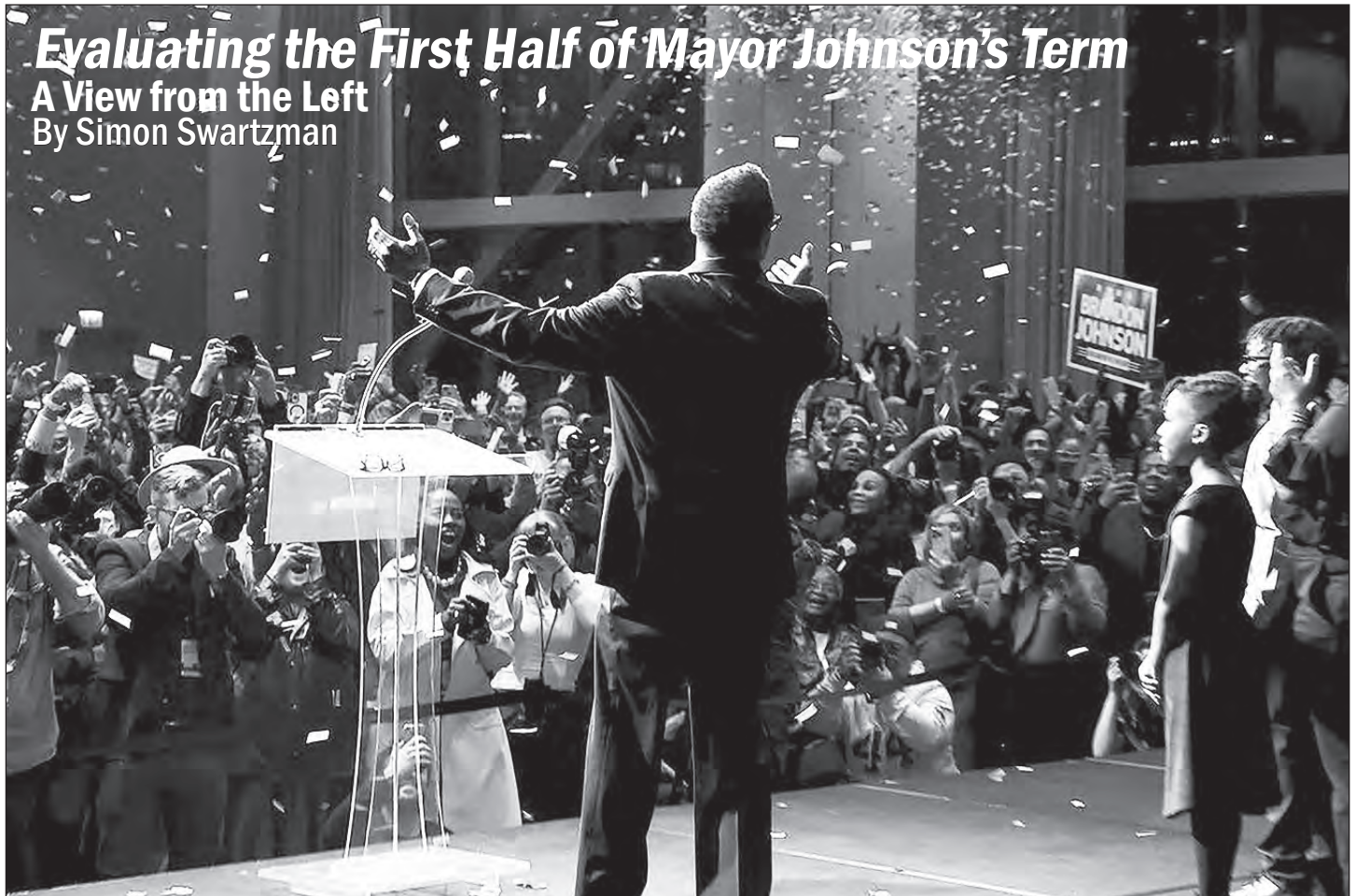


Kim Moody on the Democrats' Road to Defeat — what's next?

#234 • JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025 • \$5

AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL



Evaluating the First Half of Mayor Johnson's Term
A View from the Left
By Simon Swartzman

Criminalizing Solidarity

◆ Three takes: Rachel Ida Buff; Kathleen Brown; Alan Wald

Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Zionist Backlash

◆ Malik Miah

Reviews on African American Life

◆ Owólabi Aboyade; Keith Gilyard; M. Colleen McDaniel

A Classic of Queer Marxism

◆ Alan Sears



A Letter from the Editors

The Chaos Known and Unknown

THE ADVENT OF “Trump 2.0” poses dangers and challenges in U.S. society as well as globally — including the non-trivial problem of surviving environmental catastrophe — and most certainly to the social movement and socialist left. We will attempt here to sort through those elements of the swirling chaos that are pretty well known, and suggest where the uncertainties may lie. We know for sure that *all our movements will be under attack* — and it’s absolutely essential to stand together and refuse to be intimidated or divided. How extreme the assaults may become isn’t certain, and the strength of immediate resistance can make a big difference.

The factors behind the Democrats’ debacle in the presidential election are explored in depth by Kim Moody in this issue of *Against the Current*. We won’t dwell on those here except to remark that if the swing-states margins had been as razor thin as expected, the Biden’s unequivocal enabling of Israel’s Gaza genocide, and the Kamala Harris campaign’s refusal to distance her from that policy, all by itself could have tipped Michigan and likely the presidency into Trump’s column.

The election ultimately turned on core economic issues, especially the impact of inflation, and on alleged “insecurity” — skillfully exploited by Trump’s anti-immigrant scare rhetoric, and rightwing appeals to (mainly male) fears of job and status loss. When he pardons the convicted January 6 rioters, we’ll find out whether they fade into obscurity or re-form their goon squads for future use.

In any case, goodbye and good riddance to Genocide Joe with his lasting legacy of the destruction of Gaza. What next then for 2025 and beyond?

Greed on Steroids

We won’t dwell on the sexual predators, crackpots and creatures from the white-nationalist lagoon who make up many of Trump’s Cabinet nominees. There might be just enough Republican Senators to save Trump from the consequences of his most ghastly choices — Pete Hegseth, Kash Patel, Tulsi Gabbard — and God forbid the outbreak of a new pandemic with RFK Jr. in charge of public health. But first things first.

It’s clear that Trump’s core agenda aligns with “traditional” Republican policy, but this time on steroids: corporate enrichment and deregulation, tax cuts for the affluent, cuts in essential services and social safety protections, reversal of the modest recent gains in unions’ right to organize. Things like removing federal oversight that might restrain murderous racist police brutality also come with the territory.

This is all predictable, but the full extent of the right wing’s sadistic savagery remains to be tested and fought over — things like drastic cuts and unachievable “work” requirements for SNAP (supplemental nutrition) benefits. Already under Biden, the end of expanded Child Tax Benefit that had famously cut child poverty in half during the COVID emergency, resulted in those rates rebounding right back to the deplorable rate of 13.7% as of 2023.

For another example, we also can’t yet predict whether the privatization of Medicare envisioned by Dr. Mehmet Oz, to force all recipients into ruinous “Medicare Advantage” schemes, will actually be attempted against the public and institutional firestorm it would provoke. (Certain recent events have thrown a gruesome spotlight on popular attitudes toward the U.S. health care and insurance industry.)

While the toxic combination of greed and hard-right

ideology propels the tax-and-program-cutting drive, more extreme measures threaten to destabilize the whole project. Right away, the biggest economic and financial “unknowns” include the extent and consequences of Trump’s promised tariffs on “all imports.”

One assumes that economically-literate professionals with access to Trump might explain how 25% tariffs would threaten to crush the Canadian and Mexican economies which are inextricably bound to the United States, to say nothing of those of European and Asian countries, and highly inflationary in the U.S. economy itself.

Among those hard hit immediately would be many of those same U.S. middle and working class people who voted for Trump from inflation resentment — a self-destructive consequence. But as a display of the kind of “strength” that Trump loves, tariff threats might be leveraged to extract concessions he’s demanding from U.S. partners.

There’s panic in the Canadian political establishment evidenced in the clamor, not just by the governing Liberal but also Conservative and leftwing New Democratic parties, for a billion-dollar cost for increased border control personnel, surveillance and drone technology. Ostensibly Trump is demanding that Canada crack down on “drugs and illegal migrants” crossing to U.S. territory, but these issues in fact are marginal to nonexistent. His real more likely goals are trade and other concessions from Ottawa, and perhaps separate deals with Canadian provinces.

Tariffs also have their use in the growing economic (and potentially military) conflict with China, a bipartisan cause, which is why Biden maintained Trump’s initial anti-China measures.

Immigrants Under Reign of Terror

We do know what’s coming is a literal reign of terror facing immigrant and refugee communities. Right off the bat, this is a crisis demanding preparation for resistance on multiple levels. Immigrant and civil rights organizations are preparing various legal, political and sanctuary measures.

In Michigan, for example, activists are putting pressure on the lame-duck Democratic legislative majority to pass access to drivers’ license, which would give undocumented folks at least a measure of protection from being swept up in racial-profiling traffic stops.

“Mass Deportations Now” was a prominent sign on display during the Republican convention. The incoming administration promises to do so by the “millions.” While the capacity, staffing, logistics and financing to pull off such an operation rapidly are in question, there’s little doubt that intimidation and high-profile sweeps are coming for televised effect at least — and the terror they produce will push many people into the shadows, and others to “self-deport” (as

continued on the inside back cover

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January / February 2025 – Volume XXXIX, Number 6

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ANN ARBOR: University of Michigan students protest for Gaza, November 21, 2024. Note that the microphone is in the street so it is technically off campus property.

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

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The War to End All Encampments: Criminalizing Solidarity

By Rachel Ida Buff

IN THE SPRING of 2024, students around the world set up Gaza solidarity encampments — at the same time that the U.S. Supreme Court took up the legality of camping on public lands.

The concurrence points to connections between rightwing opposition to pro-Palestine organizing and the ongoing campaigns to delimit collective rights to public space. It also indicates a powerful ideological assault against a broad array of practices of solidarity.

In *City of Grants Pass vs Johnson*, unhoused respondents Gloria Johnson and John Logan claimed that regulations imposed by the city of Grants Pass, Oregon, prohibiting sleeping outside, are unconstitutional. The case engaged the question of whether municipalities can punish mostly involuntarily unhoused people sleeping in public spaces.

Theane D. Evangelis of Gibson, Dunn & Cutcher represented the city of Grants Pass. Indigenous land and water defender Winona LaDuke describes Gibson, Dunn & Cutcher as part of a “modern cavalry.”

This same firm supported Energy Transfer Partner’s SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) case against Greenpeace for its support of the NO DAPL encampment at Standing Rock in 2015-16.

In addition, the firm did *pro bono* work to support the Brackeen family’s case against the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in *Haaland v Brackeen*, and represented Chevron, parent company of Texaco, against claims by the Indigenous Cofan people of Ecuador and their lawyer, Steven Donziger.

Evangelis herself belongs to the Federalist Society, which supports the legal assault against Indigenous sovereignty, and organizes against the long tradition of federal Indian law. As the “modern cavalry,” such legal efforts oppose Indigenous collective practices, including ICWA’s protection for Indigenous forms of relationship and care outside of the

Rachel Ida Buff teaches history at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A specialist in immigration who also teaches in African American Studies, she is a member of the Academic Advisory Council of Jewish Voice for Peace. Buff is the author of three books on immigrant rights, including the 2020 bilingual glossary of terms, A is for Asylum Seeker: Words for People on the Move/A de Asilo: Palabras para Personas en Movimiento (Fordham, 2020).

nuclear family.

The firm’s support for the city in *Grants Pass v Johnson* illuminates ideological and strategic connections among three ongoing wars — against Indigenous sovereignty; the assault on Palestine solidarity organizing; and the criminalization of practices of solidarity, including encampments, caravans, and mutual aid funds.

Criminalizing Homelessness

Cities and towns around the country are experiencing the worst housing crisis since 2007, the eve of the Great Recession. Rampant real estate development and speculation inflate costs, placing home buying and even renting out of reach for many.

This crisis forces many people to become unhoused for the long or short term; a recent count places the number at over 600,000.

Grants Pass has one shelter, the Gospel Rescue Mission, which is operated by a private, Christian organization and does not have enough beds to accommodate the city’s burgeoning unhoused population.

But the city is determined enough to clear out its homeless population that a city council member suggested in 2013 that the city force them onto buses headed out of town, saying: “the point is to make it uncomfortable enough for them in our city so they will want to move on down the road.”

While a lower court ruled in 2018 that Grants Pass’ sanctions for sleeping in public spaces constitute a violation of Eighth Amendment protections against “cruel and unusual punishment,” the city pursued its appeal, winning the case with the support of the Gibson, Dunn & Cutcher and the court’s conservative majority.

Evangelis presented the case as a public safety issue, deploying purple prose worthy of 19th century “yellow peril” tracts to portray unhoused encampments as sites of drug dealing, filth, and gang activity.

Dismissing the defense’s arguments that outlawing public camping discriminates against unhoused people and punishes them with ballooning fines that they are unlikely to be able to pay, the court found that such penalties do not constitute “cruel and unusual punishment.”

Further, it found that targeting people sleeping outside does not discriminate against a particular class of people. Despite arguments by the court’s three-person liberal minority who argued that sleeping is a human need and should not be made illegal, the court’s decision essentially criminalizes homelessness, making people forced to sleep outside liable for the crime of doing so.

Penalties assessed against unhoused people are likely only to stack up, immuring those already contending with financial exigency further into debt and making it more likely that they will remain homeless.

The court’s decision legitimizes the municipal demolition of encampments, where unhoused people can share resources and create a modicum of shelter from the storm of being forced to live outdoors.

Such destruction, common around the country, gains traction as a way for municipal authorities to claim that they support public safety, but does little to contend with the ongoing housing crisis.

Writing for the majority, Justice Neil Gorsuch observed more than once that “those living without shelter often live together,” indication that he views such cohabitation as a problem in itself.

His decision insists that laws against public sleeping do not target a particular population, though most people targeted by the regulations the decision permits are unhoused.

Gorsuch asserts that “Under the city’s laws, it makes no difference whether the charged defendant is homeless, a backpacker on vacation passing through town, or a student who abandons his dorm room to camp out in protest on the lawn of a municipal building.”

It is unlikely that Gorsuch’s reference to a student encamped on a lawn was arbitrary. The justice would have had the Palestine solidarity encampments on his mind, as news coverage of them was ubiquitous at the time he was writing the decision.

His phrasing indicates the court’s broad agenda of criminalizing protest and solidarity. While Gorsuch emphasized that the Grants Pass decision empowers state and local governments, the outcome of the case invokes a thin cover of states’ rights and public safety to enable the repression of solidarity and protest.



Judge Gorsuch's decision attempts to criminalize protest and solidarity actions. <https://jimwestphoto.com>

Demonizing Student Encampments

The widespread campaign by university, municipal, state and federal authorities to prohibit the return of last spring's campus encampments further reveals the extent of the rightwing war on collectivity.

As in the case for penalizing unhoused people for the crime of sleeping in public, this assault is presented as necessary for public safety, particularly the safety of Jewish students.

The Gaza solidarity encampments of spring, 2024 were exemplary educational spaces organized by students and supported by faculty, staff and community members.

They included teach-ins on multiple topics, interfaith services and peaceful protests demanding that universities end their complicity with the industrial military complex sending billions of dollars in weapons to facilitate the Israeli genocide in Palestine.

Students, faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds, including many Jewish people, took part in these activities. These peaceful encampments occasioned severe and ongoing repression, including physical brutality, from university administrations and local police.

At UCLA, university police stood by for hours as Zionist counter-protesters attacked encamped students, and then rallied to arrest twenty-seven encampment students, faculty and community members.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Columbia and many other campuses, university administrators did not hesitate to direct university police to use physical force against encampment participants.

Hauled into special congressional sessions to testify about what was taking place on their campuses, college presidents were reduced to stammering, unwilling or unable to defend the freedom of expression and

right to safety on campus of their students and employees.

Most campus encampments came down by summer, but that was not enough for the forces of order. Administrators worked tirelessly over the summer — not for the demands of the university communities they allegedly serve to divest and cut ties with Israel, but to implement policies and procedures preventing future encampments.

With the aid of paid educational consultants, they crafted convoluted and deceptively named freedom of expression and civility policies delimiting protest. Moving quickly, they suspended student organizations as well as individual student organizers for violating these policies.

At Cornell, university administrators set a precedent by calling the Immigration Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) to deport suspended graduate student organizer Momodou Taal. This repression was partially enabled by definitions of antisemitism which include criticism of the state of Israel.

Just as the case against the unhoused is part of a broader effort to eradicate collective formations like Indigenous sovereignty, opposition to encampments and student protest on campus represent one arm of a long campaign to counter international condemnation of Israeli practices.

Speaking at a meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in October, House Majority leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) vowed to strip accreditation and federal monies from public and private campuses which do not “crack down” on “anti-Israel protests.”

The Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913 to combat antisemitism and discrimination and now a primary bolster of the notion that any criticism of the state of Israel is equivalent to anti-Semitism, issued a report

on “Anti-Israel Activism on US Campuses, 2023-24.”

In it, ADL asserted that the Gaza solidarity encampments were spaces of violence and vandalism — in much the same way that the Gibson, Dunn, and Crucher lawyers and Justice Gorsuch portrayed unhoused encampments in Grants Pass.

While there may well be cause to set up more encampments, with the genocide in Gaza ongoing and Israel attacking the West Bank, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iran, those seeking to set them up will face challenges from local forces of order, backed by state and federal law as well as powerful institutions. Like the assault on the civil rights of unhoused people, the impediments now installed against campus protests are as intentional as they are deadly.

Practices of Solidarity

The war against the encampment is an assault on collective solidarity.

Such assaults are familiar staples of white nationalist political rhetoric; they have been similarly mounted against other forms of collective solidarity, such as the mutual aid funds supporting protesters at Cop City in Atlanta, migrant caravans as dangerous, and sanctuary churches, campuses and cities that seek to shelter undocumented denizens.

People gather in impossible conditions, because being together in a church building turned sanctuary, or in a walking caravan, or in an encampment where tents and food and ideas are shared, is sometimes the only available shelter from the ongoing storm of history.

They set a watch for overnight so that people can sleep in safety; a Palestinian restaurant owner arrives in the early morning hours, van steaming with the fragrant aroma of her donated breakfast; a drowsy voice calls everyone to morning prayer over a fritzzy sound system.

A neighbor passes milk through the window to a protester running from police, eyes stinging with teargas; a pet cockatoo makes the dangerous journey through the Darien Gap, hoisted onto familiar and strange shoulders; people from far away become beloved relatives because of their shared commitment to protecting the land or the water.

These are our collective resources and inheritance; they are what remains of the commons long shared by Indigenous nations and peasant agrarians.

Villainizing those who insist on working together and owning things in common is the oldest political traditions in the Americas. It has long been weaponized against Indigenous nations and collectivist formations: maroons, communists, labor organizers, anarchists.

Criminalizing solidarity is an attempt to conquer the commons and make us afraid of each other instead of collaborating for our collective survival. ■

The Palestine Exception at U-M

By Kathleen Brown

THE CAMPUS-BASED INTIFADA that swept college campuses during the winter and spring 2024 was an overwhelming show of solidarity with Palestine.

Demanding that universities sever economic and material connections with Israel's genocide and apartheid in Palestine, students and workers marched, sat-in, "died-in," disrupted military and weapons manufacturer recruitment fairs, protested graduation ceremonies, occupied buildings, and even went on strike in the case of UAW Local 4811 in California.

The intifada's intensity and momentum temporarily knocked college administrators and powerful donors off-balance, and administrators struggled to respond to wave after wave of protest culminating in Gaza Solidarity Encampments last spring.

But if administrators were initially unprepared for the level of protest provoked by people's anguish watching a genocide unfold on their phones, administrators spent the summer regaining their footing and rewriting their counter-insurgency playbook.

Showing that the "Palestine Exception" to be the rule at the University of Michigan, the Democratic-majority Board of Regents have taken aim at pro-Palestinian students, workers, and community members, marshalling the university's vast resources to take down the pro-divestment movement.

The movement, spearheaded by the TAHRIR Coalition, has demanded that the Board of Regents divest its \$20 billion endowment from companies involved in Israel's subjugation of Palestinians, and called for greater financial transparency and campus democracy.

Intentionally obscured by venture capital and hedge fund middlemen and shielded by a 2004 law that denies public access to the endowment, researchers do not have a full picture of exactly how much of the university's endowment profits from genocide-implicated corporations. Yet initial research indicates that the University is invested in venture capital firms like Advent International, a16z, 8VC, Lightspeed Venture, Accel, Eclipse, Francisco Partners, and more.

These venture capital firms in turn invest

in weapon manufacturers and surveillance technology like Cobham Ultra (supplier to the UK military), Anduril (producer of drones, AI facial recognition, sentry towers), and Edgybees (AI-informed aerial/satellite photography), and much, much more.

While the University of Michigan Board of Regents has historically voted to divest its endowment from apartheid South Africa, tobacco, fossil fuels and Russia, they have insisted that they will never divest from Israel. Instead, they have engaged in an intense campaign of criminalization, spending over \$4.15 million since May to go after protestors.

Firing and Blacklisting

The Regent's current counter-insurgency repertoire has included deploying police to violently beat and arrest protestors, levying criminal charges against activists, firing and blacklisting undergraduate student workers, contracting external consultants to pursue student code violations, suspending student groups, expanding on-campus surveillance in the form of private security and thousands of surveillance cameras, and bulldozing any shred of shared governance with faculty.

They have even refused discussing the defunding of the University's vaunted liberal showpiece, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programming, because of its association with pro-Palestine sentiment.

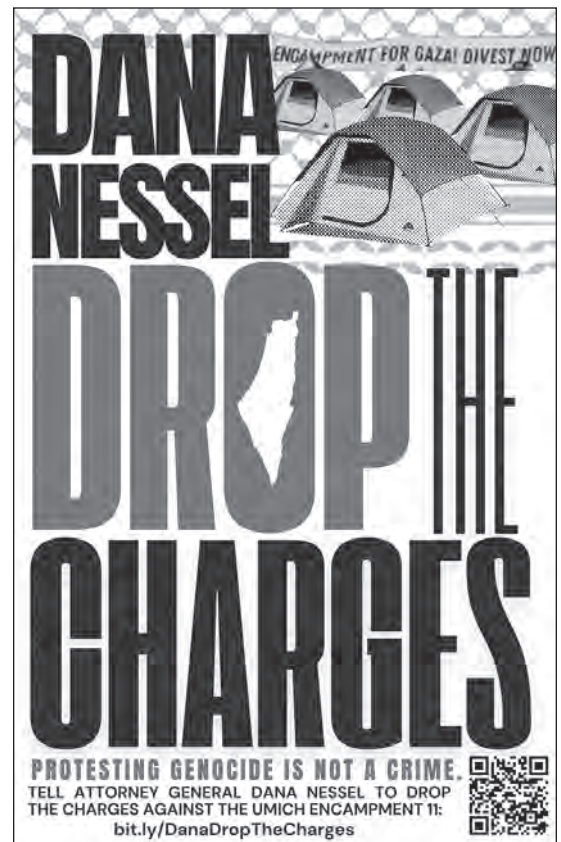
The level of repression caused the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) to characterize the University of Michigan "an institution of particular concern," while on November 8, 2024, the U-M Faculty Senate members voted for the first time ever to censure the Board of Regents for pushing through policy changes without faculty input and for violently repressing activism on campus.

The Board of Regents have made their disdain for the campus community very clear: Regents have ignored numerous student and faculty votes for divestment from

weapons manufacturers and have actively smeared, punished, and criminalized those who continue to press for divestment.

Democratic Regent Mark Bernstein called the former Central Student Government, President Alifa Chowdhury and Vice President Eli Atkinson, elected on a pro-divestment platform, "no better than the antisemitic mob running around campus" at the June 2024 Board of Regents meeting.

Democratic Regent Jordan Acker claimed the movement was "foreign funded" and compared protestors to "klansmen," while Republican Regent Sarah Hubbard gloated that the University police had "taken back" the center of campus from pro-Palestine students and community members after the Regents directed university police last May to violently raid the vibrant activist-run encampment.



Open letter to demand that Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel drop criminal charges against the U-M Encampment 11. TAHRIR Coalition www.tahrirumich.org

Kathleen Brown is a PhD student at the University of Michigan and active in the graduate student union, GEO.

The Regents' "pro-terror" and "criminal" framing of community activism, as well as their tired allegations of antisemitism, is an attempt to deflect attention away from demands from divestment. Yet it also sets a dangerous precedent of a liberal-led witch hunt against the left on the cusp of a second Trump administration.

The Board's hatred of Palestine and the movement for Palestinian freedom even led the Regents to recruit Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat, to pursue charges against 11 encampment activists.

Seven of these are felony-level charges related to the police's brutal clearing of the encampment, which sent four people to the hospital. Nessel's decision to charge activists overrides the authority of local prosecutor Eli Savit and is designed to specifically target and punish pro-Palestine protesters, essentially weaponizing the criminal justice system against the left, which Trump and Republicans will most certainly expand upon in the new year.

These charges represent an acute betrayal of Nessel's political base, which included labor unions, civil rights organizations, LGBT groups (Nessel herself is gay), and even the *Arab American News* in Dearborn, Michigan, all of whom carried her to re-election in 2022. Nessel's commitment to protecting Zionism smashed that coalition to pieces.

While Nessel's prosecution unfolds in the court system, University police have found a more effective tactic to keep activists off campus by issuing trespassing bans.

To date, University police have unilaterally banned over 60 individuals from parts or all of campus. Trespassing bans essentially "warn" an individual that they are barred from campus and if they return, they will be arrested by police.

The bans do not require any proof of having committed a crime, and that lack of due process has given police unlimited ability to bar students, graduate workers and community members from accessing a public campus. Stickers on campus? You'll receive a ban. Using a megaphone? *Arrest and ban*. Holding a "sign on a stick"? *Ban*. Protesting an event? *Ban*. This has resulted in students being barred from attending classes or even their own graduation.

Weaponized Discipline

Simultaneously, University administrators have weaponized internal student disciplinary processes via the Office of Student Conflict Resolution (OSCR) and Student Organization Advancement and Recognition (SOAR).

In an unprecedented move, the University hired external consultants Omar Torres from Grand River Solutions and Stephanie Jackson from InCompliance, contracting both companies for a total of \$1.5 million.



A recent "Work-In," Against Repression saw over 160 faculty, staff and graduate workers show their opposition to the Regents' authoritarianism. Kathleen Brown

Both Torres and Jackson were recruited to act as "complainants" in student disciplinary hearings, even though neither were on campus nor even employed by the University when the alleged infractions occurred. This is a wild perversion of the student conflict resolution process, which normally seeks to resolve harm through restorative justice.

Indeed, the Board of Regents even changed the rules of the Student Statement of Rights and Responsibilities to make it harder for students to appeal disciplinary outcomes, positioning Vice President of Student Life Martino Harmon (salary \$397,000) as the ultimate arbiter. In short, the Board of Regents have removed any semblance of due process.

Nor are the assaults on civil liberties limited to pro-Palestine groups on campus. At a recent rally decrying job cuts in Graduate Student Instructor positions within the University's College of Literature, Sciences, and the Arts, University police forced members of the Graduate Employees Organization, AFT Local 3550, at risk of arrest and campus bans, to drop their picket signs and megaphones.

In addition to the spectacular shows of repression in police violence and public denunciations is the more mundane repression experienced by workers who show any connection or solidarity to Palestine.

Graduate workers have been threatened with discipline for having a pro-Palestine email signature; Residential Advisors have been reprimanded for displaying Palestinian

flags in their dorm rooms; police have harassed faculty and staff for sitting with chairs and tables on the Diag over the summer without a permit, and undergraduate workers have been fired and blacklisted for participating in protest.

This level of repression points to the importance of labor organizing to resist and reverse these quotidian battles over freedom of expression and academic freedom. In this way, fighting for Palestine has enlarged the struggle for freedom on campus and heightened the contradiction between authoritarian administrators and workers, leading to cross-union collaboration against repression.

Frequent police attacks have forced activists to take up more creative forms of protest: students organized silent "study-ins" at the library where protestors tape signs condemning genocide on the back of their laptops; workers have organized lunch hour

"Work-Ins" for employees to gather to show opposition to repression.

At a recent walkout in November, protestors stayed on the public streets of Ann Arbor so that University police would not arrest them; activists have held events off-campus to evade University surveillance, which now includes private University-contracted surveillance personnel, a sort of modern-day Pinkerton (AmeriShield Protection Group, \$851,000), thousands of new surveillance cameras, and police-controlled drones.

And while the Regents' offensive continues, so does the movement for Palestinian liberation, propelled onward by the horror of genocide and a commitment to the people of Palestine, their right to resist subjugation and the right to return to their homeland.

University administrators may try to smash the movement using millions of dollars at their disposal, but no threat of punishment will ever make people unsee the horrors of genocide.

The Regents represent a minority on campus, evident by their deep unpopularity and inability to step foot on campus without protest. After the ICC's arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant and the first-ever vote in the U.S. Senate on halting arms sales to Israel, there are cracks forming in the United States' support for Israel.

At the base of the foundation, chipping away, are the campus movements for divestment; they are nuclei of democratic, people's movements contesting power at every turn. ■

Ta-Nehisi Coates' Trip to Palestine: Facing the Zionist Backlash

By Malik Miah

TA-NEHISI COATES is a celebrated writer, journalist and public intellectual known for his works on racism and the Black freedom struggle.

Coates has been praised for his books and essays, including establishment publications. That would change after his 2023 visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories of Palestine, his first trip to the region.

As he says in his new book *The Message* (One World, October 2024, 250 pages):

"Writing is a powerful tool of politics. For positive action and clarity, or for misinformation and dishonesty by those in power."

This book of essays is directed toward his students at Howard University in a writing workshop where he focuses on three trips — including to Dakar, Senegal and to Chapin, South Carolina. The controversy arose because of what he says about Israel and the Occupied Territories, where he visited the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The Message has stirred controversy and deep anger from Zionists and pro-Israel lobbyists.

"I Felt Lied To"

Going to Palestine was "a huge shock to me," he told the *New York Times*. Coming back to New York, he felt, as he told reporter Peter Beinart, "a responsibility to yell" about what he'd seen — which he describes as apartheid and which he compares to the segregated Jim Crow South in the United States.

A review in *The Atlantic* by Daniel Berhner wrote that Coates "had confronted, he said, Israel's 'Jim Crow regime,' its 'segregationist order,' enforced by the 'biggest guns I'd ever seen in my life.'"

And given that Coates had been "reared on the fight against Jim Crow, against white supremacy," he felt mortified by his years of blindness to the brutal simplicity of the Palestinian plight. "How," he asked, "could I not know?"

The trip took place in May 2023, before the October 7 Hamas attack that sparked Israel's ongoing genocidal war in Gaza, now expanded to daily bombing of Lebanon.

Coates has explained in numerous interviews and speeches that when he was guided



Ta-Nehisi Coates found the West Bank reminded him of the Jim Crow South.

from Jerusalem to Hebron on a tour organized by the Palestine Festival of Literature in May 2023, he found that the situation was far from complicated.

It reminded him of the Jim Crow South and apartheid in South Africa. "I felt lied to," he told *New York Times* columnist and podcast host Ezra Klein. "I felt lied to by my craft. I felt lied to by major media organizations."

"I don't think I ever, in my life, felt the glare of racism burn stronger and more intense than in Israel," he said. "There are aspects I found familiar — the light-skinned Palestinians who speak of 'passing,' the Black and Arab Jews whose stories could have been staged in Atlanta instead of Tel Aviv."

The pro-Israel lobby sharply attacked Coates as a "dupe of Hamas" and an unwitting terrorist advocate.

CBS Mornings Show Blindside

A September 30 interview with CBS Mornings news anchor Tony Dokoupil was no normal interview about a new book, nor an effort to seek the author's reason for writing a controversial but highly acclaimed book.

It was a hit job. Coates was aggressively challenged by Dokoupil on his claims against Israel's legitimacy. Dokoupil accused the author of engaging in extremist rhetoric.

"If I took your name out of it, took away the awards, and the acclaim, took the cover off the book, the publishing house goes away

— the content of that section would not be out of place in the backpack of an extremist," said Dokoupil.

Dokoupil's former wife and two children live in Israel, and he did not hide his pro-Zionist ideology while claiming to be an unbiased journalist.

As Coates later said after being ambushed by CBS, he asked where are the Palestinian and Muslim journalists on television? Why aren't they allowed to tell their story?

In fact, most pro-Arab voices are pushed off the mainstream media including at CNN, MSNBC and other outlets. Coates cites a study showing that over the past 50 years (1970-2019) fewer than two percent of opinion pieces about Palestine were written by Palestinian journalists or writers. (*The Message*, 229)

The Message, Coates said, was not intended to be "a treatise on the entirety of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis." He isn't offended specifically by a "Jewish state," Coates said, but "by the idea of states built on ethnocracy, no matter where they are."

When Dokoupil asked him why his essay ignored the "terror groups" that seek to wipe Israel off the map — which might explain Israel's elevated level of scrutiny and lack of courtesy at security checkpoints — he replied that "Israel does exist. It's a fact. The question of its 'right' is not a question that I would be faced with any other country."

Other Rebuttals

In an interview with Trevor Noah, the South African-born former host of the "Daily Show" on Comedy Central and prominent podcaster, Coates acknowledged what he had thought about "a lot" but never said out loud before.

He described the need to recognize the historical contexts that shape actions, likening the situation in Gaza to past struggles. He drew a parallel from October 7 to Nat Turner's 1831 slave rebellion: "The example I think about all the time is like Nat Turner. This man slaughters babies in their cribs."

He questioned whether the "degradation and dehumanization of slavery" could ever justify such acts, pondering whether some enslaved people would have thought, "This is too far. I can't do that."

Malik Miah is an ATC advisory editor and regular columnist.

In an interview on “Democracy Now” on October 8 he elaborated the point:

[Co-host] JUAN GONZÁLEZ: You write in the book, quote, “It occurred to me that there was still one place on the planet — under American patronage — that resembled the world that my parents were born into.” Can you elaborate?

TA-NEHISI COATES: Yes. And I think I talked about it the last time I was here, actually. These are the words I have even now, and they are probably insufficient to what a Palestinian would offer who experiences this, but the words that come to me are “segregation.”

When you are on the West Bank, there are separate roads. There are roads for Israeli settlers and citizens of Israel, and there are roads for Palestinians. These roads are not separate and equal; these roads tend to be separate and unequal. It tends to take longer to get where you want to go if you’re a Palestinian.

If you enter a city like Hebron, for instance, Hebron is quite literally segregated. There are streets that Palestinians cannot walk down. There are streets (where) Israeli settlers are

given complete and free movement...

The justice system, which is deeply familiar for African Americans today, is quite literally segregated. There is a civil justice system that the minority of Israeli settlers, as Israeli citizens, enjoy, and then there is an entirely separate justice system (to which) Palestinians on the West Bank are subject...

It has been this way since 1967. And the word we use for that is “occupation,” which is a kind of a deeply vanilla word that does not actually describe what is going on.

Coates has taken the attacks of his critics and Zionists smear operatives well. It is a powerful example of how to respond to the racist right.

But *The Message* is much more than about Israel and Palestine. The sections on Senegal and South Carolina are worth a serious reading.

In Conclusion

Coates concludes his view of Zionism: “I’ve been home for a year, but sometimes I still dream that I am back in Palestine...” “Zionism was conceived as a counter oppres-

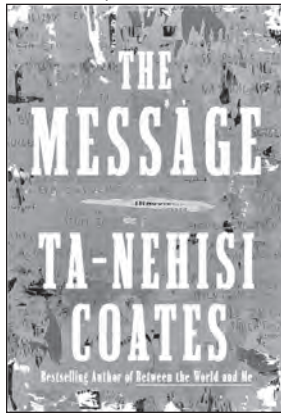
sion that feels very familiar. I read the early Zionist Moses Hess naming himself as part of “an unfortunate, maligned, despised, and dispersed people—a but one that the world has not succeeded in destroying,” and I hear the prophets of Black nationalism, the struggle into which I was born, the struggle of Garvey and Malcolm, the struggle that gave me my very name....

“So much of what I saw during those ten days seemed explicitly about that particular mission. Honor. Even the platitude “Israel has the right to defend itself” made sense in the context of a people who’d so often been made to dance for their killers....

“But the security of Israel did not just require an agreement with apartheid — it required that Israel practice apartheid itself.” (207)

The founders of Zionism explicitly saw themselves and their envisioned state as an outpost of Western civilization against Asiatic barbarism. Israel today stands revealed by Amnesty International as the perpetrator of genocide in Gaza. It also leads to Jewish deaths and antisemitism around the globe.

Palestinian resisters are freedom fighters just as enslaved people from Africa were the true heroes — not the slaveholders or Founding Fathers who incorporated white supremacist ideology into the blood and bones of American democracy to this day. ■



Support Ukraine's Independent Unions! Celebrate the Syrian People's Victory!

THE UKRAINE SOLIDARITY Network has issued this appeal:

Winter is coming to Ukraine, temperatures are dropping, but nearly 60% of the country's electrical generating capacity has been knocked out by unrelenting Russian air strikes. After causing tens of thousands of civilian casualties, the Russians are bent on freezing every child, woman, and man.

The Ukraine Solidarity Network in the United States has teamed up with two Ukrainian trade unions, the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers and the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine and an NGO called Kryal to provide portable electric generators to families in need. Our initial goal is to raise \$6,000 dollars for 12 portable generators for union members and their families. These brave workers and their families are in urgent need of support.

The UN reports that Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure are impacting millions, creating serious humanitarian and public health risks, and adding hundreds of thousands to the 10 million already displaced by the war. Other critical systems including water and education are also being severely disrupted.

Join Us in Standing with Ukraine's Workers! Your donation will provide essential power to some of those who need it most. Let's show our solidarity with Ukraine's rank-and-file workers and the vital work they do

under unimaginable conditions.

(For a flier and details on how to donate, visit <https://www.ukrainesolidaritynetwork.us/electric-generators-for-ukrainian-workers/>.)

The network is also celebrating the Syrian People's victory and reaffirming solidarity with Palestine in the face of continuing U.S.-Israeli genocide:

THE UKRAINE SOLIDARITY Network (U.S.) wholeheartedly celebrates the liberation of Syria and its people from the half-century murderous Assad family tyranny. Like so many others, we are profoundly inspired by the scenes of people celebrating in the streets, the return of refugees who had fled their country to save their lives, and prisoners' mass release from the regime's incarceration and torture centers.

Ukraine's resistance to Russia's annexationist invasion was a key factor aiding the Syrian people in overthrowing the Assad dictatorship. The Putin regime was also been a pillar of support for Assad's military machine. Even as the Syrian regime was collapsing, Russia carried out terror bombing of Aleppo and other cities reminiscent of its bombing of Ukraine's civilian population.

Like the Ukrainian resistance, the struggles of the Palestinian and Georgian peoples have in their own ways contributed to Syria's enormous victory.

We are disgusted but unsurprised by U.S. president Biden and the State Department's

proclamation of support while United States imperialism continues to supply military support for Israel's genocide in Gaza, bombing of Lebanon and land grabs in the West Bank.

Ukraine and Syria, vastly different in many respects, have both been devastated by war and face massive tasks of economic and social reconstruction. In solidarity with Ukraine's people and progressive political forces, USN has demanded *cancellation of Ukraine's foreign debts*. Similarly, today we demand international aid to Syria for its humanitarian and economic needs — *with no strings attached, and free of repayment obligations*.

All sanctions imposed on Syria by western governments must be immediately lifted and progressive movements in every country must raise that demand...

Today, above all, Syria's freedom from Assad's rule is a giant leap toward a democratic future, free of religious-sectarian conflict and with respect for the rights of all its people.

To the extent that Assad's downfall weakens Russia's imperial power, it aids Ukraine's struggle for survival and is all the more welcome. Perhaps it may also revitalize the struggles of the “Arab Spring” which have undergone such brutal repression over the past decade. But first and foremost this is the Syrian people's victory, and they deserve congratulation and, above all, solidarity on the part of all international progressive and left movements. ■



U-M symposium in defense of Professor Maura Finkelstein. From left, Alan Wald, Rebekah Modrak and Maura Finkelstein.

Charles H.F. Davis III

The Antisemitism Scare: A Guide for the Perplexed

By Alan Wald

AS WE ENTER a new political landscape following the election of Donald Trump, resistance to Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza and its bellicose military actions in the region takes on a greater urgency than ever before — even as political repression on U.S. campuses intensifies.

The following essay is based on a talk by ATC editor Alan Wald at a 29 October 2024 symposium at the University of Michigan (U-M) in defense of Professor Maura Finkelstein of Muhlenberg College, the first tenured faculty fired for anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian speech. (See the full report on the case by Natasha Leonard in the 26 September 2024 issue of *The Intercept*.)

The U-M symposium, called “Academic Freedom in a Time of Genocide,” was sponsored by the Colonialism, Race and Sexualities Initiative of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, and it included Professor Finkelstein as well as Rebekah Modrak, Professor at the Stamps School of Art and Chair of the Faculty Senate at U-M.

I. A Well-Documented History

BLESSED WITH THE keen eye of Minerva's Owl, much of today's academia is cognizant that the Red Scare of the 1950s did incalculable harm to US educational institutions. This history is well-documented in many books such as Ellen Schrecker's classic *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (1986).

At least since the rise of the Culture Wars of the 1990s, faculty across the political spectrum have been charging

“McCarthyism” as the go-to pejorative epithet to contest policies and practices they find threatening to their free speech (briefly, the expression of opinions in public without punishment) and academic freedom (originally, the pursuit of knowledge without external interference).¹

Allusions to the disgraced Republican senator (Joseph R. McCarthy, 1908-57) are frequently employed by radicals to brand efforts to suppress their activism; at other times they are used by conservatives to raise a hue and a cry about “Political Correctness” and “Wokeness.” In both cases McCarthyism invokes memories of the bad old days of the post-World War II anti-Communist witch-hunt with its broad-based smears and slanders, hardly a forgotten era.

It is also no secret that the Red Scare's out-of-control campaign of intellectual intimidation — instigated by the needs of US foreign policy — was facilitated by a rapid capitulation to the demands of external political pressure. As soon as the initial forays of government investigators occurred, most administrators and faculty, even if briefly disconcerted, acted shamefully. Their behavior quickly evolved through silence and complicity to formulating liberal rationales for the political purge, famously exemplified by Sidney Hook's *Heresy, Yes — Conspiracy, No* (1953).

Yet such groveling didn't work; today we honor figures like Sarah Lawrence College President Harold Taylor, who fought back and defended his faculty, while many of the one-time Left-wing victims have received institutional apologies. So how is it possible that we are already well into a bumfuzzling resurrection of this malign behavior 70 years later?

Alan Wald is an editor of *Against the Current*, a member of the Academic Advisory Council of *Jewish Voice for Peace*, and a founder of the *University of Michigan Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine*.

II. Faculty of Conscience

The context of 2024 is of course quite different. Faculty in the 1950s, unlike today, were not under fire for militant activism, statements in or out of the classroom, or civil disobedience. The focus was mainly on past political beliefs, i.e., association with the Communist Party (CP-USA). And the demand of the inquisitors was for professors — few of whom still had organizational connections — to repudiate this past by exposing others through the method of “naming names.”

What amounted to political show trials were orchestrated through public hearings of Congressional investigating committees in different states. Professors who didn't co-operate, by invoking either the First or Fifth Amendments, were mostly punished by their universities through dismissal. Although there was incessant propaganda claiming that such faculty were disloyal, there was never any evidence of professors' engagement in conspiratorial activities, sabotage, or civil unrest.²

At present, faculty of conscience are actively trying to end what much of the world considers to be a genocide of Palestinians by one state (Israel) and enabled by another (ours), which counts among the most monstrous acts of our time.³ This also means trying to stop Israel from barreling down an ethical abyss ruinous to its own population.

As Zionist Israel becomes an international symbol of oppression, immorality, and illiberalism, Jews throughout the world are wrongly put in danger because the Israeli state insists that it speaks for all of us.⁴

Although individual activists have their own views on causes, solutions, and strategies, the predominant political campaign is for a coordinated global solidarity movement for peace and justice in the region. This should start with an immediate, permanent ceasefire and an embargo on weapons for Israel, and also include economic divestments, boycotts, and increased and more accurate education about the issues.

Yet universities and colleges are implementing a 2.0 version of political repression based on supposed discriminatory, harassing and threatening behavior, and mostly extramural expressions of opinion. Students and staff are also in the cross-hairs, which I hope will be the subject of future articles.

For faculty, my focus here, the result has been blacklisting, arrests, and job loss. *The New York Times*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Guardian*, and the Left press have been reporting on numerous cases of such repression, pointing to faculty at Columbia University, MIT, Princeton University, UC Irvine, and Northwestern University.

The most shocking is probably that of Dr. Maura Finkelstein at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. She was Chair of the Anthropology Department and was fired from her tenured position mainly due to her reposting an anti-Zionist poem on social media.⁵

What I'm calling a 2.0 political repression, against pro-Palestinian speech and activism, is perhaps distinct from 1.0 McCarthyism by the way it aspires to con the university community as well as the public. Administrators use the rubric of protecting free speech and the right to protest, and especially the “safety” of Jewish students.

This last is engineered under Civil Rights Act Title VI by treating outspoken anti-Zionist opinions — especially certain slogans, phrases, and ideas — as antisemitic discrimination against a supposed “protected class” due to race, color, or

national origin.⁶

The repression is accomplished as well by implementing university policies that were not used during protests of previous decades; many of these involved much greater disruptions of university activities than we have seen to date, and property destruction far beyond the spray-painting that has occurred in several places.

These new rules are then selectively deployed to intimidate and silence when politicians and donors put on the pressure. What is more, undemocratic means of gaining approval for the new rules are achieved through by-passing the norms of traditional faculty “shared governance;” that is, they are imposed top-down, without consultation with faculty and students.⁷

III. Redefining Antisemitism

Then there is a second distinctive element of 2.0: The widespread promotion of a calculated redefinition of the meaning of “antisemitism.” This is what enables the declarations that violations of Title VI have occurred when criticism of the political ideology of Zionism is sharply expressed. Supposedly, the targets of such criticisms were not ideology or state policy but a “protected class” of “national origins.”

This phrase roughly refers to one's country of birth or ancestry as well as physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics. If a university fails to act against violations of Title VI (i.e., claims of harassment and hostile environment against a protected class), it can be punished by losing millions of dollars of federal funding.⁸

Thus, when politicians want to take aim at a campus where there has been radical activity, there is a financial incentive for university administrations to find new mechanisms for punishing people to avoid losing funds under Title VI.

Some of the alleged Title VI violations receiving attention are based on complaints about the personal social media of faculty, customarily seen as extramural speech with First Amendment rights.

Individuals and organizations are monitoring accounts of suspected faculty, often searching for political ammunition, and then they (sometimes outsiders and sometimes students) report to university administrators that the content makes them feel emotionally uncomfortable and anxious. The charge becomes that the professor's speech or writing negatively impacts a student's access to education.

For sure, emotional upset at views we don't like is not surprising. The pain felt when there are challenges to myths that are hardwired through socialization into one's culture and imagination can't be dismissed. But this works both ways. Those of us who see pro-Zionists' images and reports from the unhinged Betar, *College Fix*, *Washington Free Beacon*, and Right-wing individuals on our own social media feed can likewise feel distress and apprehension.

At the University of Michigan, faculty and student anti-genocide activists can point to Regents who publicly refer to us as “an antisemitic mob” and participants in “a coordinated, foreign-funded student protest that is engaging in violent activity.”⁹ These powerful spokespersons are not just dumbing-down the debate into crude insults but defaming us in a slanderous way that could provoke retaliation.

Whether the emotions we feel in response to this level of discourse are tantamount to our being the victims of threats and harassment that demand an institutional punishment is

another matter.

Additional alleged violations by pro-Palestinian faculty are attributed to political appraisals that might be used in a classroom. One supposed antisemitic critique is the assessment of the Palestine/Israel historical conflict through the framework of a variant of colonialism known as “settler-colonialism.”¹⁰

This is reinterpreted by supporters of the Israeli state as a call for annihilation of the Jewish population. Of course, Columbia Professor Rashid Khalidi, the most popular explicator of the settler-colonial framework, plainly does not advocate any kind of expulsionism or eliminationism of Jews. As he clearly states in his most famous book:

*“There are now two peoples in Palestine, irrespective of how they came into being, and the conflict between them cannot be resolved as long as the national existence of each is denied by the other. Their mutual acceptance can only be based on complete equality of rights, including national rights, notwithstanding the crucial historical differences between the two.”*¹¹

Another critique, decried as antisemitic, rejects present-day Israel as a lawful form of self-determination — not because it is a Jewish state but because any ethnostate on contested land is unacceptable. *Jewish Currents* editor Peter Beinart, among others, has written compellingly about the fact that self-determination is not necessarily achieved through its own state form, and that self-determination cannot mean a violation of others’ rights:

*“National self-determination can only constitute a universal right if it means something less than independent statehood. Think about the term itself. For individuals, ‘self-determination’ means autonomy, one’s right to determine one’s own affairs. But there are limits to that right because individuals have to respect others’ autonomy too. It’s the same with nations, which are large groups of people that feel some collective solidarity and want to run their own affairs.”*¹²

IV. Confronting Fake History

The situation we face is that protests and scholarship fundamentally challenging the Zionist position, especially those demonstrating that current events are not an aberration but a fulfillment of Zionism, are being outlawed as “antisemitic.”

Instead, we are frequently offered the view that the violence in the Middle East is a result of the centuries-old “longest hatred” of Jews, as well as a continuation of Holocaust antisemitism. Such an interpretation, that the conflict is at root an ethnic or religious war, keeps the intellectual discourse about states and self-determination in its troglodyte phase.

On the one hand, the object is to normalize the false description of antisemitism found in the International Holocaust Remembrance definition of antisemitism, which is still not legally binding.¹³ On the other hand, it correspondingly amounts to deploying a fake history to justify a predetermined conclusion that apartheid and genocide are understandable solutions.

There is a need to name colonial subjugation, and understand its implications, in order to unframe Palestine from the distorting myths of Zionism, which are made possible by a widespread ignorance of Jewish history that ultimately inhibits one’s capacity to understand the world in which we live. This is the only way to reframe the problem as one of equal coexistence through the abolition of Jewish colonial privilege.

Reducing the matter to Jew-hatred only fuels a permission structure to exaggerate one’s discomfort into accusations of a

menacing and hostile campus environment. Unsettling chants (“From the River to the Sea”), symbols (Palestinian flags, keffiyehs), and language (“intifada,” which means “shaking off”) are thereby transformed into genocidal threats.

None of these, and similar ones, meet the standard of actionable “hate speech,” which is not a protected class. Only an anti-Zionist statement combined with an imminent physical threat qualifies as punishable. Even scary red triangles (used by Hamas’s military wing to indicate Israeli targets in propaganda videos) don’t make the grade.¹⁴

For the most part, common sense should tell us that the chants, clothing, and the majority of slogans cited are no more menacing and harassing than pro-Israel partisans waving flags of the state of Israel (the country slaughtering civilians each day), or campus Hillel chapters sponsoring Israeli Defense Force speakers Arky Staiman and Yadin Gellman.

Right-wing websites like Canary Mission that accuse hundreds of university community members of being antisemites and pro-terrorists, or the stream of messages by some Zionists calling anti-genocide protestors “terror and rape supporters,” are as simplistic and as offensive as labeling all Zionists fascists and racists.¹⁵

If any activists from any point of view sincerely want to get a hearing from people who are not yet convinced of their opinions, they need to avoid gratuitously pushing buttons or using ambiguous slogans that can easily be twisted to mean something not intended. The anti-genocide movement is operating in a climate where powerful actors are trying to depict us as a part of a “global Hamas Support Network [HNS],” turn the public against us, and frighten potential sympathizers into cutting their ties with us.¹⁶

Veterans of the 1960s antiwar movement who fought for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam know that militancy is most powerful when clear and comprehensible.

Still, disputes over which language actually constitutes a physical threat don’t clarify the question most crucial to accusations made under Title VI: Are the protestors, faculty and others, who are rightfully angry about genocide, but sometimes saying heated and not always accurate things, in any way attacking people of a “protected class”? Or are they vigorously opposing a specific state form and ideology — ones supported by people of various nationalities and ethnicities? Here some definitions and a representative example of how the Title VI accusation is being used might help.

V. Widespread Venerations of Hamas Violence?

Customarily, antisemitism has been described as Jew-hatred, a racist conspiracy theory since the 1894 Dreyfus case. It is commonly distinguished from anti-Judaism, the denial of the Mosaic covenant and replacement by another theology.

In my view, the current 2.0 redefinition of Jew-hatred is primarily aimed at damaging the reputation of people trying to act responsibly; these are hyperbolically and opportunistically smeared as Jew-haters (even if Jewish). Here it is worth noting what Peter Beinart posted on X a few months ago: “When I speak on campus, I ask what % of the pro-Palestine protesters are Jewish. Usually, Jews are overrepresented. Sometimes they’re the largest identity group. Maybe folks calling for cracking down on protesters in the name of Jewish safety should consider their safety too.”¹⁷

Furthermore, using the antisemitism smear as a lie and a tactic is particularly alarming with the rise of actual antisemitism worldwide. Continually playing the “antisemitism card” to extort fear and silence means that the term loses its power to illuminate, making the charge less credible in relation to the real dangers from the Right.¹⁸

This is not to suggest that, in contrast to the rest of U.S. society, there is no antisemitism to be found on the Left, or that Jew-hatred has been non-existent among Palestinians and Arabs.¹⁹ Supporting a cause does not mean idealizing the side one espouses, or robotically believing that every action taken in the name of that cause will effectively further it.

While it is up to Palestinians to determine their own future, much of the movement does not hold that the ideology and strategy of Hamas, or the Iranian-led “Axis of Resistance,” are one and the same as Palestinian resistance. What we do know is that Israel has harshly stamped out efforts at nonviolent resistance (the First Intifada, the Great March of Return) and oppressed people will resist through the means available to them.

It is only by halting the Zionist onslaught that conditions can be created for there to be a fuller range of choices and options for meaningful alternatives by the population.²⁰ In our shared struggle with Palestinians for a better world, we should rebut those who use disagreements with Hamas as a convenient excuse to disengage.

Instead, socialist internationalists must redouble efforts to organize and mobilize around effective demands on the U.S. government that will expand, not shrink, the needed mass opposition.

A widely publicized example of the invocation of Title VI appeared on *The New York Times* Opinion page, in late October: “College Officials Must Condemn On-Campus Praise for Hamas Attacks.”²¹

I choose this article because the author, Erwin Chemerinsky, is no eye-popping wing-nut fanatic; to focus on cherry-picked cringe and fringe opinion from places like Campus Reform wastes time. Chemerinsky is a respected legal scholar, Dean of the UC Berkeley School of Law, and possibly a nice guy. This gives him authority and credibility to most *Times* readers. But what does he say?

First, Chemerinsky starts by equating some “anti-Israeli language” with “glorification of the Hamas massacre.” Referring to a UC Berkeley rally of 1000 people this October 7, he insists that “many of the protest signs were explicit in their endorsement of the violence on that day.” He then cites one sign (yes, an offensive one, reading “Israel deserves 10,000 October 7ths”) and then one other sign (“Long live Al-Aqsa Flood”). He then mentions one banner, “Glory to the resistance,” which has a red triangle.

After that, however, Chemerinsky immediately moves away from his Berkeley demonstration of 1000 over to Columbia University, to cite one essay posted by an organization, and next to Brown University to cite one Instagram post. He climaxes by quoting the Anti-Defamation League, notorious for

identifying statements critical of Israeli actions with antisemitism.

The ADL asserts that all over the country there were, similarly, “protestors’ signs, clothing, flags, chants and speaker comments [that] explicitly venerated Hamas’s deadly attacks.” Not surprisingly, no evidence is cited.

So out of 1000 people protesting at Berkeley, he cites two problematic signs, and also one banner. What did the other 998 participants express by their signs, buttons, and chants? (Could it be that they called for ceasefire, divestment, and so on — not a glorification of the Hamas attack?) Who placed that banner, who agreed with it? Were there any other banners with different slogans?

Notwithstanding, Chemerinsky concludes that the Berkeley action was a threat serious enough to violate Title VI (meaning Jew-hatred), compares it to a KKK rally, and demands administrative

action. But none of these signs and posts refer to Jews. Some refer only to armed resistance against an occupying power — which is recognized as legitimate by international law. (To be clear: International law additionally regards the targeting of civilians as a war crime — where Israel, in its slaughter and starvation of Palestinians, is by far the more grotesquely savage perpetrator.)

One must cast a gimlet eye on this Op Ed, for it is not just an ill-informed hot take based on a safari via Google among a wide range of campus protests. Chemerinsky is trafficking in a panic and outrage that turns him into part of the propaganda machine that provides justification for others — off campus — to pressure university administrators to do the actual dirty work of banning and punishing.

VI. Who Are the “Zionists”?

I’m not disputing that Chemerinsky’s five examples might be crude, ambiguous, unhelpful to winning people over — expressions of rage and frustration.

The problem begins with rendering these confrontational anti-Zionist statements as antisemitic, and then his excessive inflation of their presence. It is then multiplied with his invoking of Title VI with reference to Jews — which is disingenuous and factually false.

Chemerinsky’s demagogic melding simply ignores that the largest body of Zionists in the United States, espousing the Israeli political position that Jews have the God-given right to all the Holy Land, are *Christian Zionists*. They number at least 30 million, compared to about 4.5 million Jewish adults of whom only half consider Israel crucial to their identity.

They are very well-organized — Christians United for Israel, led by John Hagee, has 11 million members. Politically, Christian Zionists are completely aligned with the Israeli state, give many millions of dollars to Israel, and are the largest component of the Israel Lobby. Pastor Hagee is personally close to Netanyahu and gave the benediction when the capital of Israel was moved to Jerusalem in 2018.

Their theology, however, is anti-Judaic. Christian Zionists want Jews to make Aliyah (immigrate to Israel) because the Jerusalem ingathering of Jews is the prerequisite for the Second



Maura Finkelstein in a happier moment.

Coming of Christ following the Rapture (believers' journey to heaven) and seven-year Tribulation.

Jews in Israel must at that time convert to Christianity or suffer the fiery horror of the apocalypse, burning in hell forever. Moreover, Hagee believes God sent Hitler to create Israel, Muslims have a "mandate to kill" Jews and Christians, and the coming anti-Christ, embodiment of all evil, will be a half-Jewish homosexual.²²

What is critical here is that Hagee's less-numerical allies are also people who have chosen an ideology. The portion of the Jewish population supporting Zionism, which is far from homogeneous, is subscribing to a nationalist movement infused with religion, somewhat like *Hindutva* (the right-wing ethno-nationalist political ideology of Hindu nationalism in India), and various others.

The Zionist movement is relatively recent (about 120 years) compared with the Jewish religion (at least 2500-3000 years) and emerged as a secular form of Jewish nationalism in the late 19th century in the face of antisemitism. It was generally rejected by Jews until the rise of Nazism in the 1930s. Even then, their primary desire was not Aliya but to escape antisemitism by immigrating to the United States, where entry was mostly prohibited as it was across Western Europe and Great Britain.²³

Thousands of refugees from Europe who then poured into Palestine before World War II would have been murdered if this one remaining escape route were not available. It is additionally true, however, that the founders of Zionism, going back to the Agricultural Aliyah (1881-1903), had evolved from seeking a Jewish homeland to collaborators in Western colonialism when they became sponsored and protected by Great Britain (the 1917 Balfour Declaration).

By the time of the 1948 *Nakba* and establishment of a Jewish ethnostate in Palestine before World War II, the transformation of all wings of political Zionism — Left and Right — into settler colonialism was clear.²⁴

To be sure, there is no doubt that many of the founders of the Israeli state were a remnant of a European population that itself underwent a precarious history of the Pale of Settlement in Tsarist Russia, blood libel accusations, pogroms, and outright genocide; furthermore, a near-majority of those Jews in Israel today are non-white refugees from Middle Eastern and African countries.

Nevertheless, this suffering of the past only helps *explain* but does not *justify* the behavior of the Israeli state. Its rulers have long been acting like the white overlords of the U.S. South or South Africa — and are now much resembling the historical persecutors of Jews.

If aimed only at this political ideology, anti-Zionist speech is simply not antisemitic. Undeniably, it can be angrily expressed, and can also be combined with antisemitism. This is obvious if one blends Holocaust denialism, conspiracy theories about "Jewish Power," and statements like "death to infidel Jews" with an anti-Zionist political claim.

Nevertheless, slogans, tweets, political analyses, and statements of groups focused on the Israeli state and the Zionist

ideology are not expressions of Jew-hated or harassment of a protected class — even if they may *feel* threatening.

VII. The Responsibility of University Intellectuals

Those of us affiliated with universities have an unequivocal intellectual and ethical obligation to make it clear that anti-Zionist contentions about settler-colonialism are not antisemitism. The same goes for challenging the right of self-determination in ethno-state form when it encroaches on an indigenous population. Anti-Zionism and antisemitism are historically and definitionally discrete.

Zionism is a political mission of state-making that advantages Jews. In contrast, anti-Zionism stands in resistance to a supremacist state — but emphatically not to Jews or Judaism. We must expose the fallacies behind the conflationary argument that Zionism is a core belief of Jews that cannot be contested without opposing individuals *qua* Jews, so that expressions of opposition become the equivalent of a harassing or even hate speech.

Every time one merges antisemitism and anti-Zionism, one goes through a political looking-glass to produce false information, and that's when dangerous hallucinations begin to bloom into a perpetual din of fictional perceptions. Jewish fac-



Alan Wald speaking at October symposium.

Late Dispatch from the Campus Wars

RACHEL DAWSON, A coordinator of diversity initiatives at the University of Michigan, was fired over allegations of "antisemitic remarks" reported to campus administration by the Anti-Defamation League. The accusations against Dawson (e.g. that she said Jewish students "are all rich"), are uncorroborated and denied by her attorney Amanda Ghannam, who is threatening to sue.

A statement by Dawson's support committee charges that two professors who approached Dawson at a conference "fabricated allegations that Ms. Dawson had made anti-Semitic comments, and filed a complaint with the ADL and the university. Instead of using its internal processes to investigate complaints, UM hired an external firm, Covington and Burling, which also represents the ADL, to investigate."

A source at U-M tells *Against the Current* that Dawson was reportedly "very visible trying to protect students from police brutality during a student protest, making her a target of the administration." The firing comes at a time when attacks on diversity programs are also attracting student protests.

Attorney Ghannam says that "What Ms. Dawson did there (at an August 28 protest) was advocate for student protesters not to be violently arrested.

"The fact that (the University) would rely on Ms. Dawson attempting to protect those students from violent arrest by police as a reason for her termination, I think it speaks to a wider and more troubling pattern of the University of Michigan's abdication of its responsibilities to uphold people's First Amendment rights."

Professor Rebekah Modrak, chair of the U-M Faculty Senate, regards Dawson as "a fierce protector of all students in Academic Multicultural Initiatives, including Jewish students..."

"I have complete confidence in her and her integrity (in denying the anti-Semitism allegations — ed.) I was with her on theDiag during Festfall when she pleaded with DPSS not to harm the students." ■

ulty, above all, must object to administrators recycling Donald Trump's campaign promise to "defend women" as an excuse to repress students and campus diversity efforts; they're saying, in effect: "Whether the Jews like it or not, I am going to protect them!"

We are also faced with the constant recirculation of a relatively small number of ultra-provocative, and a few possibly antisemitic, protest messages. Refuting the relentless "exposure" of these in the press would require a non-stop-treadmill of fact-checkers.

Besides, rebutting spurious complaints about "widespread Left anti-Semitism" doesn't address any real problems, because the purveyors of this false information are only interested in protecting the Israeli state from accountability. They are out to exploit what is so far a minor although real problem, rather than helpfully resolve it.

Nevertheless, it doesn't follow that we should ignore our obligation to clarify really existing antisemitism in this country and around the world, so as to work toward its elimination. Here a special responsibility falls on those of us in the Marxist tradition, for our 19th century understanding was profoundly misguided as to the strength and tenacity of modern Jew-hatred — which was mistakenly judged to be an anachronistic survival doomed to wane.²⁵

So it goes in regard to academic freedom in a time of genocide. Yes, we can see that many of our colleagues, especially those with the least job security, are understandably tempted to keep their heads down so as not to be in anyone's sights. Still, it is time for more secure activist academics to go on the offensive in the way we know best and in which we are trained.

Collective action is probably the most effective, through local and national Palestine Justice organizations that collaborate with students and staff, as well as the American Association of University Professors.

At this point, I do not know if we can win cases like that of Maura Finkelstein. A commitment to solidarity in a time of genocide means that one cannot count on a safe passage through life.

Faculty protestors like Maura, with a steadfastness of moral vision, are up against unprincipled bullying, character assassination, and perceived guilt by association. And these are being perpetrated by pliant and petty university and college administrators, obediently carrying out their orders, who are the latest personifications of the banality of evil.

But in listening to my inner Jean-Paul Sartre, we only know our authentic values and degree of intellectual honesty when we tell the truth even if that truth might hurt us. ■

Notes

1. The clearest explanations of Academic Freedom and Free Speech are available through the American Association of University Professors website: <https://www.aaup.org/programs/academic-freedom/faqs-academic-freedom>. For my own discussion of Academic Freedom in the McCarthy era, see: <https://s-usih.org/2013/08/ornery-professors-and-academic-freedom/>
2. This the conclusion of research in Lionel S. Lewis, *Cold War on Campus: Study of the Politics of Organizational Control* (1989).
3. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/nov/06/we-are-witnessing-the-final-stage-of-genocide-in-gaza>
4. Gideon Levy encapsulated the situation well regarding Israeli Jews in this comment in *Haaretz*: "This is another cost of the war in Gaza that should have been considered: The world will hate us for it. Every Israeli abroad will be a target for hatred and violence from now on. That's what happens when you kill almost 20,000 children, carry out ethnic cleansing and destroy the Gaza Strip. It's a little quirk of the world; it doesn't like those who commit these sorts of crimes." The passage is from a longer Opinion piece: <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-11-10/ty-article-opinion/premium/>

- from-amsterdam-to-the-hawara-pogroms-are-wrong/00000193-128f-d304-a3db-16ff60fb0000?utm_source=mailchimp&utm_medium=Content&utm_campaign=daily-brief&utm_content=48710845b5
5. See Anemona Hartocollis, "Professors in Trouble of Protests Over Protests Wonder if Academic Freedom is Dying": <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/23/us/faculty-protests-academic-freedom-tenure-discipline.html>; Megan Zahneis, "This Tenured Professor Says She Was Fired": <https://www.chronicle.com/article/this-tenured-professor-says-she-was-fired-her-case-tests-the-limits-of-academic-freedom>; David Shorter, "Academic Freedom Under Attack": <https://truthout.org/articles/academic-freedom-under-attack>; Michael Sainato, "US Professors Face Discipline and Investigation Over Palestine Support": <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/24/university-professors-discipline-palestine-support>
 6. To try to understand what I believe is the inaccurate claim that a Zionist political identity constitutes a "protected class" under Civil Rights Act Title VI (discrimination against race, color, national origin), see Congressional Research Service, Legal Sidebar, Updated 17 September 2024: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB11129#>
 7. See Andrew Manuel Crespo and Kirsten Weld, "The Harvard Corporation Tries to Kill Faculty Governance": <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-harvard-corporation-tries-to-kill-faculty-governance>
 8. At present the University of Michigan receives one billion dollars of federal funding per year.
 9. See: <https://apnews.com/article/michigan-university-president-vandalism-8f523c277762107708c155faa3a443d6>; and *Guardian*, 24 October 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/24/michigan-attorney-general-dana-nessel-campus-gaza-protests>
 10. Unlike metropole colonialism, where a parent state exercises direct control over a colony or empire, settler-colonialism takes land and resources from an indigenous people with the aim of displacing them by settlers.
 11. This quote from *The Hundred Years War on Palestine* (2017) has been widely circulated; see, for example, "How Israelis and Palestinians Can Make a one-State Solution Work": <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-how-israelis-and-palestinians-can-make-a-one-state-solution-work>. This is not to suggest that violence can be ruled out in the anti-colonial process, only that it must be minimized as much as possible. As Palestinian scholar Tareq Baoni points out: "Ultimately, decolonization, if it is to be effective, is not going to be grounded in bloodletting and killing of civilians. It's going to be a process that's focused on dismantling a structure of oppression." See: <https://jacobin.com/2023/11/hamas-israel-palestine-gaza-history-decolonization-violence>. While many facts are not known about the events of 7 October 2023, and Israel has promoted lies about beheadings and systematic rape, the reports of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem should be taken seriously.
 12. <https://jewishcurrents.org/there-is-no-right-to-a-state>
 13. See: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>
 14. See: <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech>
 15. For Canary Mission, see: <https://canarymission.org> for "terror and rape supporters" see: https://www.instagram.com/betar.us/p/DBro62CvpRj/?img_index=1
 16. See, for example, Project Esther of the Heritage Foundation: <https://www.heritage.org/progressivism/report/project-esther-national-strategy-combat-antisemitism>. Some useful political advice about the need for strategic thinking can be found in an essay by Palestinian activist and scholar Bashir Abu-Manneh: <https://jacobin.com/2024/10/palestine-genocide-israel-international-solidarity>
 17. See: <https://x.com/PeterBeinart/status/1782202542127972511>
 18. <https://religiondispatches.org/the-adl-is-correct-that-antisemitism-is-rising-but-the-main-and-most-dangerous-source-isnt-the-left-its-always-been-the-right/>
 19. For example, see the brilliant discussion of Arab responses to Nazism in Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (2010). This was rising in *Against the Current* by David Finkel: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc151/p3191/>
 20. Here I am sympathetic to the views of Rashid Khalidi: "There is a powerful trend or faction that advocates an unrestricted form of violence... In my view, this trend does not have a strategic vision. It has achieved tactical victories and some catastrophic strategic defeats, and it has caused enormous suffering to Palestinians and also to Israelis... Only a new vision of Palestinian liberation, rooted in progressive ideals rather than in the ethno-religious project of Hamas, he argues, can lead to genuine Palestinian freedom and sovereignty." For the full interview see: <https://jacobin.com/2024/10/gaza-lebanon-ireland-biden-netanyahu>
 21. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/20/opinion/hamas-colleges-free-speech.html>
 22. For more on Christian Zionism and Hagee see: <https://forward.com/opinion/603310/john-hagee-christian-zionist-iran-israel>; and <https://forward.com/culture/569725/john-hagee-march-for-israel/>
 23. See Harold Myerson: <https://prospect.org/world/2024-05-06-who-created-israel-palestine-conflict/>
 24. There is also the question of whether there is convincing scientific (genetic) or historical evidence to prove convincingly that contemporary Jews throughout the world have a common ancestral origin; that is, comprise a population entirely exiled from Palestine two thousand years ago with a Biblical property right to own the Holy Land. This is the subject of many books, which point out that there is no shared Jewish gene to define Jewish ancestry, that Jewish migration from Palestine was not complete and caused by many factors, and that substantial conversions to Judaism had a major impact on Jewish history. Some of these matters are discussed by David Finkel in his review of Shlomo Sand's *The Invention of the Jewish People*: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc146/p2805/>
 25. See Enzo Traverso's remarkable *The Jewish Question: History of a Marxist Debate* (2019) for the fullest discussion. See Peter Drucker's review of the First Edition: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc065/p2310/>

Pothole in the Middle of the Road: The Democrats' Path to Defeat

By Kim Moody

CRUISING DOWN THE middle of the road, the Democratic Party handed Donald Trump and the political right the White House, the Senate, and the House of Representatives. Looked at in percentage terms, the Republicans picked up support in just about every geographic and many demographic categories: urban; suburban; medium metros; small towns and rural areas; men; white non-college graduates; 18-29 year-olds; Black and Latino men; and those earning \$50,000 or less a year.

The Democrats clung to their majorities among women (54%), college graduates (54%); those making \$100,000-199,000 (51%) and won 51% of those with incomes of \$200,000 or more — upping the average income of Democratic voters once more. Nevertheless, they lost their majority in the suburbs, the central focus of their electoral strategy, where their vote went from 54% in 2020 to 48% this year.¹

Yet this was no voter landslide for Trump and the Republican Party, so much as a defeat for the Democrats. Trump gained just over three million votes more than in 2020, a gain of less than two percent compared to a drop of eight percent for Harris. He won by 2.8 million out of more than 155 million also less than two percent. The secret to his success lay in the Democrats' loss of over six million votes compared to 2020, despite the growth of the eligible electorate by four million voters. That is, Kamala Harris won 75.1 million in 2024 compared to Joe Biden's 81.3 million four years ago. Had the Democrats turned out just over half of those lost voters, Harris would have at least won the popular vote and quite likely enough of the swing states to take the White House.

The extent of the lost Democratic vote was breathtaking. The Harris/Walz team lost in all seven swing states that put Trump in the White House, and saw Democratic vote numbers drop in 37 out of 47 states where the vote count at this writing was complete compared to 2020.

Twenty-four of those states saw the Democratic vote fall by more than the Republicans gained. In Pennsylvania the Democrats lost 145,036 votes, while Trump gained 133,602. In Michigan, it was the drop of 61,000 votes in usually solid Democratic Wayne County, home to majority Black Detroit and heavily Arab Dearborn, that accounted for the bulk of the 80,000 lost Michigan Democrats and cost Harris that state. In the case of Dearborn, it was *the Biden Administration's unwav-*

ering support for Israel's genocidal war on Gaza that cost Harris thousands of Arab-American votes.

The sweep of the collapse of Democratic support is underlined by the fact that the Democratic vote fell in 81% of all U.S. counties. Even in once deep blue New York State, the Democrats lost 831,252 voters compared to 2020, while Trump gained just 219,000. The Democrats' share fell from 60.9% to 55.9% in 2024. It also fell in New York City where Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) was shocked to discover that the percentage of votes for Trump in her congressional district had risen from 22% in 2020 to 33% this year — many of whom also voted for her.²

Nationally, the Black Democratic vote continued to fall as a percentage this year from 87% to 86%, but down from 95% in 2012. Perhaps the biggest shock was the dramatic falloff of Latino Democratic voters from 65% to 53% this year — from 69% in 2012.

Both the turnout of Black and Latino people also fell as a proportion of all voters. Despite the centrality of abortion rights in the Harris/Walz campaign, the percentage of women who voted Democratic fell from 57% in 2020 to 54% this year.

The Democrats even broke one of the prime laws of American elections: that nine-out-of-ten candidates who spend the most win. In the 20203-2024 election cycle, Harris broke fundraising records as her campaign spent \$1,167,194,124 to Trump's \$622,633,035, while Republican "outside" money beat that of the Democrats by just \$975,826,757 to 843,053,718, according to OpenSecrets.org. And yes, this election was even more expensive than the record-breaking 2020 election at \$15,901,068,285 — and that isn't the final count.

Apparently, even with today's polarized electorate and a threatening future, it takes more than dollars to get people to the polls when the alternative doesn't speak to what they actually feel.

Party of the *Status Quo*

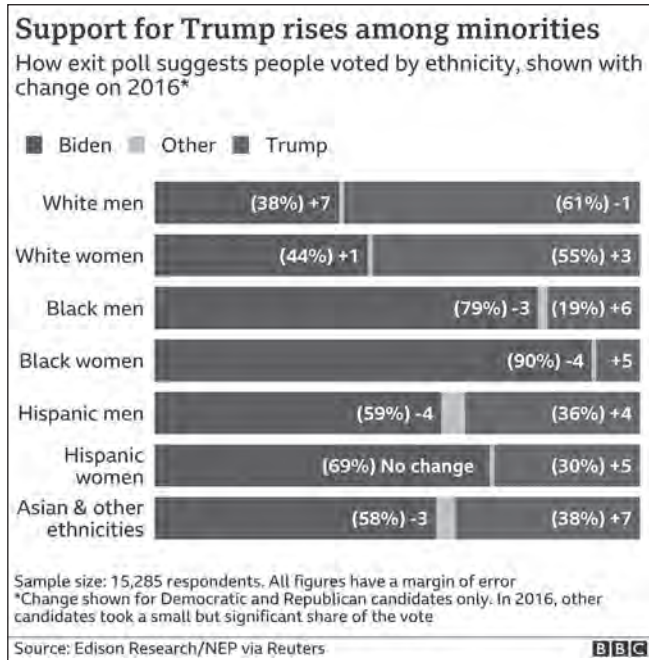
That racism and sexism worked against Harris is clear, just from the nature of Trump's campaign. And no doubt there were Democrats who were not willing to see a Black woman in the White House. But given the size of past votes for Obama and Hillary Clinton among all traditional Democratic groups, both of whom won a majority of the popular vote, it seems unlikely that race and gender by themselves can explain the depth of the fall in Democratic turnout.

The Democratic campaign's economic message, insofar as they had one, remained squarely in the political center in defense of the *status quo*, mainly in support of Biden's record. Exit polls tell us that the vast majority of Democratic voters approved of Biden's economic performance, but those respon-

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dents were disproportionately among the better-off who did vote (see below). And even among all voters, 67% rated the “condition of the nation’s economy” “Not so good/Poor.”

Following a longstanding trend, the Democrats did better among the highest earners, though not enough to win the suburbs as a whole. It was primarily working class and middle-income people of all races who deserted the erstwhile “party of the people,” either by voting Republican or more often this year by just failing to mail their ballot or staying home on election day.



Whereas Biden beat Trump 57-42% in 2020 among \$50,000-99,999 earners, who would encompass most of the employed blue-collar working class, in 2024 Harris lost them by 47-49% — a drop of ten percentage points compared to Trump’s gain of five points. Furthermore, this middle-income group fell from 39% of all voters in 2020 to 32% in 2024.

This goes far to account for the drop in the number of Democratic voters, especially blue collar and middle-income workers of all races in 2024. Given that the small business owners many of whom also fall in this income bracket vote disproportionately Republican, the bulk of missing voters were working-class Democrats.

This is further suggested by the drop in the Democratic union household vote from 56% to 54% this year and its decrease as a proportion of voters from 20% to 19 percent. Overall, the voting electorate and the Democratic voter base were significantly whiter and more prosperous in 2024 as those with an income of more than \$100,000, where Democrats won a majority, rose from 26% of all voters in 2020 to an astounding 40% in 2024, according to CNN exit polls. Clearly it was the nation’s economically embattled workers who disproportionately sat this one out in protest or disgust, rather than a stampede to the right.

The Harris campaign’s centrist message and its effort to sell Bidenomics to the working class failed utterly. They ran as the party of the *status quo* when many potential voters were angry and wanted “change,” above all relief from the cost-of-

living crisis. That trouble was already on the way could be seen in a September 2023 Pew Research survey which found that approval of the Democratic Party had dropped from 60% in the early 2000s to 37% in 2023, while disapproval had risen to 60%.³

Indeed, only 33% of registered voters identified as Democrats in 2023 compare to between 37 and 40% a decade earlier.⁴ The messages of good vibes and Biden’s big spending programs fell on deaf ears because they didn’t match working-class experience (more below). Trump’s “dark” message of a nation in trouble did resonate and for good reason. The rate at which inflation grew might have slowed down, but it didn’t relieve the accumulated cost of living of the previous four years — particularly on some of those items that lower- and middle-income people depend on such as food, fuel, rents, etc. In fact, real weekly earnings for production and nonsupervisory workers have been essentially stagnant since 2022.⁵

The Legacy of Democratic Party Neoliberalism

Deeper than this, however, and even more ignored by Democratic politicians was the tectonic shift in the lives of those workers who make and move the nation’s material production. It was a shift that followed the course of the Democrats’ move from the party of at least modest reform, during the upheaval of the civil rights era, to that of neoliberal austerity from Carter to Clinton to Obama. It was during these years that the Democrats consciously distanced themselves from unions, pushed labor law reform down the agenda, terminated almost all aid to the cities, while promoting free trade, deregulation, welfare reform, mass incarceration, etc.

The prelude to neoliberalism in the United States began with the embrace of “supply-side economics” and deregulation of transportation under Jimmy Carter, even before the “Reagan Revolution.” Neoliberal policies that undermined working-class life were further developed, designed and implemented by Democratic Party think tanks, leaders and politicians who reigned for 20 of the 32 years after the period of Reaganite Republican rule.

This was the long period sparked by the Stagflation crisis of the 1970s characterized in the United States by the simultaneous and interrelated rise of globalization (outgoing foreign direct investment and free trade), deregulation, deindustrialization and union decline, on the one hand, and the political organization of big business in the Business Roundtable, the rise of corporate PACs and wealthy money in elections, and the remaking of the Democratic Party on the other.

This latter was a shift not only from the old New Deal voter coalition of northern liberals, labor unions, urban machines and Southern segregationists, but from some level of grassroots organization in machines, local party clubs, unions and the now mostly hollow county committees, to a top-heavy tower of power of increasingly well-financed and staffed institutions (DNC, DCCC, DSCC, party caucus, professionalized state parties, donor networks, consultants).

This hierarchy of organized money and power that is today’s Democratic Party floats far above a disorganized electorate, while the party’s top-down organization is increasingly and disproportionately dependent on business and wealthy donors. Call it realignment, dealignment or misalignment, the party’s voting base on the other hand is a changing patchwork of incompatible and increasingly prosperous class fractions lacking

organizational coherence in which various elements of capital provide selective financial glue in each election cycle.

For the majority of working-class people, the neoliberal period was a catastrophe. The fact of deindustrialization of the nation's rust belt running from Pennsylvania through the Midwest has been well documented ever since Bluestone and Harrison wrote *The Deindustrialization of America* in 1982.⁶ The current wave of Democratic leadership however, didn't seem to notice (except for Chuck Schumer who argued that "for every blue-collar Democrat we lose in western Pennsylvania, we will pick up two moderate Republicans in the suburbs in Philadelphia." Not quite, Chuck.)

The focus of attention on the impact of deindustrialization has often been on the plight of white workers in rust belt mine, mill and factory towns who became the famous Reagan Democrats. The fact, however, is that this well-known industrial shift hit Black workers as hard or harder in gutted industrial cores of urban centers such as Detroit, Flint, Gary, Chicago, Pittsburgh and St. Louis as well as many smaller towns.

For these workers of color, however, becoming Reagan Democrats was unthinkable. It took Trump's message of radical change and protectionism to move a significant number of them from the Democratic column to the Republicans, while many more joined the 40% or more of the electorate that doesn't vote.

Wherever the trio of neoliberal "Third Way" policies, global forces and deindustrialization hit, they disrupted and undermined decades-old working-class communities, cultures and union-based ideas of solidarity that had kept these communities voting Democratic. A recent study of steel towns in Pennsylvania by Lainey Newman and Theda Skocpol shows how the decline of working-class organizations, above all unions, led white workers to turn to the right as the unions left town, and that old culture was undermined.⁷

The generation that followed the loss of blue-collar work was stuck with service sector jobs that were non-union, sometimes based on casual or "contracted" labor, and always with lower wages. Only recently have we seen the beginnings of organization in these jobs, and it will take time to build new cultures of solidarity.

It wasn't simply that the good jobs were gone and wages stagnated. As a study done for the *New York Times* shows, a huge section of the employed U.S. workforce since 1980 saw their incomes fall below the average for all employees as millions bypassed them. The relative earnings of production workers fell fastest in the Southeast but dropped below the national average in the Midwest, both key locations of Trump supporters and this year's missing voters, in the wake of the 2008-2010 Great Recession.⁸

While the victims of this downward shift may not know the

statistics, they have seen and felt the results and interpret it, not altogether incorrectly, as rejection by Democratic Party elites. This often overlooked shift of well-being and economic status, largely under Democratic administrations, is certainly one reason why so many white workers turned Republican or dropped out over the years, and why now more Black and Latino workers didn't vote for Harris on November 5. It was not the workers who abandoned the Democratic Party, but the party that had rejected the workers over the decades.

Neoliberalism Decays, Democrats Seek Old Solutions

The Biden Administration and the 117th and 118th Congresses were the first caught fully in the crisis of the neoliberal order, tasked with regenerating the economy in the transition to a largely unknown new phase of global capitalism — one compounded by a global pandemic and intensified climate change.

Democrats naturally turned for help to the state because it is their territory and there was nowhere else to turn. But rather than raise the minimum wage, build low-cost housing, dramatically expand free healthcare, pass the PRO-ACT and sufficiently fund the NLRB, tax bloated wealth and incomes, continue the direct COVID payments to individuals that Trump initiated, or anything else people had demanded or desired, they obeyed the commands of their benefactors and their own deeply held belief in the system to save U.S. capitalism by rewarding capital and protecting private assets — which no social movement or section of public opinion had demanded.

Facing a period of low investment and profit rate volatility, Democratic policy wonks and politicians reached back to the thinktank debates of the 1980s and 1990s and dug out "industrial policy." Industrial policy meant the government picking "winners and losers" to further the growth of strategic or competitive sectors by making them profitable at state expense. Reagan actually set up a commission to study industrial policy but ignored its findings.⁹ Bill Clinton briefly flirted with industrial policy before leading the neoliberal charge.¹⁰

To some on the left, industrial policy is a progressive approach — perhaps social democratic. But it has always been little more than a top-down means of encouraging capital to invest where those in charge thought it was most needed by financing businesses from the public trough. While there are often some requirements for getting the money, it does so without threatening or cramping management's rights, investors' dividends or the sanctity of private property.

The two trillion or so in tax breaks, grants, loans and other incentives and subsidies at the center of Biden's three major pieces of legislation (CHIPS, Infrastructure, Inflation Reduction), stretched out over 10 years, will eventually create jobs if the private employers take the bait, but they seldom demand specific conditions for those who do get the work.

Furthermore, as an analysis of the Inflation Reduction Act from *American Prospect* noted, "Yet, challenges remain



to make sure the funding isn't being skimmed by middlemen..."¹¹ Given the multi-tiered contract nature of much production and construction these days, this is almost inevitable. Ironically, despite the "Inflation Reduction" name of the major Act, the flow of government money without price controls for non-fossil fuel energy has actually inflated the prices of renewables.¹²

Furthermore, this version of industrial policy was designed and sold on the basis of national security and international competition, not the elevation of a working class in crisis. Industrial policy stimulus, thus, is little more than targeted welfare for capital in a crisis-ridden world with a presumed trickle-down effect on employment, stretched out over time and largely invisible to the public.

Trump on the other hand described a country with problems and promised highly visible, promptly implemented solutions: protective tariffs; border walls and immigrant removal -- concrete actions that promised to bring back jobs and seemed to many to address the problems they and their communities faced in an immediate way.

No doubt underlying racism has furthered this view, but it has increasingly been adopted by Black and Latino workers whose communities suffered even more from Democratic neoliberalism. That turn to reactionary and racist solutions is the consequence and culpability of the Democrats' leadership and institutions' inability to offer tangible progressive solutions.

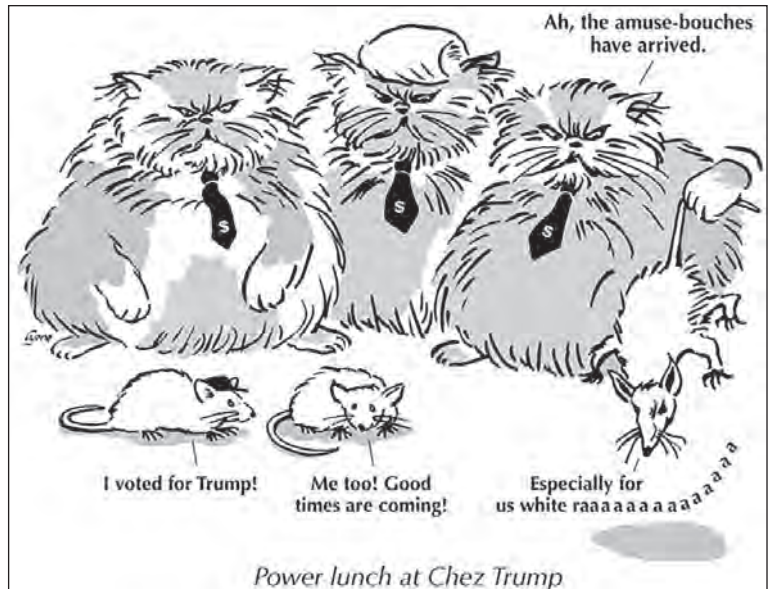
Just as public opinion and movement demands fell on deaf Democrat ears, so did pleas from the left to run a "populist" campaign à la Bernie Sanders: attack corporate elites; propose really taxing the rich; pass the PRO ACT, raise the minimum wage, promise healthcare-for-all; control rents, etc.

Some down-ballot candidates regularly deploy "populist" anti-corporate language during campaigns, including this year to be sure. But the actual existing party's leadership, establishment, institutions, and the vast majority of officeholders and candidates could no more threaten to bite the hands of their wealthy and business benefactors with heavy taxes and higher real wages than actually run a socialist, even a reformist one like Bernie, for president.

Nor could they threaten to seriously tax the very employers to whom their "industrial policy" infrastructure and climate programs were sending billions of dollars through tax breaks, incentives, grants and subsidies. They ran a centrist campaign because no matter how liberal they may seem on some social questions, they and their benefactors are centrists or worse by conviction and financial necessity: the need to keep in place their tower of power party structures, fund their campaigns, and promote the system on which they and the whole money-driven electoral system rests.

What Now for the Left?

Like the party itself, the effort to build a genuinely progressive left in its midst by unseating incumbent centrists and push it in a progressive direction has lost momentum and ground to a halt in 2024. The strategy of changing the party by "primarying" sitting moderate Democrats that began with Bernie Sanders' 2016 challenge for the presidential nomination, accelerating down-ballot in 2018 with the election of the original "squad" to the House and the emergence of the Justice



Democrats and Our Revolution that encouraged left primary challenges, has derailed.

In 2022 Sanders, Our Revolution and Justice Democrats endorsed 23 candidates for the House of Representatives, eight of whom challenged sitting moderates. Of the 15 who fought open seat contests, nine won, but only one of the eight challenging a sitting moderate won and she (Jamie McLeod Skinner) lost in the general election. Overall, in 2022 left progressives made net gains of just four — none through a direct challenge.

In 2024 things got worse. Sanders, AOC and others collapsed from the start into the Biden, then Harris campaign and there was no left challenger in the presidential primaries. Sanders, Our Revolution and Justice Democrats together endorsed only 16 candidates for the House, 12 of whom were already incumbents mostly in safe blue districts, while four ran in open seat contests. None, however, challenged a sitting Democrat.

To make matters worse, incumbent Squad recruits Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush lost their seats as the Zionist lobby AIPAC threw millions of dollars at their campaigns and the party leadership stood by in silence despite pleas from party activists. Where there had been seven members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in Congress, today there are three — either because the others were defeated or left the organization. AOC, once the outstanding public voice of intra-party rebellion, has migrated to the mainstream, even to the degree of recently voting for a House resolution that endorses the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of anti-Zionism as antisemitism, and the strategy is almost certainly further buried in the wreckage of this year's party vote.¹³

To be sure, there are still voices of dissent in Congress on Palestine from Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar and others, and some who will push for "realistic" reforms, but the dreams of a Green New Deal, Medicare-For-All, aid for desperate communities, massive housing construction, or any comprehensive reforms that could benefit the working class have died with the left's permeationist electoral strategy. The idea of building mass electoral organization or a "surrogate party" while using the Democratic ballot line, once projected as the socialist left's

path to power, didn't get off the paper it was written on.

Almost certainly, pressure from the party leaders to move right will increase as Trump occupies the White House with his band of policy extremists and billionaires. The Democrats will fight among themselves — watch the Democratic National Committee leadership contest already underway — attempt to raise yet more money to maintain their shaken tower of power, and recruit more moderates to run for Congress in the 2026 midterms in hopes of thwarting Trump's more extreme actions. The resistance to Trump will have to come from elsewhere.

We don't know at this point exactly how the Trump Administration will implement its white nationalist policies, but the political scene will switch from Washington to U.S. streets as his storm troopers or the military seek to round up immigrants, smash protests, promote fear, and turn the nation's streets into battlegrounds in the name of order.

At the same time, his tariffs would create more inflation and reignite the cost-of-living crisis, while his plans to purge thousands of civil servants can only undermine the functions of government, and his violent efforts to deport masses of immigrants disrupt communities of color and civil society in many ways.

The hope that capital will thwart all of this has vanished with the rush of business leaders and billionaires to suck-up to the new administration and its vindictive leader even before they take office. Not to be outdone by his fellow plutocrats, Amazon's Jeff Bezos kissed the ring with a million dollar donation to Trump's inaugural fund.

This means that the tasks of the left lie not in another round of hoping to make the Democrats something they aren't by getting lost in their midst, but in mobilizing to counter Trump's attempts to implement policies where they happen. This has to be more than one-shot conventional protest demonstrations.

From my vantage point in England, I was impressed at how tens of thousands of British activists and citizens flooded the streets and town centers to successfully beat the nationwide far-right racist "riots" of last summer and drove them off the streets, something the police couldn't do.

I was also inspired during the Obama administration when young undocumented immigrant "dreamers" sat in front of federal buses to stop deportations. These kinds of actions should be at the center of left work on a mass and continuous scale to defend immigrants, abortion clinics, unions on strike, and each other despite differences.

There is certain to be resistance to attempts to limit or ban abortions at the state and possibly national levels. There is also still momentum in strikes in many industries and on organizing Amazon and other centers of economic power. Unions, of course, will necessarily be key to "the resistance" as it arises this time. I believe there is enough anger and disgust to make such mobilizations and actions possible and effective. As the impact of Trump's policies hit blue-collar workers as well, perhaps it will even be time to take UAW president Shawn Fain at his word about general strikes.

To most Americans, politics means elections and government. We cannot afford to cede the electoral terrain to either the right or the center for long. In the multiple crises of the system, the disarray of the Democratic Party and the dire consequences of Trump's policies will offer openings and pos-

sibilities to intervene in this arena at various levels.

The initial object of running independent or third-party candidates in down-ballot general elections is not necessarily to win the first time out, but to show that there are alternatives for working-class people from candidates who listen to and come from them. This can't be done in the usual money-dependent-media-consultant-celebrity endorsement way, but by building grassroots support and organization in communities, local unions, and social movements. People, not dollars must drive these campaigns.¹⁴

There are hundreds of "one-party" centrist or right-wing-occupied House and state legislative seats, in both Democratic and Republican urban and rural districts, with no "spoiler" effect or even second-party competition, where it is possible to build a foothold. A look at the somewhat unique labor-based, anti-corporate and pro-choice independent campaign for U.S. Senate by union and strike leader Dan Osborn in deep red Nebraska might help. Osborn got 46.6% of the state-wide vote (435,582 votes), and though his campaign was conventional in many ways, his appeal might offer some ideas.¹⁵

The central fact of the next four years, however, is that *Trump and MAGA cannot be fought by depending on the Democratic Party or its officeholders*. Whether by direct or electoral action, it will be grassroots mass mobilization and, above all, ongoing organization that can limit Trump/MAGA effectiveness in the streets and halls of government and point to a long-term alternative to the endless replay of center-vs.-right lesser evilism. ■

Notes

1. All election stats and results including comparisons with 2020 are from CNN, AP VoteCast, NBC, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *Politico*, *Bloomberg*, *The Hill*, and/or University of Florida Election Lab unless otherwise cited. I use the latest election figures, but they may not reflect the official final count exactly.
2. Michele Norris, "Split ticket voters offer some bracing lessons for the Democratic Party," MSNBC, November 12, 2024, <https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/aoc-trump-democrats-listen-voters-rcna179762>.
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13. For detail on this see Kim Moody, "The Crisis of Left Electoralism," *New Politics* 76, Vol. XIX No. 4, Winter 2024: 57-65; Kim Moody, "AOC's Journey to the Center," *Against The Current* 228, January-February 2024: 22-27; Kim Moody, "Stuck in the Mud, Sinking to the Right: 2022 Midterm Elections," *Against The Current* 223, March-April 2023: 23-28.
14. There is a certain irony in the fact that DSA "electeds" in Congress have raised millions for conventional campaigns, while DSA is itself perpetually broke.
15. Osborn's campaign was union-backed, but it raised a lot of money from various sources, most of it from out-of-state, and less than half from small donations of \$200 or less — over \$6 million total according to OpenSecrets.org.



Sarah Jane Rhee

Trying Times for the Chicago Left:

Mayor Brandon Johnson's First Year

By Simon Swartzman

The 2023 election night victory held out promise for Chicago's progressive forces.

IN THE SPRING of 2023, there was a budding hope in the Chicago political left. In the final days before the election, Brandon Johnson held a large rally with Bernie Sanders, packed with supporters who lined up to get in. Many wore black market Brandon t-shirts that had popped up in an online store soon after Johnson made it to the run-off. City officials had decades ago discarded parties and primaries for municipal races to undercut progressive Black candidates from following in Harold Washington's footsteps, but Brandon Johnson seemed like he could maybe still win.

Every other day, volunteers were knocking on doors in neighborhoods all over the city. At the election night party, I saw familiar faces from Black nationalist housing organizers, labor staffers and union members, anarchist street medics as well as staffers and neighborhood organizers for left alderpeople — all gathered in a downtown hotel to celebrate the dizzying victory.

Later, at a panel in a Northwest Side bar, we celebrated the decades of struggle that got us to this moment, and the gear shift it called for across the city. Our neighborhood's aldermanic staffers attended a conference on municipalism to learn from experiences around the world in implementing progressive citywide reforms.

In the time since, that horizon of possibility in Chicago has receded to a large extent, and the organized citywide base for left electoral politics along with it. I will track some evidence of the deteriorated situation and the root of the problem as I see it: *the failure to build a party that can co-govern and organize left electoral projects at a citywide level.*

I'll also look at the organizations that have struggled most with the attempts and failures to build a citywide party, most notably the left-labor alliance United Working Families (UWF),

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as well as more hyper-local neighborhood organizations. I'll discuss how these organizations may still be the strongest basis for correcting our path. However with Trump's victory, that path continues to narrow.

In the first-year-and-a-half of the Brandon Johnson administration, there were some clear reforms. Among the wins are a "one fair wage" ordinance that abolished the subminimum \$9.48/hour wage for tipped workers, increasing it yearly until it matches the city's standard \$15.80/hour minimum wage; new loans for public investment in housing; and paid parental leave for city and county employees. Johnson also cast a tiebreaking vote for a city council resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, making Chicago the largest U.S. city to do so.

Treatment Not Trauma is progressing towards replacing police responses to community crises with mental health professionals, and the city ended its contract with police surveillance tech ShotSpotter (although the decision may devolve back to individual alderpeople). While these wins are the result of protest and organizing, it's safe to assume they would have required much more organizing to pass city council without Johnson.

During this time we've also seen some clearer difficulties for the Left in Chicago. Over 47,000 newly arriving immigrants have been given a very mixed welcome. Rightwing national figures like Texas governor Greg Abbott have cynically sent them as pawns to make Democratic cities like Chicago deal with the contradictions of U.S. border policy. While Abbott is maybe the most vocal and prominent politician taking this tactic, other Republican governors of Arizona and Florida have joined in, and Abbott was given the stage at the 2024 Republican National Convention to talk about his buses, suggesting that this tactic is coordinated (or at least endorsed) by Republican Party leadership.

While many left alderpeople, community organizations and mutual aid groups have worked tirelessly to help integrate and support new neighbors, the issue has been used by rightwing Chicago politicians, who tag them as "coming here illegally." If

these centrist or rightwing politicians opposing new immigrants represent majority Black or brown communities, they point to their constituents' under-resourced neighborhoods as justification for blocking additional aid for new neighbors. Mayor Johnson has occasionally buckled under this anti-immigrant pressure.

Johnson's attempt to hire security contractor Garda World to build a "base camp" to house arrivals ultimately fell through, but it showed increased willingness to alienate the progressive activist and pro-immigrant base rather than alienate the Black Caucus. The conflict reached a rolling boil late last year: key members of the caucus tried to strip Chicago of its "sanctuary city" status that prevents collaboration between ICE and local police. Johnson's floor leader Ald. Carlos Ramirez-Rosa tried to prevent the vote. The vote failed, but rightwing members of the council agitated the racialized tensions into a new vote that stripped him of his committee chairs, and Johnson acquiesced.

Johnson's attempts to pursue progressive revenue reforms have taken a similarly vacillating route. His largest effort to champion housing reform — Bring Chicago Home (BCH) a March 2024 referendum to tax housing purchases more progressively — went down to defeat. This revealed that Johnson has lost a significant chunk of his voter base in the city's South and West sides.

Since then Johnson has looked for less progressive, even sometimes regressive, sources of revenue to fund reforms. These include surpluses retained in special tax district funds called Tax Increment Financing districts; property tax increases; short-term loans. These faced pushback, but more importantly don't broadcast the clear message that the rich must pay their fair share.

In an October 2024 United Working Families meeting with Johnson's ostensible base, the mayor's main takeaway was that Chicago is essentially out of options for progressive revenue and can only be redeemed through state-level budget fights.

The primary forces that have put Johnson on the defense are the strong capitalist forces we knew would undermine him. The real estate interests shoveled money to defeat BCH.

But Johnson, an organizer trained in struggles against neo-liberal education reformers, has responded to those forces in ways that are disorganizing for the people who volunteered to elect him in the first place. Instead of an organizer-in-chief, Johnson has positioned himself as a mediator with morals, both in how he speaks to movements and to the press. *We won a mayor's seat, but have in some ways "lost" our candidate to that mayor's seat.*

Staffing provides another example of this disorganization. After Johnson's victory, the first focus for the campaign and United Working Families was to staff the new administration. We have a situation where "movement staffers" are butting heads day-to-day with "Lori's leftovers," — as a comrade calls them — though some have careers going back to the Daley administration.

Johnson's first chief-of-staff (now retired and replaced with a progressive) was "City Hall lifer" Rich Guidice, who was "likely to be reassuring to the City Council, business leaders and longtime observers of city government," according to the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Similarly his CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Pedro Martinez, has been a source of continuous and distract-



March in support of the ceasefire resolution before the city council. Chicago is the largest U.S. city to pass such a resolution. Sarah Jane Rhee

ing drama.

Martinez was appointed by previous mayor Lori Lightfoot, and brought with him a resume of dramatic fights with school boards in Reno and the teachers union in San Antonio, where he expanded privatization and charter schools. Yet Johnson kept him on, and he has remained in power throughout the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) contract negotiations.

This has led to the disorienting situation where the person reporting to Johnson is saying "no" to the demands put forward by the largest social movement organization that brought Johnson to power.

Reports indicated that Johnson was looking for ways to remove Martinez. The mayor's October 2024 re-appointments to the school board suggest that Johnson is trying to find a more cohesive pro-public education footing. However, the results of the November school board elections (the first elections for these seats since the '90s) showed the same problem we saw in the Bring Chicago Home referendum. Privatization and charter-aligned candidates, "independent" candidates, and CTU-aligned candidates won roughly equal slices of the 10 seats.

Johnson will be able to secure a pro-public education board since he will appoint the 11 remaining board seats. But like the failure of BCH, this election can be read as a barometer on Johnson's weakened legitimacy. And because of his close identification with the Chicago Teachers Union, a portion of the populace has soured on CTU. This is a change from five years ago, when the CTU was quite popular even as they were about to go on strike and potentially disrupt many people's daily lives.

While such contradictions may be inevitable when taking power, there has been little shared learning from these experiences. *What role can movements outside government play to support the democratization of a historically anti-democratic city government?*

Johnson instead reacts fairly defensively to questions about staffing. There has been some self-organization of "Chicago Progressive Staffers" for progressive goals like supporting a Gaza ceasefire, but even that Twitter account is closed now.

Receding of Left Strength

The general trend towards disorganization on the city council certainly preceded Johnson's victory, particularly given the previous mayor's obstinance and maneuvers. Lori Lightfoot's

dangling of special perks for those who voted with her broke up a socialist caucus that had grown to six alderpeople. The promise of a united left bloc gave way to issue-by-issue alliances, and the slow work to build collaborative individual relationships.

Chicago DSA (CDSA) and United Working Families both attempted to help this group cohere into a united front, with only occasional success. Coming out of the 2023 elections, the progressive and social bloc was very much of a minority on the council, but a growing one. Sitting socialist alderpeople were able to hold onto their seats, and new progressive allies such as Angela Clay, Julia Ramirez and Jessie Fuentes joined the ranks.

But instead of uniting this progressive/socialist minority of allies, Johnson backed down under attacks from the right at crucial junctures. He went along with demands to strip socialist alderpeople of their committee chair roles.

Centrist and rightwing aldermen, often representing majority Black or Latino wards, attacked Johnson for seeking to replace police with mental health professionals or ending ShotSpotter, an expensive police surveillance technology. They either neutralized or won over progressive and socialist alderpeople like Jeanette Taylor on votes such as implementing ShotSpotter as a way to provide safety in underserved Black neighborhoods.

Johnson sought to mediate between council blocs, even when one of those blocs consisted of his biggest allies. Sometimes he cast tiebreaking votes alongside these allies (the ceasefire resolution; blocking a censure of Johnson's floor leader at the time, Ald. Carlos Rosa), but at other times distanced himself.

At the same time, Johnson has attempted to close the distance between himself and national Democratic Party figures. He must have felt he needed their victory last November to secure the federal funding to broaden municipal services around education and housing. Even as he cast a vote for ceasefire in Gaza, he faltered on protestors' right to demonstrate during the Democratic National Convention. He avoided the infamous brutality of 1968, but Chicago police still limited free assembly and arrested dozens, including journalists.

Why is it going this way? A too-easy analysis would see this as simply a reflection of Johnson's "reformist" politics. It would point out, perhaps rightly, that Johnson and the political leadership in his campaign didn't set out to radically transform or democratize the capitalist state. Rather they only set out to use the state, or a section of it. Or perhaps Johnson may see the need to democratize Chicago government, but *feels* constrained by the objective situation.

Another analysis would say that this is because of the limits imposed by the structure of the capitalist state itself. "Politics as usual" limits how much can be transformed by changing which individuals sit within that structure. Perhaps these structural forces reveal a "deep state" political class like Guidice and Martinez and other "leftovers."

Put another way, Chicago politics-as-usual under Daley II and even Rahm Emanuel looked like a mayor brokering between various special interest groups. Perhaps we've so far only reproduced "the Chicago Way plus social movements, unions and community organizations" — but haven't yet figured out how to break out of this "politics as usual."

These analyses may have some truth. But the very fact that Johnson's strategy, or the limits imposed by the capitalist state itself, remains a mystery to committed activists within his movement, suggest a deeper issue: *the absence of an organization that could facilitate conversations between rank-and-file organizers and the leadership they elected.*

Longtime activist and author Barbara Ransby noted after the victory that the ground game and organizing that won Johnson the election was built on years and years of organization building. *So why didn't a trained organizer's victory sustain or even increase the organization building that brought him to power?*

Some might say that it's not the mayor's job to organize us, it's our job to organize ourselves for class power. In a recent *In These Times* roundtable of organizers who all have played vital roles in this moment, the lack of mass organized movements that could set the agenda was one point raised. Another was that the capitalist state will always attempt to (dis)organize us as it sees fit, even if an ally sits in the executive office.

This line of thinking is useful for understanding in concrete terms the forms that power takes, both for the working class and capital, both in political and socio-economic spheres. *Does Brandon Johnson winning an election signify "class power," or "governing power," or simply "administrative control"?*

While I agree that we need to continue to build class power and independent mass movements, it can be somewhat easy to fall into a one-sided view of "governing power" vs. "class power." Working-class organization won ground in Chicago over the past decade *because* it fought for economic and social wins, until those wins bumped up against the limits of political power (such as Rahm Emanuel's ability to close schools even after a successful strike in 2012), and then started fighting for electoral wins too.

Many organizers — educators, anti-police brutality organizers, undocumented immigration activists — learned this same lesson in many different movements and waded into the cold waters of elections. (These lessons are not unique in Chicago, as highlighted in Marta Harnecker's analysis of Latin American municipal socialist projects, discussed in the box on page 24.)

If we are bumping up against a limit with "governing power," the way is not by unwinding our steps back to the streets, back until we learn this lesson all over again. It's by understanding this limit and overcoming it through a higher form of organization, through a party. Far from distracting us from building mass movements, it seems to me this is the only way to continue the fight for class power and movements in a way that is honest, resilient, and clarifying about the limitations we face.

It is true that the level of organization across the city is limited and uneven. The demands voiced by political leaders reflect this unevenness. Decades of disinvestment in Black and Latino communities makes investments in police surveillance tech seem stabilizing, and so Black aldermen are raising this demand.

For decades, mayors have invested in a downtown that welcomes convention attendees and businesspeople to enjoy our "world-class city" at the expense of our working-class city. As a result, alderpeople representing some working-class Black and Latino wards have fought the current mayor's investments to welcome new immigrants because they seem to come at the expense of existing residents. These attitudes are strongest in the least organized, most disinvested parts of the city in the South and West sides.

Mixed white and Latino communities on Northwest Side and some (more integrated, though heavily white) communities on North Side have more organizations for housing, immigrant rights and public resources. Alderpeople in those neighborhoods reflect those demands, but organization in even these more progressive wards has limited penetration. And even while canvassing in my neighborhood, which has relatively stronger organization, a large Latinx population and a pro-immigration alderperson, I still hear anti-immigrant sentiment.

If the path to overcome reactionary ideas is through organizing and winning demands, we need a rich ecosystem of organizations that touches multiple parts of the lives of Chicagoans: labor unions, tenant unions, immigrant rights groups, mutual aid. Every kind of working-class organization can play a role, and they can mutually support each other.

It's somewhat easy to fall into hierarchical or "staged" ideas about base-building being the first step and then working up to political organizing — base and then superstructure. Sometimes leaps in political campaigns — either at the neighborhood level or the national level — can help orient otherwise unorganized residents and spur organization-building. And sometimes projects at larger geographic scale can jumpstart local organizing.

Citywide political organization can play a *specific role* that is unmet in Chicago, and may help us leap beyond the block-by-block, community-by-community base-building that, though also necessary, has been clearly insufficient.

After a group of Northwest Side independent political organizations (IPOs) sat down with Johnson to ask him to be an organizer alongside us, I realized why he couldn't be an "organizer-in-chief." *To be an organizer, you need to be building an organization, and there was no shared organization or party that encompassed us all.*

Worse, to prevent the racist caricature that he is a puppet getting his strings pulled, the mayor has tried to distance himself from too strong an association with organizations that supported him such as the Chicago Teachers Union. To be bound together in a shared commitment to building people power, we need a form of citywide organization, with the capacities to strengthen, not isolate ourselves and our political project.

In a less optimistic light, if the absence of a party or party-like organization has helped the situation deteriorate over the past 18 months, how will that absence manifest in new problems in the coming years? *What happens if the disorganization leads to deeper fractures — between Black and brown communities, between community and educators that supported Johnson, between different sides of the cities and their aldermanic blocs — or even open antagonism?*

Seeing how successful national rightwing politicians like Texas' governor Greg Abbott have been in deepening those fractures through external pressures, what will happen as the Trump administration uses federal machinery to raise the pressure even higher? *Will the Chicago Left hold its ground in this new period? Can we gain ground?*

Party-building Potential in Chicago

The unifying and strengthening capacities that Marta Harnecker describes in the accompanying box ("What Kind of Party and Why") may seem foreign to us when we think about parties. This is far from the national Democratic Party; it has an



Housing justice is a key issue; the loss of the housing referendum is an incalculable setback

internal life, membership, and ongoing democratic processes.

It is also not the historically corrupt Cook County Democratic Party; it has an explicit ideological and social goal, beyond the material needs of its party workers. How a party like this operates day-to-day would probably look different from Harnecker's Latin American examples, due to the objective conditions in a city like Chicago.

But it's not completely foreign to us. Within the 33rd Ward Working Families, we talk about a symbiotic relationship between elected officials and our non-electoral organizing and mutual aid: one builds the other that builds the one that builds the other. *Mijente*, a national membership organization for Latinx rights and justice whose goals and endorsements have often overlapped with our organization's, has a similar framework of *sin, contra, y desde el estado* that we've looked to.

We've had success with building a mutual metabolism on the local level of the Northwest Side, with ward offices and movement groups help each other build collective responses in the face of wave after wave of crises. But as we move to a citywide level, we can see the risks in trying to keep this mutual metabolism moving forward, both from internal contradictions and from external threats. As we try to grow to the citywide level, the bodies (city council committees, the city council as a whole, administrative bodies in City Hall staffed by movement staffers) are much larger and harder to "capture," and the risk increases of "capturing the movement" instead.

And as an external threat, after success in a couple rounds of mutual metabolic building, capital may look for and seize on opportunities to intervene and interrupt the metabolism as a whole. We'll need to build the metabolism at higher stages to prevent these threats from stopping it in its tracks.

The fight for immigrant rights locally has been one example of this metabolism in action. Chicago's sanctuary city status and resistance to Trump's threats of mass raids show clear wins from the collaboration between immigrant rights movements and elected socialist officials.

Capital attempted to wedge apart that mutual metabolism.



ack. Sarah Jane Rhee

The Republican Party's effort to bus immigrants to Chicago was a cynical attempt to break or undermine that collaboration, especially at the citywide level. The response from our alderwoman Rossana Rodríguez Sánchez was to encourage more organizing.

She convened meetings of neighborhood groups, immigrant rights activists, and community service organizations to form mutual aid response networks in our side of the city, while she also advocated support within city council for new arrivals. Even with these local efforts, the citywide response to new immigrants — in the mayor's office, in other neighborhoods, etc. — has shown weakness in defending immigrant rights.

In this struggle, we see the need for the symbiotic, party-like relationship between movement and our representatives to operate at a larger citywide level.

What are the main capacities for a party-like operation? I outlined some items a few years ago, before the mayor's seat seemed a remote possibility:

- Points of unity or a program
- Pipelines for identifying and developing candidates and activists

• A process to transform points of unity or program into policies for sitting politicians to champion

• Commitment from your candidates that they will pursue these policies in exchange for political power (i.e. volunteers and financial resources during campaigns)

• A defined and democratically empowered membership, either individually or via a coalition of member organizations, that can be mobilized as a volunteer and fundraising force

• A shared fund, apportioned out to campaigns

The experience of being in government would probably add some other important features:

• In addition to pipelines for developing new candidates, capacities to rotate politicians and staff who take on roles within government, preventing stagnation or burnout.

• Internal membership communications that can continue to organize and educate members on the functioning of the party's politicians, outside of corporate media.

• Co-governance structures, internal organizing, and conventions with votes or plebiscites that can provide avenues for members and non-members to defend the government from attacks and transmit viewpoints they're hearing on the ground, and bind together mass movements and the political power they fought to win.

• Institution building and member-to-member discussion that can foster expansion of "popular protagonism" into other areas of Chicagoans' daily life, or throughout parts of the city that organization has not yet reached. This couldn't replace the need for movements outside government, such as fighting to remove ShotSpotter or support newly arrived immigrants, but it could make sure that they have the best opportunity to develop in coordination with a left government.

We've been sorely missing this kind of citywide organization.

Four years before Johnson's win, in 2019 we actually had multiple citywide organizations all clamoring to lay claim to coordinating the progressive and socialist victories that year: United Working Families, Chicago DSA (CDSA), and People's

Action-affiliate People's Lobby/Reclaim Chicago. Independent political organizations (IPOs) around the city also laid claim to neighborhood-level victories, but with minimal inter-IPO coordination between those victories.

In the years after 2019, Chicago DSA fell short of the task needed to develop into any kind of pre-party apparatus. It attempted to unite its endorsed electeds as a bloc, but stumbled in this goal. Members played a crucial role in 2019 as doorknockers and donors, but the organization played an increasingly marginal role thereafter.

CDSA often eschewed coalitional electoral efforts, in favor of running candidates independently of other organizations or only where they could be the "senior partners." After some seriously underwhelming electoral results for these CDSA-backed candidates in 2023, the organization has essentially drifted deeper into political sectarianism. In a city that has seen more electoral fronts opening, and more working-class and left organizations jumping into the fray, they have taken an increasingly less active stance on electoral fights.

CDSA avoided the Johnson campaign, draping their reasoning in skepticism about the limitations of municipal budgets. But this has meant they've in effect sidelined themselves as a force to push Johnson to test those limits. As DSA nationally may be discussing breaking with the Democratic Party, when confronted with experiments that tested that mettle, CDSA has abstained from the experience to flesh out its theory.

People's Lobby continues to play a role as an umbrella organization for community organizations and IPO activists. But from my understanding, it aims to continue its role as a network of (often non-profit or grant-funded) member organizations and electeds, though it may attempt to become more party-like as it wins more seats.

And unlike a party that is member funded, it seems that People's Lobby is funded about 10-to-1 outside of Illinois, and more than 10-to-1 by organizations rather than by individual membership dues (though some donor organizations are member-funded unions like National Nurses United and Amalgamated Transit Union).

It is possible that through transformations, People's Lobby will attempt to reposition itself as a citywide party, but it is not positioned to do so in the context of the current Johnson administration, or its weaker relationship to non-electoral social movements currently.

Of the contenders for citywide party-building in the last few rounds of elections, then, UWF has been the clearest citywide organization that could approximate a party-building approach — and has been openly pursuing this. As they stated in their 2016 Platform and Points of Unity:

"We declare our commitment to form a new political party, independent of corporate control, with a grounding in working-class communities and leadership from the emerging American majority — Black, Latino and Asian, female, queer, and young. We see the recognition and support of black leadership and engagement in independent politics as primary in building a successful progressive political movement in this country and commit ourselves to popularizing the need for independent organization and action in our communities and workplaces."

Two major election cycles later UWF has spurred huge developments in establishing leadership and self-determination from working-class and oppressed communities. In the case of

CTU president Stacy David Gates, that leadership is recognized citywide. They have built coalitions across unions, community organizations, progressive political movements and independent organizations.

UWF also maintained these coalitions while still responding seriously to more spontaneous events like the George Floyd protests, such as organizing political messages from elected officials to support protestors and joining the calls for defunding police and funding public health and public education.

But UWF has not yet materialized into a political party by most definitions, whether as a ballot-line designation like the Democratic Party or a political instrument as Marta Harnecker describes. And where these gaps were becoming noticeable before Brandon Johnson's election, they have since revealed to be endemic weaknesses in the political project as a whole.

While they have developed strong leadership that has provided needed direction and coordination for the organization, they lack the internal capacities for two-way communication — assemblies or participatory budgeting from Harnecker's examples, or even primaries and caucuses within the current Democratic Party — that make a party a party.

At a certain point, UWF expanded membership from coalition organizations to individual members. But they seem to have failed to recruit much beyond the periphery of their member organizations. Most members identify more with their

neighborhood group or union than the citywide organization.

UWF's occasional conventions have rarely discussed and voted on decisive questions like the 2021 budget. Rare newsletters provide little in terms of democratic involvement between conventions. After Brandon Johnson's election, when there has been so much more to communicate, communications to members (and even internal committee members) about major shifts and updates (leadership changes, major drops in revenue, coordination on upcoming campaigns) have trickled in.

A recent and rare member meeting titled "Reconnecting" illustrated the tension within UWF around motivation to actually organize and engage members, with minimal or disorienting effort in that direction. UWF staff and some elected leaders — including Johnson — offered some political orientation and organizational updates (like a passing reference to a near 100% staff turnover) to the 50 or so members attending, most of whom were representatives or organizers in more active organizations, some with thousands or tens of thousands of members.

Confusingly, the asks put forward by the staff were individualistic (e.g. "sign up for an election day volunteer shift," "call your alderman"), though in the city budget breakout I attended at least one member from a nurses' union raised the need for a broader political conversation among UWF members. As underwhelming as it was, the attendance and the coalition itself

What Kind of Party and Why?

MARTA HARNECKER's *REBUILDING the Left* is a major influence in my thinking in this article. In that book, she synthesizes lessons for the Left from her direct experience within socialist governments like Allende in Chile and Chavez in Venezuela, as well as her study of "Pink Tide" governments throughout Latin America in the 21st Century, and failed left governments of the 20th Century.

Her view of a "new political instrument" is an organization that can synthesize between politicians and social movements, between indirect and direct lessons of the struggle, and jointly design a path out of capitalism. This instrument is necessary as "a body that unifies and coordinates the various emancipatory practices around goals common to all actors."

She later says, "If political action is to be effective, and the popular movement's acts of protest, resistance and struggle are to achieve their anti-system goals, there needs to be an organizing subject capable of directing and unifying the multiple initiatives that arise spontaneously and capable of encouraging more initiatives."

She then goes on to explain some lessons on how this instrument should function both internally—developing programs, developing members, developing capacities — and as a force in government, in a way that avoids the mistakes of the past: too top-down or not top-down enough, etc.

She turns to case studies of Latin Amer-

ican popular municipal governments that have "set themselves the goal of creating a social project in which civil society, and particularly the popular sectors, are the protagonists." She notes how Left political organizations, after winning election and draining their cadres to fill the government positions (as we saw in Chicago), learn the difficulty of going from opposing to governing.

In this moment, there develops a disconnect between the government and those movement organizations: "debilitated by the loss of their cadres, powerless to follow the rhythm of decision making required by an executive body of this kind and unable to understand the difference between being the opposition and being the government — instead of playing the role of guide to the new government's actions, tend to adopt an attitude of critical opposition, at times even harsher than that of the Right."

This diagnosis is very familiar to those of us in the Chicago Left right now, with many organizations like IPOs, CTU, and labor-community coalition members who have "lost" many of their cadre to roles in government. The desire to re-balance our forces from "governing power" to base-building and class power above is reacting to this same "brain drain."

Instead of just re-balancing forces between social movements and government, Harnecker sees a party as the way to overcome this contradiction. The Left requires "a party mediating body at the highest

level — national or state — to resolve the differences that often arise between municipal political leaders; and a political team that looks beyond day-to-day affairs, that considers the big picture and that, at given intervals, critically evaluates the way the government is going so it can correct its course in time if it has lost its way, or if new situations arise that demand an unplanned change of direction."

The political organization should be mature and experienced enough to make constructive public criticisms of its government to maintain the legitimacy of both in the eyes of the public.

A large factor in Harnecker's focus on legitimacy and criticism comes from her focus on popular understanding and developing what she calls "popular protagonism," the idea that regular working people understand and act upon their own agency in transforming the world.

She sees left parties as pedagogical, teaching everyday people about the capacities they have when acting together, and the barriers that capitalism erects against those capacities. But this pedagogical role depends on the party and its cadre collaborating to maintain a legitimate leadership of the broader populace.

Without this legitimacy (like Gramsci's idea of hegemony), or without the collaboration between the party and its cadre, the left can barely hold onto a government let alone use it to transform popular consciousness. — S.S.

indicate that, if there is a path towards revitalizing Chicago's left political project, it will have to be something like what was assembled in that room.

We can see the same double bind with leadership when it comes to elected leaders. UWF has empowered strong leaders who have transformed the nature of Chicago politics, but is still developing the mechanisms to cohere those elected leaders to points of unity and commitments.

UWF — even more so than the Chicago DSA example — endorsed and supported elected politicians who later wriggled under scrutiny or even turned their back on the endorsement, especially earlier in its history.

For example, after winning big in 2019, UWF saw the need for even deeper commitments, and attempted to unite its endorsees around a “no” vote on Mayor Lori Lightfoot's 2021 city budget. Lightfoot made concessions to individual alderpeople, and some broke ranks and voted “yes.” After an accountability process that petered out, the pattern was set for following years, when UWF refrained from even attempting a coordinated bloc during city budget votes.

UWF and other organizations have talked about “co-governance” as a means to overcome these dynamics, but this leaves a bit of an open question: govern with who? One interpretation is for electeds to govern with the organizations that elected them, similar to Harnecker's idea of “a party mediating body ... and a political team that looks beyond day-to-day affairs.” Even then, how that party or political team operates can take different forms depending on the nature of the organization that plays that role.

A second interpretation is to “govern with” social movements, unions, and community organizations, instead of via some “mediating body.” A third interpretation would be to “govern with the people” even more “immediately,” like using participatory budgets or open assemblies, as Harnecker describes in the Latin American municipal experience. The strongest version of “co-governance” could probably include multiple approaches at the same time.

But our local experience with participatory budgeting has made it fairly clear that even the most “immediate” version of taking governing questions directly to the people still requires mediating organizations to support and build up engagement with people who aren't used to “popular protagonism” in capitalist society.

Given these struggles with maintaining a voting bloc and co-governance in the years leading up to Johnson's election, it's unsurprising that after the election, UWF lacked the capacities and experience needed to prevent the scattering and disorganizing dynamics described above — between movements and elected leaders, and between elected leaders themselves.

This was not written in stone — and it still isn't. There were key junctures during and after the Johnson campaign when these patterns could have been reversed. Particularly during the Johnson campaign, UWF gained some structure as a cohering force, because they needed to. Effective grassroots campaigns require two-way communication between volunteers and leaders.

Compare UWF's approach after Johnson's win to how the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) transformed CTU after their victory. The caucus recognized that the next step

was building an organizing department to prepare membership in every school to take the “popular protagonism” of going on an historic strike.

It was the Bring Chicago Home referendum that starkly revealed the disaster unevenness can bring. Although the referendum mostly succeeded in parts of the city with strong local organizations, it failed citywide. Without citywide organization a crucial referendum went down to defeat.

After victory, focus shifted from running a heroic campaign to governing like working-class heroes, starting with staffing up obscure offices. UWF pursued some internal organizing, seeding neighborhood-level political organization on the majority Black West Side. While necessary, it now seems insufficient.

In a city where many organizations have grown in the wake of insurgent and unexpected victories, Brandon Johnson's win has taken UWF in the opposite direction. Why?

After Johnson won, activist Brian Bean summarized UWF's potential and challenges as a mixed success in building a party. He suggests that the main barrier is political independence from the Democratic Party.

I think more attention is warranted on how UWF has failed to organizationally make good on its party-building aims, more so than in its ballot-line or policy independence — though perhaps, as serious efforts continue, we can learn more about the relationship between political independence and organizational or institutional capacities.

In my opinion, political independence from the Democrats nationally and acting like a party within Chicago are not currently mutually exclusive efforts, nor does one hinder the other. If anything, I suspect that building itself organizationally as a democratic, member-led party with an activated and politicized base of members would provide UWF more openings to develop political independence, rather than the other way around.

Another explanation for UWF's direction may be the health of the broader local Left ecosystem. Multiple organizers in the *In These Times* roundtable mentioned earlier agreed that the big gap is in on-the-ground organizations and movement infrastructure. Tania Unzueta said, “I think we need to strengthen our movement infrastructure. We need to focus on base building. It's really apparent to me — particularly when it comes to immigration issues with the Johnson administration — that there still needs to be a movement outside of City Hall pushing for policies and moving policies to the left.”

In looking specifically at the labor movement in the city, UWF remains a bit of an island as a progressive coalition of mostly unions. CTU anchored many political alliances of progressive labor and community organizations since CORE's victory in 2010, but it has had difficulties since then, and has pulled only a minority of the city's labor movement into UWF.

The building trades remain largely conservative, and some now vocally oppose Johnson. The Teamsters locally have engaged with rightwing politicians like Paul Vallas and the ousted patronage clerk, Iris Martinez. UAW may be on the march nationally, but is not as active in Chicago politics. Some unions which are active in Chicago politics outside of UWF, like National Nurses United and Amalgamated Transit Union, do so via the People's Lobby.

This limited affiliation among unions makes it difficult for

UWF to make the leap into a party, though it has added more union affiliates since its founding. I believe that a more coordinated and democratic party-building process could pull in more unions as a pole of attraction, and isolate the rightwing union leaderships. Democratic processes would also protect the coalition from crumbling based on interpersonal or sectoral tensions among union heads.

It's possible that the past decade has been more about the illegitimacy and the weakness of the Right in Chicago than the Left's positive strengths. We can see some signs of the Right's weaknesses in dynasties like the Daleys and Mellis that collapsed over the past decades, replaced by neoliberals like Rahm Emanuel and Lori Lightfoot who also left office deeply unpopular.

While the Right is not defeated by any stretch, its weaknesses have presented the Left with some opportunities to gain ground, especially in certain parts of the city. If that's the case, perhaps UWF and our progressive current around it has enabled electoral victories that are out of pace with the movements and organizations they were built on.

The victories that expanded democratic mechanisms in local government — the newly elected police district councils, or the newly elected school board last November — have moved forward, but the ability to participate in those as movements or coalitions has been underwhelming.

Coalitions fought for this new horizon and successfully unwound some of the legacies of Boss Daley controlling every aspect of city politics. But despite a decade-plus of campaigning for the right to elections, these same coalitions failed to find and run strong progressive candidates for many of the seats. We've removed the remnants of Boss Daley, but without an alternative political leadership we've set up a power vacuum. This "interregnum," Gramsci warned, can breed new monsters.

Despite all these difficulties, the fact that UWF and allied organizations have continued such a string of successes, culminating in winning the mayor's seat, suggests that these barriers are something that can be surmounted through deeper investment in organization and party infrastructure.

If the current volunteer and activist base of the Chicago left, plus the grassroots and union funding, have been able to win so many seats this far all over the city, it suggests that a party may be feasible. That requires, however, a shift in organizational focus, one discussed but never seriously pursued by UWF and some of its affiliates. This also requires a shift away from the heavier investment in hyper-local politics, which has reached its own barriers and limitations.

Hyper-local Responses and Limits

In spite of the lack of citywide organizational focus, there are some hyper-local pockets of electoral strength in specific neighborhoods. My organization, 33rd Ward Working Families (33WF), working along with our alderwoman Rossana Rodríguez Sánchez, has had a string of successes in the past decade. We have built stronger ties with our Northwest Side sister organizations.

But we've also seen the limitations. There are still opportunities in this hyper-local organizing, but if we continue to carry our wards while losing initiatives citywide, our horizon for change on a hyper-local level may shrink.

As some of us organizers from Chicago's "Red Kedzie Corridor" have summarized, independent political organiza-

tions (IPOs) have taken a hyper-local, ideologically explicit strategy that tries to build organizations autonomous from the Democratic Party.

Although IPOs have strong history in Southwest Side Latino communities going back to the 1980s, over half the IPOs these days are on the (generally whiter) North Side, with a quarter of them on the more mixed racially Northwest Side. One-third of IPOs are on the South Side, mostly in more predominantly Latino communities though some in traditionally white enclaves. A couple are on the West Side. Only one currently exists in a predominantly Black community, the 290 IPO (named after the West Side highway), which is supported by UWF.

In the 2023 elections, two-thirds of these IPOs ran a candidate for city council. Most ran as open socialists (as judged by the fact that they were either members of, or sought endorsement from, DSA). Over a third were incumbents who won re-election but there were a couple of new wins as well.

These organizations have also supported their local alderpeople, and built co-governance structures with them on a local level. (A cross-town IPO summer softball league in 2023 revealed eight progressive/socialist/abolitionist organizations, each fielding teams of about eight to ten people.)

Where UWF has failed to cohere party-like capacities citywide, IPOs attempted to build these capacities in smaller, more experimental settings. UWF has also invested its organizing capacities into supporting these all-volunteer grassroots organizations, as well as relying on them for field operations in their campaigns.

The victories of the electoral Left in Chicago have depended to a substantial degree on these grassroots formations. 33WF has won election after election, including helping anchor the wins of Congresswoman Delia Ramirez and State Senator Graciela Guzman, an organizer with CTU who won as state senator in a 20% margin, over a centrist incumbent backed by the Springfield Democratic Party and \$2.6 million.

Each of our victories are shared with coalitions of unions, citywide progressive groups, and other IPOs within our congressional districts, as well as other hyper-local neighborhood movements like Albany Park Defense Network and Autonomous Tenants Union. These movements have expanded in power and shifted the balance of forces in local politics to the Left.

Almost a decade old, 33WF has grown alongside these movements, but also grown as an organization in its own right. We've helped support our alderwoman to advance legislation like Treatment Not Trauma and establish democratic transformations in the ward-level executive functions (participatory budgeting, community-driven zoning). We defended it against rightwing attacks during and between election season.

We've also expanded into new areas of organizing such as mutual aid (running a pantry from our office during the first year of the pandemic, and supporting the organizations helping new immigrant neighbors) and state-level races. We've established a precinct organizer program in many parts of the ward, which has helped increase our win margins by at least five percent more in those precincts.

All the while, new layers of members have assumed leadership positions as some founders moved on to other political work. Our experiment in building party-like capacities at a hyper-local level has often been a model for other organiza-

tions attempting to do the same in their neighborhoods.

And yet we've hit some of the limits of hyper-localism. IPOs on the Northwest Side have consolidated our efforts and encouraged each other's organizational growth, but it seems to me that many of the IPOs that sprouted during a period of efflorescence in 2019-2021 have since disappeared.

In 2021 I estimated that there were around 15-20 IPOs in the city, accounting for 30-40% of the wards, half of them formed in the previous one to two years. In 2023 I estimated that leading up to that municipal election, IPOs continued to spread. Now, it seems likely that many have collapsed.

Some IPOs in the city have been demoralized by internal conflict, lost elections or both. This could change in the leadup to the next round of municipal elections in 2027, but what would it mean if that downward trajectory continued through then? *How would members of the Left bloc, already a minority, fare in the face of diminished political organization?*

Just as worrying are the divides within Chicago's working class that could be reflected in this hyper-local unevenness. The relative lack of progressive electoral organization in the Black community — despite UWF's attempts to seed IPOs — has created an opening for centrist and rightwing Black electeds to thwart Johnson's reforms.

The Bring Chicago Home referendum is emblematic of this unevenness. It won overwhelmingly on the Northwest Side but failed citywide. Even on the Northwest Side, where BCH won, we may be seeing some organizational limits from the lack of a more citywide party-like formation.

Our ward contains 60,000 residents and our candidates have received thousands of votes. Our organization's members, contacts and sympathizers are only in the hundreds (or maybe thousands during a heated campaign season). And we're one of the larger IPOs in the city.

I'm guessing that there are limits to the participation and growth of a grassroots organization of volunteers like this, and so there will be a limit to fostering new hyper-local organizations like this across the city. Meanwhile, our string of electoral victories hit an unusual and unexpected loss with one of our candidates for school board, Jason Dónes.

Pro-privatization candidates successfully hammered on the fact that Dónes was part of CTU's slate, and through that tied him directly to the increasingly unpopular Brandon Johnson. When facing this anti-Brandon and anti-CTU sentiment, our canvassers would point out how Jason related to other popu-

lar local electeds in our side of the city and how the pro-privatization opposition had overlapping billionaire backers and education policies with Trump. But these messages were either not convincing enough or drowned out by the millions spent by pro-charter forces in the city.

My conclusion is that we should try not to fall into a stage-by-stage view of organizing that believes hyper-local organization is needed in every part of the city before constructing a citywide organization. Yet UWF has aimed their internal and external organizing efforts at building hyper-local organizations in specific, under-organized communities.

In the time UWF managed to seed a new organization in one neighborhood, others hit their hyper-local limits. Based on the experiences of the 2010s — when citywide struggles and victories in some neighborhoods galvanized others without any organization — suggests that citywide projects could help galvanize local neighborhood groups.

Next Steps

With two-and-a-half years left in Johnson's first term, there may still be some opportunity to turn around his trajectory. If we don't, it could drag down the broader progressive and left-labor movements that have been associated with Johnson.

However, success will not come from changing his mind or the (perhaps closed) circle around him. It will also not come from building independent movements and organizations as if Johnson were just another politician in power. It will only come from organizing left-labor and social movements into a united formation. Most likely that will either be a transformed UWF or its replacement.

The election of Trump throws these questions into more urgent focus, but may also indicate new paths for party-building. On the Northwest Side of the city, progressive and socialist elected officials, along with IPOs and community organizations, rapidly pulled together a summit to discuss what Trump's election could mean and next steps.

Around 500 attendees — members of IPOs, CTU, and many more — dove into breakout groups on the environment, immigrant rights, reproductive rights, education, labor and a half-dozen other topics. Each was facilitated by movement organizers and elected officials in an open conversation.

Moderators and participants throughout voiced the importance of continued organization for these different issues, but at the end of the event the primary ask was to help form deportation defense squads to prepare for Trump's Day-One promises of mass deportation.



Campaigners in the 33rd Ward turn out for the February 2023 election.

While it's too early to tell where this experiment goes, it shows the need and the potential in this moment for a pole of attraction together under a shared organizational umbrella. If Johnson has any hopes for a second term, or if the Chicago Left has any hopes of weathering the remainder of his first term, we definitely need to reach for the same umbrella. ■

REVIEW

Shelter in a Literary Forest By Owólabi Aboyade

A Darker Wilderness

Edited by Erin Sharkey
Milkweed Editions 2023, 312 pages,
\$20 paper.

"This God who made the sun, who brings us light from above, who rouses the sea, and who makes the storm rumble will direct our hands, and give us help. Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears. Listen to the liberty that speaks in all our hearts." —Dutty Boukman, Haitian revolutionary and Vodoun spiritual leader

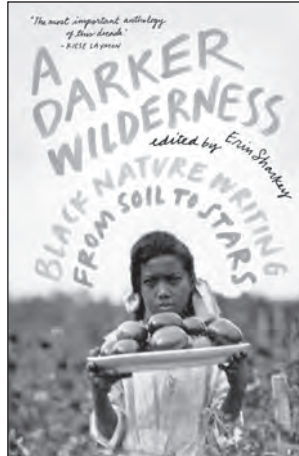
ONE OF MY best friends is from Kalamazoo, a western Michigan city not far from the powerful Lake Michigan. The city of Kalamazoo boasts how it is a regional center of the pharmaceutical industry that has grown around biking, hiking, golfing, kayaking and other outdoor recreations. My buddy's family enjoys at least one major group trip annually with uncles, cousins and family friends, often also hosting other smaller summer outings.

My buddy took me camping for the first time in my life when we were roommates in our twenties. I had a great time on our outing cooking over a dancing fire, getting sand in between my toes, bonding with the majestic Great Lake. I came back refreshed and asked my father a few weeks later, "Dad, how come you never took us camping?"

In response, my father turned my question on its head, "Why would I sleep on the ground for pretend when I had to do it for real?"

My father is from the Mississippi Delta, from a family that was employed as sharecroppers and domestics to benefit rich Southern whites. Growing up, he missed months of school at a time to work the fields alongside his parents and other community members to help bring money into the home, getting paid by the bag.

Owólabi Aboyade (William Copeland) is a cultural worker (Creative Calabash, AWE Society) and MC (Will See Music) from Detroit who served as Local Coordinator for the 2010 US Social Forum. He is a co-creator of Bullet*Train, a magazine chronicling Detroit's revolutionary culture. Owólabi was a 2021 Radical Imagination Fund fellow advancing Detroit's culture of racial justice via arts. Lee, Young Lee is his newest poetry book. (See: <https://awesociety.bigcartel.com/product/lee-young-lee>)



Just this year, I learned from my older sister that his father, my namesake, possessed an exquisite skill for helping folk escape the cotton plantation. This is my grandfather we are talking about, at the turn of the 20th century, not an Ancestor of the 1800s or 1700s.

Ever since he retired from the State of Michigan, my father has been an avid

gardener in Detroit. He keeps a backyard garden. He also cultivates a lot the block over from his house, where I grew up. Even as age slows him down, and it is sometimes painful for him to bend and grasp to weed, he still takes care of fruit trees, grows hot peppers and makes his own hot sauce.

Black Nature Inheritance

From reading *A Darker Wilderness*, a rich and evocative anthology edited by Erin Sharkey, I came to realize that these are some of the Black Nature stories that I've inherited. Our nature stories are deeper, richer stories of surviving and navigating this society of whiteness that simultaneously enjoy a recreational connection to nature while building a culture based upon possessing, subordinating, and exploiting.

This collection of essays explores Black relationships to the natural world. For many white and privileged people, nature is a place to go and escape the pressures of capitalistic work. For us, experiences with nature are usually still mediated by the dominance of the United States of America.

Just because we don't have the same relationship to recreation and land ownership doesn't mean that we don't have relationships to nature that are restorative, ecstatic and also communal. Don't we all know of the groundskeepers who know and love the land better than the American family who only owns it on paper?

Our nature stories are deeper, richer stories of surviving and navigating a society of whiteness that can simultaneously enjoy a recreational connection to nature while enjoying the spoils of a culture based upon possessing, subordinating, and exploiting.

I used to somewhat regularly attend an annual music festival held on a family farm in northern Michigan. Hundreds of people would gather, camp, drink, smoke, dance and frolic to amazing independent music.

Families settling in. A village of volunteers collaborating and communicating. Restaurants would offer tasty treats and dozens of Michigan artisans and entrepreneurs would set up tents to vend their handmade goods.

Attending this festival at least five or six times, I recognized the privilege of land ownership. In Detroit, most of our outdoor gatherings were held on public land, where we were under the observant jurisdiction of local and state police. It is rare for us to have the freedom to stretch out and do what the hell we want to do the way festival goers did here on so-called privately owned land.

I had a good time there, but often, in the back of my mind, felt "surrounded" by white people. It was difficult, perhaps impossible, for me to relax fully in this outdoor setting. I'd count on my hands the number of people of color I'd see in a weekend.

Once I had to run 50 yards and shout away a group of white boys who were "squaring up" on my 10-year-old son while they were off playing together. Out here on this beautiful farmland, in the midst of nature and amazing music, I still had to "keep my head on swivel" attuned to possible dangers and vulnerabilities to my loved ones. This, too, is my Nature story.

Observing with Care

A Darker Wilderness reminds us that we have always nurtured a great capacity to seek nature. These American limitations never stop us completely. In the Introduction, Sharkey describes teaching nature writing inside a Minnesota prison:

"The writers moved through their days on a schedule imposed by a crackling voice over a loudspeaker, but they also watched birds gliding freely past the windows; industrious yellowjackets throwing their bodies against the glass; and a flock of mallards who navigated puddles in the yard, ignoring the guards watching from their towers."

Sharkey's "An Urban Farmer's Almanac" is my favorite essay in the anthology. It is a beautifully detailed story of observation of an east coast urban farm. She reflects on Benjamin Banneker's 1795 almanac, rich with astronomical observations and conclusions that would be useful to farmers and anyone

whose life was dependent upon the rhythms of natural cycles.

Sharkey admits that today's urban farmer often learns more about the sky from an app than from direct observation. Still, today's urban farmer must read the vibes, study the patterns of her people as attentively as she studies the weather and the plants growing in her care:

"A Doritos bag tumbleweed rolls, end over end. The shiny flag holds tight a wooden paint stir stick that marks where the Black Krim heirloom tomatoes end and the black cherry heirlooms begin. Wrapped around the row marker is a weave, ratty black hair ripped violently in a tussle, the woman's face Vaseline'd and her earrings handed to a friend. The catalpa tree hurls her long spear-shaped seedpods toward the warm earth, ambitious and ill-prepared for childbirth. Most of her babies won't live."

Defiance in the Rain

In "An Aspect of Freedom," Ama Codjoe reflects on a photograph found in the archives of the *Southern Courier* captioned "Young woman standing in the rain during a civil rights demonstration in Greensboro, Alabama."

In the 1965 photo, a teenager braves the rain and a horde of police throwing noxious gas grenades into the St. Matthew African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Young people had mobilized that day to protest the murder of four little girls at Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church by white supremacists with 15 sticks of dynamite.

These protesting kids fled inside the AME Church after the police began spraying them with chemicals to disperse them. The girl in the picture has left the relative safety of the church, in the photo her face covered by rain; outside the photograph's framing, she faces the police. She clasps her shoes in her right hand and walks fiercely towards the camera, her mouth open as if exclaiming or maybe, "Singing and Shouting and Praying. She wants freedom."

Codjoe doesn't know the young woman's name or if she still walks and prays with the living 60 years later — only that she was about the same age that day as the four little girls, now Ancestors. She knows what she knows about that day because of an article in the *Southern Courier*. Good thing Codjoe also checked the archives because that photo was never printed in the newspaper.

Good thing she dug deeper than what was published, or we wouldn't get to connect with this vibrant Black embodiment of courage in the pouring rain. We wouldn't know this story about how nature helps us connect with "an aspect of freedom" that this country cannot give us and cannot take away from us.

In "This Land is My Land," Sean Hill tells a story of Austin Dabney, a veteran of the Rev-

olutionary War who was awarded emancipation from his enslavement and an allotment of land by the U.S. Government in recognition of his service and bravery in fighting the British colonialists.

Hill complements Dabney's story with more recent reflections at the intersection of land ownership and Black military service. He tells readers about his uncle, a Vietnam vet who "loves being in the woods and intimately knows the land he hunts. He enlisted in the army because he wanted some say in what happened to him in determining his fate."

It was his service in Vietnam's tropical forests and river valleys that honed his deep respect for and awareness of the outdoors. He fiercely taught his nephew Sean his way of walking the land, quietly with deep attention.

Military service and service to the government more broadly has been one avenue that has provided African-Americans with opportunities, travel, personal transformation, relationship to the land and sometimes even land ownership. Hill notes that in every era these benefits may be restricted or impeded by what is allowed or disallowed to Black people.

This meditation on land is mirrored later in the collection by Naima Penniman's "Concentric Memory," which begins with two sisters nurtured by the forest as children. It ends with their purchasing land and founding two organizations that embody lineages of Haitian freedom fighters and maroons who fled plantations into the forest to create autonomous communities that could serve as bases to attack those who would enslave and commodify us.

SoulFire Farm and WILDSEED Community Farm and Healing Village have hosted rites of passage, recipe exchanges, creek clay pottery, planting medicine and soulful playlists. "We are practicing ways of living that rely less and less on extractive and harmful systems."

Necessity of Culture

Some of the more political among my leftist readers may still be wondering what all this has to do with the United States today. Donald Trump has just been elected again and threatens with his appointments to dismantle major institutions and bring various types of intolerance into public policy. I ask in response, "What kind of culture is necessary in this new Trump era?"

For many of us, Making America Great Again betrays a culture's yearning back to a time when the USA felt free to use force and violence without obstacle, and call that its national strength and prosperity. I would respond to those politically minded individuals that we need a culture that is rich with attention: caring, history, and nature.

A Darker Wilderness reminds us that we have nurtured such cultures for centuries on

this land regardless of our legal status. The anthology recommends that we check the archives, the images, words and ideas left behind by those who survived those "Great American times." It recommends we check the archives for its absences, that we sit in silence with that which was never published and those of us who were misrecorded, all the names that have been lost to us.

Sean Hill cites some writings that were influential for him to understand his relationship with nature in the context of urban life. He was mentored by Terrel Dixon at the University of Houston while he lived in that sweaty metropolis built upon a drained swamp. The first writing he names is bell hooks' "Touching the Earth." In 1996, she envisioned Black environmentalism as a necessary reclamation:

"Unmindful of our history of living harmoniously on the land, many contemporary black folks see no value in supporting ecological movements, or see ecology and the struggle to end racism as competing concerns. Recalling the legacy of our ancestors who knew that the way we regard land and nature will determine the level of our self-regard, black people must reclaim a spiritual legacy where we connect our well-being to the well-being of the earth."

Replenishing People and the Land

The essays in *A Darker Wilderness* reflect upon and riff off archival objects. They are acts of recalling, of putting our current contexts in the light of what has gone before us.

They are acts of acknowledging that this country, as soon as it laid its profit-grubbing hands upon us centuries ago, inhibited our acts of remembrance, marking us in official records as cargo: Negro boy and woman [insert physical description] while citizens were named and encouraged to form Historical Societies to record their passage on ships and towns and villages of origins. As Codjoe illustrates, sometimes there's only the sun and the rain to witness our grief. So don't let anyone tell you that we don't know nature.

Ronald L Greer III wrote his essay "Magic Alley" in a series of emails that had to be mediated by the Minnesota Department of Corrections and the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop. Sharkey points out that it was impossible to contact him directly and introduces his essay with a plea for prison abolition.

In a time when many are anxious for the future, Greer reminds us to engage with those who know survival deep in their roots. Like all the essayists of *A Darker Wilderness*, Greer smuggles his respect for nature and the elders who taught him out of the confinements the United States of America has placed him in. In all likelihood we will have to rely on informal networks of care and connection as Trump's austerity shapes the

continued on page 31

REVIEW

Recovering Black Antifascism By Keith Gilyard

The Black Antifascist Tradition: Fighting Back from Anti-Lynching to Abolition

By Jeanelle K. Hope and Bill V. Mullen
Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2024, 280 pages,
\$24.95 paperback.

AT A WRITERS conference in Brooklyn during the 1980s, the novelist John A. Williams explained to his audience the inspiration for *Clifford's Blues*, his novel about an African American musician imprisoned in Dachau.

Williams had seen a photograph, surprising to him, of a Black man in a concentration camp. His agent cautioned him to be sure about what he had seen if he intended to write a realistic story. The advice spurred Williams to conduct research and learn about Black prisoners in Nazi Germany.

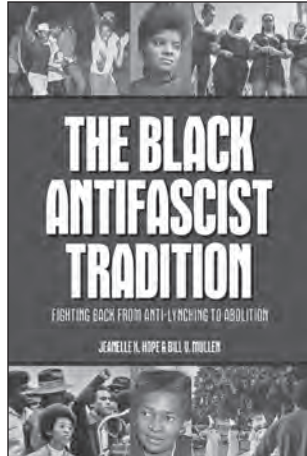
Jeanelle K. Hope and Bill V. Mullen, authors of *The Black Antifascist Tradition*, would not be surprised by a picture of a Black man in a concentration camp. In an engrossing history of Black antifascist struggle, they firmly assert that the essence of fascism is anti-Blackness. They state, "there is no Fascism anywhere that is not also anti-Black." (8)

This proposition will seem counterintuitive to those who think of fascism, or at least the capital F version, as a repressive, authoritarian, far-right, nationalist, sexist, ethnic-cleansing, genocidal, European formation (both oppressors and victims) associated with the rise of Mussolini and Hitler.

Hope and Mullen, however, argue carefully from archives that procedural antecedents of those regimes, as Hitler was certainly aware, lay in racial capitalism and in the language and methodologies of anti-Black oppression developed in the United States during its slavery and the subsequent reign of Jim Crow.

The American ruling class hard-baked a form of fascism into the laws of the land. These included slave codes, the loophole in the 13th Amendment that permits slavery as criminal (often meaning racialized) punishment, court decisions legalizing segregation and suppressing democratic participation, and anti-miscegenation statutes.

Keith Gilyard is the author of Louise Thompson Patterson: A Life of Struggle for Justice (Duke University Press) and True to the Language Game: African American Discourse, Cultural Politics, and Pedagogy (Routledge). He is Edwin Earle Sparks Professor of English and African American Studies at Pennsylvania State University.



Lynch Law Rule

Hope and Mullen view Ida B. Wells-Barnett as a paradigmatic figure because of her crusade against lynching and lynch law, the tolerance and fostering of extrajudicial violence to discipline Black bodies and Black labor in the

post-Reconstruction U.S. south.

Wells-Barnett's influential pamphlets *Southern Horrors* and *Red Record*, published in the 1890s, argued and documented the fact that the rampant lynchings were often enacted on the pretense of curbing or punishing Black criminality, especially rape. But the real motive usually was to terrorize Black people and dispossess them of their labor and wealth in service of a white ethnostate.

Wells-Barnett posited that white people had committed fewer attacks during the era of enslavement because of the economic value of the enslaved. She noted that after that period thousands of Blacks had been lynched without trial.

Wells-Barnett also connected lynching to sexual violence and the insecurity of white males. In addition, she was anti-accommodationist, opposed gradualism, advocated armed self-defense, promoted women's causes, and possessed an international perspective concerning antiracist struggle.

Operating without terminology that later came into vogue, she was nonetheless a forerunner to the Black antifascism of W. E. B. Du Bois, Thyra Edwards, William Patterson, and numerous others who, over the first half of the 20th century, built on her pioneering work and endeavored to "anticipate, analyze, destroy, and replace" what Hope and Mullen term Anti-Black fascism. (4)

A Black Antifascist Project

The authors point to an array of activists across the African diaspora, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Harry Haywood, Thyra Edwards, Salaria Kea, James Yates, George Padmore, C. L. R. James, William Patterson, Claudia Jones, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Some

stressed anticolonialism, some pan-Africanism, some communism.

Regardless of competing or overlapping ideologies, their ideas and actions coalesced into a Black antifascist project. Their collective aim was to combat a system of colonial violence largely inflicted on the global south by the global north, a system that was part and parcel of racial capitalism.

Fascism in Germany, the authors note, horrified much of the western world because those observers saw domestic application of the repressive violence directed against colonial "others."

Rallying points for the Black antifascist coalition included Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, and the "Double V" Campaign during World War II.

In the Black imaginary, antiracist struggle in the United States was inextricably tied to resistance to colonialism, ultra-authoritarianism, and genocide unfolding overseas. Black men volunteered to fight in Italy, though virtually none made it there. On the contrary, Black men such as Yates served in Spain. It wasn't Ethiopia, but, as some soldiers expressed, it would do. Similarly, approximately one million Black U.S. soldiers embraced the concept of Double V: Victory over fascism abroad. Victory over racism at home.

During the postwar period, the Civil Rights Congress, spearheaded by William Patterson, prominently furthered Black antifascism by way of the We Charge Genocide movement.

The organization understood, as Hope and Mullen explain, that Blacks were a primary target and thus should be a primary line of defense against fascism and the destruction of national, ethnic and religious groups: "the Negro was the American Jew under the Nazis, the bellwether group for the potentiality of a permanent Fascist order for all." (120)

In the face of the oppression and slaughter of Black people, Patterson along with Paul Robeson presented the "We Charge Genocide" petition to the United Nations near the end of 1951. The document was in the spirit of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which the UN adopted in 1948.

The Cultural Front and Beyond

Political organizing evolved alongside what Hope and Mullen term a Black Antifascist Cultural Front. Robeson proved to be a key inspiration, especially after his tour of war-

Spain, during which he performed for Republican troops near the battlefield.

Langston Hughes, a forerunner to contemporary embedded correspondents, sent articles home from Spain. He could also be considered the poet laureate of Black antifascism by virtue of his numerous poems calling out fascism by name.

Other antifascist artists, operating with different degrees of directness, included Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Burroughs, Franklin Marshall Davis, Ralph Ellison, Ollie Harrington, Jackie Ormes, Ann Petry, Grace Tompkins and Richard Wright.

Much Black Antifascism in the 1960s and 1970s tapped into the Black Power movement and foregrounded armed self-defense in conjunction with radical organizing.

Robert Williams loomed as a central figure because of his militant work as president of the NAACP chapter in Monroe, North Carolina. He also attracted attention because of his monthly newsletter, *The Crusader*, which he began publishing with his wife Mabel Williams in 1959.

Williams characterized American racism as fascism, a line of analysis he continued while in exile in Cuba and China, and he stressed how anti-Blackness and a profoundly racist state apparatus (police, courts, prisons, schools) were sutured to the success of capitalism and the concomitant exploitation of the working class.

Williams influenced the Black Panther Party as they settled into an antifascist rhetorical groove by the end of the 1960s. Panther leader Huey P. Newton began to deemphasize Black nationalist and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist formulations and develop his theory of revolutionary intercommunalism, a more expressly antifascist concept.

Fred Hampton, the most high-profile Black Panther leader in Chicago said, as noted by Hope and Mullen, "Nothing is more important than stopping Fascism, because Fascism will stop us all." (142).

A watershed in antifascist organizing was The United Front Against Fascism Conference convened by the Black Panther Party in Oakland in the summer of 1969. Attendees represented a host of New Left organizations, including Students for a Democratic Society, Women for Peace, The Red Guard Party, The Young Lords, and the Asian American Political Alliance.

At the time of the UFAFC, the seeds had already been sown for additional antifascist tendencies that flowered in the 1970s — the Black Liberation Army, for example, and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a mostly "Black and Brown transgender and gender-nonconforming organization" founded by Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and Bubbles Roe Marie in 1970, directly resisting state repression. (174).

Johnson and Rivera had played key roles in the Stonewall Rebellion. They saw fascism as a specific threat, as did the Black and Brown LGBTQIA+ community in general. (Clifford Pepperidge, the prisoner in Dachau, was also homosexual.)

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anti-miscegenation
statutes.*

Current prison abolitionism can also be traced back to that period. In fact much of the abolitionist theorizing came out of prisons, as inmates in facilities such as Folsom and Attica considered themselves to be confined to the "fascist concentration camps of modern America." (185, 187)

Important abolitionist voices today include Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, as well as groups such as Critical Resistance, We Charge Genocide, and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement.

Overall, Hope and Mullen have written a

stellar book and rendered a vital service. Stories about many of the referenced freedom fighters have been often told. However, to re-frame much of their effort, whether anticolonialist, pan-Africanist or communist, as Black antifascism may provide conceptual clarity for activists both old and new. It affords for the most part a less complicated language.

Moreover, firmly positing the centrality of anti-Black racism to fascism is the most solid theoretical move they can make because racial capitalism is what the ruling class wants to uphold in America.

Every patriarchal, natalist, anti-reproductive rights, anti-union, anti-Critical Race Theory, anti-democratic gesture operates toward establishing the order in which corporate profiteering can be optimized. Hope and Mullen know and convey this well.

Slight blemishes exist in a decidedly marvelous study. The prose is a bit jargony in spots — *Intersectional Abolitionist Antifascism*. (193) I have to try that on the street. And there is slippage concerning a factual matter or two.

For example, Robert Bandy was not killed by a white cop in Harlem in 1943, as the authors report. A cop indeed shot him, but Bandy received a superficial wound to his arm or shoulder. The rumor that he was killed is what sparked the uprising.

Concerning disturbances, I expected to see mention of the Peekskill Riot of 1949, an event in which Robeson and Patterson were targeted, that made the specter of fascism on home soil seem real to many.

I also thought I might encounter, as part of the material on the prison industrial complex, discussion of the activist pushback against large prison corporations such as Corrections Corporation of America (now CoreCivic) and Wackenhut Corrections (now G4S Secure Solutions).

The Black Antifascist Tradition is nonetheless an invaluable work. Hope and Mullen want their offering to provoke grassroots people to become antifascists. This reviewer would like to see them get their wish. ■

Shelter in a Literary Forest — *continued from page 29*

institutional landscape of the empire.

A Darker Wilderness is a literary forest fecund with such communities that we form with each other, our ancestors, the wild overburdened waters, the lands (public, private, and secret), and the myriad creatures endangered by the society that dominates this earth.

May Greer's "Magic Alley" show us the protective alchemy of connecting deeply with each other and with the natural world that blooms around us.

Let's end with his words from the Detroit soil that grows unruly outrageous plants

which stretch out towards the sun, sheltering wild beasts and small creatures while probing for weaknesses in man-made structures:

"But in this story, in this world, my grandfather exists and burns brightly, always being reborn from the ashes. He survived and overcame everything between the Great Depression and the crack era, from rural Mississippi to inner-city Michigan, and it awes me to believe that a regular human could endure half of that: he was magical. And when the world and people around him were withering away or growing into some monstrosity, he used vegetable gardens to replenish the people as well as the land." ■

REVIEW

Toward Communal Healing By M. Colleen McDaniel

The Cultural Betrayal of Black Women and Girls:

A Black Feminist Approach to Healing from Sexual Abuse

By Dr. Jennifer M. Gómez, American Psychological Association, 2023. \$40 paperback.

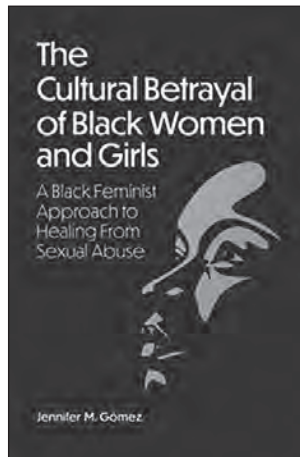
DR. JENNIFER M. Gómez's premier work, *The Cultural Betrayal Trauma of Black Women and Girls: A Black Feminist Approach to Healing from Sexual Abuse*, is a radical advancement of psychological theory, practice, and research around trauma and healing for women who have experienced sexual violence within marginalized communities.

Gómez identifies sexual violence committed within marginalized communities as particularly harmful because of group dynamics. For example, when a Black man sexually assaults a Black woman, the violence is not only felt as a betrayal from that individual. Additionally it violates their shared experience as community members who struggle against anti-Black racism, adding another layer of trauma.

Gómez's theory is "placed within and atop more than 150 years of Black women's (and some others') scholarship and activism," drawing on the work of Black Feminists such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Combahee River Collective. In explicitly peppering quotes from "brilliant scholars and activists, she rejects "a singular, individualization of [her] work in favor of contextualizing [her] contributions within the past and present collective We." (Collins, 1991;2000) (10)

This powerful communal approach to

Dr. M. Colleen McDaniel (she/they) is an award-winning anti-violence activist and interpersonal violence prevention expert based in the Northern Virginia/DC area. Dr. McDaniel has organized for graduate workers' rights, anti-sexual harassment, and Title IX reform with the Graduate Organizing Committee, AFT #6123 in Detroit and the Alliance for Survivor Choice in Reporting Policies. Dr. McDaniel has conducted and published original psychological research on young men's sexual aggression perpetration, Social Norms Theory, and Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory. Their public scholarship includes publications in Against the Current: A Socialist Journal, People's World, and Spark Magazine. Their work can be found on Twitter and Instagram @violence_femme.



her writing is an application of her own theory that calls for binding ourselves to the power of community for healing.

In a time of global shared traumas, as we experience both harm

and hopefully healing, Gómez' work, although in parts directed at mental health practitioners, is applicable to all who confront harm committed within our communities. As a result, we can learn to heal together, and end patterns of violence.

Gómez is highly critical of the field of psychology. She maintains that it "as a whole has problems with inequality being embedded within its foundational practices." (98)

The hegemony of Whiteness within the psychological community permeates psychological pedagogy, research approaches, foundational theories and therapeutic practices. In contrast to a structural inequity that maintains a fictional universality, the author reframes the therapeutic approach. She calls for a "liberation psychology" which "links the individual and society with the goals of radically transforming both through clearly identifying and dismantling the personal and societal oppressions that bind." (99)

The Theory: Roots of Silencing

Gómez's theory, Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory (CBTT), points to how a marginalized community promotes a sense of trust and loyalty of all community members. This is "a community orientation; as opposed to an individual one: What uplifts one, uplifts us all; simultaneously what harms one, harms us all as well." (56)

If the person who harms them is also a member of their community, the resulting betrayal trauma severs their "(intra)cultural trust." This trust breaks the "connection, attachment, dependency, love, loyalty, and responsibility" that provides emotional safety from racial discrimination. (53, 56)

Further, Black survivors may also face

(intra)cultural pressure. This occurs where the needs of the perpetrator(s) and/or the community are prioritized over the survivor's (57-58), when the community fears that if the survivor reports the case, it might bring harm on the whole community.

Gómez calls the most extreme form of this pressure "violent silencing." She quotes an anonymous commenter who wrote, "Women of color who dare to discuss male predation/violence in minority communities often meet with violent backlash — rape and death threats, etc."

Gómez validates this claim with the example of Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo movement, who was sent death threats from some Black men for speaking out about sexual assault against Black women and girls. (58)

A notable feature of this silencing is its root in White Supremacy. When white men commit harm, society protects them because of their societal standing at the top of the hierarchy as "promising young men," future (or current) successful leaders and businessmen.

White women too face disbelief and are certainly harmed by the criminal legal system and law enforcement through disbelief, victim blaming, and shaming. But if a white man is imprisoned, although incarceration inextricably harms communities, the impact on white people's societal standing is nonexistent.

White Supremacy continues to benefit because that white man will be viewed as an exception: a sociopath or a sexual deviant. But Black communities have everything to lose from incarceration.

When a Black man is imprisoned, society accepts him as naturally and typically monstrous, violent and criminal. This sets up a bind for Black survivors: suffer silently or attempt to make use of a system that continues to harm Black communities and enforce White Supremacy in order to get some accountability.

Rooted in Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, Gómez's CBTT notes that "what is means to be Black is different for Black women and girls because of what it means to also be female. This inverse of responsibility serves to preserve the power dynamics and hierarchy within the Black community: Black men are protected, while Black women and girls are structurally and interpersonally crushed, disposable, and disregarded." (59)

Of course there is a structural reason behind this silencing. Gómez notes that within the Black community, “the ‘rape problem’ is not considered to be Black male-perpetrated sexual abuse against Black women and girls (cultural betrayal sexual trauma); rather, the rape problem is predominantly framed as White women falsely accusing Black men and boys of rape — which has historically resulted in an array of human rights violations, including lynching and imprisonment.” (40).

Therapy and Radical Healing

Gómez, in agreement with Crenshaw, points out that “solutions that preserve and extend Black males’ power, such as those that mirror White men’s freedom to dominate and oppress, will likely not eradicate sexual abuse in the Black community at all.”

Gómez boldly and righteously claims that “unequivocally, the reality of racism against Black men cannot be used to defend or permit such sexual abuse in the name of anti-racism while Black women and girls remain largely unprotected, unsupported, and even violently silenced as [they] endure cultural betrayal sexual trauma.” (41)

Gómez highlights the necessity of “post-traumatic growth” that survivors can experience after trauma. Many survivors not only heal from trauma but gain new perspectives, skills and insights.

She calls for the need for the centrality of relationship building in healing from sexual trauma. But that means breaking from a medical model that defines signs like depression, anxiety, or eating disorders as an “illness,” rather than natural, understandable responses to the unnatural experience of trauma.

Instead of a model where the therapist holds the tools to fix or reduce the client’s symptoms, Gómez proposes “healthily repairing relational connections through validation, apology, and reconnection.” This can be a relearning process for those who have become disconnected from the protection of their community.

Gómez calls this process Relational Cultural Theory (RCT). It emphasizes building “collaborative relational dynamics centered on mutuality” so that people can build paths of healing together (96).

In alignment with her call for healing through relationships, Gómez calls for radical healing in the Black Community. This healing and the consequential change is effected in the individual, in their relationships, in their community, and in their society.

As individuals, for example, “part of healing” from sexual violence “can be reclaiming your body as yours, knowing that your body is nothing to be ashamed of.” (119)

Within communities there can be the practice of restorative justice, or at least its tenets: to name who was harmed, what their

needs are, and whose is obliged to those needs. In the context of Black women and girl survivors, “her needs may include physical health care, validation and (intra)cultural support, and psychoeducation on sexual abuse.” (121)



Jennifer M. Gómez

Because cultural betrayal trauma is a community harm, “it is the obligation of those in the Black community — including but not limited to the perpetrator(s) — and the broader society that feeds the context of inequality to meet these needs.” (121)

That means we all must take responsibility and effect change, because as a society we are all responsible for these harms. Gómez goes on to discuss what this healing can look like in groups and families, as well as highlighting the specific roles of Black men in this healing process.

Although there is excellent detail in the book that is too long to address here, the takeaway is crucial: “Experiencing freedom, liberation, joy, light, and laughter is possible for everyone in the Black community, including Black women and girls who have endured cultural betrayal trauma” (131).

Struggle for Equality

Because cultural betrayal sexual trauma is the result of societal inequity, institutions also have a responsibility to address this harm. (134)

Gómez applies the work of Dr. Jennifer Freyd in making sense of how institutions can change. Although institutions can cause harm, Gómez remarks that they also have the power to help end violence by supporting survivors via institutional courage. She identifies an “antidote” that “requires institutional actors and the institution itself [to] promote equitable justice.” (139)

This call on institutions for courage and change is a radical shift in that hegemonic approaches to violence response hold individuals, but not institutions, accountable. If we are to end systemic sexual violence, we must hold accountable the very institutions which perpetuate social injustices.

This includes colleges and universities, K-12 schools, businesses, and governments. Not only must they be held accountable, but they must take an active role in the ending of sexual violence through institutional courage.

Gómez prefaces her theory with the question, “How can we radically transform the world?” She describes how she created the term “dreamstorming,” meaning that “extension of brainstorming” in which she “envison[s] liberation and engage[s] in fantasy for what has never been but what [she does] believe could be (brown & Imarisha, ed., *Octavia’s Brood*, 2015): a truly free world.” (xi)

In this work, she does just that, outlining how shifting our understandings of violence within marginalized communities in therapeutic practice and research can make that dream a reality.

Yet Gómez does more than that. She calls each and every person into an all-around critical revisioning of how we can heal from and strategize to change the intersectional systemic oppression that affects us and our communities towards liberation.

As Gómez states, “We’re not yet *There*. But it would not be life if we were not fighting to transform *There* into existence now.” (xi) ■

Bernie Said It!

FOLLOWING THE NOVEMBER 5 election, Bernie Sanders noted that it “should come as no great surprise that a Democratic Party which has abandoned working-class people would find that the working class has abandoned them.

“First, it was the white working class, and now it is Latino and Black workers as well. While the Democratic leadership defends the status quo, the American people are angry and want change. And they’re right.

“Today, despite strong opposition from a majority of Americans, we continue to spend billions funding the extremist Netanyahu government’s all out war against the Palestinian people which has led to the horrific humanitarian disaster of mass malnutrition and the starvation of thousands of children...”

“Will the big money interests and well-paid consultants who control the Democratic Party learn any real lessons from this disastrous campaign? Will they understand the pain and political alienation that tens of millions of Americans are experiencing? Do they have any ideas as to how we can take on the increasingly powerful Oligarchy which has so much economic and political power? Probably not.”

Sanders stated that “very serious political discussions” are in order for “those of us concerned about grassroots democracy and economic justice....Stay tuned.” ■

REVIEW

A Classic of Queer Marxism By Alan Sears

The Regulation of Desire:

Queer Histories, Queer Struggles

By Gary Kinsman

Revised third edition, Montreal: Concordia University Press, 2023. Distributed in the USA by University of Chicago Press, 480 pages, \$49.95 paperback.

THE PUBLICATION OF the third edition of Gary Kinsman's *The Regulation of Desire* is an opportunity to mark the contribution of this path-breaking classic of queer Marxism. It is characteristics of Gary Kinsman's work that the two subsequent editions (1996 and 2023) each involved substantial and creative reworking to integrate new thinking and challenges emerging from activist movements.

I would consider my relationship to *The Regulation of Desire* to be rather personal. It was a crucial resource for me as I was trying to work out the relationship in my own life between socialist organizing and queer mobilization.

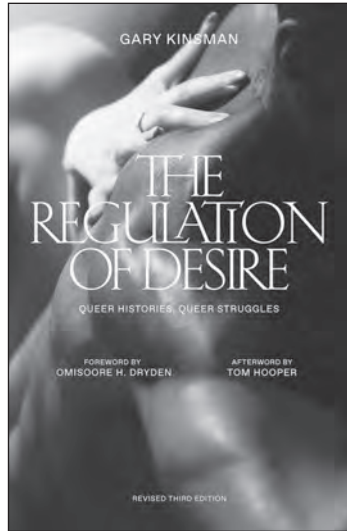
This work has been a resource for me since I picked up the first edition, shortly after it appeared in 1987. I found it to be the most systematic Marxist account of what we might now call queerness, tracing the historical development of sexualities and gender identities under capitalism.

The first edition combined theoretical richness, drawing on a wide range of perspectives to develop a nuanced analysis, with a deep grounding in activist knowledge and queer movement experience.

Gary's writing draws on his long history of committed and thoughtful activism. He has played a crucial role in queer mobilizations challenging not only the power structure but also the mainstream leadership of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ+) movements.

I first became aware of Gary's activism around the militant response to the 1981 Bathhouse Raids in Toronto, following the roundup and mass arrest of 286 patrons of gay bathhouses. The police taunted the men they arrested with homophobic slurs.

Gary played a role in mobilizing the mil-



Gary was then involved in Gays and Lesbians Against the Right Everywhere (GLARE), launched after the Bathhouse raids to fight back against right-wing attacks.

At the time, the right was building bigotry against LGBTQ+ people, just as today the right is deploying anti-trans bigotry to fan the flames of their broader hate agenda. GLARE mobilized resistance to this right-wing agenda, ranging from education through to activist mobilizations to challenge hate events.

Gary became part of the AIDS activist response to the devastating epidemic, mobilizing against state inaction and official bigotry. One of the key features of AIDS activism was the way it honored the knowledge and community of people living with AIDS and queer people more generally.

A sophisticated theorist who puts activist knowledge at the core of his analysis, Gary has recently contributed to the work of No Pride in Policing, building solidarity with anti-racist and anti-colonial abolitionist movements to challenge the police presence at Pride events. He has also been prominent advocate of queer solidarity with Palestine. This activist mobilizing guides the most recent edition of *The Regulation of Desire*.

Gary's writing also reflects his committed anti-capitalism, developed in part through his complex relationship with revolutionary socialist organizations. In the 1970s, he was a member of the Young Socialists and the Revolutionary Marxist Group that eventually merged into the Revolutionary Workers League. He and other queer activists ultimately left the organization, finding it to be an inhospitable environment for the

itant response in which people blocked streets, confronted the cops and chanted "Fuck you 52!" outside the headquarters of Police Division 52 that conducted the raid. This response launched a new phase of activist radical militancy in the queer community.

Theory and Activism

queer anti-capitalist perspectives they were developing.

Gary and I were both members of the New Socialist Group in the 1990s, though he left with others who disagreed with the direction of the group. He has continued to work to combine revolutionary anti-capitalism with queer militancy.

Changes in Queer Lives

Gary's ongoing activism is the basis for his reworking of the two subsequent editions of *The Regulation of Desire* around key political issues of the moment.

The 36 years between the first and third editions saw enormous changes in queer lives and politics in much of the Global North and some places in the Global South, including a much more prominent representation of (some) queer lives in movies, songs, television shows and other forms of popular cultural expression, formal legal inclusion in human rights codes, and the recognition of same-gender relationships including the right to adopt children.

It may be difficult to believe, but in 1987 there were few prominent out queer performers and almost no queer characters in mainstream popular culture. People could be fired simply for being gay. Life partners could be excluded from participation in medical support or decision-making.

There have been important changes since then, but the latest edition of *The Regulation of Desire* is not a simple victory celebration. Rather the book carefully unpacks these changes, examining the ways new forms of queer inclusion have gone along with the emergence of new barriers and forms of exclusion along lines of gender, racialization, Indigeneity, migration status, poverty, and categorization as disabled.

In this review I will comment on what I see as crucial contributions of the book over time, and the specific rethinking that went into the writing of this new edition. I am going to discuss Kinsman's overall method of analysis, which I consider to be an important model for queer marxism.

I will also focus on the three most important innovations in the third edition: (1) the discussion of the emergence of the neoliberal queer and queer life in the context of neoliberal capitalism, (2) the examination of the impact of settler colonialism and systemic racism on queer lives and politics and (3) the focus on trans lives and the centrality of trans activism to queer liberation.

Alan Sears is a Professor Emeritus retired from the Department of Sociology at Toronto Metropolitan University. He is a long-time socialist, queer activist and theorist of movements. His latest book is Eros and Alienation: Capitalism and the Making of Gendered Sexualities (Pluto Press).

A Focus on Struggle

One of the great strengths of this work is the focus on struggle, working from the key issues of the day in queer movements. Queer struggles, as all other movements, are dynamic — they must respond to changes in the world that frame our life experiences and our activism.

At the simplest level, the words we use to describe ourselves and each other have changed since the first edition of *The Regulation of Desire*, for example through the reclaiming of the previously offensive slur queer as a self-description. Mobilizations lead to victories, defeats, and complex “settlements” that change the ground we are fighting on and our own forms of activism in important ways.

Movement leaders and activists may, for example, be more inclined to try an insider approach to manipulating the levers of power after their rights have been formally recognized.

Since 1987 we’ve seen remarkable changes in the formal recognition of lesbian, gay and trans rights in the Canadian state (where both Gary and I live), and more broadly in much of the Global North and parts of the Global South. Yet this partial inclusion is organized around deep exclusions and persistent violence. These changes disproportionately benefit some (especially cis-gendered white men in higher-class positions) more than others.

The trend towards recognition of queer rights is proving to be far from irreversible, and over the past few years the far right has been successfully targeting trans rights in the United States, Canada, Britain and elsewhere.

The fault lines within queer politics, between those who have benefitted from inclusion as insiders in the dominant power relations and those facing increasing marginalization and prosecution, are clearly exposed in this context.

The deep revisions in both the second and third editions of *The Regulation of Desire* represent a recognition of the ways changes in the world cast a new light on queer life and politics. Gary’s commitment to thoroughly rewriting this book in the light of political developments and movement issues is an important model of how to respond to the dynamism of struggles.

His work is a very special combination of deep principle, firm commitments and clear theoretical compass points with a deliberate open-endedness, oriented around learning from struggles and reassessing honestly. At the core of this approach is a recognition of the richness of activist knowledge, the analysis and perspectives emerging from particular experiences of struggle.

Activists learn a great deal about how power works and how to mobilize effectively as they organize to change the world. This

knowledge is shared and developed through movement engagement, and Gary Kinsman has been there for conversations, meetings, and demonstrations and other actions.

This book carefully weaves activist knowledge in with a supple and nuanced theoretical reflexivity. It book models a non-reductive, dynamic and integrative historical materialism, marked by careful attention to the active historical processes of formation that have made the world we now inhabit. The practices of sexuality and gender we grow up with in this society are not hard-wired natural features of human life, but the product of struggles around freedom and subordination within the context of capitalist social relations.

This book is particularly attentive to the ways contemporary practices of gender and sexuality have been organized around racialization, colonialism, class formation, gendering and sexualization. Kinsman challenges class reductionist approaches to Marxism, critiquing those “who adopt a narrow ‘class first’ politics and who claim to reject the politics of identity.” (iv)

Class is lived and organized through gender, racialization, settler colonialism and sexuality, and cannot be understood in isolation. This approach to historical materialism makes this book a valuable resource, and I always learn from Gary Kinsman’s work even though I approach queer marxism through a rather more orthodox lens.

I do not agree, for example, with his argument that socialism is “too state identified” to be useful in describing liberation from below. (iv)

Kinsman also uses theory to disturb our taken for granted assumptions about the way the world works. One example is a granular reflection on the ways we use “we” in writing and conversation.

“We” is often used as if it includes everyone, when in reality it often reflects experiences of those who share the same social position with the speaker. “We” is often framed by whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality and settler status. Kinsman challenges us to work towards the development of a genuine collective, a real ‘we,’ as an organizing project in which people do the work of listening, learning and taking responsibility for the impact of social inequalities: “We is a project that people can come to be involved in and identify with.” (xix)

The Neoliberal Queer

This book makes an important contribution to the extensive body of work examining the impact of the neoliberal restructuring of capitalism since the 1980s on queer lives.

The cultural presence and formal rights of queer people in much of the Global North increased tremendously through the process of neoliberal restructuring. Kinsman traces the emergence of a queer politics aligned

with the dominant power relations of neoliberal capitalism.

At the core of this politics is “the growth of a gay, white middle class and a business/professional/managerial class — mostly composed of cis men — that identifies its rights and progress with a non-moral-conservative form of neoliberal capitalism.” (287)

There are many dimensions to neoliberal queer politics, including the commercialization of Pride parades and events, the bureaucratization of AIDS service organizations and the retrenchment of racialized and trans exclusion at all levels.

The right to privacy for some goes along with the lack of access to privacy for others, for example those who are among the unhoused, who face bureaucratic scrutiny as social assistance clients, who undergo deep surveillance as migrants, and/or who are incarcerated.

Access to neoliberal respectability is granted only on condition of demonstrating “responsibility,” for example gaining access to sufficient resources to meet your needs through the sale of your capacity to work and the purchase of goods and services on the market.

Kinsman traces the many dimensions of this emergence of the neoliberal queer, ranging from the specific role of layers of the queer community in the gentrification of urban spaces to the development of a queer version of the normative model of domestic relationships and parenting.

The neoliberal queer perspective extends into the realm of global relations, where the pinkwashing of the Israeli state cast as supposed queer ally in the apparently hostile context of the Middle East is only one example of the identification of imperialist violence with the spread of global gay rights. The neoliberal queer tends to identify with their own nation-state as the protector of their rights on a national and global scale, an attitude is described as homonationalism.

Settler Colonialism and Racial Formation

The homonationalist identity with their own nation state includes the neoliberal queer identification with whiteness. The third edition of *The Regulation of Desire* includes much more deliberate learning from a broad range of Indigenous, Black and other racialized and anti-colonial activists and writers.

Official queer movements too often pursue cooperation with the police, forgetting the long history of harassment and incarceration queer folks.

Kinsman traces out the crucial role of anti-colonial and anti-racist queer resistance in challenging the political dominance of the neoliberal queer perspective. In 2016, for example, Black Lives Matter Toronto mobilized to grind the Pride Parade to a halt to advance an abolitionist perspective.

continued on page 38

REVIEW

Free Radicals' Lives and Times By Michael Friedman

Radioactive Radicals:

A Novel of Labor and the Left

By Dan La Botz

Booklocker.com, 2024, 738 pages.

\$29.99 paper.

RADIOACTIVE RADICALS BY Dan La Botz presents a sprawling, sometimes chaotic, panoramic overview of the author's experiences and lessons learned in the left political movement that was birthed in the 1960s.

The novel is written as a *roman à clef*, i.e. based on the real people the author knew, worked with and engaged with politically, but with their stories told through characters whose fictional presentations both mirror and differ from the individuals on which they are based.

For those who actively participated in the various left political movements birthed in the 1960s and thereafter, especially those whose work focused on labor organizing, *Radioactive Radicals* presents an absorbing and challenging read.

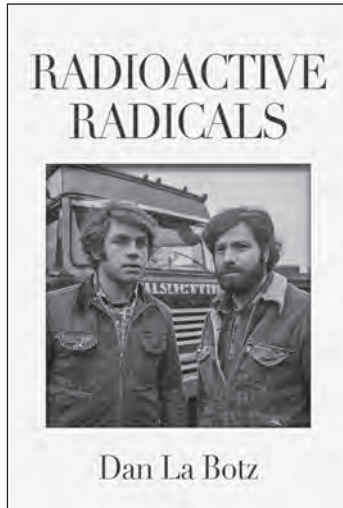
In one of the chapters titled "First Interlude and Reflections," the author explains why he chose this particular mode of presentation:

"For the true is, as Hegel says, the whole. I want to grasp for myself what happened and share with you the pattern into which everything fits. That's why I am writing a novel, because, though truth may be stranger than fiction, fiction always has more veracity than mere facts. The truth, I believe, is in the story."

Yet a few pages later, the author presents a somewhat different stance towards his approach to storytelling and his storytelling methodology:

"Perhaps it's because of my childhood experience, raised as a pacifist, beaten by my classmates on the South Side of Chicago, experience that made me an outsider, an observer, turned me into a precocious anthropologist ... made me ever after always attentive to the details of others' lives, always taking notes of those around

Michael Friedman, a retired attorney, was a truck driver and TDU activist. He is currently a member of Jewish Voice for Peace-Detroit chapter. His previous reviews for Against the Current have covered the Black cooperative movement, the global significance of Israel's "matrix of control" over Palestine, and the Jackson-Cush plan in Jackson, Mississippi (see ATC 176, 187 and 197).



me ... the perpetual anthropologist doing the ethnographies of my family, my tribe, and later of my generation, so that I found myself engaged in what has become an extended lifetime field of study of the species and particularly of that subset marked by the bomb's radiocaesium with its luminescent aura."

I will shortly explain the perhaps confusing reference to the "subset

marked by the bomb's radiocaesium with its luminescent aura" in this quote, but at the moment I will simply point out the two roles the author describes himself as playing — the novelist and the anthropologist. These are not necessarily in conflict, but they do function in quite distinct ways throughout.

The author purports on one hand to be a storyteller, recounting the experiences, actions and viewpoints of the fictional characters he has created; on the other he seems to be studying them simply as players in the historical drama he is presenting. In the latter role, La Botz provides contextual interludes and historical backgrounds to events he is seeking to portray as a novelist.

For example, when the main character Dirks Leeuwenhoek is introduced, there is an extensive presentation of his family's three-generational history in Chicago, which becomes a detailed telling of the history of Chicago itself.

When Dirks gets a truck driving job in Chicago, he proceeds to tell the history of the Chicago Teamsters union; when Dirks begins working with the United Farm Workers Union, he provides extensive discussions of Caesar Chavez's role in the organization's founding and its successes and failures.

When Dirks moves to Detroit, we are regaled with an extended story of Henry Ford and the city of Highland Park; and when Ron Carey runs for and becomes president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), Dirks provides a very extensive and absorbing description of Carey's background and his rise to, and fall from, power.

Here is the anthropologist at work, and

in truth, I often found these anthropological/historical background offerings among the best parts of the book. La Botz ended his very varied and extensive working career as a college professor, and this book shows him to be highly talented in that role.

There is a lot to be learned from this book about a very wide range of political events in which his main character either observed or was directly involved — both the contexts in which these events occurred and the historical backgrounds that led to them. These background excursions make a valuable contribution.

Problematic Metaphor

La Botz, however, is a far better anthropologist/historian than novelist. The novel is driven by Dirks' meeting and working with the other main protagonist, Wes Kinsman.

The book starts in a somewhat dramatic fashion by noting that Wes and Dirks were born on "almost" the same day — "on both ends of the long atomic day that began August 6 and ended on August 9, 1945; he born on the sixth, when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and I born on the ninth, the day the second bomb fell on Nagasaki."

With this dramatic opening, one hopes that the novel will make some significant, if not dramatic, use of this surprising circumstance of the beginnings of its two main characters. The novel after all is titled "*Radioactive Radicals*."

Here my previous reference to the confusion of "that subset marked by the bomb's radiocaesium with its luminescent aura" should make some sense. Unfortunately, rather than a powerful metaphor that defines his generation, the radioactive consequences of the atomic coincidence of the births of Wes and Dirks are used literally to explain the political commitments, sexual drives, and organizational basis for a range of characters and organizations that Dirks and Wes move through.

By the end of the novel, the numerous references to "radiocaesium in the blood" as a reference point, or explanation for what the characters are doing, becomes a bit trite. It's an explanation that explains very little, and the repetition becomes somewhat tiresome.

La Botz via Dirks, however, does present a very important portrayal of Wes Kinsman, whose real life doppelganger clearly inspired La Botz, as well as many others who knew

and worked with him.

Wes is a highly committed, yet complicated person. He is portrayed as very much a kind of ultimate grassroots organizer.

His ability to spot opportunities, connect with a wide range of folks, provide an unshakeable commitment to those tasks he deemed important, and to do all this with a kindness and integrity towards those he worked with impressed nearly everyone he met.

On the other hand, Wes was perhaps the most disorganized “organizer” one might ever meet, whose personal habits and foibles were both infuriating at times and self-destructive at others.

In short, Wes was a notable and important contributor to many of the struggles that Dirks became involved with, the most important of which was the organization of a rank-and-file caucus in the IBT that came to be known as Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), called in the novel *Teamster for Democracy* (TfD).

Dirks’ portrayal of Wes Kinsman here pays justifiable homage to the work Wes had done throughout his life both as a student, community and labor organizer. Dirks’ appreciation of that work is both significant and heartfelt.

Yet for all Wes’ importance in the novel, Dirks’ descriptions of Wes falls somewhat short of fully humanizing this character. The detailed descriptions tell what Wes did, how he did it, sometimes why he did it, but rarely do we get inside the character of Wes to experience him for ourselves.

Indeed, one of the adventures that Wes and Dirks got involved with underlined for me the artificiality of the book’s characters, even the presentation of Wes. That adventure is when Dirks describes himself and Wes going to help organize a scrap-metal yard in Detroit owned by mob interests.

Their motive for involvement in this venture is never clearly explained, as it needed to be since Dirks admitted that this was not the kind of venture Wes would be attracted to, and likely would see that the pros did not outweigh the cons. Nevertheless they went to help, and while I will not go into the

details of what occurs, it’s dramatic and very definitely out-of-step with how Wes usually operated.

By the end of the novel it becomes clear why this episode was included. While dramatic, it’s clearly a contrived one — not a fictionalized telling of actual events — and its consequences for the novel’s story come across to this reader as a contradictory intrusion to the overall tenor of the story, and a bit gimmicky as well.

Characters and Conflicts

If Dirks does not succeed in fully presenting Wes, it should go without saying that no other characters in the novel fare much better. We are presented with a string of women with whom Dirks gets involved (my quick count noted 14, though Dirks implies the number is higher); but these women are often just named, given a short bio, the affairs are noted, but almost none of them come across as more than appendages to the story Dirks is telling about himself.

Even the child Dirks had with one of these women comes across to the reader as little more than a problem to be solved whenever Dirks changes jobs, ends relationships, or moves to a new city.

More importantly and perhaps most controversially is Dirks’ treatment of the character of Fred Getz, a key organizer and leader with Wes of TDU, the rank and file caucus that is a focal point of the novel. It is clear that Dirks does not like Fred.

Dirks met Fred through the activity of the International Socialist (IS) group and the role it played in organizing TDU. Dirks grudgingly recognized that among the leadership of that group Fred “seemed to be the sharpest. . . .

“But whatever was said, it was Getz, who was not one to get physical, who at the end of the day made the call, because generally he did have the best ideas in any discussion, and we all recognized that. He was one of those who unfortunately combined brilliance with arrogance.”

While Dirks clearly thinks Getz did not fully appreciate Wes nor necessarily treat him well, he seems to miss that while Wes and Getz did not always get along, the contributions of both were key and essential in creating TDU as the most successful rank and

file caucus in U.S. labor history.

Getz brought the long-term organizational and strategic skills and the personal inner drive; Wes brought the grassroots outreach skills, tactical perspicuity, ever-renewable energy and outward passion. Unfortunately Wes also brought a measure of erratic, undisciplined behavior that was somewhat incompatible with Fred’s inner sense of discipline and the organization’s need for assigned tasks to be carried out in a timely fashion.

Importantly, however, it was the singular and unique contributions of both that allowed TDU to successfully develop the multi-racial, multi-gender, and multi-generational rank and file activists and leadership that has allowed TDU to survive for almost 50 years.

Movement Failure?

As I was trying to put my finger on what I felt was missing in the characters who populate this novel, I thought of the Viennese philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s aphorism “the map is not the territory.” However accurate and detailed a map may be in describing a particular landscape and the features of a place, it is not the same as exploring and experiencing that territory, that place, directly.

Novels are intended to bring the reader into the territory they have created, not simply to be map guides as to how the author sees those places and characters. Reading maps can be both interesting and illuminating, and this novel at times is both. But in seeking to carry out his goal of unearthing the truth from the story — because as the author has said, “The truth, I believe, is in the story” — La Botz may have *mapped* out the story, but that is not the *territory* where the truth of any successful novel ultimately lies.

I believe, however, that what ultimately undermines the novel is Dirks’ characterizing the limits of his life in the movement as reflecting not simply personal change, but the failure of the movement itself.

“By 1980, I felt ground down and defeated,” having left his position of leadership in the IS, lost his relationship with the mother of his son, and quit his truck driving job, Dirks admitted that he “was pretty lost.” But he does not seem to have personally lost his way, so much as he believes it was the movement that had failed, or rather it was the movement’s failure that had taken the meaning and purpose from his life:

“Our movement has been wrong about everything. The crisis we expected had never come, or at least not in any form we recognized, and the working class upheaval had already begun to wane in the early seventies, just about the time we got jobs in industry. . . . Our socialist group, created to lead mass labor struggles, was not useful in the new period when revolution was not on the agenda. America was back to normal and we no longer fit. I was now thirty-five. Who was I now? What was my life

Fund Appeal Update: Thanks to Our Readers!

AS OF DECEMBER 18, the holiday fund appeal for *Against the Current* had brought in more than \$3300, over halfway to our goal. Thanks to everyone who’s contributed so far! As our letter to subscribers stated, our “extended holiday season” runs from Halloween through the secular midwinter festival known as Super Bowl Sunday. As a reminder, your tax-deductible contribution can be mailed by check to Center for Changes, 7012 Michigan Avenue, Detroit MI 48210 or online at <https://againstthecurrent.org/donate>.

Our movements for social justice are facing both repression *and* opportunities for growth at a moment of severe global turbulence. As always, we seek to contribute to building a new, revolutionary and democratic socialist left within a mass working-class movement. We’ll do our best to interpret the world and help change it. Forward to a better 2025 for all of us! ■

about?"

What Dirks is saying here clearly reflects feelings that many who had been committed activists in the labor, women's, queer, antiwar, anti-capitalist struggles of the 1960s and beyond, may themselves have expressed at one time or another. Indeed, many simply gave up, or at least had serious doubts whether it all had been worth it.

But Dirks' pessimism unduly colors the novel's conclusions. While it is clear that La Botz is not wrong in bemoaning the failures of the movement, and specifically those of the more radical left that saw a socialist working-class uprising as a strategic near-term goal, such pessimism ends up preventing him from seeing, as he had previously announced, that Hegel was right — the truth resides in the whole.

It is Dirks' failure here to fulfill the mission he set for himself in writing this novel.

Dirks describes the TDU that had been created by the efforts of Wes Kinsman, Fred Getz and many, many others as having given up on the "socialist revolution." But it is not clear in the historical moment that TDU ever saw or should have seen itself as directly creating such a revolution.

Given the state of U.S. politics at that time, creating a democratic, militant labor movement might be possible, and that movement if created might play a significant role in moving things closer to such a pre-revolutionary context.

How well TDU succeeded in its mission is a matter for extensive debate and discussion. But to write TDU off as becoming some kind of foundation-supported NGO, as Dirks describes it, leads him not to see that TDU, beyond continuing as a serious and successful rank-and-file caucus, has succeeded in replacing the Teamsters' corrupt old guard, developed numerous local officers who are TDU members or, influenced by the its work, have sought office as progressive rank-and-file leaders, and organized more women Teamsters and Teamsters of color to play a greater role in the union — locally, regionally and nationally — than ever before.

Most significantly, through the example set by and lessons learned from TDU, the caucus has influenced the creation of similar efforts in a number of other unions. Perhaps the most significant and impactful of these are in the United Auto Workers (UAW), but efforts in the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and other major unions cannot be ignored.

Moreover, TDU has been an inspiration to a new generation of union organizers who are working outside traditional union structures to create unions in companies such as Starbucks, Trader Joe's and Amazon.

"Failure" is Not Irrelevance

Further, La Botz gives no recognition to another project that the IS was instrumental in creating, the magazine *Labor Notes*. Since its inception in 1979 *Labor Notes* has been reporting on union organizing drives, intra-union struggles, and developments in nascent unions both in the United States and globally.

It actively organizes workshops on all issues facing labor activists, publishes books about organizing strategies and worker rights, and at its biannual conferences brings together literally thousands of labor activists from all over the world to meet, share experiences and learn from each other.

Shawn Fain, the current president of the UAW, has openly spoken about what he has called his "bible" for organizing, the *Troublemaker's Handbook* published by *Labor Notes*. The number of labor activists who would probably agree on that is too long to list.

Indeed, the IS and all the other socialist

organizations active in the 1960s and '70s did not foster a successful socialist revolution — indeed most organizations that had pursued such a goal have either fallen by the wayside or have become infinitesimally influential — but one period of historical failure does not condemn a movement to eternal irrelevance.

The IS may have been wrong about a lot of things, and these need to be analyzed and understood (the topic of other books to be sure), but it was hardly "wrong about everything" as the narrator Dirks would have us believe. Unfortunately, concluding that it was universally wrong works at cross purposes with La Botz's work as a novelist who seeks to present the "truth" that resides in the "whole."

It is in some measure that part of the "whole truth" which La Botz misses that renders the novel, as impressive as it is in its scope and breadth, ultimately less than satisfying. ■

A Classic of Queer Marxism — continued from page 35

Anti-racist and anti-colonial queer movements in Toronto have mobilized to counter the celebrations of the Canadian state as a model of lesbian and gay rights by official queer organizations. This celebration obscures the role of settler colonialization and systemic racism at the heart of the project of the Canadian state, informing every aspect of its policies and practices.

The genocidal destruction of Indigenous communities required deliberate attacks on their practices of life-making through the violent imposition of a colonial regime of sexuality and gender identity. As Kinsman described, "Going after gender/sexually diverse Indigenous peoples was a crucial strategy of colonization, and was not only about sex, sexuality, and gender but also very much about land and culture." (51)

The imposition of settler sexualities and gender relations was fundamental to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and colonization of the land. The settler colonial regime of gender and sexuality was integrally connected to the enforcement of capitalist property relations in regard to land and personhood.

Trans Mobilization

This edition of *The Regulation of Desire* does important rethinking in relation to the expansion of trans organizing since 1996, when the second edition went was published. This expansion has cast important light on the long history of trans activism as the leading edge of queer liberation, for example in the crucial role of racialized trans people in the 1969 Stonewall uprising that launched the contemporary gay liberation movement.

The emphasis on trans activism and analysis in this edition is particularly import-

ant given the intensive spread of anti-trans measures globally. Anti-trans politics have become the leading edge of the far right's anti-queer agenda.

Kinsman traces out the political fault lines between the neoliberal queer stream in trans organizing, emphasizing human rights and respectability, and the transformative stream pressing for a fuller vision of liberation. He contrasts the two in relation to the question of the prison abolition, which aligns with the politics of the transformative stream: "rather than focusing only on trans people being assigned to the gender-appropriate prisons, this raises questions about why trans and other people are being imprisoned at all." (352)

Conclusion

This edition of *The Regulation of Desire* contributes to a period of impressive development in queer marxism, including such works as Peter Ducker's *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism*, Rosemary Hennessey's *Fires on the Border* and Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke's *Trans Gender Marxism*.

Kinsman's pathbreaking book has been carefully rethought and revised to address crucial issues in contemporary queer politics. It models a dynamic queer historical materialism, founded on a deep commitment to learning from movements and integrating anti-racist, anti-colonial and trans perspectives.

The third edition provides crucial tools for making sense of contemporary queer movements, understanding the influence of neoliberal queer perspectives, and seeing the centrality of trans, anti-racist and anti-colonial queer mobilizations to moving beyond the neoliberal queer towards liberation. ■

REVIEW

Rosa, Spark of Revolution By William Smaldone

Rosa Luxemburg:

The Incendiary Spark

Essays by Michael Löwy

Edited by Paul Le Blanc with a foreword by Helen C. Scott.

Translated by Dan La Botz, Paul Le Blanc, and Lynne Sunderland
Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2024, \$19.95 paperback.



DURING THE FIRST two decades of the 20th century, Rosa Luxemburg was one of European socialism's most trenchant Marxist thinkers and controversial political activists. Born in 1871 in Zamosc, a small town in Congress Poland, she was raised in Warsaw in a Reform Jewish family of modest means.

Growing up in a household that opposed the Tsarist regime and supported the education of girls, Rosa became a precocious student fluent in Polish, Russian, German and (later on) French. She joined Poland's budding illegal socialist movement at the age of 16, and eventually fled to Zurich, Switzerland, which had one of the few European universities enrolling women.

After taking courses in a wide range of fields including philosophy, zoology, history and mathematics, she earned a Ph.D. in economics with a dissertation on "The Industrial Development of Poland" in 1897. From there she moved to Berlin, where she became a major figure in the German and Polish social democratic movements.

Her contributions to Marxist theory and her radical political views made her a lightning rod in international socialist politics until her murder at the hands of counter-revolutionary soldiers during the German Revolution of 1918-1919.

Given Luxemburg's background and, as we will see, her commitment to international socialist revolution, it is fitting then that Michael Löwy has produced this outstanding collection of essays on her thought and politics. Born in 1938 to Austrian-Jewish immigrant

William Smaldone is the E. J. Whipple Professor of History at Willamette University. He is the author of several books in German and socialist history including Rudolf Hilferding: The Tragedy of a German Social Democrat (1998) and European Socialism: A Concise History with Documents (2019). His most recent work is "Freedom is Indivisible": Rudolf Hilferding's Correspondence with Karl Kautsky, Leon Trotsky, and Paul Hertz, 1902-1938 (2023).

parents in São Paulo, Brazil, Löwy also became active in the socialist movement as a teenager.

At age 16 his first encounter with Luxemburg's writings resulted in "a passion" for her life and work that transformed him into a lifelong "Luxemburgist." After earning a degree in the social sciences at the University of São Paulo in 1960, he completed his Ph.D. thesis

on "The Young Marx's Theory of Revolution" at the University of Paris in 1964, where he worked with Marxist philosopher and cultural sociologist Lucien Goldmann, also an admirer of Luxemburg.

Löwy's interests are deeply interdisciplinary and transnational. His books treat such subjects as Marxist theory, cultural sociology, revolution and ideology. He has published studies of the ideas of Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Che Guevara, Georg Lukacs, Walter Benjamin and Franz Kafka, among others.

While working as a professor at the University of Paris and as the Research Director in social sciences at the French National Center of Scientific Research, Löwy also remained engaged with the socialist politics of his native country as well as those of France.*

Exploring Luxemburg

Written over the course of several decades, the 10 essays collected here are not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of Luxemburg's life and work. Instead, they aim to examine "certain aspects of Luxemburg's beliefs, whether known, unknown, or poorly understood," and to look at them with fresh eyes. (xi)

Löwy is convinced that Luxemburg's contributions to our understanding of history, political philosophy, and Marxist epistemology, are unique, of lasting value, and indispensable to the revival of Marxism in our time. The book is not a hagiography, however, and Löwy interprets Luxemburg's writings, especially in the sphere of economics and on

the national question, with a critical eye.

While three of Löwy's essays examine how specific thinkers, such as Trotsky, Lukacs and the Romanian philosopher and historian Georges Haupt, engaged with Luxemburg's theoretical and practical work, the remainder focus on specific topics including her concept of "Socialism or Barbarism;" the "philosophy of praxis" in her thought; revolution and socialist transformation; internationalism; and the relationships of revolution to freedom, Western imperialism to primitive communism, and ideology to knowledge.

As Helen Scott notes, the contributions that Löwy clearly considers a part of Luxemburg's lasting legacy are her systematic critiques of imperialism and militarism, her unique and powerful analysis of the process of capital accumulation, her commitment to democracy as a fundamental element of the transition to socialism, her view of the mass strike as a revolutionary tool of the workers, her dialectical view of the bourgeois state, and her grasp of revolution as a process. (ix)

Löwy's essay on Luxemburg's conception of "Socialism or Barbarism" provides a broad point of departure for the entire collection. For many socialists of her era, the assumption that the economic contradictions of capitalism, identified by Marx, would lead inevitably to socialist revolution stood in contrast to Marx's clear dictum that the emancipation of the working classes could only be achieved through the actions of workers themselves.

This tension between waiting for the economic laws of the system to unfold and actively working for the revolutionary transformation of society cast a long shadow over social democratic politics. It came into especially sharp relief when, in the late 1890s, Edward Bernstein, a leading figure in the German Social Democratic Party (the SPD), asserted that Marx's basic economic assumptions were wrong, that socialism was a moral, not a scientific imperative, and that the movement should strive for socialism through parliamentary reform, rather than revolution.

As Löwy reminds us, Rosa Luxemburg helped lead the charge against Bernstein's "revisionist" approach to Marx in her powerful *Reform or Revolution* (1899), which defends Marx's analysis of capitalism and argues that the struggle for reforms is inextricably linked to the coming revolution.

But Luxemburg too fell victim to the

*On Löwy's career and reception in the U.S., see Alan Wald, "Missives for the Future? Michael Löwy's Close Encounters with the U.S. Left," *Historical Materialism* 31, 1(2023): 159-190.

temptations of “revolutionary fatalism” by asserting repeatedly that the system’s collapse is inevitable, and that proletarian class consciousness is only “the simple intellectual reflection of the growing contradictions of capitalism and of its approaching decline.” (2)

Those contradictions pointed the way to the system’s demise, and it was Social Democracy’s task to drive the process forward through political struggle.

Luxemburg shared this outlook with her political mentor Karl Kautsky, socialism’s leading theorist at the time and a key defender of Marxist “orthodoxy.” Following the Russian Revolution of 1905, however, she and Kautsky parted ways politically due to his focus on parliamentary tactics and opposition to her support for radical actions like the mass strike. She remained wedded, however, to the idea that capitalism’s fall was inevitable.

Stark Alternatives

The outbreak of the First World War and the collapse of the international socialist movement forced Luxemburg to reconsider her conviction that socialism’s coming was “irresistible.” In her famous *Junius Pamphlet* of 1915 she put forward the argument that there is not one single “direction of development.” (4)

Instead people were faced with alternatives, real choices, and it was the task of the proletariat, led by its party, to decide which road to take, that of socialism or barbarism.

Löwy traces the sources of Luxemburg’s new position back to various places in the works of Marx and Engels. Unlike Bernstein, who saw socialism as a moral choice, Luxemburg still grounded her position in the objective development of capitalism, which, she held had created the possibility of socialism — but only if the class-conscious proletariat makes the choice for socialist revolution.

That subjective decision can only be arrived at via a dialectical process, not some inexorable, evolutionary one envisioned by thinkers like Kautsky. Löwy notes that during the war, Lenin and Trotsky came to similar conclusions. They saw developing class consciousness and the will to action as embedded in the historical process, but they recognized the crucial importance of the subjective factor in making the historical choice.

Thus, in Löwy’s view, despite earlier differences with Lenin on a variety of issues, such as the role of centralism in the party and the party’s relationship to the masses, during the war there was a clear convergence between them on the need for the proletariat, under the leadership of a new International, to intervene in the struggle against imperialism and for socialism.

Many of the key issues raised in Löwy’s opening chapter, e.g. on the need for revolutionary action, on the subjective factor, and on the proletariat’s historical choice recur in the essays that follow.

Focusing on Luxemburg’s “philosophy of praxis,” Löwy again notes the fatalism in her understanding of capitalist economic development, for example in her major work *The Accumulation of Capital* (1911); but here he stresses how, at the same time, she put forward a “revolutionary pedagogy of action” in which the proletariat, through its experience in class struggle, achieves the political consciousness required for its self-emancipation.

In contrast to Lenin’s position, which held that workers could only achieve revolutionary consciousness through the educational work of an organized political vanguard, she held that it was the result of a dialectical process of subjective development in which “practical experience” took center stage.

Luxemburg recognized the importance of theory and of political education, which she actually undertook with great alacrity, but Löwy shows how the experience of the Revolution of 1905 and especially the role of the mass strike in that struggle, shaped her thinking on the development of proletarian consciousness.

While the party and trade unions certainly were essential in providing political leadership to drive such actions forward, it was the *practical and active consciousness* of the workers, gained through experience, that was at the heart of the process of the revolutionary struggle. (Löwy’s emphasis, 16)

Revolution and Democracy

This perspective was also at the core of her analysis of the Bolshevik revolution. In *The Russian Revolution*, written in 1918 while she was in prison but not published until 1922, three years after her murder, she praised Lenin and Trotsky for daring to make the revolution, but also criticized a number of their policies, for example on the land and national questions.

Most importantly she opposed their suppression of democratic liberties such as freedom of the press, of association, and of assembly, without which she believed “the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable.” (20)

Luxemburg recognized the enormous challenges of the transition to socialism, and it was precisely because of their scale and complexity that maximum political freedom was necessary for the masses, rather than some central committee, to gain the practical experience necessary to build the new society. Her views on the German Revolution were fully consistent with this outlook. Rejecting the tutelage of party intellectuals like Kautsky, she insisted that “the workers will learn in the school of action.” (22)

Thus for Löwy, Luxemburg’s conception



of socialism was both revolutionary and democratic and stood in “irreconcilable opposition to capitalism and imperialism” while grounded in the self-emancipatory praxis of the workers. He extends this analysis in chapters titled “The Hammer Blow of Revolution” and “Revolution and Freedom.”

In the former, Löwy outlines Luxemburg’s ideas of about the democratic limits of the capitalist “class state,” which even in its democratic parliamentary form remained first and foremost an instrument of class rule.

She believed that parliament was an important arena of class struggle, which along with other forms of struggle would promote the development of proletarian class consciousness, but she resisted the “parliamentary cretinism” of party leaders who suffered from the illusion that parliament “is the central axis of social life and the motive force of world history.” (31)

The already limited democracy of the class-bound parliamentary state was further undermined by militarism and colonialism, both of which fueled a “savage” process of capital accumulation on an ongoing basis.

In contrast to Bernstein’s vision of a reformist road to socialism, Luxemburg argues that the only way to break down the walls between class-based bourgeois democracy and socialist democracy is via the “hammer blow of revolution” which certainly would take many forms, including violence.

Although she did not elaborate any particular formula for making a successful revolution, she was certain that only a radical break could open the road to a socialist, and truly democratic, order.

In discussing Luxemburg’s ideas concerning revolution and freedom, Löwy returns to her analysis of the Russian Revolution. He makes clear her fervent support of the Bolshevik’s willingness to act and that she saw their seizure of power not as a Putsch in the tradition of Blanqui, but as a reflection of mass support for their program.

Indeed, she argues that the Bolsheviks had salvaged the honor of international socialism, which had disgraced itself in 1914. Yet her criticisms were also sharp. By distributing land to the peasants, she believed the Bolsheviks undercut the future socialization of agriculture. Moreover, in the name of internationalism, she rejected the Bolshevik principle on the self-determination of nations.

Löwy finds her positions unpersuasive. Noting that Bolshevik survival depended on peasant support and that denying the right of self-determination contradicted her own stress on the centrality of democracy in the

revolutionary process, he gives these views short shrift.

But on the key issue of freedom, Löwy believes Luxemburg is especially prescient. Not only does she view the suppression of democratic liberties as contrary to the principles of socialist democracy and the needs of the revolution, but by excluding popular participation in decision-making the Bolsheviks opened the door to the domination of the bureaucracy.

While she understood that the revolution faced many enemies and that no revolutionary process could be unblemished, she urged the Bolsheviks not to make a virtue of necessity. For her, the proletarian revolution's aim should be a "class dictatorship" "on the basis of the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of the people, of unlimited democracy." (49)

In my view, Löwy could have devoted more space to this issue. One of the vexing questions of the Russian Revolutions of 1917, as well as the "socialist" revolutions that followed in Europe and around the world, has been the determination of who rules in the new society and through what institutions.

If one sees soviets of workers' and peasants' deputies as the institutions of revolutionary democracy, then one must define these groups and then decide what is the status of all the non-workers and peasants.

If one supports "unlimited participation of the mass of the people" does the latter mean "everyone" or "everyone except...?" Who falls into these categories? And if, after "expropriating the capitalists," one denies equal rights to large swathes of former property holders, would that not bode ill for civil war and the construction of socialism?

Rosa Luxemburg did not live to fully engage these issues, but her assertions about the centrality of democracy put them on the agenda. They remain important issues for socialists today.

Rosa's Internationalism

Another interesting issue in Löwy's collection is Luxemburg's analysis of Western imperialism and its relation to primitive communism. Here he explores both her well-known work *The Accumulation of Capital*, and her incomplete and less familiar *Introduction to Political Economy*, which appeared in 1925.

According to Löwy, the very substantial attention Luxemburg devotes to primitive communist societies and their dissolution has two main goals: first, to shake up and destroy "the old notion of the eternal nature of private property," and second, to use primitive communism "as a precious historical reference point' for criticizing capitalism.

She does not view these non-capitalist societies uncritically, but as Löwy summarizes, aims to "find and 'save' everything in the primitive past that may prefigure modern socialism, at least up to a point." (54-55)

She accomplishes this by ranging far and wide in her critique of European colonialism, its role in the accumulation process, and its impacts on its victims.

In this way, Löwy concludes, she confronts capitalist industrial society with humanity's communitarian past and forces us to think about other ways of viewing the past and present. Her effort "breaks with linear evolutionism, positivist 'progressivism,' and all banally 'modernizing' interpretations of Marxism that prevailed in her day." (61)

Luxemburg's critique of imperialism was also inextricable from her internationalism. According to Löwy, the source of her deep commitment to the Socialist International rather than any "fatherland" was her rootedness in the tradition described by Isaac Deutscher as "the non-Jewish Jew."

These were "brilliant intellectuals" who included such figures as Heinrich Heine, Marx and Trotsky, "who transcended what they saw as the too-narrow boundaries of Judaism" and, as revolutionaries, "lived and thought beyond national boundaries and dreamed of internationalism." (63)

Luxemburg paid little attention to the situation of Jewish communities. She rejected the "separatism" of the Jewish Bund, as well as the "social patriotism" of Zionism, and she underestimated the power of antisemitism despite the many attacks on her.

Her skepticism about national self-determination, as in the case of Poland, was largely based on economic arguments but also on her view that nations were basically a "cultural" phenomenon for which "cultural autonomy" was a solution to nationalist demands. (66) Löwy's aim here is not to revisit her views on self-determination, but instead to look at the "positive side of her perspective," which consists of her contributions to the "Marxist conception of proletarian internationalism" and her resistance to national chauvinism.

Drawing on Lukacs, Löwy argues that Luxemburg approached internationalism from the perspective of "totality," meaning that she looks at all social and political questions from the perspective of the interests of the international working class. She does this by going "beyond Eurocentrism" and viewing the universal proletariat in a global sense.

By way of illustration, Löwy traces Luxemburg's studies of colonialism over many years from Martinique to North and South America, China and Africa. Again he focuses on her analysis of the destruction of non-capitalist societies and on the relations between capital accumulation, militarism, and war.

Unsurprisingly, her interest was far more than academic, and her relentless campaigning against German national chauvinism and militarism ultimately led to her arrest and subsequent imprisonment during the war.

She was also sharply critical of her

comrades in the SPD who supported the government war effort or hesitated to resist. Ultimately, she and her comrades in the revolutionary Spartacus League stood for a new international, one that would promote the international class struggle and international workers' solidarity.

Interestingly, to avoid the failings of its predecessor, she believed that the new international should be highly centralized and disciplined. This view, Löwy notes with irony, stood in marked contrast to her criticisms of Lenin's view of the party in 1904.

Luxemburg's Lasting Influence

In the latter half of his book, Löwy revisits the major issues discussed above in essays that examine the ways in which Georges Haupt, Leon Trotsky, and Georg Lukacs interpret Luxemburg's work. Although sometimes repetitious, these chapters provide interesting insights, especially considering the rather different perspective each figure had on Luxemburg's life. Haupt, for example, was a scholar specializing in the Second International who had moved in 1958 from Ceausescu's Stalinist regime in Romania to France. Trotsky had known Luxemburg largely from afar before the war and, though their criticisms of Lenin had much in common, he later noted that he may have "never properly appreciated her." (92)

Once in exile, though, he "rediscovered" Luxemburg as he drew on her work in his struggle against Stalin's new bureaucratic order. Meanwhile Georg Lukacs, a Hungarian intellectual, developed evolving views on Luxemburg's theoretical and practical ideas in the context of war, revolution, and defeat.

The ably translated and edited essays in this work are succinctly and lucidly written. They can be read individually or as a whole and would be useful for students or study groups. One lacuna in the work, however, is that Löwy does not really address Luxemburg's activities in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.

Most scholars have long focused on her career in Germany and drawn on widely available German language sources, but much new Polish-language material has recently come to light and is being translated as part of the *Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Peter Hudis.

It will take a long time to appear, but some historians, such as Eric Blanc in his recent study of revolutionary social democracy in the Russian Empire, have already noted that Luxemburg's politics in the Polish context were much more "Leninist" than had previously been recognized.

Löwy did not have access to this material when many of these essays were written and when the collection was first published in French in 2018. The essays will have to be read in a new light as the new material appears. ■

REVIEW

Rosa Luxemburg's Bolshevism

The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg

Volume IV, Political Writings 2
On Revolution 1906-1909

Edited by Peter Hudis and Sandra Reom

Translated by Jacob Blumenfeld, Nicholas Gray
Henry Holland, Zachary King, Manuela Kolke
and Joseph Muller

Verso, 2024, 576 pages, \$39.95 paperback.

THE TITLE OF this review will strike many on the left as a baleful characterization of Luxemburg's politics. Does the reviewer not know that in her famous 1904 essay *Organizational Questions in Russian Social Democracy* Luxemburg (and the Mensheviks) denounced Lenin and the Bolsheviks for adopting Blanquist organizational principles, where a dictatorial party lords over a working class, directing it toward socialism, thereby violating Marx and Engels' injunction that the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the working class?

Now, in the aftermath of the 1905 Russian Revolution, Luxemburg reversed her position.

Luxemburg recollected:

"There were perhaps traces of [Blanquism] in the organizational plan comrade Lenin put forward in 1902 but that belongs in the past, the distant past, since we live quickly, at a dizzying pace. These errors were corrected by life itself and it does not do to fear they may be repeated." (172)

"Life itself" — the 1905 Russian Revolution — had shown, at least to Luxemburg's satisfaction, that the Bolsheviks were not trying to organize the liberation of the working class behind workers' backs but active in the working-class movement and striving to give it political leadership. On this fundamental (if banal) score, the Bolsheviks were orthodox Social Democrats, little different than their counterparts in the West.

The Nationalities Question

Luxemburg disagreed with the RSDLP's position favoring the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, Poland in particular. "Independently of anybody's conscious will...capitalist development links our country and Russia together into one capitalist state." This development rendered "utopian" the program of independence for "capitalist Po-

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land," and thus laid the material basis for the Polish proletariat to "struggle jointly with the Russian proletariat for shared freedom." (189)

Russian workers and Polish workers were class brothers, requiring Polish Social Democrats to oppose aspirations for national independence voiced by the liberal bourgeois opposition as these aspirations ran counter to their common interests as proletarians. In sharp even strident polemics with opponents in the Polish revolutionary movement, she developed a host of arguments in favor of her position.

A Parliamentary Road to Bourgeois-Democracy in Tsarist Russia?

In the West, participation in electoral campaigns — parliamentarism — was a matter of course for all Social Democrats, its "Erfurtian" premises central to social democracy achieving power and effecting a transition to socialism, as Kautsky repeatedly explained. Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky were on the same page, rejecting non-participation as sectarian abstentionism worthy only of anarchists.

But in Tsarist Russia the question of parliamentary politics, and of its relationship to the tsarist autocracy and the workers' movement, assumed an entirely different aspect for Mensheviks and Bolsheviks respectively.

The Mensheviks were first to argue that the 1905 Revolution had run its course. But Luxemburg and the Bolsheviks doggedly held throughout 1906 that the revolution was still on the upswing. It was not until 1907 that Luxemburg and Lenin belatedly concluded that the revolution was over — for now — and that one had to adopt political tactics appropriate to the new conditions.

Fundamentally at issue at this juncture was the question of the RSDLP's attitude to the Duma, the newly created Russian parliament. It was the burning political question of the day and Luxemburg contributed "Lessons of the Three Dumas" (1908) and "Revolutionary Hangover" (1909) to the intra-Russian social democratic debate.

The Mensheviks reasoned that the Duma, established in 1906, was a genuine parliament like those in the West. Though possessing comparatively few powers, its formation nonetheless had breached the walls of the autocracy, laying the institutional basis toward a fully empowered parliament, ideally embodied by the English Parliament.

Indeed, in 1893 and again in 1911, Kautsky himself noted with keen satisfaction how the

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English working class:

*"... is already capable of influencing domestic politics in its favor in and through parliament, and, with giant steps, the day is approaching when the almighty English parliament will be a tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat."*¹

This view was an ideological stock-in-trade for Second International Marxists.

The Duma was therefore the first step toward a European-style constitutional state, simultaneously laying the basis for Russian social democrats to adopt fully the politics and organizational methods of the SPD systematically laid out by Karl Kautsky in the *Class Struggle*, his 1892 conspectus on the Erfurt Program.

The Bolsheviks countered that the Russian parliament was not a genuine parliament at all, but an arm of the Tsarist autocracy. In the West parliament had achieved political power and ran — or could be made to run, the state — or so every Social Democrat thought, following Kautsky.

But in Russia the Tsarist state ran a powerless parliament. Only a bourgeois-democratic revolution could overthrow that state, "smashing" the Russian pseudo-parliament along the way. Luxemburg agreed:

"A parliamentary system that has not overthrown the [Tsarist] government, that has not achieved political power through revolution, not only cannot defeat the old power, not only cannot hold its own as an instrument of opposition but can and must become an instrument of counter-revolution." (386)

Thus, Luxemburg opposed the Menshevik idea of using the Duma and the ballot box as a steppingstone toward a bourgeois-democratic order. A "counterrevolutionary club" (438) could not be used to push for more democracy, let alone socialism. In the absence of a bourgeois-democratic state, the Duma was but a "fig leaf of absolutism." (385)

The Menshevik-touted parliamentary road to bourgeois-democracy was a utopia "comparable more or less to the attempt to build a house by starting with the roof and "working your way down to the foundations." (381)

But to abstain from electoral contests to the Duma was no solution, as some 'left' Bolsheviks, many Socialist Revolutionaries, and others, mainly anarchists, held, Luxemburg continued.

The RSDLP had to use the Duma as a tribune from which to denounce Tsarism and to explain that only a working-class



Rosa Luxemburg speaking at a rally in Stuttgart in 1907.

organized-and-led bourgeois-democratic revolution could sweep away the autocracy, together with the Duma, and set up a bourgeois-democratic state with a genuine parliament.

Only after the bourgeois-democratic revolution could Russian social democrats, like their counterparts in the West, use parliament, supplemented by extra-parliamentary action, if necessary, to reform the (now) bourgeois democratic state in a socialist direction.

With an absolute social-democratic majority in the legislature, feasible only where suffrage was universal, equal and direct, it would become possible for a peaceful, socialist revolution by parliamentary means, supplemented — again, if necessary — by mass strikes and street demonstrations should the bourgeoisie unlawfully defy the people's will.

Only after the bourgeois-democratic revolution had abolished "Russian conditions" could Kautskyism be "adapted" to the new, now "Erfurtian" conditions of political struggle and not (as Lars Lih has imagined) before that revolution, in what the Bolsheviks believed were "non-Erfurtian" political conditions.²

Party, Soviet, and Class

A party may embrace a few hundred thousand activists — a revolution involves millions and tens of millions. Until 1917, revolutionary Marxists understood extra-parliamentary action — the mass strike — the way Luxemburg did: as the "mode of motion of the proletarian mass, the form of manifestation of proletarian struggle within the revolution." (222)

However, in none of their writings does the self-movement of the working class appear to endow itself with a mass institutional form of its own, arising outside the Social Democratic party. This is the Soviet.

In the 1905 Revolution mass strikes and mass demonstrations — the "street" — created key elements of a new state form, the Soviet. But no one in Social Democracy, Luxemburg included, recognized this to develop a new theory of the state.

Instead, Luxemburg and all revolutionary Marxists argued that social democratic parties faced a Herculean task: achieving direct organizational and political supremacy in the working class to lead it to victory. The daunting challenge lay in the party "seizing and utilizing the boundless field of action" that revolution opened "for gigantic class struggles." (313)

In fact, the 1905 Revolution proved too 'boundless' to fit into any party-political form, requiring the mediation of a non-party organization, representing all workers, through which the party could perform its vanguard role.

Whatever their theory on this question, in 1905 all parties in the workers' movement had to compete in the St. Petersburg Soviet for leadership of the working class. A non-party organ, the Soviet represented the proletariat, regardless of political tendency. It was democratically elected.

Since all workers recognized its authority, no party could lead the working class to victory unless it had the authority of the Soviet behind it. The party could not do it all and, what is more, it did not have to.

Lenin would spell this out in his *State and Revolution* (1918) where the soviet takes front and center, and the parties present their program of action before the assembly, vying democratically for political leadership of the class.

The "Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry" — and then what?

Luxemburg agreed with Lenin's partisans that only the working class could lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution. To look to the liberal bourgeois opposition instead, whether inside or outside the Duma, as the Mensheviks were doing, was a non-starter. Here, the "proletariat could only play the role of stirrup, helping the bourgeoisie take the reins over the ruins of absolutism." (377)

Luxemburg, like the Bolsheviks, anticipated that in the next round of the revolution the RSDLP-led proletariat, with the

support of the peasantry, would overthrow Tsardom, vanquish counter-revolutionary bourgeois-democrats, organized in the Kadet Party, and set up a provisional revolutionary government. Lenin called it the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry."

But if the workers and peasants were provisionally in charge in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, why not make that government permanent and build socialism going forward, as Trotsky was arguing? Why not use that power instead of giving it up?

Luxemburg's sociological answer was straightforward and shared by all Second International Marxists: material conditions for building socialism in Russia were absent because the non-socialist peasantry formed the vast majority in the Tsarist Empire, not the working class and sole agent of socialism.

So, while it was possible to organize a democratic revolution to overthrow the Tsarism, it was impossible to reconcile socialism and democracy on purely democratic grounds since 100 million peasants had no interest in moving beyond the bourgeois-democratic revolution toward socialism.

But the political question remained: What would the RSDLP do with the plebeian dictatorship it led?

Trotsky alone thought the Russian working class would seize power permanently, with the European and world proletariat following suit. If that happened, then building socialism after Tsarism's destruction would be possible.

Luxemburg, like Lenin, Kautsky, and others, were also sure the victory of the Russian Revolution would greatly impact the social democratic movement in the West but were unsure it could trigger a socialist revolution there.

If there were no internationalization of the Russian Revolution, all bets were off. Luxemburg explained in detail:

"... [N]o Social Democrat fools himself that the proletariat will remain in power; if it remained, that would lead to the rule of its class ideas and it would realize socialism. Today, there is not sufficient strength for that since the proletariat constitutes a minority in Russian society. [O]n the day after the proletariat triumphs over the Tsar ... power will pass to the proletariat because this proletariat occupies every post [in a provisional government], and it will stand guard until power passes into the hands that are legally appointed — that is into the hands of the government, which may only act to appoint a Constituent Assembly and a legislative body chosen by the entire populace ... Social Democrats will not constitute a majority in the Constituent Assembly, only democrats from the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie [will]. We may regret this, but we cannot change it." (173)

In effect, the working class would have to yield power to a democratically elected Constituent Assembly, which would establish

a bourgeois-democratic state. There was no alternative, in Luxemburg's view. The Bolsheviks stuck to this scenario as well — until April 1917, when they jettisoned “Old Bolshevism” in favor of Lenin's April Theses. “New Bolshevism” solved the problem of democracy, Soviet power, and the Constituent Assembly in an unanticipated way.

Skipping ahead briefly, when the theoretically anticipated Constituent finally met in January 1918, the Bolsheviks were in the minority.

In the Soviet, the Bolsheviks commanded a majority. It decreed the expropriation of the landed gentry, recognized workers' control in the factories, and called for an end to the imperialist war. The Assembly rejected all three.

The Bolsheviks ignored the Assembly and “formal” democracy because they had the support of the peasants to destroy gentry rule, the support of proletarians to maintain workers' power at the point of production,

and the support of both to stop the war.

In Russia, dispersing the Constituent Assembly in favor of Soviet power was a substantive democratic act catering to the interests of the overwhelming majority, overriding formal democracy i.e., the anti-Soviet, anti-Bolshevik electoral composition of the assembly.

As noted, Luxemburg thought working-class rule in Russia could not be realized so long as workers were in the minority and the democratic peasantry and petty bourgeoisie were in the majority. In 1917, however, she thought the proletariat could stay in power and build socialism if — and only if — rescued by international revolution. That rescue never came.

Aftermath

In the last 64 days of her life, and considering the German Revolution, unfolding before her eyes, Luxemburg clarified the debate on the relationship between the “ballot box” and the “street,” between parliament and

extra-parliamentary action, between the revolutionary soviet road to working-class emancipation, and the reformist parliamentary road, whether in autocracies or in bourgeois democracies. But this is a topic for the next volume of Luxemburg's political writings.³

Notes

1. “Parliamentarism and the Parties in England,” 129; in *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, Ben Lewis editor and translator, Historical Materialism Book Series, 2019, Leiden: Brill.
2. Lih, Lars T. 2006, *Lenin Rediscovered: “What Is to Be Done?” in Context*, Historical Materialism Book Series, Leiden: Brill. Before 1917, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks both thought “Kautskyism” was the way to go in the capitalist West. Lars Lih has documented this and the “Leninists” are mistaken to think Lenin had any fundamental problems with Kautsky's parliamentary strategy, offering an alternative. This changes in 1917, when Bolshevism breaks with Kautskyism because it cannot bring victory in either “Erfurtian” or “non-Erfurtian” conditions — a break Lih refuses to recognize. *International Social Democracy and the Road to Socialism, 1905-1917: The Ballot, the Street and the State*, Historical Materialism.
3. I examine this problematic in “Rosa Luxemburg and the democratic road to socialist revolution,” *Tempest* <https://tempestmag.org/2024/06>.

“The future of the Syrian and Kurdish people must be decided by the self-organization of their popular classes”

This statement by Anticapitalistas [Spain] on the fall of Al-Assad in Syria was translated and published Wednesday 11 December 2024, at www.internationalviewpoint.org.

THE ASSAD REGIME has fallen in Syria and the former dictator has gone into exile in Russia. Events have moved in rapid succession and in 11 days, the kleptocracy that seemed to have stabilized its rule has collapsed with a crash.

Syria is now plunged into great uncertainty, where joy at the fall of the tyrant is intermingled with concern for the future. No wonder: unfortunately, it is reactionary forces that have overthrown Assad, a precarious coalition between fundamentalist forces from Al Qaeda and an army directly financed by Turkey.

To understand how we have arrived at this situation we need to go back to 2011. In the heat of the Arab revolutions and the deep economic and social crisis provoked by Al-Assad's neoliberal policies, the Syrian people began a cycle of protests that sought to change the political situation and improve the living conditions of the working class.

Soon, in the face of the regime's closed-mindedness, brutal repression and inability to listen to the protests, these mobilizations turned into a quest for its overthrow, for which local councils were formed. In classical terms, the Syrian revolution entered a democratic phase.

The lack of clear political leadership and the regime's savage repression pushed towards a militarization of the conflict. Responsible for imposing this civil war was the

regime itself, which preferred to feed reactionary forces, releasing jihadists from prisons and locking up protesters from the popular sectors, rather than admit the breakdown of its legitimacy.

With thousands of prisoners in jails (including Palestinians), millions in exile and more than 600,000 dead, describing the Al-Assad regime as a bastion of “stability” is a macabre joke. Despite its apparent strength, the regime has proven to be dependent on foreign powers such as Russia and Iran. When these countries decided that it was no longer in their interest to defend it, as their interests now lie elsewhere, the regime collapsed like a house of cards, with no one to defend it.

It is on this process of pulverization of the popular rebellion promoted by the dictatorship that the new reactionary forces have strengthened themselves. First ISIS, today HTS (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, coming from Al Qaeda) and the ENS (Syrian National Army), serving the Turkish state. These forces defend a reactionary agenda and are enemies of the freedom and emancipation of the Syrian popular classes.

As we have seen, foreign powers have no qualms about making deals with each other to defend their interests in Syria: Putin has already announced his willingness to talk to the rebels in order to maintain his bases in the Mediterranean; the United States, which formally considers HTS a terrorist group, has no problem considering it a valid interlocutor; and Turkey seeks to increase its regional strength and crush the Kurds.

There is a real danger that Syria will enter

a new destructive phase, prolonging in new forms the one initiated by the bloodthirsty Al-Assad regime, and that a warlordist division of the country, crushing of national minorities, a new dictatorship or subordination to the interests of foreign powers will be imposed. Israel, the main enemy of the peoples of the Middle East, has already taken advantage of the situation to invade new portions of Syrian territory.

Despite this difficult balance of power, Syrians have come out to celebrate the fall of tyranny. The obligation of the political organizations that practice socialist internationalism is not to support any bloodthirsty dictator or to hope in the machinations of the imperialist powers or reactionary forces.

It is to support the impulses, today surely very weakened, of all Syrians who seek to return to the path of 2011 and who refuse to subordinate themselves to the reactionary forces that today replace Al-Assad in power.

Far from relying on one or another capitalist power, the future of the Syrian and Kurdish people must be decided by the self-organization of their popular classes, guaranteeing the freedoms of women, queer people and oppressed peoples.

We must also intensify support for the Palestinian resistance, redoubling the struggle against the complicity of our governments and corporations with the Zionist genocide.

The road to liberation has never been easy and it is our political duty to revive internationalism: this is, far from all the traps, the only way to counterbalance and defeat the imperialist and reactionary forces that keep the world in disaster. ■

the firmly establishment Republican Mitt Romney used to happily advocate).

The promised “largest deportation in our history” *might* turn out to be mainly a higher-publicity version of what the Biden and “deporter-in-chief” Obama administrations preferred to do under the radar. Keep in mind that under Biden, 1.1 million people were “repatriated” in 2023 and 411,000 in the first half of 2024.

That would be vicious enough of course, but the potential also exists for police-state methods on a much expanded scale. By some accounts there are some tens of thousands of undocumented people in prisons and local jails — often on minor charges like driving without a license — vulnerable to being swept up and summarily deported if ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) can get its hands on them.

That’s why one point of conflict will be whether municipal and state officials, willingly or by coercion, will implement extended detainment of prisoners for ICE to seize them. The fate of those awaiting immigration or asylum hearings, who might be swept into Stephen Miller’s planned privatized mass detention centers, is also frightening — and a profit carnival for the contractors who will build and run them.

Will there be mass workplace raids? Sweeps of immigrant communities? Instantaneous revocation of Temporary Protected Status for people from 16 countries (e.g. Haiti, Venezuela, Ukraine) living and working legally in the United States — such as the large Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio brutally scapegoated by the Trump-Vance campaign? Peremptory deportations of those now held in detention centers? A new round of the family separations that became so infamous in the first Trump round?

Notoriously, Texas is furnishing land for a detention-deportation concentration camp to expedite removals with minimal or no due process. How to finance and fill such a facility for Trump’s intended crimes against humanity isn’t clear. And although not adequately covered, severe economic disruptions could result from truly mass deportations — particularly in agriculture, construction and meatpacking for example. In Michigan, farmers are already petitioning for workarounds.

Plans seem afoot to “investigate” the possibility of stripping naturalized citizens of their status. At the far extreme, ending birthright citizenship has been advocated by Trump and most aggressively his house fascist Stephen Miller. As that would entail cancellation of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, such a measure can’t be accomplished by “normal” means — it would require some kind of executive and judicial coup that could shake the entire institutional structure of law and government.

U.S. capitalism objectively does not need any such destabilizing crisis, nor for that matter deportations “by the millions.” One expects in normal circumstances that capital in its own interests would impose some restraints. But in today’s political climate what’s “normal” cannot be assumed. We certainly can’t count on the Democratic Party to effectively resist a far-right assault that its own policies have enabled.

If one target more centrally than any other, is in the crosshairs of repression, it’s the Palestine solidarity

movement — both for the cause it represents, and as a wedge for systemic assaults on progressive social activism across the board. Further, this attack on pro-Palestinian advocacy is bipartisan, both from the racist right wing and “progressive except Palestine” liberals. We have seen that all-out support for Israel is so deeply embedded in U.S. politics that the Democratic leadership would rather lose an election than break with it.

This is occurring at the very moment when the Israeli state’s U.S.-enabled and armed genocide in Gaza, and military and settler violence in the West Bank, not only isn’t ending but is escalating. What has happened in the past horrible year is both a quantitative and qualitative leap in the long history of ethnic cleansing, entailing not just mass murder by the tens of thousands but also targeted killing of journalists (192 and counting), medical and aid workers, and the drive to depopulate northern Gaza.

Every single day produces new world-class Israeli war crimes in Gaza, with the clear intent of destroying that society. And now whole cities in Lebanon and districts of the capital Beirut lie in ruins, shattered far beyond the destruction in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. And while both Hamas and Hezbollah remain as political forces in Palestine and Lebanon, their destruction as strategic military factors in the “axis of resistance” gives U.S. imperialism enhanced power in the Middle East and raises the enhanced possibility of an assault on Iran.

Stand Together!

The menace to our movements ranges from victimizing immigrant communities, to attacking transgender rights (which the Supreme Court looks ready to wipe out), abortion access and racial justice, and from policing the right to read to crippling labor’s right to organize, all the way to “Project Esther” -- the Heritage Foundation’s plan to target and defund Palestine solidarity and all progressive advocacy, brought to us by the same authors of Project 2025.

The tip of the Project Esther spear has been launched in Congress (HR 9495 and companion bills in the Senate). Incredibly, this would authorize the Secretary of the Treasury, without process or appeal, to designate any organization as a “material supporter of terrorism” and remove its tax-exempt status.

“Material support of terrorism” in this context can mean anything, including expressing the principle of oppressed people’s right to resist. It is unlikely to be applied, for example, to the Jewish National Fund whose “tree planting” directly finances Israeli apartheid and ethnic cleansing, or the fundraising organizations for the violent West Bank settlers.

Although not likely to pass even with some craven Democratic support in the lame-duck legislative session of the fading Biden administration, this blatantly unconstitutional effort will be tested when the Republicans take over the government trifecta on January 20.

All this — and more to come — touches on some of the chaos, known and unknown, facing our communities and movements in a new political moment. In the face of a vicious and empowered right wing, unity from the outset will be critical. Division will be deadly. ■

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ROSA LUXEMBURG AND Clara Zetkin (left) were leaders of the revolutionary and antiwar socialist left. Pictured here in 1910, the two were close collaborators.

Rosa Luxemburg was to be murdered in 1919 by a military death squad. Her complete works are being translated and collected in the multi-volume series by Verso Books.

Read about Rosa Luxemburg's place in revolutionary history, reviewed in this issue of *Against the Current* with two reviews on her writings and their impact by William Smaldone and John Marot.

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