

AGAINST THE **CURRENT**
A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

**SOUTH AFRICA THEN,
ISRAEL NOW**



**THE LEGACY OF JEWISH
INTERNATIONALISM
— Alan Wald**

José Carlos Mariátegui, His Times and Ours

♦ MARC BECKER

Can Schools Really Reopen Safely?

♦ DEBBY POPE

Britain's Pandemic/Brexit Abyss

♦ PHIL HEARSE



A Letter from the Editors: USA on the Brink?

BY THE TIME this editorial statement reaches the readers of *Against the Current* in print, there may or may not be a result of the 2020 presidential election. There may — or may not — be wildly chaotic legislative and court battles in multiple contested states. There may — or may not — be street battles involving white-nationalist armed mobs, fueled by conspiracy theories, mobilized to preserve a defeated presidency.

In this Trumpster fire of a political year, the difficulty of prediction is partly that much of the Republican Party has morphed into something close to the French National Front or German *Alternativ für Deutschland* — parties of the racist far right which, by establishment consensus, are excluded from national government although they may be regionally or locally powerful. In the U.S. context, the human and political damage of the past four years is severe enough — but the full extent of the menace remains to be tested.

The “September Surprise,” Trump’s rush to fill the Supreme Court seat after the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, raised the explicit possibility of his using the Court to halt the vote count and steal the election. At the same time, Barton Gellman’s extensive piece in *The Atlantic* (September 23, 2020), “The Election that Could Break America,” shows how much of the post-election struggle could become a knife fight with few clear rules and no ultimate deciding authority.

Many scenarios were already contemplated and game-played in various locations, in the greatest detail by the Transition Integrity Project (“Preventing a Disrupted Presidential Election and Transition,” August 3, 2020). TIP’s authors warn: “The closest analogy may be the election of 1876 (leading to) a grand political bargain days before Inauguration — one that traded an end to Reconstruction for electoral peace and resulted in a century of Jim Crow, leaving deep wounds that are far from healed today.”

That’s a salient warning of what a “bipartisan” bargain today might look like — and at whose expense. Yet such are the crazy times we live in that the United States in November-December might face a full-scale existential crisis of its constitutional system — or alternatively, that these concerns might vanish like waking up from a bad dream. At this writing there’s simply no way to know, or to predict whether the U.S. capitalist class is prepared to risk the shattering of the legitimacy of its political institutions.

It might well be, especially if Biden’s margin is wide, that the Republican leadership might decline to follow Trump down the path to an extreme crisis. Since he’s already given the ruling class a stacked right-wing federal judiciary and Supreme Court, massive destruction of consumer and environmental protections, and giant tax cuts — but also cost the Republicans their Congressional and possibly their Senate majority — their craven loyalty to Trump may have reached a point of diminishing returns. Instead, he could be forced to exit along with some rotten agreement with Biden not to pursue his past and continuing criminal operations.

If it should come to a post-election confrontation with a defeated Trump seeking to negate the result, it will be the clear responsibility of the left to fully participate in mass mobilizations to defend the vote. Beyond that crucial point of principle, we won’t try here to add to the analyses proliferating online and in print on how the election and its aftermath might unfold.

We’ll focus here first on what we do know, and second on what seems to be the most likely — although far from guaranteed — outcome, a relatively orderly transition to

a Joe Biden presidency. Indeed, if the neoliberal corporate leadership that controls the Democratic Party can’t defeat an organism like Donald Trump, it becomes difficult to see the point of their continued existence — except as a receptacle for the massive funds from the mega-donors who set the party’s agenda.

Persistent Crises

If anyone from either end of the two-party political spectrum believes that the election of their candidate will resolve the multiple calamities confronting this society, we’d like to offer them a reserve stock of hydroxychloroquine for sale cheap.

Wildfires turning Western forests and towns to ash and the skies a toxic orange, sequential hurricanes smashing the Gulf and East coasts, and the less-publicized windstorm (*derecho*) that blew down Cedar Rapids, Iowa are not freak occurrences. They mark the no-longer-deniable arrival on these shores of the climate change disaster that will become only worse in the coming years and decades.

The coronavirus crisis, even with potential vaccines coming on stream in a few months if we’re lucky, will persist through 2021 — according to relatively optimistic public health and epidemiology experts. By the end of October 2020, official (probably undercounted) U.S. deaths from COVID-19 passed 225,000 and might double by year’s end. The virus death toll falls heaviest on the front-line workers, their families, and on communities of color that also bear the worst impact of a deep economic recession which cannot end until the coronavirus pandemic is contained.

Even before Trump himself contracted a bout of COVID-19, the fact revealed by Bob Woodward that Trump actually knew from the outset that the virus was a serious crisis, which he deliberately hid from the public, is “surprising” mainly in the sense that it isn’t really surprising at all in view of his record. It may also have enabled his pal Jair Bolsonaro, the semi-fascist president of Brazil, to dismiss the virus there as “a little flu,” with devastating consequences for that country and especially its Indigenous peoples.

But even aside from Trump’s criminal indolence and super-spreader campaign rallies, the United States has a health care system that remains the worst-prepared among all the rich countries to handle an infectious disease emergency. The most important lesson of the pandemic and the associated collapse of employment is the desperate public health necessity of universal health care, Medicare for All.

continued on the inside back cover

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Front Cover: Jewish Voice for Peace activists protest the "Celebrate Israel" parade with their contingent.

Above: Daniel Bensaïd (1946-2010) with bullhorn, son of a Sephardic Jew from Algeria, May 1968 French uprising.

Back Cover: Julian Assange's extradition trial continues.

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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Aiding and Abetting U.S. War Crimes Great Britain & Julian Assange

By Cliff D. Conner

BELOW ARE THE comments Clifford D. Conner made at a September 8th press conference, organized by the New York City Free Assange Committee (<https://nycfree-assange.org/>), in front of the British consulate in New York City. Conner is an historian and author of *Jean Paul Marat: Tribune of the French Revolution and The Tragedy of American Science: From Truman to Trump*.



The British court is holding hearings on the Trump administration's request to have Julian Assange, the Australian editor, publisher and founder of WikiLeaks, extradited to the United States. Assange would be tried on 17 counts of espionage and one count of conspiracy to commit a computer crime. If convicted, he could face up to 175 years in prison.

In 2010 Assange had the audacity to post a video showing a U.S. Apache helicopter indiscriminately murdering a dozen civilians and two Reuters' journalists in the streets of Baghdad.

Daniel Ellsberg, the Pentagon Papers whistleblower, testified in court on September 16 that Assange could not receive a fair trial. When he pointed out that the *Collateral Murder* video was clearly a war crime, the prosecution maintained that Assange was not wanted by Washington for it but for publishing documents without redacting names. Ellsberg pointed out that when he leaked the Pentagon Papers, he did not redact a single name.

Assange's lawyer has since informed the London court that in 2017 former Republican U.S. Representative Dana Rohrabacher and Charles Johnson, a far right political activist, relayed Trump's offer to pardon Assange if he provided the source for the hacking of Democratic National Committee emails. This was described to Assange as a "win-win" situation for all involved.

A National Committee to Defend Assange and Civil Liberties, chaired by Noam Chomsky, Daniel Ellsberg, and Alice Walker has been set up. For further information, go to www.facebook.com/CommitteeToDefendJulianAssange.

— Dianne Feeley for The ATC editors

I AM HERE at the British Consulate today to protest the incarceration and mistreatment of Julian Assange in Belmarsh Prison in

Great Britain, to demand that you immediately release him, and above all, to demand that you NOT extradite Julian Assange to the United States.

As a historian who has written extensively on the case of the most persecuted journalist of the 18th century, Jean Paul Marat, I am in a position to make historical comparisons, and in my judgement, Julian Assange is both the most unjustly persecuted journalist of the 21st century and arguably the most important journalist of the 21st century.

Julian Assange is being hounded and harassed and threatened with life in prison by the United States government because he dared to publish the truth about American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan for the whole world to see. *This persecution of Julian Assange is an assault on the fundamental principles of journalistic freedom.*

The sociopathic Donald Trump and his accomplice, Attorney General William Barr, are demanding that you deliver Assange to them to face false charges of espionage. Every honest observer in the world recognizes Trump and Barr as utterly incapable of acting in good faith. If they succeed in suppressing Julian Assange's right to publish, *it will be a devastating precedent for journalists and publishers of news everywhere — and above all, for the general public, who will lose access to the information necessary to maintaining a democratic society.*

If you allow yourselves to become co-conspirators in this crime, *History will not look kindly on Great Britain for that.*

Last November, more than 60 doctors from all over the world wrote an open letter to the British government saying that Julian Assange's health was so bad that he could die if he weren't moved from Belmarsh

Prison, where he was being held, to a hospital, immediately. Your government chose to ignore that letter and he was not hospitalized, then or later. *History will not look kindly on Great Britain for that.*

Of all crimes against humanity, the most unforgivable is torture. No nation that perpetrates torture has the right to call itself civilized. United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer has unequivocally characterized Julian Assange's treatment in Belmarsh Prison as torture. *History will neither forget nor forgive that terrible moral transgression.*

Furthermore, the exposure of the widespread use of torture by the United States military and the CIA at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, at Guantánamo Bay, and at so-called "black sites" all over the world, absolutely disqualifies the United States from sitting in moral judgement of anybody. If you deliver Julian Assange into the hands of torturers, *History will not look kindly on Great Britain for that.*

So I join together today with human rights advocates and advocates of journalistic freedom around the world.

I stand with the Committee to Protect Journalists, which declared: "For the sake of press freedom, Julian Assange must be defended."

I stand with the Center for Constitutional Rights, which said that the attempt to prosecute Julian Assange is "a worrying step on the slippery slope to punishing any journalist the Trump administration chooses to deride as 'fake news.'"

And I stand with the ACLU, which said: "Any prosecution by the United States of Mr. Assange for WikiLeaks' publishing operations would be unprecedented and unconstitutional, and would open the door to criminal investigations of other news organizations."

History will not only record the names of the countries that collaborate in this travesty of justice, but also the names of the individuals — the judges, the prosecutors, the diplomats, and the politicians — who aid and abet the crime. If you, as individuals, choose to ally yourselves with the likes of Donald Trump and William Barr, be prepared for your names to be chained to theirs in infamy, in perpetuity. *History will certainly absolve Julian Assange, and it certainly will not absolve his persecutors.* ■

Abolish and Replace: The U.S. Criminal Legal System

By Malik Miah

THE DECISION OF a Kentucky grand jury, a secret body, not to file murder charges against the two white cops who killed Breonna Taylor in Louisville shows that *the United States criminal legal system is unjust and needs to be abolished and replaced.*

The case of Breonna Taylor, an essential Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) during the current pandemic, shows this. She was a heroic figure. It did not matter to the police, or the criminal legal system as now constructed.

Breonna Taylor's boyfriend Kenneth Walker had fired a single warning shot at the intruders, and the cops killed Taylor with massive gunfire.

Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron said he never considered charges against the killer cops. He said her death was a "tragedy" but not a crime. It later came out from one grand jury member that the Attorney General didn't even offer them a choice to indict the killer cops under any circumstance.

Two Criminal Legal Systems

There are two *de facto* criminal legal systems in the United States — one for African Americans and people of color, the other for whites.

While Black and white liberals, in office and out, focus on voting for Joe Biden on November 3, Black Lives Matter activists and leaders are mapping out a long-range plan to defend Black lives, defeat systemic racism and press for a new police and legal system.

The stakes in this battle are high. The corruption and unreformable criminal legal system extends to other parts of bourgeois democracy, including the Supreme Court — nine unelected lifetime appointments — a court that for most of its history has been a conservative wall to prevent fundamental changes.

It ruled in favor of slaveholders and slavery (the Dred Scott case), Jim Crow segregation (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896) and against equality for Blacks and other oppressed peoples, approved the internment of Japanese Americans (World War II) and held back women's equality and gay rights. Only in *Malik Miah is a retired aviation mechanic, union and antiracist activist. He is an advisory editor of Against the Current.*

recent decades, sometimes, the courts have registered gains won in the streets.

Keeanga-Yahamta Taylor, assistant professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, writing in the September 26 *The New Yorker* in her article, "The Case for Ending the Supreme Court as We Know It," explained:

"The insistence that the Supreme Court is not a political body is a principle of high folly in American politics. ... Moreover, as the branch of government that is least accountable to the American public, the Supreme Court has tended, for most of its history, toward a fundamental conservatism, siding with tradition over more expansive visions of human rights. Indeed, at the most significant moments in African American history, the Court reflected the most reactionary elements of the culture in its efforts to abridge, degrade, or simply eliminate the rights of African-Americans."

The Senate also is an unrepresentative body where a state like Wyoming with less than 600,000 people gets the same number of Senators as California with 40 million.

Both these institutions need to be abolished and replaced by bodies directly accountable to the people.

Whose Violence?

The issue of "violence" in the context of injustice reflects the racial and class issues in the criminal system.

It is crucial to understand where violence originates and reject the false equivalency argument that biased media, many liberals and most conservatives say. In fact, all violence is not the same.

Peaceful protesters are attacked by military style police forces and Federal government police as seen in Portland, Oregon. Whatever response to police violence by those attacked is self-defense. That's what the right and Trump falsely call "radical left" violence.

Another violence is committed by right wing white vigilantes who infiltrate peaceful demonstrations, as occurred in Minneapolis as the George Floyd protests began.

Black-clad or armed vigilantes as seen in Kenosha, Wisconsin are "friends" of the police. They are not targeted by the cops. Their violence is blamed on protesters who are labelled "anarchists" and "terrorists"

(or antifascists) and the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement.

There are police *agent provocateurs* violence who initiate anti-Black terror.

The BLM movement is decentralized, with local organizations and leaders. The website M4BL.org lays out general positions and principles. There is no call for violence. It is Trump and his cohorts who invoke violence in the name of "law and order" by the state and its extralegal supporters, including the Proud Boys in Oregon.

Violence against property is not supported by the movement. However, the media disproportionately target these activities in its coverage to smear the demonstrators.

The BLM seeks to isolate those who commit violence. Traditionally in mass demonstrations, organizers use volunteer marshals to help protect the marchers from the cops if possible.

"Progressive" Prosecutors

The role of the "progressive prosecutor" is debated among Black activists and liberals. Like some liberal Democratic mayors who try to accommodate the demands of Black Lives protesters and some reform of the system, liberal prosecutors seek to make the system a little less unjust for Blacks and working-class people without undermining the police and criminal legal system.

While the "progressive" label was rarely used at the time she was elected as District Attorney of San Francisco (2004) and Attorney General of California (2011), Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party vice presidential nominee, was seen as a liberal prosecutor.

Yet she did little to resolve the issue of police racism and brutality in San Francisco. She supported more resources to the police department as other social programs were reduced. Harris once said, "I'll be first to raise up my hand" to do so.

As state Attorney General she repeatedly sided with prosecutors accused of misconduct, challenging judges who ruled against them.

It is a contradiction to be called "progressive" as a criminal prosecutor who is aligned with the police. It is why Harris was seen by most San Francisco liberals and leftists as not pushing back on the cops and a corrupt criminal legal system.

Kamala Harris thought she could change the legal system from within. It did not happen. Modest changes, yes, but those didn't stop killing of Black and Brown people by cops.

There are a few liberal prosecutors in other cities — San Francisco, Philadelphia and Portland. They support bail reform and other issues, but not radical restructuring of the criminal legal system.

In Portland, Oregon, the new “progressive” district attorney, came into office in the midst of daily Black Lives Matter protests. He came out for modest reforms that angered the police and Trump. But he did not call for a radical change to the legal system.

An article in the September 16 *The Intercept* shows both the significance and limitation of those jobs of prosecutors:

“When Mike Schmidt took office as Multnomah County’s new prosecutor, Portland was two months into a wave of protests that continues to this day. Schmidt, a progressive who won a landslide victory in the county that includes Portland, Oregon, was scheduled to take office next January, but his predecessor announced early retirement days into the protests. By the time Schmidt took over, some 550 people, including journalists, legal observers, and many peaceful protesters, had been arrested during nightly standoffs with police — the vast majority over low-level, nonviolent charges.”

Schmidt declined to prosecute protesters over the majority of misdemeanor charges, including criminal trespass, disorderly conduct, and interference with a police officer, or felony riot. “Instead, the office would focus on more serious protest-related crimes, like property damage, theft, and the use or threat of force.”

While an improvement from what most prosecutors do against protesters, this didn't weaken or rein in the police. Focusing on reforms of a system that must be abolished and re-created in a new way cannot succeed.

New System Must Be Created

The focus must be mass protests to hold the states and federal governments and the criminal legal system accountable.

To give Breonna Taylor and other victims of murderous police and state-sanctioned violence a chance for justice, the cops responsible must be fired, prosecuted and removed permanently. It requires *abolishing and replacing the current legal system period.*

A new legal system must be created from the ground up. The old system, including its criminal procedures, must go. So-called police “unions” must be limited in their powers to undermine oversight. Police “qualified



This Detroit Black Lives Matter march was organized by and for the disabled community, who are often “invisible.” www.jimwestphoto.com

immunity” must be eliminated.

It will require a revolutionary struggle to bring this change. But anything less will lead to more Breonna Taylor killings and freedom for killer cops.

Most liberals reject these solutions. In fact, they believe there are only a few bad cops, bad prosecutors and a system that's fine but needs some tinkering. They support Public Defenders for the poor, but little pressure is mounted to fund them.

Leaders of the BLM demand much more. In a deepening crisis, Donald Trump repeatedly says the November 3 presidential election will be rigged and a scam if he is not reelected. He says there will be no transition of power, only a continuation of his rule. He has never had a majority of popular support.

In the first presidential debate on September 29, Trump told his white supremacist and armed militia supporters to “stand back and stand by” to act. He urged his supporters to go to polling places, with obvious intimidating intent.

Trump cites the Constitution where if there is no Electoral College victory by December 14 certification because of state conflicts, the decider is the House of Representative where each state delegation gets a single vote.

Republicans currently control 26 state legislatures and the Democrats 22, with two states tied. Trump also expects the Supreme Court to intervene, as it did in 2000, to keep him as president.

Fear of Rebellion

The ruling class must *fear* rebellion — mass actions that could overthrow the current system and win radical reforms.

Malcolm X in a 1964 speech, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” explained why revolution (the bullet) is the answer to national oppression and to win full equality for Black people:”

“This government has failed us; the government itself has failed us, and the white liberals who have been posing as our friends have failed us. And once we see that all these other sources to which we’ve turned have failed, we stop turning to them and turn to ourselves. ...

“America today finds herself in a unique situation. Historically, revolutions are bloody. Oh, yes, they are...but America is in a unique position. She’s the only country in history in a position actually to become involved in a blood-less revolution...All she’s got to do is give the black man in this country everything that’s due him. Everything.

“So, it’s the ballot or the bullet. Today our people can see that we’re faced with a government conspiracy. This government has failed us... It’ll be the ballot, or it’ll be the bullet. It’ll be liberty or it’ll be death. And if you’re not ready to pay that price don’t use the word freedom in your vocabulary.”

The end of legal segregation and expansion of voting rights 50 years ago occurred after decades of Blacks fighting to be recognized as equal citizens. The right to vote came as mass marches demanded that the ruling party, the Democratic Party, act. Blacks being elected to office and other positions in business and academia happened because of that mass pressure.

Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. A new Black middle class emerged in the 1970s. But the inequality for the vast majority of African Americans remains the same. The wealth gap between Black and white families has widened — from 10 percent of white wealth then to seven percent today.

Every social gain won from school desegregation to fair housing to affirmative action programs are in decline, eroded or overturned. Malcolm’s analysis remains valid.

Key Lesson

The Black Lives Matter movement is a decentralized movement of local leaders and groups. It brings that vision together. It includes a multi-year plan for “Black Power Rising” (see M4BL.org/black-power-rising/). Its focus is organizing on the ground while also supporting voting in elections. It stresses community organizing to gain influence and power.

The central lesson from seven months of mass protests is that the criminal legal system must be radically transformed from the bottom up.

The end of legal segregation and expansion of voting rights 50 years ago occurred after decades of Blacks fighting to be recognized as equal citizens.

Today “Black Power Rising” is a mass upsurge needed to roll back white supremacy and bring radical change. While many may think Black Power belonged to a bygone era, history in truth is repeating itself.

The white militias, the far right and Trump’s threatened use of the state to stay in power means that a clear revolutionary vision is needed to move the fight for Black lives to the next level. ■

COVID Exposes Deeper School Crisis: Can Schools Really Open Safely? By Debby Pope

WHY OPEN SCHOOLS when everyone who believes in science knows it is unsafe? As soon as schools began to open in August, closings began — in some cases within days — due to spikes in coronavirus cases. When we examine why, we need to look at the big picture: capitalism and the prioritization of profits over people.

Because our cities and states barely tax the rich or major corporations (as has been noted recently with the President's tax writeoffs), most school districts are overly dependent on property taxes and on revenue from sources such as gambling, sales tax etc. Right-wingers and some neoliberals who seek to undermine public education regularly campaign against school bonds and other funding, leaving many school districts without adequate revenue.

As wealthier districts find ways to supplement their funding, the constant struggle for school funding disproportionately hits those who can least afford it. As a result, the older schools in poor, Black and Brown neighborhoods suffer. They don't get the repairs needed and become dilapidated, sometimes dangerously.

At least as importantly, schools lack services such as nurses, counselors, librarians and social workers. They lack enrichment classes and, at the high school level, course variety. This resource starvation is a key part of what attracts parents to charter schools.

Problems like these are not limited to urban schools. Cash strapped rural districts also suffer from building disrepair, inadequate services, and limited class offerings.

This massive disinvestment in education had an impact on students and teachers long before the pandemic hit last spring. It has given rise to educators fighting for better working and learning conditions.

Some struggles have been led by militant unions, while other fightbacks began more spontaneously, led by teachers in 'red' states organizing through Facebook and other

Debby Pope is a retired high school bilingual history teacher. She has been active in both CORE, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators and UCORE (United Caucus of Rank and File Educators) for over a decade and serves on the steering committee of these organizations. Debby Pope is a social justice activist; she works part-time for the Chicago Teachers Union.

social media at a point when they "just couldn't take it anymore."

When COVID-19 hit, schools were shut down with almost no preparation and teachers quickly transitioned to teaching online without training or time to prepare. This, of course, exacerbated the problems in an inherently challenging situation.

Issues of internet access and lack of devices for students were coupled with the problems of homelessness, inadequate housing (now their schoolroom as well as their homes), special difficulties faced by students with learning challenges, and more. Problems locating students, maintaining attendance, communicating with parents and providing meals normally served at school compounded the already difficult situation.

After the Summer

Once the 2019-20 school year came to an end, most school districts operated under the now naïve-seeming assumption that everything would be back to normal by the fall.

For the most part, teachers too wanted this to be the case. But as the summer went on and cases spiked in many areas of the country, educators and their unions demanded that contingency plans be put in place for remote learning in the fall. Many found their mayors, governors and school boards stonewalling them.

This reaction came from several sources. Financial pressure from the federal government and from many governors and state legislatures was one.

Enrollment numbers were another major fear factor: What if parents pull their children and send them to private and charter schools, decimating public school enrollment? They also had to face politicians insisting that schools continue with testing, teacher evaluation and other benchmarks as if it were just an ordinary school year.

In some areas school systems polled parents, asking what they wanted for their children. Instead of districts making collective decision based on safety for all, they forced some parents, often under intense personal financial pressure, to choose between what was safe for their children and what would enable them to pay the rent and put food on the table.

In some cases, parents were pressured to make advance decisions for an entire semester, as if they had a crystal ball and could predict what the rate of coronavirus infection would be in their neighborhood three months hence. Although Black and Brown parents are more likely to be essential workers who cannot work from home, 70-80% felt that in-person schools were unsafe for their children.

After conducting polls and discovering that parents were reluctant to send their children back to school, and having to negotiate with the teachers' unions, some school districts have come up with various "hybrid models."

In one model, the teacher works with children in school on some days and online other days. This requires the teacher to master two different styles of teaching. Another model, where some teachers are in the classroom and others work online, disadvantage the online teacher with a much larger group of students.

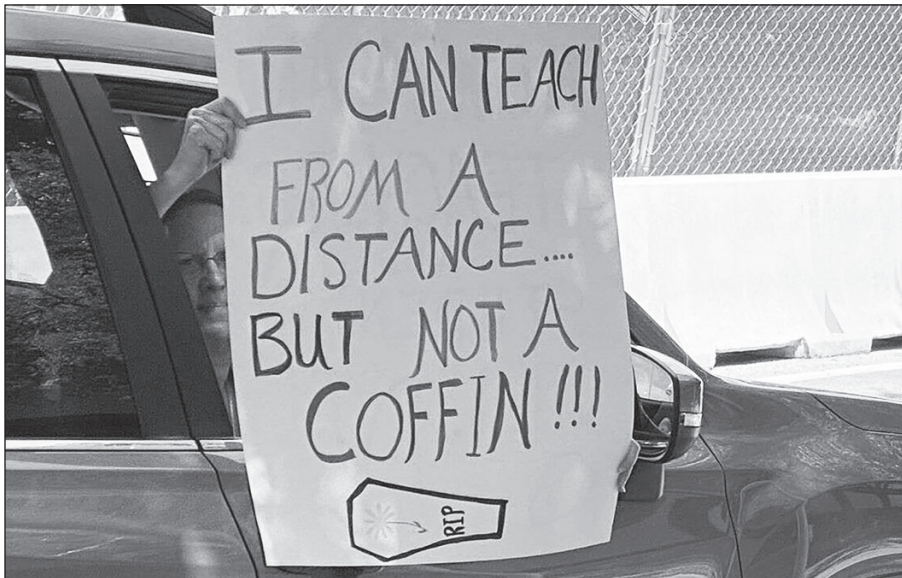
Still another frequently used hybrid model involves students attending school part time and then part time using remote learning. Often these students are divided into groups or pods, attending at different times or on different days. While these plans may appear safer at first, teachers and school staff particularly teachers of art, music, physical education etc. are exposed to all the students and therefore are potential conduits between groups of children.

Teachers Resist

Teachers led by progressive unions in Chicago, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Oakland and many smaller cities around the country demanded that schools should only reopen when reasonable safety could be assured. Their demands began with adequate PPE such as masks and sanitizer but go way beyond.

Free high-speed internet access and fully functioning devices for all students, school meals for take-home, a relevant and anti-racist curriculum are among the school-based demands. One of the major battlefronts has been the issue of building ventilation, as most schools have woefully inadequate air filtration.

Another major battleground is class size,



particularly in districts attempting hybrid models that have students divided into groups or pods attending at different times or on different days. While these plans may appear safer at first, teachers and school staff remain exposed to all the students, becoming potential conduits between groups of children.

All involved of course are conduits to their homes and to the community as a whole. In schools with full time remote-learning, battles between unions and school districts are taking place on issues of testing, teacher evaluation, and the number of hours that students, especially little ones, can reasonably be expected to spend in front of a screen.

Union Caucuses such as MORE (Movement of Rank and File Educators) in New York and WE (Working Educators) in Philadelphia have led protests. They have

developed innovative tactics including car caravans, street theater and art installations.

In Andover, Massachusetts, when teachers were told to report for a professional development day at their schools, they made the decision to bring their chairs, tables and laptops and work outside. Their union arranged to bring a generator to power laptops and boost Wi-Fi and ordered port-a-johns.

New York City teachers have staged teach-outs where they do their work outdoors. They've also utilized Zoom to hold numerous meetings of 1000.

Meanwhile the privatizers are busy at work trying to utilize the pandemic as an opportunity to weaken public schools and teachers' unions. In some places, remote learning has been contracted out to private companies while the actual teachers are forced to go back into unsafe school buildings either from the start or, at a future date

to be determined.

Over the last several years progressive unions and caucuses among education workers have been linking the demands for quality education with demands for a sustainable life for students, their families and their communities. While organized labor has failed for too long to self-organize and to take on the broader fight for the working class, especially Black and Brown workers, teachers understand they cannot teach if children do not feel secure.

This recognition of the crisis has emboldened this section of the labor movement to link up with its natural allies, parents, students and community organizations. Unions such as the Chicago Teachers Union in Chicago and the United Teachers of Los Angeles have led the way on "common good" demands such as no evictions, rent control, physical and mental health services, and alternatives to policing.

From Florida to Maine and San Diego to Seattle, educators and parents are fighting for the schools and the communities that children need to feel safe so they can learn and that teachers need so they can truly teach.

The fight is underway. The needs are urgent and massive. We are in a crucial period and, in many ways, public education workers have seized the lead by linking the demands for quality education with the fight for a sustainable life for students, their families and their communities.

Labor has failed for too long to self-organize and to take on the broader fight for the working class, especially Black and Brown workers. An emboldened labor movement representing all working people could play a pivotal role in bringing the fight for justice in schools and communities to the next level. ■

Conviction in Death Squad Massacre

A SPANISH COURT on September 11, 2020 convicted Inocente Montano, a former Army Colonel and Minister of Security in El Salvador — and a graduate of the infamous U.S. School of the Americas — for the November 1989 murders of five Spanish Jesuit priests.

Ignacio Ellacuría, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Amando López, Segundo Montes and Juan Ramón Moreno were murdered — along with Celina and Elba Ramos and Salvadoran Jesuit Joaquín López — at the Jesuit-run University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador. (The Spanish court's jurisdiction was limited to the murders of the Spanish citizens.)

Montano was part of a group of high-level military officers — including other SOA graduates — who gave the order to "eliminate" Jesuit Ignacio

Ellacuría, rector of the UCA, for his leadership in working to broker a peace agreement to end the war in El Salvador.

No other members of the Salvadoran military high command have been prosecuted for ordering and planning the massacre, and there has yet to be a trial of the intellectual author of the crime in El Salvador. (Col. Montano was extradited to Spain from the United States.)

Furthermore, neither the U.S. government nor the SOA (often labeled the "School of Assassins" — ed.) have been held accountable for training members of the military leadership who ordered the murders, as well as members of the counter-insurgency Atlacatl Battalion, created at the SOA, who carried out the massacre. (For information and updates see <https://soaw.org/home/>.)

DUE TO THE vandalizing of the usually reliable U.S. Postal Service by Trump's postmaster-general appointee Louis DeJoy, there was a full month's delay in delivering our subscribers' copies of the previous issue of *Against the Current* (September-October 2020, #208). We regret the snafu. If you're a subscriber and still haven't received your copy, please let us know and we'll replace it. Thanks for your patience.

Our fall-winter fundraising drive for the magazine has been launched. Subscribers will receive a mail appeal — sent by first class this time in view of the state of the post office under Trump. You can donate by check to *Against the Current* (7012 Michigan Avenue, Detroit MI 48210) or online via our new dedicate website <https://againstthecurrent.org> if you click on "donate." ■

We Protect Us — U-M GEO Strikes Back

By Kathleen Brown

THE GRADUATE EMPLOYEE Organization (GEO) of the University of Michigan represents over 2000 graduate student workers.

Between September 8-16, 2020, GEO members led an explosive abolitionist strike for a safe and just campus, the culmination of months of organizing against the University's opaque and unsafe reopening plans and its expanding investment in policing.

The University of Michigan's response to the pandemic follows the neoliberal playbook. The University outsourced pandemic-related financial losses onto workers and students through austerity measures and a tuition increase, while President Mark Schlissels insisted the University would hold a "public-health informed residential semester" in the fall, a fantasy that he and the Board of Regents have clung to even as COVID cases spike in the residence halls.

The University demonstrated its willful intent to reopen, regardless of the human cost and against the recommendations of its own ethics committee, who argued the University's reopening could cause "grave harm" to the surrounding community.

Inspired by wildcat strikes throughout the spring and summer led by workers fighting for safe working conditions, and the Chicago Teachers Union's and United Teachers of Los Angeles' willingness to fight for their students and communities, and this summer's uprising for Black Lives, GEO members knew that we needed to take action in order to protect our coworkers and our community.

With our power to withhold our labor, GEO could act as an emergency brake against the University's reckless reopening plans and carceral infrastructure. In this way, GEO always envisioned our own struggle as broader than just the needs of graduate workers.

This was demonstrated in our slate of demands, calling for the universal right to work remotely, which would have set a precedent for other workers on campus; robust and randomized testing, which is necessary to detect and contain an outbreak and protect the community; support for parent graduate workers and international

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graduate workers, struggling under increased caregiving responsibilities and buffeted by a hostile political environment; and critically, to disarm and defund campus police and cut ties between campus and city police forces.

Defunding became all the more urgent during the pandemic given that U-M commits \$17 million annually to the police, but has enough food-insecure students to host a permanent food bank on campus.

Pandemic and Policing Issues

While critics of the strike sought to separate GEO's COVID and abolitionist demands as unrelated, the University linked these issues directly: in its reopening plans, University officials created the "UM Ambassadors Program" which employed federal work-study students paired with armed police officers to patrol social gatherings on and off campus.

Heavily criticized by coalitions like Students of Color for Liberation and the University's own ethics committee, the Ambassadors Program demonstrated the University's reliance on repression to secure its reopening, a task that would disproportionately harm Black and brown campus members.

As GEO argued, "Policing and surveillance are not 'public health-informed;' they are harmful to physical and mental health. Increased police presence on campus and in the wider community will further jeopardize the safety of Black and brown graduate workers, students, faculty, staff, and community members in the midst of a pandemic that is already disproportionately ravaging Black and brown communities."

By taking up these pandemic and policing issues in tandem, we smashed the narrow confines of acceptable bargaining topics and forced the University to bargain around policing — something it swore it would never do.

GEO's strike acted as a lightning rod for campus discontent, concentrating workers' power, forcing a conversation around campus priorities. Two days into the strike, Residential Advisors — student workers in the residence halls — announced their own strike for safer working conditions, calling for better safety protocols, PPE, and hazard pay.

Four days into our strike, student workers from the dining halls and cafés on campus announced a walkout and work slowdown in response to unsafe working conditions.

The bravery of our student worker comrades should not be understated. These are working class students who rely on the University for their housing, meals, and a paycheck. They led job actions despite not having a union and having far fewer legal protections to wage a battle with the University.

Their willingness to fight back despite these limitations gave confidence to GEO members, who voted to reject management's first offer and keep striking.

First Offer Rejected

Three days into the strike, the University presented GEO with an "exploding" first offer, meaning it would no longer be on the table should we reject it. However, the offer failed to address the majority of our demands: most critically, it refused to commit to a universal remote work option and offered nothing on our policing demands. GEO members rejected the "exploding" offer en masse and headed back to the picket lines.

Campus unrest increased after COVID-positive students in quarantine housing posted videos about poor conditions of housing, cold meals, and lack of toiletries. This exposure demonstrated that despite a summer to plan for student return, the University was not ready for infected students

Moreover, these student exposés ripped a hole into the slick marketing materials and assertions that "everything is fine."

In a show of solidarity, GEO members donated food and supplies to students in quarantined housing to make up for the University's negligence. In a symbolic but politically damning move, the Faculty Senate passed a vote of no confidence in President Mark Schlissel on the last day of our strike.

Perhaps equally damning, the Democrat-dominated Board of Regents passed a vote of confidence in the University's president and the University's reopening plans.

By September 14, the University threatened GEO with a looming court injunction to force us back to work. Concerned with the resources required to fight a lawsuit,

GEO members grudgingly accepted the University's second offer on September 16 and returned to work on September 17.

While the actual outcome of our bargaining is tepid — expanded childcare funds, protocol for remote work, and a policing “task force” — it sets a precedent that we will build on for the future. Not coincidentally, the day after our strike ended, the University announced it would cancel the “Ambassadors” policing program.

While the material gains of the second offer fell far short of what GEO members had hoped for, the significance of our strike under pandemic conditions should not be underestimated. First and quite simply, our strike demonstrated that workers can fight back and win.

Our union local had not struck since 1975, and there was no living memory in

the union of striking. “Strike” was discussed in hushed tones and often described in terms of fear and risk. Yet graduate workers rebelled against Michigan's anti-union laws that prohibit public employees from striking, refusing to work for a total of nine days.

This had a qualitative effect on graduate students, who were transformed by the experience of fighting back. We ended the strike with a sense of our own power and a clearer understanding of the University's hostility to workers. Despite liberal rhetoric of “dialogue” and “listening,” the administration steamrolled its workers by chasing tuition dollars and football revenue at the cost of health and lives.

Not surprisingly, Board of Regents member Ron Weiser, Ann Arbor's largest landlord and owner of McKinley properties, donated \$30 million to the University just prior to students' return to campus and another

\$100,000 to the Political Action Committee “Unlock Michigan,” dedicated to overturning Governor Whitmer's emergency powers.

Our experience demonstrates that in the right conditions and by linking our demands to the greater good of the community, strikes are “contagious: and can spread easily. We were overwhelmed with solidarity — from individuals and organizations around the country who flooded our strike camp with food, donations, and solidarity greeting; from undergraduates who pooled their money to buy us sandwiches, to encouragement from UCSC grad workers.

Most significantly, we demonstrated that workers can and will strike over “permissible” subjects in order to shake the foundations of carceral infrastructure, en route to building a new world out of the ashes of the old. ■

Fighting for What Students Deserve Education, Not School-to-Prison Pipeline

THE UNITED TEACHERS of Los Angeles (UTLA) in late June endorsed a call for the Los Angeles United School District (LAUSD) to eliminate its \$70 million contract with the city police department. This contract paid for 400 police, representing the country's largest independent school police force. Instead the money should be shifted to providing for student needs such as counselors, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, and pupil services and attendance counselors.

On June 30, the LAUSD School Board approved the immediate cut. This decision came after Students Deserve, a grassroots high school network, had carried out a several-year campaign for investing in Black, Brown and Muslim youth by divesting in policing. SD called for counselors and other resources that would benefit the whole child, rather than the punitive policing model where random searches are standard.

Asia Bryant, a SD activist who just graduated last summer from Hamilton High, pointed out on Suzi's Weissman's interview program on Jacobin Radio that in schools with a majority white student body de-escalation tactics were the norm. But in those with a majority Black/Brown students a “no tolerance” policy was in place. In fact, police have taken over disciplinary roles such as issuing city citations for being tardy or absent.

Bryant mentioned that the presence of armed police changes the campus atmosphere. The presumption is that police presence is necessary because students are potential criminals. She called for employing restorative justice model when a fight breaks out between students, instead of police intervention.

That begins by figuring out what caused the fight, which means listening to students, not imposing brute force. Bryant remarks that “would make for a much better learning environment, for a much better school environment.”

Also interviewed was Sarah Djato, a high school senior at Dorsey High and Students Deserve organizer. She remarked that policing teaches students that “We don't deserve love, we don't deserve care within the school system, and the school system clearly doesn't care about us.”

During the teachers' strike in early 2019 the union reached out to students, parents and community partners, including Students Deserve. That strike was a breakthrough moment. Suddenly students had a role to play in supporting the demands teachers were raising for having smaller classes. “We spoke to them about why it was important to take up the policing issue,” said Djato. “They did — they made that one of their strike demands!”

The demands that the teachers raised went beyond teacher-focused issues but bargained “for the common good.” This included opposing the racist daily searches of students, eliminating suspensions and harsh punishments that disproportionately target Black and Brown students, and wrap-around services that provide a learning environment.

After voting its support to cutting the contract with the police, UTLA joined a coalition of organizations, including Black Lives Matter LA, ACLU of Southern California, California Association of School Counselors, CHIRLA, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los Angeles, and California National Or-

ganization of Women to lobby the LAUSD School Board meeting at the end of June.

The board's 4-3 vote approving the \$25 million police contract reduction capped weeks of protest by Students Deserve and Black Lives Matter-LA. This is a significant decision in the second largest public school district in the country, with about 100,000 K-12 students plus another 100,000 in day care and adult education programs. Ninety percent of are students of color, with more than 80% low income.

The late-night school board vote came after followed testimony by students who detailed the fallout by the daily presence of law enforcement. They pointed out how police sometimes stood outside school, on occasion using pepper spray. Further, years of research demonstrate that school police presence lowers graduation rates, does not make schools safer, and negatively impacts student learning.

Students Deserve recently surveyed students and former students about their encounters with school police. Over 80% of the 5433 responses responded negatively to police presence. When students are arrested just outside the school, and in front of other students, they feel they are being shamed.

The school board's motion prioritized serving the needs of students of color and set up a task force to “re-envision” school safety. Other school systems — in Oakland, San Francisco, Richmond, Denver, Portland, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Charlottesville and beyond — are discussing the removal of armed officers from campus and redirecting the funding to an expansion of programs that can facilitate learning. ■

The McCloskeys as Keynoters By Dianne Feeley

ALTHOUGH IT DID seem bizarre to invite the gun-waving couple Mark and Patricia McCloskey to give a four-minute address on the opening night of the Republican National Convention, in truth they were Exhibit A in Trump's re-election strategy to "protect" the suburbs.

The couple are facing felony charges for brandishing their guns at protesters marching by their St. Louis mansion last June.

While a Black Lives Matter demonstration took a shortcut to the mayor's house by slipping through the open gate of the private street where the McCloskeys live, the couple maintain they feared for their lives. Mark McCloskey, 63, pointed an AR-15 rifle at protesters while Patricia McCloskey, 61, wielded a semiautomatic handgun.

The personal-injury lawyers spoke to the Republican convention from their 52-room palazzo about how they were determined to defend their property.

Patricia McCloskey claimed that the demonstrators wanted to "abolish the suburbs altogether" by ending single-family home zoning, bringing in crime, lawlessness and low-quality apartment units. She noted that Trump "smartly" got rid of such a policy.

This vision matches Trump's campaign speeches. On the campaign trail in Michigan, he remarked:

"The suburbs are the American dream, and I will tell you, I have protected your suburbs. You know I got rid of a regulation that played with your zoning and played with other things, where they force projects into the suburbs of our great country. And I got rid of it."

The clear message: Trump is a "law-and-order" guy who will prevent an "invasion."

As a child growing up in San Francisco in the 1950s, I remember my mother telling me that if a Black family moved into the neighborhood, we'd have to move. When I questioned her, she said our house would lose value because the mere presence of one Black family would destroy its market price.

As we talked, she mentioned how it

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Mark and Patricia McCloskey "defending" their mansion against a Black Lives Matter demonstration marching by.

would be difficult to be neighbors to a Black family. If my brother and me played with their children, then as we got older we might think it was acceptable to date, or marry. It seemed to me that even more than the potential loss of money, my mother was worried about the future of my brother and I should we be so foolish as to cross the color line.

Housing researchers have concluded that most racial discrimination is the result of U.S. public policy, reinforced by white homeowners whipped up by developers and real estate brokers into protecting their property values and their "way of life."

Zoning laws, restrictive covenants that homeowners were once required to sign and redlining were the main mechanisms through which the real estate industry, in cahoots with every level of government, enforced racial segregation in 20th century America. These mechanisms were in clear violation of the 1866 Civil Rights Act. However no case was taken up by the U.S. Supreme Court between 1883 and 1948, when covenants were finally ruled illegal.

While it's easy to see the discrimination of a landlord or management company refusing to rent to Black people, local zoning laws on paper seem race neutral. These include restrictions on multiple-family occupancy, banning commercial development, proscribing lot size and setting architectural standards. Yet these measures successfully eliminate most Black families.

Between the end of World War II and the 1950s developers and homeowners

associations united to "protect" neighborhoods from those they viewed as "undesirable," i.e. Jews and Blacks. They campaigned for and elected city officials who opposed civil rights organizations and their demand for open housing. They also filed legal briefs in support of restrictive covenants and successfully passed "homeowner rights" ordinances.

Associations networked to monitor attempts by Blacks to buy homes in their neighborhood, and when they did, they received a visit from association members, who offered to buy the home. If they declined, extra-legal action included breaking windows, setting fires and turning out weeks-long rocking-throwing crowds.

Consequently, areas where African-American families could find housing were the ones zoned for industrial and commercial development. These are where toxic waste dumps and incinerators were built — and are still operating. As a result, the health of the Black community suffers. No wonder that when COVID-19 hit, the virus found Blacks twice or three times more vulnerable than whites.

From Redlining to Spatial Segregation

Deeds that restricted the homeowner from selling to non-whites date from before World War I. Redlining, invented by an agency of the federal government, sprang up during the 1930s Depression. As many homeowners went into foreclosure, what was to become the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) purchased mortgages and issued new ones with long-term payment schedules.

To minimize the risk of defaults, the FHA hired real estate agents to appraise the home's worth. Given that the agents' national ethics code required the maintenance of segregation, the resulting metropolitan area maps were colored green for the "safest" neighborhoods, and red if even one African-American family resided there.

That is, the presence of even one Black family made it a "risky" area. This was true even when the neighborhood was solidly middle class.

By 1935 the FHA produced the first edition of the *Underwriting Manual* as a guide to banks, pointing out "A change in social or

racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction in values." At the same time, the New Deal built affordable housing. Disregarding post-Civil War legislation that made segregation illegal, these complexes were assigned to either whites or Blacks.

Of 26 projects built in the Northeast and Midwest, 16 were reserved for whites, eight for African Americans and two complexes where buildings were segregated.

Massive civil rights organizing, spearheaded by A. Philip Randolph of the Sleeping Car Porters, organized meetings and marches against segregation and projected a 1941 March on Washington. Just a week before, Roosevelt persuaded Randolph to call it off in exchange for an executive order prohibiting racial discrimination in the war industries.

The Fair Employment Practices Committee accomplished little, and the dual labor market continued. Black men and women had less access to jobs and, once hired, frequently faced harassment from management and coworkers, especially if they sought higher-paying jobs.

After World War II and the creation of the Veterans Administration, returning GIs were guaranteed mortgages, and this program continues today. That's how my brother, a Vietnam veteran, bought his house.

Because the VA imposed the conditions outlined in the *Underwriting Manual*, Black veterans were almost totally excluded. This was at a moment in which the federal government, through the FHA and the Veterans Administration, expanded the housing market. But they financed exclusively white subdivisions like Westlake (just south of San Francisco), Lakewood (south of Los Angeles), Oak Forest in Houston, Prairie Village in Kansas City and, in New York City, Stuyvesant Town.

It is unlikely that any could have gotten off the ground without the federal agency's infusion of capital. Levittown was able to mass produce 17,500 two-bedroom, 750-square-foot houses for \$8,000, with no down-payment required. And the white homeowner got a federally-backed mortgage to boot.

Cities willingly condemned and cleared neighborhoods and provided tax abatements to the banks and insurance companies that worked with the federal agencies. In some cities "slum clearance" tore down formerly stable and integrated neighborhoods. But Black families, paying the most for the worst and densest housing, were left behind.

As for public housing, which Patricia McCloskey dismissed as "low-quality apartment units," its original purpose was subverted as African Americans were unable to take advantage of postwar subsidized housing. By 1950 the real estate industry had successfully lobbied for an upper-income limit on their rents. Over the next decade better off white

and Black families were forced to move.

While the Fair Housing Act of 1968 outlawed segregation, by then the postwar housing pattern had been established. Not only was integrated and affordable public housing no longer a possibility, but as maintenance budgets were cut, remaining residents were demonized by politicians.

What little remains of public housing is viewed as a place to warehouse the poor. It has become increasingly segregated, run-down and crime ridden. And because schools are so closely tied to one's residence, this means their neighborhood schools are increasingly segregated and resource starved.

In the early 1970s, when parents of Detroit public school students sued for integrated schools, the courts agreed with them about the degree of segregation but claimed it was impossible to demand suburban schools open their doors. After all, the judges concluded, suburban schools hadn't "caused" segregation so they couldn't be held accountable for reversing it.

Courts today see segregation as "de facto," rather than intentionally imposed ("de jure") therefore no action need be taken.

Politicians have come up with Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) as a way that the poor — disproportionately people of color — can be integrated into various neighborhoods. While the government supplements their rent, they must secure their

own housing.

Since landlords can and do refuse to rent to people who have vouchers, the vast majority live in poorer neighborhoods where the housing stock is rundown and the rent high. Even when the family finds housing in a suburb, it is usually within a segregated enclave.

As of 2015, a million families had vouchers, with long waiting lists of those who have been approved and six million more who haven't yet qualified.

Meanwhile, the economic recession of 2008-09 devastated Black homeownership, wiping out gains made over the last half century. A decade ago, when the mortgage crisis hit, it turned out that African Americans of various income levels had been steered toward higher-interest (subprime) mortgages. Today Black families are 40% less likely to own their homes and hold just one-tenth of the wealth of white families.

Given this history of segregation in housing, it's easy enough to see that when the McCloskeys stand in front of their mansion with weapons — and when Trump talks about making sure suburban families "safe" — it is a barely disguised code in order to demonize families who have struggled for the right to live and work with dignity. These families deserve reparations for the trauma they have been subjected to; it is they who deserve to be safe. ■

Bolivia: Coup Repudiated

REPUDIATING THE RIGHT-WING coup that brought down the government of Evo Morales a year ago, Bolivia's voters decisively elected his ally Luis Arce of the MAS (Movement Toward Socialism) party in the October 18 presidential election. MAS is also expected to gain seats in the Senate.

Rightly proclaiming "we have reclaimed democracy," with 52 or 53 percent of the vote and a 20 point lead over his main conservative opponent Carlos Mesa, Arce will take office without requiring a second-round runoff election. This is a stunning victory after the right-wing coup of a year ago and twice postponed elections.

Both Arce and his vice-presidential candidate, David Choquehuanca, were longtime members of Morales's cabinet. Choquehuanca served as Bolivian foreign minister from 2006 to 2017.

As finance minister, Arce was a technocrat who successfully renegotiated for a greater share of the state's assets in the mining, gas and telecommunications industries. These profits were then used to develop social programs that decreased inequality. He also helped launch the Bank of the South, a regional development fund. At the same time he maintained good

relationships with international financial institutions and investors.

Despite the repression unleashed by the coup government, Bolivians never stopped marching, protesting and putting up blockades to demand democracy.

This MAS victory is a defeat for the Trump administration. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had cheered the coup as it granted impunity to those involved in the military massacres, expelled Cuban doctors, carried out a reactionary foreign policy and destroyed Indigenous symbols.

Huge challenges will follow: undoing the year of damage inflicted by the right-wing coup regime, governing along with a pandemic that has hit Bolivia particularly hard and without the favorable export commodity prices that aided Evo Morales in the early years of his administration. Above all, there is a need to restore the trust and solidarity between MAS and the Indigenous peoples' movements that had seriously eroded prior to the 2019 coup.

Some observers are looking hopeful to the possibility of a new Pink Tide in Latin American politics. The recent experiences show the importance of the popular movements in sustaining the tide and turning it a redder hue. ■

Firestorms and Our Future By Solidarity Ecosocialist Working Group

FIRESTORMS IN THE western states, hurricanes pounding the Gulf and East Coast, rising water along the ocean shore and Great Lakes along with the pandemic blanketing the United States all starkly reaffirm that humans are part of nature — and can only attempt to subdue it at our own peril.

Hopefully, more and more people recognize that the scientific predictions of the last 50 years are coming to pass — even sooner than projected — as climate change unleashes its intensified heat and wind upon the land.

Climate deniers and rightwing conspiracy-mongers, still at work with their systematic falsehoods, now accuse social activists of setting the fires. Shockingly, some Oregonian residents built blockades to confront the “antifa” demonstrators they believed were setting fires. *But there were none.*

Evaluating the destruction of the west coast fires, we see it made up of a combination of several climate factors.

Spring and fall rains now come in the winter, so the rise in the Pacific Ocean’s temperature feeds the winds as they pick up speed over dry land. Heat rises to 115 degrees — reaching 130 degrees in Death Valley — and the electrical grids grind to a halt.

Fire season no longer starts in the fall but begins in late summer as hot and dry conditions allow wildfires to spread faster and further. Compounding the longer and increasingly hotter fire season is its size and intensity.

Retreating to Mountain Homes

Whitman County Sheriff Brett Meyers told at *New York Times* reporter that the fire burned as if it were jet fuel. “Unless you had a fire truck for every house that was on fire, you just couldn’t touch it. It was that swift.”

Who are the people living in small mountain areas? It is a combination of rich and poor, with two-thirds of this housing built in fire-risk areas over the last two decades.

Particularly given the prohibitive cost of housing in California, Oregon and Washington, low-income families, seniors and the disabled have moved into these areas, or never left. Some would prefer to live in places that have more services but can’t

afford it. They live on narrow and winding roads that are the only way in and out of town. They are the most likely to be trapped and die because they have less opportunity to be notified of the need to evacuate, have difficulty moving quickly, or are without reliable transportation.

Given today’s economic inequality, the fire disaster — just like the coronavirus pandemic — hits the most vulnerable. In many areas, the homeless were left to shift for themselves.

Spreading Fires, Narrowing Possibilities

Of course the extent of the 2020 fires goes well beyond these isolated areas, threatening the more suburban towns of several major cities. Cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Portland, and Vancouver in Canada suffered some of the worst air anywhere in the world, with the Air Quality Index reaching 500-700. The smoke traveled to the U.S. Midwest and East Coast, then all the way to Europe.

Mike Davis, the urban theorist and Marxist historian, compared these fires to the equivalent of “endless nuclear war.” He noted that the growing number and intensity of the fires have prepared the ground for the invasion of non-native grasses, shrubs and trees. As these invasive species spread, the ground becomes even more flammable.

All along the west coast the infrastructure of colonialization and industrialization has transformed the natural ecology with its mining, lumber, reservoirs, dams, industrial agriculture and the building of roads.

Firestorms, drying deserts and forests along with rising and warming oceans have narrowed our possibilities. There’s a clear and present global emergency.

Not only the western USA, but Siberia and the Amazon rain forest are burning. The melting of the Greenland ice sheet, we’re informed by climate scientists, is now irreversible.

Meanwhile the racial segregation of our cities means Black, Brown, Indigenous and low-income communities live near toxic fossil fuel sites and incinerators; consequently these communities disproportionately suffer from high rates of asthma, cancer and the

daily stress of racial discrimination.

Extracting fossil fuels locks in planet-warming pollution and compounds the problem, placing these communities at a higher risk of dying from COVID-19.

Around the world clear-cutting forests, expanding industrial agriculture and road building create the conditions for transmitting viruses from animals to humans, as it has done for COVID-19. While know-nothing politicians like Trump call for reopening the economy, 210,000 have died in the United States and the death toll has passed one million worldwide. Scientists are only beginning to talk about the long-term effects for the millions who have survived the virus.

California Governor Gavin Newsom (D), who calls for making the state a leader in building a livable planet, was hailed for signing an executive order to stop sales of new gasoline-powered passenger cars and trucks by 2035. As if we didn’t know punting programs to the legislature is a delaying tactic, he announced that he will ask the legislature to end new fracking permits by 2024.

Some state governments and even corporations talk about being “carbon-neutral by 2050.” But these are mere pledges. As we have seen from the results of the Paris Accords, they may not mean much.

Clearly we need to focus on moving away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible. End all subsidies of fossil fuels; stop fracking and mining. But that’s just the beginning. Our transportation system has to prioritize mass transit not the individual car. With sustainability as our primary concern, we need a moratorium on new construction in fire-prone areas, instead developing green and affordable housing models.

We note that Indigenous communities throughout the Americas have lived in these forests, jungles and mountains before colonialization. They have knowledge in land management and food production that can help us begin to repair the environmental damage.

We acknowledge that human civilization must live in concert with nature in order to survive. It is the fear of creating feedback loops, and not a calendar date, that must set our agenda. But with a certain confidence, we pledge to build an ecosocialist consciousness, for an ecosocialist world. ■



Johnson Crashes Britain Toward Abyss By Phil Hearse

LESS THAN ONE year after its resounding electoral victory over the Labour Party, Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government is in turmoil — and crashing the country towards a social, health and economic disaster of unprecedented proportions. Combining incompetence with neoliberal myopia, Johnson is allowing a second wave of COVID-19 to explode.

The ensuing economic crash merges with the disastrous results of Britain's departure from the European Union (Brexit) and threatens economic and social meltdown by Christmas. Politically, the hard right Conservatives are responding by trying to ramp up anti-migrant, anti-European xenophobia.

To see how the crisis is unfolding, we have to look at the virus disaster, Brexit and the political aftershocks from the December 2019 election — including the crisis and collapse of the left-wing Labour project around former leader Jeremy Corbyn.

COVID-19 disaster

Britain's record on the coronavirus is shocking. According to official figures, at the time of writing (September 2020) officially there have been 42,000 COVID-19 deaths, almost certainly an underestimate. One third of those deaths have been in care homes for the elderly.

To put this in perspective, Britain has almost exactly 20% of the population of the United States, and about 21% of the number of deaths. In other words, the outcome so far is just as bad as Trump's in the United

States, probably a bit worse, but in the same league.

It is striking how some of the most hard-nosed neoliberal governments — the United States, Britain, Brazil — have delivered some of the worst outcomes on COVID-19.

The underlying reasons for these UK results are the same as in the United States — a lockdown started too late, an easing of the lockdown too early, a completely inadequate privatized test and trace regime, and failure to give clear advice about mask wearing and social distancing.

Britain went into lockdown on March 23, by which time the number of infections was doubling every four or five days.

As the virus overwhelmed hospitals, with 120 deaths among healthcare professionals, the government told hospitals to make space by sending elderly COVID-19 patients who were apparently "recovering" back to their care homes. The predictable outcome was a eugenic massacre of the old and sick.

Deaths reached alarming levels among essential workers, especially in the public transport sector — for example 29 deaths among London bus drivers.

The lockdown had a devastating effect on the economy in Britain, hugely dependent on the hospitality/tourism sector and retailing. And when people don't go to shops and offices, neither do they buy from sandwich shops, cafes and burger chains. Pubs and restaurants took a massive hit.

In March the government chief finance minister Rishi Sunak decided to pump up to £500 billion into supporting businesses large and small, and into a furlough scheme that paid 80% of the wages of millions of laid-off

workers. Even so, the lockdown detonated an explosion of layoffs, now in the hundreds of thousands. It is expected that as the furlough scheme ends next month, unemployment will rise to around five million.

During the lockdown, the government put a ban on evictions for non-payment of rent. This restriction is now being removed, and tens of thousands risk losing their homes. Mass destitution is a real prospect.

But at every stage key lockdown measures have been opposed by the Conservative right-wing, including the rabidly reactionary *Sun* and *Daily Mail*, as a breach of personal liberties that was wrecking business. Thousands took advantage of a partial easing of lockdown in the August sunshine to flock to beaches where little social distancing was in evidence. Many thousands took late summer holidays to Greece and Spain, where countries getting on top of the virus had it re-exported to them by British tourists.

Now, with schools and universities allowed to return and people encouraged to go back to work, infections are once again doubling every four or five days.

The notion that school kids don't spread the virus has been shown to be absurd — with, for example, more than 100 schools in Greater Manchester alone reporting positive tests and whole year cohorts sent home. The government is responding with local lockdowns, but is desperately trying to avoid another national lockdown.

As in most countries, the social geography of the virus is a map of poverty. Towns in the North West around Manchester have been badly hit, because they are centers of

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poverty and very crowded housing. This particularly affects the Asian communities, often living in small multi-generational houses. The same is true in other major conurbations.

Brexit Turmoil Mounting

How is Brexit going to compound the crisis? Britain left the European Union at the beginning of 2020, but little really changed. The country entered a year of transition, during which a trade deal would be hammered out and cross-border travel sorted, to make it as friction free as possible.

It now looks as if there will be no deal by the December 31 deadline, as the British side raises more and more objections, so that economic relations between Britain and the EU will be like those with the rest of the world — i.e. with major new tariffs.

On the face of it this seems like cutting off your nose to spite your face, and for many sectors of British capital it surely is. But Brexit nationalism and xenophobia has reached levels that override even capitalist rationality. How so?

To stay in a trading bloc with the EU, Britain would be forced to accept many of the Union's regulations concerning the environment and working conditions, which the ultra-neoliberal Tory right wants to get rid of. Perhaps more importantly the Conservative right is staunchly pro-American, and wants a trade deal with the United States, opening up a sort of North Atlantic free trade area. To do that of course means accepting not EU regulations, but those demanded by U.S. government negotiators, bluntly explained in an astonishing U.S. government document.

Britain will have to open up its National Health Service (NHS), indeed all government financed bodies, to bids from U.S. corporations, and outcomes must be decided by commercial criteria only. Joint oversight committees must be established to ensure "fair accesses" to the whole of the British economy. For a government obsessed with asserting Britain's "full sovereignty" it seems obvious that lots of it will be given away to US capitalism.

After the end of 2020, with a "no deal" Brexit there will be chaos. Many businesses depend on EU workers, who will not be able to come. There are likely to be massive queues of trucks at Dover and other key ports as customs documentation is checked. Britain depends on hundreds of trucks a day delivering food and other key supplies from the EU, and shortages of some food items are on the cards.

Trouble at the Borders

But a "no deal" Brexit has many other implications, particularly in Ireland. Northern Ireland is of course part of the United

Kingdom, but economically very integrated with the Irish Republic.

Travel across the border is unrestricted and in many places it is difficult to detect where the border actually is. But the Irish Republic is a staunch member of the European Union, which creates a thorny problem for Brexit, if goods and services can flow freely across the border, and then across the Irish Sea to mainland Britain.

The deal worked out so far is that Northern Ireland will remain economically in the EU, but goods and services going between the North and the rest of the UK will have to be checked and EU goods given the appropriate tariff. For hard-core Brexiteers this is an outrage since it means that Britain no longer has full sovereignty over Northern Ireland.

In a no-deal Brexit, a "hard" border with the Irish Republic will be re-established, with border posts and customs checks. The conclusion is — expect big trouble and a massive resurgence of the Irish national question, putting the 1997 Ireland Peace Agreement in question.

As veteran Derry socialist Eamon McCann puts it, "If they re-establish border posts, within six weeks there will be people shooting at them." The border will be widely defied, with local business people, cross-border workers and Dublin shoppers all finding informal routes to evade it.

Brexit is also causing a surge in support for the moderate social democratic Scottish National Party (SNP), which leads the devolved Scottish government, and for its proposal for a new referendum on Scottish independence. The politics of the SNP are moderate social democratic, not right-wing nationalist.

Scotland's First Minister, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon, is seen as having dealt with the pandemic north of the border much better than Boris Johnson in London. Actually Scotland's death rate is only marginally better than England's, but Sturgeon is seen as more open and honest than the evasive and blistering Johnson.

For the moment the devolved government has limited sovereignty over some Scottish questions only. A new referendum for full independence would have to be agreed by the British government and for the moment this seems unlikely.

Anti-immigrant Racism

At first blush it seems unlikely that leaving the European Union could have been the key mechanism for the hard right seizing control of the Conservative Party, or indeed pushing British politics overall sharply to the right.

The key to the Brexiteers' long offensive

was to link the European Union with immigration, summed up in the Brexiteer slogan at the 2016 referendum "take back control." Wilfully and obviously misconstrued by sections of the British Left as meaning taking back control from European capitalism, in fact it was (rightly) understood by the electorate as "take back control of our borders," i.e. keep the immigrants out.

Fifteen years ago Brexit was very much a minority concern inside the Conservative Party, but pushed forward by a coalition of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and its then leader Nigel Farage.

Farage was strongly backed by Rupert Murdoch's newspapers and indeed the whole of the right-wing press. Farage became the leader of a sort of "external faction" of the Conservative Party, which was highly effective in shifting the balance of forces within the party and pressurizing public opinion, especially after the 2007/8 financial crash and the ensuing years of austerity.

Today the anti-immigrant hysteria is focusing on the alleged flood — in reality a trickle — of "illegal" migrants taking advantage of mild summer seas to cross the English Channel from France in rubber dinghies and makeshift rafts, the so-called "death route."

Home Secretary Priti Patel has mobilized the navy to aid the border patrol in pushing them back into French waters. Britain and France accuse one another of being responsible. Patel has also announced a new program to rapidly remove thousands of asylum seekers whose claims have failed.

Labour's Weak Response

Government disarray continues mainly unscathed because of the failure of the opposition Labour Party, now led by Jeremy Corbyn's replacement, Keir Starmer, to effectively oppose it in Parliament. That has to be explained in terms of labour's electoral defeat in December 2019, and the collapse of the Corbyn project.

While there were key policy issues on which Corbyn and his leadership team fumbled, in fact their whole approach was flawed from the beginning, undermined by structural weaknesses disguised in the left-wing euphoria following his 2015 election as party leader.

In the first place, Corbyn's election was partially an accident. In 2014 the right-dominated party bureaucracy agreed to a new method of election for the leader, which allowed anybody to register as a party member online for \$5, and then vote in the leadership election. Hundreds of thousands did, and most of them voted for Corbyn.

This of course represented the radicalization of many young people in the face of grinding austerity, the other side of the polarization boosting the radical right. But

the right wing of the Labour Party, hugely dominant in the Parliamentary Labour Party, never accepted the Corbyn leadership and determined to do anything, anything at all, to get rid of it.

The Corbyn team set up an inner-party campaign arm, Momentum, which rapidly recruited more than 40,000 members. But they failed to do anything useful with it, restricting it mainly to mobilizing support in inner-party elections and getting out the vote in national elections.

Corbyn and his team failed to grasp the need to wage war on the Right in Parliament and attempt to “reselect” right-wing MPs at local level. While replacing all right wing MPs was an impossible task, this would have thrown the Right onto the defensive and made them less willing to attack the national leadership.

But more generally, Corbyn and his key deputies, like MP John McDonnell and communications chief Seumas Milne, based their strategy on a fatally flawed assumption — that a compromise could be reached with the party’s right wing, which would be forced into conceding support for the existing leadership and radical policies.

It could not, and would not. There was never any hope of a Corbyn government pushing through radical left policies against a right-dominated parliamentary party, in turn supported by entrenched right-wingers in the national bureaucracy and among many local party officers.

A first attempt at a new leadership election was easily beaten back in 2016; then right-wing MPs and union leaders pinned their hopes on Corbyn suffering a humiliating defeat in the snap election called by then premier Theresa May in 2017. To their chagrin, and that of the right-wing press, he didn’t.

Although the Tories remained the biggest parliamentary party, Labour made substantial gains and the Conservatives lost their overall majority, having to rely on a parliamentary stitch-ups with the Northern Ireland Democratic Unionist Party to get their measures through Parliament. The prospect of Corbyn being the next prime minister was widely discussed.

This was the major turning point. From then on a major political slander campaign was launched against Corbyn accusing him of anti-Semitism, a campaign coordinated by the Conservative Party, the Labour Right and Jewish Board of Deputies, with strong links to Israel.

What united all those slandering Corbyn was support for Israel and opposition to Palestinian rights, but also a simple desire to say anything that would undermine the Labour Left. In 2018 for example, right-wing papers accused Corbyn of having been a Russian agent in the 1980s, but in a libel

court Conservative vice “chairman” Ben Bradley admitted that it had been a simple invention of Conservative Party Central Office.

The Labour membership figures after 2015 had shot up to more than half a million, and they all had access to the Internet. There were, it turned out, some dozens of people in the party who had posted anti-Semitic sentiment on social media. But that was a long way from saying the party as a whole, the Left or Corbyn himself was anti-Semitic, or presiding over an anti-Semitic party.

The Labour leadership made a fatal error. Instead of robustly rejecting the slander, they decided to apologize — the worst thing you can do when accused of an egregious offense. This was a tactical move disastrous in itself, but irresponsible towards the whole Left, and the Palestinian solidarity movement, who could all be tarred with the anti-Semitism slander.

A second failure was Labour’s total incomprehension of the national question in Scotland, which has been boosted by a revolt against neoliberal austerity, seen as emanating from London. Because Labour strongly opposed independence or substantial greater autonomy, it has collapsed north of the border.

Twenty years ago Labour elected 71 MPs in Scotland. Now that figure is down to one. No Labour government has ever been elected without a strong contingent of Scottish MPs. Now the left-of-center ground is dominated by the SNP, including in Glasgow, one of the most radical cities in Britain. Corbyn failed to break through Labour’s image as a “unionist” party.

Third, the Labour leadership was incapable of dealing with the Brexit issue, as was a whole swathe of the Left to the left of Labour. Caught between older white working class communities that were strongly pro-Brexit, and many inner-city multi-ethnic communities with large numbers of young people that were strongly anti-Brexit, the Labour leadership dithered.

In the 2019 election campaign, Corbyn came up with the preposterous position that Labour would hold new negotiations with Europe, and then organize a new referendum, but refused to say in advance which way he would vote which would depend on “circumstances.”

In truth many older Corbynistas, in the party and the unions, were in favor of Brexit. Opposition to the EU — “bosses’ Europe” — had a long tradition in the British Left since the 1975 referendum which confirmed Britain’s membership.

Left Illusions

Indeed the EU is a capitalist alliance, but a left-wing exit (“Lexit”) was not available. Lexiteers, who included the Communist Par-

ty and the biggest far left organization the Socialist Workers Party, failed to grasp that Brexit was the key banner of the Tory right, would deliver Britain to further political and economic domination of the United States, and was justified above all by anti-immigrant racism, in particular immigration from countries like Poland and Romania, allowed to live and work in Britain by the terms of EU free movement.

Opposition to EU regulations from the Tory right focused on the most progressive aspects of the EU’s regulations on the environment and workers’ rights. Turning Brexit into a left-wing Brexit was impossible, and the Left’s relatively tiny voice was drowned out in the avalanche of anti-immigrant racism.

Reflecting changes in the ethnicity and occupational structure of the working class, all the major cities with the exception of Birmingham returned big anti-Brexit majorities in 2016. Former industrial towns in the North and Midlands, much less ethnically diverse and like the U.S. rust belt including many areas of economic and social desperation, voted heavily for Brexit and did many rural areas and middle class suburbs.

Brexit successfully split the working class and polarized many older white workers towards racism. Three days before the Brexit referendum, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon astutely characterized it as “an attempted putsch by the right wing of the Conservative Party.”

In any case Labour would have done better in the 2019 election with any definite view on Brexit; Corbyn’s dithering made his leadership look weak and incompetent, and contrasted with the Conservatives’ simple “Get Brexit done” slogan.

With the Left reeling from the 2019 election defeat, a much more moderate social democrat, Keir Starmer, was elected leader. His decision to engage in only “constructive” criticism of the government has let Johnson off the hook in his many failures.

The Left, much of which has remained in the Labour Party, faces a long period of political and organizational renewal and some of it is clearly shell-shocked. It will have to engage in campaigns to defend the NHS and other public services, as well as oppose anti-immigrant racism and new signs of fascist mobilization in anti-lockdown rallies organized by anti-vax and conspiracy theory groups.

And the Left will have to grasp the central strategic lesson of the last period: a moderate social democratic party cannot be seized by the Left and used as an instrument for radical social change without a bitter internal civil war. Such a fight for change can only be successful in a period of working-class upheaval and mass radicalism. ■

José Carlos Mariátegui: Pioneering Latin American Marxist

By Marc Becker

WRITING IN THE 1920s, the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui introduced a uniquely Latin American perspective on revolutionary socialist movements and theories. He famously noted, “we certainly do not want socialism in America to be a copy. It has to be a heroic creation.”¹ This political dynamism is what made him into an intellectual force with lasting relevance.

Mariátegui’s voluminous and perceptive writings as well as extensive political activism left an unmistakable and lasting impression on the political, social, and intellectual landscape of his country. Nevertheless, even as he has retained central importance for revolutionary socialism in Latin America, in the United States few people are aware of his contributions.

When Mariátegui died in 1930, his funeral turned into one of the largest processions of workers ever seen in the streets of the capital city of Lima, but in the United States his death was hardly noticed.

Waldo Frank, a prominent left-wing U.S. writer, the first chair of the League of American Writers and a close friend of Mariátegui, declared that Mariátegui’s death plunged “the intelligentsia of all of Hispano-America into sorrow; and nothing could be more eloquent of the cultural separation between the two halves of the new world than the fact that to most of us these words convey no meaning.”²

Despite this lack of attention in the United States and writing a century ago and on a different continent, Mariátegui’s thought remains relevant for the struggles we face today.

Early Life

José Carlos Mariátegui was born June 14, 1894 in the southern Peruvian coastal town of Moquegua and grew up on outskirts of Lima. He was raised by a poor and deeply religious *mestiza* (mixed race) single mother, María Amalia LaChira. She had separated from her husband, Francisco Javier Mariátegui, because, when she discovered that he was the grandson of a liberal independence hero, she wanted to protect her children from that liberal influence.

This did not prevent her son from becoming the leading Marxist thinker in Latin America, but it did seem to temper his attitudes toward religion.

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José Carlos Mariátegui, 1929.

Mariátegui was a poor and sickly child. He suffered from tuberculosis, and when he was eight years old he hurt his left leg, disabling him for life. Because of a lack of financial resources, he only managed to achieve an eighth-grade education. As a result, he was largely self-taught, which later led him to quip that he was an intellectual at odds with the intellectual world.

Rather than continue his education, Mariátegui was forced to find a job to help support his family. At the age of 15, he began to work as a copyboy for the newspaper *La Prensa*. He soon rose through the ranks in the newsroom as he began writing and editing as well.

These experiences introduced him to the field of journalism, which he subsequently used both for his financial livelihood and as a vehicle to express his political views. Almost all of his voluminous writings originated as relatively short pieces that he penned for popular magazines.

Drawing on this journalistic experience, Mariátegui launched two short-lived newspapers, *Nuestra Epoca* and *La Razón*, that assumed an explicitly pro-labor perspective. His vocal support for the revolutionary demands of the workers soon ran him afoul of the Peruvian dictator Augusto B. Leguía, who in October 1919 exiled him to Europe.

Mariátegui later calls this early period of his life his “stone age” and ignored the literary output that resulted from it. As a result, his early writings have received little attention.

Marxism and *Amauta*

It was during his three-and-a-half-year sojourn in Europe that Mariátegui developed into a Marxist intellectual. Through a series of experiences in France and Italy he saw the revolutionary potential of Marxism. This trajectory and orientation later led his critics to condemn him as a “Europeanizer,” a rather ironic criticism for someone who has come to be generally applauded for adopting Marxist theories to a Latin American reality.

Mariátegui later commented that in Europe he picked up some ideas and a woman, the Italian Anna Chiappe with whom he subsequently had four children — all boys.

In 1923, Mariátegui returned to Peru “a convinced and declared Marxist.” He presented a series of lectures on the “history of world crisis” at the González Prada Popular University in Lima that drew on his experiences and observations in Europe.

He was a popular lecturer, but because of his lack of an academic degree he could not get a regular teaching appointment at the main San Marcos University. Indeed, he was an intellectual at odds with the intellectual world.

In 1924, the police arrested Mariátegui because of his alleged subversive activity at the González Prada Popular University. A strong international reaction led to his release, perhaps reinforcing in his mind the importance of the international dimensions to a socialist struggle.

In 1924, Mariátegui lost his (good) right leg, and as a result spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. Even as his health failed (or perhaps because of that), both his intellectual output and efforts to organize a social revolution intensified.

Among Mariátegui's literary activity, the most significant was the founding in 1926 of the journal *Amauta* (which means "wise teacher" in Quechua) as a vanguard voice for an intellectual and spiritual revolution. The journal moved beyond politics to include philosophy, art, literature, and science.

Amauta was a relatively high-brow publication that gained international renown. Two years later, Mariátegui launched a short-lived biweekly newspaper appropriately titled *Labor* as an extension of *Amauta* to reach out to the working class.

In 1928, Mariátegui published his most famous book *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (*Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*). The essays provide a broad sociological overview of key issues facing Latin America: economics, racial problems, land tenure, education, religion, regionalism and centralism, and literature (the last and by far the longest essay in the collection). This book quickly became a fundamental work on Latin American Marxism and established him as a founding light of Latin American Marxist theory.

In terms of his political activity, in 1928 Mariátegui founded the Peruvian Socialist Party (PSP), served as its secretary-general and brought it into alignment with the Communist International as a vanguardist party designed to lead the proletariat to revolution. With that goal in mind, the party organized communist cells all over country. In 1929, the PSP launched the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP) as a Marxist-oriented trade union federation.

During this entire time, Mariátegui continued to run into political problems with the Leguía regime. Mariátegui attacked working conditions at the U.S.-owned Cerro de Pasco copper mine and Leguía feared that he was inciting workers.

In 1927, the police arrested and detained him for six days at a military hospital on charges of involvement in a communist plot. The police subsequently raided his house and shut down



The cover of *Amauta* #26, (9/29), Mariátegui's journal.

Labor.

Even as the labor and political organizations that Mariátegui helped found flourished, his health floundered. The person who came to be known as the Amauta died on April 16, 1930.

Mariátegui's Ideology

Mariátegui was an integrative thinker who incorporated a broad range of factors into his political analyses and materialist conception of the world. Broadly, his intellectual contributions can be broken down along five lines: national Marxism, anti-imperialism, agrarian issues, racial matters, and religion.

Mariátegui is often seen as the first truly creative and original Latin American Marxist thinker who analyzed concrete historical realities in order to develop solutions to problems of non-European societies. Rather than a rigid and deterministic Marxism, he embraced an open and voluntarist revolutionary praxis that excelled

in applying European doctrines to Latin American realities in new and creative ways.

From Mariátegui's perspective, European forms of Marxism became dysfunctional when mechanically applied to Latin American realities. In part, this disconnect was due to the lack of an advanced capitalist economy that characterized the 19th-century European context in which Marx wrote. From that perspective, a social revolution should have been impossible in Latin America.

In contrast, Mariátegui contended that, given Latin America's context, it was uniquely situated to move toward revolution.

Even though Mariátegui's ideas were rooted in local realities, he was also interested in international aspects of a socialist struggle. In reviewing Mariátegui's writings, his broad interest in topics such as the Mexican Revolution and Bolivian tin miners becomes readily apparent. He also maintained contacts with revolutionaries around the world including in China, France, and the United States.

An additional overwhelming factor that Latin America faced was U.S. imperialism. Mariátegui provided a critique of neo-colonial economic expansion of U.S. capital into Latin America and recognized the need for a unified socialist Latin America to halt that encroachment.

The Latin American revolution would be part of an international struggle. This was reflected, in part, by mobilizing international support for figures such as Augusto César Sandino's fight against the U.S. marines in Nicaragua.

An "orthodox Marxist" understanding is that a socialist revolution must be based in an urban working-class vanguard, something that was largely missing from an overwhelmingly rural Latin American landscape. Furthermore, reflecting a mid-19th century French experience, Marx had been famously

critical of peasants as an anachronistic and reactionary group who were only concerned with defending their traditional values and institutions and as such held back the flow of history (although Marx's later thinking on Indigenous and peasant societies was considerably more nuanced).

Well into the 20th century, Latin America was an overwhelmingly rural society. Rather than seeing this as a weakness, Mariátegui saw it as a strength. Rather than a conservative and reactionary class, he looked to the rural peasant and Indigenous masses to lead a socialist revolution. Furthermore, he looked for a "Lenin" to emerge out of these masses to lead them to victory.

One mechanical interpretation of Marxist theory presents history as moving through a series of stages: from primitive communalism to slavery to feudalism to capitalism before finally progressing on to socialism and eventually the final stage of a communist utopia. From this perspective, Latin America was trapped into a feudalistic mode of production and needed to experience fully developed industrial capitalism before it could even think about proceeding on to socialism.

Mariátegui argued that while these stages might be present in Europe, his native Peru was simultaneously experiencing all of these modes of production, and hence could move from them directly on to socialism without the hundreds of years of delay to develop capitalism.

Racism and Indigenous Struggles

Related to Mariátegui's belief in the potential for an agrarian revolution was his attention to racial issues. He championed the value of Indigenous societies as he sought to incorporate their heritage and population into the national culture. This included extolling the virtues of the ancient Inka civilization, emphasizing the socialist potential within their collectivist attributes, and embracing their gains and accomplishments.

As important or even more so than reclaiming a place for Indigenous peoples and the Inka empire in Peru's national history and culture was advocating for a change in landholding patterns. Mariátegui wrote in his essay, "The Problem of the Indian," that "Socialism has taught us how to present the problem of the Indian in new terms. We have ceased to consider it abstractly as an ethnic or moral problem and we now recognize it concretely as a social, economic, and political problem."³

From Mariátegui's perspective, a key issue that Peru faced was that Indigenous peoples and peasants, who comprised four-fifths of the country's population, encompassed a large, impoverished and marginalized sector of society. For Peru to proceed forward, their situation needed to be addressed.

Their lot, according to Mariátegui, could not be improved or solved with humanitarian campaigns, administrative policies, legal reforms, moral appeals to conscious, religious conversions, or through education.

The situation Indigenous peoples faced was not one of powerless victims who needed outsiders to intervene on their behalf, of missionaries and others looking for a way to redeem a backwards race. Nor could people be educated out of their marginalized status, because those educational systems served the interests of the dominant culture.

Nor was the solution an ethnic one of inferior races that could be solved with an interbreeding with a European population. Mariátegui famously wrote, "To expect that the

Indian will be emancipated through a steady crossing of the aboriginal race with white immigrants is an anti-sociological naiveté that could only occur to the primitive mentality of an importer of merino sheep."⁴

Mariátegui instead made the materialistic claim that an understanding of the rural population's exploited and oppressed status must be rooted in the land tenure system. The solution, however, could not be through individual, private ownership of land. Such a liberal strategy would not improve the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Rather, he advocated the need for fundamental economic change that would incorporate a land reform that was based on the ancient communal values of the Inka empire to alleviate land tenure problems and put power in hands of the people. It must be a local development that emerged out of local conditions, not a foreign import.

Mariátegui advocated what he saw as the highly developed and harmonious communistic system of the Inkas as a model for "Indo-American socialism" that grew out of Peruvian culture and language. In this way, Latin America could end its economic dependence on external capital.

Complexities of Religion

A final distinctive characteristic of Mariátegui's Marxist approach was that he never saw the need to distance himself from his mother's religious beliefs. He wrote, "The revolutionary critic no longer disputes with religion and the church the services that they have rendered to humanity or their place in history."⁵

Some scholars have interpreted this as an act of respect for his devoutly Catholic mother. Others have pointed to "a personal, religious-like code of ethics that enabled him to endure physical pain and psychological anguish."⁶

Mariátegui saw religion as an inherent component of human society. He did not consider a rejection of religion as necessary to engaging in the social struggle. Instead, he acknowledged the positive contributions that religion could make to a social revolution.

He did criticize priests who used religion to oppress Indigenous peoples, but for the most part considered anti-clericalism to be "a liberal bourgeois pastime" that ignored more fundamental and important issues.⁷ He criticized liberals for their attempts to uproot religion without offering something in its place.

Michael Löwy challenges the conventional reading of the phrase "religion is the opium of the people," as both not at all specifically Marxist (it had earlier roots in Hegel and others), as well as a more qualified and less one-sided statement than the soundbite usually indicates.⁸

Marx was critical of religion, but also recognized the dual character of the phenomenon. He wrote, "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people."⁹ Marx understood it as the alienation of the human essence, not a clerical conspiracy.

Mariátegui argued instead for a new and broader definition of religion. He termed this the "revolutionary myth" that would occupy people's "conscience just as fully as the old religious myths."¹⁰ He wrote, "The soul of the Indian is not raised

by the white man's civilization or alphabet but by the myth, the idea, of the Socialist revolution."¹¹

Mariátegui's "revolutionary myth" conception is related to his ideas of a subjective and voluntarist Marxism. He understood that objective economic conditions of an impoverished and exploited proletariat or peasantry was not enough to create class consciousness. For that reason, he emphasized the need for Marxist education and political organization to heighten class and racial awareness and to move the masses to action.

Myths are not passive, but lead to action. As the Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro famously observed, "the duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution. . . it is not for revolutionaries to sit in the doorways of their houses waiting for the corpse of imperialism to pass by."¹² Mariátegui was an intellectual, but also a political activist who worked hard to achieve the realization of his ideals.



Below: Mariátegui with the four sons he had with his wife, Anna Chiappe. Above: With friends in the Matamula forest outside Lima, 1929. <http://archivo.mariategui.org/>



Lessons for Our Realities

Although Mariátegui was active a century ago, he leaves us with many ideas and lessons that are still relevant. His ideas of a national Marxism underscore the necessity of adapting ideas and theories to local realities.

As the recent experiences of pink-tide governments in Latin America demonstrate, it is of utmost importance to break dependence on foreign capital in order to move toward socialism. A country's production must be oriented toward internal development rather than benefiting external imperial powers, even as that goal has become only more difficult to realize.

International solidarity remains as important as ever before. The issues that Mariátegui faced in the early 20th century, much as those that we face today, transcend narrow political borders. We need an international movement to move us closer to the promises of a socialist revolution.

Over the last century, Latin America has experienced a dramatic shift from a primarily rural society to one that is overwhelmingly urban. As a result, the specific concepts of the social base for a revolution and the importance of agrarian issues have changed. What remains, however, is Mariátegui's insistence on an open and creative analysis of contemporary realities.

Racial issues are as present if not even more so than they

were a century ago, although the ways they are articulated and defined continually change.

For a period in the 1980s, Mariátegui's ideas of a revolutionary myth had a particular resonance as ideas of Liberation Theology influenced Central American revolutionary movements. How best to engage people with revolutionary socialist ideas continues to be an open debate, particularly in terms of the relative importance of emotion and ideology in motivating people to action.

Among all these issues, Mariátegui still continues to provide us with a shining example of the intelligent and creative potential of rethinking these ideas that has emerged out of Latin America. We need to rethink theory and ideas continually. Socialist theories are only viable when they are creative and dynamic. Avoid dogmatism; question everything. ■

Notes

1. José Carlos Mariátegui, "Aniversario y balance," *Amauta* 3, no. 17 (September 1928): 3. Much has been written about Mariátegui, particularly in his native Peru. Less is available in English. The best treatments of his thought in English are Harry E. Vanden, *National Marxism in Latin America: José Carlos Mariátegui's Thought and Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986) and Jesús Chavarría, *José Carlos Mariátegui and the Rise of Modern Peru, 1890-1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979). For his writings in English, see José Carlos Mariátegui, *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, edited and translated by Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), as well as his most famous book José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971). A recent though problematic biography in English (see my review Marc Becker, "The Life of José Carlos Mariátegui," *Monthly Review* 71, no. 9 [February 2020]: 57-63) is Mike Gonzalez, *In the Red Corner: The Marxism of José Carlos Mariátegui* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2019).
2. Waldo Frank, "A Great American," *The Nation*, June 18, 1930, 704.
3. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 29.
4. *Ibid.*, 34.
5. *Ibid.*, 124.
6. John M. Baines, *Revolution in Peru: Mariátegui and the Myth* (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1972), 112-13.
7. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 151.
8. Michael Löwy, "Friedrich Engels on Religion and Class Struggle," *Science & Society* 62, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 79-87.
9. Karl Marx, "The Introduction to Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, edited by Lewis Samuel Feuer (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 304.
10. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 152.
11. *Ibid.*, 28-29.
12. Fidel Castro, "The Duty of a Revolutionary is to Make the Revolution," *Fidel Castro Speaks*, edited by Martin Kenner and James Petras (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1969), 115.

The Past that Must Not Pass:

On Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism

By Alan Wald

I. The Prisoner in the Dock

THE JEWISH REVOLUTIONARY Internationalist commitment to the indivisibility of justice was on full display in palpable if muted form on April 26, 1964. That day, in Pretoria, South Africa, a tall, handsome man stood boldly in the prisoner's dock of the Supreme Court.

Well built, and photogenic with a majestic bearing and nicely groomed hair parted in the middle, this regal-looking fellow was also identifiable as a revolutionary anti-apartheid activist. Accused of the crime of sabotage against the state on the grounds of his preparation of explosives, he was almost certain to receive a guilty verdict and the expected penalty would be death.

Even so, in defiant words that the *London Observer* reported under the headline, "Why I am Prepared to Die,"¹ the dignified militant, whose frequent use of disguises provoked the *Guardian* to label him "The black pimpernel of South Africa,"² commenced to deliver what the *Observer* described as "the historic speech which could be his last."³

Sitting behind this 44-year-old "Black Pimpernel" who was, of course, none other than Nelson Mandela (1918-2013), and facing the same charges and the same fate, sat nine comrades and codefendants. All had agreed that Mandela should deliver a four-hour speech explaining their cause and defending the use of violence. His oration ended as follows:

"During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

While speaking these haunting words, Mandela stared directly into the eyes of the white judge.

This passage from Mandela is critical to the reconstruction that the following essay will offer of several select aspects of the history of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism. It is composed in the hope of persuading others to think through the germaneness of this tradition for the present moment of Black Lives Matter, BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions for Palestinian rights against the State of Israel), and other social movements demanding interracial and interethnic solidarity.

II. The Jewish Presence

A year before Mandela's speech, in 1963, a group of

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anti-apartheid activists was arrested in Rivonia, a suburb of Johannesburg, and accused of launching the guerrilla warfare that would be the basis of the trial in Pretoria.

Five or six of the 13 originally apprehended were Jews. However, two of the Jews quickly managed a dare-devil escape from prison and South Africa disguised as priests — Arthur Goldreich (1929-2011), the famous abstract expressionist painter (probably the ringleader), and Harold Wolpe (1926-96), the sociologist and political economist. Both would die in exile — in Israel and England.

Among the Jews indicted in the ensuing trial were Denis Theodor Goldberg (1933-2020), the son of Lithuanian Jews, who joined the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1957; Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein (1920-2002), an orphan child of European Jews who was a SACP member and architect; James Kantor (1927-74), a Jewish lawyer arrested only because Wolpe was his brother-in-law; and Bob Hepple (1934-2015), a student activist of English descent on his father's side and Dutch and Jewish on his mother's.⁴

Those ultimately convicted were sentenced to life imprisonment, Mandela himself at hard labor in a lime quarry on Robben Island.

At that time in 1964, Jews in South Africa had full political rights and comprised possibly 1.4% of the white population; whites were perhaps 4.75% of the total inhabitants. Accordingly, Jewish representation among the "saboteurs," risking their freedom and lives for Black liberation, was noticeably disproportionate.

Even more Jews were coupled with this "Rivonia Trial" in other essential capacities: Bram (Abram) Fischer (1908-75), from an elite Jewish Afrikaner family, was the lead attorney, and immediately after the trial was arrested for "supporting Communism." Fischer was sentenced to life imprisonment and only released after 11 years due to a terminal cancer that killed him two weeks later.

Then there was the novelist Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014), daughter of immigrant Jews from Lithuania and England, who assisted Mandela in writing his memorable speech. In 1979, Gordimer, who voted Communist and supported the armed struggle, published the novel *Burger's Daughter*, with the protagonist Lionel Burger modeled on the Communist Party member Fischer. Predictably, her book was straightaway banned although it proved noteworthy in Gordimer's winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991.⁵

Mandela was also supported throughout the ordeal by two of his closest friends from school days in the 1940s, a married couple: the SACP leaders Ruth First (1925-82) and Joe Slovo (born Yossel Mashel Slovo, 1926-95), of Latvian and Lithuanian Jewish families.

Slovo became commander of “The Spear of the Nation,” the armed wing (founded by Mandela) of the African National Congress; First was assassinated in 1982 by the South African police while she was teaching in exile in Mozambique, apparently because they couldn’t get to Slovo himself.⁶

The solidarity of this couple with the African Liberation Struggle has stood as a model for generations. The November 2013 issue of *Tablet* magazine reprinted a well-known and telling story about Slovo:

“After seeing a photo of Black activist Khosian X [Benny Alexander] and Slovo together, a young friend of Khosian X’s son asked, ‘Why is your father shaking hands with a white man?’ Khosian X’s son answered: ‘That’s no white man. That’s Joe Slovo.’”⁷

Mandela surely had Slovo and First in mind, among others, when he wrote in his 1994 autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*: “I have found Jews to be more broad-minded than most whites on issues of race and politics, perhaps because they themselves have historically been victims of prejudice.”⁸

These names hardly exhaust the list of Jews who acted as heroic comrades in the anti-apartheid struggle, including several who were politically at odds with the SACP, which was considered controversial in its theories and practices due to its close alignment with the Soviet Union. One example of the latter is Baruch Hirson (1921-1999), founder of the critical Marxist journal *Searchlight South Africa* in 1988, who was jailed for nine years for carrying out sabotage in connection with the pro-Trotskyist African Resistance Movement (ARM).

Born near Johannesburg to Russian Jewish émigrés, Hirson evolved from the radical Zionist Hashomer Hatzair to Marxism. His daring activities while held in Pretoria Central Prison included assistance in the famous escape of several radical inmates recently dramatized in the thriller film *Escape from Pretoria* (2020). A postage stamp in Hirson’s honor was issued by Sierra Leone.

Hirson was eventually a collaborator of Hillel Ticktin (b. 1937), who also fled South Africa to avoid political persecution. In 1973 Ticktin founded the journal *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, and later became an advisory editor of *Against the Current*.⁹

III. The War of Narratives

The facts reported above are not in dispute, yet few pieces of information produce more cognitive dissonance than the war of different narratives about the “moral universe” of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists. A short list of its defining constituents would include the Jews arrested at Rivonia; their predecessors in the anti-Fascist struggles of the 1930s and 1940s; and the originators of the 20th century Marxist tradition such as Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky.

Moving forward in time, we have those Jewish anti-racist and anti-colonialist activists who emerged in the 1960s New Left, as well as young people today. While these are two different generations rebelling in distinct circumstances, the common denominator is that they found it in their own self-interest to act in concert with anti-racist and anti-colonial movements, including those for Palestinian human rights and self-determination.

Politically, all in this tradition share with Marxism an understanding of capitalism as a world system that requires that discrete challenges against exploitation locally must of necessity work in harmony internationally. Culturally, this tradition



Nelson Mandela (1903-2013) and Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014).

is animated by a feeling of an elective affinity with a heritage animated by a global, supra-national identity.

Whatever the nature of their Jewish backgrounds, and their differing emotions about their experiences, all have dreamed and taken action on behalf of a socialism without borders.

Still, even as the Rivonia Trial, Spain, and other episodes are shared moments of the political past that countless historians have addressed, the experiences and individuals customarily function as Rorschach Tests as soon as it comes to interpretation and assessment.

To be brief, the degree of rigidity or complexity with which one thinks about communism, Jewish Identity, distinctions between oppressed and oppressor nationalities, assimilation, and Zionism — what one includes and what one ignores — plays a critical role in one’s stance toward this Jewish Revolutionary Internationalist tradition.

After World War II, variants of just one viewpoint came to carry the day in the West: the doctrine that communism produces Stalinism which is totalitarianism; and that an ethnically-privileged Israeli national state in at least half of historic Palestine is the legitimate, necessary, and historically logical manifestation of Jewish national self-determination.

This was consolidated as an early Cold War optic that has lived on and on. Although recent outrageous activities of the Israeli state are now undermining the latter belief, it is a perspective that continues to prevail in the U.S. mainstream press as well as academe. It not only charts the dominant political terrain but establishes much of what is judged to be permissible to be debated.

If one is firmly locked into such an outlook, there may not be a lot to discuss even when unearthing new research. Moreover, the “naturalization” of the status quo can make a progression look predictable in hindsight. To many, the military victories and expansion of a Jewish ethno-state appear to be an inexorable evolution rather than the results of an asymmetrical conflict between competing forces and visions. One might even conclude that there never was and still isn’t a future for a Revolutionary Internationalist past that failed to produce viable alternatives to a USSR without despotism, or a homeland for Jews without Zionism.

From this perspective, the Marxist ships that sailed in 1917, 1936 and 1968 must have been iceberg-seeking ones from the get-go, and the world of the Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists was and is at best marginal, most likely lost.

There are also willful efforts to promote historical amne-

sia that impinge on this legacy. Among the most egregious was the one that provoked me to formulate the title of this essay, “The Past That Must Not Pass.” On June 6, 1986 in the prestigious German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the German historian and philosopher Ernest Nolte (1923-2016) published an alarming short piece called “The Past That Will Not Pass Away.”

Nolte’s notorious argument was that the current generation of Germans, then 40 years after the end of the Second World War, should be allowed to embrace Germany’s national past without a “permanent sense of guilt.” All the notice bestowed on the Final Solution simply “diverts our attention from important facts about the National Socialist period... Earlier histories should be subject to revision.”¹⁰

It is indeed true that a fixation on certain events can become a distorting prism that impoverishes our understanding of the full scope and complexity of the past, resulting in a mutilated historical hermeneutic. Nonetheless, for us, in a 21st century of rising nationalisms, right-wing terrorism, mass incarceration, desperate refugees rejected by advanced economic states, a growing technological alt-right foscosphere and Trump, the Nazi record is not one of those events to be scaled down.

Never would I detract from German fascism’s malign focus on the Jewish people; any form of Holocaust trivialization is unacceptable. However, the reason for this stress is not to enshrine Jewish exclusivity as the unmatched target of an eternal hatred in some sort of Olympics competition of victimhood; it is because the Final Solution crystalizes, summarizes, and draws our attention to the racist barbarism of a modernity that we continue to see before our eyes.

The industrial extermination of the Jews — after taking away their citizenship rights on the grounds that they were alien; dispossessing them; and relocating them to barbed wire camps — was a pure distillation of the culture of imperialism, biological racism, European/white chauvinism, and colonialism.

Nazism was not merely a throwback to medieval or pre-Enlightenment mystical obscurantism. It was a brutality and exploitation made possible by developed industrial society and its abuse of technology, from the mass media to weapons of terror.¹¹ Our grasp of this aspect of modernity, and the forms of internationalist resistance carried out by Jews and other targets, cannot and must not pass because they remain both palpable threats and exemplars of defiance.

Yet this consideration of the past in the present cannot occur as the tracing of a straight line but only as a shadowing of the contours of a slow spiral; Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism is not explained by abstract formulae and pre-ordained verdicts, but apprehended as lived experience, a textured view not exempt from opacities. It is a past that must not pass because it once carved deep and distinctive tracks across the political and cultural landscape of the struggle for socialism.

IV. Internationalism and National Oppression

When I use the phrase “Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists,” I am not referring to a phenomenon that was crystal clear and consistent, or an identity devoid of those

paradoxes that are always intrinsic to specific situations. I mean, simply, women and men who were born, educated, and lived lives as Jews in countless ways, even if their degree of awareness about the molding power of this personal story varied.

Among the most vexing elements of this history is that the dispossessed Arabs of Palestine after 1948 were for the most part the victims of arriving Jews who were themselves indisputably victims of immeasurable violence; yet the Zionist rulers of Israel today are of a very different generation and have become straight-out victimizers.¹²

Certainly, there is no agreement that Jews can be defined as Jews simply by accessing ancestors’ DNA or the articulation of certain convictions about ancient theological tenets. There was and remains no consensus as to whether being Jewish is mainly a religious, cultural, ethnic or national identity.

What is pertinent to our own inquiry is that, apprehending that they were Jewish in some sense (for me, Jewishness is a treasured cultural legacy), individuals then made a choice in political outlook and behavior that is known as Revolutionary Internationalism.

The politics of this stance amount to the basic creed underlying Nelson Mandela’s 1964 Rivonia speech. In fact, if one alters a few of his words, they could have been uttered, in unison, by his Jewish comrades Goldreich, Wolpe, Gordimer, Fischer, First and Slovo:

“During our lifetimes we have dedicated ourselves to this struggle of oppressed people. Born Jews, we have united with others to fight against Aryan, Christian, or any other racial or religious domination, and we will fight even against Jewish domination. We have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which we hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which we are prepared to die.”

In sum, without repudiating or denying one’s birthright connections to what was historically an oppressed or pariah group, one even so remains pledged to fight for a shared utopia. One’s commitment, then, is not to one’s ethnicity alone but, if appropriate, for communal homelands, ensuring rights and dignity for all residents.

Without a doubt, such a politics is something of an imagined answer to knotty and vexing problems, which are at all times to be realized imperfectly. Moreover, there will always be stages and stepping-stones, transitional phases, en route to the ultimate end, especially in a multifaceted situation like Israel/Palestine where a one-time oppressed group has come to assume a different role as the comparatively privileged population in what can best be understood within the framework of a type of settler colonial state that practices forms of apartheid.

Nonetheless, even as one debates out the complexities of what equalitarian co-existence looks like and the most effective strategies to achieve this, one is striding forward, joining a new world of class-conscious social rebellion against the old.

V. The Illusion of Security

The Revolutionary Internationalist sees one’s Jewish emancipation bound up with the emancipation of others, much as Mandela clarified his own commitment in the Rivonia trial. Long-term safety is found not in retreat into a Fort Apache but in stronger, more just communities, where everyone has

full citizenship without exceptions.

Ending anti-Semitism is not a competing cause but part of the same struggle as ending Islamophobia, and racism against people of color in the United States, as well as supporting state structures that guarantee full Palestinian rights in Israel/Palestine. A world divided among hardened national identities, fixed national states, and exclusive homelands is likely to offer only an illusion of security in a globalized world.

If humanity continues laboring to assist the long arc of the moral universe in bending toward justice, citadel states of the apartheid type that exists in Israel are putting their populations in peril.

Of course, I am not an expert on Israel and can't predict whether, in the immediate next period, we face a future of barbaric reaction or a resurgence of political enlightenment. Moreover, it is true that as I write, several reactionary Sunni regimes in the Middle East appear to be forsaking the Palestinians to make common cause with Israel against their mutual Shiite enemy of Iran.

Even so, as a historic phenomenon, retrograde apartheid societies such as Israel are likely headed toward the dustbin of history in the long run.¹³ That's because, while Israel may be a dominant force militarily at present, its behavior since 1967 (which was rooted in 1948) is now revealing to the world a new and disturbing image: The defining of Israel as "a Jewish state," in the specific context of Palestine, is similar to defining the USA as "a white man's country."

This understanding is taking hold and explains why so many pro-Israel scholarly rationalizers are arriving on the scene like the U.S. cavalry with guns blazing. These academic and journalistic hit squads seem capable of performing endless mental contortions to justify the defense of an ethno-supremacist state against the demand for a pluralistic democracy appropriate to this new millennium.

Nevertheless, this projection of high-mindedness while kicking people in the teeth is not going to work forever. Whatever ideals may have been present at the beginning, the logic of Zionism in the post-World War II world has become that of an ethno-nationalism favoring one group over another in a manner that stinks of white supremacy.

There is an unstoppable growing recognition among even liberal Zionists such as Peter Beinart that the conjoining of Jewish privilege with democracy is simply a political oxymoron.¹⁴ If cosmopolitanism and human rights are to thrive, the world will increasingly unite against the Israeli state form unless it changes.

The most frightening scenario is an even greater increase of Israeli dependence on becoming still more of a watchdog for U.S. imperialism. Inasmuch as all the leading political parties in Israel share a deep commitment to U.S. dominance in the Middle East, the stage will then be set for the ultimate act of anti-Semitism, which is when the Jewish people are used as pawns in power plays by elites.¹⁵

Viewing the future not as nationalism but internationalism was at root in the defense of the Spanish Republic in 1936, in which 1000 Jewish American members of the Lincoln Brigade were combatants;¹⁶ the Voter Registration Drive in Mississippi called Freedom Summer in 1964, when two Jewish-Americans from Leftist families were martyred along with their African-American comrade, James Chaney;

or even in the obviously doomed but inspirational effort that resulted in the death of 13,000 Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.

This last was a rebellion planned and prepared by young Jewish radicals, including veterans of Spain, whose banner in the Z.O.B. (Jewish Fighting Organization) was anti-racist internationalism.

Such constructions of solidarities across geographic and ethnic borders — an "imagined

community" reaching beyond practicality into the realm of the symbolically emboldening — promotes a "utopia" in the sense used by German sociologist Karl Mannheim: yanking social institutions, including states, out of the present framework and restructuring them around new rules and norms.

Indispensable to this vision is a search for global solutions to unending inequities of capitalist modernity that were once called "The Negro Problem," after the 1903 collection of writings to which W. E. B. Du Bois contributed, and "The Jewish Question," after the theologian Bruno Bauer's 1843 book. (Bauer's essay, of course, was a highly controversial interpretation that Karl Marx answered in 1843 with his equally controversial "On the Jewish Question.")¹⁷

That's why the moral universe of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists over many decades lies in a worldview briefly summed up by Mandela's Rivonia speech. It also lies in a method that starts with a political evaluation constructed around a primary division of exploited and exploiters — not between Jew and Gentile, or the European West and non-European East or South, or, later, the Cold War binary of the "Iron Curtain" versus the "Free World."

Rather, diverse liberation movements are to be enfolded into a unified world social revolution based on what humanity holds in common. Exploited classes are viewed as the strategic center of insurrection against societies ruled by economic and racial privilege; the reason is that their experiences of inequality and subjugation are conjoined with the collective strength to transform social arrangements.

VI. Easy Answers to Hard Questions

Nevertheless, even among the Left there are multiple, competing accounts of the Jewish Revolutionary Internationalist tradition, some rooted in varieties of socialism, communism and anarchism, as well as the fact that all Jewish experience is not homogenous. The versions are confounded by shifting grounds for evaluation due to the disastrous historical regression of Stalinism and the 1948 founding of a Jewish nation-



The moral universe of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism is of combatants in the Spanish Civil War.



s exemplified by the Botwin Brigade, an all-Jewish contingent

al state with the ensuing Palestinian Nakba (disaster). Such complications have surely shattered any basis for believing that there is only one version of how it was.

Hostile academic books of the last decade such as Robert Wistrich's *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel* (2011) and Stephen Norwood's *Anti-Semitism and the American Far Left* (2013) are among the many writings claiming that the Jewish Rev-

olutionary Internationalist tradition is in point of fact one of illusions nested within more illusions.

We are talking here of a disputation of this legacy that is advanced not only by conservatives, but also by assorted liberals. Regrettably, by the time these guys are done characterizing those of us on the far Left, one can barely recognize oneself.

This genre of writings variously holds that the tradition of the far Left was corrupt from the outset, or became corrupted. They maintain that Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists were really mere "assimilationists," and that their universalism was a cover for Jewish self-hatred. They further argue that the exhortation for "class struggle" was just one more example of a "will to power," and that demands to give "power to the people" were nothing less than a means to obtain power for themselves.

Since most Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists identified with Communism, they were allegedly exploiting Jewish issues as a method of recruitment, and so would episodically affirm identification as Jews only to mask their authentic intent. Moreover, when Jews served in Spain, in the anti-fascist Resistance, allied with the African National Congress, and so on, it was primarily because, as soldiers of Stalin, they were ordered to do so — an act of duty to one's party and ideology, not to the Jewish, Spanish or Black African people.

In this view, some Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists may have been well-meaning but were duped; others seduced; and still others warped by ambition or resentment. In sum, the authors are adamant that Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists of the far Left provide no moral compass for today, and probably never did. To claim otherwise is allegedly to promote nostalgia for a tradition that contained the seeds of its own destruction and has now led to a full-blown Left anti-Semitism.

The statement on Wistrich's book jacket seeks to transport the kind of polarized politics we associate with Trump

culture to this particular topic:

"From Ambivalence to Betrayal ...reveals a striking continuity in negative stereotypes of Jews, contempt for Judaism, and negation of Jewish national self-determination from the days of Karl Marx to the current left-wing intellectual assault on Israel."¹⁸

Stephen Norwood's book also rams home a similar self-promotional message in an operative overstatement:

"Norwood discusses the far left's use of long-standing theological and economic stereotypes that the far right has also embraced. This study analyzes the far left's antipathy to Jewish culture, as well as its occasional efforts to promote it. He considers how early Marxist and Bolshevik paradigms continued to shape American far left views of Jewish identity, Israel, and anti-Semitism."¹⁹

The final paragraph of Norwood's book, written with all the subtlety of a club-wielding thug, adds an even more sinister accusation: "Decades after its demise, the far left's outlook on Jews and Zionism has entered the mainstream... American colleges and universities are ensuring the transmission of anti-Semitism to the next generation."²⁰

VII. Curiosity and Candor

Mostly I find the above to be a myth that has staying power because it offers easy answers to very hard questions. Unquestionably, such books and essays contain disturbing facts interwoven with false interpretations; one should not turn a blind eye to unflattering episodes in Left history, even as one cannot let them be enshrined in collective memory as a series of caricatures.

Revolutionary Internationalists need both curiosity and candor. For instance, one is certainly able to cite crudely simplistic remarks by Luxemburg and the young Trotsky dismissing or trivializing a positive Jewish identity.

More troubling to many is the inaccurate analysis by Karl Marx in his pre-Marxist 1843 essay "On the Jewish Question" — importantly *defending* full rights for Jews (against Bruno Bauer's essay), but identifying Judaism with "the huckstering spirit" of capitalism — and nasty offhand anti-Jewish insults, all too characteristic of the time, that appear in private correspondence. (For a discussion of this episode, see Hal Draper's extended note, "Marx and the Economic-Jew Stereotype" referenced in endnote 17.)

Then there is the indefensible record of the Soviet Communist movement on so many questions, including the fact that Communists did not support anti-fascist resistance from 1939 to 1941 — from the advent of the appalling Pact with Hitler to the surprise attack on the USSR itself.

Finally, there were shrill, simplistic, statements made in the 1960s by various New Leftists — some that were hyper-revolutionary at best and oblivious to the toxicity of using language and drawings that associate Jews and money. It is obligatory to speak the truth, and anger is sometimes justified; but serious revolutionaries try to figure out a strategy that can reach new people beyond one's base and not merely demonstrate one's self-righteous rage.

Does anyone really think that calling all liberal Zionists racists or Nazis is the way to win them over to the Palestinian rights movement? And why use political formulae that can easily be twisted to suggest the advocacy of violence by a foreign power against civilians (as in calling for the "destruction of Israel") when one's goal is the revolutionary transformation of a state form by implementing genuine democracy?

At the same time, one must be vigilant about accepting depictions and construals of the record of the far Left when a hostile author's passions are inflamed, even if the publisher is the prestigious Cambridge University Press. Here is how Norwood summarizes his material on Trotsky and anti-Semitism:

*"Even after the horrifying wave of pogroms that began at Kishinev in April 1903, Trotsky saw no reason for socialists to concentrate on eradicating anti-Semitism or protecting Jewish communities, unlike the Zionist and Bundist groups, which organized armed self-defense forces."*²¹

In contrast, here is what Joshua Rubenstein (far more qualified as a specialist in the Soviet Union than Norwood, whose field is U.S. history) says in *Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionary Life* (2011) on the same subject:

*"Led by Trotsky, the [1905 Petrograd Soviet] also recognized the need to defend Jews from pogroms....In October the Soviet learned of plans to stage a pogrom in the capital itself...[Under his leadership the Soviet] organized armed units to defend Jews living in Saint Petersburg....as many as twelve thousand men, armed with revolvers, or with wooden or metal clubs, were mobilized to fight the Black Hundreds....[Trotsky's] trial began on September 19, 1906....he detested pogroms...and never abided physical attacks on Jews, and often intervened to denounce such violence and organize a defense....No non-Jewish revolutionary had ever confronted tsarist officials with such defiant words about their violent anti-Semitic animosity."*²²

Books such as Norwood's are of a genre that arranges history to conform to the author's prejudices; primary and secondary sources require fact checking, and Norwood himself may deserve a "Pants on Fire!" rating.

VIII. They Came From Yiddishland

When disquieting episodes emerge, they are not to be ignored or excused but understood. The history we have inherited of the Jewish Revolutionary Internationalist presence is often fragmentary, occasionally becoming visible as uncertain and questioning phantoms of a yesteryear.

Persistently, events from the past — the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, the German Spartacist Revolt, the International Brigades, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Rudolf Slánský Trial, the execution of the Rosenbergs, the murder of Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney — step through the scrim of history. These memories are linked — but in what way? Some have features that certainly trouble the political landscape — such as accusations of espionage and political treachery still under dispute.

Then again, enigmas of the past are likely to torment the minds of all those who look back on the multifaceted histories of fascism, nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, Stalinism, imperialism and colonialism without succumbing to the temptation to twist the world around one occlusive theory or another.

For the dogmatic Left, such theories can be grand narratives of history, ones that teleologically promise social redemption at some future date if one stays loyal to one faction or another's "revolutionary program" or putative "socialist fatherland." Toward the Right, we find adherence to a certainty of belief in eternal ethnic hatreds, "clashes of civilizations," and undying religious animosities that often mask exploitative class structures and legacies of colonialism that the ideologue prefers to keep hidden.

In searching out the roots of 19th century Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism, it's natural to think about starting an inquiry with a quest for political documents, the dead past found in historical records. Yet documents easily give rise to cherry-picked and decontextualized quotes that are of dubious service in constructing an accurate narrative from highly charged historical materials.

It is the human activity that is the main interest of social history, not only what people wrote but what they thought and dreamed. The tradition we are mapping arises from individuals who are well known. Not all, but many of them typically came from 19th century Yiddishland — the Jewish world of mostly Eastern Europe, where there was a concentration of about eleven million people and the common language was Yiddish.²³

We are not talking of a territory in the strict meaning of borders, but of social and cultural space found mainly in parts of Russia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine. As industrialization and urbanization was pulling Jews out of shtetls and into towns and cities in this region, traditional communities were broken up.

Jewish workers (mostly in handicrafts) entered factories where they found socialism, communism and anarchism in the air, and discovered a common project in the organization of unions. Thus they were drawn to the Bund (the Jewish General Workers Union), Poale Zion (Workers of Zion), the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, and more.

What is vital to understand is that many of these political trends were pulled to the far Left before and after the October 1917 Russian Revolution; they would unite, split, reunite, and leaders and rank-and-file members would pass back and forth among them.

This means that official Soviet Communism is far from the full story. Communism may have been an essential ingredient, but Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism was always something more — and sometimes at odds with official Communism.

A range of denizens of Yiddishland, as well as Jews in Central and Western Europe, and the United States and the Middle East, felt a great need and desire to identify with the Russian Revolution broadly, as a historical phenomenon. The event had an electrifying — dare I say near-religious? — import as a beacon of justice signaling that hierarchies were to be leveled on behalf of a unified, liberated humanity.

Then again, from the outset many Marxist activists and intellectuals found themselves disagreeing at times with the policies and leaders of the reigning Bolshevik Party. Notwithstanding, such distinctions did not prevent a pro-Revolution stance sweeping the Left.

During the Soviet Civil War (1918-22), for Jewish radicals and beyond, broad sentiment was very much on the side of the Red Army, commanded by a Jew — Leon Trotsky. The counter-revolutionaries, the Whites, were seen as openly anti-Semitic. A considerable portion of the Jewish intelligentsia was recruited to the Soviet state apparatus at this time.

Moreover, the early Bolshevik stand against anti-Semitism was unimpeachable. Further, as the post-revolutionary attitude toward Jewish culture — especially in Yiddish education and the arts — was fully supportive, even as independent Jewish political organization was opposed.

For Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists, there was a heartfelt intellectual wrestling over what it meant to be a nationality without a nation — and one without land. This debate would remain part of the tradition.

Should one find land — where and how? Zionism made no sense to most Jewish revolutionaries because it meant leaving Europe, where one's culture was based, and where one had every right to be.

They also saw the proposed new homeland in Palestine as one that was usurping an already-occupied territory by collaborating with a horrific colonial power (the British Empire). Besides, Soviet policy was that of trying to create a truly multinational state by promoting cultures of many minorities.

In Yiddish, there were numerous publications in the USSR and some famous achievements in theater throughout much of the 1920s. Jewish-American philosopher Horace Kallen (1882-1974) was hardly the only visitor to declare the Russian Jewish world far more Jewish than anything in the United States. Moscow was hailed as the Yiddish World Republic of Letters, outshining Warsaw and New York.

In Manhattan, basking in reflective glory, the Jewish Communist *Freiheit* newspaper attracted a cadre of poets such as Menachem Boreisha (1888-1949), Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886-1932), H. Leivick (1888-1962), and Avrom Reisen (1876-1963), as well as the classic prose humorist Moyshe Nadir (1885-1943) and the “poetic novelist” Isaac Raboy (1882-1944).

Abruptly, this renaissance in the USSR was mostly shut down under Stalin's ever-tightening state control. Even then, in the mid-1920s and 1930s, Jewish regional autonomy was inaugurated through agricultural settlements in the Crimea and a promised homeland in Birobidzan (close to the border with China).

Such turn-about in policy continued right up until the post World War II period, which partially explains why Jews were both enticed toward and repelled by the Soviet Communist dream. As late as 1935, for example, the Soviet Union was the only country in the world to openly condemn Nazi anti-Semitism. This is why tracking the progress of pro-Communist Revolutionary Internationalism, which is conspicuously problematic, is not the pursuit of a straight-line trajectory from illusion to disillusion. There were reasons why a waning faith might be renewed.

Moreover, not all revolutionary Jewish Internationalists were Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews who had originated in Western Germany and Northern France in the Middle Ages but moved Eastward. Sephardic (originating from the Iberian Peninsula) and Mizrahi (residing in North Africa and the Middle East) Jews make up perhaps 25 to 35% of the population.

Far less research is currently available in English on the relationship of these two smaller yet crucial components of what can be seen as a global revolutionary tradition that overlap even as they have divergences. Nevertheless, one can readily point to historical figures such as Avraam Benaroya (1887-1979), the Bulgarian-born Jewish socialist author of *The Jewish Question and Social Democracy* (1908), and Abraham Serfaty (1926-2018), the anti-Zionist Moroccan Jew, who was in the Moroccan Communist Party until 1970.

A prominent revolutionary figure of the 1968 generation in France was Daniel Bensaïd (1946-2010), the son of a Sephardic

Jew from Algeria,²⁴ and a somewhat younger author and activist on behalf of Palestinian rights is Ella Shohat (b. 1959), a New York University professor who is the daughter of Iraqi Jews born in Israel. The Israeli Black Panthers (founded 1971), modeled themselves on the U.S. Black Panther Party and the organization was comprised of Jewish immigrants from North Africa and Middle Eastern countries. Today, in the U.S. Left there is growing consciousness of the situation of “Jews of Color,” which includes offspring of mixed marriages as well as some Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews.²⁵

IX. Political Seesawing

To be sure, Jews on the Left were pole-axed by the 18-month Pact of Stalin with Hitler, and the joint Gestapo-NKVD (Soviet secret police) conferences to crush Polish resistance, all rooted back in the policy of “Socialism in One Country” and the bureaucratization of the Soviet party apparatus. Then, in contrast, the Soviet Union relocated a million-and-a-half Jewish refugees from occupied Poland, saving them from Nazi slaughter.

The USSR carried the brunt of the war that defeated Hitler with half a million Jews fighting in the ranks of the Red Army. (Personal disclosure: This included my great uncle and his wife, both military doctors, who were killed on the front lines in the initial onslaught of the Nazis' Operation Barbarossa.)

During and right after the war, Jewish/Yiddish culture was once more promoted in the USSR, and the resurrected Popular Front directed Communists to link arms with Zionists in New York City to sing the ultra-nationalist anthem “Hatikvah.”

When the United Nations in 1948 voted for partition of Palestine into two states, the USSR was a strong supporter, even though this contravened its immediately preceding stance that advocated the establishment of one democratic state of Arabs and Jews. In the war that followed, arms from newly-Communist Czechoslovakia were vital to the Israeli military victory in defeating the Arab armies and enabling Jewish expansion into the area earmarked for Palestinians.

At the same time, many of those Jews deported from occupied Poland died in Siberian Gulags, and in 1948-49 the leading Soviet Yiddish cultural figures were arrested and in 1952 shot as “cosmopolitans.” The presence of a Jewish state fueled Stalin's paranoia that Jewish Communists might feel a dual loyalty. This was part of the reason for the postwar anti-Semitic trials launched against Jewish Communists in Eastern Europe.

In these prosecutions, many one-time Communist heroes of Spain and the Resistance were denounced as Zionists and put to death. The finale of this anti-Semitic purge was the infamous 1952-53 Doctors Plot, in which prominent Moscow Jewish medical men were accused of conspiring to assassinate Soviet leaders — their pending execution halted only by Stalin's lucky death.

The political seesawing of the USSR over the decades is largely explained by swerves in Soviet policy aimed at Stalin's maintaining power over the state. But threats from the West that provided pretexts for Stalin's dictatorial rule didn't help. As might be expected, a similar record of Communist oscillation was mirrored in regard to the Palestine Left.

In the 1930s, the local Palestine Communists were first ordered to swing to uncritical support of the Arab nationalist movement, one led by feudalists often in league with the

British. Next, Communists were commanded to abandon Palestinians by allying with the British colonialists during the Second World War. Zionist politics were backed, although never the ideology.

Subsequently Communists supported the formation of the Israeli state in 1948. This alteration in loyalty was changed only in 1956, when Israel led France and England in invading Egypt, attempting to seize the Suez Canal and depose President Nasser.

In the United States, Communist policy shifts regarding Jewish and Arab matters were also imitated, most scandalously, in 1929. Arab riots were initially denounced as pogroms, next defended as anti-imperialist. Then came the 1935 switch from a Communist Party Yiddish Bureau, which attempted to organize Jewish workers and promote Yiddishkeit, to a Jewish Bureau urging Communists to move from outsiders of the Jewish-American community to Popular Front insiders.

In the 1940s, the leadership of the Communist Party (CP-USA) was purged and a Left turn commenced. This persisted into the Cold War era when, once again, Communists were forced to defend the indefensible — the 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia, then the Rudolf Slánský trial.²⁶

X.A History of Misunderstanding

What is striking is how much of the confusion of the Jewish Revolutionary Internationalist tradition, and what this means for a Jewish identity in the modern world, was facilitated by ambiguities and uncertainties in the original discourse of Marxist positions on “The Jewish Question.” The Italian scholar Enzo Traverso aptly observed: “The history of the Marxist debate on the Jewish question is a history of misunderstanding.”²⁷

To clarify this we need to back up a bit to Marx’s youthful political errors. Thankfully, his initial identification of Jews with mercantile capitalism was dropped completely as he developed his economic critique around production. Nonetheless Marx remained beholden to a mistaken Enlightenment vision of assimilation: Like similarly advanced thinkers, he held that the linguistic and cultural features that made Jews different were a product of their exclusion, and that such alterity would dissipate with full political and civil rights, as it also would with other peoples.

Definitely, this socialist internationalist viewpoint on assimilation was not the belief that a minority would simply become like the majority; for example, that Jews would convert to the dominant Christian, often anti-Semitic culture. This is what would later be called “bourgeois assimilation.”

The alternative prediction as well as the mistaken program of 19th century Marxism was that capitalist industrialization would progressively require all discrete groups to relinquish distinct national cohesion to form something new from elements of the old. As Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property.”²⁸

Perhaps we would say today that they expected a future social order in which “assimilation” would be irrelevant because we would live in some sort of universal *gemeinschaft* (a community of reciprocal bonds). Marx and Engels thought that, with full rights, modernization and secularization, Jews would voluntarily overcome Jewish “otherness.” They saw this “otherness,” as did other Enlightenment thinkers, as archaic

theology, language and customs.

The first problem is: Archaic or not, for what would this “otherness” be given up? Calling for an international, universal culture is simply an algebraic abstraction without content; what exactly were the 19th century models Marx and Engels had in mind for such a culture?

If we look at the work of the icons of the 20th century historic internationalist cultural Left — Paul Robeson, Pablo Neruda, Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, Mahmoud Darwish — we find that specific national and ethnic cultures are very much present in internationalist culture, not cast off but augmented by a blending with other elements. This is because one still has to reach individuals through a local starting point — African American for Robeson, Palestinian for Darwish, Spanish and French for Picasso.

Reaching people starts with languages and includes symbols and references to what is familiar and understandable, even if thought to be “premodern” or “archaic.” Otherwise, without any grounding in local or subaltern culture, “universalist internationalism” could easily become a euphemism for the imposition of the interest of the most powerful dominant group — especially that of white Christian, elite males, as we have already seen in the history of the Western canon.

One reason that national and ethnic elements remain very present in internationalist culture is that the advances of capitalism did not abolish nations as Marx and Engels predicted. Instead of the more technologically advanced countries absorbing the economically weaker ones, they competed to invade and exploit them, exacerbating nationalist tensions and religious differences.

XI. Toward a Multicultural Society

For Jews, the traditional Jewish world of the 19th century did break up, yet Jews as Jews did not fade. In Western Europe, it is true, a kind of structural assimilation of Jews began; but even those Jews who changed names, and declared themselves not Jewish but French, or German, or socialist, continued to be perceived as Jews. Alterity was detected and Jews continued to suffer marginalization and discrimination. Even those with considerable wealth did not necessarily escape the horrors of anti-Semitism culminating in genocide.

In the East, capitalist development never even led toward assimilation. Whatever the Bolsheviks believed, and opinions varied, a living Jewish nationality existed, evolving into a more modern type as Jews moved into the city, experienced a cultural renaissance in Yiddish, and expressed a group consciousness.

Thus there emerged from these European developments theories that tried to harmonize Jewish nationality and universalism in the workers’ movement. Some Jewish Marxists “on principle” did not champion a Jewish identity, believing that it only made sense in reference to theology and that it stood for a limiting way of life. Others declined to use their Jewish names in political work so as not to reinforce myths about socialism as a “Jewish conspiracy.”

Yet the term “Jewish Marxism” emerged, as in the writing of the Bund’s Vladimir Medem (1879-1923). Bolshevik leaders tended toward an assimilationist ideal; but Lenin at times referred to a Jewish nation and the mature Trotsky favored a Jewish homeland/territory for reasons of security.

Those Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists who came

afterwards, including those arrested with Mandela at Rivonia, continued to fall all over the map on these matters, especially as World War II unfolded and a Jewish state was created.

In the 1940s, Communist publications in the United States aggressively critiqued what they called “the ideology of assimilation”; they counterpoised what they called “a progressive Jewish life” — which seemed to be a Jewishness identified with political values promoted by the CP-USA at that moment, including pro-Sovietism.²⁹

Today, most of us hold the view that different groups should be able to retain their identities and institutions to whatever extent they wish, within a multicultural society.

Unfortunately, in the post-World War II period Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism fell to a low point. The sickening outburst of Soviet anti-Semitism was denied by Stalinists and fellow travelers; at the same time there were major illusions on the Left about Israel, even among Communists, former Communists, and other radicals.

Many now saw Israel as socialist, or at least anti-colonial, and perhaps independent from imperialist powers such as the United States. Conceivably this was because Israel, due to World War II, was now populated by a new immigration — disinherited, homeless, desperate refugees, excluded by racism from more desirable destinations in the West.

Also, the Left was learning for the first time about the scope of the Nazi Holocaust and rightly taken aback by its extent and horror. So the plight of Arab Palestinians fell into the background as a concern of the Left.

After the 1956 invasion of Suez, however, a handful of anti-imperialists among a burgeoning New Left in Europe became more disapproving of the Israeli state; for many more, the change would occur only in the aftermath of the 1967 war with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

One exception to this pattern in the 1950s and early 1960s was the tiny Trotskyist movement, which however had splintered into ever more warring factions as their guiding predictions — that World War II would lead directly to social revolution in the West and a rebellion against Stalinist regimes — seemed ever more distant.

Leaders such as Tony Cliff (born Yigael Glückstein, 1917-2000) in England and Hal Draper (born Harold Dubinsky, 1914-1990) in the USA wrote pointedly about the mistreatment of the Palestinian population, and the far better known Isaac Deutscher (1907-67) published essays predicting disaster if an equitable solution to the disputed territory in Palestine was not found.³⁰

In this material young activists of today may find elements of a usable and meaningful Jewish Revolutionary Internationalist identity, albeit it must surely be interrogated in light of a deep dive into the latest thinking about heteropatriarchy and the relationship between Ashkenazi Jews to Jews of Color.

XII. The Precarity of History

The thought-provoking history of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism, most numerical and gathering steam in Yiddishland, and unfolding in its most rousing yet puzzling form in the era of Hitler and Stalin, shadows us into the pres-

ent. How promising is it for us to tackle, once more, such a vexed topic as reconfiguring Jewish identity in a Revolutionary Internationalist context in 2020?

After all, many features of the historical terrain have changed. The material basis of the moral universe of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism was once integral to the broader working-class movement and parties that promoted its interests. In the late 1950s and 1960s, however, it was mainly an international youth radicalization that opened up socialist anti-Zionist vistas for young Jews. Yet those inspired remained considerably marginalized, making no headway at all in either the Jewish community or Democratic Party.

Today, the blatant racism of Israel has changed the situation, registering very promisingly in pro-Palestinian sentiment growing in the Democratic Socialists of America (of a kind impermissible in that same organization a few years ago), as well as in groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Open Hillel, and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice.

It is true that a certain proportion of the present-day youthful rebellion against Israeli state policy is expressed by sets of ideas different from explicit revolutionary Marxism. Some promote “allyship,” which is an encouraging development if not quite the same as a common agreement with Palestinians and others on the need for an international anticapitalist struggle. Then there is philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler’s specifically Jewish critique that Zionism is profoundly “un-Jewish.”³¹

Without disparaging her efforts, as well as those of Daniel Boyarin, a historian of religion, and Jonathan Boyarin, his anthropologist brother, who hold that Zionists should support Palestinian national liberation,³² I still must pose the question: Does there remain in the Jewish Revolutionary Internationalist tradition an untapped potential, a reactivation of the unexpected, in what might otherwise be an eclipsed and buried past?

Stephen Norwood’s *Anti-Semitism and the Far Left* claims that this tradition met its “demise” decades ago; I would only grant its defeat as a major force in the mainstream politics of the day. A new generation, which resembles the old in not wanting to be trapped in any narrow Jewish identity that is established by others, may well be able to mend this past and not allow it to pass.

Undeniably, Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism has not regained the foothold it once possessed since the Cold War, and an updated version of the solidarity once demonstrated by a variety of South African Jewish Leftists is needed more than ever at present. This is due to the dangerous trajectory of the Israeli state but also because of the current rise of a truly threatening, far-Right anti-Semitism, in Europe and to a lesser extent here in the USA.

What Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism teaches us is that, in fact, anti-Semitism was never fully exorcized in the West despite the defeat of fascism; in the United States anti-Semitism was simply displaced by myths that were intended to shroud many brutal aspects of our nation’s past.

Above all, for the moral universe of Jewish Revolutionary



Hal Draper was a revolutionary Marxist who wrote critically of Zionism and in defense of Palestinian-Arab rights during the 1950s.

Internationalism to be fully reclaimed, we must understand that any new U.S. fascist-like movements will never be *solely* anti-Semitic; they will surely be built on a groundwork of anti-Black racism and will incorporate a hatred of Muslims and other people of color. That is why the inspiring social movement of Black Lives Matter demands decisive support from Jews who should take inspiration from our political ancestors once standing with Mandela in the prisoner's dock.

Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism is simply incompatible with the view that the present state of Israel is the guarantor of Jewish safety or the lodestar of Jewish identity. Even the liberal Zionists, who air personal misgivings about particular Israeli policies but refuse to acknowledge the systemic nature of the problem, are going to have to face the truth about the state that acts in their name: It covets with European despots and Holocaust deniers while fanning racism in the territory it rules and denouncing advocates of democracy for Israel/Palestine as "Left anti-Semites."

This smear, too often taken up by U.S. liberal apologists for Zionism, is nothing but a desperate attempt to bullwhip young Jews into line. (We gray-haired Jews have been dealing with this by-now stale slander since the 1960s.) In truth, the young Jews in groups such as JVP are threatening to the pro-Israel establishment not because they are hateful anti-Semites but precisely because they *aren't*.³³

Auspiciously, many young people, and some not so young, will "not stand idly by" in the face of police killings and the criminalization of African Americans, Islamophobia, anti-immigrant prejudice, mass incarceration, as well as the long-standing abuse of Palestinian human rights.

A 2.0 version of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism must be rescued from the netherworld to which the Wistrichs, Norwoods and others are trying to consign it. Inquiry into the real, existing heritage of Jewish Revolutionary Internationalism could recover anticipatory, guiding ideas — alternatives to the self-defeating limits of liberalism.

Research combined with practice will also help us come to terms with realms of modernity that are a nexus of inexpressible pain and anger — such as how the Judeocide happened and the social causes of Soviet deceit — not through suppression or evasion but by means of reasoning and a superior command of the subject.

On the other hand, to follow the view that the Jewish Revolutionary Internationalist tradition is exhausted or doomed to certain failure is to assume the stance that what did not happen could not happen. Such a choice, to thereby replace the contingency of history with the certainty of hindsight, is one that will surely close off alternative futures.

If we have learned nothing else, it is that sometimes an apparently closed road must nonetheless be reopened. In this sense, with our actions today driven by the precarity of history, our awareness must be that frozen visions of the past are the errors we are forever correcting. ■

Notes

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/feb/11/nelsonmandela.southafrica2>
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/jan/29/nelson-mandela-arrested-august-1962>. *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was a 1905 popular play and novel about a chivalrous Englishman who uses disguises to rescue French aristocrats before they could be guillotined during France's revolutionary terror. The identity of this Englishman is a secret but his communications contain the small red flower "pimpernel" as his symbol. When the moment is right for rescue, he abruptly transforms himself into a formidable swordsman and quick-thinking escape artist.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/feb/11/nelsonmandela.southafrica2>

4. Others indicted include Ahmed "Kathy" Kathrada (1929-2017), an Indian Muslim; Govan Mbeki (1910-2001), of the Xhosa people; Raymond Mlaba (1920-2005), also of a Xhosa background; Moosa Moola (b. 1934), of South Asian descent; Abdulhay Jasset (b. 1934), a South African Indian; Elias Motsokoedi (1924-1994); Walter Sisulu (1912-2003), classified as "colored"; and Andrew Melangeni (1925-2020).
5. See my review essay, "Tribute to Burger's Daughter," *Against the Current* 3 (May-June 1986): 11-17.
6. See Alan Wieder, *Ruth First and Joe Slovo in the War Against Apartheid* (2013).
7. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/mandelas-jewish-helpers>
8. <https://jewishcurrents.org/mandela-jews/>
9. See the *Against the Current* obituary for Hirson: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc084/p1700/>
10. http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1064
11. See Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (2003), reviewed in *Against the Current*: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc112/p367/>
12. The most compelling account of this transformation of the relationship of much of the Jewish population from pariah status to imbrication in mechanisms of domination can be found in Enzo Traverso's *The End of Jewish Modernity* (2016). See also the critical review by David Finkel: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc194/review-finkel/>
13. I am not suggesting that invasion and defeat of Israel by an outside power is desirable or possible, any more than acts of individual violence against Jewish civilians can do more than bring disproportionate retaliation and loss of support. A combination of economic pressure from the West and a dramatic growth of Arab-Jewish solidarity within the region would be the optimal course.
14. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/opinion/israel-annexation-two-state-solution.html>
15. Clearly I reject any notion that Israel or Jewish-American elites are using the power of their money to manipulate U.S. policy; quite the opposite, it is more that the United States, including Christian Evangelicals, see the Jews of Israel as cannon fodder for their interests (political or theological).
16. See the fascinating recent study by Gerben Zaagsma, *Jewish Volunteers, The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (2017).
17. See Hal Draper's 1977 "Marx and the Economic-Jew Stereotype": <https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1977/kmtr1/app1.htm>
18. From inside jacket flap of Robert S. Wistrich, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, The Jews, and Israel* (2012).
19. Statement on the first page of Stephen H. Norwood, *Anti-Semitism and the American Far Left* (2013).
20. *Ibid.*, 240.
21. *Ibid.*, 14.
22. Joshua Rubenstein, *Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionary's Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 44-52 *passim*.
23. For much of the background that follows I am indebted to Alain Brossat and Sylvie Klingberg, *Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism* (2016). See also the fascinating review essay by Peter Drucker of Elissa Bemporad's *Becoming Soviet Jews* (2013) in *New Politics* (Winter 2014) that addresses many complex issues that my limitations and space and knowledge do not permit me to take up: <https://newpol.org/review/bolshevism-yiddish/>
24. See my review of his autobiography, *An Impatient Life*: <https://isreview.org/issue/93/astonished-present>
25. The Jews of Color and Sephardi/Mizrahi Caucus of JVP has a blog: <http://jocsm.org>
26. The Slánský trial (officially "Trial of the Leadership of the Anti-State Conspiracy Centre Headed by Rudolf Slánský") was a 1952 anti-Semitic show trial against 14 members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, including several high-ranking officials. They were falsely accused of organizing a conspiracy against the Czechoslovak Republic. All 14 defendants were found guilty; 11 were executed and the remaining three received a life sentence.
27. Enzo Traverso, *The Marxist and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate 1843-1943* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), 232. I am greatly indebted to this and other books by Traverso for much of my understanding of this topic.
28. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>
29. An important resource on this topic is the Tony Michels, ed., *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary Reader* (2012), which includes CP-USA writers along with Socialists, Trotskyists, and more. Pioneering new research and theorizing on Jewish-Americans and Communism is currently underway by Benjamin Balthaser. See: "When Anti-Zionism Was Jewish: Jewish Racial Subjectivity and the Anti-Imperialist Literary Left from the Great Depression to the Cold War" in *American Quarterly* 72, 2 (June 2020): 449-470.
30. The Trotskyist record on Zionism, Palestine, and "The Jewish Question" is a complicated topic that has yet to receive a comprehensive and nuanced treatment. Some readily available sources include: Hal Draper, *Zionism, Israel and the Arabs* (2010); Ian Birchall, *Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time* (2011); Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (2017). A few of the more recent discussions are Samuel Farber, "Isaac Deutscher and the Jews," *New Politics* (Winter 2014): https://newpol.org/issue_post/deutscher-and-jews, and Nathaniel Flakin, *Martin Monath: A Jewish Resistance Fighter Among Nazi Soldiers* (2019). The Israeli organization Matzpen, founded in 1962, expressed many elements of this tradition as well; see their website at: <https://matzpen.org/english/>
31. See Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2013).
32. See, for example, their "Dialogue with Edward Said" in the Spring 1989 issue of *Critical Inquiry*: [https://nes.berkeley.edu/Web_Boyarin/BoyarinArticles/53%20Towards%20a%20Dialogue%20with...Said%20\(1989\).pdf](https://nes.berkeley.edu/Web_Boyarin/BoyarinArticles/53%20Towards%20a%20Dialogue%20with...Said%20(1989).pdf)
33. It is pointless to deny the possible existence of anti-Semites masquerading as Leftists or anti-Zionists, especially since there are all kinds of reasons why one might oppose Zionism besides from socialist convictions. Even though Left anti-Semitism is at present a marginal phenomenon, Jewish Revolutionary Internationalists must remain on a "Red Alert" against its presence. At the same time, the claim that fundamental opposition to an ethnostate is inherently anti-Semitic is spurious and intended only as a debate-stopper.

La Lotta Continua

Fragments from a Past By Jeffrey L. Gould

MY POLITICAL ACTIVISM began in 1964 when I passed out SDS leaflets, “better a crook than a fascist” (Johnson over Goldwater); it effectively ended by the late 1980s. Although I consider my scholarly research and writings and especially my films to be a continuation of my earlier activism, I can’t speak to activists as one in the trenches. Yet today’s political moment is too charged to remain silent.

If the following abbreviated political memoir has any relevance today, it is to underscore just how much any real advance in grassroots movements for radical social change depends on a favorable political environment and on broad alliances, however unpalatable the latter may be to activists on the ground.

When I was 19, I watched the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) implode in Chicago, wracked by insane levels of sectarianism. The Worker Student Alliance faction supported Albania and China alone; the Revolutionary Youth Movement also pledged solidarity to North Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba.

I remember looking around the vast hall inside the Chicago Coliseum and trying to read other faces. Were there others who were also repulsed and demoralized by that spectacle? Surely there were, but we were atomized and largely voiceless.

At the time I sharply defined myself against sectarianism, that is placing the interests of an organization or party above the movement as a whole, or, I would add today, the immediate needs of society’s non-elite. Nonetheless, in retrospect I realize that I was not immune from a different kind of that political disorder, one marked by a very strong bias against electoral politics.

Aftermath of Italy’s Hot Autumn

In 1971, my participation in a radical communications collective in Turin, Italy re-

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inforced that perspective. Thousands of Fiat workers participated with varying degrees in the extra-parliamentary left (especially *Lotta Continua*) as they battled the company and the state.

Through countless wildcat work stoppages and marches within the 50,000-worker plant, they gained impressive control over the production process and dramatically improved their quality of life.

Politics infused workers’ lives. I vividly recall debates in bars about workers’ councils, workers’ control and Gramsci, conducted by Southern migrants with little formal education.

More significantly, I attended meetings of hundreds of workers that signaled a fundamental change: they excluded non-workers [I had some kind of left journalist dispensation]. And in order to avoid any form of sectarianism they asked people to not speak in the name of the extra-parliamentary left or the Communist Party (PCI).

In sum, they created what they called the autonomous workers’ movement (*movimento operaio autonomo*), one they believed would eventually create a new, non-authoritarian, egalitarian society propelled by worker-controlled industry. Ever since then, I have carried with me the image of Fiat workers democratically charting that course.

Two years later, when I returned for a brief visit, I found my Fiat worker friends, Antonio and Achille, to be utterly demoralized. They had been fired from their jobs and their nascent autonomous workers’ organization had disintegrated. (Later incarnations of *autonomismo* had little to do with their origins.) As the world economic crisis hit their group and others on the extra-parliamentary left had difficulty responding, while maintaining their intransigent posture against the PCI and its union allies.

In reflecting back on 1971, that inspiring time in Turin, I realize I did not grasp the broader context. First, a social revolution wasn’t on the agenda of a country marked by such extremely uneven development. However impressive the consciousness and actions of the Fiat workers, the working class in large-scale industry formed a relatively small minority of the Italian population.

More significantly, the PCI was the largest communist party outside the Soviet bloc,

remarkably strong and independent, winning over 25% of the votes in a multiparty system in 1968 and 1972, reaching over 34% in 1976 (the Christian Democrats won 38%). The neo-fascist right and the CIA were engaged in all manner of attacks against it as well as against the extra-parliamentary left.

The PCI was a reformist party hostile to any kind of autonomous workers’ movement and of course to the extra-parliamentary left. At the same time, the autonomous workers’ movement was too weak to resist the company and state onslaught.

Faced with similar neo-fascist, business, U.S. and governmental assaults, a left alliance might well have withstood them — at least better than their bitter antagonisms, which culminated in grisly fashion at the end of the decade when the far left violently combatted PCI militants. Yet at the time, talk of a left alliance against fascism and the right would have been heretical.

This, despite the fact that if you were walking down the streets of Turin and someone from behind called out to you “*compagno*” (comrade) and you turned your head, a fascist with brass knuckles would smash your face. They didn’t care if you were PCI or *Lotta Continua*.

Union Organizing

After returning from Italy I spent a number of years working in the U.S. labor movement, first as a self-appointed rank-and-file organizer and then as union organizer.

My experiences as a rank-and-file organizer in a UAW construction products plant were mixed at best. I was entirely cut off from what remained of the left. That was a conscious decision as I felt that the left was either lost in sectarianism or had “sold out.” Yet operating alone had severe limitations, primarily a lack of communication with others involved in similar work.

I saw my job as listening to the other workers on breaks, attending union meetings and voicing concerns that for one reason or another, members would not raise. Circa 1972, New Jersey, this factory already had a globalized work force — I remember Jamaicans, Cubans, Argentinians and Italians, and my language abilities helped out somewhat.

In retrospect, I don’t think that the diversity of the work force was a deterrent to

organization, perhaps because there were no clearly defined ethnic groups. I also don't remember any real racist expressions by white workers, except in the language employed, e.g. "the colored guy."

Not particularly surprisingly, I found the local leadership uninterested in hearing any alternative perspectives. In 1971, Nixon had decreed wage and price controls. Union and management used what for small firms were guidelines as a rationale for only minimal raises.

When I objected to that rationale behind the union bargaining proposal, the vote was close, but my motion failed. Then an older worker with whom I worked closely conveyed a message to me that it would be best for my own good if I quit. Feeling something between an idiot and a coward, I followed their advice.

In early 1977, I started working for the International Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU). I was a "colonizer" (I could not believe their obscenely stupid language), sent to work in a sporting goods plant producing rubber footballs and sports jerseys in upstate New York.

I had very little supervision during the initial stages of the organizing drive. After working in the plant for a couple of months I decided to approach some workers to form an organizing committee.

In the space of a month, using tried and true tactics of secrecy and trust — trusted workers would recruit people they trusted — we got over 400 authorizing cards out of some 500 employees. When we presented the cards, the manager was shocked as he had no idea about the organizing effort.

When I conferred with my superiors based in Long Island, they sharply rejected my appeal for an immediate union representation election. One longtime union leader admonished me with two unforgettable phrases: "We never win elections" and "Never trust the workers."

They ordered me to provoke an unfair labor practices dispute by doing something outlandishly provocative. Although I threw a football near a foreman's head, he just walked away.

The union leadership could not grasp that consultant firms now advised management precisely about the tactics which unions such as the ILGWU had used so successfully in the 1950s and 1960s.

Many months later, long after the union dropped the campaign and sent me to "colonize" another factory, the company, facing no union opposition, resoundingly won the representation election.

My futile arguments with the union leadership led not only to my firing, but to placing me on a blacklist apparently circulated among unions. In addition, they prohibited all union organizers and union members from

talking with me on pain of firing or expulsion.

Today, the blacklist and order almost seem like a compliment but at the time I was devastated as clearly the career path that I had chosen for myself was blocked.

At the time, unlike the union leadership, I trusted the people with whom I worked and organized. They engaged in democratic and empowering experiences, not to mention ones that dealt sharp blows against racism, as the union organizing committee had large numbers of Puerto Ricans and workers of Polish descent.

As in the construction products plant, despite the hierarchical non-democratic framework, the union offered a space for anti-racist resistance without naming it as such. Although far from the workers' power on the Fiat assembly line, I could see the seed of future democratic possibility.

Central America's Revolutions

Although burned by the union leadership and embittered by the experience of personal defeat, I gained an invaluable and wonderful relationship from my time as an organizer: I met my future wife on the factory floor.

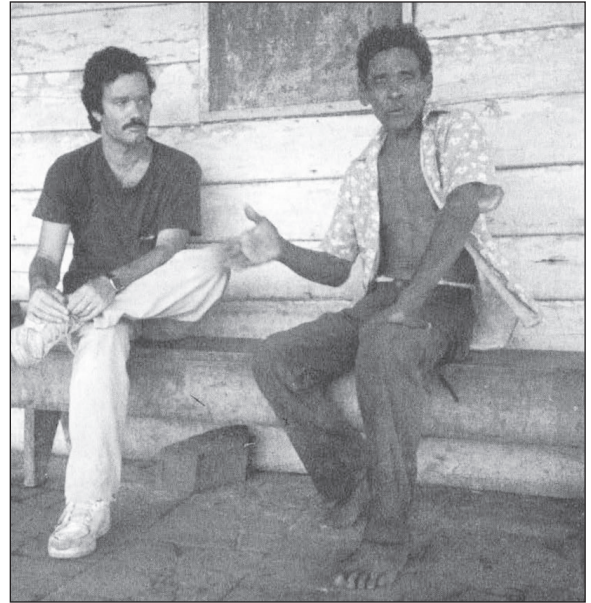
Her family couldn't afford to come to the wedding from Costa Rica, and so after I got fired, we decided to visit them. We ended up staying for four years.

In July 1979, an old friend invited me to go to Managua to serve as an assistant/interpreter for a Dutch TV station who was filming the triumph and immediate aftermath of the revolution. Although I could write a great deal about those days and more over the three years that we lived in Nicaragua in the 1980s and 1990 doing research, I will limit myself to couple of memories and thoughts.

I'll never forget the faces of so many people revealing the joy of liberation mixed with sorrow for lost love ones. Our crew came across a scene that did not make immediate sense. A hostile crowd of maybe 50 people were milling around outside of a small brick building. Sensing a story, the Dutch producer had me ask for permission to enter.

Inside four men were cowering against a wall, watched over by three armed *muchachos* (as the Sandinistas were known). One of them, 16 or 17 years old, gun in hand stepped outside and stood in front of the crowd that was shouting "oreja!" "oreja!" (spy) Their angry shouts suggested that they wanted to kill the Somocistas inside the makeshift prison.

The boy mustered his courage and



How to bridge the gap between the national and the local?

strength to address the crowd: "Look *compañeros*: we're trying to create a new Nicaragua and we need a new type of revolution, a humanist revolution. These *orejas* need to be brought to justice."

I've often wondered where this boy got his voice and whether he signaled a path not taken by the revolution. Was it possible for this incredible, heroic upsurge of impoverished youths, workers, peasants and students to create a humane, non-authoritarian, solidary, democratic society? The *muchacho* announced that possibility.

I also remember the announcement by the Sandinista leaders in those first days of the Revolution that there would not be elections for at least five years. At the time I thought that was a tactical mistake. In subsequent years, I came to view it as a strategic, highly consequential error.

In reflecting back on the period, it strikes me that the revolutionary imaginary, the utopian egalitarian vision announced in the euphoria of 1979 that I could still catch glimpses of in 1983, when I began my dissertation research, did not have a formal expression on any political agenda. But could such a vision have been incorporated into the Sandinista Front (FSLN) program?

The FSLN would have been obliged to tolerate the more or less autonomous labor and peasant movements that were blossoming. Similarly, the leadership would have had to accept the yearnings of grassroots militants for the individual or cooperative appropriation of the fruits of proletarian and peasant labor along with the egalitarian spirit that resisted all forms of coercion.

Indeed, the role of the revolutionary state might have been to enforce laws that protected citizens and their property against such popular excesses, but not to thwart the movements themselves. Had the *Frente*

opted to stimulate rather than control the grassroots movements, it would also have swept early elections before Reagan could unleash the Contra War.

The Contra War of 1981-1990 of course devastated the impoverished Nicaraguan economy and pushed the government towards increased militarism, at the cost of greater restrictions on individual rights and reduced spending for the highly successful social programs in health and education.

The revolution set in motion social and cultural movements that were in constant tension with the revolutionary government.

Although the level of political repression, in most parts of the country, was never a fraction of the dystopian vision promoted by the Reagan administration, there was an ideological rigidity that certainly affected the expression of dissent and unnecessarily restricted the autonomy of worker and peasant organizations that had fought so hard and courageously against the Somoza dictatorship.

Such control can be envisioned in two anecdotes. In Chichigalpa, a town dominated by the massive sugar plantation/mill complex, the Ingenio San Antonio, a resident walks up to the Sandinista mayor and offers a list of problems in his *barrio*, ranging from insufficient water to power outages. The mayor's response: "yes you have a problem: you're a *contra*."

Now he didn't act on this accusation and that is important. But he certainly alienated his constituent and probably scared him.

In 1989, I talked to an old veteran of the *campesino* movement in Chinandega. He commented, "The Sandinistas understand 'people's property' differently." He was referring to the government policy of creating state farms on expropriated land.

For Juan Suazo, who for decades had fought landlords and the Somocista state for land to the tillers, state farms did not translate as people's property. The Chinandeganos who had fought alongside the Sandinistas after 10 years silently broke with them, angered that their goals embodied in their own histories were simply not taken seriously.

Grassroots Energy

It strikes me that the Chinandegan example is not atypical: there are inevitable disjunctions between national level movements and local grassroots organizations.

I suggest that the organized left tended to understand the local subjects and their social experiments as parts of a universalizing program and discourse. They often failed to grasp the local realities, because of their immersion in a strategy focused on the national or the international.

When I was doing my research in the unbearably hot Chinandegan countryside, I pushed on with a combination of hubris and

naivete, believing that my work would make a difference. I convinced myself that once the FSLN leadership understood the autonomous roots and historical significance of the *campesino* movement it would shift ground and begin to afford that movement greater autonomy.



I wrote a report in 1989 that synthesized my research and urged the FSLN to reengage with *campesinos* and recognize their need and their right to create their version of people's land. Otherwise they would face defeat in the 1990 elections. Although the report reached leadership circles it was certainly not acknowledged, much less acted upon.

Since then I have continued to research in Nicaragua and since 1998 in El Salvador, but my pretensions and expectations have been lowered substantially.

With the hope of reaching audiences in Central America and the United States, I have created documentary films that deal with contemporary Salvadoran history: the 1932 massacre of 10,000 people, mainly Indians; the impact of Liberation Theology on a group of peasants in Morazán during the 1970s; labor struggles in a shrimp port in the seventies and eighties.

All three films, rooted in largely oral historical research, have political relevance without driving home a particular political line or interpretation. Yet they touched on common themes: At different historical moments *campesinos* and workers experienced non-hierarchical cultural and organizational forms. Following the historian Jay Winter, I call them minor utopias.

In 1931, indigenous peasants and *ladino* (non-Indian) artisans in western El Salvador broke down rigid social boundaries as they held meetings that became indistinguishable from fiestas as they collectively planned and celebrated social revolution.

In the early 1970s, peasants in the eastern department of Morazán created collective farms, cooperatives and tightly knit Liberation Theology-inspired communities. In 1979, during a six-week period in which death

squads ceased operations under a reformist Junta, workers on coffee, cotton and sugar plantations, seized nearly a hundred properties and in several cases started running the operations themselves.

These minor utopian experiences ended in tragedy. Most of the participants in the 1931 meeting/fiestas were massacred by the military in January 1932 in response to an abortive Communist-led insurrection. Those Liberation-theology inspired communities became targets for the military, as did the *campesinos* involved in the land occupations.

In 1980, military-tied death squads executed over 8000 civilians suspected of "subversion," most of them snatched off the street and thrown into unmarked cars.

The Left, writ large, conditioned the emergence of these socialist experiments. Yet in all three cases, the organized left — specifically the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, and the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (PCS, ERP and FPL, components of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN — ed.) — failed to acknowledge their emancipatory potential.

In 1931 and 1979, the revolutionary left also refused to ally with a reformist government that had conditioned the grassroots advance and might have forestalled or even blocked the lethal rightist reaction that cost so many lives.

The far right, in these and many other cases, aided to varying degrees by splits in the left, defeated those movements, drenching them in blood. Those failures and tragedies were perhaps not inevitable unless we consider that debilitating sectarianism is an inevitable part of leftist politics.

Bringing it Home

My earlier activism and research have a common theme. In both dimensions, I observed and experienced the tension between organizations and parties with national pretensions on the one hand, and grassroots movements on the other.

One of the great virtues of leftist grassroots activists is that historically they have been attuned to the immediate necessities of ordinary folks (what academics call the subaltern). And often they have practiced an ethic of solidarity aimed at helping the largest number of people achieve a reasonable quality of life.

Unless tightly wedded to the larger organizations or parties, the activists do not have to operate under a long-term cost benefit analysis. They can ask: what can materially and spiritually aid our base, rather than what will build our party or group?

That autonomy of thought and action is critical, I would say, to any real democratic social and economic change. Piecemeal, ameliorative changes promoted by grass-

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REVIEW

Lea Tsemel, Advocate for Justice By Lisa Hajjar

LEA TSEMEL IS an angry optimistic woman. That is how she describes herself to a journalist on the phone, as she races to the Israeli Supreme Court to appeal two major political cases that she just lost.

Advocate, by filmmakers Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaïche, offers an intimate portrait of this Jewish Israeli lawyer who has made a career defending Palestinians in Israeli courts.

To many, Tsemel is a hero, a fearless and tireless warrior for justice. To others, she is “the devil’s advocate.”

To everyone who knows her, regardless of their political views, she is larger than life, which is ironic because she is tiny. When she stands beside a 13-year-old client, one of the Palestinians whose case is traced through this film, her head barely reaches his shoulder. Yet when she speaks, she roars. *Advocate* brings audiences into her world and explains why she roars.

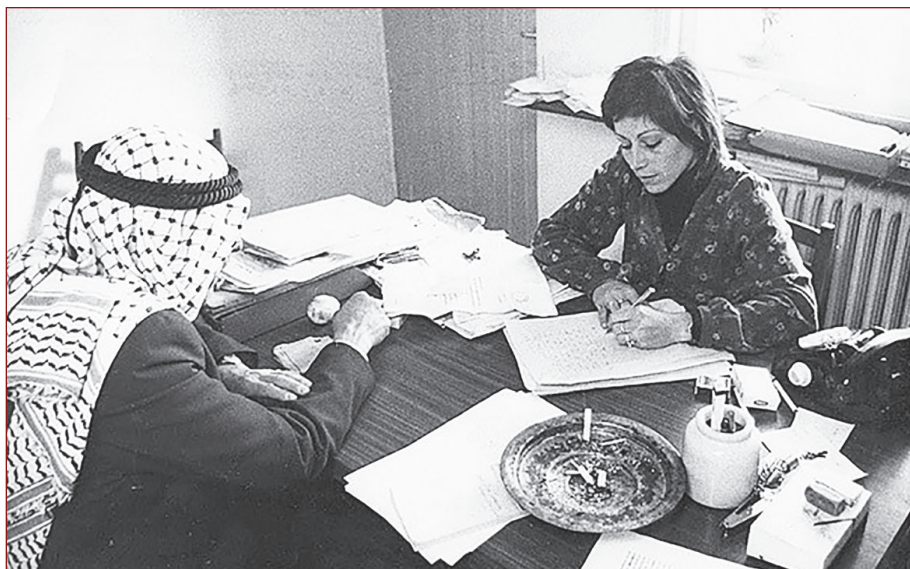
Tsemel’s fearsome reputation is legendary. In the early 1990s when I was researching the Israeli military court system in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, it amused me to learn from some Israeli military judges and prosecutors that they had been warned by their colleagues to “watch out for Lea” — good advice for people who uphold the occupation.

Tsemel is a human cyclone who, if the playing field on which she works were actually level, could demolish any adversary through the sheer force of her will. The playing field is not level, and she probably can count her victories on two hands. However, that force of will keeps her going, keeps her fighting, and that angry optimism sustains her faith that maybe the next fight can be won.

Early in the film, the camera zooms in on files in Tsemel’s East Jerusalem office that bear the labels “possession of a weapon,” “accessory to murder,” “suicide bombings,” “stone throwing,” and “possession of a knife.”

These types of cases are her bread and

Lisa Hajjar is a professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her work focuses on the Israeli military court system in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and on issues of human rights and torture internationally, including only that implemented by the United States. This review of Advocate (2019) is adapted from Lisa Hajjar’s “The Angry Optimistic Life and Times of Lea Tsemel,” Jadaliyya, June 11, 2019.



Lea Tsemel preparing a case, undated photo.

Courtesy Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaïche

butter and her *raison d’être*. “It is not that I like to take tough cases. I am not afraid not to,” she explains. “I always see the person behind the case. That is the important thing.”

This is one side of a Rubik’s cube explanation about why Tsemel does what she does. Another side is presented in a clip of Tsemel on an Israeli morning talk show in 1999 as she explains herself to the confounded interviewer: “Israelis have no right to tell Palestinians how to struggle . . . You should try to understand me because I am the future.”

The filmmakers capture a third side of the Rubik’s cube as Tsemel explains that, as an Israeli, she benefits from the fruits of the occupation, bitter and sweet.

“On what moral grounds should I judge the people who resist my occupation? . . . Who gave me that right? [I]f the act is intended to resist the occupation, as such, I will take it on.”

Background and Commitment

Viewers learn about Tsemel’s background: Her mother emigrated from Europe to Palestine in 1933 and was able to bring her own mother, but the rest of the family was annihilated in the Nazi Holocaust.

Lea was born in 1945 and grew up in the Arab-Jewish city of Haifa. In 1967, she was a law student at Hebrew University when the war started. She volunteered for military service.

When the Israeli army conquered East Jerusalem, she was the first Israeli woman

to reach the Wailing Wall which, at the time, was in a narrow alley. After the war, dozens of homes in the vicinity of the wall were destroyed to make way for a prayers’ plaza. She wondered, “What happened to the people who lived here?”

Although from a Zionist family, she was unsettled by what she was starting to learn about the occupation. Soon after the war, she decided to join the far-left organization Matzpen because they had answers to her questions. “From that moment, I never looked back.”

In Tsemel’s first political trial in 1972, she represented members of the Arab-Jewish Underground. She recounts how her clients described their interrogations in court:

“It was one after another, always the same. They all described the shackling, sleep deprivation, deafening music, interrogations day and night, and the beatings. It clearly was not the whim of a sole interrogator. It was systematic. There were instructions, like a user manual. How to cause the human body pain and suffering. How to cause pain and suffering without leaving marks. How to cause the body pain and suffering so that the detainee remains conscious and keeps answering questions.”

Then the voice-over of a judge, “We have no doubt that the defendant’s claims about torture are a figment of his imagination, and we do not believe him. We are convinced he confessed of his own free will, and we approve [the confession] as evidence in this trial!”

Her clients were found guilty of the charges and sentenced to seventeen years in prison and Tsemel was “faulted” by the court for identifying with Israel’s enemies.

Torture was not a figment of anyone’s imagination, except for the gullible or craven Israeli judges who, for decades, chose to believe lying security agents and government officials who denied that violent and coercive techniques were staples of the interrogation of Palestinian “enemies of the state.”

Tsemel saw the lies for what they were because so much of her work turned on judgment-proof confessions that had been beaten or sleep-deprived out of her clients.

Those Who Don’t Confess

For Tsemel, the client who does not confess, who does not break down with the first blow and seal his own fate or name his whole village is like a unicorn — a rare and mythical figure. She deals constantly with clients who confessed, true or false, and in these circumstances, she strives to minimize the damages by negotiating a plea bargain.

The unicorn client who does not confess, even under duress, gives her ammunition to fight it out in court. Ahmad, her 13-year-old client, was a unicorn.

Ahmad and his 15-year-old cousin Hassan took souvenir knives from their homes in Beit Hanina and went to the neighboring Jewish settlement of Pisgat Zeev. Hassan stabbed and injured an Israeli man and a boy, then was shot and killed by the police.

Angry Israelis shouted that the police should put a bullet through his injured cousin Ahmad’s head too. Ahmad did not use his own knife, and had urged his cousin not to strike another child. Throughout his interrogation, in his responses to a screaming security agent who was trying to frighten or bully him to admit that he had gone to Pisgat Zeev with the intention to kill people, he maintained that he and his cousin had taken the knives in order to scare people because they were angry that Israel was bombing and killing children in Gaza.

Ahmad became the youngest person, to that date, whom Tsemel had ever represented who faced such serious charges — two counts of attempted murder and possession of a weapon. She and her co-counsel Tareq Barghout, a lawyer with the Palestinian Prisoners Office in Ramallah, began strategizing.

Tsemel pointed out that Israel’s Youth Law does not allow for the detention of individuals younger than 14 in adult prisons. Could they work this angle?

Ahmad’s looming 14th birthday was like a ticking clock. Barghout thought they should try to negotiate a plea bargain in order to ensure that he go to a juvenile detention facility, whereas Tsemel wanted to take the case to trial because she believed she could use the fact that he did not confess to strike



Lea Tsemel holding a press conference.

Courtesy Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaïche

or downgrade the charges.

After all, she tells Barghout, there is precedent for leniency: a Jewish man who attacked a Palestinian woman got just three months of community service. That was her optimism speaking.

The arc of the film follows Ahmad’s case. Remand. Indictment. Plea. Testimony. Plea bargain negotiations. Verdict. Punishment proceedings. Sentence. Before the testimony hearing, as she and Barghout go into the courtroom, she says, “I am ready for battle, as they say.”

When they come out, Tsemel is elated and impressed that Ahmad has maintained that he never intended to kill anyone. Outside the courtroom, she gives her unicorn a thumbs-up.

The second high-profile case that Tsemel takes during the making of *Advocate* involves a Palestinian woman, Israa Jaabis, who is charged with attempted murder. One morning, Jaabis loaded a couple of butane tanks in the back seat of her car and drove into Jerusalem. She set fire to the car, injuring a policeman lightly and herself severely.

As with the case of Ahmad, for Tsemel the question is what was her intent? Did she intend to kill many people, or did she intend to kill just herself and if so, why? Tsemel learns from Jaabis’ relatives that she was a depressed woman in an unhappy marriage who had attempted suicide twice before but not in a showy “political” way.

This time, Tsemel wonders, had she decided to try “suicide by cop”? The prosecutors were indifferent to this question of intent; for them, her actions were enough to make her a terrorist who wanted to kill Jews.

“Not a Sliver of Hope”

Both cases were decided on the same day in the Jerusalem District Court, and both clients were found guilty of all the charges against them. Ahmad was sentenced to 12 years in prison, and Jaabis was sentenced to 11. According to the court: “Their sole intent

was to kill.”

As Tsemel reads the ruling in Ahmad’s case, she mumbles, “Wow, wow, wow, wow. Wow, not a sliver of hope.” Looking up at the camera, she says, “It is as if I live with the illusion that I can do something in the world, make an impact. That there is someone to reason with. It is strange. I am not willing to give up trying.”

Outside the courtroom, journalists have formed a scrum. Barghout is so devastated that he refuses Tsemel’s pleas to stand by her side while she makes a statement. She faces the press alone and roars:

“We have been defeated! . . . But our defeat, as a legal team, is nothing compared to the far-reaching and long-lasting defeat for Israeli society and its judicial system. The court ignored the fact that this is a national conflict. It attributed anti-Semitic sentiments to both defendants, which neither of them expressed at any stage. But it is convenient to think: ‘They only want to hurt the Jews!’ Fifty years of occupation were stricken from the record, and vanished from the judges’ consciousness, unfortunately. I hope it will not vanish from the public’s consciousness. This is an occupation! And it must be responded to. And everyone does so according to their capabilities. The victims, the vanquished, the children, the women respond in their own way. The expectation that Palestinians can find justice in Israeli courts may have been buried for good. I hope not. I really hope not. The path to the Supreme Court still lies ahead of us. We will appeal as soon as possible, in pursuit of justice.”

In 2017, the Supreme Court upheld Ahmad’s conviction but reduced his sentence to nine and a half years. It rejected Israa Jaabis’ appeal outright.

Advocate ends with a blackened screened and a postscript. “In 2019, shortly after the film’s world premiere, attorney Tareq Barghout was arrested. After a month of secret service interrogations, with a gag order and without the right to counsel, he initiated his own plea negotiations. He was charged with shooting at Israeli targets.” Tsemel became his lawyer. ■

REVIEW

Relevance of Marxist Critique

By Matthew Beeber

Marxist Literary Criticism Today

By Barbara Foley

Pluto Press, 2019, 272 pages, \$27 paperback.

IN 2001, THE late Argentinean philosopher Ernesto Laclau and Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, foundational proponents of what would become known as “post-Marxism,” asserted the following premise:

“In the mid-1970s, Marxist theorization had clearly reached an impasse. After an exceptionally rich and creative period in the 1960s, the limits of that expansion — which had its epicentre in Althusserianism, but also in a renewed interest in Gramsci and in the theoreticians of the Frankfurt School — were only too visible. There was an increasing gap between the realities of contemporary capitalism and what Marxism could legitimately subsume under its own categories.”

The two go on to observe that:

*“This situation, on the whole, provoked two types of attitude: either to negate the changes, and to retreat unconvincingly to an orthodox bunker; or to add, in an ad hoc way, descriptive analyses of the new trends which were simply juxtaposed — without integration — to a theoretical body which remained largely unchanged.”**

Almost 20 years later (and more than 30 years after Laclau and Mouffe first formulated their position), the debate continues over the usefulness of “orthodox” Marxism — as opposed to any number of post- or neo-Marxisms like that of Laclau and Mouffe. Barbara Foley, Distinguished Professor Emerita of English at Rutgers University-Newark and a specialist on African-American and proletarian literature, unapologetically asserts the continued relevance of Marxism, and in particular the continued necessity for a class-based critical approach to literature, in her recent book, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today*.

Some critics will no doubt consider her position a “retreat” to an “orthodox bunker” — indeed the introduction to the volume makes clear its intentions to return to the

Matthew Beeber is a PhD candidate at Northwestern University, where he is writing a dissertation about the role of literary institutions in the 1930s proletarian movement. His work focuses on the writing circles, congresses, journals and printing presses that both undergirded and shaped the literary production of the radical 1930s.

“basics” of Marxism. As a whole, however, the book manages to depart from the dichotomous paths described by Laclau and Mouffe, charting a model for the “integration” of orthodox Marxism with our contemporary economic and social order.

While steadfast in its determination that Marxism still provides the necessary tools for the analysis of our present moment, the volume represents more than mere retrenchment. It addresses head-on many of the critiques made of Marxism’s limitations, offering rebuttals to such critiques that draw on a wide range of scholarship.

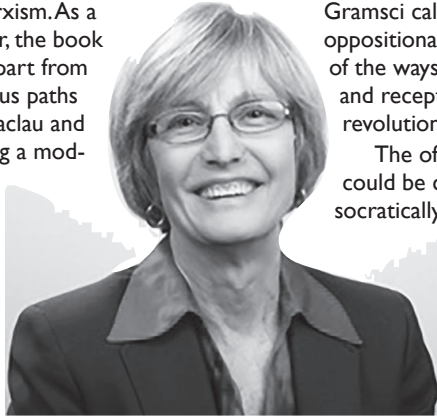
Entry into the Conversation

In its prologue and throughout many offset explanatory text boxes, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* puts forth a coherent political position, representing a valid entry into discourse surrounding the continued relevance of Marxist theory.

Foley argues (against the likes of Laclau and Mouffe, who are referenced directly as foils), that neoliberal or “late” capitalism is still capitalism, that a class-based analysis is thus as necessary as ever, and that “it is those who have given up on the class-based critique of capital who are behind the times.” (xii)

Foley’s claim for the continued relevance of Marxist critique derives from an analysis of our current neoliberal moment as continuous within — rather than a departure from — capitalism as an overarching economic structure. We are, according to Foley “still very much in the *longue duree* [...] of capitalism,” such that the critique of capitalism provided by Marxist analysis is as relevant today as it was during Marx’s time.

Working within what many would consider an orthodox Marxist framework, the goal of the book, and of its version of Marxist literary criticism, is to “contribute to the project of constructing what Antonio



Gramsci called an alternative hegemony: an oppositional common-sense understanding of the ways in which artistic production and reception can either foster or fetter revolutionary change.” (124)

The offset text boxes answer what could be considered FAQs of Marxism, socratically voicing and responding to possible critiques. These text boxes do much of the work towards making the book’s topics relevant to today.

Foley does not shy away from such controversial topics as “What does it mean to say that class is the ‘primary’ analytical category for explaining social inequality and leveraging revolutionary social change? What about sexism and racism and modes of domination, and gender and race as modes of identity?”

Or, “What is the difference between chattel and free labor? Are they features of qualitatively different modes of production, or can they exist within a single social formation?,” or “Is Marxist value theory obsolete in the era of the internet?”

Many of these sidebars address questions that might indeed be asked by an undergraduate student, whereas others address questions of Marxism’s limitations which would more likely be raised by those already working within a Marxist framework.

The responses to these questions — such as the assertion that class, as an analytical tool, is in fact not an “axis of oppression” on par with gender or race but rather an “ur” category of Marxist analysis (which of course then includes the other two) — follow from Foley’s premise that the locus of contemporary oppression is not “multi-faceted,” but “unitary,” and “situated ... in capital.” (xi)

Foley openly advocates for communism, yet does not engage in a defense of past or current regimes who identify with that term. The book makes clear that its interests lie in the idea of communism as theorized by Marx and Engels, not any historical substantiation of it. Indeed, the volume gives a wide berth to historical questions regarding the achievements or atrocities of past self-described communist regimes.

Despite this, Foley does not dismiss the “huge challenges” that “are posed not only

*Laclau and Mouffe published their seminal work, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, in 1985. A second edition was published in 2001 with a new introduction, from which this quotation was taken (viii).

by the coercive and ideological power of current elites but also by certain historical limitations in the legacy inherited from Marx and Engels themselves — as well as by problems inherited from past movements carried forward under the banner of one or another version of Marxism.” (xv)

An explanatory text box rhetorically asks, “Why do I use the term ‘communism’ rather than ‘socialism’ to denote the classless society superseding capitalism?” Foley responds by clarifying that despite their seeming interchangeability (even a return to Marx does not clear up the distinction, as he used both terms inconsistently), in the vocabulary of today, socialism often denotes a reformist position, one which many consider compatible with aspects of capitalism.

Foley writes that “countries designating themselves as socialist (the Soviet Union and China figure prominently here) retained so many features of capitalist inequality — including nationalist politics, unequal wages, and continuing divisions between mental and manual labor — that they reverted to capitalism.” (9)

Foley here both rejects a stagist approach — in which socialism is seen as the first stage towards achieving communism — and also any reformist version of socialism which could exist within capitalism. She simultaneously, if somewhat tacitly, argues that historical regimes such as the Soviet Union did not in fact achieve communism as Marx envisioned it, thus removing the burden from contemporary Marxist critics to either defend or condemn them.

Lit Crit Primer

Informed by the continued necessity of Marxist critique, the main text of *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* puts into practice the politics it advocates for in its prologue, explaining the basics of class-based criticism and demonstrating its applicability to a wide range of contemporary literature.

The book fills a need for such a volume, being the first entrant into that field since Terry Eagleton (*Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 1976) and Raymond Williams (*Marxism and Literature*, 1977). The first half serves as a foundational course in Marxist studies more broadly (not limited to its application to literary criticism).

This is both a primer on the work of Marx and Engels and on Marxist studies since Marx, akin to books such as Perry Anderson’s *Considerations on Western Marxism*. Foley divides this first section into three major areas of Marxist studies: historical materialism, political economy, and ideology.

The first, “Historical Materialism,” draws mainly from Marx and Engel’s *The Communist Manifesto* and from the famous preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, giving a general overview of Marx’s philoso-

phy, including his reformulation of Hegelian dialectics, the distinction between materialism and idealism, and the relation between base and superstructure.

The following section, “Political Economy,” offers an overview of Marx’s critique in *Capital*, defining key concepts such as commodities, surplus value, and alienation.

The third section, “Ideology,” begins by explaining that Marx himself uses the term in three distinct senses: 1) “illusory consciousness,” 2) “the standpoint of a class,” and 3) “socially necessary misunderstanding.”

Marx’s multifaceted use of “ideology” as a term — and his incomplete theorization of it as a concept — has contributed to its being one of the richer fields of interrogation by 20th-century Marxist thinkers. Foley charts the development of ideology critique, giving concise overviews of Lukács on reification, Althusser on interpellation, and Gramsci on hegemony.

In particular, the focus on hegemony powerfully anchors the volume as a whole, emphasizing the role of literature — and of the critique of literature — in its “capacity to encompass a wide range of modes of resistance to ruling-class hegemony.” (83)

The second half of Foley’s book directly addresses the ways that Marxist analytics can be put to use in a practice of literary criticism, and in turn how literary criticism can play a role in challenging ruling-class hegemony.

Foley divides this half of the book into three sections, the first attempting to define literature itself, the second addressing many current strains of Marxist literary criticism, and the third giving several examples of Marxist analyses of classic literary texts.

The first of these makes a convincing argument for the need to conceive of literature as a bounded category of cultural production, and usefully articulates the political implications of how we define this category. The book’s attempt to actually provide a definition of “literature” is, however, less convincing, comprised of thirteen characteristics of which many are either vague or subjective, such as “greatness” or “depth.”

The strength of the second half of the book lies in the “Marxist Literary Criticism” section, in which Foley both traces dominant strains of Marxist critique of bourgeois literature (the majority of which expresses the ideology of the ruling class), but also addresses the role of critique regarding overtly revolutionary texts.

Foley begins with Paul Ricoeur’s concept of a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” providing a list of “maneuvers” of which the Marxist critic is rightly suspicious, such as dehistoricism (capitalism has always been the dominant economic mode) and naturalization (hierarchical social structures are natural).

Another major strain of Marxist criticism,

“symptomatic reading,” attempts to locate what Fredric Jameson calls the “political unconscious” of a text, such that we “view the given text as a mediation — indeed, a series of mediations — of the contradictions shaping the world from which it emerged.” (131)

Foley also responds to critics who have questioned Marxist critique for a number of reasons, allowing for the validity of some (e.g. critical techniques such as symptomatic reading are better suited to analyzing bourgeois literature than to overtly political writing), while vehemently rejecting others.

In particular, Foley responds to claims from Rita Felsky and others that Marxist criticism ignores the “‘joy, hope, love and optimism’ embedded in great works of literature,” arguing that “this accusation constitutes little more than an updating of Cold War-era formalism, extending the radical-baiting historically directed at specifically Marxist criticism to the entire domain of politically charged cultural critique.” (136)

Closing Arguments

In the book’s final section, “Marxist Pedagogy,” Foley performs Marxist readings of a range of texts, providing both useful examples to students and a formidable resource to teachers of Marxist criticism.

The section offers pairs of poems organized by themes such as “art,” “nature,” and “alienation,” often putting canonical bourgeois texts in conversation with overtly radical works.

In one particularly effective example, Langston Hughes’ “Johannesburg Mines” (1925) serves as the foil to Archibald MacLeish’s oft-taught “*Ars Poetica*” (1926).

Whereas “*Ars Poetica*” argues that “A poem should not mean / But be,” suggesting its relevance purely to the aesthetic realm, Hughes’s poem directly addresses the political, specifically the conditions of the “240,000 natives working / In the Johannesburg mines.”

Yet while Hughes asserts that poetry should in fact “do” things in the political realm, his poem “interrogates the limits of literary representation,” asking, “What kind of poem / Would you make of that?” Thus, while both poems ultimately question the political utility of art, MacLeish’s serves as a condemnation of poetry which attempts any kind of political engagement, while Hughes’s on the other hand laments poetry’s limitations in fully expressing political conditions.

Foley contextualizes her readings of both poems, explaining that “In the hands of the New Critics — who, we will recall, elevated formalism to the level of political and cultural orthodoxy during the Cold War — over the decades MacLeish’s poem would come to stand in for a critique of the entire

continued on page 43

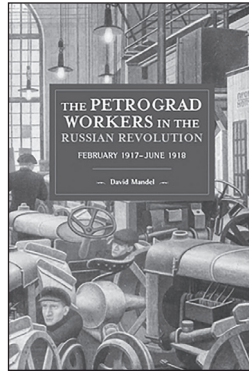
REVIEW

Workers in the Revolution: Studying Petrograd in 1917

By Ted McTaggart

The Petrograd Workers in the Russian Revolution: February 1917-June 1918

By David Mandel
Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2018,
522 pages, \$25.20 paperback.



THE LEADING ROLE of the workers of Petrograd in the victory of the Russian Revolution has been well documented. Despite this, most historians have focused primarily on the writings and actions of Lenin, Trotsky and other individual leaders, leaving the workers as an abstract idea.

The masses may be the force making history, but beyond the knowledge that a certain percentage of workers support Bolsheviks, a certain percentage Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, the internal dynamics remain obscure.

David Mandel's *The Petrograd Workers in the Russian Revolution: February 1917-June 1918* is a valuable contribution to the history of the Russian Revolution. The author teaches political science at the University of Quebec at Montreal, and is a scholar and educator studying and supporting rank-and-file labor activism in the former Soviet Union, particularly in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

An expanded, revised edition of two previously published works, this study provides a detailed analysis of the working class of Petrograd not only in their party affiliation but also by profession, neighborhood, gender and nationality. It also sheds light on the ways in which work was organized in the early months of the proletarian dictatorship, and the ways in which workers grappled with the idea of workers' control at the point of production.

When he founded St. Petersburg as the new capital of the Russian Empire in 1703, Tsar Peter I (aka Peter the Great) made an intentional move to introduce greater European influence into Russia. The city's architecture and layout were modeled on European metropolises, and its location on the Baltic Sea is a point of entry for cultural influences that rarely penetrate far beyond the city's outskirts.

The Germanic name "Sankt-Peterburg"

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was Russified into Petrograd in 1914 in a show of patriotism as Russia entered the First World War. In 1924, after Lenin's death (and after the capital was relocated to Moscow), the city was renamed Leningrad. Finally, in 1991, the city was rebranded with its original name.

The international influence exerted by the city's geography and cultural history are not explored in depth by Mandel. He does, however, highlight a strong spirit of internationalism and solidarity across ethnic lines among Petrograd's working class despite its overwhelmingly ethnic Russian makeup. "The patriotic wave that swept Russian society when the war began found little echo among Petrograd workers and even that was short-lived. Police reports make clear that no trace remained by the fall of 1915."

Further, he notes that "One of the most famous strikes of 1912-14 upsurge of labour militancy was a 102-day stoppage at the Lessner Machine-construction Factory, sparked by the suicide of a Jewish worker who had been driven to despair by the taunts of a foreman. In 1917, people with obviously Jewish names, such as Izrailevich or Kogan, were elected by workers as delegates to soviets and other workers' organizations." (25)

At the outbreak of the February 1917 revolution, the workers of Petrograd were at a very advanced level of class political consciousness due in no small part to the experiences of the 1905 revolution.

Informed as much by a history of betrayals by bourgeois liberalism as by their own experiences of working class insurgency, they developed a culture of "class separateness" of workers from exploiters, which "was more than the desire for self-determination. It stemmed from a deeply held sense of the antagonistic interests that separated workers from the propertied classes. This gave rise to the desire for workers' organizations to be kept under exclusive control of workers, free of intervention or influence from census society." (21)

Although this ethic of "class separate-

ness" led workers to reject any political alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, and weakened support among conscious workers for the Mensheviks (who were more inclined than the Bolsheviks toward such alliances), it also made workers yearn for unity among working class forces.

"The 'conscious' workers typically referred to themselves as part of a 'worker family' or as 'a single harmonious proletarian family.' They felt there should be common goals and a common strategy, not division. Workers often expressed impatience with party divisions, sometimes ascribed to the pride of the party leaders." (24)

Skilled Workers vs. Worker Aristocracy

Mandel points to the skilled and relatively highly paid metalworkers of Petrograd as perhaps the most class conscious, revolutionary sector of the Petrograd working class. Meanwhile, unskilled and semi-skilled workers tended to be at a very low level of political consciousness and tended to show little interest in collective action.

Unskilled workers were typically recruited from the countryside; their peasant backgrounds and low levels of literacy affected their receptivity to appeals to the class struggle. Furthermore, their poverty and exhausting conditions of life afforded them little opportunity to engage in any activity not related to their own immediate survival.

This was doubly true of women workers, the vast majority of whom were unskilled, and who were responsible for the lion's share of domestic labor on top of their responsibilities as wage laborers.

Unlike unskilled men, women workers were unlikely to be afforded the opportunity to advance to skilled or semi-skilled positions that would offer higher wages and a moderately improved quality of life.

While earning wages far lower than men on average, women also "were subject to the arbitrary rule of unscrupulous managers and foremen who often took advantage of them economically and sexually. The 'decent public' looked upon women factory workers as little better than prostitutes." (28)

The small minority of skilled women workers, meanwhile, including those in the needle trades, who typically went through a two- to three-year trade school or apprenticeship, tended to be politically engaged

much like their skilled male counterparts.

While highlighting the advanced political consciousness of men in the metalworking industry and women in the needle trades, Mandel nevertheless validates the notion of the labor aristocracy, which is disputed by some Marxist thinkers. Although only a minority of the skilled working class, Mandel cites as an example of the 'worker aristocracy' the printers.

"As skilled workers, the printers were well assimilated into urban life and were nearly all literate. Their work required considerable intellectual skills, and their wages were on a par with those of metalworkers. It was not a privileged material situation but rather the nature of the industry and work, its structure and traditions that muted the antagonisms felt by skilled metalworkers toward census society and gave rise among printers to a sense of kinship with the intelligentsia and, through the latter, with the liberal elements of census society." (39)

Mandel notes that "defencist" or pro-war sentiments were strong among the printers; "printers also participated in such 'bourgeois' organisations as liberal philanthropies and in the city дума's efforts to alleviate the workers' economic distress. This went counter to the skilled metalworkers' norm of 'class separateness.'" (43)

Workers' Control: Oversight or Self-Management?

In the months between February and October, the question of workers' control was put before the workers of Petrograd. While socialists had long called for workers' control of production, there was not generalized agreement on what this control would look like; rather, the forms assumed

by workers' control were forced on workers by the actions of the capitalists.

"The workers wanted to keep their factories running, to save jobs and to defend the revolution. Workers' control in its initial conception of monitoring bore a resemblance to dual-power in the political sphere. . . . But workers' control, as originally conceived, was based upon the assumption that the capitalists would cooperate or at least tolerate control. The workers wanted to leave the administration in charge of running the basic financial and productive dimensions of the enterprises, while reserving for themselves the right to monitor this activity and to intervene in cases of abuse.

"But that was the problem: workers' control came up against the same obstacle as dual power in the state: the party to be 'controlled' was not obliging. On the political level, the workers soon concluded that the bourgeoisie wanted, in fact, to reverse the revolution. And they were reaching the same conclusion in regards to the owners' interests in keeping their factories running." (291-2)

Before and after October, factory committees were divided between those who wanted to restrict these bodies' activity to "passive" control, where ultimate management would be left in the hands of factory owners, and those who sought to grant factory committees "the broadest possible freedom of action vis-à-vis management. . . that is, the power to issue orders that would be binding on management." (398)

While many union leaders and moderate Bolsheviks argued for passive control, there was strong support at the rank and file level for active control. In the chapter "The October Revolution in the Factories," Mandel recounts the debates about the role of the factory committees in great depth. These

debates were complicated by the lack of a centralized economic plan.

Supporters of passive control were motivated to a large extent by a desire to maintain a state of dual power in the factories — to keep capitalists from pulling out of their enterprises entirely and forcing widespread nationalization on a regime without the wherewithal to administer a national planned economy. Ultimately, however, this dual power was untenable.

As Yu. Larin, a strong advocate of 'passive' control concluded in January 1918, "... there is but one way out: either move forward or drown." Mandel concludes that "As in the case of workers' control itself, nationalization was not primarily undertaken as a necessary step towards socialism but as a practical measure, one imposed by circumstances, for the survival of the revolution." (416, 418)

(David Mandel discusses these dynamics in his ATC article "The Russian Revolution: Its Necessity and Meaning," online at <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc192/p5181/> — ed.)

St. Petersburg is not the whole of Russia by any means, and Mandel's close study of the proletariat in one city is not the ideal choice for a reader seeking an entry level history of the Russian revolution. Its focus is intentionally narrow, as its title makes clear.

Given the importance of the workers of Petrograd in the Russian revolution, however, the value of Mandel's work can hardly be overstated. Painstakingly researched, it illuminates the connections between debates among party leaders and the underlying tensions affecting workers' lives. This leaves the reader with a much richer understanding of how the working class, in all its complexity, acts collectively to make history. ■

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REVIEW

The Political Economy of Struggle By William Bryce

Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement

By Jack M. Bloom

Indiana University Press, 2019, Second edition, 380 pages, \$32 paperback.

THE SECOND EDITION of Jack Bloom's book is a welcome addition to the huge body of work documenting the Civil Rights Movement, its actions and history. Bloom's book has been in print since first published in 1987, a rare feat in the competitive world of academic publishing.

The book is widely used in college classes and is among the works most cited by other scholars. Its quality is acknowledged by two prestigious awards, the C. Wright Mills Second Award Winning Book 1987 and "Outstanding Book Award," Gustafus Myers Center.

The Black Lives Matter movement today has piqued interest in the Black community's story. The University of California Press alone lists eight new books on related topics. Yet even those widely read in the field will appreciate Bloom's jargon-free, historical, class-based analysis of the Civil Rights struggle.

Many books that examine social movements look either at the structures and structural changes that make movements possible or, in some accounts, inevitable; or they look at the ways people's consciousness is changed and they are mobilized for action. This book looks at both.

The first half of the book examines with some precision how class interests — specifically those of the plantation class that had ruled the country and which after the Civil War, through a conflict that lasted for the remaining decades of the nineteenth century, continued to rule the South.

The antebellum southern system of white supremacy had developed to serve the interests of the agrarian master class, plantation owners. Planters' pre-Civil War wealth was based on "king cotton" and the cheap labor of their slaves. The profits accruing to plantation owners were unprecedented in the history of the country.

It is no accident that Senator Calhoun's ideas legitimizing slavery — "property prima-

William Bryce is a retired union educator, organizer and video producer. He has over 40 years experience teaching, organizing and troublemaking with unions and social justice organizations.



The post-Reconstruction southern bourgeoisie reorganized the economy, under the banner of "white supremacy," into a sharecropping system.

cy" — are echoed in today's anti-democracy arguments popularized by libertarians David Koch and John Buchanan (these are detailed in Nancy Maclean's book *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*).

In a chapter called "The Old Order Changes" Bloom argues that the decimation of the war, migration patterns, new technology, few banks and a collapse in commodity prices combined to birth a new system. A coalition of large landowners and merchants came together creating the system known as "sharecropping."

Bloom calls the merchant/landowner coalition a new bourgeoisie. Busily organizing and funding friendly politicians and Klan enforcers, their first order of business was disenfranchising Blacks and poor whites while holding them in debt servitude.

Bloom estimates that the poll tax, while aimed at preventing the Black vote, also disenfranchised more than 25% of poor whites. Whom you talked to, how you talked, whom you looked at, where you walked, worshiped or worked was determined by the system of white supremacy and your "place" in it. Not knowing your "place" or being "uppity" was a very serious matter.

The merchant/planter new bourgeoisie were clearly a minority. Any talk of democracy was very threatening to them. Whenever Black and white small farmers,

sharecroppers, farm workers or later manufacturing workers united, the elite immediately mobilized their divide and conquer strategy to save themselves from an organized workforce.

"White supremacy" was the banner under which they reorganized, even though what that slogan meant was in reality the dominance of the ruling class and the subordination of other whites, as well as the Black population.

In the 20th century dominance of that class would be undermined through the Great Depression and World War II by the rise of manufacturing and commerce, so that the Southern economic elite was structurally split. At the same time, a white middle class developed that had its own interests.

The book shows how the changes in political economy that took place in the South brought about a shift in power from the old agrarian ruling class to the new business class. These changes did not alter racial policies or dynamics, but they opened new possibilities for a Black freedom struggle — if they could find a way to act collectively for their own benefit.

The Fate of Reconstruction

What about the post-Civil War Reconstruction? Even today many Americans are still confused by the propaganda campaign slavery's apologists mounted after Union troops were withdrawn in 1877, following a "compromise" that settled the chaotic contested 1876 election.

Slavery's apologists calling themselves "redeemers" were very active politically, suppressing the vote of Blacks and poor whites. Redeemers were aided by the thirty thousand strong Daughters of the Confederacy who influenced everything from school curriculum to popular films like "Birth of a Nation."

To "Redeemers" the northern occupation of the south was oppressive and corrupt. In reality early Reconstruction evidenced reform, innovation and a flowering of democracy. Poor whites and Blacks formed coalitions around issues like roads and pioneered programs of public education.

Reconstruction was a genuine mass popular movement that if successfully completed, could have changed the course of racial and social U.S. history.

In Mississippi a coalition of Black and

white small farmers tried to overturn the lien laws. In Virginia there was a new party called the Re-adjusters. The Re-adjusters stepped over the line when they began appealing to Black farmers. This seriously challenged an old order struggling to reassert itself after the withdrawal of federal troops.

White supremacy rode to the rescue with its doctrine of “divide and conquer.” Sowing division was used over and over again: against the populists in the 1890s, against union organizing in the 1930s.

All attempts to bring people together were a danger to the “southern way of life.” (When anti-communism was added to white supremacy during the Cold War the elite were handed a new divisive tool.)

The Movement Rises

The book’s second part begins with the difficult conditions in which Black people were forced to live under white supremacy, and how they were made to feel inferior. Then, as they began to struggle for their rights, they cast off these feelings and grew and developed new ideas and new capacities.

Their efforts to make changes, in the sit-ins and freedom rides at first, changed themselves and the society in which they lived. The book follows the struggle through African Americans’ efforts to gain voting rights and the conflicts that took place between them and the federal government, between the federal government and the state governments, and how activists were forced to choose which of these authorities they would accept.

The book also examines the differences between Black communities in the South and the North, how the differences they faced brought about different ideologies, and the limitations of what was possible at that time, given the class and racial configurations.

While the changes that Black people demanded in the South for dignity and rights were possible to attain, the changes in material inequality they sought in the North were not.

Bloom has a unique ability to pick quotes and stories that are multi-layered and drive the point home. For example when describing the role of Black students in early lunch counter sit-ins he describes a situation where by the third day of protest whites were getting more violent and desperate. They recruited tough young gang members to attack and beat the protesters.

Forewarned, the protesters were led that day by a large group of star athletes. The protesters were confronted by the young toughs who demanded “Who do you think you are?” The students responded “We are the Union Army.” The protest continued.

This second edition adds a lot of information on the Freedom Rides, on how a new Black leadership was able to emerge to take



on the racial system, and goes into more depth considering the dialogue between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X and the development of both of their thinking.

It lays out their differences, reflecting the respective situation facing the freedom struggles in the South and the North, showing how their ideas grew closer as each of them approached their assassinations.

In explaining the evolution of Malcolm X’s ideas, Bloom chooses the words of movement icon John Lewis, who spoke of meeting Malcolm in Nairobi Kenya and of Malcolm using the word “imperialism” for the first time.

Lewis recalled how Malcolm “talked about the need to shift our focus both among one another and between us and the white community, from race to class. He said that was the root of our problems, not just in America but all over the world.

“He saw the great powers, such as the Soviet Union and the United States, using the poor people of whatever race, for their governments’ own imperialistic ends. That is the word he kept repeating ‘imperialistic.’”

Bloom discusses the evolution of Dr. King’s ideas as well. With U.S. society today facing an unprecedented crisis and protests exceeding anything since the 1960s, King’s words are more relevant than ever:

“For years I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of society — a little change here and little change there. Now I feel quite differently. I think you have got to have a reconstruction of the entire society, a revolution of values.”

Malcolm X and Dr. King were in Bloom’s words “groping towards a solution that emphasized class.” Typically, Bloom has the quote that nails it from King: “We are dealing with class issues... Something is wrong with the economic system of our nation, something is wrong with capitalism... There must be a better distribution of wealth, and maybe America must move towards a democratic socialism.”

A final observation comes from a chapter entitled “The Defeat of White Power and the Emergence of the ‘New Negro’ in the South.” This chapter tells the story of the psychological impact of organizing for change and its ability to create a new person.

The emergence of a “New Negro”

was first written about in 1920s Harlem. A large stable urban community with its own businesses, schools and infrastructure does not have the same vulnerabilities as isolated farmers in the south. It would be several decades before demographic and economic changes in the south made Black southerners less vulnerable to economic intimidation or terror.

“The success in Montgomery, Little Rock and elsewhere helped to create a new elan and leadership,” Bloom notes. As this leadership challenged the existing order more and more, anger emerged at white liberals’ and the federal governments’ faltering support.

This created a realization that the Black community would have to set its own course. In the decades ahead, “the impulse toward direct action would take hold.” Participation in direct action that wins change transforms people like nothing else.

Revising Conclusions

In a new “Afterword” for this edition, the author reconsiders and corrects some of the early optimism of the first edition’s conclusion about achieving a “second Reconstruction.”

Rather, the New Right has used race to build the present Republican Party — a party that can no longer legitimately claim to be “the party of Lincoln” — and has made itself a place where white supremacists can be comfortable.

The people who were attracted by the party’s “southern strategy” are also the people who made Trump the party’s nominee. He has been fulfilling the role they sought. The author projects another book to examine “class, race and the rise of the right” in the context of the broader sweep of U.S. history.

Jack Bloom is a product of a lifetime of struggles for justice. From his early days at Berkeley to his time in Detroit helping UAW members fighting for union democracy Bloom is in the thick of social justice causes. He was one of the six faculty members fired at the University of Detroit for their political beliefs and activities.

Disclosure: I was one of Professor Bloom’s students. We occupied the administration building on behalf of those who were fired. Jack Bloom was by far the best college instructor I ever had.

As distinguished professor at Stanford, Doug McAdam, testified:

“Books that significantly reorient fields of study are rare. Class, Race and the Civil Rights Movement did just that for the study of the civil rights movement when it first appeared in 1987. Rarer still are books that seem just as relevant 40 years later. As the new material in the 2nd edition of the book makes clear, Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement, belongs in this second select group as well.” ■

REVIEW

Facing Our Dangeous Moment

By Steve Leigh

Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger

By Julie Sze

University of California Press, 2020,
160 pages, \$18.95 paperback.

ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE THREATENS all of humanity. Civilization and perhaps the continued existence of the human race is at risk — yet we are not all threatened equally.

Julie Sze's short new book outlines the connection of racism to the ecological crisis. Those who are most oppressed in general are also most threatened by each social evil. This book presents the need for environmental justice as part of the general movement to save the earth.

Julie Sze is professor and the founding chair of American Studies at UC Davis. This is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship that examines American history, society, and culture, traditionally incorporating the study of history, literature and critical theory, but also welcoming research methods from a variety of other disciplines.

Subjects studied within the field are varied, but often examine the histories of American communities, ideologies, or cultural productions. Examples might include topics in American social movements, literature, media, tourism, folklore, and intellectual history.

Sze's work focuses on connecting environmental issues and the social crisis. In a brief interview accompanying this review, she described herself as a supporter of ecosocialism and ecofeminism and "influenced by the Social Ecology of Murray Bookchin."

She also told me that to describe the present epoch, "I like Capitalocene better than the Anthropocene, (which) is a problematic concept. It erases class, power and domination."*

She also sees "Decolonialism" as a central concept.

Sze's first book, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (MIT Press), won the 2008 John Hope Franklin Publication Prize, awarded annually to the best published book in American Studies.

Her second book is *Fantasy Islands: Chi-*



nese *Dreams and Ecological Fears in an Age of Climate Crisis* (University of California Press, 2015). She is editor of *Sustainability: Approaches to Environmental Justice and Social Power*.

Movement of Movements

Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger is part of the American Studies Now: Critical Histories of the Present series.

The book begins with the background of the division between the rich and the poor: "The three richest people in the United States (Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates) own as much wealth as the bottom half of the population (160 million people). In 2013, the world's eighty-five richest people had a net worth equal to that of 50% of the world's population (3.5 billion people). In 2017, the wealthiest global 1 percent gained 82 percent of the world's wealth." (2)

The poor are disproportionately people of color and the formerly colonized. As the ecological crisis intensifies, "(t)he resurgence of explicit racism is unsurprising for justice activists, who see their lives impacted by legacies of structural domination and racist public policies." (3)

The same profit-driven system that reinforces racism is also responsible for the threat to the earth.

"Capitalism depends on control, specifically control of nature. It also relies on the control and abuse of people of color..."

"Environmentally just outcomes cannot be expected within existing liberal and capitalist institutions, and they cannot rely on market-based or technology dependent solutions." (7, 8)

As the author observes: "Social movements for environmental and climate justice are mobilizing large numbers of people... and having a broad national and global impact." These movements have some common features:

"Environmental justice movements ... are a counterhegemonic philosophy of practice, a search for freedom ... Environmental justice is not (just) about state centered policy incorporation or reformism. It challenges the status quo rather than fixing or tinkering with a system grounded in domination, racial terror and colonial control." (3, 14)

Sze presents case studies that illustrate her analysis. Chapter One, the "Movement of Movements," outlines the long-lasting struggle of Native people in the United States for environmental sanity and for their right to self-determination.

This deep connection between Native liberation and the protection of the earth is a common and important theme. This connection has resulted in the leadership of Native people in the fight to save the earth. The focus of this chapter is on the Standing Rock struggle, but its slogan "Mini Wiconi" ("Water is Life") resonates far beyond the Dakotas. (Though the Dakota Access Pipeline was finally approved by Trump, a court has ordered it shut down and the struggle continues.)

Chapter Two on the Flint water crisis is another example of *Mini Wiconi*. This time the victim was the majority Black population of that Michigan city. It is a further illustration of institutional racism:

"The victims of greed and power in the United States are not just Indigenous and black communities, but the agents of greed and power are particularly merciless when it comes to those bodies at risk." (50)

The tragedy in Flint is an example of greed and racism but other issues as well. The precipitator of the crisis was the transfer of the water source from the relatively clean Detroit water system to the Flint River, "contaminated from decades of industrial pollution." Without the necessary corrosion control, this meant: "The water corroded pipes and lead flowed as a result." (51)

Why did this happen? Flint, along with many other African American cities in Michigan had been placed in receivership

Steve Leigh is a member of the Revolutionary Socialist Network and an ecosocialist activist in Seattle, Washington.

* On the terms "Capitalocene" popularized by author Jason W. Moore, and "Anthropocene" developed by scientists to describe the dominant role of human activity in shaping today's global environment, particularly its accelerating impact in the decades following World War II, see the discussion by Ian Angus in *Facing the Anthropocene. Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System* (Monthly Review Press, 2016).

by the governor. The theory was that these communities were irresponsible and needed the budget discipline of mostly white emergency managers enforcing the discipline of the market.

This health crisis was exacerbated by the economic consequences: "Thousands of Flint resident, in 2019, a full four years after the crisis broke, still face foreclosure for non-payment of water bills for lead contaminated water." And Flint's tragic story is not unique: "For more than a century, lead poisoning has devastated low income and particularly African American children who suffer from disproportionate exposures and unequal protection from the state. Lead poisoning is the story of the intentional failure of government in service of industry." (51, 52)

It is not only African Americans who suffer. This chapter also points out how mostly Latinx farm workers in California suffer similar issues, as "160,000 residents of the Valley do not have regular access to clean water.

"The Valley has some of the highest rates of air pollution in the nation, poisoned groundwater, over concentration of prisons, high rates of poverty and residential foreclosure rates, and low educational attainment." (52) Further: "The agricultural regions in the Valley... import water hundreds of miles from water-rich parts of Northern California. Clean water from the north bypasses poor, farmworker communities..." (63)

Chapter 3 outlines the impact of neoliberalism and racism on the crises in New Orleans after Katrina and Puerto Rico after Maria. In both cases political and industry leaders used "natural" disasters for unnatural consequences — privatizing social assets for the profit of a few. Again, greed and racism compounded each other.

These were examples of the "Disaster

Capitalism" described by Naomi Klein, whom Sze admires as "a great popularizer of left wing ideas around ecology" and "a gateway to deeper considerations, like Rebecca Solnit."

"Capitalism Must Die"

The concluding chapter returns to the general themes of the introduction, calling for solidarity across issues and a revolutionary opposition to capitalism. Quoting Scott Alden, the author says: "For the earth to survive, capitalism must die." (99)

In my view, the only major limitation of this short and well-written book is its implication that the primary conflict is between capitalism and people of color.

"Capitalism... relies on the control and abuse of people of color." (7)

In fact, capitalism fundamentally relies on the exploitation of the whole working class, not just workers of color. Racism is used to super-exploit people of color, but just as importantly to divide and weaken the whole working class to facilitate exploitation.

The collective exploitation of all workers gives the whole working class the potential incentive to oppose capitalism and the institutional racism that helps prop it up.

Overthrowing capitalism requires a movement of the entire working class. That movement will not be successful unless it directly confronts racism. The movement against environmental racism is an important contribution to building the necessary unity of workers.

This book is a useful contribution to an understanding of this important movement and deserves a read by anyone who wants to overcome environmental destruction along with racism and capitalism. ■

An Interview with Julie Sze

Steve Leigh: What do you think of the work of Naomi Klein?

Julie Sze: I like her work! She is a great popularizer of left-wing ideas around ecology. She is a gateway to deeper considerations, like Rebecca Solnit.

SL: What do you think of the concept of the Anthropocene? Capitalocene?

JS: Anthropocene is a problematic concept. It erases class power and domination. I like Capitalocene better than the Anthropocene. The Feminist/Indigenous criticism of the grand narrative is very important.

Decolonialism is also very central.

I support EcoSocialism and Eco Feminism and have been influenced by the Social Ecology of Murray Bookchin.

SL: What do you think of the mainstream environmental movement?

JS: It has had too much of a technocratic policy approach. That has changed to a degree. It has largely dropped the racist/eugenicist approach of years ago. It still marginalizes oppressed communities too much and is too middle-class oriented. This is not acceptable.

SL: How do your students react to your teaching?

JS: There has been a big change in the last few years. The stakes are higher now. People get it more now. Students now recognize the idea of colorblind racism. Now even non-radicals recognize white supremacy. ■

Fragments from a Past — continued from page 31



roots activists are of course anathema to a long tradition of leftist thought. Yet that work is always a source of strength and hope.

In that vein and in light of the pain and suffering that the Trump administration has caused and will continue to do so, I would ask you to consider the everyday pain caused by their range of vicious policies from cages for child immigrants, to eliminating overtime pay for millions to food stamp cuts (not yet finalized), let alone his threats to Social Security and disregard for health care.

Consider Trump's dangerous appeals to white

nationalism, however veiled, and how they affect people of color. How can we not look in horror at his outrageous handling of the pandemic or his dismissal of climate change science?

Without any doubt, neoliberalism promoted by the Democratic Party also has had devastatingly negative effects on subaltern sectors of U.S. society and of course overseas. Eight years of the Obama administration helped to create the social-economic conditions for rightist populism.

The question that must be answered is: from what position can neoliberalism be resisted? A Trump-emboldened ascendant populist right wing that promotes racial animosity is not propitious terrain for anti-neoliberal resistance. That the rightist resurgence is international should give us even greater pause.

Neither history nor theory offer ready-made solutions. ■

REVIEW

An Education in Indigenous History By Sergio Juarez

An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People

By Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Debbie Reese and Jean Mendoza

Beacon Press, 2019, 272 pages, \$18.95 paperback.

IN ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ's wildly popular *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2014), she builds a historical narrative that challenges the one commonly taught to U.S. students. The book sheds light on the major doctrines that shaped modern United States policy and how the architecture of oppression was built by white supremacist values during its formative years. It particularly focuses on how modern Indigenous nations and communities are societies shaped by their resistance to colonialism.

This work, which has been adapted for young people, uses sidebars and exercises to ask the reader to reflect on conventional historical narratives. Dunbar-Ortiz's exercises are not simply filler; they challenge the reader to rethink what they may have read in a traditional school textbook. One even gives the reader helpful strategies for interpreting the media.

The book begins with a brief overview of current U.S. history and an outline of how modern textbooks mask the country's white supremacist roots. Dunbar-Ortiz then identifies some of the basic tenants of American settler colonialism:

"White supremacy. The idea that European American civilization is superior to those of the American Indians and of the Africans who were enslaved for economic gain" and "A policy of genocide and land theft." (12)

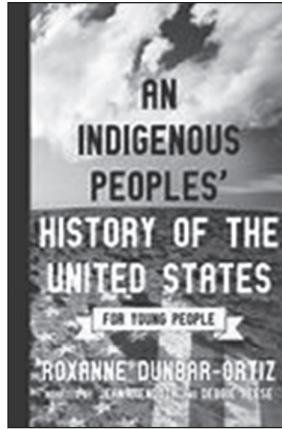
This ominous start foreshadows the many painful incidents that would shape Indigenous resistance.

Indigenous Empires Excel

We are then given a snapshot of Native cultures through one of their most valued staples: corn. Dunbar-Ortiz challenges the traditional colonial settler narrative by illustrating that Native cultures were based on advanced agrarian practices and well developed systems of governance.

These innovations led to a population

Sergio Juarez is a Chicano who grew up in a working-class mixed-status immigrant family. Currently he lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.



was about seventy million. "Scientists attribute the significantly larger population in the Americas," Dunbar-Ortiz notes, "to a relatively disease-free society whose use of herbal medicine, surgery, and ritual bathing kept disease at bay." (19)

The author also describes the financial motivations of European colonizers and emphasizes how they imposed their religion. When the colonizers first made contact with Indigenous peoples, they justified their actions by dehumanizing them and characterizing them as spiritually and biologically inferior.

Even when Natives reluctantly converted to Christianity, Europeans still deemed them lower: "This idea that bloodline is more important than wealth or social status laid the groundwork for what we call, today, white supremacy," Dunbar-Ortiz comments. (37)

The arrival of these colonial settlers and their world view was at complete odds with the Native populations. The colonizers viewed everything they saw (land and resources) as theirs to own and exploit.

Previously people of England had used common land for their crops and livestock. However, during the Crusades era nobles took over those commons. Dunbar-Ortiz noted "Land went from being accessible to all to being private property where no one could go without permission from the owners." (35) These brutal privatizations in turn created an entire class of people who were doomed to poverty and set the stage for colonial conquest.

The colonists' strong desire to accumulate wealth at all costs and to do so by

explosion and the creation of city-states toward the 1500s.*

During this time the Western Hemisphere had approximately one hundred million people, while the population of Europe

spreading religious dogma and therefore stamp out Indigenous cultures resulted in genocide.

Bloody Footprints

Once the author defines the motivation and framework of the colonial settlers, she then analyzes some of the significant conflicts. The violent systems that the colonists created are described at some length:

"By the mid-1670s, scalp hunting had become part of an organized system throughout the colonies.... The settlers gave a name to the mutilated and bloody corpses they left in the wake of scalp hunts: redskins." (67)

(Remember this next time someone normalizes the name of that football team!) This cycle of violence would repeat itself in battle after battle.

Land grabs and violence were amplified under Andrew Jackson. It is when describing the larger than life "heroes" like Jackson that this book shines. Dunbar-Ortiz argues that "there is danger in romanticizing any person, but especially ones who, like Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, acquired wealth and status by taking actions that directly or indirectly harmed others." (109) The author makes it clear that both men were wealthy plantation owners who exploited enslaved laborers and developed one of the largest wealth-robbing genocidal systems ever seen.

Jefferson built the system by empowering settlers to continue to take Indigenous lands and crafting policies that normalized violence against them. Jackson contributed to this system with his militias and the U.S. military through brutal campaigns. One particular example was the subjugation of the Muscogee nation that resulted in a commission from President James Madison to become major general in the U.S. army.

Systemic ethnic cleansing went hand in hand with the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This enabled the government to create tracts of land west of the Mississippi. New treaties ceded Indigenous homelands to the United States in exchange for a new land base.

Following the Act's passage, Washington made 86 treaties with 26 Indigenous nations located between New York and the Mississippi. These were signed under false pretenses or through intimidation. In the case of the Cherokees, when the leadership

*The reader who wants to study in more depth about the groundbreaking innovations from indigenous peoples might want to read *American Indian Contributions to the World* or *Daily Life of the Aztec on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*.

refused to sign they were jailed. They would then proceed to force any remaining council member to sign the treaty. The legacy of the Removal Act resulted in death marches in the middle of winter:

“Half of the sixteen thousand Cherokee men, women, and children who were rounded up and forced marched in the dead of winter perished on the journey.” (120)

These consolidated Native spaces set the stage for continued extermination as the land grab served to embolden the United States in its violent expansion west.

White supremacy also birthed the institutions meant to “reeducate” the Native populations. For instance, the Indian Civilization Act provided thousands of dollars for missionaries to “civilize” and “Christianize” Native children.

“These boarding schools,” Dunbar-Ortiz tells us, “were modeled on treatment of Native prisoners held at Fort Marion.” (159) Indigenous children were taken from their homes, sometimes with their parent’s “consent,” sometimes by force. Schools were built far away from the children’s homelands in order to remove them from their cultural surroundings.

These violent, systemic actions illustrate that the United States, under the guise of diplomacy and law, ethnically cleansed and pillaged Native nations. They undermined Native nations’ abilities to self-determine, to organize, even to exist. They sought to strip a Native person of their identity from the minute they were born until they died.

As Dunbar-Ortiz puts it:

“The Termination and Relocation acts of the 1950s were part of the centuries-long efforts to dispose of indigenous peoples...The new termination policies attempted to deprive entire nations of their right to exist, and the Relocation act was an attempt to entice entire families to abandon their homelands and their communities.” (175)

Despite these continuous efforts to eradicate them, Dunbar-Ortiz reminds us that Native nations found ways to resist.

Existence is Resistance

In Chapter 10, Dunbar-Ortiz focuses on key uprisings in Indigenous history from 1960 to 2013. One of the most notable incidents is the occupation of Alcatraz. This uprising was led by the large Native population in the Bay Area (due to the relocation program) in 1964 and again in 1969. The idea was to reclaim Alcatraz, which served as a prison until 1963, because legal treaties stated that abandoned federal lands would revert to tribal ownership.

Although the first occupation was short lived, the second group garnered worldwide attention. The second wave, which occupied the island for as much as a year, included

families. Groups organized and created demands for new institutions to serve Indigenous interests. This action radicalized a generation of indigenous youth.

It was under Nixon’s administration that some of the demands from Alcatraz were met, such as establishing a Native college (Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University) and a Native cultural center. However the reclaiming of the site was not granted.

The years after this important action led to a wave of successes in the courtroom, policies that acknowledged Native peoples’ rights to cultural preservation and tribal sovereignty.

- In 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act passed, which empowered Native communities to determine their needs and decide how to best use federal monies.

- In 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed. Before ICWA, there was little effort to keep Native children in their communities or with Native families.

- In 1990, after decades of pressure, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Before this, cultural artifacts were stolen and hoarded in museums and private collections. Some even displayed their ancestors for tourists to gawk at! The Act required museums to return human remains and burial items. Indigenous communities held ceremonies and buried their ancestors.

- In 2013, Congress took a first step to address violence against Native women by implementing the Violence Against Women Act. Before this policy, tribes could not prosecute non-Native people who committed domestic or dating violence. (The Act was only for five years and has not yet been reauthorized.)

Dunbar-Ortiz concludes by highlighting scenes from the current struggle for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) illustrates the same reoccurring and systemic failures on the part of the U.S. government to honor treaties made with Native peoples.

Before construction on the DAPL project was to begin, the energy companies were required by the federal government to carry out environmental impact studies. These studies were to include consulting those affected by the pipeline’s construction.

Failure to perform these consultations has been used as the basis for legal action from Indigenous nations because consultations clearly showed that building this pipeline would result in a violation of the Fort Laramie Treaty and, more importantly, put their local water supply at risk.

Despite the objections of Native people, whose sovereignty was once again under-

mined, construction began. As these capitalist interests sought to extract resources, the Native population began a campaign that garnered worldwide attention.

“Many people around the world were shocked to see a September 3rd video of dogs attacking water protectors who tried to stand in front of machinery that was digging to lay more pipeline” (214).

The high visibility campaign against DAPL produced both wins and setbacks. During the Obama administration enough pressure was put on the president that his administration denied the pipeline company the easement it needed. However, the Trump administration reversed the order and authorized a go-ahead. As of March 2020, a federal court denied permits for the pipeline, the rationale being that the environmental impact statement left out vital worst case scenarios. The court ordered that a full environmental impact report be conducted. It remains to be seen what the outcome of this battle will ultimately be.

As more educational institutions become aware of the importance of Native Studies/ Ethnic Studies, literature such as this book will grow in importance. *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States for Young People* is an excellent introduction that centers Native experience. Here in California the State Senate passed a bill that would require high school students to take a semester of an Ethnic Studies course starting in 2029. I can envision this book being the required text for a unit on Native history. ■

Critique — continued from page 35

tradition of socially committed poetry that had exercised widespread influence during and beyond the Depression years.” (222)

Through such pairings, Foley demonstrates the utility of Marxist criticism in understanding both “politically engaged” work as well as art that participates in the pretense of an apolitical “art for art’s sake.”

Overall, Foley makes a convincing argument both for the “continued need for a classless future,” and for the continued relevance of Marxist critique in achieving this project, against post-Marxists and others who would suggest that Marxism has become rather “part of the problem.”

In its capacity as a literary criticism primer, the book practices its politics, demonstrating the applicability of Marxist critique to a wide range of cultural production, both contemporary and historic.

In so doing, Foley avoids the twin accusations of Laclau and Mouffe — either blind retrenchment to orthodoxy or ad-hoc application — offering a model for the elusive integration of orthodox Marxism with the present social and economic landscape. ■

Nettie Kravitz, 1921-2019 By Peter Glaberman

ONE OF THE last members of a small socialist organization, *Facing Reality*, Nettie Kravitz was part of a group that made an important contribution to Marxist theory and practice. Reporting about working-class resistance to capitalism, these socialists had an intersectional perspective. While some accuse Marxists of failing to see gender and race, Nettie was attracted to a socialist tradition that prioritized the Black and women's struggles.

NETTIE KRAVITZ WAS born in Philadelphia in 1923. Her parents were Jewish immigrants from Ukraine. Her mother came from a politically leftist family. This was in contrast with her father, unhappy that Nettie took after her mother's side of the family, he was nonetheless progressive enough to quietly help his wife by doing the laundry.

Her opposition to unjust authority had early beginnings; when Nettie brought home a Black friend, her mother warned her not to cross her father and said that the friend had to go. Her concern for injustice was further aroused as a young girl by reading about the violent pogroms against Jews in Eastern Europe. She told me "If you see something and don't do anything, then you are guilty."

While in college at Temple University, Nettie organized a women's group and started a course on women and literature. She was attracted to C.L.R. James' faction in the Workers Party and during the war suggested the organization should pay more attention to women factory workers, based on her sister's experience.

C.L.R. convinced her to work in a factory and this led to an article on the sharp political awareness of some of the women in the clock factory where she was employed, written for the WP's newspaper. After her graduation in 1945 (with a degree in psychology) Nettie formally joined the Workers Party and was at one time the head of the Philadelphia branch.

James and his faction (known as the Johnson-Forest Tendency) joined the Socialist Workers Party as a minority faction in 1947. In 1951 the group left the SWP, forming the

Peter Glaberman grew up in a socialist household; his parents were members of the Workers Party. Although not a political person or a scholar, he wrote this remembrance based on his memories, some reading, a series of conversations with Nettie at the end of her life and a recent discussion with Selma James. Some of the information the two provided was contradictory.



Correspondence Publishing Committee whose goal was to share its views and news of working class activity. The core leadership was James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee (Boggs).

Some of the defining positions of the group were its characterization of the Soviet Union as a state capitalist regime, not a workers' state, its support for an independent African-American movement, rejection of the idea that a vanguard party was necessary to lead a revolution, and the democracy of the group's internal organization which encouraged all members to have a voice.

Nettie moved from Philadelphia to New York, living with C.L.R. James and acting as his aide while he was courting his second wife Constance Webb. After an acrimonious split in the organization in which Raya Dunayevskaya left (forming the News and Letters Committees), in about 1955 Nettie was sent to live in Detroit, where she stayed for the rest of her life.

Correspondence and After

Detroit had been at the center of the struggles of organized labor since the 1930s and the group moved to be nearer the action. The group published the newspaper *Correspondence*, which published letters from workers, as well as its own take on events.

The group reported on and supported the self-organizing activity of the working class and of Black Americans including Robert F Williams, the local head of the NAACP in Monroe, NC, who chartered a branch of the National Rifle Association named

the Black Guard which defended the Black community against the KKK.

An important confirmation of the views of the group came with the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which saw the spontaneous formation of workers' councils and a rapid transfer of power from the puppet Soviet government. Russian Soviet tanks soon crushed the workers' revolution, but the nature of that revolt was revelatory.

In the midst of the ferment of the New Left, by the late 1960s it became clear that the organization (by that time called *Facing Reality*) was not attracting new members, and that its usefulness had run its course. The group was disbanded in 1970, despite the objections of C.L.R. James.

As a young woman, Nettie always wanted to travel but, unable to devise a means of getting paid to do so, decided that the next best thing was to become a teacher and have her summers free.

She began teaching elementary students in a private Jewish school, went on to teach junior high and high school for the Detroit Public School system, and, after getting an MFA at Wayne State (her dissertation was on Jonathan Swift) she taught Women's Studies and Literature at Oakland Community College for 24 years.

Nettie had many and varied interests; after college she spent some time studying art at the Barnes Institute outside of Philly and she remained visually and aesthetically acute. She dressed well and often sewed her own clothes. Her stalwart nature, generosity and support attracted loyalty in her political and social life.

She had many friends, only some of whom shared her politics, and over the years she poured energy into maintaining communications with her friends and comrades. She was very interested in the theater and film, and was a founding member of DAFT (digital arts film and television).

She was an officer in the American Association of University Women, a strong supporter of the National Organization for Women and Planned Parenthood, and contributed to a very wide variety of local charities, Jewish groups, veterans groups and medical research charities.

An unrepentant member of the anti-Stalinist, post-Trotskyist Left, Nettie will be missed. If she had survived, she would have wanted to be out in the streets, demonstrating with the Black Lives Matter movement. ■

That's a demand supported by something like two-thirds of the U.S. population, overwhelmingly popular among the Democrats' base and activists — and zealously opposed by both capitalist parties, including Biden who promises to veto any such legislation that improbably passes through Congress.

There are collateral crises that we've discussed in previous and the present issues of *Against the Current*, including the intractable dilemma of K-12 public education as well as colleges.

Opening up the schools is a deadly menace to teachers and communities, while reliance on "remote learning" deepens already disastrous race, class and geographic inequalities of access to the necessary technology.

Still not fully charted are the enormous fiscal deficits facing state and local governments, for which the Republican-controlled Senate has vowed to provide absolutely nothing.

On top of all this, despite the enormous upsurge of #Black Lives Matter activity and popular support for the struggle, police forces seem enabled to continue and escalate brutal tactics of control and arrest up to and including murder of civilians. The failure to indict the police who killed Breonna Taylor highlights the fact that they were not "rogue cops" — they were acting on the basis of the system's rules. That illustrates how the system actually works, with all its potential for explosive consequences.

Looking Forward

Against this backdrop, what would be the prospects of a Joe Biden presidency, should it emerge from the dust and grime of the November election?

To begin with the obvious: The Republican campaign mantra that "Biden is the captive of the radical left" — standard Republican absurdity in every election, recited with more vicious bile in the Trump era — is the exact reverse of the truth. The Democratic convention established the decisive hegemony of the neoliberal Biden-Obama-Clinton party leadership and marginalization of the "progressive" wing. There was more speech and face time for moderate-Republican-for-Biden figures than for the AOC and Bernie Sanders forces, and that's not only a cynical electoral calculation — it's what Biden is comfortable with, as his whole political record shows.

The party platform, for whatever attention anyone pays to it, deleted a 2016 plank for ending subsidies for fossil fuels industries, and maintained unconditional support for Israel despite the increasing alienation of the party's base, including young Jews, from Israel's brutal occupation policies and open ethno-nationalist Jewish supremacy. Even worse, the Biden campaign didn't wait a single day before launching a gratuitous smear against leading Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour who spoke at a Muslim-American side event during convention week.

If all that weren't enough to signal where a Biden administration is likely to go, there's another factor: An anti-Trump blitz began, as sectors of the U.S. elites (belatedly) responded to the full menace of where Trump might be leading them. The barrage of rushed-into-print books by Mary Trump, Michael Cohen, then Bob Woodward and Peter Szrok was hardly accidental.

To what extent their revelations move the final electoral

needle is an unknown, but they indicate the establishment hope that Biden will be the "unity and healing" candidate for a polarized country. Just what he's supposed to unify it around is a giant vacuum.

In brief, Donald Trump fires up both his own base and the Democratic opposition, while Joe Biden puts much of the Democratic base to sleep. As some figures like Cornel West and Michael Moore have put it, they feel compelled to vote for Biden, "but we won't lie for him."

True to form, state Democrats engaged in sleazy power plays to keep the Howie Hawkins/Angela Walker Green Party ticket off the ballot in the crucial states of Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. This demonstrates a characteristic contempt for democracy that's a big part of why the Democrats have lost so much ground. (A collection of perspectives on the election appears at <https://solidarity-us.org/>, the website of Solidarity, the organization that sponsors this magazine, including results of a poll of its membership posted August 22, 2020.)

Going a bit deeper, we can ask three partly overlapping questions about what a Biden/Harris administration might do in a post-2020 far-from-normal United States.

First, how would a Biden presidency respond to pressures from the party's "progressive" left wing in Congress? As already suggested, we suspect the answer is "very little if at all." The question isn't about nice campaign speeches about "build back and better" or climate change or racial justice, but what a president once in office is prepared to fight for. Nothing we've seen indicates that progressive Democrats can make Biden a fighter for anything his "moderate" friends in both parties won't approve.

Second, how would it respond to the activist movements of these times? Our answer here is "possibly a bit more, because they'll have little choice." Of course Biden and Harris will try to force #BLM and the fighters for environmental justice and immigrant rights to cool out and act "responsibly," but we expect that these movements will remain in the streets, especially in the face of police and right-wing racist violence that won't be going away.

Third is the great unknown — how might a Biden administration, despite its neoliberal politics and conservative instincts, be compelled to respond to the objective emergencies of the economy, the pandemic and political and racial polarization? If for example the reactionary Supreme Court majority overturns the Affordable Care Act, would Biden have the guts to declare a national health emergency and take the necessary measures?

The situation we face demands, to begin with, massive economic stimulus and relief, protection from evictions, and very serious health infrastructure reform, if only to head off a threat of descent into chaos. Could the force of circumstance compel a Democratic administration to abandon its stagnant neoliberalism and move toward something like a New Deal?

The odds of that, and the possibility of it becoming some version of a Green New Deal, are even less easily predictable than what might unfold in the days and weeks following the November 3 election. In the face of the sheer enormity of the crisis, popular mobilization can make a difference. ■

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