

AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL



Fighting Back:
Book Bans and Rising Resistance

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Union Democracy and Socialist Politics

◇ STEVE DOWNS

The Green Party Debates Ukraine

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A Letter from the Editors “Noise as Usual” — Or Crisis Now?

AS THE UNITED States hurtled toward an unthinkable, and entirely artificial, default on the “full faith and credit” of meeting its debt obligations, the question arises: was the appearance of crisis more a case of “noise as usual, only louder”? Hadn’t we had debt-limit brinksmanship before — a periodic and partisan theatrical game of chicken, ultimately refereed by ruling class imperatives not to end in mutual suicide?

Against this logical assumption was another fact: a powerful far-right faction, within the traditionally preferred party of the capitalist ruling class, that was prepared to let default happen — even ready to force it, on the assumption that the resulting chaos or collapse would propel them to victory in the 2024 election.

The imminent crisis, ultimately, was defused with the wide Congressional vote and 63-36 Senate approval for the McCarthy-Biden deficit-and-budget deal. The practical imperatives of “divided government” and the demands of ruling-class financial institutions prevailed. The hot media debate over “who won” — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy for blackmailing the President to negotiate over the debt ceiling, or Biden for maneuvering McCarthy into budget deals without savage social spending cuts — is ephemeral and unimportant.

The rightwing playbook since the 1980s has been to run up deficits under Republican administrations with military spending, untax-the-rich policies and unfunded corporate subsidies, then scream “out-of-control spending” to force Democratic presidents to make cuts. In recent history, only the Bill Clinton administration produced a balanced budget — at the expense of America’s miserable welfare system and the working poor.

Looking forward, what’s important is the connections of the debt-and-budget fights to the broader dysfunctions of U.S. bourgeois politics. Republican demands will persistently center on cutting the safety net for working people and vulnerable populations, despite food and housing inflation that’s constricting tens of millions of people’s lives, without reducing the military budget or fossil-fuel corporate subsidies — and most definitely nothing to raise revenue from the severely under-taxed super-wealthy and big business.

The Republican — and Wall Street’s — goal meant “putting paid” (to borrow the apt British phrase) to what remained of the Democrats’ once-expansive “Build Back Better” infrastructure programs, along with emergency spending that propped the economy and actually reduced poverty during the pandemic. What’s left are mostly measures like in-shoring semiconductor production and escalating the scramble for lithium — elements aimed at countering the global reach of China, on which both ruling class parties generally agree.

The sausage-making deal process did little or nothing to solve real issues, whether the national debt, inflation, housing costs and homelessness, or anything else — nor could it have done so in existing political conditions. On the one hand, there is a genuine problem following the runup of the national debt to \$31 trillion, mostly under the Reagan-Bushes-Trump regimes and recently the COVID pandemic crisis — and now higher interest rates, which at five percent mean interest payments of \$1.5 trillion on the debt annually. (Corporate and individual debts are another whole issue.)

Seriously addressing the debt would require major military budget cuts, reversing tax cuts and loopholes for rich and corporate America, and ending destructive fossil fuel and agribusiness subsidies — none of which are remotely on capital’s agenda.

On the other hand, a feature of the present deal is new “work requirement” restrictions imposed on some food assistance (SNAP) recipients (although partially offset by new eligibility for military veterans and some homeless people). At a time when SNAP should be expanding, tighter work requirements and the associated administrative hoops are

morally bankrupt, politically stupid for the Democrats, and fiscally irrelevant, a “bipartisan” trifecta — 1) stomping on the face of the most vulnerable working poor experiencing job precarity and insecurity, 2) repelling and demoralizing a good part of the Democrats’ voting base, and 3) not saving any measurable money.

Confluence of Attacks

While the far right’s blackmail threats fizzled in the debt ceiling fight, their convergence with unbridled state legislatures’ and Supreme Court assaults on democratic rights suggest that in the arena of U.S. bourgeois politics, *the crisis is now.*

The attacks are out in the open, well covered in much of the media — we are not making any spectacular revelations here — and importantly, they’re met with as much resistance as targeted populations and communities are able to mount.

The overriding twin dynamics of the reactionary assault are *white racism*, and *unrestrained corporate greed*. The first of these is politically leveraged to enable the second, the real priority of ruling-class America. Labor rights, and environmental protections are gutted, while headlines are dominated by “culture war” attacks on Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter and the mythical “woke mob.”

Mounted in state arenas, the attacks are also propellants for the Ron DeSantis presidential campaign, with its shambolic but also profoundly menacing features. How long before the public gets sick of his “Florida is where woke goes to die” mantra — or whether DeSantis or some other reactionary emerges as the main Republican challenger to the career fraudster and soon-to-be serial criminal defendant ex-president who commands the party’s present frontrunner status — are secondary questions.

The infrastructure for the brutally reactionary social agenda is provided by well-funded fake-grassroots and advocacy forces — call them Moms for Illiteracy, Americans for Plutocracy, Club for Greed, Prolife (until you’re born) America, etc. The infamous American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) provides language to be cut and pasted into rightwing state legislation.

In almost all cases these measures are against majority public opinion. In some cases they’re blatantly unconstitutional as well as sadistic, notably laws criminalizing essential medical care for transgender people and youth in particular. Abortion bans are metastasizing following last year’s unhinged Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*, with increasingly deadly effect.

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Above: Teamster President Sean O'Brien discussing UPS contract campaign at 2022 TDU Convention. <https://jimwestphoto.com>

Back Cover: Palestine Legal poster in support of Fatima Mohammed.

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U.S. Anti-immigrant Policy: Cruelty at the Border

By Malik Miah

At 11:59 PM EDT on May 11, Title 42 of the Immigration law expired. The code was enforced for three years during the coronavirus pandemic. Title 42 allowed the government to stop and expel migrants from entering the country.

Since its enforcement, millions of political and economic refugees have been stranded in Mexico or other countries in horrific conditions.

Both Democratic and Republican administrations have carried out inhumane treatment of migrants. While the rhetoric by Republicans has been openly racist, the practical results produced by the Biden administration are equally cruel.

The end of Title 42 means little for those trying to enter the country. Under pre-Title 42 rules, former president Barack Obama deported more people than any previous president.

Reality at the Borders

"In the hours leading up to Title 42's termination," reported the May 12 *Los Angeles Times*, "migrants continued to gather near ports of entry on the southern border with Mexico, hoping for a new opportunity to enter the U.S. as confusion over the imminent policy changes and their impact persisted.

"Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas issued a warning Thursday that 'starting tonight, people who arrive at the border without using a lawful pathway will be presumed ineligible for asylum.'

"He noted that 24,000 Border Patrol agents and officers had been deployed to work alongside 'thousands of troops and contractors, and over a thousand asylum officers to help enforce our laws.'"

A few steps away on the Mexican side, a group of National Guard elements held their own drill. Mexico has helped Biden in his anti-immigrant efforts, as *The Times* details:

"Mexico's National Guard has been positioned along the southern layer of border barrier in recent weeks, and Thursday was no exception. Tijuana police also seemed to more closely monitor activity at ports of entry."

Malik Miah is an advisory editor and regular columnist for Against the Current.



Venezuelan refugees in Chile. With global wars and climate change, families seek safety and a future.

We Are Human Beings

Who are those people seeking entry on the southern border? Many are not from Central America. The issue of migration is global, and not only at the U.S. border, as discussed in the editorial in the previous issue of *Against the Current* (#224), "Desperate Journeys, Sick System."

It can take years to become a naturalized citizen in the United States, even assuming you are granted a "green card" or temporary legal status (special employment visas, for example, in high tech).

But U.S. economic sanctions against countries such as Cuba (a seven-decade embargo), Venezuela and Nicaragua, as well as Iran, Syria and other countries, along with other factors from war to climate disaster, cause tens of thousands of people to flee for survival.

"People from Senegal, Cameroon, Bangladesh, Iran, Russia and Brazil were among those who waited in seats under tented white tarps for rapid COVID-19 tests and travel itineraries. Migrants pay their own way, though the Regional Center for Border Health helps supplement if needed," added the *LA Times*.

"I.B., a Peruvian man who asked to be identified by his initials out of concern for his

immigration case, said he had flown to Mexico, crossed the border and turned himself in to border agents. He was detained for six days before being released in Yuma....

"Guri Singh, 21, said he fled India after experiencing religious discrimination as a Sikh. His parents, who are legal residents in England, couldn't get him a visa. So, he said he paid smugglers \$50,000 to fly to El Salvador, then took buses to the U.S. border."

Knowing nothing about Title 42 or changing border policy, Singh "just knew he had a flight to the Bay Area and would be at his cousin's home by 3 pm Friday..."

Those are a few among many human stories.

Record of Discrimination

U.S. policy on immigration was based historically on national origin and ethnic discrimination. Early settlers were from England, Scotland and northern Europe.

In the 1800s there was a *de facto* open door to people from northern Europeans ("Caucasians"). Asians, Africans and other nonwhites were only accepted as workers, as Chinese men learned in California — they built the railroads but could not bring in women or other family members.

Each state decided immigration policy. The first major federal law was passed by Congress in 1882—the Chinese Exclusion Act. This was preceded by state laws excluding both bonded and free Black people as well as Chinese immigrants.

In 1924 Congress passed a sweeping immigration law. A key plank codified quotas for legal immigration, based on people already living in the United States by national origin as of the 1890 census. There were few Asians or other nonwhites, except former enslaved and Indigenous peoples, living in the country.

In 1965, under the impact of the anti-colonial revolution and a powerful domestic civil rights movement, the government changed its policy regarding quotas for Asians and Africans. The new system made it easier for family reunifications.

When Obama was elected as the first biracial Black president in 2008, the Republican Party first decided it needed to become more open to minorities as demographics were changing.

From Trump to Biden

But in 2016 with the rise of a white fear-mongering backlash led by Donald Trump, a lifelong New York City Democrat who decided to run for president as a Republican, popularized the once fringe view that “others” were taking over the country.

Trump declared anti-immigration his main

campaign issue. His “Build the Wall” slogan became a chant at his rallies. Every Republican politician who runs for office rants about foreigners (undocumented or legal) replacing “Americans.”

Most pro-immigration rights groups had hoped that the Biden government would be better than Trump’s. It quickly became clear that while the rhetoric is more friendly, the administration’s practice is more similar than not. Biden was the vice-president alongside “Deporter-in-Chief” president Obama.

The immigration issue for Biden is not about justice and human rights. He pledges enforcement of current laws, and supports stricter rules, a better border wall and making it harder for immigrants to stay.

Biden is quietly building a 30-foot wall in southern California, opposed by locals on both sides of the border.

Contrary to predictions, the end of Title 42 did not lead to “chaos” at the border, as the Biden team has been implementing a strict removal and denial of immigrants for two years.

Title 8, a law in place since 1940, means keeping new immigrants from applying for five years if they don’t follow the new rule. It includes requiring registration in a third country and setting up an appointment by using a special mobile phone app, which works unreliably if at all.

The United States already has over 11 million unauthorized people, according to the Migration Policy Institute. Harder border restrictions will not stop people entering, as has been true for decades.

Big agricultural enterprises and other manufacturing businesses as in California, seek cheap labor and will hire them. Scaremongering the public will not change that.

Demand: Open Borders

Open borders — South, North and other ports of entry — should be implemented to give all refugees from economic crises caused by U.S. sanctions and by climate changes.

Refugees should be given court dates, temporary work permits and allowed basic services. Obviously that requires a functional and expanded social safety net — and experience shows that refugees, like all immigrants, create more wealth than they take in their transition to permanent residency and citizenship.

Most are willing to do jobs that many native-born citizens won’t. Their children get educated and generally are successful.

Democrats and Republicans both know these facts. An Open Border policy is the solution that few politicians will acknowledge — since it begins with human rights, not cruelty and scapegoating immigrants for society’s other problems. ■

Fundraiser for Gary Tyler

A 65TH BIRTHDAY celebration and fundraiser for Gary Tyler takes place July 16, 2023 from 1-4 PM at 939 San Vicente Blvd in Santa Monica, CA. Tickets are available at <https://www.gofundme.com/ff/g3jh4-happy-65th-birthday-gary-tyler> for a contribution of \$65 or more.

On October 7, 1974, a white mob almost 200 strong and enraged over school integration, attacked a school bus filled with Black students in Destrehan, Louisiana. In the frenzy, a 13-year-old white student, Timothy Weber, was shot and later died.

Gary Tyler was one of the Black students aboard that bus. Despite the bus driver’s statement that the shooting did not come from the bus, Gary was taken off the bus, threatened and beaten by the police.

Arrested at 16, he was tried as an adult before an all-white jury. His conviction was based on the statements of four witnesses, all of whom have since recanted. Sentenced to death, he became the youngest person on death row in the country. Gary Tyler escaped electrocution when the U.S. Supreme Court declared Louisiana’s death penalty unconstitutional. His sentence was commuted to life without parole.

Wrongfully imprisoned in Louisiana’s Angola Penitentiary for 42 years — including



Ted Soqui

eight years in solidarity confinement — Tyler maintained his innocence.

Amnesty International declared him a political prisoner, arguing that the legal process and procedures were flawed by the racially charged atmosphere as well as by police intimidation of Tyler and witnesses. *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert wrote several articles on the lack of evidence that Tyler had a gun or could have fired the fatal shot.

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the trial judge’s instructions to the jury

were “unconstitutional” and the Louisiana Board of Pardons urged his release on three separate occasions. Yet governors refused to act.

While in Angola, Gary was president of its acclaimed drama club for more than 25 years. He also volunteered in the prison hospice program. In the process of raising funds for the project he became an accomplished textile artist.

“The Blue Print,” part of a traveling exhibit about the Angola Prison hospice program, will become part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture.

Since his release he has used those skills with homeless youth. But as he reaches retirement age he will not have accumulated the work years required for receiving any social security benefits.

Radical groups, particularly the Red Tide youth group and its newspaper, fought for Gary’s freedom. See <https://www.facebook.com/GaryTylersRoadBacktoFreedom> and <https://isreview.org/issues/49/garytyler/>.

The July 16 fundraiser is being organized by Bob Zaugh, Jan Goodman, The Red Tide and Actions Speak Louder. ■

La douce France sous Macron: **Paving the Way for Le Pen?** By Gerd-Rainer Horn

SINCE MID-JANUARY 2023 France is experiencing its most significant wave of social movement mobilization since the heady days of May/June 1968.

Though clearly of a lesser magnitude than those of 55 years ago, the ongoing demonstrations and strikes make clear that France remains one of the most prominent terrains for frontal challenges to politics as usual.

The issues at the heart of the conflict are simple enough. President Macron had proposed that the retirement age would need to be raised from 62 to 64, supposedly in order to avoid that the deficit would rise beyond unmanageable proportions in upcoming years.

Outside France, published opinion initially tended to concur. After all, it is true that virtually all other European countries have retirement age cut-offs that are several years higher than the comparatively low age of 62. So what's wrong with the French?

Macron's Accidental Rise

The conflict must be seen in the wider context of the rule by Emmanuel Macron since May 2017, when the Rothschild banker was elected to the presidency as a result of what was essentially a fluke.

The Socialist President François Hollande, in power up to the elections in the spring of 2017, had been chosen in 2012 on the basis of the usual vapid electoral campaign promises by social democrats, then carrying out essentially the very same neoliberal policies as his conservative predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy.

By 2017, France's Socialist Party had thus reached rock-bottom in popular appreciation, so that everyone expected the conservative challenger François Fillon to win the 2017 presidential contest.

Fillon, however, followed his fateful temptation to procure lucrative publicly-funded jobs for members of his immediate family, and the resulting scandal ensured that Fillon would not become the next President.

The former Minister of Economics for François Hollande, Emmanuel Macron, inched ahead of his closest challengers in the first

round of the 2017 presidential elections with 24.01% of the vote. The far-right Marine Le Pen came in second with 21.3% of the vote, then came Fillon with 20.01%.

The key figure on the Radical Left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, an ex-Trotskyist and then-head of *La France Insoumise*, obtained 19.58% of the first-round vote. Macron had thus everything but a clear head start. But the French political system mandates that only the top two vote getters may participate in the second-round run-off.

A large number of well-intentioned voters with sympathies on the Left thus voted for Macron in order to avoid that the radical right-wing Marine Le Pen would emerge as the winner. Macron thus became President with 66.10% of the popular vote in the second round, Le Pen obtaining 33.90%.

Battle Lines Drawn

And now began the seemingly irresistible rise of Macron to pole position in French politics. Never having had even the slightest link to even the mildest forms of leftwing politics, Macron now claimed popular approval for himself and his neoliberal politics — despite the obvious fact that he owed his victory to a significant extent to left-wing voters having chosen the lesser evil.

One of his very first acts as President was consequently the abolition of a token wealth tax on the richest French citizens. The battle lines thus quickly became clear.

His first altercation with France's combative labor movement happened rather quickly, when Macron decided to tackle the rail unions, who benefit from various special "privileges" in terms of pension and other provisions. The rail unions let themselves be cornered by Macron and lost this first significant battle for trade union rights under the new President.

By late autumn 2018, an entirely unprecedented social movement suddenly grabbed headline news, precisely in those regions of France where traditional trade union presence had always been sketchy at best.

In rural and small-town France, hundreds of thousands of people who live off mostly rather precarious positions of employment, often having to travel long distances in their cars to get to work as public transportation in rural France is for practical purposes

non-existent, decided to hit the streets.

These quintessentially "average French" with no combative union tradition suddenly began to block major road intersections, notably the ubiquitous roundabouts (traffic circles), wearing yellow vests (*gilets jaunes*), a mandatory highway crew safety feature.

Macron, pretending to follow his self-proclaimed "ecological consciousness," had announced a number of measures which would have had the combined effect of a significant increase in gasoline prices for the average car owner.

Those French who faced increasing difficulties to survive until the end of the month, when their next paycheck might arrive, were now incensed enough to come out in huge numbers all over France, from November 2018 onwards.

By no means were all "yellow jackets" opponents of ecological measures as such; but they felt that their worries over making ends meet were at least as justified as other concerns about the end of the world due to climate change.

For more than a year, this purposefully decentralized movement periodically paralyzed French public life and defied the policy choices of the French elite.

From Blockades to Covid

Three characteristics of this epic struggle deserve to be highlighted. First and foremost, the police response was swift and brutal. More than 25,800 persons were injured by the forces of order using the full arsenal of weapons at the disposal of the French state.

Some of those weapons have been repeatedly condemned as excessively heavy by various human rights organizations, Amnesty International or the European Parliament. More than 30 protesters lost an eye, for instance, because of the resort to such armaments, which virtually no other European countries have authorized for public use against civilians for quite some time.

Second, the small-town and rural nature of most *gilets jaunes* made for an unusual combination of political opinions on the roundabouts and clover leaves of the rural interstate highway network across France.

Rural and small-town France is often a stronghold of the Radical Right. Thankfully, adherents and sympathizers of France's

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During the January 2023 march against pension “reform,” the sign that dominated this massive action declared “Prisoners of work don’t get old.”

multifaceted thinking Left did not use the presence of sympathizers of Marine Le Pen as a convenient excuse to abstain from this epic struggle.

Thus, the *gilets jaunes* saw small-town rebels attracted by the social message of Marine Le Pen engaged in common actions and intense political discussions with left-wing activists, amongst them members of the Trotskyist NPA.

The third feature of the movement of the *gilets jaunes* was the shameful abstention of France’s trade unions, who obstinately refused to engage in solidarity actions, worried about a movement that they could not tightly control, although many rank-and-file activists ignored their union bureaucrats’ advice and donned “yellow jackets” themselves.

What killed the movement of the *gilets jaunes* was Covid. In mid-March 2020, Emmanuel Macron decided to combat a virus by a series of police-state methods with few parallels outside of some other southern European states with traditionally conflict-laden class relations, some Third World authoritarian regimes — and the People’s Republic of China.

In several waves, for months at a time, Macron imposed a tight form of house arrest on all 67.75 million French, allowing them a maximum of 60 minutes (!) per day to leave their oftentimes cramped living quarters with little air circulation to go shopping for the necessities of life, compelled to carry an array of documents designed to ensure that no one would dare venture beyond the maximum

perimeter of one thousand meters from their home address.

For people of the country hosting the Tour de France, using a bicycle to go shopping was strictly outlawed, as was swimming in a lake or the ocean, even if one lived less than one kilometer from the water’s edge.

The vast forests of France, the Alps and the Pyrenees, were suddenly declared off limits to anyone, even local villagers. Infractions of these punitive measures were punished by an immediate fine of 175 euros. It was a gigantic exercise in demonstrating the powers of the state.

Even the mainstream liberal German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* published articles depicting France under Macron in those long months and years as an “Authoritarian Absurdistan.” Not only the movement of the *gilets jaunes*, but also the dynamic anti-climate change protesters inspired by Greta Thunberg (Fridays for Future) making inroads at the same time, were thus killed off in mid-flight.

“Make France Competitive Again”

When Macron had successfully annulled the “privileges” of rail workers in 2018, his original plan had been to generalize such moves “to make France competitive again” and thus to spread his actions against “pension privileges” to the entire population.

Macron was smart enough to put those plans on hold when he locked down France in repeat exercises of what was then even officially called “confinement” during the Covid

epidemic. When Covid subsided, however, such plans were put on the front burner again — with a vengeance.

More than eighty percent of the French population reject Macron’s scheme, and this number has not diminished even after months of disruptive strikes and massive demonstrations. All the more reason for Macron to obstinately insist on passing his brutal counter-reform.

Reelected in 2022 to a second term with a much smaller majority in the second-round runoff of 58.55% to Marine Le Pen’s 41.45%, Macron, now a lame duck President, no longer had to hold back. His arrogant disdain for the proverbial average “hard-working French man and woman” had few limits.

Already during his first term in office, this pure product of the French Republic’s highly exclusive elite education in the *Grandes Écoles*, publicly proclaimed his likes and dislikes: “There are those who succeed; and then there are those who count for nothing.”

Macron now proudly repeated such sociological insights more regularly and on any and all occasions.

Hiding behind the thin veneer of parliamentary democracy, his reelection in 2022 had been once again assured by massive voter turnouts in his favor by leftists fearing a victory of Marine Le Pen.

Macron initially banked on parliamentary approval of his pension counter-reform, as most current MPs hail either from the Center, the Center-Right, the traditional Right or the Radical Right. With the Radical Right (Le

Pen) and small portions of traditional Conservatism announcing their tactical opposition to the reform plans, Macron was no longer assured parliamentary victory.

In mid-March, he thus invoked paragraph 49.3 of the French Constitution, a clause that allows the government to decree laws without parliamentary approval, to pass his reform act.

The opposition movement, which had begun to weaken in the weeks before this fateful move, now was revitalized and experienced a rebound, with demonstrations taking on an increasingly violent tone. But at the time of writing on May 3, it appears almost certain that Macron will win this contest once again, as he's done in all earlier rounds of his altercations with progressive social movements.

Getting Away With It

What can explain such a victory in the face of hostile public opinion and a movement which has consistently mobilized up to 3.5 million people in the streets in more than a dozen coordinated national days of action?

For one thing, the sometimes-crippling strike movements only touched certain sectors of the economy. Public transportation, energy workers, dock workers, the chemical industry and garbage collections were its strong points. Other areas of the economy and public life were only partially affected or not at all.

The movement, impressive as it was from Day One, never spread beyond these original strongholds. Unlike what happened in 1968 or in the days of the June 1936 strikes during the Popular Front, private and public life continued without major disruptions, and after some time the strikes began to lose their inner dynamic even in those sectors at the heart of the movement.

Second, the key political forces behind the strikes, France's formerly powerful Left, is deeply divided with no single figure or party emerging as a viable alternative to Macron's neoliberal course. As a result, the political current paradoxically benefiting most from the unrest is Marine Le Pen's Radical Right.

Nominally opposing the reforms, Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* in fact did very little to propagate the protest movement, and its forces are barely visible in the huge street demonstrations that accompany the strikes in irregular intervals.

They thus come across as the voice of reason in the opposition to Macron's counter reform, whereas the Left, animating the vast social movement, is frequently — wrongly! — associated with the sometimes violent tactics of the so-called Black Block, which capture front page news in the evening television and the press.

Here it is important to point to a clear and present feature of French public life for

many generations in the more or less recent past. There exists a strong, seemingly perennial undercurrent of radical conservatism, rearing its ugly head at frequent points in France's turbulent history.

The collaborationist Vichy Government (under German occupation) in World War II, it is sometimes forgotten, was surprisingly popular for quite some time.

May 1968 not only witnessed barricades animated by students and a three-week general strike, but on 30 May 1968 conservative forces descended on Paris and hundreds of thousands of Gaullists marched on the Champs Élysées, demanding an end to "anarchy" — and the late June 1968 parliamentary elections presented Charles De Gaulle with his most smashing electoral victory ever.

Some recent opinion polls by respected

institutions suggest that, if there were runoff elections between Macron and Le Pen right now, Marine Le Pen could win with a 55-45 margin against the current President.

Serious academic studies have also shown that the French have an unusually high appreciation of the place of labor and work in their lives, which may go to explain in part the tenacity with which the current struggle is being fought. But the same studies also repeatedly show that many of the same individuals who hold such views are also venerating authority and hierarchy.

It would be the ultimate irony if the current wave of mass demonstrations and associated strike movements triggered by Emmanuel Macron would pave the way for Marine Le Pen to ascend to the presidential palace. ■

Keith LaMar: A Struggle for Life and Freedom by David Finkel

KEITH LAMAR, A death row prisoner in Ohio, faces a scheduled execution date of November 16, 2023. Several features of his case command attention — beginning with being held for nearly 30 years in indefinite solitary confinement, a condition that Amnesty International identifies as torture, while continually maintaining his innocence.

There's also the background of an exceptionally violent, now largely forgotten prison uprising; the remarkable person, author and artist that he has become; and a team of cultural workers spearheading the struggle for Keith's exoneration and freedom.

"Music," says Keith, saved him from despair and self-destruction in the hell of prison, especially the music of John Coltrane and Trane's classic suite *A Love Supreme*. In the past year he collaborated with Catalan jazz pianist Albert Marques to produce a CD titled "Freedom First."

On the album *LaMar*, from his prison location, reads original poetry and commentary interwoven with various instrumental ensembles led and arranged by Marques. Fourteen performances include Coltrane's spiritual compositions "Alabama," written in the wake of the infamous Birmingham church bombing, and "Resolution" and "Acknowledgement" from *A Love Supreme*, Mongo Santamaria's "Afro-Blue" which also became a Coltrane staple, and Marques' own compositions.

An equally unique work is an interactive sculpture *DIGEST*, created by Mia Pearlman, on display at the Michigan State University Broad Art Museum. As the website explains:

"The exhibition grows out of LaMar's experiences and his metaphor for the prison industrial complex as a digestive system designed to consume people and break them down.

"DIGEST is both a sculpture and a musical instrument, played by the motion of viewers' bodies: As visitors enter the space and move

around the work, they trigger videos of LaMar telling his story and audio of a piano composition in five separate tracks."

Photos and a video can be viewed on Pearlman's website (https://miapearlman.com/CUT_PAPER/digest.htm).

The Case and the Conviction

Easter Sunday, 1993 marked the beginning of an 11-day uprising at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, known as Lucasville where it's located. The story of the Lucasville events was the subject of the prominent historian Staughton Lynd's 2004 book *Lucasville: The Untold Story of a Prison Uprising*. Lynd contended that the five men sentenced to death for murders committed during the uprising were, in fact, victims of a gross frameup. (For a review of Lynd's book see Christopher Phelps, <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc112/p375/>).

One of the condemned men was Keith LaMar (also known at the time as Bomani Shakur). The www.keithlamar.org website states: "In the aftermath of the riot, the State of Ohio was under public pressure to clean up a multi-million dollar mess, one that included the death of a prison guard and multiple prisoners. After investigators trampled the crime scene and contaminated any and all potential evidence, they paid jailhouse informants to put together a false narrative, and withheld evidence that would have proven Keith's innocence at trial... This evidence has never been heard in any court to this day."

Readers can go to www.keithlamar.org for continuing updates as well as information for ordering Keith's memoir *Condemned* and the Freedom First CD, musical videos, podcasts and donations. It's a case deserving national and global attention.

[This text is abridged from an article posted at <https://solidarity-us.org/keith-lamar-a-struggle-for-life-and-freedom/>.] ■

In the Rightwing Crosshairs: Libraries Under Attack

By Mark Weber

FROM MAINE TO Arizona and Idaho, more than 120 bills have been introduced in state legislatures that would either cut the budgets of public libraries or ban certain books or categories of books — thus endangering important literacy, children's programming, and services for senior citizens.

While censorship and book banning has had a long and inglorious history in the United States, the most recent attacks on libraries seem to revolve around the issues of inclusion of books by queer and transgender authors. Also under threat are any books that dare to touch on the subjects of sexuality and racism.

Often, conservative lawmakers target the removal of books on these topics. If these effort at censorship fail, then the lawmakers become determined to punish the libraries with severe budget cuts and to punish the librarians themselves with both fines and jail time if they do not follow newly-enacted censorship guidelines.

In Missouri, for example, the GOP-controlled House of Representatives has passed a budget that would eliminate almost five million dollars in state funding for public libraries. The elimination of the budget line for Missouri public libraries was spearheaded by GOP State Representative Cody Smith, who chairs the Budget Committee.

Smith was reportedly upset over a suit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the Missouri Association of School Librarians. The suit challenged a 2022 Missouri law that banned librarians and teachers from "providing sexually-explicit materials" to students.

The Censorship Crusade

According to everylibrary.org, more than 100 bills in 31 states are intended to either ban certain categories of books in public libraries or to cut the budgets of these libraries. Not surprisingly, the leader in these efforts is Texas, where 28 bills have been introduced in the legislature in Austin.

Cheered on by the state's right-wing Gov-

Mark Weber has worked in public school libraries, public libraries, and college libraries. He lives near Cleveland and is a Solidarity member-at-large. He is active in Jewish Voice for Peace and Cleveland Peace Action. He has done solidarity work in Colombia and Palestine.

ernor Greg Abbott, local officials have tried a number of ways to enforce their notion of morality on libraries because of their choice of books or sometimes their programming.

For example, in rural Llano County, the State banned a number of books. A Federal judge ordered the banned books returned to the library. In response, angry lawmakers and rightwing activists demanded that the Llano County Library be padlocked.

One of the banned "controversial" books was Isabelle Wilkerson's acclaimed *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*. Another was a book for teens, *They Called Themselves the K.K.K.: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group* that accurately described the Ku Klux Klan as a terrorist group.

These incidents are not found only in the South. In 2022, voters in Michigan's Jamestown Township rejected two separate tax replacement levies intended to fund its Patmos Library. This happened because efforts to remove from the library several books on LGBTQ issues failed.

Without money from somewhere, the Patmos Library is scheduled to close next year, eliminating all library service in Jamestown Township.

New Strategies

The American Library Association (ALA) recently released new data showing that in 2022, 1270 demands to censor books were recorded. This compares with 729 censorship demands in 2021.

This is the highest number of attempted book banning since the ALA began to keep these statistics more than 20 years ago. Of the recorded number of book censorship demands, 58% occurred in public school library setting and 42% in public libraries.

With the significant increase in the number of book banning in 2022 comes two changes in the strategies employed by censorship advocates.

In prior years, the vast number of censorship challenges involved controversy over a single title. Now, the ALA reports that 90% of the book censorship demands now involve

more than one book and that 40% of the demands for censorship targeted 100 books or more. Most book challenges are organized with outside censorship groups.

"A book challenge is a demand to remove a book from the library's collection so that no one else can read it. Overwhelmingly, we're seeing these challenges come from organized censorship groups that target local library board meetings to demand removal of

a long list of books they share on social media," said Deborah Caldwell Stone, director of ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom.

When confronted by a censorship demand organized by outside religious or conservative political organizations, the position taken by the local library boards is sometimes courageous; but more often it simply one of expedience with a dose of cowardice.

Usually, pliable library board members just quietly remove the book(s) in question to avoid controversy. In a growing number of cases, the library boards or local governing boards themselves are captured by rightwing pro-censorship groups in local elections.

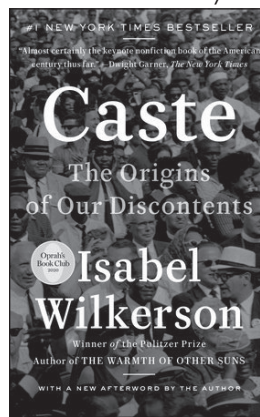
This is what happened in Livingston Parish in Louisiana, where censorship advocates called "Citizens for a New Louisiana" forced the resignation of the Livingston Library Director Giovanni Tairov, winner of the Louisiana Library Association's 2019 Public Library Director of the year award.

Coordinated Pressure

Who is behind the increasing number of book censorship demands in public and school libraries across the nation?

While censorship campaigns have always had a political edge, in the last few years an estimated 50% of censorship efforts have been caused by pressure from state Republican lawmakers and officials working with one of more than 20 national groups, of which the most well-known are Moms for Liberty, MassResistance, and No Left Turn in Education.

With the use of social media, these national organizations are connected to



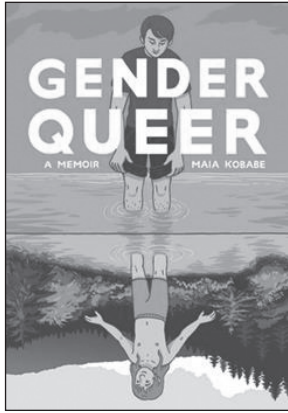
local Facebook groups of “concerned parents.” Most of these groups have sprung up since 2021, when the current wave of protests against books on LGBTQ people and on people of color began to intensify.

One of the leaders of MassResistance, Brian Camenker, calls books on LGBTQ themes and people “pornography.” He further states that libraries shouldn’t be promoting the “LGBTQ lifestyle.” The Southern Poverty Law Center has designated MassResistance as an anti-LGBTQ hate group.

What are the books targeted by local or state censors? While books on race, gender, and LGBTQ issues are at the top of the list, the most censored book in school districts in the United States is *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe.

The book, a graphic novel on queer identity, has been singled out by Republican Governor Henry McMaster of South Carolina. The Governor branded the book as “pornographic” and has demanded that the South Carolina Department of Education investigate. The Kobabe book been banned in 41 school districts in the United States.

Coming in second with bannings in 29 school districts is *All the Boys Aren’t Blue: A Manifesto* by George M. Johnson. The author, an LGBTQIA+ activist describes his child-



hood, adolescence, and young adulthood.

Finally, Ashley Hope Perez’s *Out of Darkness* has been banned in 24 school districts. Named by Booklist as one of the “Fifty Best Young Adult Fiction of All Time,” this novel tells of the relationship between a Mexican-American teenage girl and an African American teenage boy in 1930s Texas.

While these three are the most banned books, the state that has banned the most books is Florida.

Governor Ron DeSantis, despite his complaints about the “cancel culture,” has done some cancelling of his own, banning 565 books in public schools during the 2021-22 school year.

He proudly touts book banning as just one tactic in the ongoing Culture Wars. He has also discovered that attacks on schools and libraries are an effective way to raise money from sympathetic donors.

How to Resist

What can we do? As activists on the left, we are all involved in such struggles as supporting striking workers, playing a meaningful role in our unions, working for reproductive freedom, and promoting support for Ukraine’s right to self-determination. Sometimes, fights around removing books from the shelves of public libraries, or attempts

to intimidate teachers by allegations that the school curriculum is “too woke,” escape our notice.

In his book *American Midnight*, Adam Hochschild describes the racist violence against immigrants, people of color, Jews, and trade unionists during and after World War I. A country in the midst of change of millions of immigrants coming to U.S. shores was a prospect that wealthy business owners, conservative politicians, and hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the American Legion were determined to use violence to prevent.

The same is true today. An energized right wing, often employing threats, intimidation and violence, is determined to preserve “white and straight America” regardless of the human cost.

During World War I, racist leaders such as Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt promoted policies that demonized those whose lives had been marginalized, and whose efforts to struggle against oppression was labeled as “disloyalty.”

Today, we see leaders like Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis mouthing words of hate and policies that justify and promote vigilante attacks on our schools and libraries with the effect that students of color, LGBTQ kids are continually under threat.

As socialists and activists, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with the victimized students as well as teachers and librarians who are determined to defend library collections and school curricula that stress inclusion of marginalized voices. The time is now. ■

Book Banning and Education Restrictions: Our Moment of Rising Resistance

By Harvey J. Graff

AT A MOMENT of intensifying rightwing attacks and even defunding of libraries for refusing to remove books on Queer and anti-racist topics, the author has supplied an extensive list of references and sources, which can be obtained from him by writing to graff.40@osu.edu. Harvey J. Graff is Professor Emeritus of English and History at The Ohio State University and inaugural Ohio Eminent Scholar in Literacy Studies. Author of many books on social history, the history of literacy and education, and interdisciplinarity, he writes about the history and contemporary conditions for Times Higher Education, Inside Higher Education, Academe Blog, Washington Monthly, Publishers Weekly, Against the Current, Columbus Free Press, and newspapers. Searching for Literacy: The Social and Intellectual Origins of Literacy Studies was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2022. My Life with Literacy: The Continuing Education of a Historian. The Intersections of the Personal, the Political, the Academic, and Place is forthcoming. He thanks David Finkel and Ashley Perez for their comments.

ACROSS THE MEDIA and elsewhere, we
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hear of organized efforts to ban books, especially for school-aged young people, and to censor school curricula, primarily history and civics.

New currents of resistance, especially by young people, rise in response. We hear too little about them. Underreported and seldom viewed together as a national counter-movement or movement in its own right is what I now identify as not yet connected elements of a 2020s “massive resistance.”

This is the developing response to misinformation and suppression of basic rights by censorship, overreach, and unconstitutional, anti-democratic dictatorship at all levels.

The strength of widespread reactions to anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ attacks has rational Republicans concerned about losing votes. The results of the 2022 mid-term elections as well as patterns across numerous opinion polls support their fears.

The Attacks

False charges of teaching “critical race theory” (undefined by those attacking it) and

“age-inappropriate” or “obscene” books do the work of politicians by attracting media and fearful parents’ attention. Following scripts from the Heritage Foundation, the Koch Brothers and Moms for Liberty, among others, well-funded groups on the right do grave damage to public education.

These book-banning campaigns seek to reverse more than a hundred years of efforts to combat censorship and establish children’s rights. Although the historical precedents are lengthy, today’s efforts began in earnest during the last three years.

The ideologues contradict the wishes of the far greater number of parents and students. All reputable surveys agree with CBS News that “Americans overwhelmingly reject the idea of banning books about history or race. One reason for that: a big majority also say[s] teaching about the history of race in America makes students understand what others went through.

“Large majorities — more than 8 in 10 — don’t think books should be banned from

school for discussing race and criticizing U.S. history, for depicting slavery in the past or more broadly for political ideas they disagree with." More than 70% of those polled in a survey commissioned by the American Historical Association support "divisive" and "uncomfortable" schooling, across all lines of party, education and age.

Republican politicians, right-wing opinion columnists and editorial boards, and Fox News re-circulate talking points from Tucker Carlson, Christopher Rufo, Ted Cruz and Donald Trump. Mounting evidence suggests that they appeal to a declining minority.

The well-funded, highly organized national misinformation campaign targeting public education and literacy is very successful in reaching its intended audiences: rightwing sympathizers and fearful, manipulable parents.

Funded by the Kochs, Heritage Foundation and PAC, Bradley Foundation, Robert Gates and others, their propagandists like fake journalist Rufo admit to fabricating quotations and allegations. Books are banned; so are curricula topics.

The anti-factual message is dishonestly spam-mailed with fallacious "opinion surveys" and requests for donations to unknowledgeable millions by the Faith & Freedom Coalition and Michigan's Hillsdale College. The latter offers "free" online courses to tempt the fearful and unknowing to purchase online degrees on the 1776 Project's white-washed fictionalization of American history.

Hillsdale now also markets a speculative chain of "Classical Academy" Latin- and STEM-based private elementary "schools" as franchises of Hillsdale College. Private Christian and precariously accredited Hillsdale is DeSantis' model for remaking liberal arts education in Florida.

The Resistance Rises

Young adult novelist and literature professor Ashley Hope Perez's national prize winning novel *Out of Darkness* sat unchallenged on library shelves from 2015 until 2020, when organized banning actively commenced. With civil rights, free speech, authors' rights, librarians' and citizens' challenges, bans that violated district and state guidelines and laws are facing resistance.

So far, bans of *Out of Darkness* have been rescinded in several counties particularly in ban-flooded Utah after district superintendents or school boards were confronted with their own formal free-speech policies. That is a growing movement of legal resistance to unconstitutional actions, sometimes by authors and their representatives and sometimes by civil liberties groups.

With few exceptions, the authors of targeted books are racial and ethnic minorities, women, and/or LGBTQ, regardless of the national and international acclaim they have earned sometimes over decades. The only white male authors on banned lists have

LGBTQ protagonists. Mere mentions of sexuality, romantic attraction, or differences lead quickly to radical exaggeration and distortion.

Few book-banners have any familiarity with the actual contents of their targets.

Graphic novels including Art Spiegelman's award-winning account of Jews in the Holocaust, *Maus*, and an adaptation of Anne Frank's *Diary* attract condemnation and outright banning because they might make readers "uncomfortable" or are purported to be "divisive," categories that are never defined.

The underreported new and mounting "massive resistance" is an increasingly joint effort by librarians, students, authors, publishers, and civil libertarians more or less in that order. I call for greater communication and cooperation.

Not surprisingly, librarians lead in fighting back, at least as often individually and locally as with the national American Library Association's and Freedom to Read Foundation's leadership. This is sometimes part of union organizing drives and sometimes at the risk of losing their own jobs.

Imaginatively and originally, the Nashville (Tenn.) Public Library introduced a limited edition "I read banned books" library card. Teachers and librarians also remind youth people, "You can ban a book, but can you stop teens from finding it online." Banning parents and school boards typically, and ironically, miss that.

Individually, sometimes along with librarians, sometimes cooperatively with PEN America, scholarly organizations, ACLU, National Coalition Against Censorship, Red Wine.Blue and publishers, authors also fight back. We need stronger leadership and organization across genres, generations, and interest groups.

Especially impressive, imaginative, and courageous, teenage high school students across the country and especially in Texas lead by organizing "read banned books clubs" and reading groups. Sometimes they act with the help of individual schools, teachers, parents, and local booksellers and authors who provide copies of books.

Social justice, LGBTQ rights, freedom to read, and the rights of the young are major motivations and themes. Some of the clubs initiate lawsuits against schools and local authorities. Texas, Florida, and even small-town Pennsylvania groups set examples that inspire peers elsewhere.

Some exceptional teens, often racial and ethnic minorities, add individual voices bril-

liantly. In the *Dallas Morning News*, 9th grader Sriya Tallapragada writes, "Adults who want to ban schoolbooks don't understand how we students read them." She continues, "Often the larger message of a book overshadows any uncomfortable language."

In the Opinion pages of the *New York Times*, Viet Thanh Nguyen reports movingly how "My Young Mind Was Disturbed by a Book. It Changed My Life." The Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, author of *The Sympathizer*, attributes his intellectual beginnings: "When I was 12 or 13 years old, I was not prepared for the racism, the brutality or the sexual assault in Larry Heinemann's 1974 novel, *Close Quarters*."

He continues, "If we oppose banning some books, we should oppose banning any book. If our society isn't strong enough to withstand the weight of difficult or challenging — and even hateful or problematic — ideas, then something must be fixed.... And loving books is really the point...."

Four months later, on April 18, 2022, Southern California high school junior Sungjoo Yoon boldly announces, "Take it From a Student: We Should Argue About Books, Not Bans." As a sophomore, he led a petition drive to remove five classic novels from a banned book list (it gathered almost 5000 signatures) and spoke at school board meetings.

From these experiences, he "had a long-overdue realization: How we as Americans approach restrictions on literature curriculums is not only flawed but also wholly reactionary. My experience... convinced me that the problem is not that we disagree but how. We need to shift focus away from reflexive outrage about restrictions and bans, and toward actual discussions of the merits and drawbacks of the individual books."

If only more adults would read and listen. Can they?

Next a Spectator Sport

Founder and president of Interfaith America, author and father, Eboo Patel adds an accompanying adult parental voice. He writes clearly about "What I Want My Kids to Learn About American Racism." Recalling his own educational awakening 30 years ago through reading, he observes that his children are learning about racism more immediately and at younger ages.

"My kids are 12 and 15. As they progress through adolescence and become even more attuned to the politics and culture of their nation, I want their schools to play the appropriate role in shaping them to be participating citizens of a diverse democracy. That means teaching an expansive version of American history and instilling in them a sense of responsibility to help make the next chapter more just and inclusive. Citizenship is





not a spectator sport.”

This is precisely what Moms for Liberty, No Left Turn in Education, Heritage Foundation, Faith and Freedom Coalition, Hillsdale College, and rightwing politicians do not want.

There are mounting signs of progress on the ground. I mentioned unbannings when citizens confront school superintendents and boards of education with their own stated policies upholding free speech, and/or threaten legal action. Many cases now move through the courts.

In rare instances, such as calls to “ban the Bible” or algebra, exposure of illogic and self-contradiction, as well as action on constitutional grounds, is effective. Changing state laws to make banning books easier prompted one long-time Florida activist to the logical counter of proposing publicly banning the Bible in accord with new laws’ terms. A Washington Post humorist imagined that one state legislator added, “Let’s ban algebra, too,” because it causes widespread “discomfort.”

The Miami Florida Board of Education reversed itself by accepting sex education books that it had rejected previously. Some schools compromise by adding “content warning labels” instead of banning books.

Especially compelling is increasing evidence that few parents are choosing to take action by enrolling in programs to restrict their school-age children’s reading of school library books.

State-level Censors

With right-wing Republican-domination and the ambitions of their governors, Texas and Florida lead the race for white supremacy and self-caricature. They spew fact-free violations of free speech and children’s rights, and contradict established understandings of child development.

The bar is low. A Tennessee Republican state representative, Jerry Sexton, responded to a colleague’s question about what he would do with the books he banned: “I don’t have a clue, but I would burn them.”

As part of a statewide election campaign (from which he later withdrew), Texas state house representative Matt Krause’s office produced — but could not explain — a list of 850 books supposedly in school or public libraries that he demanded without definition or explanation be “investigated.”

Inspection of the list quickly confirmed that it was compiled by a literature- and history-ignorant Google word search. Krause, his office, and his vocal supporters are completely ignorant of the contents of the books. This is part of what I’ve named “the new illiteracy,” the condemnation and campaign to ban books while lacking any familiarity with their contents.

Again in Texas, the Governor assaults trans-youth, illegally denying health care and protection from bullying. He disallows protecting the young from parental and other adult abuse. In Oklahoma, a teacher was threatened with having her license revoked for explaining to her students how to access “banned books” legally.

One West Philadelphia teacher adds reality to the nondebates: “Book Bans? My School Doesn’t Even Have a Library. How underfunding is its own form of censorship.”

A number of states try to limit the books for which students may search. Virginia attempts to label books as “obscene” and alternatively ban them, restrict their sales, or sue publishers, booksellers, or the books themselves. Judges find no merit in these illogical, unconstitutional stunts.

In Ohio, a home-schooled, non-college educated, former member of the State Board of Education and current member of the State House, argued against inclusive history

education because she believes that “both sides of the Holocaust must be taught” and “only 300,000 Jews” were killed. Her colleagues only gently scolded her.

Meanwhile, with no debate and ignoring all testimony and opinion polls, the substantially appointed State Board of Education rescinded its own 2020 resolution in support of anti-racist, inclusive education.

Fraudulent Faith and Local Lunacies

For decades, across the states, Christian home-schooling parents proclaim doctrines of “parental rights” that have no basis in law and contradict the more than century-long struggle to establish the fundamental rights of children and young people. They clash with everything we know about child and adolescent development.

Among their tactics are myths about children “identifying” as animals in schools, the threat of unisex and gender-neutral restrooms, transgender young people competing in school sports, and endless streams of condemned but rarely read books, increasingly graphic books. Families home-schooling with a 1930s Nazi curriculum make the news but solicit no action by local or state authorities.

Most of the action, especially regarding efforts to censor reading, ban books, and limit libraries and librarians takes place in counties, cities and school districts. These are the trenches, sites of sometimes all-out rhetorical, socio-cultural, political, and legal warfare, often ignoring the law and established processes and procedures.

We know the anti-constitutional and anti-child development book, education, and growing up banners do not, and perhaps cannot, read. But are they listening? The future of young generations and a semi-democratic nation depends on it. We must act collectively, and quickly. ■

Ready to Strike If Necessary: The UPS Contract Campaign

By Jack Martin

IT's 7 A.M. on a sunny Thursday morning in California, and I'm headed to my United Parcel Service hub with two folding tables, rally signs, and hundreds of flyers packed into the back of my car. In about 15 minutes, I will meet up with a few other UPS drivers, unpack the tables, set up our "United for a Strong Contract" banner and begin to greet our co-workers on their way to and from the parking lot.

It's a routine that's become increasingly familiar over the past year — not just to me but to hundreds of UPS Teamster rank-and-file activists across the country.

Last August, on the 25th anniversary of the 1997 UPS Strike, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) General President Sean O'Brien announced the launch of a year-long contract campaign leading up to negotiations covering 350,000 UPS workers like myself.

Elected on a wave of outrage following the 2018 UPS agreement, O'Brien promised a number of key differences this time around including a hard August 1 strike date, rank-and-filers at the bargaining table, and greater transparency throughout negotiations.

But perhaps the most visible difference between 2023 and negotiations under O'Brien's predecessor, James Hoffa Jr., has been the contract campaign itself. Over the past year, Teamster locals have held hundreds of tabling events, parking lot meetings and rallies across the country seeking to build member engagement around contract issues.

Many of these events were organized entirely by rank and filers, inspired by organizing webinars and direct support from Teamsters for a Democratic Union. The 2021 election of O'Brien as General President was a major win for TDU — after decades of organizing, seeking to build a more democratic, transparent and militant Teamsters union — and the UPS contract was the biggest issue in that election.

At the 2022 TDU convention the following year, an even bigger challenge took center stage: the task of building a nationwide contract campaign that brings thousands more Teamsters into action and reaches every UPS worker.

Jack Martin is a UPS package car driver based in California.



What We're Fighting For

UPS is a physically demanding, high-stress workplace — the company tells you this at orientation, and UPS workers are generally proud of our ability to withstand the rigors of the job.

But we also expect to be fairly compensated for our work and treated with respect. In recent years, there has been a growing anger among workers over UPS not holding up their end of the bargain.

There was no working from home for UPS Teamsters during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our status as "essential workers" brought us both praise as heroes and more crushing workloads than we'd ever seen before.

During the height of COVID, drivers at my hub and in most parts of the country regularly worked 60 hours a week and were often forced in for a "sixth punch" (working a sixth day) in order to handle the excess volume brought on by the massive spike in e-commerce.

Excessive mandatory overtime has always been a problem at UPS, but during the pandemic it reached unprecedented levels. Feeling the worst of the increased strain were often the lowest seniority drivers, namely "22.4s" as they're called at UPS.

The 22.4 job is a new, lower tier of package car driver created under the 2018 contract and central to the outrage members felt over that agreement. The 22.4 work classification was started under the guise of providing flexibility to the workforce and alleviating package car drivers from unwanted overtime.

In theory, 22.4s would do warehouse work when volume was lower, and drive when they were needed to supplant the regular package car drivers during periods of high demand. They would earn the same rate of pay no matter what kind of work they were doing — higher than that of a package handler but lower than that of a regular

driver.

In reality, most 22.4s ended up driving every day for longer hours, lower pay and with less contract protections than other drivers. The abuse of this lower tier of driver is exactly what many UPS Teamsters warned against when a majority voted against the 2018 contract, only for the Hoffa-led IBT to use an obscure loophole in the IBT constitution to overrule the no vote.

Under new union leadership, excessive forced overtime and eliminating the 22.4 classification are central bargaining issues for 2023. O'Brien has pledged to strike over the 22.4 issue if the company doesn't meet this demand. But while 22.4s make up a relatively small portion of the UPS workforce, the biggest part of our workforce has perhaps the most to complain about.

Part-time package handlers make up more than half of UPSers and often get paid a lower hourly wage than many workers doing similar work at non-union warehouses. The current contractual minimum pay for a package handler is just \$15.50 per hour. That's lower than the minimum wage in my city, and usually far less than is required to hire new part-timers.

As such, UPS uses "market rate adjustments" that can run as high as \$27/hr to entice new part-timers when it needs to hire, only to cut wages whenever it wants to get rid of them. This leads to a high turnover rate that sees package handlers quitting within months of being hired.

For the company, this arrangement makes much easier managing the size of its labor force during the peaks and valleys of demand. But it can wreak havoc on the lives of part-timers, making it impossible to know how much money you'll be making from one month to the next and leading to more dangerous working conditions as inexperienced trainees are brought in month after month to replace those who have quit.

Fight the Flexibility Plague

The high-turnover workforce is a staple of the modern economy alongside gig work, which UPS has also been experimenting with in recent years. Using loopholes in the contract designed to allow for the hiring of seasonal drivers during the busy holiday season, UPS has begun to dispatch routes

to temporary employees delivering out of their own cars.

Personal Vehicle Drivers are becoming increasingly common between the months of November and January. In some cases, these temporary workers make a higher hourly wage than permanent drivers, but they're cheaper for the company because they can be excused as soon as volume makes them expendable.

UPS claims that added flexibility is necessary to compete with carriers like Amazon and FedEx. But with the company making record profits quarter after quarter and shelling out billions per year in stock buybacks and dividends, workers aren't buying it. Instead, we are demanding a \$25 per hour starting part-time wage with annual raises for every year on the job, and an end to Personal Vehicle Delivery gig jobs.

For the IBT and its rank-and-file activists, winning on these issues is about more than the immediate improvements it will bring to the lives of our brothers and sisters at UPS. It is about protecting and extending the dream of a quality union job in the modern economy.

These jobs have become more and more scarce over my lifetime, and UPS is one of the last places you can find one without a college or post-graduate degree. We are fighting to defend the union difference at UPS, and organizing Amazon workers in the hopes of spreading it elsewhere.

We know that winning a generational UPS contract in 2023 is an essential step towards doing that. It's much easier to convince an Amazon warehouse worker to vote to become a Teamster when you can point to a similar job down the road at UPS that promises several dollars more per hour.

The Campaign

The immediate goals of a good contract campaign are to raise expectations among union members and to present a credible strike threat that will put pressure on the company to give in to our demands.

The lasting benefit of a good contract campaign — beyond whatever may be won at the bargaining table or on the picket line — is members becoming accustomed to taking an active role in union fights and gaining experience in the skills needed to organize in the workplace.

In February, the IBT launched the nation-



Matt Leichenger

The exuberance of UPS Teamsters shows they are committed to winning a decent contract. The UPS contract covers 350,000 workers, 60% of whom are part-time workers. They just voted by 97% to authorize a strike if they have not won a new contract when the current contract expires on July 31, 2023.

wide Contract Unity Pledge, which asked members to sign a pledge to do what it takes to win our bargaining demands. Signing a pledge card on your way into work may not seem like a big commitment, but it's a deceptively powerful activity.

Not only does it give newer organizers an easy task guaranteed to build confidence, but it presents an excuse to talk to everybody at your hub about the contract issues. It brings members who may not show up early to attend a rally into the campaign and shows them what we're fighting for.

In order to support deeper contract organizing, the IBT scheduled dozens of Contract Action Trainings in cities all over the country this year, teaching members how to talk to our coworkers about the contract issues, how we can win if we strike, and building skills like making a flier or doing turnout for a parking lot rally.

Members can use these skills to organize coordinated actions around issues like making MLK Day and Juneteenth paid UPS holidays, excessive overtime, winning higher part-time pay, and better safety protections against heat illness.

Throughout the campaign, TDU has provided direct support to rank-and-filers seeking to join the campaign. Regular webinars directed at a general audience announce the latest campaign issue and provide testimonials from UPS activists who are organizing at their hubs. Attendees who express interest in getting more involved are contacted by Teamster volunteers who provide mentoring and send out campaign materials free of charge.

Building for a Strike — And What Comes After

"Is there gonna be a strike?" Lately this is the most common question I get, both from

Teamsters and friends and family members who have noticed how little spare time I seem to have these days.

I always tell them, "I don't know. I don't think Sean O'Brien knows either. The best way to avoid a strike is to show UPS just how ready we are to do it."

Our expectations are high, and giving us everything we're asking for will cost UPS a lot of money. But so would testing our resolve.

What I do know is that whether or not a strike is in the offing this summer, the UPS contract campaign has the potential to bring new, durable, rank-and-file organization to the Teamsters that we can build on for years to come.

At some UPS hubs, large rallies protesting unjust discipline or repeated trampling of the contract have been a common part of the union culture for years. But in most Teamster locals, defending members and enforcing the contract are strictly the job of union officials.

Ordinarily there is no simple, out-of-the-box program for jumpstarting rank-and-file organizing at your UPS hub. The 2023 UPS contract campaign is a unique opportunity to do just that. First-time organizers are armed with universal issues impacting every UPS worker and a plan to win at a time when interest in the union is at its peak.

New relationships are built both within and between locals as the most motivated members work together and seek out advice from workers at other buildings doing the same organizing at the same time. These connections — which are rarely formed outside of TDU's annual in-person convention — can support future day-to-day organizing after the contract is settled.

Whatever happens on August 1, I've never felt better about the future of the Teamsters union. ■

What's at Stake for Hollywood and TV?

The Writers Guild Strike

Alan Minsky interviews Howard A. Rodman

The former president of the Writers Guild of America West, Howard A. Rodman, joined Alan Minsky on Jacobin Radio to discuss the Writers Guild strike, begun a minute after midnight on May 2, after a near unanimous strike vote the day before. This strike action, the first in 15 years, is impacting TV, movies and streaming platforms across the country and the world. The last strike, in 2007-08, lasted 100 days and focused on the Internet when streaming was in its infancy and Netflix was still a DVD-by-mail company.

This time, the key points are residuals, preserving the writers room and ending the practice of so-called mini-rooms. They demand viewer-ship transparency — writers want ratings data not algorithms — and protections regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI). All these issues create a threat to the ability of writers to earn a decent living. The interview has been edited for ATC.

Alan Minsky: Welcome to Beneath the Surface. I'm Alan Minsky sitting in for Suzi Weissman. Today, we're going to talk with Howard A. Rodman about the ongoing writers' strike that is impacting TV, movies and streaming platforms across the country and the world.

Howard is a screenwriter, author, and professor. He is the former president of the Writers Guild of America West, professor and former chair of the Writing division of the USC School of Cinematic Arts, alumnus of the Telluride Association Summer Program and an artistic director of the Sundance Institute Screening Labs. He is the author of two novels, *Destiny Express* and the much heralded *The Great Eastern*.

Welcome Howard to Beneath the Surface. Why have writers chosen to go on strike for the first time in 15 years?

Howard A. Rodman: To sketch in some history, the 2007-08 strike was about jurisdiction over what was then called "new media" and became known as the Internet, and which we now think of as streaming. The companies were maintaining that they didn't have a business model for this experimental thing and that if it ever made money, then we could come back and talk about it.

We understood that without jurisdiction over new media, over the Internet, all production and all distribution would jump to that new medium and it would be the Wild West. We wouldn't have minimums, we wouldn't have pensions, we wouldn't have



Rodman on the attempted uberization of writers, and the Writers Guild's determination to oppose the downward pressure.

medical plans.

All the things that writers have fought for over the decades would simply disappear because work in new media wouldn't be covered by the Guild. We thought that was an existential crisis for us, and that's why we stayed out 100 days. And we won.

AM: Wasn't that around the peak period of what was called reality TV?

HR: The struck companies, in response to not being able to air scripted programming, aired what are allegedly unscripted programs.

Reality TV — as Vladimir Nabokov once said, "reality" is the only word that makes sense only between inverted commas. They showed reality shows, but they weren't finding that those shows were actually filling their financial boats, and they really needed scripted content.

When they had to decide between giving us jurisdiction over the Internet or losing money hand over fist and having to report very disappointing earnings to Wall Street, they chose to resume talks with us.

AM: Haven't Hollywood writers and TV and film writers always been the secret hegemonic weapon of the United States of America? Is there anything that people around the world revel in more than the productions of these authors?

HR: The large success of the streaming companies — and now everybody's a streamer

— is due to the global demand for scripted, dramatic content coming out of the United States. I think it's always been clear that the best work coming out of the United States has been at one and the same time an inspiration to people all over the world, that the world is far more beautiful than they let you see and far more terrifying than normally you're allowed to know.

Scorpion and the Frog

AM: While *The Wire* and *The Sopranos* preceded that strike, in the '07-08 period we entered into what seemed to be a new golden age of American television. How do you relate the incredible success of those serial dramas coming out of the platforms like HBO in the era of '07-08? In what way have the issues that inform this strike chipped away at what was such an artistic high point in recent U.S. television?

HR: It will surprise neither you nor your listeners to know that capitalism is always killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Late period capitalism, or as I think is more accurately After Hours Capitalism, is in the business of the scorpion and frog story.

Frog wants to cross the river; the scorpion says, "Can I hitch a ride with you?"

The frog says, "No. You'll sting me and we'll both drown."

And the scorpion asks, "why would I do that?"

So the frog says, "Okay."

And the scorpion hitches a ride. Halfway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog and they both drown.

The frog asks, "Why did you do that?"

The scorpion answers, "It's my character."

I think that's the companies. The work of the members of the Writers Guild of America West and the Writers Guild of America East have made the industry unprecedented profits. It enabled a business model far more successful and friction-free than I think any business model capitalism has ever invented.

Just using Netflix as an example, they have in their possession 230 million credit cards. Once a month, they press a little button and something like \$3,600,000,600 million appears magically, reliably and repeatedly in their bank account — there's no invoicing, no showrooms, no salesmen, just ping.

And that is due to the global success of

streaming content. If you think about the old days of the movie industry, they had to sell their product territory by territory. They had to dub or subtitle films. They had to ship cans across the globe, heavy cans of celluloid.

Now, for subtitling they have a voice-to-text apparatus. They beam it up to the satellite and then beam it down. Fortunately for the companies, if you live in China, Burma, India or any number of developing or soon to be developed countries, the first thing the customer does is get either a cable or a satellite dish.

If we just talk about the cash flow, American writers write scripted serial content. There's an enormous global appetite for it. It goes out there. People subscribe. And instead of there being a model based on any one show, or any one thing, or any one event, it's a model based on a subscription.

As long as they keep the audience's attention, as long as subscribers feel that in order to be a citizen of their community, they need to be abreast of what's going on in the world of streaming, as long as you give them just enough, they forget to unsubscribe. The companies have that button that they push every month and \$3.6 billion appears.

AM: *What I'm interested in is the possibility that a writer in Hollywood can have a prosperous middle-class life where you can live as a human being and not under constant precarity. It seems right now, looking at the details of this strike, that way of living and being a writer is starting to close down. Apparently 33% of the writers back in '07-08 were receiving the minimum, now it's risen to 50%.*

HR: And even more than that, among the community of show runners, the sort of writers who are like what A-list directors are to the directors, just 25% are working for the minimum. If you are a screenwriter, as I am, real income, adjusted for inflation, has declined at least 14% in the last five years.

If you are a writer-producer, your pay has declined 4% a year when you adjust for inflation. That's at least 20% less than you made a decade ago.

When I was starting out as a screenwriter, it was pretty uniform to get what is called a two-step deal. They hired you to do a draft and revisions. You do a draft, you get paid for it, you get a set of notes, you get paid to start your revisions, you get paid when you deliver your revisions.

Now more and more, there are only one-step deals. One and done. And of course, you end up doing an enormous amount of free labor because you do your draft and the studio doesn't quite like it or wants improvements or the producer wants something more. Of course you're going to do that; nobody wants to be labeled a draft counter.

And if you've got only one shot at getting this thing made, you're going to do all the

writing that you can in order to make them happy. That's what screenwriters do.

The Mini Room

AM: *Tell us about the advent of the mini room. What is the mini room and why is it a major issue in this strike?*

HR: Let me go backwards a little bit. If you think of what actually made possible the streaming companies, *The Shield* was the show that put FX on the map. *Mad Men* was the show that put AMC on the map. *House of Cards* was the show that put Netflix on the map. All of these companies owe their origins to some really smart writer-producers who wrote and then went to the set and produced.

That was the model that enabled those companies not just to make a lot of money, but to exist in the first place. But once there's a successful model, CEOs try to figure out how to put downward pressure on fixed costs and "rationalize" it. It's like that old joke about the venture capitalist who walks into a bodega and says, Wow, imagine what this could be like if that guy behind the counter were out of a job."

They ask, "What if we hire a smaller number of writers? What if we hire them for a shorter period of time? What if we let them go before the show goes into production? Man, what an opportunity."

And they've been doing that. It's resulted in the alienation of the labor force. It's resulted in writers not being able to make their years.

Just to give a little history here: My father was a television writer. When he wrote a season was 39 episodes, and then there were 13 weeks of reruns in the summer. When I was coming up, a season was something like 22 or 23 episodes.

Now a season can be six episodes, but that can be your pay for a year. If you're being paid by the episode, it's a shitty metric for compensation for writers. It can be a very successful show, but the writer is working in a mini room for, six weeks, seven weeks, and then you're scrambling for work again.

It's the gig economy, it's the uberization of writing. And one of the things we fought back against in 2017 was something we called "options and exclusivity." It is where you could work on a six or eight-episode show but they held you in "first position."

That means in practice that you couldn't get employment other places, because who wants to hire a writer when somebody else owns their first position? If the show is renewed, the writer could be snapped back from you?

Due to the company's maniacal desire to have not only massive profits, which we were giving them, but more massive profits each quarter, they could show Wall Street that they were not only profitable, but increasingly

profitable quarter over quarter.

This downward pressure on costs meant impoverishing writers. The companies worked to degrade writers, they worked to rake over the larger creative machineries that made them all this wealth in the first place.

Bifurcated Product and AI

AM: *Did the negotiators for the classical studios, however savage they were in terms of their labor negotiations, have greater concern for the product than the eight or so corporations that make up the AMPTP (Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers)? If all these guys care about now is the bottom line, won't that hurt the product?*

HR: I actually think that they care about social capital as well as capital. Everybody wants to have an Oscar winner. When Marty Scorsese comes to Netflix and says, I've got this big expensive movie called *The Irishman*, they say Great, Marty, make it.

Just as the theatrical release movie business has become bifurcated, the industry contains both large, franchise-IP driven tentpole summer movies (industry term for high-budget blockbusters) and then little arty things, there is always a desire for the prestige product.

Everyone wants your *líñárritu* film, everyone wants your Scorsese film. But at the same time, really what they are doing is trying to reverse engineer what will keep their audience from yanking their credit card from that magic machine.

AM: *How does Artificial Intelligence play out in this strike? What do you see as the real life threats that exist because of AI?*

HR: AI as it presently exists is pretty clumsy. If you ask AI to cough up a bio of Alan Minsky, you will find some things that are true and some things that seem like science fiction. AI doesn't understand the difference between probability and certainty.

I've asked it to write a screenplay in the style of Howard Rodman, thinking I could get my work done on the cheap. What you get is comical. But this is AI which has been trained for what — three months, four months, six months? The more material it has to train, the more of our work it can scrape up, the more it can be capable of doing things which are... creative? No.

Are they as stupidly satisfying as the most formulaic and stupidly satisfying things in the current marketplace? Maybe. I don't know.

What we want as writers is to be paid to rewrite people, not artificial intelligence. They would not even make a counterproposal, other than to say once a year we'll meet to talk about technology. We said we would rather not have AI do our jobs; they said, nah.

I did something interesting. I asked an AI chat to respond to our concerns. Here's what the AI generated.

"It's understandable that the Writers Guild

of America would express concerns about the potential impact of AI on their profession. AI has made significant strides in recent years and has been used in various capacities to assist in the creation of written content. However, writing for film and television requires a level of creativity, nuance and storytelling that is difficult to replicate through AI alone."

That's from the horse's mouth.

The fact that in the same way that in 2007-08, the studio asked us why we were focusing on the Internet. They maintained it was just a little technological thing. Now they're asking why are we harping on AI? We're harping on it because if they could get rid of our jobs, they would.

Prospects and Solidarity

AM: Between the introduction of a script and the final product being delivered, the sides seem to be very far apart. What do you see in terms of any potential ground being closed? As an expert with real life experience with these negotiations, what will the next few months look like?

HR: I just want to emphasize that whereas the 2007-08 strike was largely about one issue, this strike is about a whole constellation of issues which, taken together, create an existential threat to the ability of writers to earn a decent living.

If you write a feature and it ends up having a theatrical release, you get compensated a lot better than if it ends up being a streaming release. We think those things should be equalized by raising streaming feature rates up to theatrical rates instead of a race to the bottom as it currently is.

We are saying yes, there are new technologies, but don't use them to pay us less for more work. And because there's no one single issue, resolving it really means a commitment on the part of the companies to view writing as a sustainable enterprise.

Given their responses to the Writers Guild proposals, it doesn't feel like they do. It feels like they, like so many of their colleagues in Silicon Valley come out of a kind of Peter Thiel-esque libertarian philosophy.

They would rather replace careers with gigs, and they would rather replace continuity of employment with sporadic employment. They want to hire a writer for a shorter period of time and pay as little as possible for each step. It's sort of like an assembly line, you know, where writing appears only at the instant it's needed.

Unless the companies are willing to understand that they've broken the system of writing and if they want to continue making massive profits they've been making, they've got to fix it. Until they understand that, this strike will go on.

I've been in the Guild since 1989. I've been in leadership since 2004, although I am not

currently in leadership, and I've been on many negotiating committees. I've never seen my union more united. I've never seen my union more resolute.

Interestingly enough, I've never seen the kind of support that we're getting. When Local 399 of the Teamsters appears before a room full of 2000 writers and says not a fucking truck will cross a picket line, when even the Directors Guild of America sends the head of its negotiating committee to speak to a roomful of writers, I'm feeling pretty good about the resolve of the community of writers.

And I'm feeling pretty good about the fact that the community understands that in 2023 what writers are fighting for is what everyone needs to be fighting for. If they can beat the writers down, they're going to beat everybody down.



Figuring the Costs

I don't see a swift solution. I think what will end it eventually is simple math, when the companies realize the cost of not having writers is greater than the cost of what they would have to pay to have writers. Then they have to calculate their reputational loss and maybe hits on the price of their stock, which they really care about.

One of my favorite American films is a movie called *Body and Soul*. It's a boxing movie with John Garfield. It was directed by Robert Rossen. It was written by the inimitable Abraham Lincoln Polonsky. And at the end of the movie John Garfield, who's an up-and-coming boxer and comes out of poverty, is asked to throw a fight. The big money is against him.

He makes a speech about his dignity, about ethics. But the boxing promoter says to him, there's addition, there's subtraction, and the rest is conversation.

I think that's what's going on here. When they add up the numbers and realize that the cost of a protracted writers' strike is greater to them than the cost of treating writers with dignity, the strike will end.

AM: My understanding is that SAG and the Directors Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA Screen Actors Guild are looking at potential work stoppages in June. How might that play into how the arc of the strike turns?

HR: SAG has its negotiations coming up, and it remains to be seen whether the intransigence of the studios with the writers extends to their intransigence with the other guilds. Traditionally the Writers Guild has been far less afraid to be militant, far less afraid to strike.

On the basis of the Writers Guild's willingness to strike, the other unions have, through that delightful device of pattern bargaining, piggybacked on the gains that the writers gained by striking. It remains to be seen what would enable them to strike.

[NOTE: The Directors Guild of America won a renewal of its contract at the beginning of June, with highlights indicating the promise that directors cannot be replaced by AI and increased residuals for subscription video on demand.

SAG's began negotiations on June 7; their contract is up at the end of June.—ed.]

AM: We also had the IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) strike. IATSE was involved in a very dramatic set of negotiations that turned out largely favorable to the union.

HR: Something interesting happened there. Generally when leadership of a union comes out of negotiations and says this is the deal, it's the best deal we could get, we won some things, we couldn't win everything, but we're recommending this to you, it's approved.

That's been traditional Hollywood union labor practice. This one was not approved by such a large majority. There was a lot of pushback and I think the lesson is that there's more militancy among the rank and file than there is among the leadership of some of these unions.

What I love about the community of writers — the WGA-West and the WGA-East — is there's no daylight between the militancy of the rank and file and the militancy of the leadership. The leadership of the Guild is never going to cut a cruddy deal and then try to convince its members that it's got enough non-crud in it to justify voting for it.

That's not who we are, and that's certainly not what we're going to do in 2023.

AM: There is a quite a significant uptick in enthusiasm for unions and for union militancy among the general public. This undoubtedly is even higher in metro New York and in metro Los Angeles relative to the rest of the country. How might you see that playing into this strike? How can people best show solidarity for striking workers?

HR: Polling approval in the United States for labor unions hasn't been higher since the Roosevelt days. It's pretty astonishing.

If you look concretely, you have very pro-labor people coming out from the labor movement and winning seats on the Los Angeles City Council. I do think that the more favorable the larger environment is toward organized labor, the easier it is for any given union to be successful in its struggle because

we've got the wind at our backs now.

In terms of what other people can do, certainly the Writers Guild has been posting the schedules of where it's picketing, with handy little sheets about where to park and where the nearest bathrooms are.

Come join the writers on the line. Come walk around. Get your 10,000 steps a day in, in a very pleasant environment, talking to some lovely people. That's something you can do. If you are a writer, not yet in the Guild — what I think a lot of people are now calling

free WGA, understand that a lot of people are giving up a lot of time and a lot of money to ensure your ability to earn a living.

So don't cross the picket lines, don't scab, don't work for struck employers. Understand that this is not an opportunity for you to advance. This is an opportunity for you to join a community in an honorable way.

And for everyone else, I think really the best way you can be supportive is when you pick up a newspaper and start reading those stories about the dry cleaners, the caterers,

all the damage that the writers are doing to the economy of Los Angeles and New York — understand that it's not the writers who are doing this.

Understand that at any moment, day or night, the companies could choose to negotiate in earnest. They haven't yet, but that if there are larger economic, social repercussions and if you can't see your favorite late night TV show, that the onus for that is not the writers, but the companies that forced them to go on strike. ■

In Support of Fatima Mohammed

The following statement, "CUNY Law Jewish Law Students Association Stands With Fatima," was issued in response to public attacks on Fatima Mohammed following her May 12 commencement address to the City University of New York School of Law. Fatima's support of Palestinian freedom was denounced as "hate speech" by the school chancellor and board of trustees and by New York mayor Eric Adams (whose own talk at the commencement was greeted with boos and backs turned by students). The controversy at CUNY comes at a time of increasing attacks on supporters of the Palestinian struggle.

THE CUNY SCHOOL of Law Jewish Law Students Association stands in solidarity with our friend and classmate Fatima, who is currently being targeted by a racist hate campaign from external organizations after delivering a commencement speech that addressed the struggle for Palestinian freedom.

Our class, including its members in the Jewish Law Students Association, proudly chose Fatima as CUNY Law's commencement speaker.

For years, Zionist organizations have been enacting targeted harassment campaigns against Palestinian and Muslim law students at the CUNY School of Law. As a public-interest focused law school, we have a duty to stand with Palestinians against Zionist oppression, as Fatima has done.

In her commencement speech, Fatima describes the unique nature of CUNY Law and the values it embodies that brought many students to our school. She explains, "we join this institution to be equipped with the necessary legal skills to protect our communities, to protect the organizers fighting endlessly day in and day out, with no accolades, no cameras, no votes, no PhD grants, working to lift the facade of legal neutrality and confront the systems of oppression that rend violence on them."

Speaking out against oppression is one of the skills we cultivate, and we aim to apply our principles consistently. As Fatima reminds us, "Palestine can no longer be the exception to our pursuit of justice."

We, as Jewish students at CUNY Law, oppose and condemn the racist organizations like CanaryMission who are spreading disgusting lies about our friend. The organizations currently attacking Fatima and the rest of CUNY Law's student body, with absurd and false claims of antisemitism, are doing so against the wishes of the majority of CUNY Law's Jewish students, who wholeheartedly stand with Fatima and have been grateful to have her as our classmate throughout law school.

As Jewish students attending an institution structured around social justice, we denounce both the murder and dispossession enacted in our name through the Zionist project and the harassment and lies that Zionist organizations are using to punish Fatima for her bravery and commitment to Palestinian freedom.

In her commencement speech, Fatima rightly condemned that "Israel continue[s] to indiscriminately rain bullets and bombs on worshipers, murdering the old, the young, attacking even funerals and graveyards, and as it encourages lynch mobs to target Palestinian homes and businesses, as it imprisons its children, as it continues its project of settler-colonialism, expelling Palestinians from their homes, carrying [out] the ongoing nakba."

It is disingenuous to characterize these factual descriptions as antisemitic, when they describe the conditions of Palestinian life.

We call on CUNY Law to listen to, support, and defend its student body. Our condemnation of Zionism is based on outrage at the way it has harmed and continues to harm Palestinians, not, as external Zionist organizations would have people believe, on antisemitism. As long as Zionism has existed, there have been Jewish people fighting against its racist and imperialist logic — to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism is to erase the history of Jewish anti-Zionism, throughout the world and at CUNY Law.

If CUNY Law wants to show it cares for its Jewish students, it can do so by showing it cares for Fatima. We are endlessly grateful

for Fatima's courageous work and her inspiring message to the CUNY Law class of 2023.

"Let us remember," as Fatima said in her speech, "that just this week, Gaza has been bombed with the world watching; that daily, Black and Brown men are being murdered by the state at Rikers; that there are Palestinian political prisoners like the Holy Land Five in U.S. prisons; that there are refugees at the southern border, still locked up; that yesterday [May 11, 2023] marked one year since the murder of U.S. journalist Shireen Abu Akleh; and that the murder of Black men, like the murder of Jordan Neely by a white man on the MTA is being dignified by politicians like Eric Adams.

"We leave our classes, and we leave this school to a world that so desperately needs us to stand alongside those who have given up, for the sake of liberation, far more than we could imagine."

We implore CUNY Law to stand alongside its students and alumni and to act in alignment with its mission and mandate by supporting Fatima and denouncing the racist lies being spread about her.

Initial signers: CUNY Jewish Law Students Association, CUNY Law Students for Justice in Palestine, CUNY Law OUTLaws, CUNY Law Indigenous Americans and the Law Student Advocates, CUNY Law Student Government, CUNY Law Labor Coalition Within Our Lifetime, CUNY4Palestine, CUNY Law Environmental Justice Coalition, CUNY Law Formerly Incarcerated Law Student Advocacy Association, CUNY National Lawyers Guild, CUNY Law Housing Rights Project, CUNY Public Interest Law Association, CUNY Law Women of Color Collective, CUNY International Law Society, John Jay Students for Justice in Palestine, Brooklyn College Students for Justice in Palestine, Hunter Palestine Solidarity Alliance, Anakbayan Manhattan, Silberman Student Advocacy Collective — Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, Fordham National Lawyers Guild and CUNY Young Democratic Socialists of America. ■

Socialists and Union Democracy By Steve Downs

A VERSION OF this article was the author's opening presentation to a May 2, 2023 Zoom call for members and friends of Solidarity. His pamphlets *Hell on Wheels* and the newly published *Socialist Strategies in Unions*, both discussing the experience in *Transport Workers Union Local 100*, are available for purchase at <https://solidarity-us.org>.

HOW DOES THE fight for democratic unions connect to the fight for socialism? My key point is that building democratic unions is not separate from what we call "our socialist tasks." It is a socialist task.

It does not exhaust those tasks, but we should not consider the push for democracy as something less than or distinct from what we need to do to advance socialism within the working class. And we should not apologize for the emphasis we, as socialists, place on union democracy.

What do I mean when I say that fighting for democracy in unions is a socialist task, especially when you don't have to be a socialist to push for greater democracy in unions? In fact, most union members who engage in these fights are not socialists, at least not yet.

As we've seen recently in the UAW and Teamsters, members generally take up this fight because they believe that their union has failed to represent them or to take on the boss, not because they want to overthrow capitalism. This failure is often explained by a sense that the union's officers are out of touch with the members, and that they are out of touch because the members do not have any real say over what the union does or how it does it.

So at a fundamental level, the fight for union democracy is a fight for more militant unions. Things like by-laws campaigns, calls for transparent ballot counts, and other manifestations of the demand for more democracy are means to the end of building a union that will fight for its members.

Mike Parker and Martha Gruelle emphasize this in their book published by Labor Notes, *Democracy is Power*. They point out, for example, that "few members will work to change by-laws or elect new leaders unless they're convinced it will improve the way the

union addresses their problems at work."

As union members and activists, we want unions to be more militant because we want to win better wages, better benefits, better working conditions, and to build deeper connections with the community. We want to limit the power of capital on and off the job.

"[It is] important that we be as clear as possible about what we mean when we talk about union democracy. And we need to accept that there will be disagreements among socialists, and among union activists more generally, about what union democracy looks like."

The Great Struggle Ahead

As socialists, we want unions to be more militant because we want them to limit the power of capital on and off the job. In this, we are in sync with Frederick Engels' observation in *The Condition of the English Working-class in 1844*, that unions are "the military school of the working-men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided...And as schools of war the Unions are unexcelled."

(Please note that Engels wrote that through unions, workers "prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided," not that they "are prepared for" or led to.)

And we are convinced that democracy — voting, but also discussing, arguing and deciding over strategy and tactics and lessons to learn — is a necessary, an indispensable, part of how people will prepare themselves for the great struggle that cannot be avoided.

Again, as Parker and Gruelle remark, "If there were a non-democratic way to run unions that gave workers more power in society and against the boss, then members would have to consider it."

I mentioned that fighting for union democracy doesn't exhaust our "socialist tasks." In fact, it's critically important to keep in

mind that this fight is insufficient to carry out "the great struggle which cannot be avoided," because we are also aware that, as Karl Marx wrote for the delegates of the Provisional General Council of the International Workingmen's Association in 1866:

"(T)he working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady."

In this context, Marx points to the need for a political party of the working-class to carry that struggle through.

There are two things I hope we can talk about, either now or in future discussions.

First, everyone active in unions is for union democracy — or at least say they are. No one builds a caucus or runs for union office calling for less democracy.

This makes it important that we be as clear as possible about what we mean when we talk about union democracy. And we need to accept that there will be disagreements among socialists, and among union activists more generally, about what union democracy looks like.

This will often require that we figure out the relationship (or tension) between direct (or participatory) and representative democracy. Let me illustrate with a couple of examples from my union, TWU 100.

I've written elsewhere about the union reform movement in the Local in the 1990s. During that time, a demand that Local VPs be directly elected by the members they were to represent, rather than by the members of the entire local, was a key part of the reformers' platform.

We were crystal clear that Local 100 members should choose the people who represent them. But we didn't think through what the implications of that change would be. How would this change alter the VPs' role? How would it alter the relationship to other officers in the divisions? In the resulting structure of the Local, are VPs even necessary? Can that layer of bureaucracy be eliminated?

We also didn't extend the reasoning that

continued on page 19

Steve Downs is a retired NYC subway train operator and a former officer of Transport Workers Union Local 100.

In the Rightwing Crosshairs: Contingent and Powerful

By Kay Mann

Power Despite Precarity:

Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher Education

By Joe Berry and Helena Worthen

Pluto Press, 2021, 289 pages. \$26.95 paperback.

HALF OF ALL college and university courses in the United States today are taught by part-time faculty. Many are “Roads Scholars” who teach at several different colleges or universities to make ends meet.

Salaries are low and health benefits are not offered. Job security is non-existent. Employment is dependent on the needs, often last minute, of department chairs. Part-time faculty members, despite holding advanced degrees work therefore in the same secondary labor market as other low wage workers and part-time workers.

In *Power Despite Precarity: Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher Education*, veteran Higher Ed faculty union organizers Joe Berry and Helena Worthen share their personal experiences and lessons learned as longtime contingent faculty organizers. Berry is also author of *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower* (Monthly Review Press), a handbook on contingent faculty organizing.

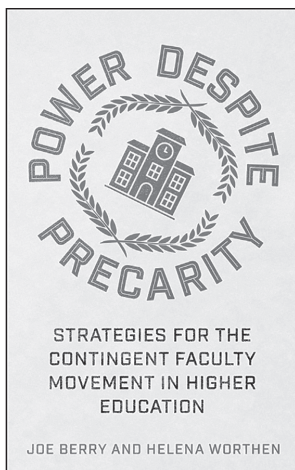
Power Despite Precarity is based on the history of the contingent faculty union movement in the California State University (CSU) system. The book is part practical organizing handbook, part organizational history of the Contingent Faculty Association (CFA), part labor history, part oral history.

Berry and Worthen’s perspective is broad, both practical and theoretical and grounded in a broad socialist perspective that analyzes faculty organizing in the context of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. They situate highly detailed accounts of organizing in the CSU within the context of the history of the U.S. labor movement as a whole.

Nuts and Bolts of Organizing

This is a book that will interest labor scholars and historians, and anyone interested in the practical challenges and potentialities of contingent labor organizing. Its great merit is the way the authors draw on their extensive

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experience involved with faculty organizing, and the clarity in which they connect these to broader social issues and the experiences of the labor movement.

Published by Pluto press as part of its “Wildcat: Worker’s Movement and

Global Capitalism” series during the pandemic in 2021, the book has a pressing timeliness as contingent and non-contingent faculty organize (the AFT and the AAUP merged in May of 2022) and struggle and strike, like those who led a successful faculty strike at Rutgers University in the spring of 2023.

Power Despite Precarity offers long stretches of discussion of the nuts and bolts of organizing and bargaining from a rank-and-file perspective, complemented by clear explanations of the broader social dimensions and political economy of contingent faculty work and organizing.

As administrators pushed issues of cost and profitability to the fore of decisions regarding hiring, curricula and programs, the use-and abuse-of part-time faculty steadily increased.

Hiring of part-time faculty began to take off in the 1980s under a constellation of several political and economic trends. During this time, the government and employers began to roll back gains that unions had made in previous decades and weaken the legal standing of unions.

The Reagan government responded to the 1981 air traffic controllers strike by crushing the strike and decertifying the PATCO union, which encouraged public and private-sector employers to move aggressively against unions. The year before the PATCO strike, the Supreme Court issued its *Yeshiva* ruling that faculty in private universities are administrators, and therefore do not have the right to organize and collectively bargain.

Neoliberal austerity drives also began at this time, which involved sharp cuts for education, including state colleges and universities at both the federal and state level.

Recession and Part-time Hiring

The economic recession in 1981 drove the unemployment rate over 10%, which resulted in increased higher ed enrollment — during periods of unemployment, higher ed enrollment rates increase as some workers hope to gain employable skills and credentials though higher education courses and degrees.

This made planning for adequate teaching staffing difficult because enrollment patterns had become more irregular. College and University administrators responded to these developments and trends by sharply increasing the use of part-time, contingent faculty.

In California, however, some counter-trends including the 1979 Higher Education and Employer-Employee Act (HEERA) strengthened the legal standing of faculty unions, and gave contingent faculty lecturers the right to union representation and resources. This created a favorable terrain for the faculty to struggle for and win significant gains, resulting in a rich set of experiences.

There are two different public college and university systems in California, the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC). Much of the book involves an account of contingent faculty organizing in the CSU system by the California Faculty Association (CFA), and the legal environment in collective bargaining rights in which organizing took place.

This is told in part through the organizing work and occasional voice of John Hess, a lecturer and for a time tenure-track professor in film studies, who began contingent faculty organizing in the 1970s.

The authors emphasize both the importance of the “political space and the legal right to organize” a union, usually though NLRB recognition, and that what is won “in collective bargaining, both the scope of bargaining, and the content of our agreements, is a temporary truce” which is “merely a reflection of the relative power between us and the employer at that moment.” (92)

They outline the key issues facing contingent faculty which should serve as priorities for faculty unions: salaries, a key demand

given the exceedingly low pay of contingent workers; support for research such as the sabbaticals that tenured and tenure-track faculty receive; health care, sick leave and maternity leave, as well as job security and academic freedom.

Abolish Contingency and Precarity

Berry and Worthen argue that the ultimate goal of contingent faculty organizing is to “abolish contingency and precarious work as a condition of our lives and the lives of all workers.” (89)

This forward-looking goal starts with the real condition of contingent faculty and non-faculty workers, and sets it in a broad social context on the basis of a radical democratic vision connecting work and social rights. They see contingent faculty organizing as a struggle for the “common good,” an expression they trace to the 2012 Chicago teachers strike, which has also been called social movement unionism.

A brief chapter, “What about Leftists,” points out the important role that leftists have played in many labor struggles including the 1934 Minneapolis, Toledo, and San Francisco strikes, the 1937 sit-down strikes in the Flint, Michigan auto industry, and more recently the 2012 and 2019 Chicago Teachers strikes and the 2018-19 Red for Ed strikes.

At CSU John Hess, who identified himself as a socialist, formed the “Ruckus society,” a group of seasoned activists who conducted organizing workshops. They led contingent faculty in simulating various possible union actions, with ascending degrees of audacity and personal risk, which Berry and Worthen see an example of what activist and scholar Jane McAlevy calls “structure tests.” (64)

Berry and Worthen discuss the tricky fault lines of alliances across faculty employment status with considerable nuance, balance and insight. Many tenured faculty and their organization long considered themselves “professionals.”

This was a barrier to defending their own interests and recognizing their common interests with contingent faculty. As the authors point out, the National Education Association (NEA) and American Association of University Professors (AAUP) resisted calling themselves unions until the 1990s. (181)

Historic Parallels

A section titled “One Big Union” discusses issues of the organization of tenure/tenure-track and contingent faculty. Should all faculty be in the same union? If so, should contingent faculty have their own caucuses within that union? How should they be represented?

Such questions in Higher Ed organizing parallel those seen in other industrial sectors, such as two-tier pay and benefit schemes seen in auto manufacturing and other sec-

tors. Berry and Worthen offer an extended quote from John Hess that sets this question in the larger context of the history of relations between skill levels in the U.S. labor movement that is worth reproducing here:

“The history of the American Labor movement is the sacrifice of the unskilled by the skilled, of the lower paid by the higher paid. . . if full and part-timers are in separate units or even unions, the administration is able to whipsaw them-divide and conquer. If they are in the same unit/union, the Lecturers . . . are generally ignored. The only way we can avoid that is by having a strong Lecturer’s group, an independent power base.” (136)

Berry and Worthen see this as a version of an Inside/Outside strategy, when a “sub-group organizes itself as an independent power group within a more powerful group in order to create a safe space where they can have a significant impact on the more powerful group.” (135)

They cite as precedents the Teamsters for

a Democratic Union (TDU) and Miners for Democracy (MFD) in the 1970s, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) formed in the 1960s by militant Black auto workers fighting against racism in the UAW, and on a larger scale the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). (139)

The authors conclude by pointing out that institutions of higher learning will most certainly continue to try to eliminate tenure and universalize contingent faculty labor. They point out that faculty can “control our own power, which we create through organizing and deploy when it’s time to make our move,” and express their hope that this book will contribute to that power. (239)

Those who wish to build a powerful contingent faculty movement in this age of budgetary and ideological assaults on higher education will find this book’s tone inspiring, and the union organizing wisdom it conveys practical. ■

Socialists and Union Democracy — continued from page 17

led us to want VPs to be directly elected to considerations of how the Local contract is negotiated and ratified.

In Local 100, as in many other unions, many parts of the contract – such as wages, sick leave, vacations, disciplinary procedure – apply to all members. But parts of the contract apply to specific groups of workers, such as Bus Operators or Conductors or Car Maintainers.

Local 100 presidents have (too) often agreed to takeaways that hit some of those subgroups in order to pay for wage increases or other gains for the whole membership. But those subgroups aren’t the only people who vote on their section of the contract, the whole membership does.

We never discussed whether we should demand that the members of each division be the only ones to vote on the section of the contract that directly affects them and only them. That certainly would have been consistent with the understanding of union democracy that led us to call for VPs to be directly elected by the members they represent.

But what should happen if one division out of 12 or so votes to reject their section of the contract? Should the whole contract be held up? Is that a democratic outcome? You can imagine that people genuinely committed to union democracy will have different opinions on this.

Or consider an example that is less about union structures and more about culture.

I strongly opposed the candidate the reform group in TWU 100 chose to run for president as we were on the verge of winning control of the local in 2000. Once the decision was made, I campaigned for him and the entire slate.

I also continued to express my concerns about the candidate and, especially, his commitment to creating a democratic union. In the corner of the left that I came from, this was consistent with being part of a democratic organization.

However, other members of the caucus felt that I was not respecting the democratic decision they had made. This disagreement was one of the things that made it impossible for us to sort out our differences and maintain our caucus.

Democracy and Disagreement

Second, deepening union democracy won’t necessarily mean that union members will take positions that we agree with. In a theoretical match-up between Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, the members of some democratic unions would choose to support Trump.

In a democratic vote, transit workers may vote for their union to push for lots more police on subways and buses. Likewise, coal miners, refinery workers and others in fossil fuel industries, as well as other workers skeptical of promises of a Just Transition, may vote for their unions to oppose steps toward a Green New Deal.

Union democracy won’t assure the outcomes that we support, but it will give us a better opportunity to argue for them.

So, broadly speaking, it’s important that we recognize that the work we do fighting for union democracy is one of our socialist tasks, while at the same time keeping mind that it is just one of the tasks that socialists have to carry out if we are to fight the causes, and not just the effects of exploitation and oppression. ■

The Green Party Debates Ukraine by Howie Hawkins

LIKE MUCH OF the ideological left and many peace groups, the Green Party of the United States is divided over how to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In early October 2022, the Green National Committee adopted a resolution submitted by the Green Party Peace Action Committee (GPAX) calling for the United States to stop military aid to Ukraine, end sanctions against Russia, and negotiate with Russia to end the war. The vote was 48-44 with eight abstentions and 54 not voting, resulting in affirmative support from only 31% of the delegates.¹

I will discuss below the content and debate on the resolution that yielded this close vote. First let me explain how the Green Party got to that point.

At the level of the Green voting base, which has been between 400,000 and 1.5 million in the last three presidential elections, my sense from talking to many rank-and-file Greens is that the majority view is more in line with that of most progressive- and peace-minded people.² They condemn the Russian invasion and demand Russian troops out of Ukraine. They affirm Ukraine's right to self-determination.

They support economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Like the bigger peace groups such as Peace Action and United for Peace and Justice,³ some are uneasy about military aid to Ukraine, but neither are they campaigning to end it. They support negotiations to end the war.

Why the Disconnect?

If the position on Ukraine adopted by the Green National Committee is at odds with the views of the majority of the support base of the Green Party, it is because the Green Party in the United States is structured more like an informal social movement than a formal party organization. Like the Democratic and Republican parties, it is memberless.

Without individual members with democratic rights in the national party, there is no organized membership to whom leadership can be held accountable. The power in such memberless parties is concentrated in informal elites.

In the case of the Democrats and Republicans, wealthy and corporate donors largely determine who populates and works for the parties' state and national committees, politicians' campaign and legislative staffs, and the parties' associated think tanks and lobbying firms.⁴

In the case of the Green Party, which does not have big donors or accept corporate funding, the party's leadership bodies tend to be dominated by professionals and retired peo-

ple with more personal means and flexible time.⁵ The national party is a decentralized federation of state parties and Black, Latino, Lavender, Women's, and Youth caucuses in which small parties and caucuses have disproportionate votes in relation to the number of people in their respective organizations.

State-level party organizations vary. A few state parties are based on dues-paying members. Most consider their membership to be whoever registers in the party with the state in order to vote in party primaries or, in states without party registration, whoever registers with the party itself. The registered membership is largely unorganized and unconnected to local and state party organizations.

The Green Party has national working committees such as Media, Peace Action, EcoAction, and International. Each affiliated state party can elect up to three people on such committees, although in practice most committee members are volunteers who take the seats without vetting or competitive elections.

In most cases, committee members do not consult with their state parties. The committees are free to initiate activities and make statements on their own as long as they are consistent with the Green Party's national platform, the planks of which require a two-thirds vote of the National Committee.

Sharp Differences

In the case of the war in Ukraine, however, the national platform offers little guidance and sharp differences quickly emerged. The Media Committee was conflicted in drafting its statements just before and just after Russia's full-scale invasion began.

As the war approached, the Media Committee drafted a release that emphasized the U.S. role in escalating the crisis. As the most recent Green Party presidential nominee, I was asked for my thoughts and a quote for the draft.

I said the release must add a statement demanding that both the United States and Russia respect Ukraine's sovereignty. My quote called on the U.S. to address Russia's stated security concerns with negotiations for mutual security and nuclear disarmament.⁶

A subsequent statement by the Media Committee about which I was not consulted was issued on the day after the start of the full-scale invasion. It condemned the Russian invasion and U.S. provocations, called for the withdrawal of Russian troops, opposed US troops or arms to Ukraine, and demanded a ceasefire and diplomatic solution.⁷

These statements just before and right after Russia's full-scale invasion were similar in their perspectives and policy demands to the corresponding statements by the International Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America.⁸

Howie Hawkins has been a Green Party activist for decades, and the party's presidential candidate in 2020, and a supporter of the Ukraine Solidarity Network (U.S.). For USN's mission statement and list of signers, see <https://linktr.ee/ukrainesolidaritynetwork>.

The arms question was the most contentious issue. In my weekly podcasts, the first of which was on the third day of the invasion, I supported arms to Ukraine for its self-defense. That soon drew criticism from some Greens. Discussions in the International Committee produced sharp disagreements that precluded any statement.

The Peace Action Committee (GPAX), on the other hand, was united around a perspective that viewed the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a “U.S. proxy war against Russia.” It was GPAX that submitted the Ukraine resolution that was narrowly adopted by the National Committee.

Before submitting the resolution in September, GPAX had already made seven statements on Ukraine in 2022, none of which condemned Russia’s invasion or affirmed Ukraine’s right to self-determination. It also chaired a webinar for Greens in May 2022 where the conflict was presented as a war against Russia “provoked” by the United States.

I was called out twice by the 2016 Green Party vice presidential candidate, Ajamu Baraka, for being “reactionary” and “disqualified” to run again for the party’s presidential nomination because I supported arms to Ukraine.⁹

Meanwhile, on April 30, I had received a letter of “constructive criticism” from GPAX that was full of Kremlin propaganda tropes about the war, including that Ukrainian bioweapons labs threaten Russia’s security.

My support for Ukraine’s self-determination was called “interesting” on the grounds that Russia’s invasion was in response to requests from the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics to defend their self-determination, and that Nazis control the Ukrainian government and “if Russia succeeds in ‘denazifying’ the Ukrainian government, it will benefit the Ukrainians and the world.”

I told them I would respond after several weeks because I was working full-time on a difficult petition drive for ballot access for the Green Party of New York.¹⁰ I responded in detail in July, disputing most of the facts and perspectives in the GPAX letter. That soon led to a Zoom meeting with GPAX where we did not agree on basic facts about the war.

GPAX told me then that it was planning to submit a resolution to the National Committee and asked if I would want to comment on their draft. I said I would, but I did not see it before it was submitted to the National Committee.

Debate on the Ukraine Resolution

The debate on the GPAX resolution raged in September and October 2022 across the National Committee’s voting and discussion listservs as well as state party and other Green-oriented listservs.

Opponents of the resolution said they were offended by the introduction, which starts out by declaring “the United States is fighting a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine.” They objected that such a characterization obscures the fact that the only imperialist army invading Ukraine with hundreds of thousands of troops is Russia’s.

Next, the introduction says it is important for the Green Party to have an official position “because of the grave danger of nuclear war in which the [U.S.] government has placed our country and the rest of the world.”

Opponents said this statement veils the fact that it has only been Russian leaders threatening to use nuclear weapons. The United States has refrained from responding to these threats

with escalatory changes to its nuclear posture and policy. President Biden has repeatedly stated that the U.S. military aid is not for use on Russian territory and that Washington is not seeking Putin’s ouster; nor does it want “to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia.”¹¹

Setting up the resolution by invoking the fear of nuclear war reinforced the proponents’ case that U.S. policy should use its economic and military leverage over Ukraine to force it to compromise land for peace in order to prevent a nuclear war.

Playing to the fear of nuclear war was the most effective tactic of the proponents. Some said openly that Ukrainians should sacrifice land to Russia to save us all from nuclear war. Opponents said that giving in to Russia’s nuclear blackmail to gain territory from Ukraine would be a disaster for nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, and deterring wars of aggression that can escalate to nuclear war.

The lesson of that kind of “peace” for Ukraine, after it gave up the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the Soviet Union in 1994, would be the same lesson that North Korea, Iran, and other countries have taken from U.S. regime-change attacks on Iraq and Libya after they gave up their nuclear weapons programs: that countries need nuclear weapons as a deterrent against foreign aggression.

The GPAX resolution’s introduction concludes by “condemn[ing] the present violence in Ukraine by all sides.” Opponents pointed to the moral bankruptcy of not distinguishing between the violence of the aggressor and self-defense by the victims of that aggression.

The resolution then raises four specific concerns. The first claims that the “militaristic approach” of arming Ukraine is “demonstrably flawed” because “Ukraine is losing the war” and “does not reflect a sincere interest in the well-being of the Ukrainian people, but rather the geopolitical and financial interests of Western elites.” Opponents objected that it is also morally bankrupt to choose sides based on who is winning.

At the time the resolution was submitted in September, Ukraine had already taken back over 30% of the land Russia had occupied. During the debate, Ukraine took back most of Kharkiv province. By mid-November Ukraine had liberated Kherson province east of the Dnieper River, bringing the total land taken back from Russia to over 50% of what the Russian army held at its peak advance the previous March.

As for arms to Ukraine not being in the interests of the Ukrainian people, opponents posted appeals for solidarity from the Ukrainian progressive movements, including Greens, socialists, anarchists, feminists, environmentalists and trade unionists. In all these appeals, Ukrainian progressive movements included calls for arms to defend themselves from the Russian invaders.

It became clear in the debate that the authors and proponents of the resolution had not sought, or were deaf to, the views of Ukrainian progressives. Some proponents made baseless smears against the Ukrainian progressives, calling them Nazis or stooges for the CIA or USAID.

Opponents argued that if Ukraine is disarmed by a cutoff of foreign military aid, there is no reason to expect Russia to stop its war to recolonize Ukraine. The concluding words to the “Right to Resist” manifesto by Ukrainian feminists were cited by opponents: “We stand for the right to resist. If Ukrainian society lays down its arms, there will be no Ukrainian society. If Russia lays down its arms, the war will end.”¹²

Questions of Sanctions and Diplomacy

The resolution's second concern makes the case for ending sanctions against Russia, stating that there is a "long track record of previous failures of punitive sanctions regimes."

Opponents pointed out that the Green Party national platform positively invokes the economic sanctions that contributed to the end of apartheid in South Africa in making the case to support BDS against Israeli apartheid today.¹³

The third concern is about the "unwillingness" of the U.S. to engage in diplomacy, and calls for the U.S. to "compromise" with a ceasefire that would lead to a negotiated peace. As opponents repeatedly pointed out, the resolution is demanding that U.S. imperialism carve up Ukraine in a "compromise" deal with Russian imperialism over the heads of the Ukrainian victims of Russian aggression. The focus is on what the United States should do to Ukraine, without considering the wishes and agency of the Ukrainians.

The fourth concern of the resolution's proponents was the American media's "dishonest portrayal" of the U.S. role in provoking the war and Ukraine's democracy and military successes. Opponents tended to make their factual points with citations of credible news sources, while the proponents tended to assert their facts without citations — although one could often trace them back to Russian state media and its internet echo chambers in the West.

Some proponents provides links to articles and videos featuring rightwing commentators like Col. Douglas Macgregor, a regular on Fox News and Russian state media, and post-Left podcasters like the Greyzone and Jimmy Dore who advance conspiracist narratives in support of Russia and against Ukraine.

The four concerns were prefatory to the resolution's concluding policy demands: the United States should end arms to Ukraine, lift sanctions on Russia, and negotiate with Russia to end the war. Opponents pointed out that these demands took no account of Ukraine's wishes and agency.

Appended to the resolution were links to sources mostly as divorced from reality as the resolution itself. They included former Swiss intelligence office Jacques Baud, who has long promoted Kremlin narratives and conspiracies on rightwing and Russian state media,¹⁴ and a now-deleted post on the blog of an anti-vax doctor that promoted the discredited claims of Ukrainian bioweapons labs.¹⁵

Supporters of the resolution have several motivations, which overlapped differently in different people. Many voted for it from pacifist instincts. As I have found in gatherings of the broader peace movement, most confess to knowing little about the war in Ukraine. Their default position is that negotiations are always the best approach and that weapons, even for self-defense, never are.

This pacifist motivation was expressed differently by some who said Ukraine must be pressured to compromise with Russia in order to avert a nuclear war. Fear of Russia's nuclear threats to themselves loomed larger for these people than the violence against Ukrainians by Russian aggression.

Another default position was an anti-imperialist instinct that defaults to the position that we must oppose whatever the U.S. military does. While understandable in view of the savage imperialist wars that the United States has inflicted from Vietnam to Iraq, it is wrong to apply that instinct without



Howie Hawkins speaking at the 50th anniversary commemoration of the civil rights movement Summer. To his right is Shelton Chappell, whose mother, Johnnie Mae Chappell, was shot dead in Jacksonville, Florida, 1964.

examining the particular situation in Ukraine, especially when the only imperialist army invading Ukraine is Russia's.

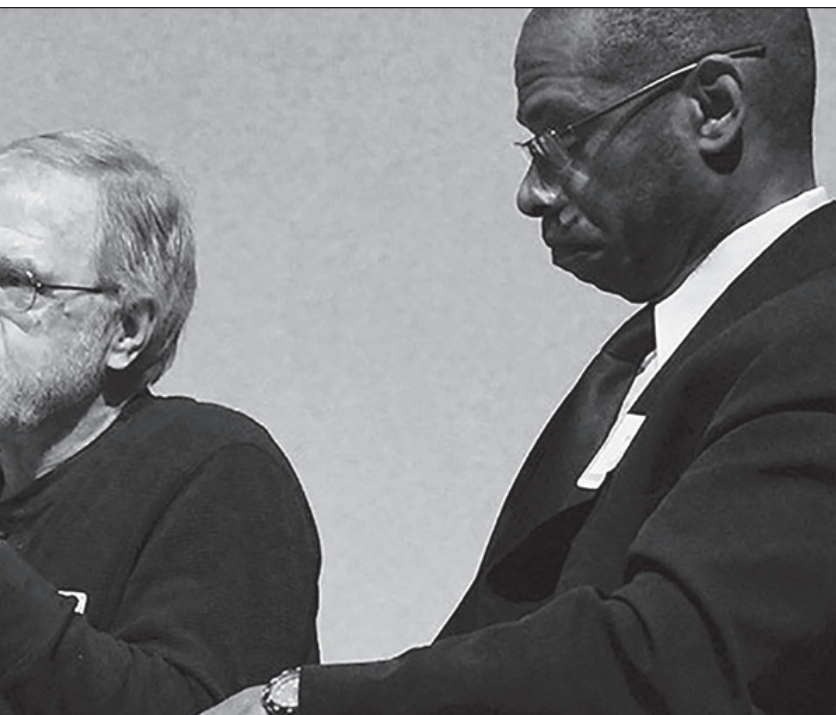
Another solid bloc in support was the anti-vax contingent, which is about a quarter of the body, judging from the decisive defeat of their recent platform plank proposal to ban all vaccine mandates. The anti-vax proponents voted for the GPAX resolution. They tend to rely on "alternative" conspiracist online media that present both the public health response to Covid and the war in Ukraine as power grabs by shadowy Western elites.

A smaller but vocal group of supporters rooted for a Russian military victory, arguing it would be a defeat for U.S. imperialism. That was their primary consideration and the democratic right of Ukrainians to self-determination was secondary at best or not to be respected because they are all supposedly Nazis.

The Vote

Among the National Committee members who voted against the resolution, not many actually spoke up on the voting and discussion listservs to oppose it. When the resolution was introduced, I commented on the voting listserv that I thought we were divided on the question of arms to Ukraine, but that we might be more united around a resolution that called for Russian troops to withdraw, affirmed Ukraine's right to self-determination, answered Ukrainian progressives' appeal to campaign for the cancellation of Ukraine's foreign debt, and called on the United States to negotiate with Russia for mutual security guarantees and nuclear disarmament.

Some proponents of the resolution objected to me posting on the voting list since I was not a voting delegate. I had been grandfathered on to the National Committee listservs as a former National Committee delegate more than a decade ago. Now my posting privileges to the voting listsev were revoked,



at Syracuse University. To his left is John Steele of the Mississippi Movement and Freedom
d in a random act by a white drive-by-shooter while Black protests were taking place in

although I could still read the list.

I continued to post on the discussion list, where I focused on arguing that the only consistent anti-imperialist position was to oppose Russian aggression against Ukraine as we oppose U.S. economic and military domination around the world. I presented factual rebuttals, with citations of sources to the pro-Russia narratives backing the resolution.

For my trouble, many proponents labelled me as pro-war, pro-Nato, neocon and so forth instead of addressing the facts and arguments I raised. A number of National Committee delegates who opposed the resolution let me know privately that they supported my perspectives, but did not feel informed enough to argue their case and did not want to be targeted for vilification as I was.

The online voting on the GPAX resolution concluded at midnight on Sunday, October 9, or 7:00 am Monday in Ukraine, which had just suffered the first overnight barrage of more than 100 air strikes in what became a months-long war crime of attacking civilian energy infrastructure as winter approached.

The resolution was adopted nine days after Putin gave his fascistic annexation speech against the “Satanistic,” homosexual, transsexual agenda of the West and called for negotiations, except that the newly “annexed” territories in Ukraine were non-negotiable.¹⁶ Few on the Green National Committee were aware of these developments as they voted.

The Debate Continues

The day after the Ukraine Solidarity Network (US) that I helped initiate was publicly announced January, Ajamu Baraka sent a message to the Black Alliance for Peace members listserv entitled “Howie Hawkins and his Ukraine Solidarity Network (US) is an enemy formation,” which a friend on the list passed on to me as a courtesy.

Baraka also tweeted, “If the Green Party wants to maintain

any credibility it must distance itself from Howie Hawkins pro-NATO, pro-U.S. imperialism, pro-democrat party, pro-‘American’ nationalism.”¹⁷

Baraka soon expanded his message into a polemic in Black Agenda Report that called the network “The Highest Stage of White Western Social Imperialism.” “Individuals like the Green Party’s Howie Hawkins, Eric Draitser of *Counterpunch*, and Bill Fletcher ... and the tendency they represent embody the worst of the arrogant, Western left that in so many cases (not all) objectively provides ideological cover (rightism with left phraseology) for the imperialist program of Western capital — they should not be allowed continued left respectability without challenge.”¹⁸

I had already given what could serve as a response in an interview that was published a few days later entitled, “The anti-imperialist position is to support the national liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people.”¹⁹ I also responded on Green listservs, saying in part that “The social imperialists today are those who pit domestic needs (socialists in words) against Ukraine’s national liberation struggle (imperialists in deeds).

“Plenty of resources exist to do both if we tax the rich and make deep cuts in the U.S. military budget...Making Ukrainian liberation and Russian imperialism ‘secondary contradictions’ to the ‘strategic priority’ of defeating Western imperialism is itself an imperialist framework in which the big nations are the only ones that count.”

Meanwhile, GPAX returned to the National Committee with a proposal to endorse the Rage Against the War Machine demonstration on February 19, 2023 that was organized by a bizarre coalition led by the Libertarian Party and included the online People’s Party, the far-right LaRouche organization, and post-Left anti-woke “populist” podcasters like Jimmy Dore, Max Blumenthal, and “MAGA Communist” Jackson Hinkle.

Proponents argued the Green Party should be part of any anti-war demonstration and should subordinate other concerns to the all-important cause of peace. Opponents argued that the demonstration was not anti-war, because it did not demand Russian troops withdraw, only that U.S. aid to Ukraine stop. Opponents also said Greens should not be marching with organizations and speakers who were known for expressing racism, anti-immigrant bigotry, antisemitism, misogyny and transphobia.

The controversial speakers and endorsers made the vote close, but it passed in a narrow 54-50-11 vote. Jill Stein, the 2016 Green presidential candidate, spoke at the rally with a Russian flag and a [Jimmy] Dore ‘24 placard behind her.

The Green debate on Ukraine continued when the Green Socialist Organizing Project held an online discussion on Ukraine with Margaret Kimberley, Matthew Hoh, and myself around the February 24 anniversary of the invasion. I was the only one advocating arms for Ukraine and while our discussion was respectful and substantive, the debate in the accompanying online chat was a flame war.

Ajamu Baraka posted that I should “resign or be expelled” from the Green Party, and Stein then added that “Howie’s views are outside Green values and removed him from contention” as a Green presidential nominee.²⁰

GPAX came back to the National Committee with a proposal to endorse the March 18 demonstration led by the

Party of Socialism and Liberation's ANSWER Coalition and CodePink.

The lead slogan on the endorsement form was "End the \$100 Billion in arms shipments to Ukraine." But that was changed in the promotional material as the demonstration grew near to "Peace in Ukraine – Negotiations Not Escalation." The slogan was similarly changed in the GPAX proposal. This time the National Committee approved the endorsement by an 88-7-5 vote.

I do not think this vote reflects a change in the perspectives on Ukraine in the National Committee. It was clear from the National Committee discussion that many members who voted against the GPAX policy resolution in October were voting to endorse this demonstration because they favor negotiations and do want the Greens to be missing from the larger peace movement.

Few delegates, however, have much experience with the peace movement. Few are cognizant of the fact that most of the peace movement, including national Peace Action and United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) and significant local groups like Brooklyn for Peace and the Syracuse Peace Council, did not endorse this demonstration.

Many peace groups are put off by ANSWER-led demonstrations that feature speakers and slogans that praise militaristic authoritarian regimes like China, North Korea, and Syria.

Few Greens on the National Committee are aware of the problems many peace groups have had working in coalition with ANSWER due to its habit of announcing demonstrations with their own slogans and speakers, then calling for "unity" around their event.

This practice by ANSWER in the anti-Iraq War movement led the UFPJ Steering Committee to announce at the end of 2005 that it "rejects future work with ANSWER."²¹ Two of the three national co-chairs of UFPJ at the time, George Friday and George Martin, were Green Party members.

Like the Rage Against the War Machine demonstration, the ANSWER/Code Pink demonstration was small for a national demonstration, with a couple of thousand attending by the most generous estimates. Jill Stein was again the Green Party representative who spoke, this time with the Chinese flag behind her.

An Internationalist Future?

The Green Party debate continued in early April with an online debate on Ukraine between Jill Stein and me.²² We had a back and forth on the facts about the conflict and what they mean for a Green response, as did the lively chat.

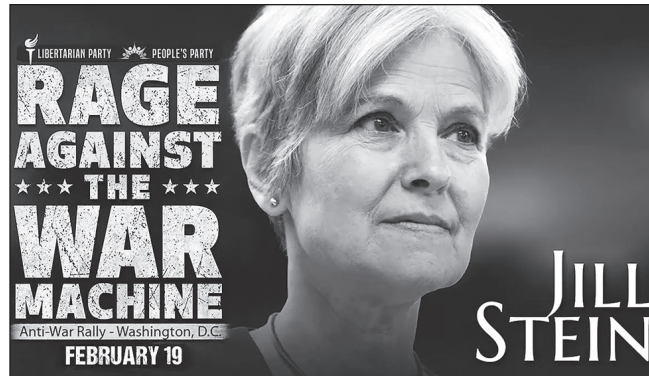
What struck me most was how nonviolence, one of the Green Party's 10 Key Values, was being used by Stein and some chat commentators to mean an absolute pacifism that does not recognize the right to self-defense and to say that my support for arms to Ukraine puts me beyond the pale of the Green Party. I pointed out that the Green Party's national platform description of the key value of nonviolence says "We recognize the need for self-defense and the defense of others

who are in danger."²³

A few weeks later Ajamu Baraka, on a podcast of the Revolutionary Blackout Network, said that I "should not be a member of the Green Party" because I have "violated the Green Party's principles and values ...regarding violence and militarism."²⁴

When I discussed the importance of the right of self-defense on a panel with members of the Deacons for Defense, which provided armed protection for civil rights workers in the Deep South in the 1960s, no Greens objected. But now the Green key value of nonviolence is being used by some Greens to say that I should be expelled for supporting Ukraine's right to self-defense.

One irony here is that I can't be expelled from a memberless party, and I have long advocated that the Green Party become a mass-membership party.



The Debate Has Just Begun

While the debate on Ukraine in the Green Party has its unique characteristics, it is similar to debates across the left and the peace movement nationally and internationally. Those of us who stand for international socialist solidarity with exploited and oppressed people, independently of the geopolitical interests of states, are still dealing with the legacy of campism in which many people on the left chose sides in the Cold War.²⁵

On the one side was a pro-Soviet camp, which supported the authoritarian bureaucratic states calling themselves socialist, and, on the other side the pro-Western camp, which supported the capitalist democracies.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new cold war has developed between the U.S.-led Western imperialist camp and a competing camp of capitalist states led by China and Russia. Some on the left consider the emerging rival camp of capitalist states to be a progressive anti-imperialist camp that will replace the unipolar world order dominated by U.S.-led Western imperialism with a multipolar world that, it is claimed, will move "Through Pluriplurality to Socialism."²⁶

From the perspective of international socialism, this new cold war is the emergence of a multi-polar world of competing imperialisms generated largely by not only by the expansionist drive rooted in capitalism's competitive structure. It is a return to the world of inter-imperialist competition that led to world wars in the 20th century.

The internationalist tradition of socialism, on the other hand, stands in solidarity with all struggles for democratic and socialist transformation in every nation in both camps of the new cold war.²⁷

This kind of pro-democracy internationalism has been the tradition of Green politics around the world ever since original Greens like West Germany's Petra Kelly and East Germany's Rudi Bahro campaigned against nuclear weapons and anti-democratic repression on both sides of the Cold War in the 1980s.

Green parties around the world today have been unhesitating in their solidarity with Ukraine, including the provision of arms. But the U.S. Greens are another case of American exceptionalism. It is the only Green Party in the world that is

so divided on Ukraine.

An important part of the debate going forward will be developing a shared theoretical understanding of the nature and structure of the emerging world of multi-polar imperials, the bureaucratic and ideological as well as capitalist drives behind the imperialisms of different states, and how to build practical solidarity among progressive pro-democracy and socialist movements across borders.

Just as important will be challenging progressive and peace-minded people to become more informed about Ukraine. I have found that even the more informed Greens, socialist, and peace activists only know what some of the controversies are, but haven't done their own investigation.

Was the 2014 Maidan revolution a U.S.-backed coup or a popular revolution? Were separatist movements in Crimea and the Donbas popular movements, or were they Russian military operations and coups? These activists tend to rely on the opinions of their trusted sources without doing their

Notes

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2. Mohamed Younis, "One Year Later, Americans Still Stand by Ukraine," Gallup, February, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/469328/one-year-later-americans-stand-ukraine.aspx>
3. The policy briefings of the biggest peace organization, Peace Action, reflect these positions. Peace Action, "Briefing & Action Steps on War in Ukraine," March 28, 2022, <https://www.peaceaction.org/2022/03/28/peace-action-statement-fact-sheet-on-war-in-ukraine/>; Peace Action, "Congress Should Promote Diplomacy to End the Ukraine War," August 8, 2023, https://www.peaceaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ukraine-policy-briefing-7_22.pdf. United for Peace and Justice, the biggest national coalition of peace groups, acknowledges "some diversity of views" within its coalition, but its comprehensive resource list has strong representation from progressive Ukrainian and Russian sources and Ukraine solidarity activists. United for Peace and Justice, "The Ukraine crisis: commentary, responses, and background," <https://www.unitedforpeace.org/the-ukraine-crisis-commentary-responses-and-background/>.
4. Kim Moody describes the informal power structure that governs the Democratic Party as a "memberless party" in *Breaking the Impasse: Electoral Politics, Mass Action, and the New Socialist Movement in the United States* (Haymarket Books, 2022).
5. The way informal elites form in the Green Party as a "memberless party" is similar to that described by Jo Freeman in the late 1960s women's movement in "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (1970), <https://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>.
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8. Democratic Socialists of America International Committee, "DSA IC opposes US militarization and interventionism in Ukraine and Eastern Europe and calls for an end to NATO expansionism, January 31, 2022, <https://international.dsausa.org/statements/page/3/>; "On Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," February 26, 2022, <https://international.dsausa.org/statements/on-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>.
9. The seven statements on Ukraine are posted on the Green Party Peace Action Committee website home page: <https://gpax.gpus.org>. The webinar is posted at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofuwdeTZ5Ek>. I was not named in Ajamu Baraka's comments but from the context given it was clear who he was talking about.
10. Thanks to a draconian ballot access law passed by the Democrats in 2020, the ballot access petition now requires 45,000 signatures in 42 days. The Green Party petition along with the petitions of seven other parties failed. The result was that 2022 was the first election since 1946, and the only other election since 1891 when state-issued secret ballots were introduced, in which only the Democratic and Republican candidates for Governor appeared on the ballot. The requirement is the most difficult we can find in any state or country. It is three times harder than the petition to run as an independent for Russia's State Duma, which is 15,000 signatures in 45 days. New York's old standard was 15,000 signatures in 42 days. We joke with state legislators that we lobby for fair ballot access reform that we would be happy to get back to the "Putin standard."
11. Joseph R. Biden Jr., "President Biden: What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine," *New York Times*, May 31, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/31/opinion/biden-ukraine-strategy.html>.
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13. Green Party Platform, <https://www.gp.org/platform>.
14. "Sur RT France, Jacques Baud coche toutes les cases du conspirationisme géopolitique," *Conspiracy Watch*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.conspiracywatch.info/sur-rt-france-jacques-baud-coche-toutes-les-cases-du-conspirationisme-geopolitique.html>; Paul Mason, "Empower the people to win the war on disinformation," *New Statesman*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.newstatesman.com/comment/2022/05/the-left-should-lead-the-fight-against-russian-disinformation-not-hinder-it>; Ian Rons, "How Accurate is Jacques Baud's Analysis of the War in Ukraine?" *Daily Sceptic*, May 22, 2022, <https://dailysceptic.org/2022/05/22/how-accurate-is-jacques-bauds-analysis-of-the-war-in-ukraine/>.

own source- and fact-checking. These educational tasks bring up the problem of convincing activists to get off the hamster wheel of endless single-issue mobilizations enough to engage in this educational work. Providing the institutional and cultural framework for this kind of political education is what the Green Party or any left party, should be doing.

That political culture should foster norms that keep debates over differences constructive instead of divisive, and make people with less experience and theoretical backgrounds welcome and comfortable participating.

Green leaders who vilify and call for the expulsion of other Greens with whom they disagree are not being the kind of leaders we need who are concerned for the good of the party as a whole. They are being politically immature at best or worse, being intentionally divisive for factional purposes.

Perhaps the most important debate for the Greens going forward would be over how to institutionalize political education and constructive debate into its political culture. ■

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16. Matthew Gault, "Putin Accuses West of 'Satanism' and Announces Annexations in Terrifying Speech," *Vice*, September 30, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/88qvep/putin-accuses-west-of-satanism-and-announces-annexations-in-terrifying-speech>.
17. <https://twitter.com/ajamubaraka/status/1614365465538600960>.
18. Ajamu Baraka, "The Ukrainian Solidarity Network: The Highest Stage of White Western Social Imperialism," *Black Agenda Report*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.blackagenda.com/ukrainian-solidarity-network-highest-stage-white-western-social-imperialism>.
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21. Steering Committee of United for Peace and Justice, "UFPJ Rejects Future Work with ANSWER," December 12, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20051228223911/http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?id=3162>.
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23. Green Party of the United States, "Our 10 Key Values," https://www.gp.org/ten_key_values.
24. Revolutionary Blackout Network, May 1, 2023, <https://twitter.com/SocialistMMA/status/1653049468923817987>. The Revolutionary Blackout Network is one of the post-Left populist circle of podcasters inspired by Jimmy Dore. In an interview I did with them last year, the host argued that Greens should say the neoliberal Democrats are as bad as or worse than the neofascist GOP, a position Ajamu Baraka has tweeted out many times. I argued that we should be honest with people that there are differences, which most clearly see, while still advocating voting for the Greens. Revolutionary Blackout Network, Third Party Summit, March 19, 2022, <https://www.revolutionary-blackoutnetwork.com/thirdpartysummit>. My interview begins on the 8th hour on the second day. The discussion of how to regard the differences between the Democrats and Republicans begins at 8:19:30.
25. Dan La Botz, "Internationalism, Anti-Imperialism, and the Origins of Campism," *New Politics*, Winter 2022, https://newpol.org/issue_post/internationalism-anti-imperialism-and-the-origins-of-campism/.
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Ukraine Peace Appeal: Towards a More Informed Solidarity

THE FOLLOWING "APPEAL to Pacifist and Peacebuilding Movements Worldwide" has been initiated in May, 2023 by the Ukrainian Community of Mediators and Dialogue Facilitators, and Ukrainian Feminist Network for Freedom and Democracy, and supported by Ukrainian civil society organizations and individual signers. See <https://www.ukrainepeaceappeal2023.info>

1. We, Ukrainian civil society activists, feminists, peacebuilders, mediators, dialogue facilitators, mental health practitioners, human rights defenders and academics, recognise that a growing strategic divergence worldwide has led to certain voices, on the left and right and amongst pacifists to argue for an end to the provision of military support to Ukraine. They also call for an immediate cease-fire between Ukraine and Russia as the strategy for "ending the war." These calls for negotiation with Putin without resistance are in reality calls to surrender our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2. We ask for nothing less than the full respect for internationally agreed humanitarian and human rights law and the UN Charter and the practical means to defend ourselves, our popular sovereignty and our territorial integrity, to resist the Kremlin's expansionist and imperialistic attempts to re-colonize its neighbors. Yes, we need diplomacy, and yes, we need humanitarian aid, but make no mistake, Ukraine needs to continue to be supported with modern weaponry and other military assistance and strict economic and political sanctions on the Kremlin.

3. Stopping weapon deliveries to Ukraine now would not lead to "peace by peaceful means" but offer a pause for Putin's authoritarian regime to renew its aggression against Ukraine. It is a dangerous call for appeasement. We have documented how the Kremlin treats prisoners of war and civilians in the occupied areas. We have seen how it treats its own legitimate political opposition. *This is not peace.* We believe that a strong defence and sustained resistance with steady and informed global solidarity for the Ukrainian people is the best incentive in such a radically asymmetric conflict for a cessation of violence and a negotiated withdrawal of Russian forces.

4. Acceptance of Russia's occupation of

Ukrainian territories and resulting impunity would set a dangerous precedent for other authoritarian regimes wishing to revise international borders. It would also lead to an increase in the proliferation of nuclear weapons globally, as it would signal to others a destructive idea that possession of nuclear weapons is the only guarantee of one's security.

5. We ask that international organizations and movements respect the right of Ukrainians to be at the front and center of determining how to make their peace and how to defend themselves and their rights. We ask for respect for our calls for inclusion and that when it comes to determining our future there should be "nothing about us without us." We object to conferences and marches for "peace in Ukraine" where Ukrainians are neither meaningfully involved nor fairly represented.

6. We find the language on the right and left that Ukrainian soldiers are somehow fighting as proxies for the West deeply offensive. This argument denies us our humanity and diminishes Ukraine's history of hard-won independence and the legitimacy of the peoples' choice of their democratically elected government. This is deceptive and harmful political rhetoric. Russia's invasion and illegal annexation of parts of Ukraine in 2014 was a result of Russian aggression and expansionism and was not a response to any credible threat.

7. We appreciate continued international mediation and support for humanitarian negotiations calling for Russian withdrawal and on the exchange of prisoners of war, return of deported Ukrainian children, eliminating the nuclear threat and for the free transport of grain. These are hugely important, should be sustained and developed further.

8. We ask for your continued international understanding and informed solidarity. This needs to be done with a new imagination and a new approach to working internationally for peace with mutual respect, understanding our complexities, sustaining, and not breaking social connections and networks of the global constituency for justice, peace and democracy.

9. We believe in the face of this resistance, and with your support, over time, we will overturn Russia's unsustainable occupation,

and they will lose this brutal and illegal war of attrition. We hold them to account for what they have done. We know that solidarity comes at a price, and this price is shared across many shoulders. We choose to live in a world where human lives matter, where democracy matters, where international law matters, and we have not given up on fighting for the world we want to see for our children and their children.

10. We thank the international community for standing beside us and for sharing this painful price for peace. ■

Kakhovka, War and Ecocide

THE DESTRUCTION OF the Kakhovka dam in Russian-occupied Ukraine and catastrophic draining of 4.3 cubic miles of water from the reservoir is an ecocidal war crime of world-historic proportions. Whether the total demolition of the dam was intentional, or (by some reports) Russian forces may have wanted "only" a partial breach to flood Ukrainian army positions downstream, the devastation is both immediate and generational.

Villages, rich farmlands and thousands of enterprises are not only inundated but poisoned by oil, land mines and all manner of toxins. The scale of this crime recalls the United States' use of the defoliant Agent Orange on the forests of Vietnam (1961-71), destroying almost 12,000 square miles that became unusable and continuing to poison people five decades later, or the 1972 U.S. bombing of the North Vietnamese dike system, which the Nixon-Kissinger team denied.

We can also cite the U.S. army's "burn pits" during the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Crimes of ecocide are baked into the nature of war, especially today's imperialist warfare where objectives extend to the destruction of the infrastructure and capacity of the "enemy" society.

The global consequences of destroying the Ukrainian farmland that depend on irrigation from the Kakhovka reservoir threaten millions of people's food supplies in the Global South. The shock waves will reverberate for decades. ■

Saito, Marx and the Anthropocene

By Rafael Bernabe

Karl Marx's Ecosocialism

Capitalism, Nature and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy

By Kohei Saito

New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017.

Marx in the Anthropocene

Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism

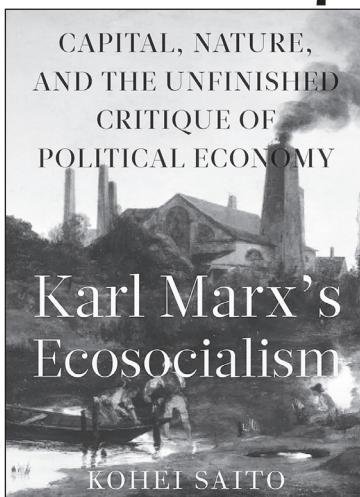
By Kohei Saito

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

El capital en la era del antropoceno

By Kohei Saito, translated by Víctor Illera Kanaya

Barcelona: Sine Qua Non, 2022.



KOHEI SAITO HAS become an important voice in the debates about Marxism and ecosocialism. His books deal with four key issues: the relation between capitalism and nature; between ecology and socialism; the agents and means of attaining ecosocialism (or degrowth communism) and the evolution of Marx's views regarding these issues.

Regarding the first question, Saito argues that capitalism, driven by the incessant pursuit of private profit, is incapable of relating to nature in a responsible and rational manner. It inevitably alters the latter to the point of endangering the survival of many species, including our own.

The climate crisis is the most pressing example of this. But many other instances could be added. In that sense, the Green New Deal, to the extent that it envisages a green capitalism, is insufficient.¹ Nothing short of the abolition of capitalism can hope to adequately address the climate emergency.²

For the earth's temperature to be kept within the required limits without relying on nuclear energy or dubious carbon capture technologies, global energy consumption must be reduced. This will require a reduction in production. Ecosocialism must therefore imply some measure of degrowth.

Saito thus adopts the perspective of degrowth communism. This implies the rejection of some ideas held by at least some socialist currents: the notion of socialist abundance based on an incessant expansion of the productive forces and of a mere adoption for socialist ends of the technologies inherited from capitalism.

Degrowth communism would rather seek a steady-state economy, capable of guaranteeing material well-being for all while respecting natural limits. This will require a radical transformation of existing technologies, which were designed with the capitalist exploitation of labor and despoliation of nature

as imperatives.

Saito's argument is thus directed against the currents he labels "ecomodernists" and left accelerationism. Both share the notion that the problems posed by capitalist technology can and should be resolved by further growth. Thus the expansion of production and consumption can continue through the further transformation of nature according to human needs.

This, argues Saito, is an indication of the unwillingness of some socialists to detach themselves from capitalism's growth imperatives. Unwilling to break with the latter, such currents must embrace dangerous technologies, such as nuclear power, carbon capture or geo-engineering.³

These views come remarkably close to the perspective recently proposed by Michael Löwy and others, which seeks to synthesize the ecosocialist and degrowth approaches.⁴ [See Michael Löwy's review of Saito's *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism* in the July-August 2019 *ATC* —ed.]

For sure, this perspective still demands elaboration. Saito's books pose some of the unsolved problems. For example, translating degrowth into an attractive political slogan or call to action is not easy. Ecosocialist degrowth implies the elimination of some sectors (arms production, advertising, etc.), radical reduction of other branches (individual automobiles, for example) and the growth of some activities (education, health care, adequate housing, electrical and water infrastructure in the poorer areas or countries, etc.)

A process that includes the growth of some sectors and even countries cannot be adequately described as mere degrowth, which, furthermore, most people will tend to associate with austerity and reduced living standards. Will the terms "just degrowth" or "differentiated degrowth" do the trick? It is an open question.

Here the degrowth perspective must steal a page from the Green New Deal, which has the merit of linking the objective of zero emissions with massive investments in job creation and the provision of basic needs. Without this, working people will tend to associate degrowth with the only version of it that they are familiar with, namely capitalist recession or depression and its impoverishing consequences.⁵

Furthermore, Saito's perspective implies a rejection of both capitalism and of the state-centered authoritarian Soviet model. Yet Saito has no explanation of the nature of the latter and of the social forces behind its emergence.⁶ Lacking an adequate explanation of the bureaucratic evolution of the Soviet state, his rejection of it veers toward a wholesale repudiation of state action as means of conducting an ecosocialist transition.

Rafael Bernabe is a Puerto Rican activist, sociologist and historian. He was one of four island-wide representatives of the *Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana* (MVC) who won office in the 2020 elections. He is the author of *Walt Whitman and His Caribbean* and co-author of *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898* with César J. Ayala.

Saito thus embraces the vision of local cooperative and municipal initiatives as an alternative to capitalism and state-centralism.⁷ This is neither a new nor a convincing argument. It is hard to see how Saito's municipal socialism can paralyze the process of capitalist accumulation, nor is it clear how such local initiatives can provide a coherent alternative if the relations between them are structured through the market, in other words, lacking some form of centralized planning. Ecosocialism requires far more than cooperative or municipal initiatives: it demands democratically centralized planning and workplace self-management.⁸

Even if an accumulation of local initiatives were able to threaten capitalist power, it is naïve to think that capital and the central capitalist states would not take action to block and dismantle such a threat. It is not possible to abolish capitalism escaping the notice of those who profit from it.

Thus, the ecosocialist struggle requires a program linking the ecological agenda and other working-class demands with the ultimate objective of replacing the capitalist state and economy with a socialist democracy and a socialized economy. The latter will not come about in the immediate future — but our present struggles must be geared in that direction, otherwise those objectives will be forever postponed.

Avoiding ecological catastrophe requires abolishing capitalism. This conclusion, argues Saito, implies that ecological thinking must come to terms with the work of Marx, whose understanding of capitalism is unsurpassed. But he combines this argument with his own interpretation of the evolution of Marx's thought.

According to Saito between the early or mid-1860s and his death in 1883, Marx moved from an uncritical celebration of capitalist progress, with little or no concern for its ecological consequences, to an ecosocialist perspective, which took those consequences into account while clinging to the perspective of future socialist growth and, finally, to the vision of a degrowth communism, which he was in the process of formulating in his final years.

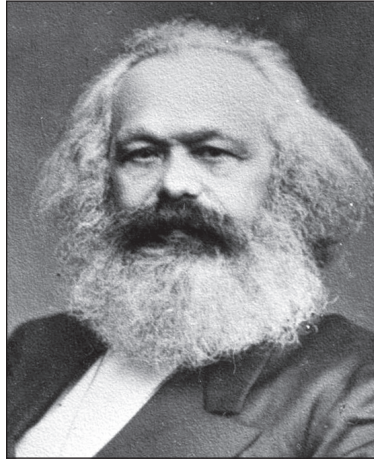
Following the contributions of John Bellamy Foster and others, Saito explores Marx's assimilation, beginning around 1865, of Justus von Liebig's studies of capitalist agriculture. Liebig explained how capitalist agriculture and the polarization of city and countryside extracted nutrients from the soil without returning them, thus undermining its fertility.⁹

Marx included those insights in the first volume of *Capital*, published in 1867. He thus pointed out that

*“Capitalist production... disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man...; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil.”*¹⁰

And he added that capitalist production inevitably undermines “the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the worker.”¹¹

But this was only the beginning of Marx's ecological explorations. Saito's underlines the importance of the work of Carl Fraas in Marx's evolution. Fraas, whose writings Marx began studying in 1868, explained how unsustainable land use led to deforestation which in turn led to climate shifts and eventually resulted in the loss of fertility and desertification. This was the process underlying the decline of once thriving civilizations in the past.¹²



Karl Marx followed the scientific studies of Justus von Liebig and Carl Fraas on unsustainable agriculture.

John Mayal, International Institute of Social History

By the late 1870s, Saito reminds us, Marx was also in contact with some of the exponents of Russian populism. The Populists argued that Russia could skip the miseries of capitalist development, building an alternative to it based on the communal practices of the Russian peasantry.

In a famous 1881 response to an enquiry by Populist Vera Zasulich and in the “Preface” to the 1882 Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx conceded that the peasant commune could be the basis for a transition to socialism. According to Saito, the 1882 “Preface” argued that the precapitalist communes “would be able to attain a communist development before Western Europe.”¹³

For Saito, this conclusion was the result not only of Marx's studies of the Russian commune, but of his ecological explorations, inspired by Liebig and by Fraas. Fraas pointed out that

some societies — characterized by communal and egalitarian structures — had engaged in non-destructive relations with the environment.

Fraas discussed the work of Georg Maurer on the German communal societies. Probably prompted by Fraas, Marx took up Maurer's study to which he attributed an unconscious socialist tendency.¹⁴ Thus, by the time of Zasulich's inquiry Marx was ready to embrace the pre-capitalist peasant commune as the prefiguration and model for a steady-state, degrowth, or no-growth, communism.

Capitalism: Progress and Destruction

According to Saito, this “passionate” embrace of the Populists' perspective was the endpoint of Marx's social theory: His new understanding of the destructive aspect of capitalist development “made Marx doubt whether Western Europe, with its ‘higher’ productive forces, was in fact superior to non-Western and pre-capitalist societies.”¹⁵ According to Saito, “This shift made him thoroughly rethink his previous assumption about the progressive character of capitalism.”¹⁶

Furthermore, argues Saito, “If the consequence of capitalism was not progress, but irreversible destruction of the natural environment and of society, the one-sided view of history as progress was seriously shaken.”¹⁷ Before this, Marx considered that capitalism created the basis for socialism, but he now realized that “Capitalism was not a phase of advance toward communism. Capitalism destroys the ‘natural vitality’ required for human progress.”¹⁸

Thus the 1881 letter to Zasulich was “an authentic theoretical transformation. The definitive distancing from history as progress”¹⁹

According to Saito, Marx in this fashion “abandoned his earlier scheme of historical materialism. It was not an easy task for

him. His worldview was in crisis. In this sense, Marx's intensive research in his last years was a desperate attempt to reconsider and reformulate his materialist conception of history from an entirely new perspective, resulting in a radically different conception of the alternative society."²⁰

At this time Marx also embraced the idea of stationary communal practices as the main form of resistance to capitalism.²¹ In sum, according to Saito: by 1881 Marx had formulated his own version of Russian populism. Thus Marx is relevant for the Anthropocene, but only because in his later years he abandoned much of what is commonly known as Marxism.

There is, to put it bluntly, no basis for these claims.²² The main texts cited by Saito, such as the letter to Zasulich and the 1882 "Preface" to the *Communist Manifesto* are the best refutation of his theses. Rather than "passionate," Marx's endorsement of the Russian Populist perspective is better described as *conditional*.

In both cases, Marx conditioned the possibility of Russia avoiding capitalism and building socialism based on the peasant commune to its *combination with working-class revolution* in capitalist and industrial Europe. At no point does he argue that socialism could do without the technological achievements of the latter, or that the Russian peasant commune could attain communism before or independently of advanced capitalist Europe.

Nor did he abandon the notion that capitalism represented progress over past class societies. In the first draft of his response to Zasulich, Marx wrote: "*Precisely because it is contemporaneous with capitalist production*, the rural commune may appropriate all its positive achievements without undergoing its [terrible] frightful vicissitudes." (our emphasis)

And he added: "On the other hand, the *contemporaneity of Western production*, which dominates the world market, enables Russia to build into the commune *all the positive achievements of the capitalist system*, without having to pass under its harsh tribute." (our emphasis) In his second draft Marx writes: "But at the same time, Russia exists in a modern historical context: it is contemporaneous with a *higher culture*, and it is linked to a world market in which *capitalist production* is predominant." (our emphasis)

He continues: "Thus, in *appropriating the positive results of this mode of production*, it is able to develop and transform the still archaic form of its rural commune, instead of destroying it." (our emphasis).

Similarly, in their 1882 "Preface" to the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argued that "*If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other*, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development." (our emphasis)²³

Saito himself recognizes what Marx called "the positive results" of capitalism. While arguing that Marx abandoned the idea of capitalism as progressive relative to past class societies, he slips in the caveat that degrowth communism does not imply a rejection of the technical achievements of capitalism or a return to the rural past.

Degrowth communism, according to Saito, "does not seek a nostalgic return to the rural world nor is it planning the creation of communes (Marx insists that the Russian communes would do well to take advantage of the positive results of capitalism, such as technological innovation)."²⁴ Nor is it "a plea to abandon urban life or technologies... Furthermore, there are many positive aspects to urban life and technological development."²⁵

Introduced several times in passing, this consideration contradicts Saito's thesis about the late Marx: it recognizes, as Marx did, that capitalism was in some measure a progressive force, whose achievements socialism cannot do without. Contrary to what Saito suggests, there is no need to abandon this conception to recognize that socialism does not imply an infinite development of the productive forces, or that it can simply employ the unaltered technology inherited from capitalism.

The notion that the expansion of production beyond a certain point may become destructive and unsustainable does not mean that its expansion in the past did not constitute progress, a contradictory progress (we will return to this), but progress, nonetheless.

Saito quotes Marx's 1869 explanation of his change of position regarding Irish independence as an example of his conversion to the idea that advanced capitalism did not create the material basis for socialism.²⁶

In a well-known passage cited by Saito, Marx acknowledges that until then he had considered that Irish liberation would be the result of the English revolution, but he now realized that Irish independence was a precondition for the latter.

But Marx's point, as exemplified in his 1870 "Confidential Communication," was that Irish independence was crucial because it could help trigger the English revolution, which was where the conditions for socialist revolution were most developed.²⁷ In no way did this reversal of position imply a rejection of the notion that it is capitalism that creates the material basis for modern socialism.

It is true, as Saito argues, that Marx and Engels valued the egalitarian and communal aspects of "primitive" communism, as exemplified by their assimilation of Henry Morgan's studies of North American Indigenous peoples, which are the central aspect of Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. But again, this did not imply or require a repudiation of the notion of human progress based on the development of productive capacity or of capitalism as progressive in relation to past class societies.

Saito indicates that ecosocialism or degrowth communism do not mean a return to past communal societies. Why? Precisely because they can appropriate the technical achievements of past class societies and, above all, of capitalism, whose progressive dimension cannot be denied.

Saito's argument is built on a false dichotomy between a "Promethean" mature Marx, who uncritically embraced capitalist progress, and a late Marx that fully rejected the notion of history as progress. But Marx always considered class societies and capitalism as *contradictory* formations, *simultaneously*



progressive and regressive, and in the case of capitalism, as an antagonistic form of progress, but progress, nonetheless.

Even at his most celebratory of the achievements of capitalism, Marx indicated the terrible cost of capitalist progress. This included his articles on British imperialism in India and China, which are often presented as mere apologies for capitalist progress. While indicating what he considered its progressive aspects, he also underlined that this was still progress that resembled the “hideous pagan idol who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain.”²⁸

Saito quotes a long passage in which Marx explains how in the past progress has been attained at the expense of the individual and the oppressed classes. Marx comments on Sismondi’s denunciation of progress at the expense of the individual:

“To oppose the welfare of the individual to this end, as Sismondi does, is to assert that the development of the species must be arrested in order to safeguard the development of the individual, so that, for instance, no war may be waged in which at all events some individuals perish. Sismondi is only right as against the economists who conceal or deny this contradiction. Apart from the bareness of such edifying reflections, they reveal a failure to understand the fact that, although at first development of the capacities of the human species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and whole human classes, in the end it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual...”²⁹

Saito comments: “Increase the productive forces, even if individuals are sacrificed! Market and capitalism all over the world for human emancipation! It is as if Marx were an ideologue of neoliberal globalization.”³⁰ But in this passage Marx is not celebrating what he describes. He is merely registering the fact that such is the contradictory and antagonistic form that human evolution has taken once the increase in productivity permitted the differentiation between dominant and dominated classes, as well as mental and manual labor.

All the advances in science, art and technology were premised on the fact that most people were condemned to unending toil and exploitation. Progress was based on the sacrifice of individuals and whole classes. As Walter Benjamin would put it later, “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”³¹

But Marx added that the unprecedented development of the productive forces brought about by capitalism, once socialized, would now permit the flowering of all individuals and not only of a small minority.

Some of Saito’s readings of other texts by Marx are equally off the mark. Saito quotes the following passage from the *Grundrisse*:

“In fact, however, when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity’s own nature? The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick? Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality?”

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Saito argues that Marx and Engels valued the egalitarian and communal aspects of primitive communism, but this does not imply a repudiation of capitalism as progressive in relation to past class societies.

Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?”

According to Saito here Marx is criticizing how capitalism reduces wealth to a “predetermined yardstick,” to a certain amount of value.³² In fact, in this passage Marx is describing how capitalism develops the productive forces, and human capacities, without regard to any past or inherited limitations. This was its progressive aspect. He also argued that capitalism did this through the subjection of humanity to the impersonal despotism of the capitalist market.

Marx explained that this contradiction, this double aspect of capitalism, generated both apologies and celebrations of capitalist progress, on the one hand, and romantic yearnings for a precapitalist past, on the other. He rejected both, arguing that we should seek a socialist future, enabled by the progressive aspects of capitalist development:

“It is as ridiculous to yearn for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill. The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond this antithesis between itself and this romantic viewpoint, and therefore the latter will accompany it as legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end.”³³

An orientation beyond a romantic yearning for the past and a celebration of the capitalism present *could* include a recuperation of some aspects of past communal societies, an idea that Engels formulated more than once.

Among other texts, in the *Anti-Dühring* he captured this dialectic well while discussing Rousseau’s notion of the passage from an initial egalitarian society (Rousseau’s state of nature) to an unequal civilization as *antagonistic* progress, as *both* progressive and regressive, and the possibility of a future egalitarian society that would recuperate the egalitarian past while appropriating the achievements of civilization.³⁴

Conclusion: Tasks in the Anthropocene

To summarize: Saito argues that in his later years Marx devoted increasing attention to non-Western societies, pre-capitalist cultures and the destructive ecological impact of capitalist civilization.

He concluded that not all societies had followed the same historical path as West Europe; that some societies could, under certain circumstances, avoid capitalism in their route to socialism or communism; and that the environmental costs of capitalism were far greater than he was initially aware. All

these ideas have been explored in the past by several authors, including Shanin, Foster, and Anderson.³⁵

In his first book Saito makes an important contribution in this area, particularly regarding the impact of the work of Carl Fraas and Georg Maurer on Marx's evolution. But it is wrong to argue that this implied a rejection of his analysis of capitalism, of the notion of (contradictory) human progress through the development of its productive forces, or of capitalism as a progress over past class societies, which creates the material basis for socialism.

There is no question that Marx's late ecological and ethnological studies enriched his conception of this historical dialectic, but this did not imply its crisis or require its repudiation.

Saito argues that socialism cannot imply an infinite development of the productive forces; that beyond a certain point degrowth may be required. But these arguments do not require a repudiation of what came to be known as historical materialism. Marx's dialectical concept of human progress as an antagonistic and contradictory process can accommodate them without renouncing any of its fundamental tenets.

There are passages in which Saito presents Marx's perspective accurately. He thus argues that "While Marx continued to believe that technological development under capitalism provides the necessary material conditions for a leap to socialism, his dialectical method came to ... emphasize the negative and destructive side of new technologies."³⁶

Elsewhere he points out that "Marx without doubt recognizes the positive side of modern technology and natural sciences, which prepares the material conditions for the establishment of the 'realm of freedom' by enabling humans to produce various products in a shorter time."³⁷

Unfortunately, these balanced formulations are abandoned for the untenable notion that the growing understanding of the "negative and destructive side of new technologies" led Marx to abandon both the idea that "technological development under capitalism provides the necessary material conditions for ... socialism" and, more generally, his "earlier scheme of historical materialism."

It is reasonable to argue that "Once the historical vocation of capitalism in increasing productive forces has been realized, the further development of human freedom and talents demands a transition to another stage of human history."³⁸ But this implies recognizing that Marx's broadened ecological awareness did not require repudiating his conception of "the historical vocation of capitalism in increasing productive forces."

Nor did Marx abandon the notion of the working class as the key social force capable of overturning capitalism and of political and state action and power as an indispensable lever of social transformation. He did not become a proponent of local, cooperative, or municipal socialism.

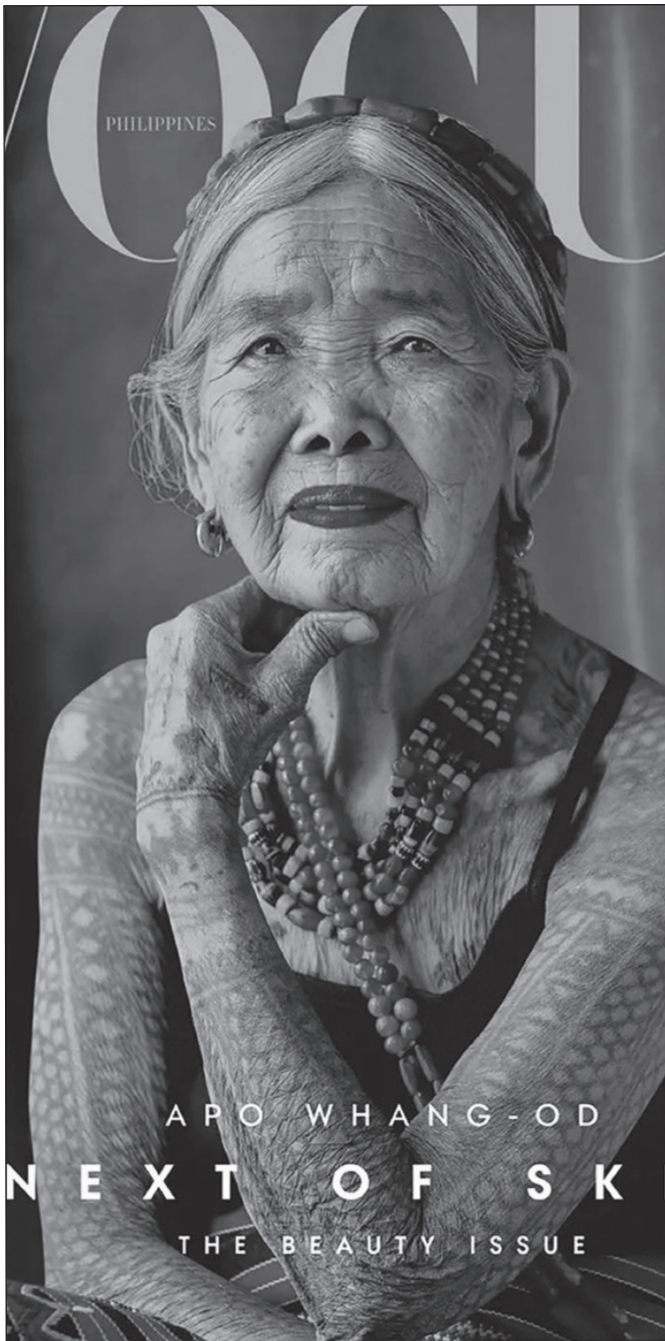
As Marx did regarding the Russian commune, today Marxists should recognize the revolutionary and anti-capitalist potential of the struggles of Indigenous peoples and the need to link them to working-class struggles, so that "they can complement each other." But Marx did not *replace* the latter for the former and/or for cooperative initiatives, and neither should we.

How to make the ecological agenda part of the labor movement and how to organize, mobilize and inspire the latter toward the exercise of political power (which, of course, can include local and municipal initiatives) remains the fundamental

task of revolutionary Marxists in the Anthropocene. ■

Notes

1. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 80. On "green capitalism" see Daniel Tanuro, *Green Capitalism: Why it Can't Work* (London: Merlin Press, 2013).
2. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 96-99. This is the main point of *El capital en la era del antropoceno*.
3. See "Monism and the Non-identity of Nature" in *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 103-135.
4. Michael Löwy, Bengi Arkubulut, Sabrina Fernandes, Giorgos Kallis. "For an Ecosocialist Degrowth," *Monthly Review*, 73:11, April 2022. <https://monthlyreview.org/2022/04/01/for-an-ecosocialist-degrowth/>
5. For comments on the Green New Deal see "Descarbonización y descolonización," *momento crítico*, 23 april 2023. <https://www.momentocritico.org/post/descarbonización-y-descolonización-el-green-new-deal-y-puerto-rico-i>
6. The basis for a Marxist critique was elaborated by Leon Trotsky through many contributions including *The Revolution Betrayed*. See also Ernest Mandel, *Power and Money. A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy* (London: Verso, 1992). For lively defense see the republished debate Ernest Mandel and Chris Harman, *Marxists against Stalinism* (London-Amsterdam: Resistance Books-IRE, 2022).
7. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 275-304.
8. "Ecosocialism and Democratic Planning" in Michael Löwy, *Ecosocialism. A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2015).
9. "Liebig and Capital" in *Marx's Ecosocialism*, 141-175.
10. Marx's Ecosocialism, 171. Quotes are from *Capital*, Vol. I, "Large-Scale Industry and Agriculture."
11. *Marx's Ecosocialism*, 202.
12. "Marx's Ecology after 1868" in *Marx's Ecosocialism*, 217-255.
13. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 146-147.
14. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 151-155.
15. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 204.
16. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 177.
17. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 155.
18. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 155.
19. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 160. Saito argues that "In his later years, Marx abandoned the vision of history as progress," *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 160.
20. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 173.
21. He now concluded that "the stationary nature of communal societies will form (conformará) the resistance against colonial domination and will, in the future, permit the overthrow of capitalism and the instauration of communism" *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 162.
22. Lack of space prevents us from commenting on Saito's arguments regarding other authors such as Engels, Luxemburg, and Lukacs.
23. The same argument can be found in a passage from *Capital* cited by Saito to demonstrate Marx's appreciation of the merits of pre-capitalist communal forms. Marx wrote that "capitalist production begets... its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish private property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labor itself." (our emphasis). A revised version reads: "It is the negation of the negation. This re-establishes individual property, but on the basis of the acquisitions of the capitalist era, i.e., on co-operation of free workers and their possession in common of the land and of the means of production produced by labor." (our emphasis). *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 227.
24. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 163.
25. *El capital en la era del antropoceno*, 276. Also *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 194.
26. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 185.
27. "England alone can serve as the lever or a serious economic revolution. It is the only country where there are no longer any peasants and where landed property is concentrated in a few hands... where the capitalist form — that is, labor combined on a large scale under capitalist entrepreneurs — has taken over practically the whole of production... where the great majority of the population consists of wage laborers... where the class struggle and organization of the working class by the trade unions have attained a certain degree of maturity and universality... where, thanks to its domination of the world market, ever revolution in economic relationships must directly affect the whole world." "Confidential Communication" (1870).
28. "The Future Results of British Rule in India" (1853).
29. *Economic Manuscripts 1861-63*, quoted in *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 184. This passage is part of the texts published by Kautsky as *Theories of Surplus Value* between 1905 and 1910.
30. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 184.
31. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (1940).
32. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 222.
33. We have examined this aspect of Marx's work in *Walt Whitman and his Caribbean Interlocutors* (José Martí, C.L.R. James and Pedro Mir) (Chicago: Haymarket, 2022).
34. Eugen Dühring's *Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)*, Chapter XIII. "Dialectics. Negation of the Negation."
35. Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road. Marx and the "Peripheries of Capitalism"* (New York: Monthly Review, 1983); John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology. Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000) and his subsequent works; Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins. On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
36. *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 138.
37. *Marx's Ecosocialism*, 214.
38. *Marx's Ecosocialism*, 136.



Facebook "Feminist News"

Igorot Village Revisited: Commodification and Colonialism By Delia D. Aguilar

MY FIRST REACTION when I saw the side-by-side photos of 106-year-old Igorot tattoo artist Apo Whang-od and that of U.S. business mogul and household name Martha Stewart: is this a joke?

If so, it wasn't funny to me. No doubt it didn't matter a bit to Martha Stewart, accustomed to and thriving, in fact, on commodification.

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But Whang-od's picture — ruby-red lips, chin resting on thumb, affecting a model's pose, likely contrived by her *Vogue* magazine handlers to justify the caption "Next of Skin, The Beauty issue" — promptly brought to mind the utterly shameless display and exoticification of her forebears in the now infamous 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition or St. Louis World Fair.

Pronounced by the properly enlightened today as "human zoos," the purpose of the exhibit at the time was to demonstrate the superiority of white U.S. civilization against

the backwardness of G-stringed natives shipped in from what was then the faraway "Philippine Islands."

This unfortunate juxtaposition of glamorized pictures was posted in Facebook's "Feminist News," subheaded "Smashing the Patriarchy" and counting 1.8 million followers. Obviously its youthful feminist subscribers had no knowledge of Igorots, much less their history of struggle, nor heard about the horrid World's Fair exhibit — only, perhaps, what was provided in the article in *Vogue* where Whang-od was the cover icon.

Detached from History

In her preface to the Facebook discussion, the author did state that Whang-od was a tattoo artist, but it seems that was immaterial to her readers.

Detached from history and geography, what was of interest to its feminist readers were the competing images of the two, both of “a certain age.” Here Whang-od at 106 emerges the undeniable winner; after all, *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit edition cover Martha Stewart is only 81. Plus maybe, as some FB contributors offered, the influencer whom everyone recognizes has gotten some help — that is, aside from “organic home-grown farm-to-table eating” — to keep that skin taut and glowing.

Moreover, while “anti-aging cannot be a beauty standard,” apparently “authenticity” is. What better evidence of this than the wisdom projected by every “stunning wrinkle and frown line” of the centenarian? Overall, the call and direction of the commentary was to reject ageist stereotypes.

And so it was that in this contest of physical attributes — dare we call it senior pulchritude? — the Igorot artist ran off with the gold. This was the theme harped upon by practically all the FB responses, 774+ of them, each one in some way praising Whang-od’s “amazing beauty” and almost entirely ignoring poor Martha Stewart.

Not only was *Vogue* lauded for its “great choice” because, as someone gushed, “she’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen,” with another suggesting that “Asian food must have contributed to her stunning appearance.” And how about this for its unknowing nod toward orientalism: “I don’t like feminists, but this is a great post.”

The magic of social media succeeded in projecting Whang-od and Martha Stewart as equals to be put on stage and compared, an act that contravened their actual worlds, in reality exceedingly distinct and separate in every possible way.

Colonial Elephant in the Room

Seeking relief and wishing to push out of mind disturbing images of Igorot Village redux, I turned to a Filipino audience and re-posted the Feminist News item with the photos on my page.

I pre-empted vapid comments such as the “debunking of youthful beauty standards” by stating outright that I thought the photos’ side-by-side positioning was utterly ridiculous, out of whack, and invited parody. Still, someone wrote that she “identified more with the lovely tattooed woman than the cosmopolitan lady,” and another remarked that Whang-od could well be Martha Stewart’s mother.

To my great delight economist Agnes Qui-sumbing summed up the main issue in one simple succinct statement: “The commentary invites us to reject ageist stereotypes, but the

elephant in the room is colonialism,” adding that “we wear different identities at once, not all of them visible.”

What she references in the latter is identity politics or the politics of representation that I will pick up on later. But the elephant in the room, I strongly agree, has to be addressed head-on for any further discussion to make sense.

Had colonization and national subjugation been used as the larger narrative or frame within which to situate the story of Whang-od, the facile comparison with Martha Stewart would have been both inept and egregiously condescending. In its absence, the focus of attention is on the two individuals as though they stand by themselves removed from their respective societies. Needless to say, this individualist view is how we are all encouraged to see the world.

The individual-centered approach is what my friend and colleague, educator May Penuela, was to critique when she turned to the *Vogue* article written by Audrey Carpio to see how Whang-od was portrayed.

She is a fashionista! Hewing close to the style magazine’s beauty theme (a vast departure from the politicized teen *Vogue*), the Igorot elder is described as “dressed in her usual accidental hipster grandma style, wearing a puffy bomber over track pants and a paisley bandana around her forehead.”

May observes the way the author reaffirms this hipster act in yet another astonishing description: “I had found Whang-od, gangster as ever, hanging out by a giant golden statue of herself, under whose outstretched arms and bare breasts I received my three dots.”

Here the appeal of Whang-od becomes undisguised. She is unabashedly the indigenous exotic, half-naked, just like her dog-eating, head-hunting forebears housed in the “villages” built for them in St. Louis, with the notable exception that now she’s attired urban gangsta-style. Can our tribal woman be any more postmodern?

May brilliantly suggests, reflecting on the *Vogue* article:

“If Architectural Digest did a profile comparison of both women in front of their homes and land, perhaps the off-kilter comparison would be too obvious. And some feminists would not consider them women’s issues. I don’t recall any discussion of Igorot land struggles when Whang-od’s cover story went viral. The Vogue story itself focused on the Kalinga tattoo tradition and struggle for representation, using American slang to make Whang-od more appealing to a hip and trendy reading audience.”

The Enduring Igorot Struggle

It’s hard to argue with May here, speaking of so much in so little space. White feminists could be forgiven for their ignorance about the Igorots who resisted 350 years of Spanish

colonization, staged the most valiant attack against the Japanese in World War II, and today mostly live in poverty as they continue the centuries-long struggle of holding onto their mineral-rich land eternally threatened by resource-grabbing corporations.

As May guesses, mention of such facts might well be straying away from the usual feminist concerns.

The politics of representation, what Agnes cites as “the many identities we wear, not all of them visible,” also becomes a problem and a distraction, even in its widely endorsed formula of “intersectionality.”

In the interplay of multiple forms of domination, all conditions of oppression become equally significant, each one vying for attention in a competitive capitalist marketplace. Moreover, so long as capitalism’s existence is deemed permanent, no amount of tweaking individual identities becomes consequential.

While the *Vogue* writer may not necessarily be fully tuned in to the Igorots’ enduring history of struggle, she is certainly aware of the tourist industry’s crass commercialization of the old woman’s art, and worse, her person. Citing a case where the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples had to be called upon to intervene, she takes a stand against cultural appropriation, summoning “decolonizing aesthetics” and “control of our bodies,” whatever these phrases may mean under current conditions.

Apo Whang-od and her art deserve to be honored. It is a shame that she is once again put on display just as her precursors were, as she grinds out a living and preserves her people’s art. Ironically, it is precisely the centuries-long honorable and valiant stand of the Igorots — their fierce independence and unwillingness to succumb to foreign subjugation — that up to now serve as the beacon and inspiration for the rest of us Filipinos. ■

FAR RIGHT U.S. LEGISLATORS continue to pass laws that violate the bodies of pregnant people. Abortion is completely banned in 13 states (Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia). Georgia, Florida and Ohio passed six-week bans although litigation in Ohio and Florida prevented the laws from going into effect.

Trigger laws banning abortions in Wisconsin and Wyoming are facing legal challenges. Nebraska and North Carolina have 12-week bans, Arizona at 15 weeks and Utah at 18 weeks.

Meanwhile a federal judge ordered the FDA to reverse the availability of mifepristone, used in medication abortions. While that case will probably end up at the U.S. Supreme Court, four states have restricted medication abortions. ■

REVIEW

Trauma, Psychiatry & War on Terror By Janice Haaken

Combat Trauma:

Imaginations of War and Citizenship
in Post-9/11 America

By Nadia Abu El-Haj

Verso Books, 2022, 352 pages, \$29.95 paperback.

IN THIS INSIGHTFUL and timely new book, anthropologist Nadia Abu El-Haj takes up a genre of war stories that gathered notable currency in the 21st century. She traces the expanding role of psychiatrists and psychologists in the cultural production of what she terms the combat-trauma imaginary.

Public concerns over the problems of returning soldiers are as old as warfare itself. But how those problems are understood, El-Haj observes, is quite dynamic. The dead haunt the living in images of returning body bags, military cemeteries with rolling hills of white crosses and granite memorial walls. But emotionally damaged survivors bring their war stories home in ways that often destabilize official accounts.

Nadia Abu El-Haj is Ann Whitney Olin Professor in the Departments of Anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University. Her previous books, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning* and *The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology*, explore controversial subjects in the production of ideology. (*Facts on the Ground* provoked a campaign by a rightwing American settler in the West Bank who unsuccessfully demanded that Barnard fire Abu El-Haj.)

In the history recounted in *Combat Trauma*, psychiatry is not cast as simply an agent of social control — a standard line of left critique. Rather, El-Haj follows shifts in the role of psychiatry in contemporary military interventions, homing in on the deployment of trauma diagnoses in two decades of the post-9/11 War on Terror.

The Vietnam War brought onto the public stage a new cast of suffering veterans and war-related afflictions. The disciplines of psychology and psychiatry flourished historically through U.S. warfare, from testing and treating soldiers unable or unwilling to fight to psychiatric care for disabled veterans housed in the sprawling mental asylums created for

the war-wounded.

The figure of the shell-shocked soldier and the mentally haunted veteran with the 1000-yard stare loom large in the American iconography of warfare. But the antiwar movement during the Vietnam War era profoundly changed the iconic portraits of mentally afflicted veterans. Activists insisted that war produces pervasive and persistent forms of madness. Even psychotic symptoms in war fighters could be described as a “normal response to an abnormal situation.”

Further, the psychiatric casualties of warfare, previously shuttered away in asylums, had a great deal to say about the irrationalities of war. In the decades that followed official recognition of PTSD in 1980, the political story of this valorized diagnosis became far more complicated. *Combat Trauma* traces this complex history of military-related trauma disorders as political battles raged during the protracted “War on Terror.”

Crises and Division

The book is structured through three sections that cover periods of crisis and what El-Haj terms the civil/military divide.

Section I looks at the Vietnam War era and alliances between veterans and radical psychiatrists and psychologists. While mental health professionals have been part of military war planning since the First World War and were vital to the Second World War mobilization, the social movements of the 1960s and 70s set the stage for rebellions in the psychiatric professions. El-Haj traces this history of radical psychiatry and the emergence of the post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosis as a political intervention.

Section II centers on the era that begins with 9/11, and takes up the profusion in trauma stories that accompanied the decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The post-9/11 traumatized veterans in these emergent accounts are shorn of the critical political commentary, guilt and outrage that were touchstone motifs of troubled veterans in the Vietnam-era.

In Section III, El-Haj gathers up trends in the post-9/11 period that bring pastors, chaplains and Christian concepts of redemption into the psychology of military-related trauma. This section looks closely at the emergence of the concept of moral injury in the PTSD field — a condition thought to be produced by seeing or participating in situations that violate the service member’s

conscience in some way. The concept, having been embraced by many clinicians, spawned a burgeoning field of trauma sub-specialists.

The Vietnam War era sets the stage for the historical trajectory outlined in the book — an era when veterans worked with mental health professionals to campaign for the entry of PTSD into the DSM, the official diagnostic manual in the mental health field. The guilt, anger and outrage coursing through the accounts of Vietnam War veterans joined a chorus of civil rights, student protests, feminists and peace groups in shaping public discourse on war and U.S. militarism.

As the trauma model took hold in the mental health field over subsequent decades, El-Haj shows how psychiatric portrayals of returning soldiers were increasingly depoliticized. She explains how the traumatized combatant emerges as a kind of collective Rorschach card upon which diffuse public anxieties could be projected.

Even as traumatized veterans were granted increased public recognition, they had less and less to say about the wars themselves. Mental health professionals played leading roles as public interlocutors and translators of the hidden meanings of military-related trauma symptoms.

In *Psychiatry, Politics and PTSD: Breaking Down* (2021), I take up this same historical terrain and similarly look at how the diagnosis of PTSD and the trauma model acquired such wide currency in framing the consequences of warfare.

Like El-Haj, I argue that this diagnosis lost its progressive edge as it was increasingly incorporated into official psychiatric manuals and treatments, including in U.S. military war planning and VA treatment protocols. And I agree with El-Haj that the key question is not so much whether PTSD is a valid diagnosis or how many soldiers suffer from this condition, but rather how it acquired such wide currency in public discourse.

The Victim/Hero Imaginary

Combat Trauma shows how the concept of military-related mental trauma mediates public anxieties over a protracted and open-ended war. El-Haj brings an interdisciplinary lens to her study of the figure of the traumatized soldier and the role of psychiatry in what cultural critic John Berger terms ways of seeing. In the picture drawn by El-Haj, psychiatry intervenes to focus on that figure of soldier as trauma victim/hero separate from the background conduct of war.

Janice Haaken is professor emerita of psychology at Portland State University. She is a documentary filmmaker and the author of several books, including *Psychiatry, Politics and PTSD: Breaking Down* (2020).

As an anthropology scholar, El-Haj is attuned to cultural dynamics that shape war stories. Anthropology has produced a rich literature on social boundaries between groups — on how those boundaries are formed and maintained. An important contribution of *Combat Trauma* lies in its astute analysis of what she frames as the combatant/non-combatant imaginary.

As the demographic distance between civilians and service members widened after the Vietnam War, public identification with war fighters took increasingly imaginary forms. Fewer people know actual service members and thus rely on popular culture and the media for authoritative accounts, causing the trauma stories of veterans that emerge and circulate in popular culture to be increasingly estranged from the actual experiences of war fighters.

In this sense, El-Haj invokes the idea of the imaginary to literally describe a shift from reality to fantasy. This same widening social distance creates a gap where veterans' stories can be taken up to advance a range of ideological interests.

As El-Haj explains, veterans occupy a complex place in the American political imaginary. Those who have served in the military carry their own documented grievances and harms suffered, many extending for decades into postwar periods.

Stories of veterans abandoned or betrayed by the same government that sent them to fight and die dominate antiwar literature. Veterans are able to make claims on the state because of their military service — claims from which other groups are politically barred. Indeed, Congress summoned bipartisan support for veterans' healthcare and disability benefits during the rise of neoliberal policies of the late 20th century when it slashed spending on social welfare and other programs for poor and marginalized groups.

El-Haj describes the special claims and moral authority granted to veterans as "truth-sayers." But the truths spoken by veterans echo political changes on the home front. Deployed by veterans against the Vietnam war, accounts of mentally tormented fighters told a larger tale of the irrationality and the immorality of the war itself.

In the post 9/11 era, accounts of the traumatized soldier were increasingly shed of those critical currents.

The moral authority of returning veterans had always rested on their presumed direct knowledge of battlefield brutalities. But trauma therapists increasingly guided how that knowledge was translated. A key principle of the trauma model centered on the dissociated or fragmented character of traumatic memories and how recovery depended on unconditional acceptance of the veteran as victim as well as perpetrator.

El-Haj's shows how this collapsing of victim and perpetrator in the trauma model guided various "listening" campaigns. In calling on the public to adopt an uncritical stance toward veterans, the actual conduct of service members and the wars themselves receded from the picture.

In her tracing of psychiatric framing of military trauma, El-Haj notes how the clinical fixation on soldiers' psyches served to politically marginalize foreign victims of U.S. military interventions. Her portrayals of U.S. war fighters are less nuanced than they might be, however, even as she effectively argues that public calls for "listening and caring for our veterans" had the effect of silencing critics of military operations.

The PTSD diagnosis and clinical protocols based on the trauma model also narrowed the scripts available to veterans in framing their own war stories. The broader theater of war and troubles with the military command that dominated the stories of Vietnam War era were displaced by a more narrowly drawn set of PTSD scripts that relied on identifying a "index trauma" — a discrete event that produced the symptoms.

Moral Injury and "Hidden Wounds"

One of the many contributions of the book is in the author's analysis of how the concept of moral injury gained currency in the mental health field in the decades after 9/11. In my own experience of presenting critiques of the PTSD diagnoses at conferences, clinicians routinely turn to the concept of moral injury in what they see as a corrective to the limitations of the PTSD diagnosis.

Whereas PTSD is bound to a psycho-physiological model, the diagnostic lens of moral injury appears to open up a more humanistic and expansive way of understanding the suffering of veterans. Proponents claim that it invites recognition of deeper forms of the "hidden wounds of war" — an idiom popularized by the PTSD movement.

I argue that this category is another version of the impact model — a modern version of the shell shock story.

While it may direct attention to the existential crisis of war fighters, moral injury remains bound to a narrowly drawn schema of battlefield impacts. Rather than understanding disturbing emotions as indicators of an awakening critical consciousness, providers treating the condition frame symptoms as a form of traumatic injury.

El-Haj makes the important social observation that therapeutic discourse on moral injury has advanced a widening array of spiritual advisors, preachers, chaplains and healers whose professed expertise came to dominate the ways that the public is asked to listen to veterans.

El-Haj takes up the shifting demographics

of military personnel as central to unpacking the civil/military divide as well. She challenges the widely held view that the poor are most vulnerable to military recruiters, arguing instead that the military draws most deeply on sectors of the middle class and particularly segments of the middle class in rural conservative communities.

The transition from the draft during the Vietnam War to the all-volunteer military of the post-Vietnam era figures into this emerging divide between civilians and military service members. Extensive commentaries are available to explain the widening gap between service members and the general U.S. population. El-Haj notes that the gap is not evenly distributed across social classes and regions, however.

She describes close alliances between those who serve in the military and the police — social alliances that create their own means of bridging the civil/military divide.

Civilian and Combatant

El-Haj offers rich insights on the question of how the position of civilian is constituted in relation to the combatant. She shows how this discursive companion to the combatant operates in American culture as a floating signifier without a stable signified.

As the position of the civilian/non-combatant came to be cast primarily as a duty to listen and validate veterans, El-Haj explains how this position served to maintain public moral innocence in relation to the long wars.

In the various psychodramas described, where veterans present dramatic readings, the civilian is inhibited from questioning veterans about the conduct of warfare. Their duty as civilians is to care and to listen.

Such framing of moral obligations draws on principles that animate the trauma therapy field: listeners are to adopt a position of non-judgmental receptivity to accounts of emotional suffering.

The context of those accounts, or our obligations to act on what is heard, are peripheral or may even risk re-traumatizing the trauma victim. Listening to veterans emerges in itself as an act of moral courage.

In her analysis of the role of psychiatry in making war stories comfortable for a worried public, Nadia Abu El-Haj seeks to unsettle those accounts. She offers through this thoughtful book a bracing awakening to the psychiatric soporifics offered by the armies of clinicians deployed to attend to the hidden wounds of war.

Combat Trauma thus shows the costs of some of these forms of expertise that sooth jagged nerves, even as we sleepwalk into another era of U.S. imperial interventions. The Epilogue in this important work takes up that very present horizon of U.S. militarism and is itself very much worth the read. ■

REVIEW

Hidden History of the New Cold War By Peter Solenberger

The New Cold War:

The United States, Russia, and China from Kosovo to Ukraine

by Gilbert Achcar

Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2023, 350 pages, \$22.95 paperback.

IN *THE NEW Cold War*, Gilbert Achcar describes how the United States abused its “unipolar moment” after the collapse of the Soviet Union to try to ensure that Russia and China would never be able to challenge it. The attempt failed, and the result is the current geopolitical conflict. The alternative that Achcar proposes is a return to the principles of the United Nations and its 1945 Charter.

Achcar doesn't excuse the Russian and Chinese governments for their conduct, domestically or internationally. But he sees the U.S. government as continuing to push global relations in the worst possible direction, toward militarism and war, when the world should be focused on fighting climate change, pandemics, economic crises, and their socioeconomic consequences.

Achcar's empirical evidence is irrefutable. His analysis can be debated. His solution may seem utopian. But getting beyond the “U.S.-NATO good, Russia-China bad” narrative in the Western media is essential for a real understanding of the New Cold War and possible ways out.

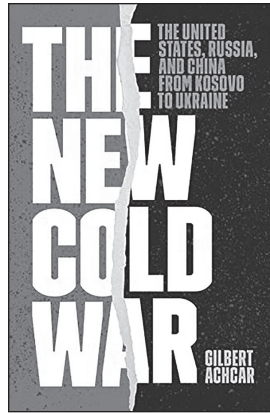
For this reviewer, Achcar's method recalls I.F. Stone's work exposing U.S. responsibility for initiating and escalating the first Cold War. In 1952, Stone published *The Hidden History of the Korean War, 1950-51*.

Refuting the Truman administration's claim that “the Communists” were solely responsible for starting the war, Stone exposed the real, two-sided escalation: U.S.-backed raids by South Korean commandos across the 38th parallel into North Korea provoked counterstrikes, and the conflict spiraled into war.

Stone's method was a close reading and analysis of published accounts, making his revelations hard to refute. He used the same method to deconstruct the Johnson administration's account of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, the pretext for direct U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War.

Gilbert Achcar, of Lebanese and French background, is a veteran activist and author of *The Clash of Barbarisms: The Making of the*

Peter Solenberger is a member of Solidarity in northern Michigan.



can Studies of the University of London.

Genesis of the New Cold War

The Introduction, “On Cold Wars and the New Cold War,” explores the history of the term Cold War and the origins of what Marxists labeled a Permanent War Economy. It is interesting and worth reading in the book, but we'll bypass it here for reasons of space.

Part I, “Genesis of the New Cold War,” consists of the two chapters that made up Achcar's 1999 book *La Nouvelle Guerre froide: le monde après le Kosovo* (*The New Cold War: The World after Kosovo*).

Chapter One, “The Strategic Triad: The United States, Russia and China,” was written in 1997 and first published in English in 1998. As the article explains, U.S. military spending peaked in 1985, as the Reagan administration, continuing the policy of the Carter administration after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, escalated the U.S. arms race with the Soviet Union. The pace was unsustainable and, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, unnecessary.

The Bush and Clinton administrations promised a “peace dividend” from the end of the Cold War. Yet they maintained real spending at Cold War levels. For 1997-2000, the Clinton administration maintained it at 85 percent of the average annual spending during the 1948-1991 period. The article asks two obvious questions: Why is the “peace dividend” so meager? Who is the real enemy?

It deduces that the “the implicit scenario to which U.S. defense expenditure really conforms, but which cannot be made too explicit for political, strategic and tactical reasons, is that of two simultaneous wars against Russia and China.” (76) The U.S. government's declared policy was

New World Disorder (2002, 2006), *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (2010), *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (2013), *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising* (2016), and other books and articles.

He is currently a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London.

“engagement” with Russia and China. Its undeclared policy was containment.

Rasputin Plays Chess

Chapter Two, “Rasputin Plays Chess: How the World Stumbled into a New Cold War” was written in 1999 and first published in English in 2000.

Relations among the triad had deteriorated. NATO had just admitted Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, and adopted guidelines for bringing in more members. The United States and NATO had rejected Russian mediation, and bombed Serbia to force it to accept Kosovo's becoming a NATO protectorate. Russia and China, iced out by Washington and its allies, were deepening their strategic and military cooperation.

After noting the deterioration in relations, Achcar cites two books that argued the positions of the “hawks” and the “doves” in the Clinton administration.

Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (Achcar's Rasputin) wrote a 1997 book, *The Grand Chessboard*, arguing the “hawk” position. Brzezinski was an architect of the Carter-Reagan strategy of employing Islamist fundamentalists, including Osama bin Laden, in 1980s Afghanistan to weaken the Soviet Union.

Brzezinski listed “the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy” as: “to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.”

Former Defense Secretary William Perry and Assistant Defense Secretary Ashton Carter coauthored a 1999 book *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America*, arguing the “dove” position. The U.S. should have offered a Marshall Plan to revive Russia and the former Soviet space. The European Union should have embraced the Eastern European countries. NATO should have collaborated with Russia in the framework of the Partners for Peace.

The debate came to a head over Kosovo. Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic abolished Kosovo's autonomous status within Serbia, and in summer 1998 the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) launched a large-scale offensive. The Serbian government answered with a counter-offensive, accompanied by genocidal killing and displacement of Kosovo Albanians.

Washington threatened military interven-

tion. Alexander Vershbow, the U.S. ambassador to NATO, proposed, instead, a plan to impose a UN-approved political settlement with the cooperation of Russia. The plan would have created an international protectorate in Kosovo, policed by an international military presence.

Achcar laments: “The Kosovo war marked a decisive turning point ... towards a new era of tension and confrontation between two great international coalitions: a new Cold War... The transition from one to the other will have lasted less than ten years, and this wonderful opportunity to fashion for the twenty-first century a world more peaceful than that of the tragic century now ending will have been lost...” (120)

New Cold War Gets Quite Hot

Part II, “How the New Cold War Got Quite Hot,” begins with a section called “Transition: Moves and Countermoves on the Grand Chessboard,” which describes the reciprocal moves during the first years of the 21st century: The Bush II administration’s invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, stationing troops in Central Asia, scrapping the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and deploying missile systems on the periphery of Russia and China, the expansion of NATO by 2004 to include Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Russia carried out invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 to prevent NATO from incorporating them.

On December 17, 2021, the Russian government proposed that the US, NATO and Russia reaffirm the terms of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997:

“The Parties reaffirm that they do not consider each other as adversaries ... [They] shall not deploy military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other States in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997 ... [They] commit themselves to refrain from any further enlargement of NATO, including the accession of Ukraine as well as other States.”

Simultaneously, the Russian government massed troops on the Ukrainian border. By December, it had more than 100,000 in place; by February, 175,000.

Achcar argues:

“[T]he Russian stance was no ultimatum, but a stated negotiating position in the expectation that the other side would make counterproposals. Serious negotiation was indeed possible ... But the fact is that NATO basically rejected Russia’s requests offhandedly as infringing upon its sovereignty. U.S. President Joe Biden ... preferred to set the world on a collision course by engaging in a game of chicken with Vladimir Putin.

“Worse still, Biden bizarrely engaged in prophesying, announcing day after day that Rus-

sia was about to invade Ukraine, in such a way that it is permissible to suspect him of having actually wished that it happened...” (134-5)

Achcar stresses that Washington’s failures do not absolve the Putin government of its responsibility for launching the war, “no more than blaming the police for not having engaged in negotiation with hostage-takers absolves the latter from their criminal responsibility in murdering the hostages.” (136)

Vladimir the Terrible: Five Acts

Chapter Three, “Vladimir the Terrible: An Opera in Five Acts,” begins with a Prologue, “The Preventable Rise of Vladimir Putin.” In it, Achcar makes an analogy between the consequences of the post-World War I geopolitical settlement and the post-Cold War settlement.

In both cases, the victors imposed punitive and humiliating conditions on the vanquished, and the resulting economic, social and political disintegration led to the rise of a strong leader who promised to make the country great again.

Achcar argues that “All this [Russia’s embitterment, the rise of Putin, the New Cold War] could have been averted had Washington opted for the policy advocated by William Perry of generous and massive Western economic aid to Russia to help it recover from the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with a reshaping of the global order toward Russia’s full integration in the concert of nations on a par with Western powers, instead of ostracizing it by expanding NATO into its former sphere of influence.” (140)

The five acts of the opera are:

Andante Quasi Allegretto, 1999–2003, when Putin hoped that 9/11 and Bush’s “war on terror” would be a basis for establishing mutual understanding and respect between the U.S. and Russia.

Crescendo, 2004–2007, when Washington’s unipolar ambitions and behavior, including the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and NATO expansion, disillusioned Putin and led him to seek an alliance with China, rather than the United States.

Forte Poi Decrescendo Assai, 2008–2010, when Russia fought Georgia in the closing months of the Bush administration to counter NATO’s approach to its borders, and the Obama administration reduced tensions by promising to “reset” U.S. relations with Russia.

Crescendo di Nuovo Fino a Fortissimo, 2011–2014, when continued tensions between the U.S. and Russia led Putin, by then an autocrat, to attack Ukraine and annex Crimea.

Ancora Più Forte Fino a Furioso, 2015–2022, when Russia intervened in Syria, consolidated its alliance with China, and invaded Ukraine.

In an Epilogue to the chapter, Achcar returns to the historical perspective. Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine “stands at the

intersection of two different processes.”

“On the one hand, the United States had quickly shattered the [post-Cold War] promise of a rules-based ‘new world order’ ... The US-led Western policy toward post-Soviet Russia was, as we have seen, calamitous in its early years — as was the decision to enlarge NATO ... As a result, Russia and NATO entered a vicious spiral of actions and counteractions.” (232)

“On the other hand, the Weimar-like conditions that prevailed in 1990s Russia fostered the rise of Vladimir Putin’s authoritarian rule... He embarked on a course combining imperial revanchism with imperialist aggrandizement, culminating in the invasion of Ukraine.” (233)

China: End of the Peaceful Rise?

Chapter IV, “China: End of the Peaceful Rise?” begins with some empirical observations. In absolute terms, China’s military spending rose steeply in the 21st century. As a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), it remained steady at less than two percent, half the figure for the U.S. China’s rapid growth allowed it to sharply increase military spending without increasing its share of GDP.

Furthermore, “of the three great powers of the strategic triad along with NATO, China has hitherto been the least belligerent in both words and deeds.” Achcar hastens to add that this “is a factual judgment, not a normative one — an observation that is corroborated by the nature of the material interests of the Chinese state and government.” (243, 244)

In the period since the suppression of the Tiananmen protests in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, these material interests have been to promote China’s growth and development, both to raise living standards and thereby maintain the loyalty of the population, and to raise China to great-power status.

Peaceful relations with the United States and its allies allowed China access to the world economy, including foreign investment and technology, and saved it the expense of an arms race.

The coming to power of Xi Jinping in 2012 coincided with a souring of relations between China and the United States. The Obama administration finally grasped that China could be a threat to U.S. hegemony, economically and, at least potentially, militarily. It made its famous “pivot to Asia” to try to counter the threat. The Trump and Biden administrations continued the pivot — Trump with bluster, Biden more shrewdly and dangerously.

“Up to the time of writing — that is, under Joe Biden as well — Washington has followed a highly provocative course toward Beijing in all respects: Taiwan; the East and South China Seas and South Pacific; anti-China military alliances, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known as Quad) with Australia, India and

Japan, and AUKUS, with Australia and the UK; and trade and financial war.” (265)

At home China’s growth slowed after 2008, leading to renewed discontent over inequality, corruption, and lack of democracy. China’s bureaucratic-capitalist class needed to expand beyond China’s borders to obtain raw materials, markets and spheres of investment, and for national prestige.

Economically, this meant the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and related ventures. Militarily, it meant continuing to expand and modernize China’s armed forces, more forcefully asserting its claim to Taiwan and the South China Sea, and moving closer to Russia.

The chapter then asks, “China and Russia: Love or Convenience?” It answers, “The obvious conclusion from all this is that collaboration between China and Russia is based on convenience, not love. What has brought the two countries together is basically their common opposition to US ‘hegemonism.’” (276)

In a postscript to the chapter, Achcar observes that Xi’s addresses to the 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2022 omitted the usual references to “peace and development” and instead warned of “dangerous storms” on the horizon.

Conclusion: Where To Go from Here?

The Conclusion, “Where Do We Go from Here?” begins with a quotation from J. A. Hobson’s 1902 book *Imperialism: A Study*. The quotation is striking, because Achcar’s book contains few references to the Marxist tradition, and this one is to Hobson and not to Lenin, who praised Hobson in his far more influential 1916 book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

The quotation presumably expresses Achcar’s views: “The power of the imperialist forces within the nation to use the national resources for their private gain, by operating the instrument of the State, can only be overthrown by the establishment of a genuine democracy, the direction of public policy by the people for the people through representatives over whom they exercise a real control.” (289)

Achcar describes NATO’s somber mood at its 70th anniversary summit in 1919, when pro-NATO Emmanuel Macron of France lamented that the alliance was “brain-dead” and anti-NATO Trump declared it “obsolete.” The mood was no better at its 2021 summit, just after the fall of Kabul capped its defeat in the Afghanistan war.

NATO was spectacularly resuscitated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Its members rushed to provide arms to Ukraine and pledged to raise their military spending to at least two percent of GDP. Finland and Sweden applied to join.

Claiming a mission to provide global security, NATO invited Australia, New

Zealand, South Korea and Japan to attend its 2022 summit as “partners.” It adopted a new “strategic concept” for the organization, which described China as well as Russia in hostile terms.

Having described the problem, Achcar presents his solution: “To this course, leading inexorably toward the precipice, the only alternative is the return to what humanity achieved in the wake of what remains to this day the biggest catastrophe in history: the Second World War. The United Nations is that achievement, and its Charter a major civilizational gain — in Norbert Elias’s sense of a ‘civilizing process,’ whereby humankind learns to pacify its relationships.” (305)

“In the 1990s, was there really a ‘wonderful opportunity’ to fashion a more peaceful world? Today, is it really possible to return to the principles of the United Nations and its 1945 Charter?”

Reflections

Gilbert Achcar has credibility. His books have challenged the U.S. “war on terror,” Zionism, Arab bourgeois nationalism, and now the New Cold War. He takes positions that aren’t always popular on the left.

In 1980, when a majority of the Fourth International leadership thought that a victory of the Soviet Union and its allies in Afghanistan might forestall an otherwise inevitable wave of Islamic reaction, he co-authored a minority resolution that presciently warned:

“A prolonged presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan can only fuel the following tendencies:

“The tendency that the Afghan rebellion will increase in strength and popularity, profiting from the national Afghan resentment against Soviet intervention and from imperialist support using this intervention as a pretext. The Kremlin is in the process of getting bogged down in a war that it can never complete, inasmuch as it is completely illusory to wipe out guerrilla forces in a mountainous country when they have in addition two bases of support at their disposal — Pakistan and Iran.”

In 2011, he took flak for not opposing the U.S.-NATO no-fly zone over Libya, which he thought was necessary to prevent a massacre by Gaddafi’s army in Benghazi. He changed to opposing the intervention when it became a broader air war that brought down the Gaddafi government and handed the country to feuding warlords.

In the early days of the Syrian uprising, he denounced the U.S.-NATO failure to supply the popular forces with anti-aircraft weapons that he thought might have prevented the Assad regime’s murderous bombing of the civilian population.

In 2021, he took flak for being insufficiently critical of U.S. imperialism in his article “How to Avoid the Anti-Imperialism of Fools”

in the left-liberal magazine *The Nation*. In 2022, he took flak again for not opposing U.S. sanctions against Russia, and for demanding that Russia withdraw from “every inch” of Ukrainian territory, including Crimea and Donbas.

For Achcar to blame the United States for the New Cold War to the extent he does in this book is an important political fact.

It’s also a caution against oversimplifying the positions of others in the antiwar movement. His denunciation of the United States and NATO is close to that of CodePink and other militant pacifists, with a crucial and fundamental difference — Achcar supports Ukraine’s self-defense and the right of its government to obtain arms wherever it can. [Editor’s note: Gilbert Achcar maintains an informational blog of his own and other writings on Syria. To get on his list contact g.achcar@gmail.com.]

His denunciation of Putin is close to that of pro-U.S. supporters of Ukraine, with the crucial difference that he blames the United States for initiating the New Cold War and for refusing to give Russia the assurances on arms and NATO expansion that might have forestalled the invasion and prevented a globally catastrophic war. Other supporters of Ukraine tend to deny or downplay these facts, lest adding their balance let Putin off the hook.

Nonetheless, Achcar’s argument invites questions. In the 1990s, was there really a “wonderful opportunity” to fashion a more peaceful world? Today, is it really possible to return to the principles of the United Nations and its 1945 Charter? Was there really anything to return to?

From an analytic standpoint, I prefer traditional Marxism. The New Cold War is a classic example of rising imperialist powers (Russia, China) challenging established imperialist powers (the United States, Japan, Germany, etc.).

Of course, the United States tried to ensure that Russia and China would never be able to challenge it. Of course, Russia and China persisted, biding their time until they were strong enough to act. Imperialism does imperialism.

The only way to get beyond that is for the working class to take the making of history into its own hands. International law, which under capitalism is always the law of the strongest, won’t solve the problem. Workers’ power is the only way out.

Achcar might well agree. But his target audience for this book, like I.F. Stone’s during the Korean war, is the public congregation, not the hard-left choir. For radicals, *The New Cold War* is a useful historical review. For a broader milieu caught in the “U.S.-NATO good, Russia-China bad” narrative of the Ukraine war, *The New Cold War* could be eye-opening. ■

REVIEW

China's Unarmed Prophets By Promise Li

Prophets Unarmed:

Chinese Trotskyists in Revolution, War, Jail, and the Return from Limbo
Gregor Benton, editor
Brill Historical Materialism Series, 2015;
Haymarket Books, 2017. xvii + 1289 pages,
\$55 paperback.

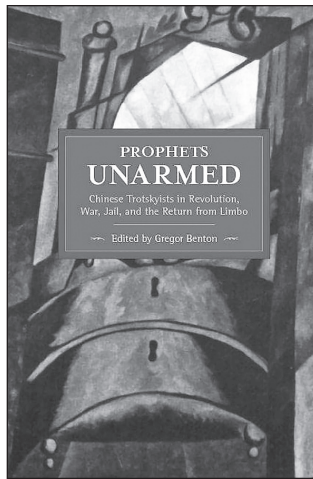
JUST OVER 70 years ago, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) extinguished the last organized revolutionary Marxist tradition that emerged from the early CCP and remained independent after its regression. In the final weeks of 1952, what remained of the Chinese Trotskyists — by then already worn and reduced in numbers by numerous rounds of persecution by different forces — were mostly imprisoned wholesale.

Among the largest grouping of Trotsky's followers outside Russia, the Chinese Trotskyists were no strangers to persecution. A couple hundred of the young Chinese Marxist students sent to Moscow who became early founders of the Left Opposition were arrested in 1929, in an overnight sweep, and eventually lost their lives in Stalinist prisons.

Faced with intense persecution by right-wing nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) agents after the party's about-face in 1927, turning from an uneasy alliance with the Communists to open persecution, Trotskyists lost their lives in large numbers, especially after their expulsion from the CCP. (Readers looking for an introduction to this tangled history and the disaster of Moscow-directed Communist strategy may consult *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* by Harold Isaacs, online —ed.)

The surviving militants continued the dangerous work in small numbers of covert labor organizing in urban areas after the CCP's departure into the countryside. The 1937 Japanese invasion further decimated their ranks: Chen Qichang and countless others lost their lives fighting against the invaders — all while being baselessly smeared and hounded by the KMT and CCP for being agents of imperial Japan; Han Jun died from hunger and malnutrition while working in Hong Kong's shipyards during the war.

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the Trotskyist movement in mainland China resulted in the tragic loss of a bulk of their writings to CCP authorities — yet some survived.

The process of recovery, compilation, and translation of the comprehensive collection of documents in this volume has been far from easy, so it is hard to overstate the singular role of Gregor Benton in making the materials of this whole tradition accessible to the Anglophone world.

Benton, an emeritus professor at Cardiff University, is a longtime researcher and editor on the Chinese Trotskyist movement, its leading figures, its contributions and its fate. Benton is the key reason why Wang Fanxi, one of the greatest Chinese Trotskyists who were able to escape the purge of 1952, was able to find a stable home in Leeds, away from the increasing pressure from CCP operatives during his time living as a schoolteacher in quiet exile in Macau.

Supported by Wang's assistance and his manuscripts, Benton steadily published and translated Chinese Trotskyist materials into English in different collections over the years, in addition to Wang's memoirs and monographs. The publication of *Prophets Unarmed* represents a significant milestone in these efforts, gathering some of the most important primary and secondary sources on the Chinese Trotskyists' activities in an authoritative edition.

The Purpose of Revival

Yet what is the use of this meticulous revival of a long-dismissed history and tradition? For one, it models the core principles of what it means to be an independent Marxist, forced to survive amidst strenuous material

conditions and difficult political contradictions. Yet these militants remained committed Marxist revolutionaries even as the chaos raged on throughout their lives, thinking deeply about the prospects of world revolution in the most difficult of times. The final nail in the coffin of

conditions and difficult political contradictions.

The collection's wide-ranging 18 sections show the breadth and care with which these writers dealt with the social and political phenomena around them. These investigations emerged not in a vacuum, but from the practical life of politics.

The first third of the book details the political autobiographies of these Marxists, beginning with the translation of Wu Jimin's *Purgatory* — one of the first independent texts in Chinese to study and record the lives and major events of the Chinese Trotskyists from a person outside the movement.

The excerpts from Wang, Chen Duxiu, and Zheng Chaolin's memoirs importantly describe what drew them into the Communist Party, and later the Left Opposition. Wang and Zheng both matured not as leaders of the momentous May Fourth movement, but as youth observing its rise and fall as an unfinished revolution, in search like many others at the time of a theoretical and political framework that could carry on the program of social revolution and democracy.

They had their first taste of organizing as student activists: Wang in the Hangzhou student movement; Zheng with other work-study students in France, many of whom later became limelights of the CCP. Both became part of the key waves of Chinese Communists who were sent to study under the tutelage of the Bolshevik Revolution at Moscow Sun Yat-sen University — the Soviets' experimental academy for Chinese communists.

In this sense, Wang and Zheng represented an important strand of Chinese Marxism that would soon be lost with the turbulence of the 1920s and '30s: the idea that communism entailed a deep social revolution that necessarily requires continuous organization of the working classes across the globe.

In short they were internationalists; and Wang in particular, having to witness the early fruits of bureaucratism in his time in Moscow through personalities like Pavel Mif and Wang Ming, realized early on that revolution and democracy must be deeply intertwined.

The early promise — but also the ultimate failure — of the Chinese Trotskyist movement reveals the hardship of socialist revolution in the Third World. Their movement shows that the key value of this tradition is not in providing a ready-made set of dogma, or a political framework based

on opportunistically responding to world events without clear principles (the Maoist “Three Worlds Theory” comes to mind), but in demonstrating what it means to struggle through difficult political questions posed by shifting objective conditions as Marxists.

They all understood the limitations of bourgeois democracy, but had little agreement on the practical question of how to relate the bourgeois revolution to the socialist one in a society increasingly submitted to capitalist market relations, even while pre-capitalist land relations remained dominant in the countryside.

The Debates Within Trotskyism

Trotsky represented many different things to people of his time, especially in the early 1920s, but the Trotsky that resonated most with his Chinese admirers was clearly the theorist of permanent revolution and anti-bureaucratism that mainly emerged in his declining years in Soviet politics.

It is noteworthy that none of the Chinese Trotskyists ever met Trotsky, with the exception of Liu Renjing; their communication with their comrades of the international Left Opposition was also greatly limited after their expulsion from the Communist Party. Yet Trotsky’s ideas and the epistolary relationship between Trotsky and the Chinese Trotskyists in the 1930s provided an important bedrock from which they uneasily developed on their home soil the ideas of permanent revolution and anti-bureaucratism.

The middle sections of Benton’s collection illustrate the intensity of debates within the Chinese Trotskyist camp. They also show the difficulty of how to properly build revolutionary organizations from these disagreements, compounded by increasingly harsh and limited conditions for organizing.

Once again, history tells it all: the Chinese Trotskyists split into four separate groupings almost as soon as the formation of the Left Opposition, reunifying into one section at Trotsky’s prodding, only for their ranks to be decimated mere weeks later by the KMT’s clampdown.

The book reconstructs these debates mainly through the eyes of Wang, Zheng, Peng Shuzhi, and Chen. One key disagreement is the nature of the transition between bourgeois and socialist democracy, as it relates to what the socialists should be fighting for on the ground within the framework of “permanent revolution.”

Wang and Zheng remain convinced of the transitional demand for democratic institutions like a constitutional assembly, inspired by Trotsky’s “The Chinese Question After the Sixth Congress,” which Wang saw as only a “means of consolidating the proletariat and helping them to re-enter the political scene.” (867) As Wang recalled, Liu believed in “limiting the aims of the struggle to the es-

tablishment of a parliamentary system” in the meantime, which Wang saw as a “social-democratic” deviation. (480-481)

While Wang’s perspective became part of the founding consensus of re-unification, ambiguities around how to relate immediate tasks of democracy and anti-imperialism to socialist revolution only re-emerged with the start of the Japanese invasion.

Chen argued for a tactical alliance with individuals or factions of the broader military resistance against Japanese fascism who were at least sympathetic to the left, believing that there would be little hope for a socialist revolution until at least industry revived in the besieged cities.

The section devoted to Chen testified to his persisting significance to the Trotskyists, although his increasing belief in a transcendental idea of democratic values, rather than one tethered to the historical and material conditions of the present, in his later life led him away from orthodox Marxism.

A nuanced spectrum of positions eventually consolidated into these two general camps, which would define and separate the remnants of the Chinese Trotskyist movement that survived in exile until the end.

In 1941, Wang and the majority advanced the idea that the nature of struggle against Japanese imperialism has changed with the entry of the United States into the war. Though China’s struggle against Japan remains “progressive,” this aspect “would dwindle away to insignificance or disappear entirely within an inter-imperialist conflict.” (558)

Nonetheless, his faction still supported resistance efforts against the invasion. Wang’s downplaying of the progressive nature of China’s struggle against Japan appears to contradict his endorsement of resistance efforts. Unfortunately, his full-length elaboration on this argument lies in one of the many invaluable texts lost during the waves of repression against the Trotskyists.

Peng and the minority offered a different position that foregrounded the progressive nature of China’s struggle against Japan, later convening a national conference that ended up with a pro-Peng majority in the leadership. This new leadership rejected Wang and the new minority’s right to continue disseminating its program in the party, leading to the last great split in the Chinese Trotskyist movement.

Though Peng’s group would later officially represent the remnants of the Chinese Trotskyist movement in the Fourth International in exile, Wang’s insistence on the right of internal factions and “plurality of political parties” (560) best anticipates the emphasis on political pluralism that the Fourth International would emphasize.

Tragic Irony

A thorough treatment of the many other differences that arose over the years between

the two camps, often represented by Wang and Peng respectively, reasonably remains beyond the scope of the book. Some of these debates, especially on the evolving class character of the Chinese Revolution and the CCP, can be glimpsed in the later sections, such as the essays and reports of Wang, Peng, and Chen Bilan in parts twelve and thirteen.

The tragic irony is that some of the most incisive Marxist analyses of the political and economic conditions of China in those war-torn years came from these individuals. Yet these analyses failed to cohere enough to “justify practical activity, an initiative of will,” as Gramsci once remarked, such that “they show what are the points of least resistance where the force of will can be applied most fruitfully; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political agitation can best be presented, what language will be best understood by the multitudes, etc.”¹

Of course, this is not to understate the enormous contributions of Chinese Trotskyist fighters during the war as individuals, like Chen Qichang and Liu Pingmui. But they mainly fought in isolation, and in conditions of immense poverty.

Workers’ movements had been decimated since the 1920s in the coastal cities of industry where most Trotskyists lived, and the Japanese occupation ensured that none would revive. Resistance units against the invasion were by and large organized haphazardly, with minimal capacity for coordinated and rigorous political agitation.

The Trotskyists had doubled down on their belief that Marxists must further take advantage of the new political terrain shaped by the invasion to rebuild proletarian forces in the cities through the anti-imperialist struggle. Subscribing to the orthodox Marxist line that the peasantry is not the revolutionary subject of the socialist revolution, the Trotskyists did not think to deeply consider and underestimated the need to build a base among the peasantry waging guerrilla struggles during the war (on which Wang and Lou Guohua self-critically reflected in a document submitted to the Tenth World Congress of the Fourth International in 1973).²

These factors greatly complicated the Trotskyists’ capacity to develop and implement a unified independent program that could mediate between immediate demands and a larger revolutionary vision.

Perhaps, in the extreme conditions of the 1930s and ‘40s, the opening for a genuinely socialist revolution remained close to impossible. The Communists had been largely delinked from the urban proletariat after the KMT’s murderous betrayal in a country decimated by hyperinflation and war.

Slim was the real prospect of a mass movement of workers and peasants organized democratically, breaking beyond the

limits of a bourgeois-democratic stage without regressing bureaucratically.

The victory of the Chinese revolution enabled incredible successes, just as it eventually confirmed the Trotskyists' grim prediction that a political revolution without continuous social revolution — only possible with pluralism and democracy to unlock the full capacity of the proletariat — can easily backslide into bureaucratism, and eventually counter-revolution.

Balance Sheet and Lessons

In this sense, the invaluable writings compiled in *Prophets Unarmed* provide today's readers not with blueprints for revolution, but a series of lessons and models for reference to inform our organizing. Since the CCP took power, there has been little space for independent and rigorous Marxist analyses of strategy and objective conditions, with fleeting periods of exception like the Democracy Movement of the late 1970s.

The result is that few organized left-wing platforms and opposition have been able to emerge from the myriad struggles of Chinese activists, which often fall into a binary of wildcat labor actions without larger visions and programs for social change, and a liberal democratic opposition movement, tethered to Western institutions.

The Chinese regime lifted hundreds of millions from conditions of "extreme poverty" only to create a new, massive working class that has little historical resources and expertise in organizing that can relate rank-and-file labor militancy to a larger political vision.

The Trotskyists' inflexible attention to industrial labor organizing to build socialist revolution — even when the circumstances made such an endeavor nearly impossible — ultimately separated them from the conditions of political victory. Unexpectedly enough, this wealth of knowledge may prove to be more useful for Chinese organizers today, now surrounded by a sea of proletarians, than for those who were operating in its original context.

It is apt that the book concludes with sections on miscellaneous documents, from the Chinese Trotskyists' pivotal contributions to the Chinese world of letters in the late 1920s and early 1930s to their obituaries: they show that the spirit of Chinese Trotskyism lies in how they thought and what they did as living Marxist revolutionaries.

They strived and persisted to the best of their ability to synthesize the social and political phenomena around them in their totality. They actively participated in the painful decades of modern revolution, holding fast to the value of theoretical clarity even in the most impoverished material conditions.

There was no moment of redemption, or even recognition, for most of them; what

maintained the unbreakable spirit of those who ultimately held fast, despite countless tribulations, was a sense of political clarity and will to interpret and act in the world they inhabited.

Despite its breadth, *Prophets Unarmed* only opens up a conversation about these militants, rather than concluding it; this tradition is far too rich, even in its fragments, to encompass in one volume. Many of the fiercest members of their movement are only recorded in history by their obituaries, written by their comrades, like Wu Jingru.

Wu, as Wang poignantly recalls, was an indispensable militant and administrator who became an elder sister or mother for many rank-and-file communists, though "no important exploits or famous writings can be ascribed to her ... never behaved like a heroine, nor did she show off as a militant." (1172)

Many more such obituaries exist beyond the collection, like that of Li Cailian, who joined the Left Opposition as a teenager and worked tirelessly to organize women workers in Shanghai until her untimely death at 24.

Li Pei, whose life is documented in an obituary written by his comrade Jiang Junyang, organized workers in Guilin to resist the Japanese invasion but was imprisoned by the KMT in the period when Trotskyists were baselessly smeared by both the KMT and CCP for being agents for Japan. Similar to Zheng, he spent another 26 years in prison once the CCP took power.

The memoirs of Wang Guolong, Zhao Fangju and Zhang Kai, among others, are available in their original language on the Chinese marxists.org website, still yet to be rendered into English.³

More to Come

More materials, especially from the majority split after 1941 that continued as the official Chinese section of the Fourth International (Revolutionary Communist Party) remain to be translated, and can serve to further contextualize the internal debates collected in the middle sections.

For one, Peng's "On the Struggle Between Two Lines" (1941) offers a valuable middle ground between both Chen and Wang's perspectives on the war, offering a clear defense of China's self-determination struggle against Japan even with the emergence of inter-imperialist war on the Pacific front.⁴

Other untranslated writings by Chen Bilan, including her reflections on the early 20th century women's movements and women in national liberation struggles, serve as the key surviving perspective on feminism and women's movements in China from the Trotskyist camp.⁵

Other lesser-known militants in the majority beyond Peng and Chen preserved the main organizational infrastructure of the Chinese Trotskyists in Hong Kong, with much

difficulty and effort, until the revival of the tradition in the 1970s in the city.

The need for this editorial work thus continues, and fortunately Gregor Benton shows no signs of stopping. This year, Benton and John Sexton released the first edited collection of writings in English by Zheng Chaolin. His incisive and prescient writings on state capitalism can only prove to be more relevant with time.⁶

A sequel to *Prophets Unarmed*, co-edited by Benton and Yang Yang, is entering its final stages of production as I write this review, detailing the afterlives and late activities of Chinese Trotskyists in exile. These endeavors, building on the magisterial *Prophets Unarmed*, are significant not simply for the sake of historical record and greater access in the Anglophone world, but also for the political development of the socialist left, especially in China and the Chinese diaspora.

As the contradictions of Chinese state capitalism grow today, Chinese social movements can benefit from revolutionary political frameworks that can adequately diagnose the CCP's idiosyncratic marriage between bureaucratic capitalism and authoritarianism.

New generations of socialist militants are needed, not to dogmatically revive the banner of historical Trotskyism, but to learn from their own experience of organizing and in conversation with the lessons of the past, what it means to be a revolutionary and to transform social reality.

Chinese social movements are only becoming more decentralized and eclectic in the face of an increasingly autocratic capitalist regime that is "socialist" in name only. Wildcat strikes continue to abound in the mainland, feminist and LGBTQ+ movements provide important entryways to politics for new activists, while Chinese international graduate workers' struggles begin to gain momentum abroad.

A Marxist outlook encourages the creative discipline of intellect to understand all these entities in ever-shifting relation to each other, in order to discover an informed practice of organization against the totalizing force of capital. The revolutionaries documented by *Prophets Unarmed* model such a way of thinking, but it is ultimately up to socialists today to interrogate the lessons of history on their own terms to breathe life into the movements of the future. ■

Notes

1. Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 173.
2. <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/wangfanxi/marxist.org-chinese-wong-1973.htm>
3. <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/fourth-international/biography/index.htm>
4. <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/fourth-international/china/mia-chinese-fi-19410404.htm>
5. <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/chenbilan/index.htm>
6. Zheng Chaolin, *Zheng Chaolin, Selected Writings, 1942-1998*, edited by Gregor Benton and John Sexton (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

REVIEW

Meanings of Palestinian Peoplehood By Leila Kawar

Crossing a Line:

Laws, Violence, and Roadblocks to Palestinian Political Expression

By Amahl A. Bishara

Stanford University Press, 2022, 376 pages, \$30 paper.

REFLECTING ON THE struggle for self-determination in Palestine in the May/June 2023 issue of *Against the Current*, David Finkel writes: “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.”

In her recent book *Crossing a Line: Laws, Violence, and Roadblocks to Palestinian Political Expression*, Palestinian-American anthropologist Amahl A. Bishara addresses the struggle for self-determination in Palestine with a similar set of concerns, but from a different perspective. Indeed, one of the strengths of Bishara’s contribution is that it foregrounds the perspective of ordinary Palestinians and the questions that are important to them.

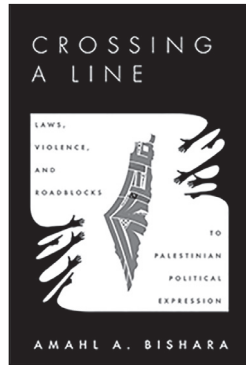
Even as Palestinians appear to be “losing” in the realm of official politics, Palestinian youth today are actively engaged in creative practices of protest, commemoration, and solidarity that build bridges across the geopolitical borders that separate their communities.

For these ordinary Palestinians, what is Palestine today? What are its possible futures? And what could Palestine be if not a state? These are the timely questions to which Bishara’s book directs our attention.

Research and Red Lines

Crossing a Line is a title with a double meaning. First, it describes the research method on which the book’s analysis is based. Over a period of more than a decade, Bishara herself repeatedly crossed back and forth between her primary sites for ethnographic research.

Specifically, this meant passage across the Green Line — the 1948 armistice line — that separates Palestinians living inside Israel’s 1948 territories, such as Bishara’s family



residing in the Galilee village of Tarshiha, from Palestinians living in the West Bank, including those in Aida Refugee Camp near Bethlehem, which was another principal research site and a community where Bishara also has close family connections.

In short interludes between the chapters, Bishara recounts these

trips in vivid detail.

The book’s title also has a less literal meaning, however, in the sense of crossing a red line politically. For the Palestinians whose experiences are recounted in this book, including the author herself, it is crucial to think about Palestinians of 1948 and Palestinians of 1967 as a people “with a collective relationship of care and connection.” (59)

As Bishara emphasizes, Palestinians hold a deep sense of connection to the place name Palestine and to its visual icon, which is depicted on the book’s cover. The book demonstrates the multiple ways in which this connection to historical Palestine persists, even as it remains outside the bounds of acceptable discourse in diplomatic circles to analyze the linkages between settler-colonial practices inside 1948 Israel and in the 1967 Occupied Territories.

Indeed, as Bishara reminds us, the degree to which such an analysis means crossing a red line politically was reinforced in January 2017, when a United Nations report discussing apartheid across the territory under Israeli control was rescinded following pressure from the Trump administration.

This red line has been baked into the structure of diplomatic conventions and NGO grant mechanisms as well as into how Israel administers border controls and research permits. Yet it is also something which activists committed to anti-imperial struggle, particularly those who came of age politically over the past two decades, are dedicated to challenging.

The Specificity of the Local

While recent scholarly writings, as well as the statements issued by Palestinian legal organizations such as Adalah, have explicitly sought to theorize a larger vision of Palestinian political community, the key contribution of *Crossing a Line* is to elucidate how the

practices of ordinary Palestinians are also contributing to challenging settler-colonialism and offering expressions of political community across borders.

In doing so, Bishara’s analysis builds on existing scholarly and activist writings in three interrelated ways. First, *Crossing a Line* insists that Palestinian intellectuals, legal theorists and community leaders must remember that expression is always articulated in relation to place. As Bishara puts it, anti-imperial intellectual theorizations “should never be allowed to reduce the specificity of people’s struggles and life experiences.” (258)

Israeli rule operates in part by severing and immobilizing Palestinians, and it is important to acknowledge these real conditions of difference caused by Israeli occupation. Bishara is keen to foreground how places present specific conditions, while at the same time highlighting in her ethnographic analysis how Palestinians in her field sites resist this ordering.

Second, the book focuses not only on the referential dimension of political expression but also on its phatic, or connective, dimension. Through its use of the term “political habitus,” the analysis emphasizes the embodied sensibility that shapes political practice. Attention is also devoted to examining the affective dimension of how Palestinians orient themselves to the political world, a dimension that tends to be overlooked in intellectualized political writings and argumentation.

In guiding her readers to these aspects of political expression, Bishara writes that her aim is to offer a “sense of texture of politics for Palestinians.” (xxiii)

Third, *Crossing a Line* asks us to consider how the reflexivity that is a cornerstone of ethnographic method might allow for a deeper understanding of class and decoloniality. Approaching political analysis reflexively means asking: Who is the writer and who is the audience for which that text is written?

In the prologue to her book, Bishara discusses her own embodied research experiences of risk and fear and how these informed her knowledge about a highly militarized colonial setting and how Palestinians are impacted by forms of violence. Here, the credibility of the writing is tied convincingly to its grounding in experience.

While these three elements might each exist separately, the methodology by which the book integrates them comes into view through Bishara’s engagement with critical

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Indigenous scholarship. I found particularly helpful in this respect her reference to the publicly-oriented writings of Native Hawaiian scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, who explicitly draws parallels between struggles for self-determination in Hawaii and in Palestine.

According to Kauanui, “citing international law is a necessary tactic by which to challenge U.S. and Israeli domination, respectively.” But Kauanui then goes on to insist that legal/judicial argumentation is not enough on its own.

For meaningful modes of solidarity to be developed, it is also essential to identify and promote decolonial practices of relationships not premised on state recognition or other forms of domination. Inspired by these theoretical insights, *Crossing the Line* draws on ethnographic analysis to model how and where to look for decolonial self-determination in the context of a “no-state solution.”

Recollecting and Reconnecting

Crossing a Line shows us that one place to look for decolonial practices of self-determination is in commemorations of Nakba Day on both sides of the Green Line (and beyond). *Nakba* is the Arabic word for catastrophe, and the term which historically has come to mark the Palestinian dispossession that was a result of the establishment of Israel in 1948.

Bishara explains that Nakba Day commemorations have assumed increased importance as an occasion for collective political practice since the late 1990s, when the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced (ADRID) began planning marches of return inside the Green Line.

Nakba Day was also slowly institutionalized in the occupied territories during this same period, with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat building on street level practices that had begun during the first Intifada to declare it a national holiday in 1998.

Bishara acknowledges the often-prosaic nature of these commemorations, which like other Palestinian commemorative occasions invoke familiar repertoires of protest, human rights, and nationalism.

At the same time, based on her participant ethnography, she highlights that — more than anything else — Palestinian participants attending these commemorations wanted to spend time together and that they found in the very repetitiveness of collective political gathering a sense of grounded connection to past resistance.

In addition, Bishara emphasizes how these commemorations often brought Palestinians together across geographic and political divides, such as by bringing people living in the city into rural areas, or as they invited participants to march toward the Green Line. In these ways, they made Palestinian history “a felt, acknowledged part of people’s regular experiences.” (132)

Moreover, in some cases local Palestin-

ian organizers sought to build relationships across the Green Line by approaching these commemorations as occasions for learning and exchanging.

Marches of Return in the West Bank and inside the Green Line deployed different graphic imagery and poster slogans, and made different choices of destination, but as Bishara shows they were often in conversation with one another. And in adopting these locally-grounded and creatively distinct forms of expression, she argues, they were speaking across the Green Line.

Nakba Day commemorations are not the only occasions on which Palestinians explicitly aim to build relationships across the Green Line. Working with Palestinian photography instructors in downtown Jaffa and in Aida Refugee Camp, Bishara herself co-facilitated a youth media project that aimed to explore what it would mean to photograph the built environment in each community “through a Palestinian lens.”

The organizers explicitly grounded the project in a framework of connection across difference. Yet in writing about this project from the perspective of a participant observer, Bishara reveals the practical challenges of imagining how to take photographs in dialogue with counterparts across a geopolitical border that many of the participants had never been able to cross.

As she shows, each group used their photographs (several of these images are reproduced in the chapter) to reveal the embodied and affective dimensions of political experience and knowledge. At the same time, the participants found that logistical limitations on movement made it hard to access what dispossession and exclusion meant — in terms of embodied orientations and political intuitions — for their fellow Palestinians across the Green Line.

Nevertheless, as Bishara recounts, the exhibition openings were experienced by all participants as a space for connection that was “Palestinian, but not nationalistic in the confines of the West Bank and Ramallah-centric, state-building version of nationalism.” (170)

Solidarity and Mourning on Social Media

Crossing a Line also directs its ethnographic lens to address a more spontaneous form of political expression in a chapter dedicated to social media practices of offering condolences and memorials for Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers or police.

Bishara’s analysis shows how the combination of social media platforms like Facebook with videos taken from cell phones and surveillance cameras has made military and police violence visible in new ways and with distinct meanings in Palestine, as these technologies have done in the United States for racist police and extrajudicial violence.

Her analysis points to the fruitfulness of

approaching media responses to racist state violence through ethnographic method, offering a visceral account of her own embodied, emotional experience of watching these videos of lethal violence while living in Aida Refugee Camp.

Building on this, she then reflects on how the experience might be even more terrifying and enraging for her Palestinian friends in the West Bank who do not have the protection of citizenship and residency abroad, and have lived their entire lives feeling constantly vulnerable and exposed as part of a “demographic of young men who could be shot by Israeli soldiers and immediately dismissed as being a perpetrator deserving of death rather than a victim of excessive violence.” (182)

Bishara then offers a careful reading of Arabic-language Facebook posts offering condolences and memorials for Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers or police, showing how their primary emphasis is on expressing an emotion and maintaining connection with other Palestinians.

Using Facebook as their medium for expression, Palestinians draw on traditional modes of grief expression to draw close to martyrs who are actually strangers. These modes of grief include poems written in a Palestinian spoken dialect and expressions of condolences as prayer.

Social media exchanges around police and military violence thus have the effect of drawing people together in loss. When Palestinian citizens of Israel or Palestinians in the West Bank engage in these conversations, they are often addressing members of their own local communities. Yet Bishara finds that social media users in both communities were actively posting about deaths of Palestinians on the other side of the Green Line.

This digital ethnography leads her to conclude that social media here act as more than simply a pressure valve that deflects energy from more serious politics; rather, they operate as an everyday site for expressive practice, for engagement with local traditions and language, and for making connections among ordinary Palestinians, on which more institutionalized forms of activism may potentially build.

Sensing Politics, Locating the Political

Finally, *Crossing a Line* addresses forms of expression surrounding Palestinian political prisoners, particularly practices of resistance and self-determination that build bonds across separate subject positions on either side of the Green Line.

She writes, “In and around prison we find some of the most radical political connections between Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank.” (207)

Because Israel incarcerates all Palestinian security prisoners in the same facility regardless of their formal citizenship status, the experience of incarceration has itself become

a site for drawing new relations.

Bishara gains insight into the depth of the emotional ties created during incarceration in part through the experience of her brother-in-law, a refugee residing in the West Bank who was incarcerated alongside Palestinian citizens of Israel for almost three decades.

In addition, Bishara investigates how new kin ties of a different kind are forged through art and activism. Here she focuses on the experiences of her cousin, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, whose solidarity work with Palestinian prisoners and their families in the West Bank is closely linked to her creative visual and performance art.

The ethnography elucidates the emotional toll of doing solidarity work of this kind — the feeling of being on the margins, but also feelings of pleasure in forging kinship-like bonds and building local communal intimacies. Bishara argues that these practices of kin-making as care, by decentering our assumptions about what politics are and refocusing our attention on process, can cultivate a foundation for liberation and survival.

The theoretical framework that Bishara relies upon to inform this analysis — drawn from critical Indigenous studies, as well as from poststructuralist feminist scholarship and queer of color critique — is premised on concepts and frameworks that clearly diverge from traditional liberal understandings of

“sovereignty” and “self-determination.”

They remind us to question party leadership’s repeated claims that the solution to occupation can only be political, or at least to interrogate what “political” means (or could mean). Moreover, in the context of Israel-Palestine, applying these critical decolonial frameworks reminds activists committed to anti-imperialism not only to challenge Israeli rule in the 1967 Occupied Territories, but also to resist the everyday tactics that constrain political expression and action for Palestinians across the Green Line.

Bridges for Liberation

Significantly, this approach aligns with ongoing creative efforts by Palestinian civil society organizations to articulate an Indigenous and anti-colonial vision of Palestinian identity. At the same time, it is a reminder to Palestinian activists that speaking together does not necessitate speaking in unison.

In examining how ordinary Palestinians build bridges across the Green Line, the analysis in *Crossing a Line* emphasizes the importance of fostering a “multivocality” rooted in place and community experience, even as it is connected to a broader Palestinian narrative and struggle for liberation.

Overall, as a reader I found it refreshing to see how *Crossing a Line* concretely connects Israel-Palestine to ongoing global structures

of imperialism as well as to creative emergent practices of resistance that counter cynicism and despair.

Bishara raises a key question — not only for Palestinians but for all of us — as she urges us to ask: “How can I say something with someone else with whom I share something or to whom I am somehow connected?” (256)

I believe Bishara would agree that this is not the only question that should guide anti-imperial political expression and action today. Yet it is certainly an important corrective to the mainstream media discourse that addresses Israel-Palestine solely through the façade of U.S.-mediated “peace talks” or through bureaucratized United Nations meetings.

It is also a necessary antidote to corporate advertising campaigns that equate the areas administered by the Palestinian Authority to Palestine, and that present a version of freedom as consumption that only thinly papers over the legal reality and injustice of ongoing Israeli occupation.

Crossing a Line serves as a reminder for those committed to anti-imperialism to look beyond the corporate window-dressing version of sovereignty, to unearth alternative and emergent projects for liberation that are more firmly rooted in lived experience. ■



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Book bans and forced library closures — and most important, the rising resistance against them — are covered elsewhere in this issue of *Against the Current*. The miseducation of American kids includes prohibition of teaching about racism, U.S. history as it actually unfolded, or anything to do with gender or sexual realities.

In Michigan, rightwing state reps who are now in the minority have proposed — even with no immediate chance of passing — compulsory school teaching of “the Christian foundations of America” and the Pilgrims’ quest for religious freedom. (Recall Malcolm X’s memorable line: “We didn’t land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock landed on us.”)

Old and new restrictions on voting rights proliferate — to take just one example, the move in Ohio to make ballot initiatives (such as enshrining reproductive rights in the state Constitution) effectively impossible.

Supreme Court Stranglehold

The outrage of outlawing transgender medical care stands alongside a Texas district court judge’s ruling to bar mifepristone, the abortion and miscarriage care drug that’s been available and proven safe for over two decades. Lawmakers and governors banning transgender care clearly feel empowered by the extreme right’s control of the ultimate “umpire,” the U.S. Supreme Court.

This far-right Court majority seems partly restrained by the fear of being totally delegitimized. The mifepristone ban directly threatens so many people and produces such anger that the Supreme Court was forced to put it on hold and might kick it to next year’s session.

Transgender care directly impacts a far smaller proportion of the population — about one half of one percent — and their families. In some ways, the strategy of singling out a relatively small targeted group, despite the obvious fact that it makes a mockery of equal protection promised on paper by the Constitution, becomes even more dangerous in both its immediate effect and wider consequences. It opens a bigger can of poisonous worms for the political suppression of essential medical services that so-called “conservatives” disapprove in the name of “traditional values.”

It’s all the more important, as we’ve said before, that delegitimizing the present far-right Supreme Court majority is not a “threat,” but an urgent necessity. What we’ve called the WSCOTUS (White Supremacy Court of the United States) majority has also been exposed as one of the most corrupt and clientelist institutions in U.S. politics — which is saying a lot.

From Clarence Thomas — bought and paid for by sleazoid billionaire Harlan Crow — to John Roberts’ wife making \$10 million by matching lawyers with elite firms including some with cases before the Court, the fact emerges that “ethics standards” when it comes to these Supreme Court Justices are functionally nonexistent. Since their purpose is to serve and protect the wealthy and powerful, it’s hardly surprising that these “conservative” Justices find it appropriate to live like them.

There is nothing much “conservative” about them. Principles of respect for precedent, avoidance of drastic radical change by judicial fiat, and consideration for the impact of Court rulings on real people’s lives, mean nothing. (Those of us who *do* want radical changes don’t expect them to be handed down by courts, but rather to be won through

powerful social movements and political action.)

The most recent decision in this regard, *Sackett v. EPA*, guts longstanding Environmental Protection Agency’s regulatory authority. While the Court unanimously agreed that the plaintiffs’ property rights were unreasonably violated in this particular case, the far-right majority took the occasion to basically wipe out the Clean Water Act.

This kind of ruling has become standard for this Court majority, whose only “conservative” allegiance is to elite privilege and power. A remaining question, which will reveal something important about the speed of the overall rightwing offensive, is whether this SCOTUS is ready right now to expose itself by affirming a mifepristone ban — creating an immediate national health emergency — or upholding an insane “independent state legislatures” theory allowing the overturn of election results.

Either or both of these could trigger an authentic constitutional crisis. In case of a court-imposed mifepristone ban, progressives and reproductive rights advocates must demand that Biden immediately issue an emergency order to the FDA and the drug manufacturer to keep it available.

Clouded Prospects

We’ve noted that it’s way early to handicap what might emerge from the nasty, brutish and long electoral season. Far more important right now is to uphold and magnify the existing and growing resistance, which is impressive although inadequately represented in daily headlines.

Notably, abortion rights organizations and networks have creatively mobilized to make the service available to people who need to travel long distances within or across state lines. There are many other examples of standing up to rightwing authoritarianism, including at community levels under the mass media radar.

Politically, it’s critical to spell out why the Democratic Party is such an abject failure in turning back the attacks. Its mega-donor base requires the party establishment to rely on the illusion of victory by appealing to that elusive suburban “socially liberal but fiscally conservative” population — while the much larger majority of the working class is actually more “fiscally liberal” in wanting to save and expand programs like social security and medicare, living wages and a social safety net that works.

And while strikes, labor contract fights and union organizing might seem a step removed from the reactionary assaults on democracy and vulnerable people’s lives, they are actually of central importance in shaping society’s future. Underlying the right wing’s attacks and anti-“woke” antics is an agenda of capital — to keep wages low, work and life for the majority precarious and insecure and to enforce “discipline” and individualism against social solidarity and struggle.

The ruling corporate elites for their part care little or nothing about issues like abortion rights, transgender medical care, public libraries or education or so-called “culture wars” one way or the other. What matters is preservation of their profits and structural privilege — and to whatever extent the far right’s social agenda and ugly racism help advance that agenda, they’re quite happy to accept its support.

That’s why the answer to the question we posed of whether the present moment is somewhat louder “noise as usual,” or the onset of “crisis now,” might well be — both. ■

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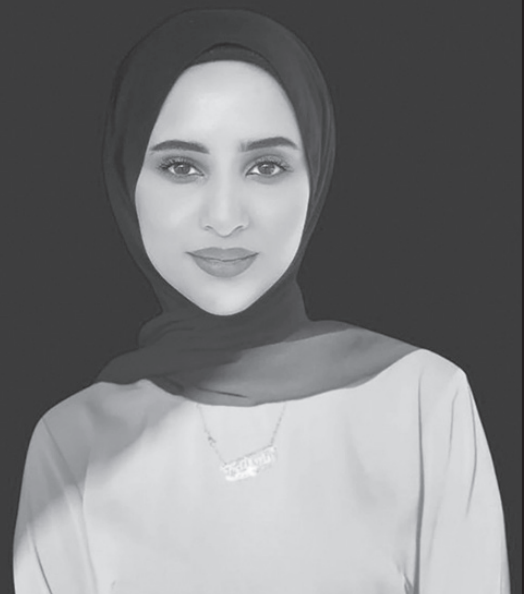
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FATIMA MOHAMMED IS under attack by the campus administration and media for her pro-Palestinian address at the City University of New York School of Law commencement. Read the CUNY Jewish Law Students Association statement supporting Fatima in this issue.

WE SUPPORT FATIMA MOHAMMED

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