minister



The sprawling JISCO complex, 2016.

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Portia Simpson-Miller as an “emancipence” gift.

The Tourism Trap

My research respondents were more circumspect about the “Beijing Highway,” as it was commonly called. Since Jamaica needed a Chinese loan to finance the highway, CHEC was granted the right to own and operate the highway for 50 years as part of the arrangement. Also, the tolls collected on the highway cannot be used for debt-servicing and, rather, go directly to CHEC as profit.

Additionally, the tolls are astronomical by local standards; to drive the length of the highway in a standard car costs the equivalent of over \$12 each way.

This is well out of reach for the vast majority of Jamaicans, where the average monthly salary is around \$600 and only 60% of workers have a waged or salaried position at all. Many of my research respondents wondered: for whom was this highway?

The answer may lie in the additional concessions granted to CHEC, primarily 1200 acres of land along the highway to be held in perpetuity. Apparently, this will be used to construct hotels and adjoining infrastructure by Chinese companies for Chinese tourists, a kind of economic enclave from which the locals would not directly benefit, as acknowledged by the then Jamaican Minister of Transport.

This gestures to another dynamic of the BRI in Jamaica, where Chinese SOEs bring in their own workforce from China operating under their own labor conditions and laws. Jamaican trade unionists complained that Jamaican workers were generally not hired for CHEC projects, and in the few cases where they were, the denial of labor rights was so egregious that it led to a strike.

Thus, for all the official cheerleading around this “gift” of the BRI, Jamaica now has a pristine (and quite empty) highway that local workers did not build, that most Jamaicans cannot use, that the Jamaican government does not own, the profits of which do not stay in the local economy, and which will primarily serve as an enclave owned and operated by foreign companies for foreign tourists.

As disappointing as the outcomes of the North-South Highway were for the hope of internationalist solidarity from China, the risk of a far more catastrophic clash between

Jamaicans and the BRI emerged with the purchase of a bauxite mine and smelter by Jisco in 2016.

Bauxite mining is deeply intertwined with legacies of colonialism, environmental destruction, and the struggle for indigenous rights in Jamaica. In 1952, the interests of Britain and a group of mining corporations coalesced to establish the bauxite industry in Jamaica.⁴ The island would become a leading global exporter of bauxite and alumina,⁵ although there would be little benefit to the people in proportion to the cost of mining.

Between 1952 and 1990, some 62,735 acres of land had been extensively damaged by bauxite mining, which had also displaced thousands of families.⁶

Pollution is also a major risk of mining, with public health surveys of Jamaican bauxite production centers recounting that “the excavation and transportation of bauxite materials left behind clouds of red dust . . . and a fine layering of red covers much of the scene, spreading far downwind . . . there prevails a distinct, acrid smell of bauxite dust in the air.”⁷

Maroons Against Mining

Given the despoliation entailed in bauxite mining, the community and leadership of the Jamaican Maroons view mining as an existential threat to their society.

The contours of contemporary Maroon struggle and the legacies of resistance they bring to bear in fighting to preserve their land, sovereignty, and culture cannot be discussed in detail here.⁸ Briefly, Maroon societies emerged from the sociogenic processes of collective struggle against enslavement when captive Africans and their descendants in the western hemisphere fled their bondage and defended themselves against recapture through guerrilla warfare.

Since enslaved labor was central to colonial capitalism in the Americas, the slave-holding states expended great effort in suppressing Maroons as an existential threat to their plantation economies. However, the Jamaican Maroons, against great odds, fought the British to a standstill and forced the empire to recognize their freedom and territorial claims in 1739.⁹

Today, the Maroons live on as one of humanity’s great cultures of resistance, embodying a tenacious praxis of struggle from below, the present-day target of which is defense of their land at all costs. It is hard to overstate how important the integrity of their environment is to Maroon culture and physical survival.

The Maroon village of Accompong is situated in a unique and ecologically sensitive region named Cockpit Country, the last contiguous rainforest of Jamaica. This is an area claimed by the Maroons as their historical territory won during their ancestors’ fight for freedom in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Maroons today live as mostly small-scale cash-crop farmers and are dependent on Cockpit Country for their livelihoods and the memory of their ancestral struggle, the fountainhead of their culture. Since the mid-2000s, when Accompong became aware of plans to mine Cockpit Country for bauxite, the autonomous community has played a leading role in an unprecedented anti-mining coalition of environmental non-governmental organizations, activists, academics, and local stakeholders reflective of the high stakes of the struggle.¹⁰

Jisco’s reopening and expansion of a bauxite mine a mere 20 miles away from Accompong escalates the stakes of Maroon struggle to dangerous proportions. Indeed, many of my research respondents, prominent leaders among them, consider mining in their territory to be an act of war.

Jisco has made no attempt to consult with the Maroons on their plans, and although they have not yet expanded their operations into Cockpit Country proper (their location lies in the lowlands at the edge of the geological and cultural boundary), company representatives have publicized plans to more than double output of the refining facility and expand the mines by hundreds, if not thousands of acres.

Residents of the areas around the mine have complained of damage to their health due to air and water pollution, only to be stonewalled and undermined by Jisco. Compounding these problems is Jisco’s acknowledgment that the displacement of farmers will be necessary as the mines expand.

All this is adding to the fear and apprehension in the Maroon community about Chinese intentions, and they share the concern

of many Jamaicans that the lack of transparency in negotiations between China and their government is fueling the already endemic corruption in their country.

Also, being a country of the African diaspora, Jamaicans are increasingly aware of the horror stories of Chinese exploitation in Africa. Only time will tell how these tensions unfold and, of course, the Maroons and their allies are

not passive actors in these events, having already fought to curtail similar mining encroachments from Western companies.

A Meeting of Revolutionary Traditions

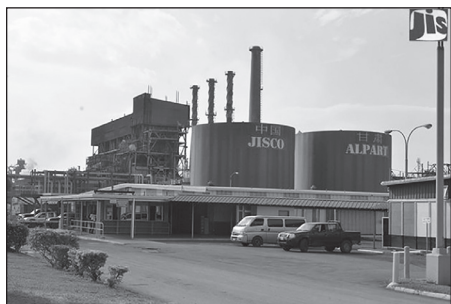
If the projects of the BRI have stark parallels with the colonial and neoliberal policies of Jamaica’s past, when the island valued as little more than a servile “paradise” for American tourists and/or an environmental sacrifice zone for the Western aluminum industry, they also have differences in keeping with China’s more novel form of imperialism.

As previously mentioned, Chinese companies often insist on importing their own labor, thus denying what little material benefit Jamaican workers could have received from the BRI.¹¹ They also manage this labor force outside the remit of Jamaican labor laws.

This, combined with a Chinese SOE (CHEC) being granted a large land grant as partial compensation for infrastructural development, represents what scholar Ruben Gonzalez-Vicente calls “embodied transnational sovereignty,” where China is able to circumvent Jamaican sovereignty, including customs duties and taxes, for the realization of profit.

China has, in effect, transposed its own exploitative labor conditions to Jamaica. Jamaican elites may appreciate that they can pay back debts with land, and that China does not directly require broad policy changes like the structural adjustment conditions of IMF and World Bank loans.

However, even with the above and the fact that the Jamaican debt to China is small compared to that claimed by Western IFIs and private firms, Jamaican politicians are growing increasingly wary of the costs of doing business with China. In November 2019, Prime Minister Andrew Holness announced



Jamaica Information Service, 2018

that Jamaica would no longer borrow from China, a scant seven months after formally joining the BRI.

As usual, most Jamaicans are not privy to the inter-governmental discussions and deals driving these decisions, but their government's newfound reticence in engaging with China reflects deeper concerns among BRI partners that the initiative is a debt trap.

In effect, much like the debt repayment structure of Jamaica's "Beijing Highway" described above, China expects a financial return from its investments such that Chinese companies become the main beneficiaries of a BRI loan while the host country incurs the debt. If profits are insufficient to replay the debt, then China will repossess the project, imperiling host country finances and sovereignty.

This risk is perhaps amplified in the Caribbean where, despite CARICOM's objective* to coordinate foreign policy for the equal benefit of all member nations and China's lofty rhetoric of equal partnerships, China pursues bilateral deals with individual states, thus leveraging its greater political economic power in an uneven relationship with smaller countries.

Almost two decades of Chinese loans and infrastructure-led development have left Jamaican workers and farmers as precarious and dispossessed as ever. The hard-fought and generational struggle for Jamaican workers' power (trade unions were instrumental to Jamaica's independence struggle) has been curtailed and rolled back by China's transposed sovereignty.

Furthermore, Chinese mining interests appear poised to pick up where their Western counterparts left off in terms of irreversible ecological destruction and threats to indigenous survival. Certainly, Jamaica cannot bear another 50 years of capitalist exploitation and extractive industry.

If there is any hope in turning this dire situation into revolutionary momentum, it will be in Jamaicans making common cause with the Chinese laborers imported to the country. According to China Labor Watch, Chinese workers on overseas BRI projects are often subject to "deceptive job ads, passport retention, wage withholding, physical violence and lack of contracts" to the extent of constituting forced labor and human trafficking.

In fact, at least one Chinese worker in Jamaica has already blown the whistle on such conditions. Unfortunately, as of the time of writing this article, there appears to be no organized effort to make solidaristic alliances among Jamaican workers, Chinese workers, and Maroons. The Maroons are organized as an indigenous community seeking land and sovereign rights, rather than workers seeking class emancipation, and remain locked in a fractious political battle with the Jamaican state toward those ends.

Furthermore, the cultural and language barriers between Jamaicans and imported Chinese workers are significant. Yet both countries have rich revolutionary traditions. If Jamaican labor militancy and Maroon struggle were able to reconcile and align their interests, while cultivating strategic allies among the heavily exploited Chinese workers, a powerful relationship of



JISCO at work, 2022.

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international solidarity from below could be forged.

Given the regional and transnational diasporic networks Jamaicans and Maroons are embedded in, along with Chinese workers' connections to their homeland, such potential is made all the more compelling in the possibility of global worker solidarity spreading along the very network of the BRI itself.

We cannot diminish the profound logistical, organizational, and ideological barriers to achieving such a vision, but conversely, the terrain of struggle in Jamaica is now aligned such that previously disparate and distant traditions of revolutionary internationalism are positioned to renew themselves and unite to resist Chinese imperialism, transnational capital accumulation, and the local capitalist class in the Caribbean. ■

Notes

1. The extent to which the BRI represents coherent policy on the scale of grand strategy or a more contested, contradictory, and contingent process is an ongoing academic debate (see <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629820301177>).
2. For foundational social science texts on this complex issue, see: Braithwaite, E. (1971). *The development of creole society in Jamaica*. Jamaica: Oxford, Clarendon Press; Nettleford, R. M. (1970). *Mirror, mirror: Identity, race, and protest in Jamaica*. London: V. Collins and Sangster. For more contemporary analyses of race and class in Jamaica, see: Meeks, B. (2000). *Narratives of resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press; Thomas, D. A. (2004). *Modern blackness: Nationalism, globalization, and the politics of culture in Jamaica*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
3. The documentary, *Life and Debt*, covers much of the social dynamics and history of debt in Jamaica. <http://www.lifeanddebt.org/>.
4. Davis, C. E. (1989). *Jamaica in the world aluminium industry*. Kingston, Jamaica: Jamaica Bauxite Institute.
5. Alumina is refined bauxite ore that is smelted to produce aluminum.
6. Girvan, N. P. (1991). "Economics and the environment in the Caribbean: an overview." Pp. xv in *Caribbean ecology and economics*, edited by N. Girvan and D. Simmons. St. Michael, Barbados: Caribbean Conservation Association.
7. McBride, D. (2009). "'Red Marly Soil': medicine, environment, and bauxite mining in modern Jamaica, 1938 to post-independence." Pp. 252 in *Health and medicine in the circum-Caribbean, 1800-1968*, edited by J. De Barros, S. Palmer and D. Wright. New York: Routledge.
8. See Connell, R. J. (2017). *The Political Ecology of Maroon Autonomy: Land, Resource Extraction and Political Change in 21st Century Jamaica and Suriname*. UC Berkeley. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5n1665b6>.
9. I should note that from the Maroon perspective, the British quickly backtracked and undermined the spirit and terms of the 1739 treaty, thus creating conflicts and tensions between the Maroons and the government over land and sovereign rights that persist to this day (see Connell, 2017).
10. For a more in-depth analysis of the political ecological dimensions of contemporary Maroon struggle and environmentalism in Jamaica see: Connell, R. (2020), Maroon Ecology: Land, Sovereignty, and Environmental Justice. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 25: 218-235. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12496>
11. Even in the instances of Jamaican workers hired by Chinese companies, such as at the Jisco mine, workers live a precarious existence, with one local union charging Jisco with "wanton disrespect" of Jamaica's labor laws and regulations. <https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/bitu-accuses-jisco-alpart-of-disrespecting-unions/>.

*The Caribbean Community, a political and economic union of Caribbean nation-states founded in 1973.

Power in Vancouver, Canada:

Police Revolt and Hastings Tent City

By Ivan Drury

BY THE HEIGHT of summer 2022, as fires burned a record number of residential hotels in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, sidewalks along the three core blocks of Hastings Street were jammed with tents, tarps and ad-hoc structures assembled by hundreds of unhoused and underhoused people with nowhere better to go.

Despite the fire chief's multiple orders to disperse; dramatic crime-scene style taping-off of entire blocks for "decampment" by billy club; repeated "progress is being made" declarations by two different mayors; and despite the blazing heat of an unusually long summer and the freezing snows and pouring rains of the winter, the Hastings Street Tent City has remained in place for nine long months, an immovable object and a chip in a pane of the city of glass.

The Downtown Eastside (DTES) — famous for being the poorest urban neighborhood in Canada, with the median income of the residents of its core blocks only \$11,000 a year — has long been the center of the low-income community in Metro Vancouver. It is also the only neighborhood in Vancouver where low-income people confidently take up public space, have access to free and affordable food, and have a women's center, drug user organizations, urban Indigenous culture and organizing spaces, and vibrant arts institutions.

Resident organizations call the DTES the "heart of the city." But never before has that heart beat outside of its chest, so openly spilling its arterial circulations visibly in the streets, as this year. What happened?

Reaping The Fruits of Austerity

The question of why so many people have crowded the sidewalks of the three core blocks of Hastings Street is different than the issue of why they are houseless to begin with. Homelessness in Vancouver, like in cities and towns throughout Canada and the United States, and particularly in coastal cities, has become inconceivably massive and widespread through the last decade.

Homelessness is a sick reaping of austerity as government policy that twinned the financialization of global capitalism, where real estate became an investment with greater returns than industrial production, where those most excluded from the gains of this 21st century bonanza have been its more terrible victims.

In the Vancouver area, homelessness has boomed since 2010 and unhoused people have persistently set up tent cities

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as both sites of protest and as a means of community survival. Tent cities are no substitute for good quality housing, but as British Columbia's courts have repeatedly ruled, following hundreds of testimonies from unhoused people, they are healthier and safer than trying to survive alone the constant perils and daily displacements of homelessness within the Canadian state apparatus.

It is difficult to recognize the VPD's abandonment of the Hastings Tent City as a political action like a campaign around a social issue for progressive activists, because campaign tools look different for the ruling class and its direct state apparatus.

Like the "migrant caravan" and the "border wall" for Trump in 2016, or the "super predator" and mass incarceration for the Clintons in the 1990s, the Hastings Tent City, as a symbol of public safety danger, was a political instrument wielded by the VPD. What makes this state-actor political campaign more unusual is that it was not conducted by a politician during election season, it was carried out and led by VPD Chief Adam Palmer, as a semi-autonomous political actor.

These tent cities have been on the courthouse lawn in Victoria, in various parks in the Downtown Eastside, and in city-owned vacant lots in the suburbs. With the exception of the Hastings Tent City (and for a shorter time, on the sidewalk surrounding the vacant Woodward's department store building in 2002), the police have not allowed unhoused people to set up tents on the sidewalk, blocking the regular circulation of pedestrian traffic and marring the views of commuters and tourists along one of Vancouver's major downtown transportation routes.

I will argue that the Hastings Tent City has been able to settle in and grow because this encampment, while absolutely a direct survival action and militant protest carried out every day by hundreds of low income people, has also been a political action by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD).

Faced with the mildest of criticism from Vancouver City Hall, VPD Chief Palmer planned a cynical manipulation of the lives of unhoused people as political instruments to expand the power and influence of the police, making a play for greater autonomous power (and funding) within the Canadian state apparatus.

The Vancouver Police's abuse of unhoused people on Hastings Street has significance for socialist debates about the relative autonomy of the police within state power. Ultimately, this is emblematic of a rightward political turn, with the police pivoting away from a harm reduction strategy it had formerly endorsed, back to a law-and-order strategy to police poverty in Vancouver's streets. The broader political effects of that turn are already being felt in the policies of the BC Legislature and Vancouver City Hall.

“Stop the Sweeps”

There were low-income people on sidewalks of the blocks radiating out from Hastings and Main Streets — the social center of the Downtown Eastside — long before the Tent City was fully established on July 1, 2022. Crowds of people gathered on corners in the evenings to hang out, drink, talk. Some laid out blankets and sold things they scavenged or shoplifted or that they didn't have space for anymore in their tiny apartments.

Others managed to throw up a tent for the night, when the rains came and they didn't have anywhere to go, but usually in the morning they were scattered by the battalions of city engineering department workers, who swarmed out from pickup trucks bearing pitchforks quick to shovel tents and packs and sleeping bags into the maw of a waiting garbage truck.

Into the frenetic vacuum of this vicious energy of street sweeps was sucked the entire life possessions of the poorest people in Vancouver. It is not hard to find someone on Hastings Street who has had the ashes of their beloved partner, or their only remaining photograph of their apprehended child, swept into the unblinking black hole commanded by engineering workers, flanked always by pairs of police officers, as ubiquitous as they are impatient.

A research report by the Stop The Sweeps Coalition, made up of VANDU (Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users) and other DTES community and legal reform organizations, estimated that \$2,510 worth of personal property was seized and destroyed by the city engineering department during the five days of Homelessness Action Week in 2021.

On June 21, progressive councillor Jean Swanson brought forward a motion to city council that supported the basic demands of the Stop the Sweeps coalition's report. This motion produced an apology from the city to those whose property had been destroyed in street sweeps, and initiated a community-organized “block stewardship” program, giving a \$320,000 contract to VANDU's “Our Streets” program to pay community “peers” to work alongside engineering as the primary point of interaction between the city and people living on Hastings Street.

Chief Adam Palmer and the VPD freaked out. That minor victory of the “Stop the Sweeps” coalition in June against these humiliating and assaulting daily engineering department sweeps was the last straw for the VPD Chief, and the beginning of the police revolt.

City Council vs. Police

This was not the first slight that Palmer had received from Mayor Stewart's council. In May 2020 (just days before the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor movement began), the City voted to freeze the police budget for the first time in decades — a move referred to as a budget “cut” by the police chief and most media.

The British Columbia Provincial government, which holds the actual discretionary power over police budgets, ended up ordering the City to restore every penny the police had requested, but the animus between Mayor Stewart and Chief Palmer had already been established. Then in July 2020, in the heat of the “defund police” movement, City Council passed two motions that gestured at restricting police powers in public spaces.

The first motion, “Decriminalizing Poverty and Supporting Community-led Safety Initiatives,” asked the police board to “itemize the work they do that is related to mental health, homelessness, drug use, sex work, and the amount of money spent on it, including the number of tickets issued from enforcing related by-laws as well as the cost of this enforcement.”

It also called for city staff to write a report recommending ways to “deprioritize policing as a response to mental health, sex work, homelessness and substance use,” and to “inform the Vancouver Police Board that it is this Council's priority to respond to [these above issues] with initiatives led by community, health agencies, social service providers, and non-profit societies rather than policing.”

The other motion, “Ending Street Checks in Vancouver,” advised the police board that “Vancouver City Council's priority is to end the practice of street checks,” which the motion defined as “the practice of stopping a person outside of an investigation, and often obtaining and recording their personal information,” a police tactic of racialized harassment of Black and Indigenous people in Vancouver.

These council decisions, however, did not dampen the power of the police, transfer funding away from the police to social services, or discipline officers for racist abuse. The first council decision that moved from rhetoric, request, and report-writing to action that would change what police are able to do to poor people in practice was the decision of June 21 to pull police back from Hastings Street sweeps.

Tent City and Police Revolt

Police chief Palmer countered immediately, announcing that starting July 1 police officers would no longer accompany engineering department workers in their street sweeps. Without police escort, the City engineering department refused to send their unarmed and legally powerless workers to steal and destroy peoples belongings with pitchforks.

The police effectively declared a strike action. If the job of the police in the Downtown Eastside is to dam, by club and gun, the raging pressure of mass poverty and social alienation from rushing into the streets and taking over, then their strike released the Tent City to its imminent existence.

This is not to suggest that the tent city was actively created by the police. The camp was created by the power of the low-income Downtown Eastside community — the community's unique unity and solidarity, its mutual care and capacity for cooperation through the most impossible of situations.

To disorganize the self-activity and repress the capacity of this community to resist its oppression, police deploy constant surveillance, harassment, and the threat of violence. You see cops on every corner when you walk the streets of the DTES. There is practically never a street without a cop car. Starting the police revolt was easy; all Chief Palmer had to do was take his finger out of the dam and the elemental forces beaten back by class and colonial oppression poured out.

The “Our Streets” coalition, with its peer workers paid \$20 an hour, equipped with garbage tongs and harm reduction supplies, stepped out on July 1 to take on the tremendous task of organizing the emergent Hastings Tent City. They organized the election of block captains, held meetings to decide on day to day organizational matters and formulate demands from the city.



Police attack an Indigenous community member, August 9, 2022. Ben Neims / @cbcnewsbc

But it was a set-up. The city contracted this peer group, made up mostly of low-income illicit drug users, to keep the sidewalks clean — which, without police patrols, swelled to hundreds of people and tents packed along both sides of the street for four blocks — and to stop people from clustering too close, in the name of reducing fire risks.

By the end of the month, after a couple of fire incidents during a record breaking heat wave, Vancouver's Fire Chief Karen Fry (notorious for her anti-tent city fire orders at an encampment when she was Fire Chief in the nearby city of Nanaimo in 2018) ordered the sidewalks cleared due to fire danger.

On August 9 the police marched back onto the block with the air of an invading army, announcing that they were enforcing the fire order. But the first day ended in disaster; when police attacked a man in emotional distress in the Carnegie Community Center, people from the tent city, pushed to the edge with the stress of the “decampment” rallied and demanded his release.

The police seized the moment and attacked the crowd, grabbing people, throwing them to the ground, and beating them in the open, with cameras rolling. In the aftermath of the August 9th police riot, Mayor Stewart clamped down on police action, trying to force the displacement process back through the community channel, which effectively stalled.

Frustrated by a non-compliant City Hall once again, police continued their violent rampage, but in one-off, more localized episodes of violence rather than in riots that center the displacement agenda at the fore.

On August 22nd police shot with bean bag guns and killed a man in distress, who, having been bear-sprayed, had stripped off his clothes and was pouring milk over his head, asking for help. And on innumerable days, in innumerable instances, police have beaten, arrested, humiliated, and tortured people in alleys and side streets and outside their tents with the slightest excuse. But the tent city remained.

The Hastings Tent City became a flag the police could

continue to wave to demonstrate the need for police to keep public order, and with a civic election coming in the fall, Chief Palmer and the Vancouver Police Union (VPU) pivoted to partisan political maneuvers.

Between August 18 and September 5, the VPU ran a public safety “questionnaire” that they released to argue that Vancouverites feel less safe than ever and that the most important issue of the election should be public safety — talking points that were embraced by the media.

On October 5, for the first time in its history the VPU endorsed a candidate for mayor — Ken Sim and his new political party, ABC Vancouver. ABC ran on a slough of political promises. Some were rightwing dog whistle points like greater transparency in spending and to end the symbolic environmental gestures put in place by previous councils, like the tax on disposable cups. But their most coherent political promise was to hire 100 more cops and to increase the police budget.

Ken Sim and ABC Vancouver swept city council, winning the mayoral seat and seven out of 10 council seats, six out of seven Parks Board seats, and five out nine school trustee seats. Two weeks after the election, either because they received the report later than they'd hoped to use it against Mayor Stewart in the election, or to insist on their openly political role alongside Mayor Sim, Chief Palmer released a tellingly-titled report commissioned earlier in the year by the VPD.

“Igniting Transformational System Change Through Policing” condemned the “five billion dollars” the report alleged is spent annually on “Vancouver's social safety net,” numbers which include, for example, \$2 billion from federal transfer payments for the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, Employment Insurance and child tax benefits.

But rather than a sign that Chief Palmer was starting to see himself as a political actor, which is how the report was received by some critical reporters, it should be seen as only the latest and most clumsy and incompetent example of the policing coup Palmer had been staging within Vancouver politics for months.

Palmer explained when questioned about his report, “I don't report to any politician. I don't report to the City of Vancouver, I don't report to the Province of BC, or the federal government. To me, the government of the day doesn't matter. I'll just call it how it is and be quite frank about it.”

Origins of the Police Revolt

We can understand why Chief Palmer organized a police revolt against Mayor Kennedy Stewart's milquetoast center-left council only when we understand the kind of power Vancouver's police chief was used to.

The Vancouver Police Department was accustomed to being part of a coalition of state agencies tasked with managing the lives of the poor in the Downtown Eastside. What Chief Palmer could not accept was any constraint on the power and violence his officers are allowed to exercise in the field. Over the last 25 years, since the beginning of the so-called “Vancouver Agreement,” better known as the “Four Pillars” drug policy model, the police worked hand in glove with a

coalition of health and social service providers to manage the communities of the poor and unhoused in the Downtown Eastside.

This coalition did not come easy, at least not around agreements that included the police ceding of law-and-order powers in all matters of drug policy. Throughout the HIV and overdose crisis of the 1990s, the VPD and conservative politicians staunchly opposed the early harm reduction initiatives spearheaded by the newly formed VANDU and their allies in public health and the community grassroots wing of the New Democratic Party (NDP).

This dynamic shifted thanks to the struggle from below, led by VANDU, and also because of the extent of the crisis. About 1000 people in British Columbia were killed in the drug overdose crisis of the last three years of the decade. The numbers were shocking, as was the panic that the parallel HIV and Hep-C transmission crisis would spill over into the homes of the white middle classes — a factor that not so prominent with the drug poisoning crisis today.

Conservative Vancouver Mayor Philip Owen bought in to the new harm reduction model and piloted the Four Pillars Drug Strategy, which brought the Vancouver police onside by ensuring that the “enforcement” of drug laws would be baked into the foundation of the plan, along with prevention, treatment and, lastly, harm reduction.

The more radical demands of the movement — for the decriminalization of all drugs — was elbowed out of the plan in order for Mayor Owen to include the police at the table. Four Pillars was consolidated as the City’s core drug policy by former cop and coroner Larry Campbell’s victorious run for mayor with the social democratic party COPE. Campbell ran, and won, on the promise to open a legal safe injection site (activists had been operating an unsanctioned site for months in the lead-up to the election).

Under the “Four Pillars” strategy, the Vancouver Police Department could count on significant budget increases each year, from \$108 million in 1997 to \$118 million in 2000. Bundled with the Four Pillars strategy was the hiring of an additional 40 officers specifically to patrol the Downtown Eastside, where harm reduction services were concentrated, including North America’s first sanctioned safe injection site.

According to the Coalition Against Police Harassment and Brutality, a police abolitionist group active in Vancouver at the time, there were already more police officers per capita in the Downtown Eastside than anywhere else in the city. The Vancouver police budget leapt up every year since, and, in 2023 will likely go up another 11.17 per cent to \$383 million — more than tripling since Four Pillars began.

The house that Chief Palmer inherited was one built by



Police barricade the Hastings sidewalk against tents.

Four Pillars; a patriarchal model home where he, not the mayor and not the Premier, sat at the head of the table. And in the tepid gestures from Mayor Kennedy Stewart’s government to hem in the autonomous power of police to patrol, harass, and seize possessions of anyone they found on the streets of the Downtown Eastside at any time, he sensed a threat to that absolute power.

Police Displacement of the Hastings Tent City

A result of the police revolt has been the restoration of their powers, expressed in their renewed attack on the unhoused residents of the Hastings Tent City — encircling, smashing, and displacing the camp in a one-day, dramatic police operation on April 5th. The police assault on the camp came as a surprise to residents and service providers in the area, who complained that they lost contact with people they were trying to house, and to activists, who had

received a leaked memo earlier in the week, saying that the city was planning to begin an aggressive decampment by forcing tent city residents into shelters.

No one was ready when the police declared the two core blocks of the tent city an exclusion zone, barricaded the street, barred advocates, media and legal observers from entering, shut off traffic cameras, and stationed police officers on rooftops with telescopes and, some observers said, rifles. The authority that police used to move in should also have been a surprise, but the long moral panic political preparation conducted by Chief Palmer and the Mayor’s office paid off. No one asked why the City didn’t seek a court injunction to displace hundreds of homeless people from an established tent city.

There have been 14 years of BC Supreme Court rulings that should mean that police and city workers should not be able to displace a tent city without first providing housing — or at least making a show of providing housing.

These BC Supreme Court rulings did not strip the Canadian state of the power to manage where and how poor people access and use public space. In circumstances where a tent city becomes “established” on publicly owned lands, not infringing on the private property rights of a land owner, the Courts appoint public health nurses, “frontline” social services, housing, and mental health outreach workers, and even “peer” harm reduction organizations as the primary points of contact between the state and the poor on the streets.

Where the iron heel of police had traditionally been the form of the Canadian state that interacted with the poor, these Supreme Court decisions wrapped that iron heel in the soft power foam of necessary services — not abolishing or defunding police, but moving them into the still-menacing shadows of these benevolent-appearing services. These same Supreme Court Justices also awarded Cities displacement injunctions once they met certain superfi-

@aaronpettman

cial shelter-provision requirements, or once Cities could argue that living conditions in tent cities had deteriorated sufficiently. And then the police come out of waiting and into displacement-action.

The decision to use a Fire Order, a singularly powerful order issued by an appointed Fire Chief and invulnerable to court appeal, rather than a court injunction, must have been a political decision by Chief Palmer in coordination with Mayor Sim. In the days before the displacement, the annual homelessness count found just over 100 people sheltering in the Hastings Tent City, and then the BC government announced that BC Housing would soon open 330 new and renovated housing units that they could make available for residents of the camp.

Taken together, these two factors would have likely have spelled a victory for the City in an application for a displacement injunction. The decision to forgo a court injunction and instead use the naked force of a fire order meant that the police restored their monopoly on managing the poor — at this critical location anyway.

Rather than criticize this authoritarian strategy, Premier David Eby, the former social justice housing lawyer, who certainly knows better, repeated the narrative from the Fire Chief and Police Chief that the camp was too dangerous to allow to stand for another day.

Like the Premier, media coverage of the displacement also repeated the coordinated talking points from the VPD, Fire Chief Karen Fry, and Mayor Sim. Fire Chief Fry said that the camp was a fire danger, claiming that the number of fires were increasing, despite the obvious problem that the end of winter and warmer weather would mean people would no longer need propane heaters to keep warm.

Chief Palmer and his spokespeople claimed that the camp was inherently violent, citing assaults on police officers, without explaining what those officers were doing in the tents of people who he alleged assaulted them.

Mayor Sim had the gall to say that “women, and particularly Indigenous women” had been assaulted in the camp. The DTES Women's Centre and Battered Women's Support Services countered his claims with a news release arguing that the displacement of the tent city would place Indigenous and other low-income and unhoused women in greater danger.

VANDU interviewed a man police standing outside of the police enclosure, watching while they strafe his tent. “I’ve been forced out of my tent, which is my home... My food is going to go rancid... I can’t really do much at all, given the fact that there’s about fucking 50 of them & one of me.”

Presumably because the police operation was run under the auspices of a Fire Order rather than a court injunction, the man says there was no housing offered him. “They offered me something about storage but that’s it,” he said.

Vancouver Police Leading Rightward Turn

Chief Palmer’s cynical use of the Hastings Tent City to ratchet-up anti-homeless hatred and increase his power did not require the cooperation of unhoused people; he used them as objects for police to act against.

Most obviously, Chief Palmer won the landslide election for Ken Sim and ABC Vancouver, a party that seems to be in his pocket. Within months of holding office, Mayor Sim has indicated he’ll raise the police budget to hire his promised 100 more officers, returned police to schools (they had been pulled

out by the previous school trustees after a pitched battle led by police abolitionists), and started to clamp down on city funding to social service groups that support harm reduction, and which have a record of opposing police power.

The ABC Vancouver council cut the funding to the “Our Streets” coalition, complaining that they were more about “community empowerment” than cleaning the streets, and even cut a \$7000 arts grant to a VANDU public art project to remember community members lost to the drug poisoning crisis.

The less obvious effects of Palmer’s autonomous police activism have been in the NDP-controlled BC Legislature. On October 25 in celebration of the new pro-police regime at Vancouver City Hall, then-Premier John Horgan said, “We’ve been hearing calls to defund police, and that’s not a solution. And quite frankly, that’s the last thing we should do. We need to fund public safety to make sure that the right people are doing the right jobs.”

David Eby, the former social justice and civil liberties lawyer, then took over the Premier’s chair and promptly brought in a slate of right wing reforms, particularly concerning the government management of the poor. In response to a drug poisoning crisis in its seventh year, which is still killing over 2000 people every year in BC, Premier Eby’s first budget increased funding for drug treatment while stalling support for harm reduction and safe supply, in what drug user advocate Garth Mullins called the “Alberta model” of treatment-focused drug policy.

And jumping on the “public safety” bandwagon, Premier Eby joined with rightwing provincial Premiers in Ontario and Alberta to demand that the Federal government reform Canada’s longstanding bail policies in order to hold “repeat offenders” until trial and to increase sentencing. On April 12th Premier Eby announced that the Province will invest \$16 million in policing that will explicitly target poor and homeless people by opening 12 “enforcement hubs” province-wide in what he calls his “Repeat Violent Offending Intervention Initiative.”

Interviewed on CBC radio, Niki Sharma, Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits, said that she believes BC’s prisons will be able to handle the increased “burden” resulting from these reforms, and that the Province will be investing in those prison capacities.

This story has something to say about the level of autonomy that the police have, as an institution within the capitalist, settler colonial state. Ultimately, VPD Chief Palmer’s police revolt at the Hastings Tent City was a strategy in a campaign of police activism aimed at increasing its influence politics in Vancouver and British Columbia more broadly.

To fight against this turn, it is important that we see it as a political turn to the right, articulated around the social regulation of the poor. The police see their locus of power not in the exercise of violence, but in the state, where they play a privileged but not fully autonomous role.

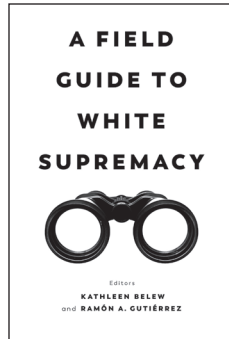
It was the threat of being marginalized within the state apparatus as a whole that led Police Chief Palmer to revolt against the Mayor’s office and campaign for regime change. And while we must fight police on the streets where they exercise their brutal power, we must also see that their power depends on their role in the state as a whole, and in the social and economic order — ultimately, the class — that the state represents. ■

REVIEW

Exploring White Supremacy By Bill V. Mullen

A Field Guide to White Supremacy

Edited by Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez
University of California Press,
2022. 424 pages, \$24.95 paper.



IT'S A WELCOME thing for the Left when a University press publishes a book on racism intended to influence “journalists, activists, policy makers and citizens.”

Kathleen Belew and Ramón Gutiérrez are scholars on a mission to make a dent in public discourse about the scourge of white supremacy that has beset the United States from inception to present. Their edited book, *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, has the flavor of a call to arms, put together in the incendiary period between George Floyd's murder in 2020 and the January 6th, 2021 Capitol riot.

It promises to “train observers” to recognize “variant forms of white supremacy, ranging from systems to laws, from hate crimes to quiet indifference.” It even offers a set of revisions to the Associated Press Stylebook's way of talking about race, in order to literally disrupt the discourse in the U.S. about white supremacy, which the editors define as “both individual belief that white people are inherently better than others and the broad systems of inequality that insure racial disparity of health, income, life, and freedom.”

Belew and Gutiérrez are well-positioned toward these admirable ambitions. Belew is the author of the very fine book *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Military America*, a contemporary history of the relationship between white power in the United States, war, militias and militarism.

Gutiérrez has written extensively on race, gender and sexuality in Latin America and among Latina/os in the United States, and is professor emeritus of history at the University of Chicago. Belew is a professor of history at Northwestern University.

To a large extent, their book succeeds in its aim of breaching the public sphere. It is

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comprised of 19 essays ranging from figures prominently recognizable within the academy (Judith Butler, Joseph E. Lowndes, Roderick Ferguson) to writers with more popular reach like Rebecca Solnit, Jamelle Bouie, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor.

Overall, the selections are lucid, written for a broad audience, and sometimes brief, like journalistic bulletins.

Belew and Gutiérrez also give the book a public-facing feel with an Introduction framing the collection around Trump and Trumpism, the rise of the QAnon conspiracy theory, and the January 6th riot, which they call a “domestic terror attack on U.S. democracy,” as well as a conclusion which returns to the January 6 events.

Acts of racist violence in Charlottesville, Charleston, and Pittsburgh are cited as evidence that “White Power has now attacked us all, and we all hold this in common.”

Wide Reach of White Supremacy

Perhaps to represent that universalism, *A Field Guide* is divided into four thematic headings meant to illuminate the wide valence and reach of white supremacy.

Section I, “Building, Protecting, and Profiting from Whiteness,” is organized around three concepts meant to serve as historical frameworks: settler colonialism, extractive colonialism, defined as when “the colonizers seek only to take wealth and resources back to their country,” and racial capitalism, “the idea that capitalism and white supremacy have been intertwined since their inception.”

The section offers to merge colonialism and racial capitalism, whereas they have often been seen by scholars as “distinct.”

To that end, the Section includes essays by Doug Kiel on indigenous land recovery and taxation on the Oneida Nation reservation; Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor on a “culture of racism” excerpted from her important book *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*; Juan Perea on slave codes and mass deportations; and Khaled A. Beydoun on “The Arc of American Islamophobia.”

Of these, Beydoun's offers the most novel and far-reaching historical account of white supremacy as a series of restrictions and preclusions of Muslim citizenship dating from the 1790 Naturalization Act to Trump's notorious “Muslim Ban.” The essays share a

general throughline of interest in the role of state law in demarcating boundaries between white and non-white citizenship.

Section II, “Iterations of White Supremacy,” particularizes the relationships between racism and gender violence (Solnit, “Anti-Asian Violence” (Simeon Man), “Homophobia and Nationalism” (Ferguson on the Pulse Nightclub shootings), violence against “Trans Women/Femmes” (Croix Saffin) and antisemitism (Butler).

The section is loosely tethered under a framework of “intersectionality,” the term popularized by critical legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw's analysis of interlocking systems of exploitation and oppression. The section also targets the relationship between patriarchy and white supremacy as demonstrated by far right groups like Proud Boys which dragged their misogyny with them to the Capitol riot.

Section III, “Anti-Immigration,” more tightly coheres around xenophobia, border policing, and what scholar Adam Goodman calls in his essay the U.S. “Deportation Machine.” Leo R. Chavez's essay “Fear of White Replacement” admirably demonstrates how far-right paranoia about white population reduction is directly linked to phobia about demographic and biological reproduction of immigrants.

Cindy Goodman and Jessica Orduz both commemorate the effects of anti-immigrant policies on lost immigrant and refugee lives. The section's focus on contemporary immigration history helps explicate the rise of today's far right as a substream within state and two-party alignment over anxieties about a fading white republic, a keynote of Trump's 2016 election appeals.

Section IV, “White Supremacy from Fringe to Mainstream,” is a useful collective genealogy of the contemporary far right.

It begins with Gutiérrez's retrieval of state-sponsored postwar white social welfare like the discriminatory GI Bill, and includes Joseph E. Lowndes' fine-grained analysis of the rise of ultraconservatism within the Republican Party, beginning with the 1980s ascent of Pat Buchanan.

Nicole Hemmer demonstrates how the Charlottesville far-right torch parade was nurtured by online organizing. Joseph Darda's illuminating essay examines how the pro-policing or “Blue Lives Matter” movement effectively coded cop work as a *de facto* form of white identity politics.

The final essay is a strong excerpt from

Belew's book on the rise of the white power militia movement which dates in part to the federal government assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, a site the now-indicted Trump just used to help relaunch his crypto white supremacist campaign for President in 2024.

Facts like the latter help lend immediacy, prophecy and gravitas to Gutiérrez and Belew's nomination of their conclusion to the volume as a "History of the Present." Indeed, the book's greatest success is its seeming ability to collate, in the hours before the latest white supremacist American midnight of January 6, a long foreshadowing of and preamble to that event.

If anything, reporting on the Capitol riot in its aftermath underscores and amplifies the thesis of the volume: Luke Mogelson's *New Yorker* essays, for example, documenting how a month prior to storming the capitol, white supremacists marched through Washington D.C. to protest the Supreme Court's refusal to overturn the election results, on the way terrorizing Black residents of D.C. and tearing down Black Lives Matter signs. (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/01/25/among-the-insurrectionists>)

A complementary volume to this one could trace the symbiotic rise of Black Lives Matter as the instigating moving target for groups like Oath Keepers and Proud Boys. (<https://kevinjshay44.medium.com/right-wing-provocateurs-likely-inflaming-protest-violence-bcf1c48e1d40>)

Toward a Wider Framework

But this urgency to narrate and scramble to check the boxes of U.S. white supremacy also files down the volume's analytic sharpness. For example, the book's above quoted definition of white supremacy — "both individual belief that white people are inherently better than others and the broad systems of inequality that insure racial disparity of health, income, life, and freedom" — seems more like a timeless expression of an old idea rather than a new understanding shaped by the events, and contemporary period, the book lives in.

Missing from the volume's framing, for example, is a literature review of the capacious writing on white supremacy, fascism and neo-fascism about that same contemporary period. This would include books like Enzo Traverso's *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right* (<https://www.versobooks.com/books/2876-the-new-faces-of-fascism>); Jason Stanley's *How Fascism Works* (<https://jason-stanley.com/book/how-fascism-works/>), or David Renton's *The New Authoritarians: Convergence on the Far Right*. (<https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745338156/the-new-authoritarians/>)

The benefit of engagement with work of this kind is that it analyzes white supremacy

within larger political frameworks (especially neoliberalism) white situating contemporary racism in the trajectory within which it often sees itself, for example Richard Spencer and the so-called "alt-right's" infatuation with the idea of Nazism. Recall Spencer's "Hail Trump — Hail Our People" salute at the far-right conference in Washington not long after Trump's election. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/richard-spencer-speech-npi/508379/>)

Indeed, Belew and Gutiérrez's volume seems determined not to fold white supremacy into political traditions it clearly belongs to, like fascism, tending to isolate it as a form of prejudice and inequality (see their definition). This tendency can lead to an exceptionalism of U.S. racism divorced from its global dimensions (including those of fascism) that recent scholarship has done much to complicate or refute. (See *Hitler's American Model. The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, James Q. Whitman, Princeton University Press, 2017.)

The unwillingness to fully theorize U.S. white supremacy is most notable in the book's Introduction and first section where three differing paradigms — settler-colonialism, extractive colonialism, and racial capitalism — are all proffered as causality. Yet these paradigms are left rather flat-footedly self-explanatory by the editors.

There is, for example, no engagement with Cedric Robinson's own body of writing and thought on white supremacy (and fascism) within his formulation of "racial capitalism." Or, for example, with George Fredrickson's important historical work on settler white supremacy in a comparative framework.

A more robust engagement with the theoretical mechanisms intended to explain the volume, in other words, would have allowed a deeper and more convincing analysis of where and how exactly white supremacy has been a constant specter on the landscape of the United States.

Doing so would also raise the question very germane to the activists the book seeks to reach about how to understand and organize against white supremacy. This leitmotif of the Black Lives Matter movement is suggested by Taylor's essay but could have been more robustly engaged with by writing from activist communities. See for example Jason Perez: <https://spectrejournal.com/snatching-victory/> or William C. Anderson and Zoe Samudzi's *As Black As Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation*. (<https://www.amazon.com/No-Pasaran-Antifascist-Dispatches-Crisis/dp/1849354820>)

The book might also have tapped the organizing writings of BLM leaders like Mariame Kaba or abolitionist theorists like Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who have made understanding of the prison-industrial complex, policing and

the courts central to our understanding of how white supremacy functions as technologies of power.

Indeed, the *Field Guide* premise suggests an opportunity and duty to survey and document the contours of new mass protests against white supremacy. Put another way, if we are living through a renaissance of revanchist white supremacy in the era of Trump and post-Trump America, we are also living in a period of anti-racist aspiration and restoration.

That said, *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* does constitute a lightning strike against any complacency within or without the academy that racism is merely Trumpism, or that both are somehow "over" since the 2020 election.

If anything, the regroupment of white supremacist ground forces and their penetration into the ranks of the Republican Party's attack on "wokism," state-level endeavors to ban the teaching of critical race theory, and the rampant, unceasing, and increasing numbers of people murdered by U.S. police since the George Floyd killing demand — as Belew and Gutiérrez implore us — that the battle against white supremacy is and must be "held in common" as part of larger struggle to end capitalist and state-sponsored violence, especially against the most vulnerable members of U.S. society. ■

Mumia Appeal Denied

SUPPORTERS OF MUMIA Abu-Jamal will continue fighting for his freedom after the judicial denial of a critically important appeal for a new trial. Abu-Jamal has maintained his innocence for 40 years imprisonment on a 1982 conviction for the killing of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner.

Peoples Dispatch (April 3, 2023) reports that massive documentation of racist jury selection and witness bribery by the prosecution, "mysteriously discovered in 2018" after being hidden for 35 years, "could have given Abu-Jamal his best chance at release, after having endured medical neglect and torture during his decades-long stay in prison. Judge Lucretia Clemons dismissed Abu-Jamal's appeal largely on procedural grounds" — ruling that even if jurors knew witnesses were bribed it wouldn't have affected their verdict.

The long-hidden documents include prosecutor's notes showing, Abu-Jamal's defense claims, that the prosecutor "deemed certain characteristics important for selecting jurors but struck prospective Black jurors who were more favorable with respect to those criteria than non-Black panelists whom he did not strike." ■

REVIEW

The Price of Slavery

By Christopher McAuley

The Price of Slavery:

Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean

By Nick Nesbitt

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022, 274 pages, \$35 paperback.

IN *THE PRICE of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean*, Nick Nesbitt continues his exploration of “Black Jacobinism” or the “political deployment of the idea of undivided equality in defense of popular sovereignty,” inspired by C.L.R. James’ classic study of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*.

A professor of French and Italian at Princeton University, Nesbitt began his focus on Caribbean studies in *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (2008) and followed with *Antillean Critique* (2013).

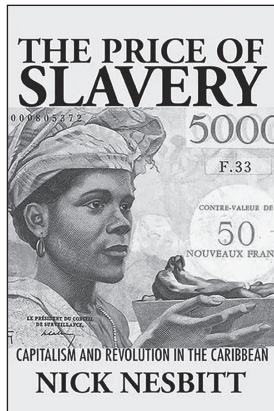
In *The Price of Slavery*, Nesbitt focuses on the “francophone Caribbean critique of social structure, from plantation slavery and the Haitian Revolution to the neocolonial present, as a tropical reconfiguration of Marx’s thought.” (2)

This critique includes the writings of Toussaint Louverture, Henry Christophe, C.L.R. James, Aime Cesaire, Jacques Stephen Alexis, and Suzanne Cesaire. The social structure in question is the “colonial variant of the capitalist social form” that was “left latent or unrecognized in Marx’s own thought.” (103)

Nesbitt further sets himself the task of “propos[ing] an original theory of the relation of slavery and capitalism.” There is an understandable endeavor considering the place of the two in the Caribbean’s history and historical legacy. (2)

Enslaved and Waged Labor

Nesbitt divides the study into two title-clarifying halves, “From Marx...” and “... To Black Jacobinism.” The first chapter is his review of older and more recent work on the relationship between capitalism and slavery, primarily from the vantage point of whether the specific scholar has respected Marx’s distinction between the labor of people whose labor power is commodified — as in the case of wage-earners — and that of those whose



“historically entangled yet analytically distinct” systems of capitalism and slavery. (3)

Nesbitt explains the basis of the distinction between these labor regimes in what is essentially a Marxist primer that extends into the second chapter, “Reading Capital in the Caribbean.” It boils down to price(s): “To count as a value in the capitalist social form, a concrete object or service must necessarily, by definition, have an exchange value, a value that can and must be manifested in the form of a price.” (47)

Thus, if we follow prices as our visible guide to compare wage-earning with enslaved labor the difference becomes clear: While enslaved people are priced, so to speak, at the current and future value of their entire persons, wage-earners are priced according to the amount of labor they can provide an employer in a given pay period.

The differences in how and for what these two types of workers are monetarily assessed has a calculable result in the wage-labor case, as we know from Marx. Wages and the prices of the specific goods created by wage labor allow us (subtracting various overhead costs), to estimate the monetary value of the excess labor that the wage earners have transferred to the commodities they produce which is not reflected in their pay.

This *surplus value*, as Marx termed it, is the very value that cannot be realized through enslaved labor. In not having a distinct value for enslaved labor, separate from that of the enslaved person’s total price, we cannot determine the amount of labor that was necessary to produce a unit of a commodity, nor the amount of the enslaved worker’s excess labor embodied in that unit of production.

It was for this reason, not because he did not recognize the economic importance

entire persons have been commodified, as with enslaved people.

Nesbitt takes to task several scholars including Eric Williams, Sven Beckert, Edward Baptist, Robin Blackburn, Charles Post and Dale Tomich, for failing to properly understand the

of enslaved labor, that Marx placed it in the category of constant capital, like land, livestock and machinery, rather than into that of variable capital, as he did wage labor.

The “concrete labor slaves perform,” remarks Nesbitt on this point, “may be useful for the slaveowner (producing profitable commodities), but lacking a commodified form (as what Marx will call labor power), it cannot appear as a value within the capitalist social form.” (78)

The Capitalist Social Form

In addition to his emphasis on the distinction between surplus value-creating wage labor and the necessarily unrecognized economic contribution of enslaved labor in capitalist accounting, the basis of Nesbitt’s critique of many scholars who theorize the relationship between slavery and capitalism is that they pay insufficient attention to the predominant capitalist social form of labor.

Nesbitt defines the social form of labor as the “modalities by which private, individual acts of labor are socially recognized and validated in any given society,” and certainly prefers it to “mode of production,” a term he generally avoids.

The capitalist social form, as we have already suggested, is characterized by commodity production performed by workers whose labor power is commodified in the form of monetary wages and who exchange their earnings for commodities sold on markets. By contrast, the social form of enserfed and non-capitalist enslaved labor is “direct, unmediated domination,” exercised by landlords and slaveowners without the intermediaries of monetary payment or exchange. (169)

Having established quite literally the terms of the question, Nesbitt then offers his suggestions on how to understand and situate enslaved labor in relation to the capitalist social form of labor — the means by which slaveowners realize profits from the sale of slave-cultivated commodities to metropolitan manufacturers, whose own surplus value-extracting processing operations of those commodities afford them profits and the money with which to purchase more slave-cultivated commodities.

In somewhat more abstract terms, Nesbitt describes the relationship between enslavement and capitalism like this:

“[W]hat the slave... produces for the capitalist slaveowner is... a concrete commodity (sugar, cotton) the exchange value (price) of

Christopher McAuley is a professor in the Department of Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His latest work is The Spirits vs. The Souls: Max Weber, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Politics of Scholarship (Notre Dame, 2019).

which... upon successful sale, allows the owner of that commodity to realize an average rate of profit (on sugar and cotton). This profit constitutes surplus value captured and distributed... to the capitalist slaveowner via market sale from a total mass of value in the system as a whole." (52-53)

This Marxist perspective, Nesbitt argues, "clearly allows for the conceptualization of the qualitative and necessary, if tendentially diminishing, place of slave labor in capitalism." (44)

Haitian Revolution and Labor Form

Nesbitt devotes two of the three chapters that comprise the "... To Black Jacobinism" half of *The Price of Slavery* to his theorization of the Haitian Revolution, and to the struggle over the alternative social form of labor that would prevail in post-revolutionary Haitian society.

Nesbitt opens these discussions with a tribute to and analysis of C.L.R. James' exemplary study of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*. In this work by a "veritable Galileo of revolutionary historiography," Nesbitt asserts, James demolished racist assumptions and inscribed the Haitian Revolution in the annals of the world's "great revolutions" through evocative historical reconstructions and "radiant" prose. (127)

James' work is not without its inconsistencies, however. *The Black Jacobins* subscribes to the formula "insurgent masses + leader(s) of genius + force of the idea (of equality) yields world-historical revolution" to structure the Haitian Revolution. But in James' chronicle of the French Revolution in the same work, he presents it as a "headless" revolution "of anonymous French masses... devoid of any notable leadership." (113, 120)

Nesbitt proposes that James could have resolved this interpretive tension between the determination of strong leadership and the agency of the masses by highlighting a factor in the revolutionary process that he already recognized: the necessity of alliances between mobilized masses and "radical elements of the middle classes and elites" to ensure revolutionary success. (124)

"James had available in 1938," Nesbitt argues, "ample historical material to build a case every bit as strong for the French Revolution as an alliance between the masses and a radical left intellectual leadership as for the Haitian and Russian cases." (125)

Nesbitt returns more directly to the question of the social form of labor during and after the Haitian Revolution in the fourth chapter of *The Price of Slavery*. In this instance, Nesbitt's focus is on the conflicts rather than the unifying goals between the self-emancipating masses and the "radical" leadership of the revolution.

Whereas the latter were committed to

the restoration of the plantation economy albeit sans slavery, the formerly enslaved people envisioned liberation in the redistribution of plantation landholdings, the legal security of their property, and the cultivation of subsistence crops. It was the plantation versus the provision grounds.

The compromise, which was the first of many social compromises between upholders of the plantation regime and the formerly enslaved who were subjected to that institution, was a sharecropping system that initially rewarded agricultural workers between a quarter and a third of the cane crop or cane syrup, before transitioning a monetary sum as payment.

Nesbitt refers to the various legal compendia of Sonthonax, Polverel, and Henry — drawn up in the immediate aftermaths of revolutionary France's first abolition (of slavery) decree and revolutionary Haiti's final one — as attempts to resuscitate the plantation economy and convince recently self-emancipated people that the new terms of sugarcane cultivation differed from those that operated under slavery, despite similarities in the actual work.

In this context, Nesbitt returns to a discussion of James' use of the word "proletariat" in *The Black Jacobins* and suggests that it might more accurately describe the new circumstances of the recently emancipated.

In a famous passage in that work, James asserted that Saint Domingue's enslaved plantation workers were "closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time," a clear reference to the coordination and rhythm of their work (especially at harvest and boiling time) that could be easily channeled into military organization.

Rather than in the active and managed employment of enslaved labor, however, Nesbitt sees greater cause to use "proletariat" to describe Haiti's formerly enslaved when they won their release from the plantation's clutches.

Their relative freedom, Nesbitt argues, recalls Marx's occasional use of "proletariat" to denote, not the industrial worker as he typically intended it, but those who, like the English peasantry, had been driven from the land but whose labor power was not yet commodified.

From this meaning of proletariat, Nesbitt proposes that we conceive of the Haitian citizenry as proletarian in the years from 1791-1820, and the Haitian social labor form as non-commodified labor power.

Against Industrial Romanticism

Nesbitt concludes *The Price of Slavery* with critiques of Aime Cesaire's social democratic and Jacques Stephen Alexis's communist romanticization of industrial wage work, and praise of Suzanne Cesaire's ecofeminism.

In many regards, this ending is a return to the point with which Nesbitt opens the study. A clear understanding of the capitalist social form of labor helps not only to distinguish it from enslaved labor, but also to dispel any belief that it can be repurposed for progressive ends. As Nesbitt underscores, this lesson was apparently lost on many socialist revolutionaries.

The latter, in the understandable desire to improve the material conditions of their working populations, embraced state-sponsored industrial programs that introduced or expanded wage work, in the belief that "increasing production output on the capitalist model" could fund social programs to redress the very inequities that capitalism produces. (171)

Such were the bases of Aime Cesaire's repeated calls for metropolitan France to expand industry in Martinique, and presumably Jacques Stephen Alexis's paeans to the "infinite promise of liberating, transformational [industrial] work" in especially his *chef d'oeuvre, Compere General Soleil*. (182)

In contrast to these projections of minimally exploitative and alienating wage labor, Suzanne Cesaire, in her fittingly titled essay-work *The Great Camouflage*, was the rare voice who took issue with the industrial vision both for its limited perspective on human labor and its disregard for the natural world.

In his tribute to Suzanne Cesaire's intervention, Nesbitt states that she "voices an insurgent poetics of the human animal, the human thing as one mere thing among all the things of nature, a quasi-Spinozist vision of a vital natural order without priority of any element over another." (186) It's unfortunate that Nesbitt devotes a mere four pages to Cesaire's vision.

In *The Price of Slavery*, Nick Nesbitt provides a rich and generative study that compels us to rethink several important theoretical, economic, historiographical and political questions and debates which are of relevance to more than just the historical and contemporary Caribbean. The work, however, only marginally corresponds to Nesbitt's stated aim of exploring how a group of "Black Jacobin Marxist thinkers tropicalize Marx." (3)

Except for his discussion of C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*, the study can be more aptly described as a Marxist assessment of scholarship on slavery's relationship to capitalism, and of the political-economic agendas pursued by Haiti's leaders during and after the Haitian Revolution, and by select figures in the mid- to late 20th century francophone Caribbean. Again, in the treatment of these themes Nesbitt is highly successful.

But in a work that claims to focus on how Marxist writers from the francophone Caribbean and, with the necessary inclusion

continued on page 38

REVIEW

No Mercy Here By Alice Ragland

No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity

By Sarah Hayley

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019, 260 pages, \$35.95 paperback.

WRITTEN BY Sarah Hayley, *No Mercy Here* provides a sociohistorical account of Black women under the penal control of convict camps, parole, and chain gangs in the early 20th century.

It delivers detailed descriptions of the gendered violence perpetrated against Black women by state penal institutions during that era. It also describes the back-breaking labor that Black women were forced to do once trapped in the system of carceral control, which contributed significantly to the creation of the modern infrastructure of the U.S. South.

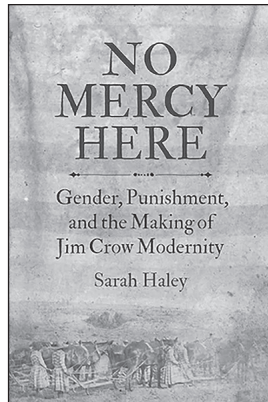
The book highlights the resistance that Black women showed during their time in captivity, including work slowdowns and stoppages, theft, outright sabotage and feigning illness. These resistance strategies strongly resemble those utilized during American chattel slavery. It was well chosen for inclusion in the National Book Foundation's 2020-2021 Literature for Justice Reading List.

An assistant professor of gender studies and African American studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, Hayley offers historical accounts of Black women under penal control in the early 1900s.

Hayley emphasizes the "othering" of Black women, buttressed by white supremacy, which resulted in their super-exploitation and various forms of violence. The "ungendering" that she describes refers to the historic depiction of Black women as less than (white) women, but not quite men.

White women were constructed by white supremacy as helpless, in need of protection, chaste, and frail in order to build white solidarity across class lines. This view justified violence against Black men through the myth of the Black male rapist; it justified violence to solidify the superior economic and social positions of whites.

By focusing on Black women in chain gangs and in convict camps, Hayley pro-



vides ample contrast between this perception of white female fragility and how Black women were portrayed. Black women were not afforded the same sympathy as white women (convicts or not), as they had to perform labor that was as strenuous as the labor that male convicts were forced to perform. Myths

of their limited sentience were combined with stereotypes of their unlimited physical strength to justify the harsh labor conditions.

These depictions of "unfeeling" Black women also subjected them to extreme violence and torture in penal institutions that would have been seen as an outrage if done to white women.

This violence and torture, performed by white guards in what strongly resembles pre-emancipation plantation relations, was essential to maintaining order and control over Black women's bodies. Even though the labor they had to do was on par with men, they faced the double burden of forced domestic servitude and sexual violence.

Hayley also details another way that penal institutions maintained control over Black women's bodies and restricted their freedom of movement: forced labor as domestic servants in white homes while on parole. White women were usually set free after serving their time (though very few white women were under carceral control to begin with).

By contrast, Black women stayed in a position of servitude and deplorable working conditions after they left the convict camps.

Domestic service was one of the only accessible career options even for Southern Black women who were not under penal control during this time period, another indication of the continuation of a social order that resembled chattel slavery. To rationalize the sexual violence that often took place in the domestic sphere, Black women were seen as deviant and hypersexual.

Through her historical journey into the lives of Black women under penal control in the early 1900s, Hayley delves into themes of state-enforced objectification and dehumanization, the denial of Black women's rights to motherhood and familial relations, and physi-

cal and sexual violence. These are couched in depictions and stereotypes of these women as criminals, prostitutes, and "not quite women." In fact, harmful narratives undergird many of the current issues that Black women and their communities face, including policing, surveillance, mass incarceration, and the labor exploitation necessary to maintain racial capitalism. ■

UAW — continued from page 7

aren't possible.

A contract campaign begins far before negotiations start. The issues are primarily developed not at a negotiating table but at work sites where workers signal the coming battle through everyday struggles.

Clearly UAWD members and supporters will be key in discussions, organizing on the job and more. Such a campaign can't stop when punching out either. We need to bring discussions to our homes and spread the word throughout our communities. Everyone needs to know about our central issues.

As the negotiations proceed we will need to show management that we are prepared to back up our bargaining team. This means wearing buttons, writing group grievances, delivering them to management, organizing rallies and informational pickets, reaching out to other unions for support.

Once there is a tentative agreement, we need the time to read and discuss the proposal before any vote takes place. Through the power of knowing and acting on our strengths, we can build a democratic UAW.

A key UAWD-organizer, Scott Houldieson — who works at the Chicago Ford assembly plant — remarked: "We believe that solidarity unionism based on rank-and-file democracy can be the basis for turning our union around. I am looking forward to starting the next chapter in the storied history of the UAW." ■

Slavery — continued from page 37

of James, Marxist writers from the anglophone Caribbean, have engaged with Marx on the topics at the core of *The Price of Slavery*, Nesbitt should have devoted some portion of his study to a discussion of their positions. As much as I normally refrain from making prescriptive statements, considering Nesbitt's professed intentions it seems fair to point out where and how he did not fulfill them. ■

Alice Ragland is a Black feminist professor, community educator, and writer based in Columbus, Ohio. Her work focuses on educating people about systems of oppression as well as documenting current history so that it will not be forgotten.

REVIEW

A Timely Classic Revisited: Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster By Guy Miller

The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster: Public Betrayal, Justice Denied

By Bruce Campbell

Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2018,
190 pages plus endnotes & index. \$24.95 paper.

IN THE MIDDLE of *The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster* are 17 photos. Three of these photos tell a graphic story of what happened to that town one July night in 2013.

The first photo is of downtown Lac-Mégantic, Quebec on what looks to be a warm summer evening not unlike the fatal evening of July 5-6, 2013. The street lamps, stores and bars paint a warm, inviting picture suitable for a brochure meant to lure tourists, or a charming postcard sent to envious families back home.

The Café-Musi, located just 55 feet from the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic (MMA) mainline, was celebrating the reunion of two musicians who were local legends. At 11 pm the place was still packed, but by 1:00 am only hard-core music lovers were left when the band paused for a break between sets. The music would never resume. At 1:14 am, catastrophe struck.

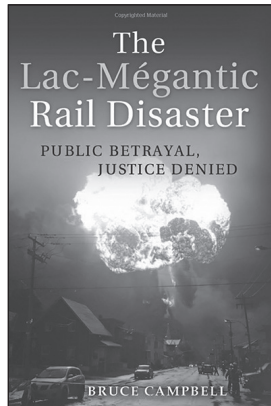
The second photo is of a mushroom cloud. It rose over where downtown Lac-Mégantic used to be. It rose over 300 feet and could be seen from miles around. The third photo of downtown Lac-Mégantic resembles Dresden in February 1945 more than a cozy mecca for would-be visitors.

A runaway train with defective brakes, parked at the top of a hill by an overworked and exhausted engineer, had rolled into town, derailed and exploded, incinerating the town center, killing 47 residents and spilling tons of toxic fuel into the lake.

I do not have the words to describe the horror of the next hours and the affect it had on survivors. A new TV series called “Mégantic” promises to do so:

“The series goes beyond what anyone has seen or heard in the media. It takes a deeply human look at this tragedy that shook Quebec, Canada and the world. Each episode follows the destinies of Méganticois marked by grief and trauma, but also by solidarity, courage and heroism.” (<http://videotron.com/megantic>)

Guy Miller is a retired United Transportation Union member, longtime socialist and lifelong resident of Chicago.



The Price of Greed

What is to blame for the Lac-Mégantic disaster? The short answer is greed. The long answer is what Bruce Campbell's book is all about. Campbell is the author of three major reports and a number of media

commentaries on the Lac-Mégantic rail disaster. For his work on Lac-Mégantic, Campbell was awarded a Law Foundation of Ontario Community Leadership in Justice Fellowship.

Although the names are different, the four-decade long project of neoliberal assault on the health and well-being of working people runs parallel between Canada and the United States, and for that matter the entire capitalist world.

Campbell starts his story with the nine years of Conservative Brian Mulroney as Canada's Prime Minister. Between the years of 1984 and 1993, Mulroney was able to splice the virus of deregulation into the DNA of Canadian politics. Once there, big business lobbyists, rightwing think tanks and the corporate media conspired to keep it there.

Whether Conservative or Liberal, or in the United States Democrat or Republican, deregulation was now part of the new orthodoxy.

By 1995, the Liberal Party politician Paul Martin was the new Prime Minister. Martin's budget of that year included a 50 percent reduction in funding for Transport Canada, responsible for all the country's transport related Acts, politics, regulations and programs.

The year 1995 was also when the Canadian National Railroad (CN) was privatized. With the figleaf of public accountability gone, the CN was free to join the Canadian Pacific (CP) in the headlong pursuit of profit.

Both railroads joined in ripping up the Ottawa Valley Line. This meant that the only option left for shippers was going through heavily populated southern Quebec. This move helped point the bull's eye directly at Lac-Mégantic.

Deregulation does not mean No Regu-

lation, and for those remaining regulations there is another ally of big business — Regulatory Capture.

The metaphor of “revolving door” is often used to describe this phenomenon. The door spins from corporate lobbyist to government position to company executive, or some variation of this trajectory.

Campbell offers several examples of this fox-guarding-the-hen house gambit by the Canadian railroads. “Harper era Minister of Transportation John Baird was appointed to a lucrative spot on the board of the CP. [Stephen Harper was the rightwing prime minister of Canada from 2006 to 2015.] Senior Transport Canada officials Bill Rowat and Cliff MacKay moved from government to President and CFO, respectively, of the Railroad Association of Canada” (the railroad industry lobby group).

Now that deregulation and regulatory capture set the table, it was time to bring in the gluttonous diners to gorge themselves. First to pull up a seat was Paul Tellier, Mulroney's point man in the privatization of CN.

In the first three years of the CN being relieved of public responsibility, the company's profit margin soared to new heights. Shareholders watched while the stock price tripled, while, ten thousand workers watched from home after being terminated.

Once a national Canadian public asset, U.S. investors soon controlled the majority of CN stock. Part of the transition of the CN from public good to private cash-cow was the selloff of less profitable branch lines to small, mostly U.S. short-line operators.

One of these short lines was the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railroad, (MMA), destroyer of Lac-Mégantic.

Culture of Intimidation

Paul Tellier's tenure brought two key diners to the banquet: E. Hunter Harrison and Edward Burkhardt. Harrison's role in the Lac-Mégantic tragedy was indirect, but as the father of the Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR), the now industry-wide norm that elevates profits uber alles, Harrison made his contribution to the disaster.

Campbell defines PSR in simple terms “... run fewer and longer trains, eliminate unprofitable (or less profitable) lines, reduce head counts.”

Less tangible but equally real was the

culture of intimidation that Harrison brought with him wherever he went. The number of grievances skyrocketed when he took over CN, at a rate five times higher than that of the comparable CP. His thinking was: if the unions are tied up with old complaints, there would be less time for new ones.

He also hosted weekend retreats for “promising” employees that became known as “Hunter Camps.” At these camps, future Harrison sycophants were schooled in “PSR Thought.” His camp talks were collected into a book, *How We Work and Why: Running a Precision Railroad*. Harrison made sure every employee received a copy.

As principal stock holder of the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic, Edward Burkhardt played a more direct role, perhaps even a starring role, in what happened at Lac-Mégantic.

Privates in the army rarely see generals — I may have seen four during three years in the U.S. Army — and grunts on the railroad rarely see Vice Presidents. Ed Burkhardt was different. During the middle 1980s, he was the Chicago and Northwestern (CNW) Vice President of Operations. I learned to recognize him by sight.

Burkhart made regular appearances in the half a dozen Chicago area CNW yards. His *modus operandi* was simple: stand and watch and watch. He never introduced himself, never asked a question, never changed expressions. Campbell writes of Burkhardt that “he may have been a legend in some quarters, but in others he was the devil incarnate.”

The Single Employee Crew was Burkhardt’s great fixation. After leaving CNW he became CEO of the Wisconsin Central (WC). Thanks to the deregulation resulting from the 1980 Staggers Act, the Soo Line was able to sell off much of its Wisconsin holdings.

Burkhardt tried desperately to implement “engineers only” on the WC. Unions and the state government joined forces to stop him. John Dobyns, a Wisconsin State Congressman described Burkhardt [“Fast Eddy”] this way, “Burkhardt doesn’t care about public safety. He thinks only of profits.”

Dobyns’ words were borne out when a WC train carrying liquid petroleum gas and propane derailed and exploded in Weyauwega, WI in 1996. Three thousand residents were evacuated and \$20 million in damages resulted. The National Transportation Safety Board cited shoddy maintenance as the cause.

Burkhardt, as always, copped a plea, learned nothing, and in 2003 wound up heading the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railroad.

Shortly after taking over the MMA, Burkhardt cut the workforce by 275 employees, about half the work force. Adding insult to injury, he cut the remaining workers’ salaries by 40 percent.

In those early years, pulp, paper and lumber were the MMA’s bread and butter.

But beginning around 2006, oil prices began to surge, and the focus of Canadian railroads began to move westward.

The Road to Catastrophe

The Alberta bitumen, or tar sands, contain the world’s third largest reserves of recoverable oil, behind only Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. Later the Parshall Oil Field, part of the Bakken Formation, was discovered in North Dakota

There was big money in that dirty oil, and Ed Burkhardt and the MMA were determined to get all of it that they could.

The train that flattened Lac-Mégantic began its 3,100-mile trip in New Town, North Dakota and was scheduled to end the trip in a refinery located in New Brunswick. The 72 DOT 111 tank cars (more suited to hauling corn oil than petroleum) were scheduled to be handled by four different railroads and to pass through or near Chicago, Detroit, Windsor, Toronto and Montreal.

It was in Montreal where the MMA made the interchange and picked up the train from the CP. The lead unit of the MMA’s locomotive consist was engine number 5017. Eight months earlier, the 5017 was brought to the company’s repair shop following an engine failure.

The shop, for whatever reason, did a hazardous repair job. An oil leak was repaired by plastering glue over what appeared to be the source of the leak. Soon the glue gave way and the engine began to periodically surge and smoke. In turn this caused an accumulation in the turbocharger and exhaust.

On July 4, 2013, one day before the obliteration of downtown Lac-Mégantic, Francois Daigle ran the 5017 from Montreal to Farnham. Daigle had trouble maintaining speed and noticed the locomotive was belching black smoke.

Daigle reported the problem to his supervisor, Jean Demaistre, and after tying up (end of shift) he sent a fax to the repair shop in Derby, Maine. Since the repair shop was closed for the July 4th holiday, Daigle had another idea: take the 5017 off the lead position and bury it further back in the consist.

Since making a turn on the 5017 (burying it from lead position) would have meant a half hour delay, Demaistre shot down the idea, adding for good measure: “You’re complaining again!”



First responders at the fire, July 6, 2013. Transportation Safety Board of Canada CC-40

None of this was passed on to engineer Tom Harding when he took over the throttle of the 5017 the next day in Farnham, Quebec. By the time Harding completed the 115 mile run from Farnham to Nantes, he had been on duty for 10 hours and 30 minutes, 90 minutes short of the 12-hour limit mandated by law.

Nantes was the designated interchange point, and the American crew wasn’t set to take over the train until the next morning. Because the siding at Nantes (a track off the mainline, and equipped with a derail) was not available, Harding was forced to leave the nearly mile-long train on the main line — which pointed directly at Lac-Mégantic.

Harding set handbrakes on the five locomotives, a VP car (a caboose modified to function as a remote control car) and a buffer car filled with sand. The rule calls for the application of “sufficient handbrakes,” putting all the onus on the employees. Traditionally, handbrakes are a conductor’s work.

Harding also applied the independent brake (a brake affecting engines) from the 5017, the only one of the five units left running. At this point a traditional two-person crew would have performed a stabilization test to make sure the handbrakes were sufficient. Sadly for Lac-Mégantic, there was only Tom Harding.

Tom was cabled back to a hotel in Lac-Mégantic, thinking all was well. It wasn’t. An hour or so later, the smoking 5017 caught fire. When the Nantes fire department arrived, the first thing they did was to hit the kill switch and shut down the 5017.

The fire was extinguished. This also meant that the engine-from-hell was no longer able to pump air. Soon the independent brakes bled off and the train began rolling westward, reaching 63 miles per hour before hitting a severe curve near Lac-Mégantic, sending 63 tank cars off the rails, releasing six million liters of petroleum crude oil.

The fire began almost immediately, sparking a series of massive explosions. At 1:14 am,

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REVIEW

The Working Class in Turkey Today By Daniel Johnson

The Condition of the Working Class in Turkey: Labour under Neoliberal Authoritarianism

Edited by Çağatay Edgücan Şahin and Mehmet Erman Erol
Pluto Press, 2021, 320 pages, \$31.95 paper.

ON MAY 13, 2014 an explosion in the Eynez coal mine in the town of Soma in western Turkey killed 301 miners. In response to angry protests over deadly working conditions from miners and their supporters, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan “went back to British history” to examine 19th century mining disasters. He concluded that such accidents are “usual,” and that “these things happen.”¹

The workplace deaths in Soma and Erdoğan’s history lesson, together with Friedrich Engels’s 200th birthday, inspired the title for *The Condition of the Working Class in Turkey: Labour under Neoliberal Authoritarianism* (hereafter *CWCT*). Edited by economists Çağatay Edgücan Şahin and Mehmet Erman Erol, the collection provides an in-depth and expansive examination of conditions for workers in Turkey from the recent past to the present.

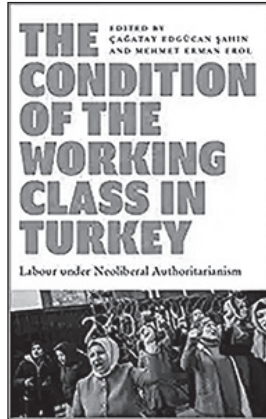
While there are many studies of authoritarian rule and neoliberal economics in Turkey, *CWCT* is notable for two reasons. First, rather than focus solely on the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), in power since 2002, contributors see continuity since the 1980s in Turkey’s fusion of authoritarianism and capitalism.²

Second is *CWCT*’s focus on labor economics in a variety of settings, which contrasts with conventional state-centric and top-down approaches to studies of political economy in Turkey.

While contributors could have provided more perspectives from workers themselves — only two of 13 articles focus on labor organization and activism — the range of issues covered in the book is impressively broad.

With subjects ranging from “gender dynamics to refugee workers, from agrarian labour relations to workers’ health and safety,

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rising capitalist power (despite an economic crisis beginning in 2018 and continuing to the present) that is also consistently ranked by the International Trades Union Congress (ITUC) as one of the worst countries in the world for workers.³

While relevant to understanding the relationship between authoritarianism and capitalism generally, Turkey provides an extreme example of this synthesis over the past 40 years.

Military Dictatorship to Neoliberal Authoritarianism

Neoliberalism in Turkey did not begin with the AKP, notes Mehmet Erol in *CWCT*’s lead essay, “Not So Strange Bed Fellows.” A military dictatorship following a 1980 coup banned trade union activity, while a stabilization program from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank devalued the Turkish *lira*, removed price controls, and encouraged the liberalization of import and export regulations. (19)

The coup reversed two decades of growing working-class power. Turkey’s first labor federation, the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş), was established in 1952 — not coincidentally the same year Turkey joined NATO. Under American tutelage in the early cold war the federation took an apolitical, bread-and-butter approach to bettering material conditions for members.

In 1967, however, dissident labor organizers founded the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DISK) as a leftwing challenge to Türk-İş. DISK grew rapidly, reaching half a million members by the late ’70s and rivalling Türk-İş, whose membership stood at around 700,000.⁴

The coup government banned DISK and

from the politics of labour restructuring to factory occupations, and from precarity to organised labour” (10), *CWCT* makes an important contribution to understanding contemporary class relations in Turkey.

Neoliberalism and authoritarianism are not unique to Turkey, of course. However, as Şahin and Erol note, the country remains a

other radical organizations while sparing Türk-İş. In his contribution to *CWCT*, Kerem Gökten notes that a 32% decline in real wages followed the banning of labor organizations and neoliberal policies of deregulation and de-unionization. (39) The anti-labor constitution implemented after the coup continues to govern labor relations in Turkey today.

Between 1983 and 1991, the Motherland Party (ANAP) implemented neoliberal economic reforms while retaining and perpetuating repressive coup-era policies. In keeping with trends occurring across much of the world at the time, all major Turkish political parties (or at least those permitted to exist) accepted neoliberal common sense in these years. (20)

A 1989 law liberalizing capital mobility represents the final stage in Turkey’s integration into global capitalism, in Gökten’s view. Yet 1989 also witnessed a major pushback with the “Spring Mobilizations,” a labor upsurge begun by public sector workers that quickly spread to other sectors. Gökten suggests that the emergence of strike and other protest activities paved the way for efforts at democratization and liberalization in the early ’90s. (39-40)

During 1990s as many as one million Kurds were forcefully removed from approximately 4,000 villages in the east as the Turkish state fought a war with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).⁵ Many of those forced from their homes moved to western cities (especially Istanbul), providing a key new source of labor for urban industries.

Organizing in these workplaces was difficult as a result of the 1983 constitution, further contributing to declining unity density. Over the same decade, employment in agriculture declined while the service sector expanded, giving rise to informal and precarious forms of labor.

By the second half of the 1990s, more than 30% of the non-agricultural labor force worked in the informal sector. By the early 2000s the service industry eclipsed agricultural labor in the sectoral distribution of employment. (42)

Privatizations beginning in the ’90s negatively impacted workers in education and healthcare while greatly exacerbating inequalities of access to these fundamental rights. Precarity and “flexibility” in employment have predictably hit poor women and rural and migrant workers hardest. These

disparate topics and groups are explored in depth in *CWCT*.

Neoliberalism Under the AKP

One key difference between post-coup parties of the 1980s and '90s and the AKP was the broad popular support enjoyed by the latter on coming to power. Ostensibly committed to basic democratic freedoms and government transparency, the AKP offered an appealing alternative to the corruption and repression of post-coup governments.

At the same time, the AKP supercharged privatization and deregulation, earning it the fawning admiration of pundits in the mainstream Western press. In the early 2000s the government adhered to tight monetary policies, high interest rates to encourage foreign capital inflows, and an export-led growth strategy.

Labor law reforms saw union density decline while the government banned major strikes on grounds of "national security" — a feature of the post-coup constitution deployed with unprecedented frequency by the AKP. (24)

In 1990, ten years after the coup, the official unionization rate still stood at an impressive 42.5% (in reality it was considerably lower, at perhaps at perhaps 23%).⁶ According to the Turkish government union density was 12.14% in 2020, though according to the OECD it was 10.3%.⁷ If teachers unions, which don't collectively bargain (another anti-worker component of the post-coup constitution) are excluded, the rate is considerably lower. Currently unionization in the private sector stands at around 6%.⁸

Yet at least until very recently, the AKP has been able to maintain working-class support, which Erol attributes to two factors. One is the party's promotion of "identity-based politics," a reference to the AKP's frequent appeals to common people's Islamic identity in opposition to traditional secular elites — a strategy used by Islamist parties since the creation of the republic.

As important has been the extension of new forms of credit. While personal debt has exploded, municipal social assistance programs, religious charity groups, and public poverty reduction programs have softened the effects of the "financialization of everyday life." (25)

Such efforts have not been able to fully compensate for the deterioration in working-class living standards, however. As union density has fallen, so too has labor's share of GDP. Precarity and the decline of safety standards have led to an explosion of work accidents and deaths, as chronicled by Murat Özveri in "When the Law is Not Enough."

The consequences of Turkey's 40-year imposition of neoliberal policies for working people are clear. In addition to high rates of occupational disease and death, Turkey has

the longest average weekly working time (46.4 hours in 2019) among OECD and European countries, as well as high rates of female and youth unemployment. (48-49) Youth disillusionment and a desire to leave the country have been accompanied by a brain drain among professionals — especially medical doctors.⁹

While providing a broad lens through which to view the negative impacts of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey, ways forward are hard to find in *CWCT*. As noted above, just two articles are devoted specifically to workers' struggles.

Resistance?

Berna Güler and Erhan Acar examine workers' self-management (WSM) with a case study of the Kazova textile factory between 2013 and 2017. Following their dismissal in early 2013, workers occupied the factory after contacting leftwing organizations and NGOs. (Notably, the sole union to support the workers was Nakliyat-İş, a member of DISK — re-formed in 1992).

Initially only 18 of 96 fired workers joined the resistance movement, which consisted primarily of public demonstrations. The outbreak of the Gezi protest movement in the summer of 2013 encouraged the Kazova workers to occupy the factory, though when they entered the business they found only scrapped metal and a destroyed building.

While workers attempted to sell garments produced in the factory, they were dependent for purchases on forums arising out of the Gezi movement. By 2017, with the Gezi movement long suppressed, there were only three workers left in the cooperative.

Though Güler and Acar stress the uncontroversial importance of worker organization and solidarity in WSM, it is unclear exactly what readers are to take away from their study. They are correct in claiming that cooperative experiments that utilize cultural — music, film, etc. — as well as economic alternatives to capitalist hegemony will be important in prefiguring a socialist society. (252-3) However, where exactly the Kazova attempt went wrong, or what could have been done differently, are unexplored.

The final essay, Çağatay Edgücan Şahin's "Organised Workers' Struggles Under Neoliberalism," provides a useful overview of organized labor's recent history in Turkey. Drawing on the work of sociologists Erik Olin Wright and Beverly Silver, Şahin periodizes workers' struggles (1989, 1991, 2009/10, 2013) in Turkey while documenting labor's gradual decline.

In addition to pointing out that rates of unionization and collective bargaining are among the lowest in the OECD, Şahin also notes the rise of conservative federations like HAK-İş (now the country's second largest after Türk-İş), the prominence of yellow unions,

male dominance in labor organizations, and the bureaucratization and corruption of union leadership. (273-74)

While the story of organized labor is generally one of decline, Şahin does find promising developments. The formation of new union alliances and labor platforms, and the growth of independent unions and disparate examples of labor militancy, suggest rank-and-file organization might soon challenge a moribund union bureaucracy.

For a Working-Class Alternative

On October 10, 2022, a mine explosion at the state-run Amasra coal mine in the Black Sea province of Bartın killed 41 miners. Preliminary assessments suggested the explosion was caused by firedamp, a flammable gas found in coal mines.

Erdoğan echoed the callous remarks offered in Soma in 2014 (and once again enraged miners), saying that the catastrophe in Bartın was "destiny" and that such accidents "will always happen."

During a meeting with families of deceased workers one relative told Erdoğan that "My brother said, 'There is a gas leak here, it will blow up soon.' How was it neglected?" The president had no answer, of course, and the opposition produced a 2019 report for the mine facility pointing to the risk of serious accidents like sudden gas discharge and firedamp explosion.¹⁰

While national and international labor movements continue to demand justice for the killed miners, in January of 2023 Erdoğan decreed that a strike by members of Birleşik Metal-İş metalworkers' union would be postponed for 60 days, using once again the "national security" constitutional clause for the banning of strikes.¹¹

As with the Amasra mine explosion, the opposition has criticized Erdoğan's authoritarian response to workers' strike plans. And for the first time, it appears that an opposition coalition (the "Nation Alliance") actually has a chance of defeating the AKP's People's Alliance in parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2023.

Tellingly, however, the Nation Alliance excluded the leftist and pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP) from discussion. A memo of understanding published by the Nation Alliance in late January promotes a number of liberal democratic constitutional and policy reforms, but notably says nothing about labor or Kurdish rights.¹²

Their exclusion led the HDP to form the Labor and Freedom Alliance with the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP), the Labor Party, the Social Freedom Party, the Labor Movement Party, and the Socialist Assemblies Federation. While the creation of a leftist political alliance in Turkey is a positive development, none of the parties other than the HDP and TIP has a significance presence in

parliament or among the general population.

All of this is to say that changing the condition of the working class in Turkey will need to begin outside the sphere of formal politics. Despite the continuing repression of the Turkish state, a recent uptick in strike activity — importantly including actions among unorganized or small and independent left unions — shows that worker direct action is alive in Turkey.¹³

Should the opposition displace the AKP in 2023, political pressure could conceivably move the new government to reform existing anti-labor policies. Such pressure will not emerge without the revitalization of the labor movement, however. Books like CWCT will

help in that effort.

Notes

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/14/turkey-mine-explosion-rescue-operation-live-updates>.
2. For a similar recent approach see Pinar Bedirhanoglu, Çağar Dölek, Funda Hülagü, and Özlem Kaygusuz, eds., *Turkey's New State in the Making: Transformations in Legality, Economy and Coercion* (Zed Books, 2020); and my review in *ATC* 216.
3. See, since CWCT's publication, "Turkey remains among 10 worst countries for working people," *Bianet*, June 28, 2022.
4. Brian Mello, "Communists and Compromisers: Explaining Divergences within Turkish Labor Activism, 1960-1980," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 11 (2010). For different membership estimates see Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2009), 273.
5. Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Fight for Kurdish Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 222. See also Paul White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (London: Zed Books, 2000).
6. Alpkın Birelma, "Trade Unions in Turkey, 2022," Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, May 2022, 6.
7. Trade Union Dataset, OECD.Stat, <https://stats.oecd.org/>.
8. Birelma, "Trade Unions in Turkey," 2.
9. Hamdi Firat Büyük, "BIRN Fact-Check: Why Doctors are Fleeing Erdoğan's Turkey," *BalkanInsight*, May 22, 2022; "Nepotism and authoritarianism behind Turkey's brain drain," *duvaR.english*, November 24, 2021.
10. "Erdoğan deems mine explosion killings 'destiny,'" *duvaR.english*, October 16, 2022.
11. "Unions demand justice for 42 miners killed in Turkey," *industrial*, January 26, 2023; "Erdoğan decree 'bans' workers' strike citing national security," *duvaR.english*, January 24, 2023.
12. "Memorandum of Understanding on Common Policies," *CHP*, January 30, 2023.
13. Birelma, "Trade Unions in Turkey," 7-8.

Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster — continued from page 40

July 6, 2013, 47 citizens of Lac-Mégantic were sacrificed to the profit-driven shareholders of the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic.

Scapagoating and Aftermath

The Transportation Safety Board (TSB) was given the job of writing an official report on the disaster. On August 19, 2014 TSB submitted its final version. Bruce Campbell's chapter dealing with the TSB report is aptly titled "The Investigation that Lost Heart," and for good reason.

The first version of the report listed 27 causes and contributing factors to the disaster; six of them pointed directly to the Single Person Crew (SPC). The second version had made no mention of SPC. The third version restored one reference. The final version hit its own kill switch and removed SPC entirely.

Campbell's trenchant comment on this whitewashing, "The railways were no doubt also aware of the initial version, as well as subsequent drafts of the report's conclusions, and were pushing hard to excise the one person crew causes."

Campbell cites that Kathy Fox, the chair of the TSB, channeling Edward Burkhardt almost word for word, offered her own opinion, saying essentially that the single person crew was actually safer, because he or she would not be distracted by a second crew member. Yes, and trees cause pollution.

Earlier, on the bright spring morning of May 12, 2014, Tom Harding, along with his teenage son and a friend, were in his driveway working on a boat. The morning calm was broken with the sound of sirens. A black van containing the Quebec police screeched to a stop.

Out poured a SWAT team, automatic weapons at the ready. They weren't there to bust a terrorist cell. They were there to arrest Tom Harding.

Tom was forced to the ground and handcuffed, then thrown into the van and driven to Lac-Mégantic for a publicity stunt: a perp

walk. But the people of Lac-Mégantic weren't buying it. One of them cried out, "It's not them we want."

Campbell adds, "Another remarked to journalists, 'I would have expected the minister of transport, who allowed the train to operate with one operator, and the owner of the company to be there in handcuffs.'"

Tom Harding and two low-level company officials faced three possible criminal charges. They were eventually found not guilty on all counts.

On February 3, 2023 East Palestine, Ohio became the latest victim of cutbacks and layoffs in the railroad industry. The details

of every railroad accident may differ, but the root cause is almost always greed. It won't be the last time.

Malik Miah's *Against the Current* article, "Behind '100% Preventable' Rail Disaster: Anti worker Deregulation, Corporate greed," tells a subsequent story. Miah writes, "No one listened to the rail workers and their unions, who demanded help from the state and federal governments, and the rail carriers. The rail unions have been warning about catastrophes for decades." (See <https://againstthecurrent.org/behind-100-preventable-rail-disaster-anti-worker-deregulation-corporate-greed/>) ■



POLITICS · EDUCATION · COMMUNITY

SOCIALISM2023

SEPTEMBER 1-4 CHICAGO

WE URGE THE readers and friends of *Against the Current* to attend Socialism2023, once again to be held in person in Chicago over the Labor Day weekend (September 1-4). The organizers describe the event:

"A four-day conference featuring dozens of panels, lectures, and workshops organized by groups from all over the country, the Socialism Conference will facilitate exchanges between existing activists and organizations, while bringing in new layers of the politically curious as part of rebuilding our radical traditions and movements."

You can check out the website with early-bird registration at <https://socialismconference.org> and contact info@socialismconference.org for information and updates, including featured speakers and performers.

Frank Thompson, 1942-2021 By Dianne Feeley

FRANK THOMPSON, LONGTIME socialist activist and scholar, succumbed to lung disease on October 15, 2021. Throughout his adult life he focused on social justice issues, both in his labor activism and in his teaching.

He encouraged students, including his daughters Heather Ann Thompson and Saskia Thompson, to probe beneath the surface of society to discover its systematic inequality. His dry wit, interest in philosophical debates, generosity and internationalism were all central to his personality.

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on December 12, 1942 and raised on The Old Thompson Ranch in Iola, Kansas, Frank was an industrious farmer's son and a top performer in school. He was a National Merit Scholar, a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, a Fulbright Scholar and graduated from Kansas University with Highest Honors and Phi Bet Kappa.

Before he'd graduated from Kansas University, he and Ann Curry, childhood friends, married and started their family. Over the years Ann was able to complete law school.

The family of three went off to Humboldt University in East Berlin. Later he studied at Magdalen College in Oxford. By 1972 Frank received his first Ph.D. from Harvard in philosophy. There he was influenced by his radical thesis adviser Hilary Putnam.

Offered a tenure-track position at Indiana University in 1972, he and his family moved to Bloomington. There he met Milton Fisk, who had been teaching in the philosophy department since 1966. Already a member of the International Socialists, Milton discussed socialist politics with Frank.

As their collaboration deepened, Frank was won over to the IS "socialism from below" perspective. They both were internationalists who enjoyed engaging students and colleagues in a variety of social justice issues.

Beyond politics, the two shared a love of the outdoors. Both had young families, both were doers as well as thinkers. Growing up on a ranch, Frank had taken care of animals; Milton was a skilled carpenter.

While Fisk remained in Bloomington,

Dianne Feeley is an editor of Against the Current. She would like to acknowledge the help she received from others, who told their stories of Frank, his wit and generosity.



within five years Frank and Ann decided to move to Detroit where they could participate more directly in the rank-and-file labor rebellion gaining steam.

As a lawyer, Ann Curry Thompson was able to work

on labor compensation cases by day and aid the growing rank-and-file Teamster caucus, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), when needed.

Frank learned how to drive a 18-wheeler and was hired as an over-the-road car hauler. He was active in TDU's campaigns to increase members' democratic rights and rid the union of its mob-invested leadership.

But the industry was changing and within a few years Frank's company went bankrupt. The reform-backed slate in his local, Local 299 — which Jimmy Hoffa had founded in the 1930s — won office and Frank became a business agent for car haulers. After a year he returned to truck driving, working as a casual freight driver until he reached a dead end. The he returned to academic life.

Teacher, Organizer, Activist

In the fall of 1984, Frank was admitted to the Department of Economics at the University of Michigan, where he earned his second Ph.D. The following year he became a teaching assistant; from 1990 to 2017 he was a lecturer in both its economics department and Residential College.

Frank joked many times that he was the only person in the country with two PhDs and a commercial driver's license. Probably a safe bet.

Alan Wald, a friend, comrade and ATC editor commented:

"Frank imparted an admirably soft-spoken kind of Marxist thought in his conversation, teaching, and writing. But the life he led was one that challenged many of us to think about socialist politics as a complete and integrated way of being and acting. With his peripatetic and unconventional career — from Harvard to

TDU to the RC — Frank set a high bar for what an activist-scholar should be. And his extensive travels to several continents and enjoyment of his family showed that one could still have a good time with friends and loved ones while working for utopia."

When the International Socialists merged into Solidarity in 1986, Frank became a founding member. He remained an active recruiter to labor and socialist activism.

Solidarity members at the university gravitated, as others, to his classes; he organized particular classes on Marxism at their request and mentored many. He also encouraged students to attend various political events and even served as part of the defense guard when Noam Chomsky spoke in Detroit.

Over the years Frank encouraged students interested in rank-and-file organizing to consider interning at the TDU office and for *Labor Notes*. He and Ann also opened their home to interns who needed a place to stay.

Frank was also active in Union for Radical Political Economics and contributed to URPE's annual summer programs for many years. He developed an innovative curriculum that combined philosophy, sociology and economics and was a visiting professor in Cuba, Japan, South Africa, Argentina, China, India and Greece. He enjoyed taking Ann and other family members along with him to these countries while also maintaining friendships with former students.

Although Frank was primarily a teacher and organizer, he wrote several book chapters, articles and reviews, particularly for *The Review of Radical Economics* and *ATC*.

Frank and Ann closely followed the work and lives of their children. Their older daughter Heather is a historian who wrote *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* and *Blood in the Water the Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*, which earned her a Pulitzer Prize. Their younger daughter Saskia has been an urban planner in several U.S. cities, including Detroit.

Intellectually engaged until his death, Frank had friends all over the world. He is survived by his wife Ann Curry Thompson, his daughters, his sister Kathleen Thompson and four grandchildren. Donations in his name can be sent to the Teamster Rank & File Education and Legal Defense Foundation. https://www.tdu.org/trf_one_time_donation. ■

North American Case Study

Think of an agricultural village in central Mexico, for example, where young and not-so-young people are considering their future. Are they hoping to make it to the USA and find work, let's say, in a meatpacking plant, because they've heard that midwestern winters are really the best?

Probably not. More likely, the village is already hollowing out because its native agriculture has been gutted by heavily subsidized U.S. agribusiness exports, facilitated by North American "free trade" agreements since the 1990s.

The impact on Mexican agriculture is not accidental or unintended. It was planned, under the free-market doctrine of "comparative advantage," whereby agriculture in Mexico would shift to specialty produce for the U.S. market, with its labor force largely moving onto *maquiladora* factories — for production taken away from the U.S. industrial belt, driving down wages and labor rights all around.

That project didn't really work out, as U.S. capital quite logically used global "free trade" to find even lower-wage sites in the Global South.

But the wreckage perpetrated by imperialist policies extends beyond the ravages of the market alone. Through the genocidal counter-revolutionary wars waged by U.S.-allied regimes in Central America, the societies of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras were ripped apart, with the greatest impact on Indigenous and peasant communities.

While hundreds of thousands fled the military death squads, even worse devastation has been wrought by the truly insane U.S. "war on drugs" since the 1980s. The entirely predictable result is that drug production — ever more potent and deadly, precisely because it's unregulated — and circulation and smuggling into the U.S. market on industrial scale is in the hands of criminal syndicates.

Wars among the gangs, their forced recruitment of youth, violent and arbitrary police crackdowns, prison overcrowding, riots and murders, have made parts of Mexico, El Salvador and other countries so deadly that flight becomes the sensible strategy. It's a big part of the reason why parents send their children northward, unaccompanied — an otherwise incomprehensible option.

The quadruple whammy is completed by the ravages of climate change, which destroys for example coffee production in parts of Central America and contributes to increasingly deadly hurricanes, flooding and droughts. All these factors of "free trade" economics, U.S.-sponsored repression, drug-war politics and natural disasters interact to produce an intractable crisis of population displacement on this continent.

One can point to the cruelty and opportunism, of immigration policies of all U.S. administrations — "stay in Mexico," Title 42, family separation, mass detention and all the rest — more overtly racist and sadistic under a Donald Trump, somewhat less so and better disguised under a Biden or "deporter-in-chief" Obama. These are significant but secondary differences. Under Biden, many children taken from their families under Trump remain separated or missing.

What's done every day to immigrants and asylum seekers at the U.S. border, and the terror experienced by undocumented people and their families living in U.S. cities under constant fear of deportation, are crimes

against humanity. The atrocities of policy, however, are really symptoms of a dysfunctional and destructive world system. Humane and comprehensive immigration reform is desperately needed, but even that is way short of a fundamental solution.

Destructive Global Disorder

This synopsis of what's happening on the North American continent opens a window on the broader crises of displacement around the world. We sometimes forget, unfortunately, that there are disasters of wars and economic ruin on a scale equal to the horrors facing Ukraine.

Such calamities in the Middle East and North Africa have brought hundreds of thousands of people attempting to reach safe haven in Europe — whether going from Syria to Turkey to the Greek islands, from the Libyan coast toward Italy, from Morocco toward Spain. The countries from which people are fleeing extend from Afghanistan and Burma to Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia to Mali.

In one year alone, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported "Some 40.5 million new people became internally displaced by conflict and disasters worldwide during the course of 2020. Of these people, 30.7 million were displaced by violence and conflict, and 9.8 million by natural disasters." That's two years *before* Russia invaded Ukraine, setting off further upheaval in global food and fertilizer supply.

So long as a world system persists that drives people by the tens of millions to undertake desperate journeys with all the deadly risks, progressive movements must demand the rights of people to move across borders to save their lives. The immediate demand must be: Let them in!

But a world without borders, without cruel immigrant policies, and cynical manipulation by racist politicians of all stripes (including centrist and liberal ones), will only become possible in a fundamentally transformed system. Bland statements by U.S. vice-president Kamala Harris about programs to help people stay in their home countries are meaningless in present conditions — particularly when the programs are mainly about corporations like Pepsi-Cola setting up shop in the Global South!

The first step toward the necessary transformation must include *reparations* and debt cancellation for the destruction brought by imperialism and colonialism. There can be no more burning example right now than Haiti — where the U.S. administration wants to prod Canada into leading the kind of military intervention that's been so disastrous for Haiti's people on every previous occasion.

If Ukraine is quite rightly demanding reparations for the colossal destruction of Putin's criminal invasion, what do western imperialist powers owe for the damage inflicted on the African, Asian and American continents?

We're not only talking here about moral obligations, but about beginning a sustainable, ecosocialist restructuring of economy in both the Global South and the rich, but brutally unequal, societies of the capitalist North. Until that is undertaken, the crises of displacement and refugee flight — which themselves are a symptom of capitalism's threat to the survival of civilization and humanity — will only grow. ■

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