

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

# AGAINST THE CURRENT



**PERU:  
RISING AGAINST  
CORRUPTION**

## Black Resistance

♦ ROBIN D. G. KELLEY ♦ ALEX LICHTENSTEIN ♦ MALIK MIAH  
♦ DERRICK MORRISON ♦ MARY HELEN WASHINGTON

## Motherhood & Work in the Pandemic

♦ URSULA McTAGGART



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# A Letter from the Editors: The 21<sup>ST</sup> Century Plague

THE CALAMITOUS MALFEASANCE of the outgoing Trump regime's response to the coronavirus pandemic threatens to obscure deeper realities of this global as well as U.S. crisis. The incoming Biden-Harris team faces a deeper and more menacing emergency of both public health and the economy than the 2008-09 financial meltdown that confronted president Obama's first year.

Throwing money to keep banks solvent, as in the 2009-10 bailout, will not work this time. Distributing vaccines as they become available is a wartime-level challenge. And the racially-driven polarization of the United States' political culture, escalating under Trump's reign, has never been more acute, or dangerous.

Yet even before the January 5 Georgia runoffs that will determine control of the U.S. Senate, the incoming administration is taking its all-too-predictable shape — a return of the centrist neoliberal policies of the Obama-Biden years, albeit with more gender and ethnic diversity.

There are few if any surprises so far, giving rise to disappointment among some "progressive" folks over the absence of Cabinet-level appointments from that wing of the Democratic Party. But what was to be expected in the wake of Biden's boasts that he was the candidate who "defeated" the advocates of Medicare for All, the Green New Deal and cutting bloated police budgets?

[For a perceptive discussion of the choices facing the new administration and its emerging trajectory, we recommend Walden Bello's article "The Biden Presidency: A New Era, or a Fragile Interregnum?" at <https://fpif.org/the-biden-presidency-a-new-era-or-a-fragile-interregnum/>. Another brief analysis, "Out with the Old, In with the — Older," is posted at <https://solidarity-us.org/>.]

Focusing here on the coronavirus, some statistics about the U.S. situation help provide context. Consider a comparison with the 1918-19 so-called Spanish flu (actually an avian flu which, evidence suggests, originated in rural Kansas and quickly spread to a military base where troops were mustered for deployment to World War I).

That pandemic, before the advent of modern vaccines, is thought to have infected 28% of the people and killed 675,000 in the United States, about 0.64% of a total population then of 106 million. Extrapolated to today's U.S. population of just over 330 million, that would produce a death total of some 2.1 million. *Is such a catastrophe possible?*

The first 11 months of the current pandemic, as of mid-December 2020, have now claimed over 300,000 lives in this country. With the "second wave" raging as winter sets in, it's difficult to imagine that the eventual total won't reach double that number. Thanks to science and improving medical treatments, with vaccines hoped to be widely available to the public by mid-2021, and with the science-denying and medical-expert-sabotaging Trump out of office, the U.S. per capita death toll from COVID-19 can probably be kept between a third and half that of the flu pandemic a century ago.

That, of course, is horrific enough, especially considering the impact on Black, Latino and Native American communities, on essential and exhausted medical frontline workers and the heartbreaking wreckage of small businesses falling through the cracks of those expiring relief and stimulus programs, which were inadequate and patchy to begin with. For a discussion of the disproportionate impact on women, see Ursula McTaggart's article in this issue of *Against the Current*.

How much of this human disaster was preventable? There's an instructive comparison with Canada, which has also been hard-hit and where the lack of regulation and preparation in crowded long-term care facilities and congregate shelters was especially disastrous [on this aspect of the crisis, see Ivan Drury's article "Two-tier Response to COVID-19" in *ATC* 206, May-June 2020].

At the beginning of December, Canadian medical and political authorities were deeply alarmed by an "out-of-control" surge penetrating every region and previously insulated Indigenous communities. Yet the per capita rate of coronavirus spread in Canada amounts to about 30% of the U.S. numbers.

That suggests we can attribute some 70% of the U.S. toll to disastrous political culture and leadership — manifested in Trump's super-spreader campaign rallies, right-wing state governors' economy-over-everything proclamations in defiance of public health commonsense, mass anti-masking protests, religious services' exemptions from mask and social distancing rules, and widespread denial of the reality of the pandemic. That's how infection rates, exactly as medical experts warned, now come to top 200,000 daily with more than 3000 fatalities and rising — more than a 9/11 civilian death toll every single day.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's appeal to avoid Thanksgiving travel, if issued three or four weeks earlier, might have had a greater impact than asking people to make last-minute cancellations of longstanding family plans. It's another case of government action too little, too weak, too indecisive, too unclear to convince tens of millions of people whose decisions ultimately make the real difference.

We have to understand what it means not only that roughly 45% of the country supported Trump, but also that 70% or more of Republican voters believe to one or another degree that the election was "rigged" or "stolen." This indicates that roughly 30% of the U.S. populace — mostly among white people — live in a reality-free alternative universe, impervious to facts and open to the most bizarre conspiracy fantasies. That has serious implications not only for politics, but for dealing with the pandemic, the reception of vaccines, and much else.

## Lockdown Conundrum

In several countries (and U.S. states) initial successes in economic closures and stay-at-home "lockdowns" were followed by too-quick uncontrolled re-opening and new virus surges, so that of the sacrifices people made seemed to have gone for nothing. The result in places like Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain and Britain: protests against reimposed

*continued on the inside back cover*

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# AGAINST THE CURRENT

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## 2 Nuclear Power and Climate Change

Ansar Fayyazuddin

## 5 Motherhood and Labor in the Pandemic

Ursula McTaggart

## 8 Building a Union Campaign

interview with Dawn Tefft

## 10 Behind the Farmers's Strike

## 11 Peru: Rising Up Against Corruption

interview with Andrea Palacios

## Black Resistance

## 14 Challenges for African Americans

Malik Miah

## 15 Organizing Then and Now

Robin D. G. Kelley

## 19 James Baldwin for Our Time

Mary Helen Washington

## 21 The American Caste System

Malik Miah

## 24 The U.S. South and Labor's Fate

Alex Lichtenstein

## 26 Recovering William Monroe Trotter

Derrick Morrison

## Reviews

### 31 The Trauma of Domestic Violence

Giselle Gerolami

### 33 When Science Meets Capital

Guy Miller

### 35 An Uprising and Its Fate

Promise Li

### 37 Indonesia as Testing Ground

Allen Ruff

### 39 The Comintern in 1922-1923

Tom Twiss

### 41 A Life in the Revolution

John Barzman

## Cultural Notes

### 44 On the Life of Justin Townes Earle

Alexander Bilet

*Front Cover:* Murals have emphasized Indigenous resistance: this one is of an Indigenous Peruvian holding a sign saying "A New Constitution from and for the People."

*Above:* Leaders of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans. 1918. Its stated purpose was to uproot the twin evils of lynching and disenfranchisement. Trotter is in the front row, fourth adult from right. Hubert Harrison Papers Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University

*Pages 5-7:* Cartoon by Lisa Lyons

*Back Cover:* Detroit living wage rally. [www.jimwestphoto.com](http://www.jimwestphoto.com)

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## Disasters Compounded: Nuclear Power & Climate Change

By Ansar Fayyazuddin

NUCLEAR REACTORS AS sources of electrical power date back to the late 1940s, when Soviet scientists first harnessed heat produced as a by-product of plutonium production to generate steam to drive electricity-producing turbines. From these ignominious beginnings in weapons production, nuclear reactors were quickly elevated to a “peaceful” and socially beneficial technology by the propaganda machines of both belligerents of the Cold War.

In this carefully crafted public image, nuclear power came to represent science with the aura of magic — it would be, in the famous and now discredited words, an energy source “too cheap to meter.”

Far from delivering on this promise, nuclear power has been an abject failure in every respect that its advocates themselves proposed as measures of its success. Yet despite this record of failure, we are seeing a revival in the advocacy of nuclear power. It is touted by some as a climate-change mitigation strategy. The purpose of this article is to interrogate the claims of these proposals and explore nuclear power’s larger consequences for humanity and nature.

### In Case of Malfunction...

When we begin to examine a technological solution to a particular problem, we are tempted to delve right away into the mechanics of the technology. In this way, we predispose ourselves to the functioning of an idealized mechanism.

One might consider instead to begin from, in a sense, the opposite vantage point — the consequences if the technology were to malfunction even in some small respect. Thus, before building a chemical plant, we should ask not how it would operate ideally but about the consequences of a leak, a fire, an earthquake.

In the case of nuclear technology, we are not only able to imagine failures, we have a historical record that vividly illustrates what failure can look like. These events by no means exhaust the ways in which nuclear reactors can malfunction or fail. Most cases of malfunction are not reported and information about them is actively suppressed.

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*Ansar Fayyazuddin is a research physicist and member of Solidarity. He would like to thank M. V. Ramana for his comments.*

Even for the major accidents that we know about, the public record is not complete due to the secrecy that shrouds all nuclear ventures, whether “peaceful” or military.

Here I will delve into some considerations that should be part of any thinking about the use of nuclear power, in the light of historical experience. We tend to value reason over experience, particularly when experience contradicts our analytic framework. It is time to reverse that hierarchy, which should surely be science’s *sine qua non* — giving observation precedence over our theoretical prejudices.

### Chernobyl and Its Lessons

Let us begin with a particular accident: Chernobyl. In history books you will find a date and a place for this disaster: April 26, 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant located in the Ukraine.

As Kate Brown in her book *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* emphasizes, “accident” conceived as a localized occurrence in space and time is not an adequate way to describe Chernobyl or, by extension, any nuclear disaster.

The date marks only the beginning of the accident — it is not done, even now. The time over which radionuclides decay depends on the particular isotope involved, and those originating with Chernobyl will continue to be active for thousands of years to come.

But it is not only the surrounding ecology of the power plant, the Pripjat marshes and environs, that have been transformed indelibly. The radionuclides spewed out into the atmosphere during the meltdown were transported throughout the Northern Hemisphere.

The first notice that the international community received of the disaster was when radiation exposure from radioactive isotopes from Chernobyl were detected via the radiation badges worn by workers at a Swedish nuclear power plant. This was hundreds of miles away and only two days after the incident. The detectors at the Swedish reactor facility indicated that workers had been exposed to unsafe levels of radiation, by the standards of the nuclear power plant itself!

The environmental historian J. R. McNeill notes that everyone living in the Northern Hemisphere has received a radiation dose from Chernobyl. Nuclear disasters thus cannot be localized in space and their span in time lasts thousands of years.

In the preferred analytic frameworks of modern sociology and a certain type of history, impersonal ways of representing the world tend to dominate. This impersonal accounting, “data” in their parlance, has its place and can be helpful.

These numbers and technicalities, however, often fail to make disasters comprehensible. How can one translate the symbolic representations of facts into a picture of reality? The answer in my view is that it can’t be done, as these symbols leave out the very thing that gives them their relevance — how these events are actually experienced by human beings.

In the case of Chernobyl, we are fortunate to have Svetlana Alexievich’s *Chernobyl Prayer* (some editions are titled *Voices of Chernobyl*), in which the people affected by the disaster tell their own stories.

These stories are not just accounts of physical injury and loss, although there is much horror to recount, but are also the stories of living with the knowledge that your way of life has been permanently disrupted. These are the stories of never being able to return to a place, of everything being contaminated by radioactivity, of living in a state of trauma that will never pass. It means living with the realization that having a child will require asking what will this child’s physical needs be, and whether society will be able to provide that support.

As the surrounding areas of the Chernobyl plant were evacuated and the inhabitants relocated, they found that they became pariahs. Their bodies were transformed by the accident into sources of radioactivity from the inhalation of radioactive dust and from consuming contaminated food grown in the area, and having these isotopes lodged in their physical bodies.

They became unsuitable partners with whom to have children. Indeed, the injuries of Chernobyl ran much deeper than the recounting that our data-based methodology can capture. Only once the testimony of individuals gives us a sense of how a



The amount of radiation released by the Chernobyl — from only one of the four reactors — was the equivalent of several hundred Hiroshima bombs.

single person can be affected are we able to begin to gain an appreciation of the magnitude of the tragedy of Chernobyl through numbers.

The amount of radiation released by the Chernobyl explosion (not a nuclear explosion) was the equivalent of several hundred Hiroshima bombs. Had the fire spread, to one or more of the other three reactors, the result would be hard to imagine.

We were spared that fate either by luck or by the sacrifice of the first responders whose own fate was sealed the moment they arrived at the site. Within the first year of the accident, 135,000 inhabitants were evacuated from the surrounding area now known as the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.

This zone had to be expanded from an initial radius of 10km to 30km from the site of the accident. This area will remain uninhabitable for thousands of years.

The problem with using Chernobyl as epitomizing nuclear disaster is that it is subject to the prejudice that what it reveals is more about the Soviet Union than about the dangers of nuclear technology. However, the most relevant aspects of the accident are universal and repeated in the so-called West and elsewhere.

The Japanese Fukushima Daiichi disaster from 2011 shows many of the same features, including the secrecy, lack of accountability and misinformation that characterized Chernobyl. We are yet to have a full accounting of the consequences of the Fukushima Daiichi accident.

The only reason why we have some level of understanding of Chernobyl is because of the dogged work of activists and researchers, who have tried to piece together the scope of the disaster, despite the hurdles actively placed in their attempts to uncover what happened and its consequences.

### Extraction, Eco-destruction, Indigenous Rights

Nuclear reactors pose a grave threat to humanity because of their use of radioactive isotopes that can easily result in the exposure to harmful levels of radioactivity of both workers and the population at large. These exposures can take place at various stages of the lifecycle of nuclear reactors.

If we view the reactor's lifecycle in terms of certain moments, one could tentatively enumerate (a) the extraction and enrichment of nuclear isotopes that serve as fuel for the reactor, (b) the running of the reactor, (c) decommissioning reactors. All three stages pose threats to safety.

(a) *Nuclear fuel* — typically enriched uranium — requires the mining of radioactive ores, separation of the compounds and the enrichment of the needed isotopes. As is the case of most mines, these are typically located in areas where marginalized communities reside.

Mining often requires the dislocation of populations and the disruption of lives and ways of living, sometimes in exchange for "compensation." This displacement and disruption is mostly done without the consent

of the population.

For the Manhattan Project (World War II development of the atomic bomb), the United States obtained a large fraction of its uranium from mines located in the Belgian Congo, where the mines were controlled by the colonial Belgian regime known for its distinctively murderous and sadistic rule.

The natives who worked the mines were not provided with protection. We know very little about the impact of uranium mining on the Congolese miners and the surrounding population, as is so typical of the colonial disregard for the wellbeing of their dispensable colonial subjects.

After the war, the United States started looking for uranium sources at home and discovered that it could be separated from a mineral ore found on Navajo land in the areas now called Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah. Over 1000 mines were established on this land for extracting uranium, employing miners from the Navajo population.

The milling technique used to extract uranium involves separating other radioactive ores from the uranium through a process that disperses radioactive dust into the surrounding area. Then the unneeded radioactive remains are dissolved in water and discarded, which then leaches into the ground. The process results in the contamination of the surrounding ecology and water reserves.

The most active uranium mines in the world, including the ones in Canada and Australia, have similar impacts on Indigenous populations. Thus, the brunt of uranium mining and enrichment — a highly toxic process — has been felt most acutely by marginalized communities, particularly those of Indigenous populations and colonial subjects.

(b) *During the lifetime of a functioning nuclear reactor, there is great potential for accident.* As Charles Perrow in *Normal Accidents* explains, the complexity and interdependent processes taking place in a nuclear power plant make major accidents triggered by a minor glitch a very real possibility.

While the behavior of workers is often blamed for nuclear accidents, Perrow points out that accidents are in actuality inherent to the technology itself. The sensible behavior of workers acting on what they know at the time often cannot be reasonably criticized.

Studying previous incidents like Three Mile Island (1979) and Chernobyl shows that accidents are the result of a cascade of interconnected failures that are built into the system although not by conscious design. Even more severe versions of these accidents could have occurred were it not for something fortuitous, planned or unplanned, that curbed the cascade.

In addition to the potential of accident, nuclear power plants produce radioactive waste, the disposal of which remains an unsolved problem.

(c) *The closure of nuclear reactors poses a distinctive set of additional problems.* Once closed, these sites are virtually permanent sites of radioactive contamination. If they go through a process of decommissioning, radioactive parts of the plant and nuclear waste need to be disposed properly.

There are still no good options for the disposal of nuclear waste. Various “remote” sites have been designated as dumps for radioactive remains, but this comes at the cost of making the surrounding areas of these sites hazardous for human habitation and putting the local ecology at risk.

The site of the closed reactor itself poses dangers as effluents from power plants leak into the surrounding environment and require independent remediation during decommissioning. The process is resource-intensive and requires years of remediation.

### Privatized Profits, Socialized Risk

The history of nuclear reactors is the history of corporate welfare that socializes the costs and risks associated with their construction and running, while privatizing any profit. In his environmental history of the 20th century, the historian J. R. McNeill writes:

*“Nuclear power held some of the same political attraction as dam building: it signified vigor and modernity. Admiral Lewis Strauss, head of the American Atomic Energy Commission, predicted in the 1950s that by the 1970s nuclear power would be too cheap to meter.... But no nuclear power plant anywhere made commercial sense: they all survived on an “insane” economics of massive subsidy.”* (Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World, W. W. Norton, 2000: 312)

McNeill goes on to explain that when Britain privatized its electrical industry, there were no private takers for the nuclear power plants. Thus the only way corporations made money from nuclear power is through massive subsidization from public funds.

While the state guarantees profits to corporations that build and manage publicly funded power plants, the risks associated with accidents are always socialized. The Price-Anderson Act dating back to 1957 and serially renewed until its current expiration date in 2025, caps corporate responsibility for liabilities associated with accidents.

Private insurance companies are also protected from the costs of nuclear disasters. The costs of the management of nuclear disasters are therefore almost entirely relegated to the public sphere. Moreover,

the management of radioactive waste associated with nuclear power are also the responsibility of the state.

Risk of nuclear disaster associated with reactors are routinely misrepresented. In the design and commissioning phases of nuclear power plants, so-called experts assess the risk by various modeling techniques and providing a reified number representing the probability of disaster.

These exercises are carried out by people with a direct interest in the approval of the power plant, and are based on assumptions that are not always warranted and often not spelled out.

Looking at actual disasters (Chernobyl and Fukushima Daiichi, say), the specific circumstances of each illustrate very clearly that, while each particular scenario may be highly unlikely (at least in one’s imagination), there is a cumulative compounding effect of many individually unlikely pathways contributing to making disasters possible and even likely. Furthermore, as nuclear reactors proliferate they multiply the possibility of disaster.

### Green New Deal, or More Corporate Handouts?

I have argued that nuclear power is a dangerous technology that poses distinctive hazards at all stages of its lifecycle. But how does it compare economically to renewable energy sources such as solar and wind?

Although an aura of innovation emanates from nuclear power, it is wholly undeserved. In reality, it is a technology of the past whose efficiency and cost have remained uncompetitive and stagnant in the many decades of its existence. Solar and wind power technologies, by contrast, continue to improve in efficiency and cost.

If we compare the present-day cost per MegaWatt-hour of electricity, solar and wind power are notably cheaper than nuclear power. When one further takes into account that solar and wind technologies are becoming more efficient with time, it becomes clear that they are better suited for public investment.

A notable feature of wind and solar power is that they don’t require much in terms of operational costs, whereas maintenance and operation are significant sources of cost throughout the lifetime of nuclear power plants.

Despite its lack of new ideas, the nuclear industry is adept at promoting old ones as if they were innovations that solve longstanding problems. One such idea that is receiving renewed attention is so-called breeder plants. They are based on using more abundantly available non-fissile radioactive isotopes, such as those of thorium, that when combined with fissile uranium isotopes lead to the net production of fissile fuel in the

process of energy production.

However, as M.V. Ramana has shown (see for instance <https://thebulletin.org/2016/11/a-fast-reactor-at-any-cost-the-perverse-pursuit-of-breeder-reactors-in-india/> and the references therein), practical implementation continues to be hounded by problems.

While all the dangers and issues attendant on regular nuclear power remain for these breeder plants, new ones particular to them are added.

A further important consideration in deciding between technologies is to take proper stock of the climate emergency and the need for immediate decarbonization of our energy supply.

While solar and wind technologies are easy and quick to deploy, nuclear power requires significant lead time. In fact, typical timelines require close to a decade from an accepted proposal to an operational power plant. Historically, nuclear reactors have a long record of delays in construction and of running well over the initial cost estimates.

We have neither the time nor monetary resources needed to implement decarbonization using nuclear power if we are to achieve it within a timeline that avoids an even worse climate catastrophe than what we are on target to confront.

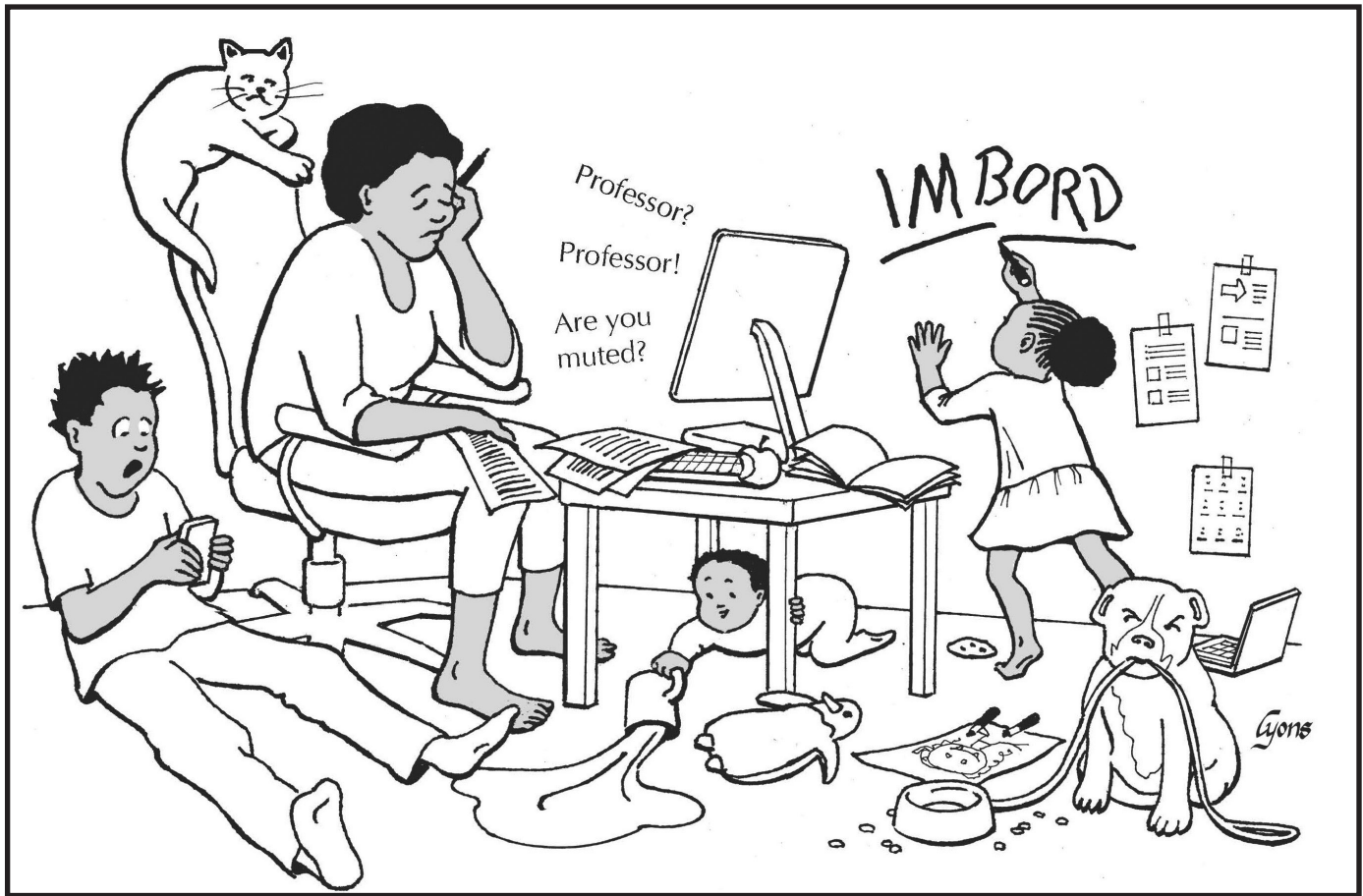
The Green New Deal for state-sponsored radical ecological intervention takes its inspiration from the New Deal of the 1930s. Public sector investment through the GND should therefore be about encouraging the growth of good jobs that provide security and good living standards as well as building publicly-owned infrastructure beneficial to humanity and subject to democratic control.

Nuclear power fails on all these counts. Several studies indicate that nuclear power will make only a marginal contribution to job growth, unlike solar and wind power, which are already contributing significantly to job growth.

Hazardous nuclear technology cannot be democratically controlled because of its close connection to nuclear weapons manufacture. Most importantly, in my view, any Green New Deal should not contribute to the further environmental degradation of our planet, which nuclear power most certainly will do. ■

#### Fund Appeal Update

AS WE GO to press, our annual fund appeal has brought in over \$4200 and counting, as well as a substantial number of gift subscriptions. This year we have a matching grant up to \$10,000 so help us meet our goal! Thanks to our readers — and remember that the appeal extends through the secular midwinter festival of Super Bowl Sunday! You can mail your check to *Against the Current*, 7012 Michigan Avenue, Detroit MI 48210 or donate through our website: <https://againstthecurrent.org/>.



Mom? Mom! Mo-om!:

## Motherhood & Labor in the Pandemic

By Ursula McTaggart

PANDEMIC IS AN opening for revolutionary thinking. It has forced us to realize that the things we take for granted — getting up and driving in to work, sending children off to school on the bus, walking the aisles of the grocery store, or packing ourselves into crowded bleachers — can change dramatically overnight.

Even the most basic activities can, in a moment, turn 180 degrees, and we can learn to do them differently.

This is an opportunity to see school and childcare, two staples of our society, anew. We could remake them radically so that when we conquer this pandemic, we have stronger, better and more equal public schools and daycare structures.

Unfortunately, our society hasn't done that. Instead, what we've done is ask women of young children to bear the burden of childcare and remote schooling in this disaster. In the process, we have widened economic and social gender inequalities.

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*Ursula McTaggart is an associate professor of English at Wilmington College in Ohio and a member of the Against the Current editorial board.*

We have walked back the gains that feminism had made throughout the 20th century, sending women out of the workforce and back into unpaid household labor and childcare.

In other cases, we have asked fully employed women to become teachers and daycare providers at the same time that they do their paid jobs.

We have told women not that they can "have it all" but that they have to "do it all." And there's even more to do — wiping down groceries with Clorox wipes, supervising hand washing for 20 seconds, and washing loads of masks for in-person schoolers.

### Who's Exaggerating?

Working fathers, too, have been involved in this dual work and childcare crisis, but evidence suggests that women are carrying an unfair share of the burden. In a Morning Consult poll for *The New York Times* conducted in April 2020, 80% of women interviewed said they did the majority of the homeschooling work in their household, and 70% said they did the majority of house-

work as well.

Men dispute these claims, apparently. Forty-five percent of men in the same study maintained that they did the majority of the remote schooling. But as *New York Times* writer Claire Cain Miller pointedly remarks, men's reports are unreliable.

A 2015 study of inequities in parenting found that both men and women overestimated their increased work loads after having a baby. However, women's work loads increased much more than men's did, as reflected in their time diaries.

In this particular study, men believed they were performing 15 hours of increased housework a week, whereas their time diaries reflected a five-hour weekly decrease in housework. When childcare and housework labor were combined, men believed that their load had increased by 30 hours a week, while time diaries indicated a 12.5 hour increase.

Women, like men, believed that their total work had increased by 30 hours when it had in fact, according to the diary, increased by 21 hours a week. When paid work hours were factored in, men in the

study recorded 69 total weekly hours of work, and women performed 77 hours.

Although both men and women exaggerate the amount of work they do, according to this study, men exaggerate more. And women do more, when it comes to childcare and housework. For mixed-gender couples, the pandemic replays this transition to parenthood and its concomitant demands for more labor. And women again find themselves doing more of the work while receiving little of the credit.

Not only that, but the pandemic has asked women to perform feats of multitasking that are often literally impossible. Working women have always had to work “second shift,” doing the majority of the child care and household labor in most families in addition to their fulltime jobs. Now, however, what was simply unbearable has become literally untenable. Working women’s lives are tearing at the seams.

### Impossible Choices

For women who are “essential workers,” laboring in health care, grocery stores, delivery or other fields that never “locked down” between March and May, school closures meant that children were at home, and childcare options were limited.

Working women like this had to choose between sending children to daycare centers at the height of a pandemic, where they hoped daycare providers would also be able to supervise homeschool activities; leaving children at home unattended; risking the health of older relatives by asking them to provide childcare (and also supervise education); relying on co-parents to do the vast majority of the childcare and homeschooling work; or dropping out of the work force altogether.

Many women in this situation chose to quit their jobs. Eighty percent of those who have left the workforce in the pandemic have been women. And among them Latinas have been affected disproportionately. In September alone, 865,000 women left; 35% were Latina.

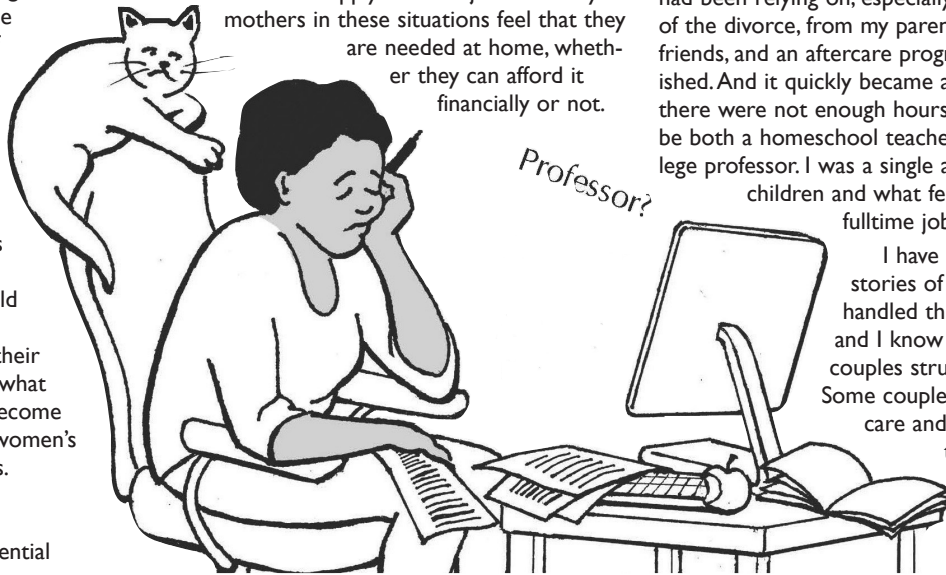
Beyond essential workers, whose children had no school to attend while they left the house daily for work, women in other types of jobs have suffered differently.

Women who work in service, restaurant, entertainment or hospitality industries often faced layoffs, financial hardship, and potentially risky returns to work as lockdowns eased. At the peak of the layoff-related unemployment crisis in April, 2020, more women were effected by the mass layoffs than men, with a 15.5% unemployment rate

compared to men’s 13.3%.

In the midst of their financial and career catastrophes, many of these women have been handed the daily responsibility of supervising their children’s online education and providing childcare that might have otherwise taken place outside the home.

The continued need for childcare and homeschool supervision affects women’s abilities to apply for new jobs — many mothers in these situations feel that they are needed at home, whether they can afford it financially or not.



Even women who have maintained steady, fulltime employment from home throughout the pandemic have confronted the reality that household labor is rarely divided equally between men and women. Many families with two working parents who now work from home — or families with only one working parent in the household — must juggle the demands of fulltime jobs with absent or reduced childcare and homeschool demands.

Babies and toddlers cannot be left unattended by a television while parents work on Zoom. Young school-age children — kindergarteners through fourth or fifth graders — require near constant supervision of their online work.

Even older children and teenagers can’t simply teach themselves with online videos and worksheets. Teachers’ physical presence is vital for children’s learning, and when that presence is limited to Zoom, it means that parents must frequently step in as advisors and surrogate teachers.

### Firsthand Experience

These are the statistics. But the collected stories of working moms convey the reality more profoundly. Journalists have done the hard work of collecting these stories, and you can read many in *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, or listen to them on NPR. To those meaningful and diverse collections, I can only add my own limited

experience.

I was five months into an unwanted and unexpected divorce when the college where I teach announced that it would move online, first temporarily and later for the whole semester. Within days my children’s schools, where they were in third grade and kindergarten, followed suit.

As we entered lockdown, the help that I had been relying on, especially in the midst of the divorce, from my parents, family friends, and an aftercare program all vanished. And it quickly became apparent that there were not enough hours in the day to be both a homeschool teacher and a college professor. I was a single adult with two children and what felt like multiple fulltime jobs.

I have heard many stories of how parents handled this transition, and I know that those in couples struggled as well. Some couples split childcare and work duties, taking care of children from 7-3 and then working from 3-11 while their partner did the

opposite. Others took days or weeks off work to manage homeschool.

One friend must sit with her first-grade son on her lap for his Zoom calls, or he refuses to participate. She had to schedule all of her Zoom teaching in the evenings.

My solution was to allow my children to watch many hours of TV a day while I taught Zoom classes, planned future classes, and graded papers. Then I harassed my kids into doing their homework urgently, in limited time, and with little patience.

When my third grader told me he had done all of his assigned work, I trusted him — only to realize later that he had turned in very little of the work. One day, while I struggled to manage my own lesson plans upstairs, I yelled for him to sign onto his Zoom downstairs; I came down 10 minutes later to find him, on Zoom, wrapped in a blanket with only underwear underneath.

In the two days during the work week and the one weekend day that my kids went to their father’s house, I worked incessantly on my teaching, and was nonetheless constantly behind. I felt daily gratitude that I already had tenure — while I worked long days on Saturdays to grade papers and prep for the next week, the book project I had been working on back in September went untouched.

By August, my children’s school district announced that I could choose either all-iv-



tual or all-in person school for them. My job, however, told me that I would be returning to teaching fulltime in person, and I would need a doctor's note for anything else.

Although I didn't feel that in-person school was safe for the kids, I signed them up, and we all went back to school, masked, five days a week.

### COVID Strikes

For nearly three months, all went smoothly. No more than a handful of cases were reported at my college, and none at my children's schools; we had each been tested for COVID regularly, anytime we have a minor cold.

Then, in the weeks before Thanksgiving, cases in both locations began climbing. When my kids' dad had them tested in the hopes of taking them to visit his mother for Thanksgiving, they both came back positive for COVID.

Completely asymptomatic, they breezed through the virus and passed it to their dad, who became ill but not dangerously so. I managed to escape, perhaps because I am participating in Pfizer's vaccine trial and may be vaccinated. Fortunately, they did not visit or endanger any grandparents or anyone outside the immediate family. We believe that one of them was infected at school and passed it to the other.

I don't yet know the impacts that COVID may have on my children's health long-term. I do know that their time at school endangered them and those around them. My conservative small town continues to push in-person school too hard and is unwilling to shut down the schools in the face of the late autumn surge.

Yet my friends in more urban settings have never sent their children back to school since March, even when cases were more manageable in the early fall. That was perhaps a mistake as well.

### What Are the Priorities?

I am not advocating for in-person school at all costs. Nor am I discounting the terrible cost that teachers and the community may face from opening schools. We should not put school opening over human lives.

*We should, however, prioritize school openings over all other economic activities, beyond basic food and medical care. We should open schools long before we open bars and restaurants. And we should have the social support to do so.*

The pandemic has highlighted what teachers have always known — we need them, and we need them in person. Online education, while possible, is vastly inferior. It favors those who are self-motivated, prepared, and resourced.

We need children, especially young children, in classrooms and not online. This

should have been our nationwide priority. We should have put all of our collective resources, both financial and intellectual, into safely returning children to school and daycare.

This could have been the moment for teachers to demand and for state governments or local administrations to grant drastic reductions in class sizes — classes of 15 or less not just for now but forever.

We could have devoted public funds to hiring legions of teachers, paying them well enough to lure them into the field from other careers, and finding new spaces to house small clusters of teachers and students, outside when possible and inside, masked, when not.

Many well-paid, well-educated teachers with small clusters of students is the exact right way to educate the population, pandemic or no. We could choose to think radically differently in this pandemic, to

put education first. In doing so, we would give working mothers the opportunity to return to their paid jobs and trust their children to skilled educators.

Or, on a similar note, we could have used this opportunity to think about the deep value of childcare and education in our society. Without childcare, in the form of daycares, schools or stay-at-home parents, we cannot engage our work force in other tasks. They will forever be getting cups of milk, opening bags of fruit snacks, and settling sibling disputes, not to mention sounding out words and counting by fives.

These are not silly tasks — this is the stuff of caretaking. And caretaking deserves compensation, not as unskilled labor or expected unpaid contributions to a family but as real, productive, often unalienated labor. This is the labor of building our own future community — the most important and most skilled labor we have.

### The Brunt of the Pandemic

Mothers are feeling the brunt of the pandemic because a patriarchal society has always handed them the labor of caretaking and declared it meaningless. This is our chance, as a society, to demand compensation for the labor that takes place within households.

When my children throw things at me while I teach my Zoom classes — on one occasion hitting me in the forehead mid-sentence — this is a moment when it becomes apparent that I have not one job but two. The reality of my life as a working mom is visible in a way that it hasn't been before.

Symbolically, perhaps, that is useful. It humanizes me to my students — we are more than our workplace selves, and

we should embrace that. But practically speaking, it means an erosion of the many workarounds that working moms have devised in the past decades to prop up their professional lives. And it leaves women balanced precariously on the edge of reversing decades of gains in workplace equality.

This isn't a criticism of teachers' unions, which operate in a pragmatic world. They did not have offers of better pay and smaller class sizes to work with. They were often entering poorly maintained buildings without enough access to soap or hand sanitizer to make teaching or learning safe. It was, in many cases, the right call to maintain virtual learning for the safety of teachers and students.

*It is our larger social response that has been disjointed and unimaginative. When school and daycare are truly unsafe, then we should fight for workers to have fully paid childcare leave. If schools returned in hybrid format, we could supplement that with reduced work weeks — at the same, federally subsidized pay — for workers.*

Reduced work weeks are part of the socialist dream of less alienated labor and human-centric living, not production- and efficiency-centric culture.

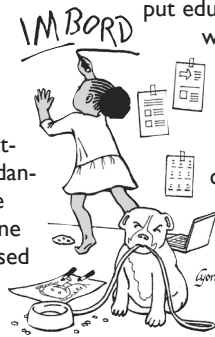
The pandemic offers us the opportunity to think about the value of human lives, within and outside of family settings, rather than the economic requirements of production. And that value of life isn't simply about staying alive, but about thriving, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

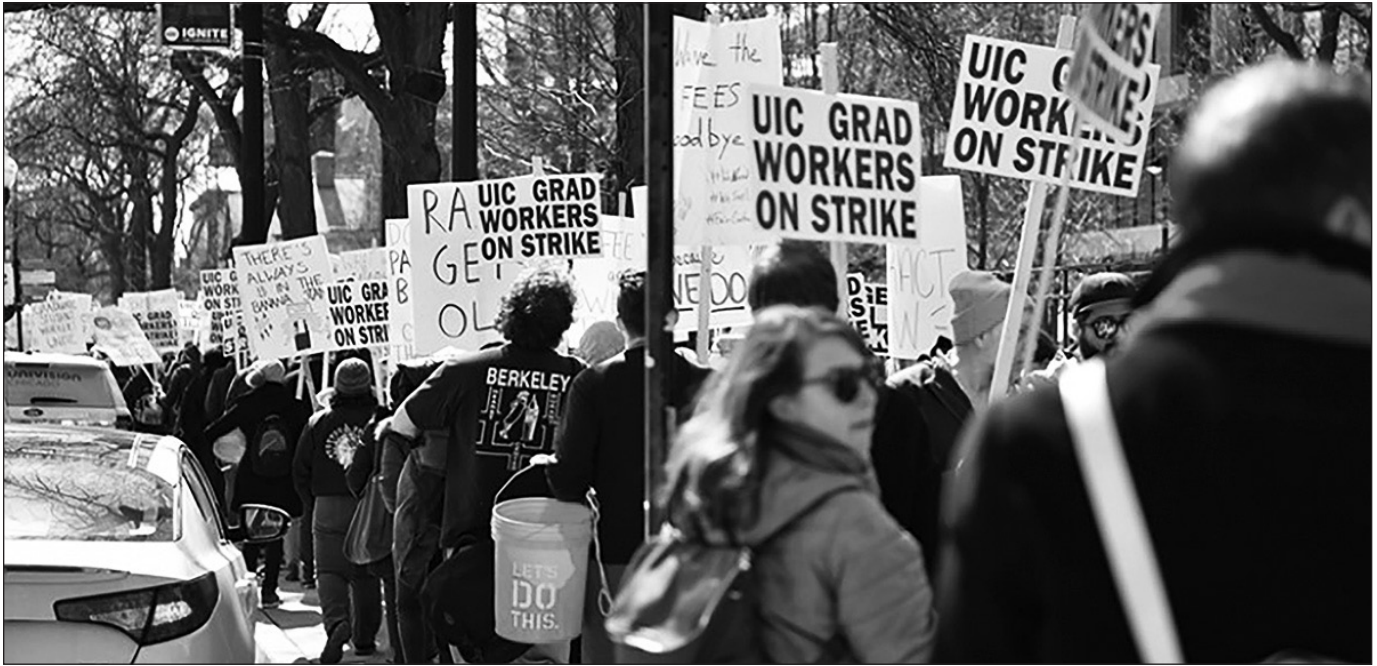
I think that the U.S. left, as a whole, has erred on the side of physical safety in considering the needs of elementary age children and advocated the homeschool option too unthinkingly. Collectively, we need to understand that this situation is not just "hard" for working mothers but that it fundamentally endangers women's ability to chase already elusive workplace equality.

This is our chance to demand, vociferously and urgently, the funds and resources to implement small class sizes for in-person, distanced learning. When right-wing pundits shout about the economy, we should be shouting just as hard about the centrality of education and caregiving to our social well-being.

Schools are easy to close because there are no small business owners decrying their loss of income. But it should be the responsibility of the left to think not only about physical safety but about overall social good in this pandemic — and, in doing so, to put political energy toward safe, well-funded school openings, with across the board cuts to class sizes that could outlast pandemic.

This is the moment when the world changes. We should be there to grab it and mold it into the shape that will benefit teachers, parents, and children in the future.





Having had a successful strike under their belt in 2019 the UIC GEO was the first graduate student union to win impact bargaining demands.

## An Interview with Dawn Tefft Building a Union Campaign

IN 2011, UNIONS and community members in Wisconsin demonstrated their outrage at governor Scott Walker's anti-union legislation in daily protests and sit-ins. Dawn Tefft was then a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and active in her union.

A few months prior to the start of a mass uprising, Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association were preparing to take action, including a strike. They knew a strike wave was unlikely to materialize due to longstanding bureaucratic approaches to unionism among many unions, but were doing everything they could to help create the conditions for one.

What has become known as the Wisconsin Uprising stopped short of a general strike, though the members of MGAA were willing to go out if other unions were, and the mass movement, in failing to escalate to the point of a strike wave, faltered.

Tefft learned from that experience that a union needs campaigns that grow out of on-the-job discussions with coworkers. From this an organizing committee can form around a list of demands and a plan for how actions can involve the membership. Without building a team that is thinking through how to broaden its base, it can't build the power it needs. And without taking strategic direct action, it can't exercise that power sufficiently.

The appearance of the COVID-19 virus last winter presented several challenges to workers whether unorganized or in unions. Now working as an organizer at the University of Illinois Graduate Employees Organization (UIC GEO) in Chicago, Tefft had helped to campaign for

a contract the year before. The question then became, how can graduate employees win what they needed at the beginning of the crisis?

Tefft also became active in the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee (EWOC), a joint project of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the United Electrical workers union (UE) taking up problems workers faced as COVID-19 spread. It is an experiment in running a labor organizing project through a network of volunteers.

Dianne Feeley from the *Against the Current* editorial board interviewed Tefft, who is also a single mother with a two-year old.

If, after reading this article, you would like to read more about or contribute to EWOC, go to <https://labor.dsusa.org/covidorganizing/>. For Labor Notes, go to <https://labornotes.org/>.

**Against the Current:** When COVID hit U.S. campuses last spring, what were the major problems graduate student workers faced? In the rapid escalation of the COVID crisis that's unfolding now, how are graduate students dealing with their own studies as well as their teaching workloads?

**Dawn Tefft:** Graduate student workers were faced with healthcare plans that were inadequate for pandemic needs, gaps in healthcare coverage, and potential loss of income. International graduate student workers also faced the possibility of becoming houseless.

**ATC:** At your university, the graduate students are organized into a union. What were you able to negotiate with the university administration?

Were there issues you weren't able to successfully resolve at that time? Were you able to take up issues about how the university would reopen?

**DT:** Yes, shortly after the state of Illinois declared a state of emergency, UIC GEO successfully impact bargained a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for immediate graduate worker needs that semester. We negotiated improvements to the healthcare plan for the semester, all but one of which we've bargained to have extended in other semesters.

One of the biggest wins was two weeks of paid sick leave, in addition to regular sick leave, for those sick with COVID or who had to take care of someone sick with it. This was critical because our members had about three-and-a-half days of sick leave on average. Eventually, the federal government passed the CARES Act, and so an even more comprehensive sick leave policy replaced the one we had won.

The second-most crucial item we won was mass pre-authorization of COVID-19-related tests and treatments at ER and urgent care facilities. The campus has its own in-house healthcare services. Normally, all students on campus are required to have their out-of-network needs pre-authorized in order for those to be covered.

We had heard from members that it could take days to get pre-authorized. And we knew that our members wouldn't have time for that, given how many people manifest respiratory problems requiring that they

be seen immediately. Also, we knew that our members would want to limit the distance they traveled on public transport since public transportation increases risk of exposure.

We also won teletherapy services for those with mental health needs. Studies have shown graduate workers have some of the highest stress levels of any workers, which was underscored by how many of our members had written us to request that we bargain for this item.

Another healthcare need the university met was to cover out-of-pocket expenses at 100% for ER and 70% for urgent care, though they instituted this as a policy rather than agreeing to it in a MOU. They instituted this for all students, including undergraduates, in response to our proposal, so we also helped students who weren't workers or in our bargaining unit.

The hardest-fought MOU, and the one that took the longest to nail down, was free summer housing in the dorms for international graduate workers who were stranded in the United States due to international travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

Though not formalized in an MOU, we also won 80 new internships and assistantships over the summer, 40 of which were specifically for international graduate workers. As with one of the other wins, this was in response to our bargaining and organizing.

This was especially important for those international workers stranded in the country because visa restrictions prevent them from working off-campus. There aren't usually many summer work opportunities on campuses due to lower enrollments, and typically most international students return to their home countries over the summer.

### **Bargaining Over COVID Impact**

We were the first graduate union to win impact bargaining demands. I suspect part of this is because we went on a highly successful strike the year before. The administration knew we would be willing to stand up for members' rights, and we did.

Initially, they met with us to bargain but refused all our demands. So we staged an email campaign, flooding administration's inboxes. And our International Student Caucus very publicly started agitating international workers, who make up 40% of our bargaining unit and whom the university courts in order to turn a profit.

We also acted quickly. Within 24 hours of the governor declaring a state of emergency, our stewards had met and crafted bargaining demands and an organizing plan. Most of our members are allowed to work remotely, and we believe this is due to our nearly instantaneous organizing and history of offensive striking. Many more members of our sister union were forced to work in person than was true for our campus.

Yes, there are still needs we haven't managed to have met yet. For instance, according to a survey we conducted, a third of graduate workers are putting in more hours than usual because online teaching takes more work than teaching in-person. And according to that same survey, a third of our members have technology issues and could use new laptops or subsidized internet.

While UIC claims a lack of resources to take care of its faculty and work force, it currently has an unrestricted \$2.5 billion in various investments, some of which it could choose to spend. Additionally, the university system has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for projects such as the Discovery Partners Institution and is spending \$311.8 million for new buildings. We also note they spent \$275,000 over five years on arbitration, most of which they lost because they were violating the law!

Last year the state raised its contribution to the university by 15% but the overall budget only increased 5%. This means they were saving money.

### **EWOC's Organizing Model**

**ATC:** *You have been working with the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee. What's its purpose and how did it develop? What have you been doing?*

**DT:** EWOC was created to help non-unionized workers organize to get their needs met during the pandemic. Both DSA and the UE saw that non-unionized workers were the ones hardest hit by the pandemic, and decided to apply a distributed model of organizing, as used in Bernie Sanders' campaign, to fill the hole.

The Advanced Organizers are a team of trained and experienced organizers who assist workers with organizing campaigns. At a first meeting with the workers, things an Advanced Organizer and the workers might do include the following:

- rank issues and draft a set of demands;
- build or plan how to build a list of workers;
- divide up workers to contact in order to ask them to join a central organizing committee or sign on to a petition of demands and possibly take future action;
- begin planning a first action or a series of escalating action.

Advanced Organizers are aided by media and communications teams, who help on certain cases with press work and social media strategies. And workers find out about EWOC primarily through social media posts. When they click on a link in a post, they're taken to a form they fill out to be put in contact with an Intake Organizer and, if feasible, an Advanced Organizer.

We try to pair up workers with organizers who have experience organizing in the worker's industry and/or organizers in their

geographical location. So far, all the organizing assistance has been remote and occurs through Zoom meetings and is further supported by phone calls and emails.

**ATC:** *What are the success stories? How do they win? What do are the central issues they organize around; what are they able to win?*

**DT:** Within the first six months, we helped workers win 13 campaigns. At that six-month-mark we had six active union drives, 15 active Organizing Committee campaigns, and 37 worker leaders building organizing committees.

The central issues are having personal protective equipment (PPEs), the option to work remotely, hazard pay, and other critical needs born of the intersection of an international pandemic and global capitalism.

For instance, the grad workers I assisted at Texas A&M University won masks. The faculty I assisted at Lafayette College forced the university to go entirely remote. And the workers I assisted at University of Texas-Austin won a 65% reduction of summer tuition for graduate students and a release from paying the already-planned 2.6% increase in annual tuition.

A Sprouts grocery store agreed to provide PPEs to workers and to limit the number of customers inside their McAllen location. Workers at a Taco Bell franchise won \$2 an hour hazard pay with back pay and two weeks of paid sick leave.

However, we also help workers organize around issues that are specific to capitalism but not necessarily to the pandemic. For instance, the workers I assisted at Ohio State University won raises of \$4,000 over two years. And we're available to help workers organize for racial justice, although that's an even harder task.

Currently EWOC is operating as a sort of remote, national labor center. Given that around 90% of the workforce isn't unionized, largely due to draconian labor laws and court decisions that make it difficult or impossible to organize most of the workforce, we need this organization that helps workers with both emergency needs and day-to-day needs under capitalism.

We're having conversations about how to help more workers learn about us, as well as how to potentially transition to concentrating some of our efforts on projects that could unite larger swaths of workers in order to further develop class consciousness. We're trying to imagine a future in which we're helping workers transform society on a larger level.

That isn't to say, though, that the campaigns we're assisting workers with don't contribute to class consciousness or to transforming society too. I'm currently assisting graduate workers and faculty at Marquette University in resisting hundreds of planned layoffs resulting from lower

enrollment due to COVID coupled with long-time financial mismanagement by the administration. They just staged a minority sickout, and their escalation plan was supported by undergraduates who planned their own escalation.

### Facing the Neoliberal University?

Embracing direct action and working in unity across demographics are crucial to all efforts to work against the neoliberal model of the university that is omnipresent in the United States.

In a neoliberal model, graduate workers and adjuncts are specifically meant to be cheap, exploitable, expendable labor. In a situation such as low enrollment, these workers are meant to be sloughed off. The only way to make inroads in this situation is through unified action that truly disrupts the work of the university and/or makes it harder for them to recruit more students.

Any wins in one worksite help pave the way for future wins in another, which contributes to helping build a more hospitable future. At the end of campaigns, I'm also trying to connect some leaders with existing caucuses (such as DSA's healthcare workers caucus or Labor Notes' Public Higher Education Workers caucus), so that workers without unions hopefully can continue to learn and practice effective organizing, as

well as unite with workers nationally in resisting increasingly harsh policies.

**ATC:** *Progressive forces are calling on the Biden administration to use executive power to cancel student debts. Do you see a movement growing around this, and what would it mean for graduate students struggling with their debts?*

**DT:** To be honest, I do not yet see a movement around this. It's interesting that you asked this question, though, because it's one I've actually been thinking about after seeing a labor activist Tweet about the need for a movement on the issue.

At a recent EWOC meeting for graduate workers to talk about what we might do in the face of a stolen election, I asked about the possibility of coordinating on this issue. Everyone agreed that it would be important to do, but many felt they didn't have the capacity to do that and to organize in all the ways they typically need to do plus organize around issues arising from the pandemic.

**ATC:** *How will this current crisis affect higher education in the long run? What are the challenges the institutions face? What are the challenges those who work for the institutions face?*

**DT:** Some small private colleges — which depend on tuition dollars — will permanently close. Public institutions might be more loathe to part with money in the form of raises because they'll want to “bank”

their money for future rainy days, even though they didn't want to spend it during this particular rainy day.

Some tenured faculty will lose tenure due to “financial exigency,” which could pave the way for further erosion of tenure rights. Graduate workers and adjuncts will face even more precarity than typically characterizes their work.

More and more undergraduate students will find themselves priced out of education as tuition increases to make up for lower enrollment and loss of other revenue streams.

This is also, however, an organizing opportunity to demonstrate the importance of state and federal funding of public education. Clearly, the increasing privatization of education has created an educational system overly dependent on tuition dollars, dorm fees, meal plan fees, etc.

When students started learning remotely for safety reasons, universities lost very large revenue streams by having to refund payments for dorms, meals, gyms and other such things.

Universities and colleges shouldn't have to depend on property and services for funding. And education should be a basic right, not a commodity available for purchase only by those who are well off. ■

## India: Behind the Farmers' Strike

*PERHAPS THE LARGEST general strike in history, farmers in India are in revolt against a set of new laws imposed by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The following is an edited excerpt from a lengthy article on the history of the struggle, “India: The Farmers' Struggle and the Agrarian Crisis” by Aditya Nigam, published by Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres, at <https://www.europe-solidaire.org/>.*

THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW laws seek to hand over agriculture to the corporate sector — which will effectively mean destruction for a large mass of farmers. Naturally they are up in arms in what is perhaps the most determined struggle of the last four decades.

The three ordinances that are currently pushing farmers into a “do or Die” struggle are: (i) Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce Ordinance, 2020, (ii) The Farmers Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020, and (iii) The Essential Commodities Ordinance, 2020. Farmers' organizations opposing the ordinances claim that they have been very misleadingly named so as to give the impression that they empower the farmers.

What the three together aim to achieve is the dismantling of state procurement (though on paper it may remain), and thereby open agriculture to contract farming for

big corporations, allowing them to corner essential food commodities in as large quantities as they want.

Contract farming, already happening informally at individual levels, once it is made the norm, is certainly going to seriously compromise food security for all. For if an agribusiness firm eyeing quick and massive profits wants farmers to change from essential food production to some other crop, it will decide what will be produced.

Of course, what gets you quick profits is not what is sold as essential food item in the domestic or local market, but could be anything from potatoes for chips to corn to manufacture “alternative fuel” for U.S. consumers. So entire cropping patterns can change, endangering our food sovereignty.

The farmers, in short, are not just fighting a battle for their own survival but one where the survival of all of us is at stake. If the design visualized in the three ordinances comes to pass, it will also lead to the complete destruction of hundreds of thousands of people who earn their livelihoods by selling fruit and vegetables — for those too will be produced by farmers under contract farming with corporations which will sell them at their retail stores. Prices for millions of consumers too will then be determined by giant retail chains.

Why have the farmers and peasants been

agitating for the last couple of years?

“Farmers are not just a residue from our past; farmers, agriculture and village India are integral to the future of India and the world,” declares the Kisan Charter (Farmers' Charter) released by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC, a platform of over 250 peasants' organizations) that had called for the massive Kisan Mukti March in New Delhi, two years ago, on 29-30 November 2018.

This was a decisive declaration by the farmers of India, who until just the other day were committing suicide in the face of destitution. [It signals] that they are not ready to vacate the stage and go into oblivion in the name of Development or Progress.

We no longer believe it was the historical destiny of Native Americans or Indigenous people to make way for “modern civilization.”

The real challenge before the peasants' and farmers' movement now lies in articulating “an agro-ecology paradigm that is based on suitable cropping patterns and local seed diversity revival so as to build economic viability and ecologically sustainable, autonomous and climate-resilient agriculture,” in the words of the Farmers' Charter. This is where it will require a great deal of patience and maturity and a readiness to re-think ideological articles of faith. ■

# Rising Up Against Corruption An interview with Andrea Palacios

THE DRAMATIC RECENT events in Peru, barely covered by mainstream U.S. media, have seen a popular uprising of massive self-organized protests. In November the student-led demonstrations in Lima and other large cities were met by riot police equipped with water cannons, tanks, and helicopters.

Corruption has tainted the political elite for years. Elected president in 2016, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, was forced to resign two years later over his failure to disclose ties to the corrupt Brazilian construction company, Odebrecht. Martín Vizcarra replaced him and attempted to carry out reforms. He tried to get rid of the prosecutorial immunity granted to lawmakers, alter how judges are chosen and even dissolved Congress in 2019. Popular for his reform plans, he had no party backing him in Congress, which for its part blocked his moves and finally, on November 9 impeached him based on an accusation of corruption when he was a provincial governor years ago.

The following day Congress installed their congressional leader, Manuel Merino. As a member of the center-right Popular Action Party, he immediately eliminated student benefits. This one-two governmental punch led students to pour spontaneously into the streets. The police reacted to these massive demonstrations with force. But police brutality backfired and brought Merino to resign in less than a week. He was replaced by interim president Francisco Sagasti, an economist who has worked for the World Bank.

Sagasti is regarded as a consensus figure who can take the country to April 2021 elections. As founder of the centrist Partido Morado (Purple Party), a party that did not vote for Vizcarra's impeachment, he does have a party in Congress to back him. As president he must face the aftermath of the police actions, deal with the highest per capita COVID-19 mortality rate in Latin America along with a contracting economy. That economy is based on exports including copper, gold, zinc, textiles, chemicals, and fish meal. It has signed many trade pacts, most recently with China.

Joe Stapleton interviewed Andrea Palacios in North Carolina to discuss the background of Peruvian politics and implications of this struggle for the country's future.]



Crowds gathering on during the early days of the protests.

**Against the Current:** Could you provide a basic rundown of what touched off what's going on in Peru?

**Andrea Palacios:** On November 9, 2020 President Martín Vizcarra was forced out by the Peruvian Congress, a body that's disliked throughout the country for their corruption. They impeached him under a charge of "immoral incapacity." Vizcarra is facing corruption investigations that have not yet been proven, but it is still an open investigation. Congress replaced him with Manuel Merino the following day. This was the last straw pushing people to the streets in massive numbers.

Many are saying "We haven't seen these protest numbers since the fall of the dictatorship in 2000."

It's a big deal, but the protests are not necessarily about the impeachment of Vizcarra, who has been accused of corruption. It is more about generalized corruption and lack of democracy.

**ATC:** He's not perfect?

**AP:** Right. Regardless, I think what guided people to the streets was a corrupted Congress that has been a reality for many, many years. It's a Congress that's protected by the Constitution for any crime they

can commit. People are saying that Congress made this decision, which destabilized the country at this moment just because they wanted to protect themselves.

The Constitution that was written in 1993, during the dictatorship of Alberto Fujimori, gives complete immunity to congresspeople. Sixty-three of whom (out of 120) still have open investigations, whether for corruption or violence against women, and for which they cannot be tried or judged.

Vizcarra was generally popular because he tried to provide the judiciary with a little bit more power to bring the cases to court. Congress roared, "Hell no, obviously that's what protects us," so they took him down and replaced him with Merino.

This is happening five months before April 2021 elections. Merino is the third president in the last four years, so the country has gone through a lot of changes. That's partly why I say this was the last straw. People are tired of Congress members being under investigation but who cannot be legally tried because the Constitution protects them.

Peru is one of the countries that has been the hardest hit with the pandemic in all Latin America. The fact that Congress would put the country through this kind of instability in the middle of a pandemic meant people saw their self-motivated action as a *coup*. From the beginning of the demonstrations, it became emblematic to see spray-painted posters on the street, "People against the coup."

**ATC:** The police murder of two young people, Jack Brian Pintado Sánchez and Jordan Inti Sotelo Camargo, inflamed the protests after they started. Can you tell me a little about them and why that was so galvanizing?

**AP:** From the first day the protests were predominantly led by young people, very loosely organized mostly through social media. And from the beginning it was clear that the police were ready to attack, and lobbying tear gas canisters.

When young people saw that the police were attacking in this way, they organized themselves, talking through WhatsApp and

other channels and set up brigadas del desactivación (“brigades of deactivation of gas bombs” or “brigades to deactivate bombs.”)

They organized themselves, saying, “What do we need? Traffic cones, carbonated water, etc.” and with those things that they would find in their households they started organizing.

There were different brigades. If demonstrators got teargassed, “brigades to clean your face” would run and help. There were nurses, doctors, or student doctors — a lot of them students actually — forming first-aid brigades to help the wounded.

Now these brigades are very highly regarded. The newspapers reported their work because they were such a huge part of the protests.

On Saturday, the sixth day of protests, the police violence escalated. They started shooting directly at people, dropping bombs from helicopters, barricading protesters in specific areas, dropping tear gas on them and making sure they couldn’t get out.

These things were not reported on Peru’s mainstream media right way, but from the beginning I was able to watch, through different friends, Instagram live. I was saying, “Oh my god yes, the helicopters are right there, oh my god, they’re being gassed.” This was happening at IAM.

### Murder and Memory

Through Instagram live we could see the helicopters dropping along with videos of protesters talking while they were being shot at. It was terrible, it was very violent. This increased police attack took the lives of two young men. One was 24 years old, Inti Sotelo Carmago, and Jack Brian Pintado was 22. The autopsies revealed that both young men had been shot multiple times. Right to this day the police maintain it was not their shots but must have come from protesters. They say “We did not use any violence,” even though there are videos showing their violence.

The day these two young people were assassinated over 100 people were wounded and 42 people disappeared. The disappeared were found days later and recounted how the police kidnapped and mistreated them.

The two young men who died have become the face of the movement. People have built altars throughout the city in their names and with their pictures. Written alongside are the words “We will not forget” and “This is the work of memory.”



The Micaela brigade, named after the wife of Tupac Amaru, indigenous Incan leader who fought the Spanish. This brigade is composed of all women.

The phrase that’s used a lot is memory. I think this alludes to the years of the dictatorship when people were unjustly killed, including a lot of students. It seemed that the country had forgotten. There was so much talk about reconciliation: “Let’s forget about ...” and not remember.

These two have become the faces of the protests still happening now. We are reclaiming our history, our memory.

**ATC:** From what you’re hearing from people you are in contact with in Peru, how would you describe the atmosphere of these protests?

**AP:** Both by what I’ve been able to watch on social media and hearing from family members there, it’s very much youth-led, and much like a festival or a party. Especially at the beginning of the protests, line of drummers would lead off. They would start and then everybody began to dance in the streets. It was a big party.

My cousin told me that the Saturday when that police attack happened down by the Palace of Justice, “It was just music and people were dancing,” and there were the sounds of the *bomberellas* (firecrackers), they’re everywhere, which is also very Peruvian because Peru’s very into soccer and fireworks are always going off when soccer is happening.

It’s those sounds that you encounter with big festivities, where a bunch of people go out into the streets and dance. My cousin was saying “It was just a party and we were dancing and then the police started shooting.” That’s the description that I get of the atmosphere, a lot of young people just having fun while protesting, having fun dancing, and then being attacked by the police.

**ATC:** Describe the work your group is doing.

**AP:** What’s been really cool to watch here in the diaspora is that the energy of the protests has affected Peruvians everywhere — to gather and do something collectively.

I think many of us started these conversations feeling we were too far away from home to actually do something. We’ve always felt like, “What do we do? I’m over here.”

Our collective started very organically. I was invited to it by a Peruvian friend whom I barely knew, but this has strengthened our connection. We started as Peruvians knowing each other and inviting others. It started as a WhatsApp group, then we said, “Hey let’s meet over Zoom, let’s form a collective.”

We call ourselves the PUMAS collective. We just selected the name two weeks ago. We are now focused on getting funds to the protesters we are directly connected with. We have been thinking about money for things that were needed, like gas masks and materials for all the brigades, especially the first-aid brigades.

The protests continue, but they’ve dwindled. Since one of the people in our collective is a therapist, tonight’s meeting is discussing the idea of group therapy sessions for the activist protesters and those who have been watching these horrific things. There might be a desire to sit down together and talk through it.

Also, we’re forming an Instagram platform in English to educate people about what’s happening in Peru. We’ve noticed it’s hard to talk to friends about these events because we don’t have resources in English.

It’s partly because Peru is a small country of 32 million and the diaspora here is small. We want to have a platform in English that would explain the political situation and the demands of the protests as they continue — especially as the election happens next year — as well as sharing things about our country. We’ve been discussing a series on Peruvian cumbias, dances, and joys, and things about our culture.

### Inspiration from Chile, Bolivia

**ATC:** Do you feel that some of the other movements in Latin America over the past few months have had any effect on what’s going on in Peru?

**AP:** I saw it from here — the brigades that were organizing themselves were taking cues from those that were organized in Chile when they had big protests last year. They were sharing and watching videos from Chile on how to deactivate bombs.

Even the demands have been shaped by theirs. Chile just voted to change their constitution, which also comes from a dictatorship — the Pinochet dictatorship. Bolivia held their Constitutional Assembly and adopted a new Constitution as well. So, the calls for a new constitution, or the call for a constitutional assembly, definitely follow the steps of Bolivia and Chile. Peru can imagine and call for this because Bolivia has done it and Chile is on the way to doing it.

**ATC:** What do the protesters want?

**AP:** It varies. Parents of the people who were wounded or disappeared formed a collective, too. They held a press conference, saying “We want the government or the police to be held accountable for what they’ve done.”

That’s a big one. People are asking, “Who’s guilty for this?” The police are claiming “We didn’t shoot anyone,” and time is passing. Family members of the murdered have publicly asked, “If anyone has a video of my son being killed by police, we need it because they will not believe us.”

The police are threatening to close the case while people are demanding justice.

There’s a big call for a new constitutional assembly, as well. Some people say, “Let’s reform the constitution.” Others say, “This constitution cannot be reformed because it was written under the dictatorship of Fujimori and only benefits the economic interests of the foreign and domestic corporations. We need to change it altogether.”

In the Bolivia they got rid of the old Congress altogether and elected new people. They made a point to include people

of Indigenous descent and people from Indigenous nations who could represent themselves. That’s one of the big issues Indigenous people participating in these protests are raising.

Since the onset of what we call the Peruvian Republic, constitutions have never been written for us, especially as we think about Afro-Peruvians or people of Indigenous descent. It was a constitution for Peruvian elites. They wrote it for themselves and left others to face violence.

So, we need a new constitution that would achieve the autonomy of the many Indigenous nations, as Bolivia did.

**ATC:** How have the class and ethnic and national differences played out in the protests?

**AP:** It seems to me that the majority of young people in the streets are unified. We want a new constitution, we’re tired of this Congress — it’s corrupt, we can’t reform it, let’s get rid of it.

I think the wrestling is much more with the liberal groups that aren’t necessarily out in the streets, and with established political parties. Even the latest president, Francisco Sagasti, says we don’t need to get rid of the constitution — let’s just reform it, or change one thing or another.

Obviously, Sagasti is super pro-corporations. It wouldn’t make sense for him to ask for anything else.

### Roots of Uprising

**ATC:** What was it that laid the groundwork for these mass uprisings? They didn’t come out of nowhere, and they weren’t totally spontaneous.

**AP:** In the collective here, we often say, we are gathering because we understand the conditions that took these young people out to the streets are the same ones that took us out of our country.

Many of us emigrated from our country because of the kind of corruption that is

happening still, and because of the dictatorship of the 1990s or before.

Living in the United States, I’ve read in the newspapers that Peru is skyrocketing economically. It is a model for other countries. Supposedly all these neoliberal reforms have made it an example: “Everybody be like Peru!”

I’ve always been skeptical. Who is benefiting? My family is still struggling; a lot of people are struggling. Especially since the protests have been youth-led and student-led, I think a lot of the foundational issues here are about the impossibility of students getting a job and the impossibility of getting an education.

One of the young protesters who was murdered had to quit his studies because he could not afford to continue. Poverty is a common reality. Neoliberal reforms have opened the country to foreign corporations. The economic and environmental devastation has created huge problems.

In the Andes and the Amazon, communities are being exposed to the pollution of our water, our land, our air. The mass uprising is a combination of a lot of things.

**ATC:** What role, if any, do the political parties have in the protests?

**AP:** Here in the USA the Republicans and Democrats are established political parties. In Peru, a lot of times elections are more about personalities and candidates rather than parties.

But the party of former president Manuel Merino was not well regarded. You have more conservative parties that are very pro-police. You have the Partido Morado, which is more liberal, like the Democrats. They don’t want to take things too far. Then you have the Communist Party of Peru, which has never received a lot of votes, but had a voice in the protests.

**ATC:** What should the U.S. Left know about what’s going on in Peru?

**AP:** It’s important to be aware that there is a revolution happening in Peru, a country that doesn’t often get the media attention because of how small it is, but that has been ravaged by colonialism and even afterward by the elites in Peru for years and years. And today we have foreign corporations, particularly American and Canadian.

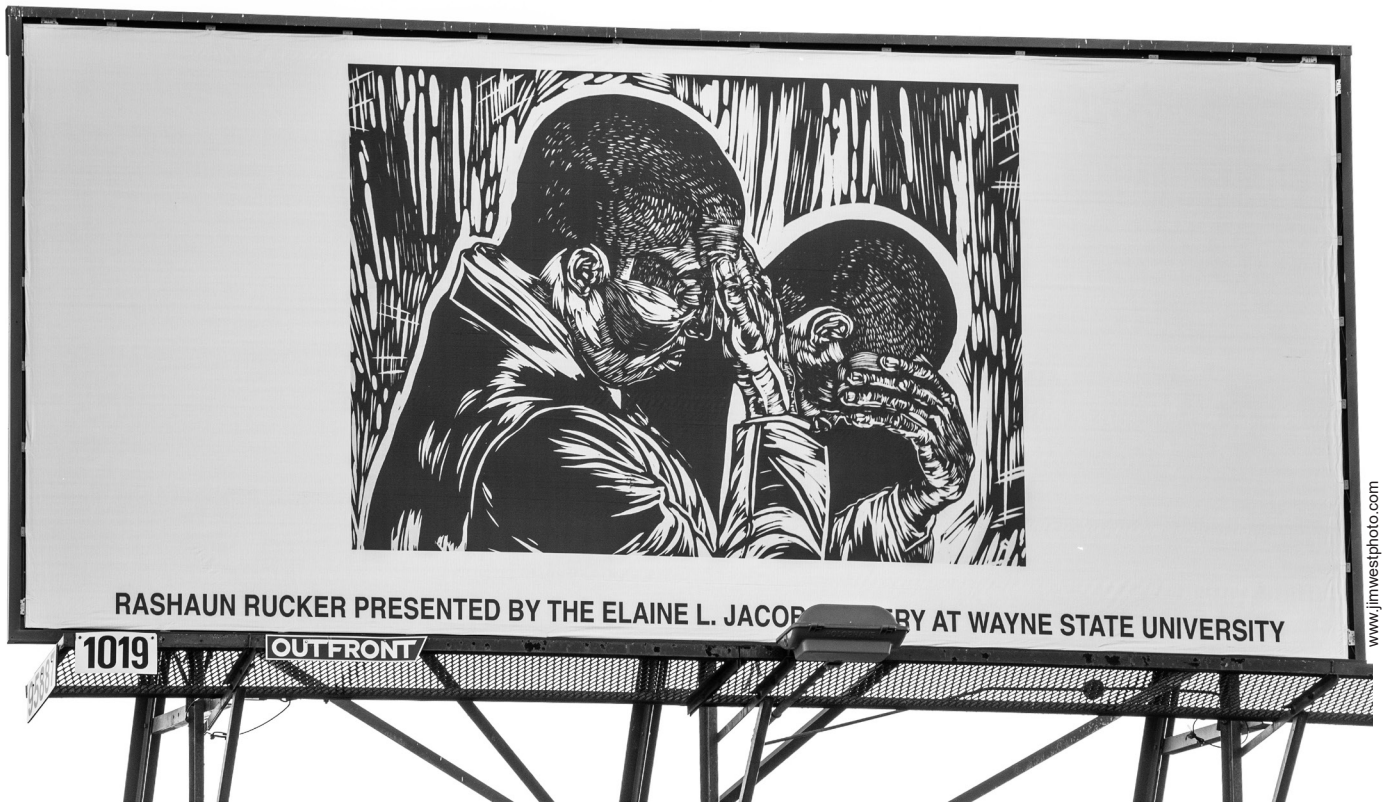
At the same time, Peruvians have fought beautifully against all this, and in many different ways. I think in the United States we forget about the global context. In our conversations about the possibilities of building a better life there is little about the global struggle.

As a Peruvian living here — and initially not connected to what is happening in Peru — I understand how necessary it is to pay attention to the global struggle for human dignity. ■

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First aid brigades such as this one have been present throughout the protests. Police directly attacked these brigades even though they are clearly marked as medical.





Given the pandemic, the Wayne State Galleries displayed Rashaun Rucker's woodcut "Resting in Black" as a billboard on Detroit's main avenue.

## Democrats in the White House: New Challenges for African Americans

By Malik Miah

WHAT DO AFRICAN Americans face with the new government of Democrats Joe Biden and Kamala Harris? After four years of a far-right regime that denied science and medicine in favor of death and profits, disproportionately destroying Black and oppressed minorities' lives, the answer for most is more a hope to lessen structural discrimination than it is high expectations for fundamental change.

### Meaning of Trumpism

The election results exposed the depth of white identity "grievance/victimhood" politics. While Trump lost the popular vote by some seven million, he won over 73 million voters — the most ever except for Biden's 80 million — including a large majority of both white men and women.

Republicans who follow Trump's lead made gains in the Congress and state legislatures. Trumpism is more than Trump. It reflects strong white-nationalist sentiments in the white population and successful voter suppression focused against African Americans.

"I think it's a dose of reality of the times that we are living in," said Nicole Small, vice chair of the Detroit Charter Commission, *Malik Miah is a longtime Black rights and union activist and an advisory editor of Against the Current.*

who believes the Trump vote was a "blatant attempt at voter suppression."

"I do not believe that Trump has created racism amongst people, but I do think he was the safety net and the vehicle for people to be more active in practicing their racism and their prejudiced beliefs publicly," Small said.

Trump never saw his presidency as representing all Americans. Trumpism exacerbates what's been true for centuries. The cult-like enthusiasm for whatever Trump says and does means that white racism is now more intense.

### What Biden Represents

Joe Biden acknowledges that his nomination and electoral victory required large numbers of Black votes in urban areas along with Latinos, Asian Americans and Indigenous people.

Since the November 3 presidential election, almost each week a Black man is brutalized or murdered by police. It is not by accident. The ideology of policing is racist and in defense of the status quo (*de facto* white domination).

According to the Associated Press, "A prominent law enforcement training group is promoting a lengthy research document riddled with falsehoods and conspiracies that urges local police to treat Black Lives Matter

activists as terrorists plotting a violent revolution.

"The document [is] distributed by the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association.... It alleges Black Lives Matter and antifa, an umbrella term for leftist militants, are 'revolutionary movements whose aims are to overthrow the U.S. government' and claims they are planning 'extreme violence.'"

Biden, however, has not embraced the Black Lives Matter movement or any of its demands. To fundamentally change how Black and Brown communities are protected they have rasied the demand "Defund the Police."

Instead, Biden has proposed sitting down with so-called police union heads, police chiefs, elected officials and leaders of establishment civil rights groups to modestly improve policing. Black activists leading the multiracial racial justice demonstrations are not invited.

Kamala Harris, the first Black and South Asian woman vice president and a former California attorney general, endorses Biden's vision of policing. It is in line with her own practices in the most populous state.

The first Black president, Barack Obama, has openly attacked the demand of Defund the Police, calling it a misguided slogan. For BLM activists, it is not a slogan. It is a

continued on page 23



## The Freedom Struggle Is a Labor Struggle Organizing Then and Now

By Robin D. G. Kelley

ROBIN D.G. KELLEY, THE Gary B. Nash professor of American History at UCLA, gave this presentation to a New York City DSA Labor webinar on a panel with Michael Goldfield, whose book *The Southern Key* is also reviewed in this issue of *Against the Current*. Professor Kelley's first book was *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (1990). His subsequent works include the award-winning biography *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of An American Original* (2009) and studies of African American and African culture and cross-fertilization.



AS WE THINK, again, about the role of organized labor in the long Black freedom struggle, it is worth noting that in India at this very moment 250 million farmers, workers, students and allies have joined in what had been a three-month long protest against the Modi government's neoliberal agricultural policies.

The new parliamentary bills essentially eliminate state-run regulated agricultural markets, and allow direct transactions between farmers and private corporate interests — namely international commodity traders and conglomerates such as Walmart and Cargill.

The new arrangements will destroy small farmers and force those who survive to enter into contracts with corporate global seed and agrochemical suppliers, traders, distributors and retail concerns. The legislation encourages the unregulated storage of produce and commodity speculation, overturning laws that made hoarding food items for profit a criminal offense.

Imagine a quarter of a billion people trying to stop unfettered capitalism, save the planet, and resist massive dispossession and a catastrophic migration to already overburdened cities — an example of militant solidarity in the face of a global pandemic and a global recession. The largest general strike in human history, and hardly anyone is talking about it in this country.

And yet events in India might afford us the most important lessons for the hour: the strike invites us to confront the question, who makes up the working class and where is it located?

When we talk about labor history on a global scale, I'm always surprised by how

quickly we slip into a Euro/U.S.-centric framework, and how we unwittingly privilege urban over rural.

I'm always reminding my own students that the largest workers' revolts of the 19th and 20th centuries occurred neither in Europe nor the United States, but in the colonies and nations of the Global South.

### Black Workers and "Racial Capitalism"

When I'm asked about the role of organized labor in the Black freedom movement, I'm always quick to point out that Black workers have been at the forefront of the labor movement, especially in the 19th century, when labor organizing took the form of parties and mass organizations rather than guilds and skilled trades unions — Knights of Labor and the Greenback Labor Party, for example.

Black workers provided leadership to white workers — or at least they tried. The more familiar story, of course, emphasizes how capitalists deploy racism as a weapon to divide workers and crush opposition; use the coercive arm of the state to put down strikes or contract out convict labor; bribe conservative Black leaders to oppose unions and break strikes; foment mob violence in the name of protecting white womanhood and fighting communism.

But wily capitalists alone are not solely to blame for undermining labor's collective power. Trade unions were also exclusionary, not inclusive. They were based on skilled trades and protecting those jobs. There were exceptions, like the IWW and the CIO, but the key takeaway here is that when white workers attempt to go it alone by building exclusionary racist unions, they lose. We can look at the 1866 campaign for an eight-hour day: in St. Louis, unionists built a

biracial campaign and won; in New Orleans a lily-white campaign went down in defeat.

This brings me to the crux of the matter — the real question is not "labor's" support of "Black liberation" but rather: *why has so much of the U.S. labor movement refused to embrace the entire class?* Just consider the long history of excluding Black workers, Asian workers, agricultural and domestic workers. Why have so many unions historically consistently supported or tolerated a racially segmented labor force and wage differentials based on race?

What explains white working-class support for housing policies that not only maintain segregation but devalue homes in Black and mixed neighborhoods and boost home values in segregated white neighborhoods? Or policies that have excluded Black people from publicly funded institutions — better schools, better hospitals and healthcare?

Are these "labor" issues? Of course they are! Spatial segregation explains so much that a workplace focus cannot — hidden costs of living, food deserts, limits on mobility to access decent jobs, home/property values and impact on intergenerational wealth, school funding, and services like access to sanitation, fire fighters, and libraries. (Imagine what it means for Black and Brown kids to attend school on-line by using the internet at their neighborhood McDonalds.)

This is what we mean by "racial capitalism," which not only produces deep race, class and gender inequalities but continues to keep a segment of white-working class in a state of precarity while convincing them that Black and Brown people are to blame.

The hidden secret of racial capitalism's longevity is the capacity of capital and the state to capture the "white" workers and tie its identity to race (whiteness) and masculinity. We all need liberating from racial capitalism.

### An Ideological Struggle

I am not suggesting that labor unions are hopelessly racist, nor is Michael Goldfield in his extraordinary book *The Southern Key*. On the contrary, we have many examples of unions dedicated to social justice and antiracism. I'm reluctant to call these "exceptions" since it implies that the "labor movement" is singular and unitary rather

than combined and uneven.

Put simply, a union's political orientation cannot be reduced solely to the inherent contradictions between labor and capital but must be understood within a broader ideological struggle. The extraction of surplus value alone does not explain why some sectors of the labor movement embrace a vision of racial and gender justice and equality, others hold fast to racism, patriarchy and social order, and perhaps most reflect a messy, ever-shifting combination of these tendencies.

And as I've suggested, some of the most critical battles have occurred not at the workplace but at the level of the state — struggles over social policy, state violence, budgetary and fiscal decisions, housing and welfare, education, etc.

Indeed, as we revisit the 1930s, the era we hold up as the heyday of interracial working-class radicalism, there are three things we ought to consider. The Left, and here I mean specifically the Communist Party, was different from other socialist parties up to that point in that it centered anti-racism.

Whatever the CP's many faults and missteps, it generally resisted color-blindness, underscoring distinctive features of Black, Brown and Indigenous workers' struggles, while refusing to forgive or explain away the racism of white workers. Second, the CP's biggest mobilizations did not center on relief or jobs or trade union struggles but the defense of the "Scottsboro Boys," nine young Black men falsely accused of raping two white women on a train in Alabama.

Third, the 1930s, the period we often describe as the U.S. left turn, was also characterized by rising fascism that drew a segment of the white working class into groups such as the Black Shirts, the Klan, the White Legion, and the American Nazi Party.

In other words, what often animates social justice or civil rights unionism are movements with a vision of justice, movements that are anti-fascist, anti-racist, and dare I say anti-capitalist (though embracing the latter doesn't necessarily translate into embracing the former).

### Where Organizing Succeeded

In the South, Black labor militants, many of whom were Communists, were the key to building the CIO in the region, even during the early stages of Cold War-era attacks on labor and the Left. Operation Dixie, the postwar campaign to organize the South, is usually seen as a total failure, but as Will Jones demonstrates, it succeeded where Black workers were in leadership positions — e.g. among Black lumber workers in North Carolina and Black tobacco and cotton-press workers in North Carolina, Arkansas, and western Tennessee.



*They've always gone together: Marching for labor and civil rights in the 1940s.*

Black workers built and sustained the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) campaign to organize sawmill employees in the South, in spite of unremitting violence from employers, allied businessmen and white workers, and the CIO's best efforts to push race off to the side.

In Elizabethtown, North Carolina where in 1948 the IWA waged a militant strike against one of the largest lumber companies in the Southeast, it was precisely racial solidarity and Black community support that ensured their success.<sup>1</sup>

The largely Communist-led Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (FTA) rested on the union's ability to tap into a deep well of black community organizing and grievances centered around workplace conditions, wages, and racial discrimination. By 1947, FTA won 111 union elections, bringing some 15,000 workers into the union.

Winston-Salem, North Carolina, had become the epicenter of FTA strength in the region. Led by an extraordinary group of Black women, notably Moranda Smith, Velma Hopkins, Theodosia Simpkins, and Viola Brown, Local 22 had successfully organized workers at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.

They fought for more than higher wages and better conditions; they promoted a Black radical vision that civil and human rights were inseparable from labor rights.

They protested segregation, fought sexual harassment at work, revitalized the local chapter of the NAACP, launched voter registration campaigns, set up worker education classes, and established a library stocked with volumes on African American history and political economy, and were largely responsible in 1947 for electing Winston-Salem's first Black alderman, the Reverend

Kenneth Williams.<sup>2</sup>

### Collective Power Under Attack

The success of the left-led unions such as FTA, the International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, the Farm Equipment Workers, United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) among others, were strengthened by the 1945-46 strike wave, only to be bludgeoned by the state and corporate response to the post-war labor insurgency.

The collective power of labor, especially in cases of exemplary interracial cooperation, threatened to severely curtail corporate power, or worse for capital, usher in a new political order that would further regulate business, expand the welfare state, protect workers' rights, and undermine corporate profits.

We all know what happened next: the war on labor ramped up in the name of fighting communism. Left-oriented labor militants were fired or deported or brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

The Taft-Hartley Act (1947) restricted workers' right to strike; outlawed closed shops, secondary boycotts and "sympathy" strikes; imposed hefty fines on union officials who failed to oppose unauthorized strikes; prevented unions from contributing to political campaigns; and required union officers to sign loyalty oaths and affidavits affirming they are not Communists.

Those that refused to sign were the left-led unions — the unions that proved to be the most antiracist — for which they were summarily expelled from the CIO between 1949 and 1950.

The story doesn't end here, however. There is a prevailing myth still in circulation

that Cold War repression forced the Civil Rights Movement to abandon labor and economic justice in favor of desegregating public accommodations and other middle-class demands.

The 1963 March on Washington, in fact, was about two things: ending racist violence and securing “jobs and freedom.” The lead organizers, Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, both had roots in socialist and labor movements.

Randolph’s opening remarks laid out a clear agenda for labor. Echoing Karl Marx’s oft-quoted line in *Capital*, that “Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded,” he warned

*“[T]his civil rights revolution is not confined to the Negro, nor is it confined to civil rights for our white allies know that they cannot be free while we are not. . . .*

*“[W]e have no future in a society in which 6 million black and white people are unemployed and millions more live in poverty. Nor is the goal of our civil rights revolution merely the passage of civil rights legislation. Yes, we want all public accommodations open to all citizens, but those accommodations will mean little to those who cannot afford to use them.*

*“Yes, we want a Fair Employment Practice Act, but what good will it do if profit-g geared automation destroys the jobs of millions of workers black and white?”<sup>3</sup>*

The Negro American Labor Council (NALC) was a lead sponsor of the March. It had organized local marches under the slogan, “Freedom from Poverty through Full Employment,” and threatened to hold a national one-day work stoppage to pressure Congress to pass the Civil Rights bill.

NALC also fought to raise the federal minimum wage and extend its coverage to all workers, and backed efforts to organize domestic workers, abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee, and build up the American Labor Party as a third-party alternative.

So what happened to this vision of economic justice? First, the big groups — the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Congress on Racial Equality, the NAACP and the Urban League — threw their energies almost entirely behind passing the watered-down Civil Rights bill, supporting a Voting Rights bill, and trying to influence the Democratic Party.

Second, the labor movement betrayed the coalition’s racial justice agenda. AFL-CIO leader George Meany and the United Auto Workers’ Walter Reuther made lofty statements and financial contributions in support of Civil Rights, while acceding to its rank-and-file white members who worried that the elimination of racial barriers to equal wages, access to skilled jobs, and unfettered access to housing, would threaten their privileged status.

Third, Randolph and other leaders excluded Black women’s organizations from playing any significant role in the movement. This weakened the coalition, in part because activists such as Pauli Murray, Anna Hedgeman, Dorothy L. Robinson, Rosa Parks, Gloria Richardson, and Dorothy Height had already committed to linking labor and economic justice to questions of racial and gender equity.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Radical Revival for Justice**

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party never abandoned economic justice. They not only embraced a program of economic justice but went further, calling for the redistribution of wealth, reparations, and workers’ power.

When SNCC organized its Freedom Vote campaign in Mississippi in the summer and fall of 1963, they ran a slate of candidates in a “mock” election to challenge the state’s white Democratic party behind a fairly radical platform that included the right of labor to organize and engage in collective bargaining; a \$1.25 minimum wage; support for farm cooperatives in place of sharecropping and dispossession; provision of low-interest loans for small farmers; a progressive land tax on tracts of land over 500 acres and tax exemption for those with plots smaller than 500 acres.

SNCC had also founded the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union (MFLU) to organize agricultural workers in the Delta. In the spring of 1965, about 350 members of the union went on strike to demand \$1.25 an hour for chopping cotton (clearing weeds). The planters would not budge and instead evicted the workers, leaving them to starve.

In January 1966 when the Greenville Air Force base was about to be sold, strikers occupied it to draw federal attention to their plight. After Air Force police expelled them, they regrouped in an encampment dubbed “Strike City” and appealed to liberal organizations and the government for food, clothing, and other basic commodities.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, without economic leverage to force planters to meet their demands, and lacking federal support, the MFLU was defeated. But that defeat profoundly shaped the politics of the MFDP, which pursued a radical economic vision even when middle-class Black Mississippians were finally admitted into the mainstream Democratic party.

By 1968, the MFDP backed a Guaranteed Annual Income, extended day care for poor and working mothers, comprehensive medical care for all, increased federal provisions for food stamp programs, free higher education, an end to the draft, and full military withdrawal from Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

This revolutionary vision of social justice unionism found expression among Black auto workers in Detroit. In May of 1968, veteran organizer General Baker led a wildcat strike of 4000 workers at the Dodge Main plant to protest a speedup of the assembly line. They did not win since most white workers did not support the strike, but out of that action the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) was born.

The strikes spread to the Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle Plant, giving rise to ELRUM, and other actions in other plants like the Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM). DRUM’s specific demands included workplace safety, lower production demands, and an end to racist hiring practices.

Of course the RUM leaders wanted to win better working conditions and wages for Black workers, but their ultimate goal was freedom for all workers — and that meant in their view the end of capitalism. So in 1969, leaders of all the RUMs came together and formed the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, with the long-term goal of becoming a political party or revolutionary movement.

The League fought the leadership of the UAW, who not only tried to crush the revolutionary union movement but called police to break up their meeting and relied on violence to undermine the League’s campaign to elect Ron March, a member of DRUM, on the board of trustees of the UAW.

Even though March would have fought for all workers and resisted speedups, too many white workers were threatened by Black leadership.

League members knew that racism limited the ability of workers to unite, undermining the strength of the entire class. But they also argued that white workers benefited from racism in the form of higher wages, cleaner and safer jobs and greater union representation.<sup>7</sup>

There are many other examples. Greensboro, North Carolina, has been a center of interracial and anti-racist labor organizing. Last year we observed the 50th anniversary of the Greensboro Massacre, when armed Klansmen and Nazis assassinated five organizers in broad daylight — four of whom were members of the Workers Viewpoint Organization (later the Communist Workers Party). The event on November 3, 1979, is usually described as an anti-Klan rally but they were also there to organize textile workers.

Fast forward to 1996, Local 2603 of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) prevailed in a three-year campaign against K-Mart in Greensboro, thanks largely to the union’s strong base in the African American community.

The union attacked racial discrimination head on, filing a complaint with the EEOC and enlisting key local Black community leaders to organize a boycott. The boycott forced K-Mart to raise wages and implement a grievance process that would shield workers from unjust discipline and terminations. The Greensboro City Council passed a resolution requiring that all future employers moving into the city pay a living wage of \$12.50 per hour before receiving any city tax incentives.

The boycott was organized by a coalition of Greensboro Black ministers called "The Pulpit Forum." Forum leaders engaged in mass civil disobedience campaigns resulting in the arrest of several ministers, including the Reverend Nelson Johnson. Johnson, along with his wife Joyce, had organized the November 3rd rally where he suffered a serious knife wound in the conflagration.

The main point is that UNITE adopted a civil rights/community based union strategy by appealing to the whole Black community and its tradition of resistance to racism and injustice. Mobilizing the entire Black community was the key to their victory.

### The Working Class As It Really Is

In closing, what the Indian general strike tells us is that we need to rethink the composition of the working-class. When we shift our attention from the big industrial unions where we imagine the working class resides to low wage, marginalized workers in fast food, retail, healthcare, homecare, domestic work, agriculture, etc. — workers who have to survive on involuntary part-time work, short-term contracts, zero-hours contracts, telemarketing (homeworkers and prison labor for example), and the concierge economy: Uber, Lyft, Grub Hub an so on — the horizon looks radically different.

Once powerful engines of racial and gender exclusion, often working with capital to impose glass ceilings and racially segmented wages, the 21st century labor movement has largely embraced principles of social justice, anti-racism, immigrant rights and cross-border strategies.

It seems that the new labor leaders are teachers, nurses and other healthcare workers, clerical workers, fast food workers and flight attendants, among others.

They have adopted new strategies, from passing minimum wage laws at the municipal and state levels to using Community Benefits Agreements to secure living-wage jobs, equitable working conditions, green building practices, affordable housing, as well as childcare provisions. And in alliance with movements such the Movement for Black Lives, and immigrant rights activists, campaigns such as OUR Walmart, Fight for Fifteen, Change to Win, are leading the way,



Nine years after the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling, the 1963 March on Washington still demanded school integration, but much more too — full equality, jobs and freedom for African Americans. Civil Rights struggles were always labor struggles as well.

building the most dynamic labor movement we have seen in generations.<sup>8</sup> ■

### Notes

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# James Baldwin for Our Time

By Mary Helen Washington

## Begin Again:

James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons For Our Own

By Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.  
Crown Publishing, 2020, 272 pages.

## James Baldwin:

Living in Fire

By Bill V. Mullen  
Pluto Books, 2019, 256 pages.

BOTH EDDIE S. Glaude's *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons For Our Own* and Bill V. Mullen's *James Baldwin: Living in Fire* are organized around what Mullen calls the "arc of change, reflection, and evolution" in Baldwin's life story.

Both are motivated, to some extent, by a renewed interest in Baldwin since the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, which was started, I note, by three Black women—Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors.

Baldwin seems to be everywhere these days. His 1974 novel *If Beale Street Could Talk* was adapted for a 2018 film by filmmaker Barry Jenkins, and Raoul Peck's 2016 film *I Am Not Your Negro* has become a major documentary on Baldwin. In 2016, young Black writers and activists responded to Baldwin's 1963 essays *The Fire Next Time* with a book of essays, *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race*.

Another major biography, Douglas Field's *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin*, was published in 2015. Ta-Nehisi Coates modeled his acclaimed 2015 book *Between the World and Me* on Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*.

Previously, at least three major biographies of Baldwin were published in the 20th century. There is a political blog called "Son of Baldwin" by Black queer and transgender activists, and *Queer Studies* has produced

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James Baldwin, photographed by Carl Van Vechten, September 1955. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Carl Van Vechten Collection, [LC-USZ62-54231]

new directions in the analysis of Baldwin's queer identity. Additionally, there is William J. Maxwell's exploration of Baldwin's 1884-page FBI file, *James Baldwin: The FBI File* (2017 paperback), which tracks J. Edgar Hoover's intense surveillance of Baldwin.

## Why Baldwin Now?

This resurgence of literary, cinematic, political and scriptural interest in Baldwin is a cause for wonderment. The question that nags me as I observe this widespread cultural homage to Baldwin is: *Why Baldwin and why now?* Professor Glaude, scholar of African American Studies and religion at Princeton University, answers that question in two ways.

His first goal is to establish Baldwin's importance for the age of Black Lives Matter, or, in Glaude's terms, to show how Baldwin has become "a critic of the after times," a period Glaude calls a kind of "interregnum as the old is dying and the new is coming into being. Baldwin is the perfect subject for such a time; he is the writer-activist who continued to evolve after the civil rights movement, who embraced

some aspects of Black Power, then set about becoming an internationalist, one who knows that 'American power follows one everywhere.'"

In the end, Glaude believes that Baldwin resisted despair by finding his place in solidarity with "those who fight from the margins," thus becoming a powerful example for our current moment.

Glaude's second goal is to establish Baldwin as a prophetic voice, one who forces us to confront not only society but also our own moral choices. Eloquently capturing the brilliant, passionate and morally persuasive Baldwin, Glaude writes that "[Baldwin] insisted that we see the connection between the disaster of our interior lives and the mess of a country that believed, for some odd reason, that if you were white you mattered more than others." (xxv)

*Begin Again* opens with the meeting between Baldwin and Stokely Carmichael at Howard University in the spring of 1963, shortly after Baldwin had published *The Fire Next Time*, and when Carmichael was a young nonviolent student activist.

Baldwin was invited to address the question of "the role and responsibility of the black writer in the civil rights struggle." (4)

Later that evening, a small group assembled for an all-night conversation, an impromptu rap in a small apartment with Ossie Davis, Baldwin, John O. Killens, the "older brothers," and a group of students, including Carmichael.

Four years later that impromptu meeting became the catalyst for Baldwin's political evolution when Carmichael stepped off a plane from Paris on December 11, 1967, and called for revolution and solidarity with anti-colonial struggles in places such as Cuba and Tanzania. His passport was confiscated; newspapers labeled him a traitor; politicians called for his arrest; Barry Goldwater proclaimed that if he were found guilty, he should be put to death.

In the wake of Carmichael's move toward Black Power, Baldwin realized that he was required to tell a different story about the country and its unwillingness to give up its racism. Baldwin's defense of Carmichael was so incendiary that neither *The New York Times* nor the *London Times*

would publish it. It eventually appeared in the Los Angeles *Free Press* and is unlike anything else I've ever read by Baldwin.

Proclaiming his solidarity with Carmichael, Baldwin calls the United States "racist to the core," and raises his protest against the Vietnam War, declaring that "every bombed village in Asia is my home town." According to Glaude, this is the moment which, for Baldwin, exposes "the lie at the heart of the American idea." (xxvii)

For Glaude, "Baldwin's courage, defiance, and willingness to confront his own complicity in evil, provide the key to Baldwin's surviving and mustering the strength to keep fighting amid the after times."

Chapter One, "The Lie," establishes what Glaude (and Baldwin) see as the central "lie" at the heart of America: the belief and justification of the dehumanization of Black people. Although, Glaude admits that we should more properly define "the lie" as "several sets of lies with a single purpose," "the lie" remains throughout *Begin Again* as the racial lie, that Black people are inferior because of "the color of their skin." (7)

Baldwin also represented "The American lie" as confined to race: the "fatal flaw" in the nation's founders is that they could not "recognize a man when they saw one," i.e. "a black man, whose destiny and identity have always been controlled by others." (2)

Baldwin was indeed producing a new "native son"; he was also construing blackness as inherently male, and defining the race problem as a gendered conflict between "the white man" and Black manhood.

Baldwin's transnational solidarity with the North Africans he met in Paris "murdered in the streets and corralled into prisons," was also gendered male. Even when Baldwin is dealing with queer sexuality, he can only conceive of male desire, ideals of masculinity, the complexity of manhood. (96)

Glaude confers on Baldwin the title of "moral compass," comparing him to the patriarchal "Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, speaking God's truth." The problem with elevating Baldwin to the stature of prophet is that once he takes on Biblical proportions we are no longer able to see him as human and fallible and to see his witness as imperfect — partial, limited, problematic and contradictory.

### Baldwin's Transformation

In *Living in Fire* Professor Bill V. Mullen, a scholar at Purdue University of African American literary and cultural studies and the Cold War, draws on a raft of new material on Baldwin made available in the past 10 years, including newly released material at the Schomburg Center for Research in African American Culture that enlarges and enriches our understanding of Baldwin's life

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*James Arthur Baldwin was inextricably linked to 30 of the most consequential and controversial years of Black American life. He lived his life in that fire. He relentlessly probed every aspect of his own personal life as he interrogated the life and strife of a racialized nation.*

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and work.

This archival boon allows Mullen to recover Baldwin's left-wing associations going back to the 1930s, which have been neglected or downplayed in much earlier scholarship. In particular there were connections with Communism, as well as 1940s links to socialism, anarchism and Trotskyism, although some details are still unknown.

Beyond that, we learn much more about the evolution of his anti-imperialism, his support for Palestinian liberation, and finally, a more expansive view of Baldwin's sexual politics. These revelations show the transformation of Baldwin's political thought that pushed him past his early fixation on white liberals, past his own sense of defeat and demoralization as he watched Black leaders assassinated and Black politics failing, and past his investments in Black masculinity.

I want to focus on the last chapter of *Living in Fire*, called "Final Acts," where in the last 10 years of his life we see Baldwin's political radicalism in full flower. In a 1978 essay, he coupled the Reagan administration with the UK's Margaret Thatcher as "symbols of white, Western capitalist supremacy."

In 1980, he derided the persecution of the Black Panthers and Angela Davis and the demonizing of poor Black women as "welfare queens" as part and parcel of the racism and corruption of the Reagan regime. In his final years, Baldwin wrote against capitalist inequality, against a racist, indifferent state and Cold War ideology "for suppressing the question of black liberation." (119)

He knew that he had incurred the wrath of J. Edgar Hoover, who began to target him intensely, resulting in his massive FBI file, yet still remained committed to a radical critique.

The Baldwin whom Mullen most clearly brings to light, and few know, is the "self-conscious black internationalist," particularly in his relationship to the Middle East and to Afro-Arab and Afro-Palestinian solidarity.

This aspect of Baldwin's political history is especially relevant in the light of relationships that have developed between Black U.S. activists and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, specifically the trend toward "anti-racist unity between African American

and Arabs nurtured by the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS)" for Palestinian rights. (xviii)

In a 1979 essay for *The Nation*, "Open Letter to the Born Again," Baldwin critiques settler-colonial Zionism and declares there can be no peace in the Middle East without attention to the Palestinians, lessons he learned from the Black Panther Party, from Vietnam War protest, and from the Palestinian liberation struggle. (xxi)

What is finally most fascinating and most productive in Baldwin's "final acts" is found in his fiction, in his profound engagements with the meanings of race, sexuality, and political affiliations in his sixth and final novel *Just Above My Head* (1978).

This focus on fiction is important because unlike Baldwin's speeches, which can more easily be read as transparent political messages, fiction does not allow such easy access to meaning. Mullen considers this novel as the work that finally allows a full expression of erotic pleasure through Baldwin's "most fully realized black and openly queer character, Arthur Montana." In another example of Baldwin's evolution, this novel "reflects for the first time in his work the centrality of black women's lives and their wide range of sufferings in U.S. society." (169)

In addition to the queer character Arthur Montana, Baldwin creates the character of Julia Miller, a one-time child preacher, sexually abused by her father, who leaves the United States for Africa to discover something about her identity. As Mullen suggests, Julia is Baldwin's female avatar and his first effort to express "in profoundly gendered terms the destructive effects of patriarchal power."

Mullen attributes Baldwin's willingness to openly engage both queer and feminist issues to the political conversations he had in the last decade of his life with the lesbian feminist writer Audre Lorde, who helped him "to part forever with his lifelong attachment to black men—and black masculinity — as the center of his analysis of the world." (165)

My question — *Why Baldwin and why now?* — is partially answered in these two impressive studies of the life and work of Baldwin. James Arthur Baldwin was inextricably linked to 30 of the most consequential and controversial years of Black American life. He lived his life in that fire.

He relentlessly probed every aspect of his own personal life as he interrogated the life and strife of a racialized nation. He became an important interpreter and critic of the global order. And, lest we forget, this extraordinary American of such intellectual brilliance and political fire came out of the poverty, racial violence, wretchedness and resilient beauty of Harlem, USA. ■

## The American Caste System By Malik Miah

### Caste:

#### The Origins of Our Discontents

By Isabel Wilkerson

Random House, 2020, 477 pages, \$32 hardback.

*“The worst disease is the treatment of the Negro. Everyone who freshly learns of this state of affairs at a mature age feels not only the injustice, but the scorn of the principle of the Fathers who founded the United States that ‘all men are created equal.’ [I could] hardly believe that a reasonable man can cling so tenaciously to such prejudice.”*

— Albert Einstein in 1946  
(Quoted, Wilkerson, 377)

THE BRILLIANT PHYSICIST and Nobel Laureate Albert Einstein left Germany in December 1932, one month before Adolph Hitler took power. In the United States he was astonished to see the way African Americans were treated.

He knew discrimination as a Jew, no matter his intelligence and accomplishments, in Germany and Europe. Jews under Nazi rule were living under a manufactured caste system that justified their mistreatment and eventual near extermination.

The United States has never had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to discuss the history of caste, racism and national oppression of Black people. The mass awakening that began with the uprising against police violence and terror following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, marks another opportunity to do so.

The power of that Black-led uprising played a central role in defeating President Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election, and electing Kamala Harris, the first Black, South Asian woman to the vice presidency.

Isabel Wilkerson’s new book, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, describes the “American caste system” forged over 400 years. While others have written about the unique American caste system (notably Oliver Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race* [1948]), she gives a well-documented analysis and timely presentation.

In 1994, Wilkerson was the Chicago bureau chief of *The New York Times*. She became the first woman of African-American heritage to win the Pulitzer Prize



in journalism. In 2011 she wrote the nonfiction best seller, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, winning numerous awards.

### A Social Construction

Wilkerson explains the caste system as the foundation where institutional racism sits. While she does not discuss how Blacks from many African tribes, languages and cultures became an oppressed nationality, the failure to end that system is why institutional racism is so strong and prevalent.

She says that what occurred — white supremacy — was not inevitable. Yet it is easy to understand why and how it happened: The vast wealth created for the white settlers who slaughtered Indigenous peoples and owned slaves made it easy for them and their descendants to treat Africans and their children so harshly.

George Washington, the first president, owned 300 slaves through his marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis Washington and chased down any who tried to escape.

Caste describes how that second-class status of African Americans has remained, even with the growth of a vibrant Black middle class. The class gap between haves and have-nots has widened within the oppressed nationality, even as the wealth gap between African Americans and the dominant “white caste” has grown.

Wilkerson looks comparatively at the oldest caste system in India, the American caste system and the caste system created under Nazi Germany.

The Nazis, she points out, studied the extreme laws and discrimination in the former slaveholding South — Jim Crow legal segregation. The Nazis were both impressed and amazed how a modern “democracy” could justify such a legal system and still be called a democratic country.

In India, the historic caste system was formally banned in the new constitution after independence from the United Kingdom in 1947. Yet the caste system is still alive, and Dalits (then known as “Untouchables”) are still looked down upon by higher castes.

African Americans still suffer from institutional racism more than 50 years after the civil rights revolution returned the right to vote that had existed under federal protection for twelve years after the Civil War.

### Caste in Context

Wilkerson defines the caste system as a social construction:

*“A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominant caste whose forebears designed it. A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart, distanced from one another and in their assigned places.”*

She goes on to explain how caste and race are connected:

*“Race does the heavy lifting for a caste system that demands a means of human division. If we have been trained to see humans in the language of race, then caste is the underlying grammar that we encode as children, as when learning our mother tongue. Caste, like grammar, becomes an invisible guide not only to how we speak, but how we process information, the automatic calculations that figure into a sentence without our having to think about it.”* (17)

She further adds:

*“Race in the United States is the visible agent of the unseen force of caste. Caste is the bones, race the skin. Race is what we can see, the physical traits that have been given arbitrary meaning and become shorthand for who a person is. Caste is the powerful infrastructure*

that holds each group in its place.” (18)

These themes are repeated with examples throughout the book.

Wilkerson is describing the origin of the special oppression and exploitation of African Americans. While the Bible and other holy texts have been used to justify it, the bottom line is that the skin color of slaves and former slaves was used to justify the dominant (whites) and inferior castes (Blacks).

By extension, other groups or subcastes were in relationship to these two dominant castes. Indigenous peoples were unique since the white settlers sought to exterminate and later forced them into “reservations” on the least habitable lands.

The post-Civil War citizenship Amendments did not apply to the original tribes. Indigenous people did not gain formal U.S. citizenship until 1924.

### Connections Between Caste Systems

A feature of Wilkerson’s study is how similar various caste systems are. She tells the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. in his trip to India in the winter of 1959. King and his wife Coretta went to India, as he said, not as tourists but as pilgrims.

India was the home of Mahatma Gandhi, the recognized spiritual leader and practitioner of the strategy of “nonviolence” around the world.

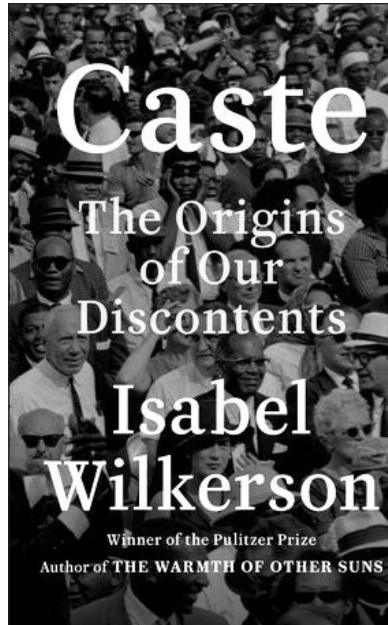
King arrived in Mumbai (then known as Bombay), invited by the Indian government. He wanted to see the Untouchables (Dalits), who were treated historically as bad if not worse than Black Americans.

He went to the southern state of Kerala and visited a high school where the students were from Dalit families. The school principal gave an introduction that surprised King: “Young people, I like to present to you a fellow untouchable from the United States of America.”

Wilkerson writes, “King was floored. He did not see the connection.” She continues: “For a moment,” he later wrote, “I was a bit shocked and peeved that I would be referred to as an untouchable.”

After further thought comparing the oppression of Blacks and Untouchables, King said, “Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States is an untouchable.” (Chapter Three, *An American Untouchable*)

Wilkerson observes how the caste system still impacts India. Higher castes still see themselves by their words and attitudes



as superior to Dalits and lower castes. She attended conferences of Indian scholars where she could identify upper castes and Dalits even if all had similar academic credentials.

The Indian constitution written after independence, banning discrimination on the basis of caste, states that all Indians are equal. Yet the social and economic inequalities remain despite “affirmative action” laws aimed at leveling the playing field.

In the United States the constitution was

amended after the Civil War to provide former slaves citizenship. For a decade that brought real change, including the election of the first Blacks to public office including to the Senate and Congress. All were in former slave states.

Yet in 1877 under the “Great Compromise,” Union troops left the South. Quickly, on the ground in the former Confederate states, the citizenship rights for Blacks were gutted violently and then overturned.

Blacks had been seen as inferior and a subordinate caste since 1619. Under Jim Crow era segregation these caste and racial divisions were reinforced. The education or economic status of a Black person mattered little.

Class differences exist. But that’s within each caste group. Whites, including union and nonunion working-class whites, see themselves primarily first as part of the dominant white group and have rarely seen Blacks as allies on non-economic issues.

Wilkerson provides numerous examples, including current ones, where this attitude persists.

### Nazi Germany’s Caste System

Wilkerson discusses a third caste system — Nazi Germany for 12 years until Hitler’s defeat and death in World War II.

In Chapter Eight, “The Nazis and the Acceleration of Caste,” Wilkerson discusses how a modern creation of caste was accelerated in Germany.

The Nazi hierarchy decided early in its rule to legally and otherwise isolate German Jews from “Aryan” Germans. They studied the Jim Crow South and its method of domination and terror over Blacks. The

Nuremberg meeting was held in 1934 to turn anti-Semitic ideology into new laws.

Wilkerson explains:

“The Nazis needed no outsiders to plant the seeds of hatred within them. But in the early years of the regime, when they still had a stake in the appearance of legitimacy and the hope of foreign investment, they were seeking legal prototypes for the caste system they were building. They were looking to move quickly with their plans for racial separation and purity and knew that the United States was centuries ahead of them with its anti-miscegenation statutes and race-based immigration bans.”

The rapidity of entrenching the dominant caste system in Nazi Germany was similar to what occurred after the U.S. Civil War. Legal rights were taken away through laws and violence. “Ordinary” citizens accepted this violence and terror directed at the lower caste.

In Germany, it didn’t matter that Jews had been co-workers and neighbors. Just as white Americans cheered lynchings, these ordinary Germans looked the other way as Hitler exterminated Jews.

### Caste and National Oppression

Why is the caste system important to understand? As all three examples Wilkerson cites show, racist ideology was enlisted to justify their actions. While caste and race are social constructions and not identical, the caste system is essential to see how the dominant group rules.

The caste system allowed new immigrants from Europe, for example, to quickly learn that their future was tied to the dominant caste, not the old relationship of groups in Europe. Thus, Irish who were seen as less than English soon recognized it was okay to be “white Americans” and look down on Blacks and other nonwhites.

Caste explains that the defeat of Radical Reconstruction in 1877 ended the possibility of a new “American colorblind nation.” Wilkerson clearly explains that the caste system is the foundation, and racism is the political justification. That’s how, by the 20th century, Blacks became an inferior “racial” group.

The oppressed Black nationality was forged in the period following Reconstruction’s defeat. The radical concept of the “right to self-determination,” emerging in 19th century Europe, also applies to African Americans: To end the inferior caste and race system means that the right to form an independent country within the boundary of the territory of the United States may be required.

Wilkerson does not discuss the national question in this book but her analysis of the origin of institutional racism opens the door to understanding a permanent solution to national oppression.



## Persistent Oppression

In the 21st century caste, race and national oppression remain strong. Trumpism could not exist without the support of “ordinary whites” who don’t face cop violence as a norm or race-based financial discrimination.

There is no level playing field for Blacks and whites. It is why the issue of reparations continues to be raised by African Americans.

A *Washington Post* feature discussed two communities — one African American, one white — both composed of middle-class professionals with decent-paying jobs. But there was one major difference.

As explained in an October 23 article by personal finance columnist Michelle Singletary, “Being Black lowers the value of my home: The legacy of redlining.”

*“If I picked up my home and moved it 20 miles west to a White neighborhood, it would be worth much more.”*

How much? Her community average home value is \$300,000 versus \$700,000 for the white-owned homes.

Wilkerson explains how decades of racist housing policies, including the New Deal of the 1930s, excluded African Americans. Due to housing segregation, the cheap GI loans in the 1950s also kept Blacks on the margins. African Americans have been denied massive potential wealth, as the *Post* article shows.

The exception is when Blacks can move into white suburbs as a minority and do not become a majority. Realtors can then still sell the homes at standard “white” market value.

The wealth gap between Black families actually grew wider from 1968 to 2020. Working-class Black families are worse off. Wilkerson says these facts are connected to the inequities of the institutionalized caste system.

Revolutionary socialists have always argued that to end caste and racial discrimination means the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a democratic socialist society. Since the late 1960s with demographic changes, hope for an end to institutional racism has ebbed up and down. But the power of white nationalism based on the ideology of white supremacy is entrenched.

The most significant fact of the 2020 presidential election is that 2016 was not an aberration. A large majority of “ordinary whites” backed Trump again in the 2020 election. There is a racial gender gap too, as a vast majority of women of color voted for Joseph Biden while 56% of white women went for Trump.

Hatred and fear of the “others” is Trumpism’s core strategy. Wilkerson’s discussion of caste makes clear why these attitudes remain prevalent — and why it is

so difficult to overcome and end them in the bourgeois democracy founded by slave holders.

In her “Epilogue A World Without Caste,” Wilkerson indicates a possible future:

*“And yet, somehow, there are the rare people, like Einstein, who seem immune to the toxins of caste in the air we breathe, who manage to transcend what most people are susceptible to. From the abolitionists who risked personal ruin to end slavery to the white civil rights workers who gave their lives to help end Jim Crow and the political leaders who outlawed*

*it, these all-too-rare people are a testament to the human spirit, that humans can break free of the hierarchy’s hold on them.*

*“These are people of personal courage and conviction, secure within themselves, willing to break convention, not reliant on the approval of others for their sense of self, people of deep and abiding empathy and compassion. They are what many of us might wish to be but not nearly enough of us are. Perhaps, once awakened, more of us will be.” (384)*

Caste and her first book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, are first rate. They should be taught in schools and universities. ■

## New Challenges for African Americans — continued from page 14

thought-out demand based on decades of experience dealing with occupying police forces in Black and brown communities.

Obama, whose record toward African Americans communities was right-of-center policies that did little, is Biden’s approach.

His appointment of “moderate” Black, Latino and women figures to his cabinet reflects the rise of a layer of well-off middle class and professional people into mainstream capitalist society. But these individuals do not represent the best interests of the working class, particularly its poorest.

### Movements Respond to Crises

Various BLM groups said before the election that they would continue to respond to police terror with street protests and demands on city, state and federal officials, including Democrats, to enact radical changes. The key, they all say, is to force governmental and corporate powers to advance the interest of the African American community, and not rely on capitalist politicians who “look like us.”

The same applies to the health pandemic crisis facing the African American, Latinos, Asian American and Indigenous communities who are the worst hit by the coronavirus. Will Biden and Democrats make sure that these communities get the vaccine first, and will it be free to those without health insurance?

Biden is opposed to universal health care (Medicare for all). He does not explain how essential low-wage workers, including Latinos (many undocumented) working in agriculture (many are undocumented), will be safely vaccinated and not targeted by immigration cops.

Biden says he will return the United States to the WHO (World Health Organization). But he has no plan to make sure the entire world, especially “Global South” countries, are able to get low-cost vaccines. The big pharmaceutical companies are there for profits not health care.

The pandemic has exposed the

inequalities of the health care system. Black and brown people have always received inferior health care compared to whites in general. Based on past and ongoing racial policies many African Americans don’t trust the medical establishment.

### Activists Push People’s Action

African American activists and commentators see the reason for the polarization: White-identity “grievance” politics convinces the poorest working-class whites to unite with billionaires against Blacks and non-whites.

Blacks understand this. It is part of the blood and bone of American history. The race card is always played by white politicians and those in power to win the white racial group to oppose socio-economic progress.

Biden’s concept of government is to make deals with conservatives even at the sacrifice of more liberal positions. His team will reflect pro-corporate Democrats who care more about working with mainstream Republicans than promoting progressive policy.

The New York Congresswoman from the Bronx, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, has been the most outspoken against Biden’s move to the center right. Her demands and those of other progressives are intended to pressure Biden’s team.

That’s a flawed strategy — working inside the Democratic Party to bring social and economic change. It does not work.

What inspired a multiracial and working-class coalition against Trump, and by default for Biden, was the broad-based Black-led racial justice uprising. The movement against the police built an effective Rainbow Coalition to fight racism.

The answer to Trumpism, modern-day white supremacist politics, is to continue to mobilize for real change. The leaders of the Black Lives movement have all pledged to fight police violence and political corruption. Others including leaders of the women’s, gay rights and unions must do the same. ■

## The U.S. South and Labor's Fate By Alex Lichtenstein

### The Southern Key

Race, Class, and Radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s

By Michael Goldfield

Oxford University Press, 2020, 432 pages,

\$49.95 hardcover.

IN *THE SOUTHERN KEY*, Michael Goldfield draws on more than three decades of scholarship, both his own and that of many others, to elucidate a deceptively straightforward point: The failure of the American labor movement to organize sustainable interracial unions in the South in the 20th century had long-term deleterious effects on the American labor movement and political economy, many of which remain with us today.

Just look at a recent COVID map, which traces directly onto maps charting slavery, sharecropping, segregation, disfranchisement, incarceration rates, 1948 votes for Strom Thurmond, 1964 votes for Barry Goldwater, and much else besides.

This isn't exactly a novel interpretation, as a very long list of sociologists, political scientists and historians, many acknowledged in this book, have made this point sufficiently. It is fair to say that this has become the reigning orthodoxy in the historiography of the southern labor movement during its heroic CIO moment (1936-1955).

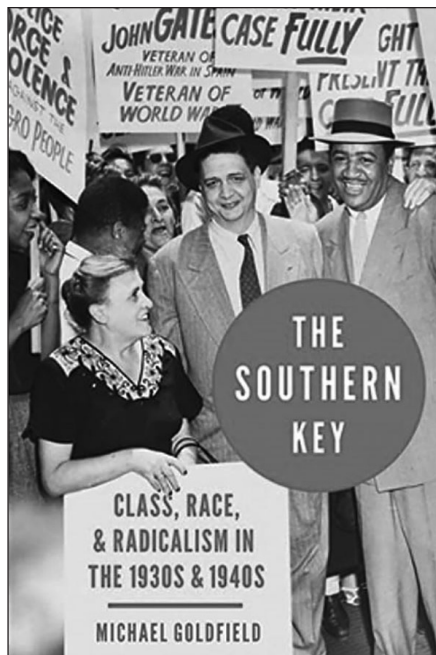
As works by Goldfield himself, Robert Korstad, Nelson Lichtenstein, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Michael Honey, William P. Jones, Michelle Brattain, Barbara Griffiths, Patricia Sullivan, Bruce Nelson, Ira Katznelson and many others attest, a combination of factors — redbaiting (by local governments and union leadership alike), conservative and racist AFL unions, individualism, fundamentalist religion, state repression, straight-out union-busting, labor's strategic errors, and not least the racism of rank-and-file white workers — helped defeat the concerted drive to organize the South over these two crucial decades.

### Contested Role of the State

While recapitulating this well-established framework, Goldfield's book still has something to offer. Most previous studies rest this

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conclusion on the study of a single industry, state or locality. Goldfield's account, drawing on years of research and synthesizing a huge swath of existing scholarship, covers coal, steel, textiles and the paper industry, all sites of protracted struggles to build interracial unions in the segregated south. If the broad conclusions he draws about the long-term consequences of the failure of these organizing drives mirror that of other scholars, the author offers some important reinterpretations of the reasons for this failure.

Where Goldfield claims to depart most dramatically from existing scholarship is in his account of the role of the state. In his view, the importance of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933-1934 (particularly section 7a, making joining a union a federally sanctioned right) in prompting southern workers to overcome their fears and seek union membership has been vastly overstated in the literature.

He extends this skepticism to the 1935 Wagner Act, which ostensibly enshrined this right in federal labor law.

Looking closely at pre-NIRA organizing drives in the coalfields, for example, Goldfield concludes that whether sparked by Communist Party (CP) militants or long-time local stalwarts on the ground, miners seemed primed to build unions before the Roosevelt Administration opened the door, but he is hardly the first scholar to point

this out. Indeed, at times it can be hard to reconcile Goldfield's assertion that established scholarship ignores this dynamic with his heavy reliance on that same scholarship, much of it quite old-fashioned.

When it comes to the Textile Workers Organizing Campaign of 1937-38, he argues that a CIO leadership prone to put its faith in the National Labor Relations Board missed a golden opportunity to tap into organic militancy in the southern mill towns.

### Communists' Contradictory Role

Secondly, Goldfield wrestles with the role of the Communist Party and the related anticommunism that proved a major obstacle to left-wing leadership in nascent CIO unions. He recognizes, for instance, that the story of the unionization of the steel industry requires not only acknowledging the activism of CP organizers in the early phase, but also consideration of the Party's errors which left its militants vulnerable to a subsequent purge of the USWA (United Steel Workers of America) by more conservative forces once the steel magnates were forced to the bargaining table.

In particular, Goldfield argues, during the mid-to-late 1930s Popular Front the Party's "acquiescence without a struggle" to the hegemony of liberals like Steelworkers President Philip Murray "paved the way for the dominance of right-wing, racially insensitive" leadership." (179) Similarly, Goldfield maintains, in the fight to organize woodworkers the CP's "surrender to the CIO rightists" and "the maintenance of the Popular front" (240) sabotaged the potential for organizing Black workers in the South.

Although he does not shy away from detailing the "self-destructive sectarian behavior" (350) of the CP, Goldfield nevertheless endorses the notion that the Party's true role as a spark to labor militancy peaked during its ultra-sectarian phases — i.e. the Third Period (1929-1933) — and was then squandered when the Party followed Soviet dictates to make nice with those to its right, like Roosevelt liberals or moderate CIO leaders.

After 1935 the Party "often abandoned its members in order to preserve harmonious relations with national CIO leaders," Goldfield complains. (358) Such subordination, Goldfield insists, not the CP's political adventurism, sectarian zigzags and constant injection of political causes of little interest

to the rank and file, facilitated the purge of the left from the CIO.

This critique of the Party's Popular Front labor politics from the ultra-left is, to put it bluntly, perverse. And yet, during the Third Period, Goldfield avers "a less sectarian Communist Party... would have had far more influence and support." (35) Yes, but then it wouldn't have been the Communist Party.

Whatever the causes of the Party's vulnerability, the consequences of the anti-communist purges were significant. In steel, Goldfield insists, despite the crucial role Black workers had played in building the union, by the postwar period, USWA leadership at best ignored them and at worst perpetuated racism within the union.

Oddly, Goldfield suggests that the USWA has been held up by many scholars as a "democratic" union, and claims to offer a bold revision by demonstrating otherwise. Yet it has always been widely recognized that because of the way SWOC (Steel Workers Organizing Campaign) was organized and consolidated the union structure was top-down and autocratic — as the many accounts of the USWA which he draws from indicate.

### Understanding the South

In organizing his analysis by industry, Goldfield eschews cultural explanations for the behavior of southern white workers — e.g. individualism or religiosity — and focuses instead on the structural factors that encouraged or impeded organizing at the regional, local and even plant level. This allows him to avoid the *deus ex machina* of an ill-defined "culture" as the explanation for (white) southerners' alleged hesitancy to join unions.

Protestantism, for example, could cut either way, depending on circumstances, as could resistance to being told what to do by outsiders (who could be owners of capital as well as labor militants), depending on the time and place.

One week a fire-and-brimstone sermon might be devoted to the CIO as antichrist; but the following Sunday, workers might find a local or itinerant churchman happy to preach the union gospel to an eager audience. Which one represents southern "culture"? As Goldfield insists, southern workers "when they had sufficient structural and associative power, were often as ready and able to unionize as their compatriots in the North." (289)

Global comparative analysis by industrial sector also helps steer *The Southern Key* away from the shoals of foggy cultural explanations. For example, as Goldfield points out, textile workers from Gastonia to Guatemala worked in a labor-intensive industry that could only seek profits in

a highly competitive sector by ruthlessly reducing per-unit labor costs.

Some of this astute analysis is diluted by Goldfield's all-too frequent meanderings away from southern history, so that readers may lose this main thread of the story. In a lengthy chapter on SWOC, for example, Goldfield spends far more time on the well-told story of the steel towns from Chicago to Western Pennsylvania than he does on Alabama, the heart of the industry in the South.

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## *The failure of the American labor movement to organize sustainable interracial unions in the South in the 20th century had long-term deleterious effects on the American labor movement and political economy, many of which remain with us today.*

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If Goldfield's book has the potential to reconfigure our understanding of the "southern key," it lies in a shift in periodization. Whereas most scholars still see the defeat of the postwar southern organizing drive, popularly known as "Operation Dixie," as the turning point in the fortunes of mass industrial unions in the South, Goldfield now argues that this was more a feeble culmination of previous trends than the crucial do-or-die moment many have assumed it to be.

He correctly regards as crucial the "associative power" — what others might call "social unionism" — lent to the labor movement by the wide array of militant organizations during the Depression, including in the South. The CIO's unwillingness to work with the left and civil rights activists during its postwar southern organizing drive, especially in textiles, Goldfield argues, hamstrung its operations while doing nothing to shield it from red- or race-baiting by employers, the press, or its AFL rivals.

The futile accommodation to racist whites, and the failure to reach out to Black workers, also weakened the union drive.

This is all true, as far as it goes, and much of it has been said before. However, Goldfield remains mute about the impact of the culmination of all this ferment, the Progressive Party's 1948 doomed southern campaign, during which some left-wing organizers sought to swing the political weight of the new southern unions in the direction of Henry Wallace (Wallace, George, appears in the index; Wallace, Henry does not).

The national CIO backed Truman, but CP unionists and their waning allies demanded that their locals endorse Henry Wallace; the segregationist Strom Thurmond won the

Deep South states. More attention to the Wallace campaign, and the divisions it occasioned on the left wing of the CIO, would demonstrate the left's political adventurism at this moment.

### Labor and Civil Rights

One problem Goldfield does not grapple with sufficiently is the widespread assumption that the defeat of the southern unions expunged any economic orientation from the civil rights movement that arose in the 1950s and 1960s. In his desire to demonstrate that the driving of militants — CP or otherwise — from the labor movement ended all left-labor civil rights activism, he simply asserts its disappearance.

Of course, significant union density and more powerful interracial unions in the South would have added an important dimension to the so-called "King years" of the movement. In fact, however, the civil rights struggle remained consistently about "more than just a hamburger," and even with the relative absence of left-wing militants or trade unionists in its front ranks (and they were by no means eliminated entirely), continued to emphasize economic rights.

E.D. Nixon's persistent activism in Montgomery in the 1950s is but one example; Dr. King's call for a general strike in Memphis during the 1968 sanitation workers' strike is another. In between came the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Despite the enormous amount of material brought between the covers of *The Southern Key*, ultimately the book confirms an existing interpretation, one that remains badly in need of revision.

In this account the early CIO unions in the South, led by the left, bore the promise of interracial democracy. If permitted to flourish, they would have transformed the South, breaking the hold of the Dixiecrats on the Democratic Party as early as 1948. But anticommunism got in the way, as liberals purged the left from the new unions, thus sapping their interracial promise.

The result was a delayed civil rights movement, and one that remained aloof from questions of class and political economy. Elements of this narrative are certainly accurate; I have made a variation of this argument myself.

But by now we need a more sophisticated version of this history, one that pays sufficient attention to the left's postwar miscalculations, acknowledges the quixotic nature of the Henry Wallace campaign in the South, and recognizes the persistence of the impulse for racial democracy inside the trade union movement and its allies, even in the absence of the Communists, who may at times have done more harm than good. ■

## A Black Freedom Trailblazer: Recovering William Monroe Trotter

By Derrick Morrison

WILLIAM MONROE TROTTER, a too little-known pioneer of the fight for civil rights in the South and civil equality in the North, is captured brilliantly in Kerri K. Greenidge's book, *Black Radical, The Life and Times of William Monroe Trotter* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).

Among the highlights of the trail Trotter blazed:

"On May 13, 1902, the [Boston] *Guardian* sponsored a rally at Faneuil Hall in support of the Fourteenth Amendment and congressional investigation of southern disfranchisement. The event called itself the Crumpacker Rally in honor of the Indiana Republican Edgar D. Crumpacker, who wanted Congress to reduce southern representation in those states where black citizens were denied the right to vote.

"Crumpacker, and fellow Pennsylvania Republican Marlin E. Olmsted, invoked Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which allowed Congress to reduce representation in those states that denied citizens' rights. Olmsted introduced the resolution on January 3, 1901, less than three months after Republicans took control of the White House and both houses of Congress in the 1900 elections."

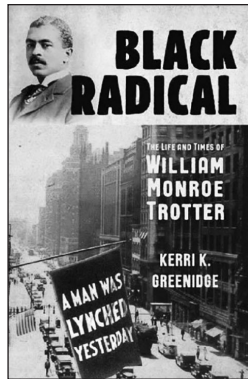
If that section of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had escaped your attention — it did mine — it didn't evade the laser-like focus of William Monroe Trotter.

"Crumpacker had worked on the resolution months before the presidential election, mainly in response to widespread white violence against black voters across the South. In 1898... five hundred white North Carolinians, angry at the predominantly black city of Wilmington for electing Republicans to the state legislature, stormed the town hall, seized control of the city council and attacked black people and their businesses in a violent political coup.

"Although the new, white Democratic Wilmington government clearly violated the Fourteenth Amendment, neither state nor Federal officials intervened, allowing the 'Old North State' to fall under Democratic control with little attention outside of the black community." (72-73)

As the founder and editor of the *Boston Guardian* [hereafter referred to as the *Guardian*], Trotter reached out far and wide to build the rally. Crumpacker sent a letter of support, and "apologies for their absence" came "from Massachusetts governor Winthrop M. Crane" and "ex-governor George S. Boutwell...."

The rally "attracted overflowing crowds to Faneuil Hall" and "included a diverse cross section of the black public —



colored people from Cambridge to New Bedford, attorneys as well as passionate janitors and bootblacks." (77)

### Roots of Black Studies

Professor Greenidge teaches at Tufts University, in the Consortium of Studies in Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora. While the book reflects tons of research, it's also very readable, a real page-turner.

This book and many like it flow out of programs that study African-American history. And these programs came out of intense struggles. I was reminded of that after viewing *Agents of Change*, a film that appears sometimes on world-channel.org, a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) channel.

That film spotlights the 1968 San Francisco State student strike and the armed occupation of the student union at Cornell University in 1969.

Black students initiated, organized and led both struggles, demanding the institution of some type of Black Studies program. These programs and departments, commonplace today, were forged in such battles at many college campuses across the country.

Let some of us remember, and many learn for the first time, about these events that extended U.S. civil democracy and pushed back social inequality. Professor Greenidge's book is one of the fruits of those battles — let's digest what it has to tell us.

### William Monroe Trotter

Among the many battles against civil and social inequality in the first decades of the 20th century, the efforts of Trotter stand out. These include the movement for women's suffrage, fought against a most gross civil inequality — the denial of the right of women to vote. The Socialist Party of America and the fledgling union movement of native-born and immigrant workers fought the plutocracy of the giant industrial companies over the right to organize and make a dent in social inequality by sharing a little in the wealth the workers produced.

Trotter not only confronted the civil inequality facing the people of color in the North, but utilized that zone of restricted civil democracy to fight the encroachment of Jim Crow in the South.

People of African descent in the North could exercise their constitutional rights as outlined in the 14th and 15th Amendments, the "Reconstruction amendments." However, those rights were null and void in the South.

The imposition of Jim Crow meant not only the denial of the Reconstruction Amendments, but the overthrow of civil democracy, the disavowal of the rule of the U.S. Constitution.

Both Blacks and whites lived a constrained and repressive existence, the former serving as the scapegoat for the all the

Derrick Morrison is a community activist in New Orleans, Louisiana.

ills wracking society in the South.

The plutocrats, and those whom they subsidized, counseled accommodation and acceptance of the emerging status quo. Booker T. Washington, the founder and builder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, was a recipient of generous subsidies from Northern industrialists and bankers.

*“As the infamous ‘Wizard of Tuskegee’ who used racial accommodation as a political tool, Booker T. Washington was ... secretly subsidizing black newspapers across the country, and crushing those editors who refused to be bought.*

*“By 1900 ... Washington managed to subsidize nearly all of the black weeklies in the country....” (57-58)*

Washington opposed the Crumpacker Bill. (74) But he couldn't stop the *Guardian's* effort because he didn't control that paper.

### Legacy of Trotter's Father

The paper's financial independence was due to the legacy left by William's father, James Monroe Trotter. James and his two sisters, Fannie and Sally, were born out of the union between Letitia, a slave, and Richard Trotter, a slave master who owned several plantations in the Mississippi Valley.

An unusual planter, Richard provided the children with a classical education as opposed to laboring in the cotton fields.

Letitia, mindful of the vicissitudes of the plantation — meaning that any abrupt downturn could cause “Richard or his relatives” to “count their losses and sell off their slaves,” finally decided to flee with her three children, landing in a small town along the Ohio River in 1850. (9)

After the Civil War broke out and upon the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, young James signed up with the Massachusetts' Fifty-Fifth Regiment (not to be confused with the Fifty-Fourth whose story is told in the film *Glory*). He became a sergeant and was eventually commissioned a lieutenant by the state's governor.

After the war, James moved to Hyde Park, a Boston suburb. He was granted a government pension in 1870 and wrote a bestselling book on African American musical history in 1878. (12)

After the 1873 Depression, which was global in scope, property prices plummeted, enabling the lieutenant to amass some real estate. These holdings grew in value, providing financial security for William and his two sisters, Maude and Virginia Elizabeth (Bessie).

William graduated from Harvard, Maude attended Wellesley. When William launched the *Guardian* in 1901, his mother, Virginia, managed the real estate holdings.

### The Growing Black Press

Greenidge notes that between the start of the *Guardian* in 1901 and the 1917 entry of the U.S. government into the Great War in Europe, “the number of black periodicals increased from less than 100 to over 288. And unlike the 1890s and early 1900s, these periodicals operated independently of Booker T.

Washington and white political bosses [Washington died in 1915].

*“Part of this was due to the mass migration of black southerners to the urban North and Midwest, and their rising literacy rates since Reconstruction.” (230)*

The “most popular black newspaper in the country by the start of World War One” was the *Chicago Defender*, edited by Charles S. Abbott.

*“Abbot was actually an early admirer of Trotter's — when he began the Defender in 1905, he often wrote admiringly to Trotter about ‘the colored man's rights.’ Trotter, in turn published excerpts from the Defender in the Guardian*

*to point out the ‘rising colored man of the middle West.’*

*“By 1915, however, the Defender, with over 500,000 weekly readers, outsold Trotter in cities and towns across the country, including Boston. With just over 2,000 weekly subscribers, the Guardian would always cost more to produce than it earned....”*

Unlike Trotter, Abbott “had no problem taking advertising revenue from products and companies that his racial politics found objectionable.” (231-2)

### Niagara Movement and Brownsville

In July 1905, twenty-nine men from the Northeast and Middle Atlantic regions of the U.S. met at a hotel in Ontario, Canada and created “the first black-led civil rights organization of the century.”

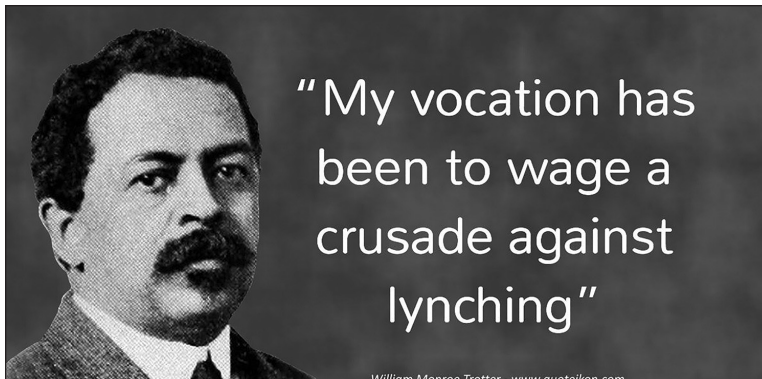
Trotter's ideas, Greenidge writes, “colored all aspects of the Niagara Movement's Declaration of Principles. Written by Trotter and edited by [W.E.B.] Du Bois, these principles claimed political independence and equal suffrage as the basis for civil rights. ‘The race stands at the webbed crossroads where it must choose between cowardice and courage, apology and truth...or a conscientious stand for right with the faith that right will ultimately win over the costliness of liberty....’”

The document “urged black men to ‘protest emphatically and continually against the curtailment of their political rights...the voice of protest of ten million Americans must never cease to assail the ears of their fellows so long as America is unjust.’” (122-3)

W.E.B. Du Bois was chosen as the “movement's executive secretary.” While the organization was hobbled with personality clashes — some due in no small part to Trotter — its formation pointed up the need for a national response to the imposition of Jim Crow in the South.

**B**rownsville, Texas, became a flash point in 1906. The all-Black Twenty-Fifth Infantry “served with distinction in the Philippines, Cuba [Spanish-American War of 1898], and various frontier settlements across Texas, Arizona, and Nebraska. It was on the Western frontier that the men earned their nickname, ‘Buffalo Soldiers,’ and entered the ranks of African American popular culture through icons like West Point graduate Henry Ossian Flipper.”

Stationed at Fort Brown, the men were “shot at, harassed,



and pistol-whipped” when they entered Brownsville. Maude’s father-in-law Theophilus Gould Steward, a chaplain with the Twenty-Fifth, “stated that white and Mexican citizens in Brownsville constantly complained that black soldiers refused to obey racial custom by getting off of the sidewalk when a white man passed by.” (140-1, 144)

In “the early morning hours of August 13, 1906...bullets rained down” on the town. It “ended with one death and the wounding of a police lieutenant...”

President Theodore Roosevelt “disparage[s] black soldiers as ‘particularly dependent’ upon white officers, lacking in ‘leadership capacity,’ and prone to panic under fire. ‘Here again I attributed the trouble to the superstition and fear of the darkey,’ he confided to a colleague, [which is] natural to those but one generation removed from slavery and but a few generations removed from the wildest savagery.” (141)

These remarks illustrate how the rise of Jim Crow went hand in hand with the elaboration of white supremacy theories. But Roosevelt, concerned about the Black vote in the midterm elections, waited until November to order a dishonorable discharge of the soldiers, which “meant loss of their Federal pensions and a lifetime ban from future Federal employment...” (142)

With the printed testimony of Chaplain Steward, the *Guardian* provided firsthand accounts. The articles were reprinted in the *New York Tribune* and in some of the Black press. In the course of a year, Steward and another writer took an “investigative trip” to Texas. Their accounts “provided national coverage, beyond the *Guardian*, of the Brownsville incident.”

Trotter “organized massive community rallies in Boston, D.C., Hartford, and New York City...” Those rallies also supported the efforts of Joseph B. Foraker, an Ohio Republican senator who sat on the Senate’s Military Affairs Committee. He introduced a resolution for an investigation by the committee as to “whether President Roosevelt had the authority to discharge the black soldiers.” (145, 146)

In January 1908, a bill known as the Tucker Act, was introduced to Congress to allow “the Twenty-Fifth Infantry’s officers to sue the Federal government for their discharge....” (158).

### NAACP, NIPL and Woodrow Wilson

The Niagara Movement finally unraveled in 1908. Two years later a group of plutocratic reformers, concerned about the civil and social deterioration of conditions for the Negro, formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. W.E.B. Du Bois was picked to edit its monthly magazine, *The Crisis*.

August, 1911 saw Trotter gather his allies in Faneuil Hall to form the National Independent Political League. By 1912 the NIPL had members in over 15 states, mostly northern. Greenidge states its three demands on elected officials: “a Federal law against lynching, Federal enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment provision that denied congressional representation for states that disfranchised citizens, and

Federal prohibition of discrimination in labor unions.” (183)

Woodrow Wilson, who had become governor of New Jersey in 1910 with the help of the Black vote, was the Democratic Party nominee for President in 1912. In his search for Black votes, he agreed to meet with the NIPL leadership in July, 1912. He said he would “observe the law in its letter and spirit...” (185)

Trotter called upon *Guardian* readers “to vote for Wilson, and Democratic congressional candidates generally, pointing out that the GOP had so thoroughly degraded black voters since Reconstruction that the modern era called for a different politics.”



Greenidge continues:

“Du Bois agreed with Trotter in his own Crisis endorsement of Wilson. Over 500,000 popular votes in the national election were held by black men in the North and West, Du Bois pointed out, a number that could make or break an election.

“Rather than sell these votes for ‘toothless appointments for assistant attorney general, recorder of deeds and a few other black wooden men whose duty it is to look pleasant,’ black men should sell their 500,000 votes for ‘abolition of the interstate Jim Crow car; the enforcement of the Thirteenth Amendment by the suppression of peonage; the enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment by cutting down the representation in Congress of the rotten boroughs of the South; National aid to elementary public schools without class or racial discrimination.” (186)

### Disappointment

Trotter and Du Bois were to be cruelly disappointed. Both “underestimated the speed at which Wilson’s cabinet transformed southern-style white supremacy into official Federal policy.” (189)

Segregation was just one part of the Jim Crow toolbox, along with lynching and all the other insidious measures designed to deny and stamp out any trace of Black humanity. Segregation of the Federal work force caused “job loss, salary decreases or humiliating work conditions” for black employees. Trotter and NIPL leaders met with Wilson again in November 1914, and tried to hold him accountable for his policies. After the meeting Trotter set out on a speaking tour denouncing the President’s course.

Before the confrontation he addressed “an antisegregation rally at the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, where hundreds of black men, women, and children cheered as Trotter rose to speak.” (194) Ida B. Wells-Barnett, a prominent anti-lynching activist, also spoke.

The speaking tour saw Trotter address mass rallies in New York, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Des Moines, Iowa.

“When black readers wrote letters praising Trotter’s ‘manly stand for our rights,’ then called out various ‘colored office-holders’ by name for ‘failing in their duty to the race,’ the *Richmond Planet* [a Black weekly in Virginia] agreed by sarcastically noting, ‘Brother Trotter and his committee forgot that they were citizens of the United States without a country. They believed that the Constitution and the laws of the United States mean just what they say.’” (206)

## Anti-lynching Law Struggle

After launching the National Equal Rights League (NERL) around 1911, Trotter hooked up with New York City Caribbean-American radicals like Hubert Harrison to start a campaign for “Federal antilynching legislation” in 1917.

*“On June 12, at the Bethel AME Church on West 132nd Street, Harrison led hundreds of black people in calls for Federal antilynching legislation, and introduced the crowd to a rising star in Caribbean radicalism, the Jamaican lecturer and newspaper editor Marcus Garvey.*

*“The next day, June 13, Harrison arrived at Trotter’s (Boston) Faneuil Hall rally after boarding a midnight train from New York. In Boston, as in New York, the hall was crowded to overflowing... over two thousand blacks cheered as Harrison and Trotter denounced ‘mob justice’ and demanded ‘a liberty congress for the colored masses.’” (243)*

They formed an ad hoc group called the Liberty League and set their sights on a “Liberty League Congress” in 1918 to organize an anti-lynching petition to the U.S. Congress. In the early summer of that year the LLC gathered 115 delegates to write the petition. (255)

Their action complemented the activity of Congressman Leonidas Dyer, a Missouri Republican. In early April Dyer submitted House Resolution 11270. Known as the Dyer Bill, it called for federal prosecution for lynching when the state failed to protect victims and included compensation for the victim’s heirs. It became the focus of civil democratic radicals for the next four years. Trotter and others welcomed the support of the NAACP.

Significantly, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Dyer Bill on January 26, 1922. The vote was 230 to 119. However the Senate killed the bill. (323 and <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-new-negro-movement.html>)

## Jane Bosfield’s Struggle

In 1915, Jane Bosfield acted on the premise that the State of Massachusetts’ civil rights laws “mean just what they say.” Her “high test scores [state civil service examination], coupled with her academic records at Boston Evening High School and Cambridge Girls’ Latin, made her eligible for a secretary position at Medfield State Hospital, fifteen miles south of the city.” (223)

The 22-year-old Bosfield got an offer of employment in April. When she and her mother showed up to talk with the head of the hospital, Dr. Edward French, the job offer was withdrawn.

Trotter and the Guardian went to work. Black ministers in and out of the National Equal Rights League protested and publicized the case in their churches. Trotter confronted Governor David I. Walsh, “a Democrat who owed his own election to black voters” in Boston. (196)

The Governor “‘took a personal interest’ in Bosfield’s case” and “wrote a letter of complaint” to the state hospital board. He “publicly ‘deplored caste prejudice’ anywhere in the Commonwealth....” Further, he issued an order “for Medfield State Hospital to rehire Jane Bosfield or face retaliation by the state licensing board.” (224)

Bosfield was rehired, but barred from congregating and eating with other employees. When she defied the ban and ate amongst her fellow workers in the dining hall on the advice

of her lawyers, she was fired — but hired again after the state legislature voted unanimously to overrule the hospital head.

As the case showed, civil democracy — the rule of law — existed in the North and West, but had to be fought for continually.

## African Blood Brotherhood and UNIA

With the approach of World War I, Trotter increasingly found himself in the company of native-born and West Indian radicals like Reverend M.A.N. Shaw, Thaddeus Kitchener and Uriah N. Murray of Boston, and Hubert Harrison, A. Philip Randolph, Cyril V. Briggs and Marcus Garvey of New York City.

These radicals fought not only against Jim Crow in the South and civil inequality in the North and West, but also against social inequality. Randolph joined the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) and edited *The Messenger* in 1917. Briggs edited a Harlem magazine called *The Crusader*.

In the fall of 1919 Trotter and Briggs initiated the African Blood Brotherhood, based mainly in Harlem. Some of its luminaries included W.A. Domingo, Richard B. Moore, Anselmo Jackson, Arthur Schomburg and Otto Huiswood.

But the one who caught the high tide was Marcus Garvey. He organized the first chapter of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, UNIA, in Jamaica in 1914. Upon landing in the United States in 1916, he set up a chapter in Harlem.

In 1917 Garvey lectured in “Boston, Atlanta, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Detroit, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, and other cities.” (Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power And The Garvey Movement*, San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1972, 100)

A new consciousness arose after World War I:

*“The new awareness reached a dramatic height in the United States...as black troops returned from Europe. Writing in the NAACP magazine Crisis in 1919, W.E.B. DuBois exemplified the militant mood of the day: ‘We return. We return from fighting. Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.’*

*“Men who had seen a comparatively non-racist France wanted to bring some non-racist culture home, and returning blacks refused to accept segregated facilities and protested discriminatory practices. When white America tried to terrorize the Negro back into his ‘place’ by bringing lynch mobs into black communities, the black man fought back.*

*“The newly returned black troops took a leading role in defense against the mobs, as the community expected them to. Black soldiers had learned how to fight and, as some three dozen post-war race riots showed, black people pressed together in the compact ghetto could now snipe at invading whites and then escape in the maze of tenements.*

*“Participation in community defense was for many a first step toward involvement in a broad political struggle.” (Vincent, 34-35)*

It was this backdrop that brought tens of thousands of Blacks into the UNIA, styling themselves as “New Negroes.” The first convention of this social momentum occurred in 1920.

Billed as “International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World,” the UNIA affair opened “on Monday night, August 2, 1920, at Madison Square Garden. The New York Times reported a crowd of nearly twenty-five thousand, and

thousands who could not get in gathered in the area to discuss the day's happenings." (Vincent, 114)

The ABB drew up a manifesto for the occasion and was permitted to address the convention. The group chose Trotter to present it. He urged the gathering to "devise means to organize our People to the end of stopping the mob-murder of our men, women, and children and to protect them against sinister secret societies of cracke[r] whites."

He also called upon the UNIA to "work with the ABB and the NERL [National Equal Rights League — ed.] to 'devise means to raise and protect the standard of living of the Negro People;...take steps to bring about a federation of all Negro organizations, thus molding all Negro factions into one mighty and formidable factor, governed and directed by a Central Body made up of representatives from all member organizations.'" (306-7)

"While Trotter's wordy, heartfelt, and dramatic manifesto earned applause from the audience, his final demand ended the honeymoon between the NERL, the ABB, and Garvey. No doubt influenced by Briggs's Communism, despite the fact that neither he nor Trotter formally joined the CP, the ABB concluded that Soviet Russia should 'be endorsed...and the real foes of the negro race denounced.'

"Trotter, Briggs, and other ABB delegates insisted that they were not members of the CP, nor were they members of the SP; they were concerned with militant black civil rights, as Briggs, Randolph, and other black radicals later testified. If these rights could be secured through an international union of workers, as provided by recently created Soviet Russia, then the 'International Race Congress' should endorse the Soviet cause."

According to Greenidge, "...the UNIA delegates to the race congress were stunned.... UNIA members tried to act as if Trotter and the ABB weren't there...." (307)

Decades later, Briggs stated in his papers, "...he was not inspired by Garveyism, 'nor was I interested in socialism per se. My sympathies were derived from the enlightened attitude of the Russian Bolsheviks toward national minorities....I believed then and still believe that the Russian Communists had successfully solved the national question.'" (Vincent, 79)

The important point is that the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks) was taking their approach toward national and racial minorities inside the Russian Empire onto the international plane.

Eugene V. Debs, leader of the Socialist Party of America, "argued in 1903 that 'there is no "Negro problem" apart from the general labor problem' and expressed the hope that even in the South racial prejudice would soon evaporate. In another article the same year Debs insisted that the party had 'nothing specific to offer the negro, and we cannot make special appeals to all the races. The Socialist Party is the party of the working class, regardless of color — the whole working class of the whole world.'" (Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs, Citizen and Socialist*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1982, 226)

With all due respect for the revolutionary credentials of Comrade Debs, Comrade Lenin did make "special appeals" to oppressed national minorities. Inclusion of this approach in their program was a big reason why the Russian Bolsheviks led the workers, peasants, and soldiers to victory in October 1917.

That victory shook the global imperial structure, a structure born in 1492 with the Spanish and Portuguese plunder and exploitation of South, Central, and parts of North America; the transatlantic slave trade; the pillage of India by the British and French; and the spread of colonialism throughout the 19th century.

## Colonialism and Jim Crow

During Trotter's lifetime there was the 1884 Berlin Conference, where European powers decided how the human and natural resources of Africa would be divided up among them. Then came the invasion and division of China around 1900 by the same European powers plus the United States and Japan. In addition, there was the naked aggression and occupation by U.S. Marines of any Latin American or Caribbean country that obstructed the operations of U.S. big business — Haiti 1915-1934 and Nicaragua 1912-1933 as examples. Colonialism and neo-colonialism formed the international roots of Jim Crow. And the plutocrats bankrolled white supremacy theories to explain their global domination.

The ferocious ruling-class support of Jim Crow defeated the Crumpacker Resolution, the Tucker Act and the Dyer Bill, creating a compliant Southern labor force for whatever operations decided upon by big business. This was behind the failure of any post-Reconstruction movement for social change. The "farmers' Grange, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the Knights of Labor," all rising in the last 40 years of the 19th century, backed away from any questioning of Jim Crow. (See an excellent work by Charles Postel, *Equality, An American Dilemma, 1866-1996*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019, 12.)

Even the women's suffrage movement did not dare defy the racial hierarchy in the South for fear of alienating southern congressmen and senators.

**T**rotter died on the eve of the three great events that set in motion the labor upsurge of the 1930s — the Toledo auto-light strike, the Minneapolis coal drivers' strike, and the San Francisco longshoremen's strike. That upsurge, which might possibly have confronted Jim Crow, was cut short by World War II.

The victory of the Soviet Union over German Nazism in Europe (Hitler planned to colonize the USSR) and Japanese militarism in Manchuria (Stalin gave captured arms to Mao's liberation army) would set the stage for an event that blew up of the whole international edifice of Jim Crow — the Chinese Revolution of October 1949. (See Jack Belden, *China Shakes the World*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1970.)

That event enabled the initial success of the Korean and Vietnamese revolutions, social democratic revolutions in the same mode as that of 1917. The Vietnamese victory at Dienbienphu, sealing the end of French colonialism in Asia, occurred in the same month as the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision outlawing school segregation. Jim Crow had one foot in the grave.

The victories of African independence movements plus the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and, most importantly, the Civil Rights Movement in the South, led to legislation in 1964 and 1965 that ultimately put Jim Crow's whole body in its grave.

William Monroe Trotter was finally vindicated. ■

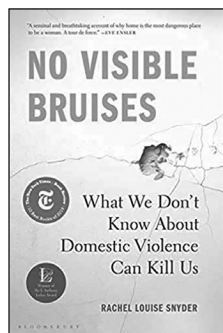


# REVIEW

## The Trauma of Domestic Violence

By Giselle Gerolami

**No Visible Bruises:**  
What We Don't Know About  
Domestic Violence Can Kill Us  
By Rachel Louise Snyder  
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, 320 pages,  
\$28 hardcover.



IN 2010, JOURNALIST Rachel Louise Snyder returned to the United States after years of working in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Niger and Honduras and other countries. One day a friend's sister, Suzanne Dubus, shared with Snyder that the work she was doing involved predicting homicides from domestic violence.

This was a wakeup moment for Snyder, who began to question all her previous assumptions about domestic violence, and it would lead her to research and write the book *No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us*. The book received widespread acclaim and was chosen as one of *The New York Times Book Review's* "Ten Best Books of 2019."

The book is divided into three main parts. "The End" is the victim's story, in this case, the story of Michelle Monson Mosure. The second part, "The Beginning," focuses on the abusers, and the last part, "The Middle," examines the work of the change-makers, the tireless advocates who are seeking to address the scourge of domestic violence.

The book's title is a reference to the emotional abuse that abused women suffer, which many of them claim is worse than the physical abuse.

Snyder makes conscious choices about language. The term "domestic violence" is no longer the preferred term for advocates who feel that the word "domestic" softens the reality; they prefer "intimate partner violence." Snyder's choice would be "intimate partner terrorism." However, as these terms do not cover violence against children and other family members, she chooses "domestic violence" for the purposes of her book.

She also chooses "victim" over the more commonly used "survivor," because survival is something that happens at the end rather than in the middle of the process. Finally, she

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*Giselle Gerolami is a member of Solidarity and has served on its Gendered Violence Commission since 2013. She is a paralegal and has volunteered as a court advocate for survivors of domestic violence.*

recognizes that men may also be victims — but since the vast majority of perpetrators are men, she refers to perpetrators as "he/him" and victims as "she/her" throughout the book.

### The End: Michelle Monson Mosure

In 2001, on the Monday before Thanksgiving, in Billings, Montana, Rocky Mosure shot and killed his wife Michelle and

their two kids, Kristie and Kyle, before killing himself. Michelle was only 23 years old and had endured almost a decade of abuse from Rocky, and was on the verge of finally leaving him.

They started dating when she was only 14 and by the time she was 17, they had two children together. Despite his increasingly controlling behavior — she was not allowed to wear makeup, to leave the house without permission, to see her family — she had finished high school and was studying to become a nurse.

In the months before the murders, Rocky had acquired a rattlesnake that he used to terrorize Michelle and the kids. He was using drugs and regularly threatening to kill himself and the rest of his family.

Snyder spent years researching this case and talking with the family members, who were wracked with guilt and grief in the aftermath of the killings. They wondered why it had happened and what signs they had missed.

A couple of months before she was murdered, Michelle revealed the extent of the abuse to her mother and said she wanted to leave him because he was having an affair.

She took out an order of protection against Rocky after he was arrested for having assaulted her mother and sister in order to kidnap his daughter. When Rocky's family bailed him out, Michelle recanted and he was released.

Snyder was so immersed in the story that she came to feel as if she had known Michelle and her family personally. In fact, she had to take a year off from reporting on domestic violence for self-care. It took her a long time to bring herself to watch the many home movies that Rocky had taken of the family.

Most of the movies are of the family in their everyday lives, camping, playing in the

yard, celebrating holidays but there were also many where Rocky filmed Michelle in her underwear. She repeatedly asked him to stop but he never does and eventually she doesn't even bother asking.

On top of the obvious objectification involved, this behavior is also a sign of the power dynamic in the relationship where he slowly eroded her confidence over time. In one video, Snyder notes a very brief and unmistakable flash of anger from Rocky that no one in Michelle's family had picked up on.

Michelle was one of the approximately 1200 abused women who are killed in the United States every year. That figure does not include the abusers themselves, children, other family members or bystanders who may also be killed in domestic violence homicides.

Advocate Jacquelyn Campbell developed the Danger Assessment decades ago, but it is now one of several tools used to determine how much danger an abused woman might be in at a given time. There are 22 risk factors which include substance abuse, gun ownership, jealousy, threats to kill, strangulation, forced sex, isolation from family and friends, children from a different biological parent, threats of suicide or violence during pregnancy, stalking, chronic unemployment.

Charting a timeline and pinpointing escalation can be critical in determining risk. In the Danger Assessment, Michelle would have scored 16 to 18 with a couple of questions to which the answers are unknown. She would have been considered at high risk.

A year after Michelle's murder, the Montana Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission was formed. Michelle's mother met with Matthew Dale of the Department of Justice and requested that Michelle's case be reviewed. Snyder attended a fatality review session years later. The recommendations included being able to access the history of protective orders across state lines and better training for judges, clergy, law enforcement and healthcare workers.

### The Beginning: The Abusers

Snyder deserves credit for dedicating a full third of her book to abusers. Working with abusers is relatively new, and there are questions about the extent to which they can unlearn violence. Domestic violence advocates tend to be focused on the needs of victims, and rightly so.

Snyder spent considerable time with

Jimmy Espinoza, a former pimp, who abused many women. He now leads a program called RSVP (Resolve to Stop the Violence) at the San Bruno prison in San Francisco, which began in the late 1990s, for prisoners with a history of domestic violence.

The program is quite rigorous: 12 hours a day, six days a week and lasting for a year. Recidivism for those who completed the program dropped by 80%. Despite its success, RSVP has not been replicated elsewhere.

The “male role belief system” goes as follows: “Man does not get disrespected. Man does not get lied to. Man’s sexuality does not get questioned. Man is the authority. Man does not get dismissed. Woman should be submissive, obedient, supportive to man.”

This belief system is challenged in the program. Men in RSVP learn about accountability and that they need to own their violence and stop blaming others, blaming substances and minimizing their violence. The men also learn to listen and to be in touch with their feelings.

In the 1970s in Boston, David Adams began working with abusers. He had no models or guidelines but over time, he developed EMERG which is widely emulated across the country. There are 1500 programs in the United States with most participants court-ordered to attend.

Courts often mistakenly send men to anger management classes, even though domestic violence has little to do with anger. Fewer than one quarter of violent men suffer from rage but they are often narcissists who manipulate, blame and deny when confronted with their violence. They often present better than victims who are traumatized and have messy lives.

Familicide is quite rare but is on the rise. It has not been well studied, possibly because the perpetrators usually kill themselves and it’s impossible to fully understand their motives. The families of the victims are often traditionally gendered, religious, and socially isolated. A sudden change in economic circumstances can be the catalyst to the killings, coming from a warped sense of altruism.

Snyder interviewed at length a man who had killed his family but survived his suicide attempt. Whatever insights he might have offered were clouded by his deep religiosity, which led him to believe that what he’d done was part of God’s plan.

Snyder did ride-alongs with police officers who were called to domestic violence incidents. Second only to mass shootings, domestic violence situations are the most dangerous for police officers, especially when guns are involved.

Homicide is eight times more likely when there are guns. States which have firearm restrictions in their protective orders have

seen a 25% decrease in homicides when those restrictions are enforced.

### The Middle: Making Change

In the third part of the book focused on advocates Snyder tells the story of Dorothy Giunta-Cotter. She had suffered years of horrendous abuse and was in a shelter with her daughter when she contacted advocate Kelly Dunne in Amesbury, Massachusetts. She did not want to remain in the shelter, so she and her daughter returned home with a security system, new locks, new cell phones and a restraining order against her husband.

One day her daughter, expecting a friend, opened the door for her father. He took Dorothy hostage while the daughter called a neighbor who called the police. As the police busted down the door, Dorothy’s husband shot and killed her. She had predicted her own death and Dunne was devastated by her killing. Like Michelle, Dorothy would have scored 18 on the Danger Assessment.

It is estimated that ten percent of domestic violence cases involve a danger of homicide. Poor communication among police, the courts and advocacy groups had contributed to Dorothy’s killing, and Dunne was committed to changing things to make it safer for abused women to stay in their communities.

Even though the advocates, who are feminists, are often at odds with the police, a patriarchal institution, the two came together in 2005 in Amesbury to form the Domestic Violence High Risk Team.

Shelters have been around since the 1960s with the advent of domestic violence advocacy, and are necessary in saving lives. Today they number over three thousand in the United States. They have serious limitations, however. Even the nicest, most home-like shelter involves a huge disruption in the lives of women and their children.

There is now a push to keep abused women in their communities. That can mean transitional housing in some cases. In Washington, DC, DASH provides housing for two years and sometimes longer, which is often the minimum amount of time it takes women to rebuild their lives.

In Cleveland, Snyder shadowed Martina Latessa, one of two detectives assigned to the Homicide Reduction Unit. It is not uncommon for police departments to have units dedicated to domestic violence, but one focused on homicide reduction is unique. Latessa handles 50 high-risk cases a month and gives her cell phone number to victims so that they can reach her 24/7.

Snyder accompanied her to visit “Grace” whose husband “Byron” came home drunk, put a loaded gun to her head, beat her and held her hostage for a week. Snyder witnessed how Latessa can entertain an autistic child one moment and then gain the

victim’s trust and get her talking the next. Latessa is the aunt of Bresha Meadows, a teen who killed her father after years of abuse and whose imprisonment led to the #FreeBresha movement.

With regard to the police, Snyder appears to be ambivalent. On the ride-alongs, she thought that the police made bad situations worse. She noted that police officers are often abusers themselves. She asked several of them how they would treat one of their own. They all said they would do nothing differently but she does not believe it.

On the other hand, Snyder believes that women police officers could be part of the solution and she has nothing but praise for the work of women like Martina Latessa.

At the end of her book, Snyder hints that what’s needed in the long term is prison reform and restorative justice. This is somewhat at odds with the police being part of the solution. The book was written before the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests made “Defund the Police” a household slogan. A critical look at the role of police in handling domestic violence is certainly in order.

### Seeking Causes and Solutions

Snyder believes that the increase in domestic violence homicides since 2014 can be partially attributed to the misogyny of the Trump administration and the greater availability of guns. She also sees reasons for hope in the widespread use of some version of the Danger Assessment in police departments across the country, in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), in the expansion of Family Justice Centers, in charging stalking as a felony, in the increased communication among agencies, and in the #MeToo movement.

It’s not hard to see why this book has won so much praise. When Snyder writes about victims’ stories, it reads like a novel. This is particularly true for the first part of the book that is dedicated to Michelle Monson Mosure. There is plenty of information, accessibly presented, in this book for anyone not familiar with domestic violence. Even for those with some knowledge, there may be surprises.

For instance, a woman is in the most danger when she tries to leave an abusive relationship. Less well known is the fact that this danger drops after three months and drops precipitously after a year. The time in which we need to keep women safe is relatively short. Can we not do better?

Stalking, sometimes depicted as romantic in popular culture, is an extremely dangerous risk factor in abusive relationships. Strangulation vs. any other kind of physical violence is also associated with a high risk of homicide, yet it doesn’t always leave marks and often gets missed.

continued on page 34

# REVIEW

## When Science Meets Capital By Guy Miller

### The Tragedy of American Science:

From Truman to Trump

By Clifford D. Conner

Haymarket Books, 2020, \$26.95 hardcover.

“WE’RE NUMBER ONE!” has been the battle cry of American exceptionalism for decades. In the best of times it rings arrogant and boastful. Now, as the COVID-19 pandemic approaches the year mark and the U.S. death toll climbs over 250,000, the chant has taken on the ghostly pallor of delusional.

As *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd summed it up, “The Shining City on the Hill is an ugly pile of rubble.”

*The Tragedy of American Science (TAS)* was ready to go to the printer just as the pandemic was gaining a foothold in the United States. The publisher, Haymarket Books, wisely decided to postpone the release date to allow Clifford Conner to write an epilogue. “The COVID-19 Pandemic” stands as a searing indictment of the Trump administration’s response to the crisis.

Conner condemns the Trump leadership as “characteristically fatuous and obstructionist.” Almost two years before the first confirmed U.S. COVID case, the Trump wrecking crew was busy eliminating the vital early warning system so essential in containing the spread of a virus.

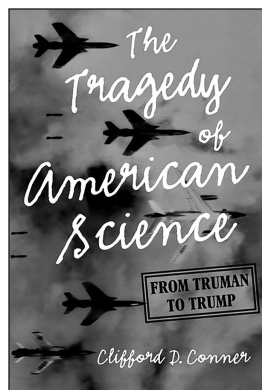
In May, 2018, the White House put the National Security Council directorate on the chopping block. This directorate had been set up, in the wake of the earlier SARS and H1N1 flu alarms, precisely to respond quickly to a potential viral pandemic.

Another cost-cutting blow came in September, 2019, when the administration shut down a USAID program called Predict. Predict had been responsible for identifying 1200 viruses, among which — what leaps out in retrospect — 160 were novel coronaviruses.

TAS goes on to catalogue blunder after blunder by the science-challenged Trump. Conner cites several, but nothing sums up Trump’s frivolous disregard for the burgeoning catastrophe better than his appointment of Vice President Mike Pence to head up the White House Coronavirus Task Force.

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*Guy Miller is a retired United Transportation Union member, long-time socialist and lifelong resident of Chicago.*



Pence’s record includes such anti-science gems as: “global warming is a myth,” “smoking doesn’t kill,” along with his espousal of “intelligent design.”

The epilogue goes on to explain how big agribusiness sets the stage for viral outbreaks. Conner writes, “Poultry farms are the notorious incubators of viral diseases (i.e. bird

flus).” To grasp the tectonic shift that U.S. egg production has undergone, consider that in 1929 the average chicken flock contained 70 birds, by 1992 the average flock size had grown to 30,000, and by 2002 the total chicken population reached a staggering nine billion hens. In short, big flocks make big flu.

Author Clifford D. Conner is a veteran historian of science (a one-time aircraft design engineer blacklisted for his stand against the Vietnam war). His previous books are *A People’s History of Science: Miners, Midwives and Low Mechanics* (2009) and *Jean-Paul Marat: Tribune of the French Revolution* (2012).

The 22 chapters in *The Tragedy of American Science* can be read independently. Conner’s writing style hits the sweet spot between popular and academic. The connecting thread that weaves *TAS* together can be found in the Introduction:

“The river of the tragedy has two headwaters: corporatization and militarization. Both are consequences of a profit-driven economic system that hamstring’s humanity’s ability to make rational economic decisions.”

The book also spotlights at least two tributaries to Conner’s river of tragedy: public relations and universities.

### From Tobacco Cover Up to Big Pharma

Tobacco and its corruption of science serves as a template for how corporations can manage the public and, at the same time, neutralize the government.

Tobacco pioneered the strategy for fending off restrictive legislation and altering a negative image. Its methods in doing so have stood the test of time; Big Pharma and the fossil fuel industry among others have successfully copied tobacco’s game plan.

From the time the first factory-made cigarette emerged from a rolling machine in 1880, its toxicity was an open secret. The expression “coffin nails” already dates from the 1880s, and “cancer sticks” was in common usage as slang for cigarettes in my 1950s childhood.

By the 1950s the big tobacco companies sensed that storm clouds threatening their profits were gathering on the horizon. Conner puts it this way, “Scientific evidence of tobacco’s carcinogenic and addictive properties began to surface in the 1950s. Large-scale tobacco growers and cigarette manufacturers recognized the myriad threats to their industry that the revelations posed.”

What to do? Certainly, telling the truth was never on the table. Instead, Phillip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, and Benson and Hedges turned to public relations sharpies Hill and Knowlton to find a simpler solution: combat good science with bad science.

As *TAS* quotes Hill, “it would be crucial for the industry to assert its authority over the scientific domain.” To that end two veterans of the Manhattan Project, Frederick Seitz and Fred Singer, were put on tobacco’s payroll. No matter that Seitz was an atomic physicist or that Singer was a rocket scientist. Their job wasn’t to argue the fine points of oncology, but to use their credentials as scientists to muddy the waters. It didn’t take much:

“Thanks to the largesse of the tobacco industry’s lobbyists, politicians needed only the slightest whiff of science to be persuaded not to burden the cigarette manufacturers with onerous regulations.”

No need to attack rigorous research findings head on, just manufacture controversy where there was none in order to create public uncertainty, and they were home free.

Tobacco sells a product that can only cause harm to its customers, while Big Pharma markets products that — at least in theory — benefit its customers.

But where the two industries are indistinguishable is in their relentless pursuit of profits. Bayer CEO Marjin Dekkers dispelled any lingering doubt about the drug industry’s priorities: “We did not develop this medicine for Indians. We developed it for western patients who can afford it.”\*

If more proof were needed, the opioid epidemic has provided it. A super-profitable

money maker for Big Pharma, opioids were hyped and sold to the American public like peanuts at a ballpark.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration database reveals that 76 billion oxycodone and hydrocodone pain pills were sold between 2006 and 2012. That's a lot of pills; a lot of pain. Even more painful is that opioid overdoses are now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States.

Over the last 40-plus years, neoliberalism has turned large swathes of America's heartland into what journalist Chris Hedges calls "sacrifice zones." The disappearance of decent-paying jobs in these zones, leaving millions of working-class Americans with little hope and less future, is the real pain that opioid addiction addresses.

### Thinkers in the Tank

TAS detours from the critique of American science proper with a chapter "Think Tanks and the Betrayal of Reason." The founding of the Heritage Institute in 1973 marks in Conner's words "a new kind of think tank, devoted primarily not to studying issues, but to advocacy."

Throughout the rest of the 1970s the number of similar think tanks mushroomed, functioning as facilitators to the long rolling Thermador of American neoliberalism.

Conner cites the Heartland Foundation as the think tank "least likely to pass a smell test." Because of its aggressively anti-science agenda — especially regarding climate change — it was dubbed the Flatland Institute.

From kindergarten to high school, Heartland specializes in lavishly produced and widely distributed materials injecting doubt and misinformation into the bloodstream of American education. Its funding is well hidden and its cash flow thoroughly laundered. It's a safe bet, however, that the money trail ultimately leads back to the fossil fuel industry.

### Birth of Big Science

There is a romantic vision of science featuring heroic scientists grinding away in near obscurity: Madam Curie risking her life in a laboratory deep in the bowels of the University of Paris, Edwin Hubble spending sleepless nights peering through the telescope on Mount Palomar, or Watson and Crick defying the skeptics at Cambridge University.

To whatever degree those images were ever true, they are no longer. Science is big business done on a big scale. Conner deconstructs the myth: "Science today is the domain of large teams of professional

researchers working on a grand scale with substantial governmental and corporate funding."

The Second World War, and especially the Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb, were the harbingers of this new reality, and soon the developing Cold War was there to seal the deal.

The Manhattan Project at its height employed 130,000 workers and cost \$30 billion in 2017 dollars. Weaponized Keynesianism was born, and Cold War ideology was soon there to nurture it through its infancy.

Even before Germany surrendered, the U.S. had compiled a list of 1600 scientists complicit in the Nazi war effort — not to be punished, but to be co-opted. The secret program that rounded up and vetted this German cohort was given the code name "Operation Paperclip."

The biggest fish in the Paperclip pond was Werner Von Braun, himself a member of the notorious SS, the *Schutzstaffel*, but reinvented by his new American patrons to appear as a mild, pragmatic technocrat with a squeaky clean past. His job was to build big rockets for the U.S. military; big rockets that could carry big nuclear payloads.

[The 1960s satirical songwriter Tom Lehrer wrote the lyric: "When the rockets go up, Who knows where they come down? 'That's not my department,' says Werner Von Braun." — ed.]

In the closing months of WWII, Von Braun had been instrumental in bringing the V-2, or Vengeance Weapon-2, online. The V-2 was the world's first long range guided ballistic missile. 1,500 V-2's rained down on Britain in a desperate, last minute attempt to change the course of the war.

The missiles killed 7,250 British citizens. It was even more deadly to the concentration camp inmates who assembled the weapon, killing at least 10,000 of them in the Dora-Nordhausen camp. Dora-Nordhausen slave laborers who did not meet quotas were routinely hanged directly above the assembly line. The dead bodies were meant to be seen, and Von Braun, who visited the assembly line, surely saw them.

Another murderous Nazi conscripted for the U.S. war machine was Dr. Hubertus Strughold. Brought to Randolph Field, Texas in 1947, Strughold previously plied his trade at Dachau. At Dachau, Strughold was the director of the Luftwaffe's Institute for Aviation. Conner writes:

*"Another focus of Strughold's research was how hypoxia — oxygen deprivation — at high altitudes affects human beings. In a 1942 study,*

*two hundred Dachau inmates were tested in a low pressure chamber.... Eighty of the two hundred subjects died of asphyxiation, and the survivors were killed so their bodies could be autopsied."*

Thus was American Cold War science polluted with murderers from its inception.

### Conclusion

The American people's relation to science has always been governed by a series of binaries: approach/avoidance, skepticism/trust and rational/irrational.

Since the days of Truman, corporations have mastered the art of manipulating these contradictions, pressing on the accelerator of trust when profits were to be gained (e.g. selling unnecessary drugs), and hitting the brake of skepticism when profits were threatened (e.g. discrediting environmental concerns over oil drilling.)

*The Tragedy of American Science* makes a strong case for freeing science from the fetters of capital and rededicating it for the good of humanity. "Science for the People," more than a chant or a slogan, is an imperative. The choice between science for profit and science for the people is stark and the stakes are high. The survival of our planet demands we make the right choice. ■

## Violence — continued from page 32

There is only passing reference to domestic violence in the LGBTQIA community. When one considers the levels of violence experienced by this community, especially violence against trans men and women, this is a fairly serious flaw. A full chapter would be the minimum one would expect.

Similarly with regards to race, there is less than a paragraph that discusses racial differences. In February, 2017, Snyder attended a conference in Detroit where she first heard Jacquelyn Campbell talk about the Danger Assessment. Campbell noted that domestic violence is the "second leading cause of death for African American women, third leading cause of death for native women, seventh leading cause of death for Caucasian women."

Snyder's sensibility around the universality of the experience of domestic violence among women globally does not let her off the hook for not looking more closely at some important differences.

She is more consistent in acknowledging class differences and the options that wealthier women have. Her stories are exclusively of working-class women.

As a journalist, Snyder did not feel she could be prescriptive. As such, she focused mostly on what is being done, not on what could be done. Her goal, beyond education, would be to "render this book obsolete." May this book allow us to take a step in that direction. ■

\*On January 21, 2014, Ketaki Gokhale of Bloomberg published a story in *Businessweek* on disputes over drug patents. The story closed with a rather sinister quote attributed to Bayer CEO Marjin Dekkers, "We did not develop this medicine for Indians. We developed it for Western patients who can afford it." The comment in question was made by Dekkers at a December 3, 2013 event hosted by the *Financial Times*, titled "Buffering the Pharma Brand: Restoring Reputation, Rebuilding Trust." Quoting from Transcript of Bayer CEO Marjin Dekkers' quote at the December 3, 2013 FT Events, regarding India compulsory license of Nexavar, from Knowledge Ecology International, [www.keionline.org](http://www.keionline.org)

# REVIEW

## The Goose and the Dragon: An Uprising and Its Fate

By Promise Li

### Hong Kong in Revolt The Protest Movement and the Future of China

By Au Loong-yu

Pluto Press, 2020, 177 pages plus notes  
and index, \$22.95 paperback.

*“Two events in 2019 marked the turning point for both mainland China and Hong Kong: the 2019 revolt and the Covid-19 pandemic. They lay bare the fundamental contradictions of Greater China accumulated throughout the ‘reform and opening’ period. The two events also started to change the status quo and put the one-party dictatorship in China to an even greater test.”* (Hong Kong in Revolt, 138)

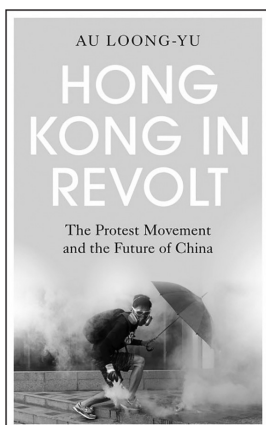
HONG KONG’S EXPLOSIVE year-long struggle, although one of the most live-streamed and broadcast uprisings in modern history, is still characterized by confounding obscurity in its details. Is it a right-wing movement? Is it a national independence struggle? Who were the different actors?

Au Loong-yu’s timely book, written as the movement’s protracted struggle transitioned into a break in what would become a global pandemic, not only succinctly captures the timeline of the movement, but also provides incisive insights to Hong Kong’s political conditions and history.

The book is written from the perspective of a long-time left-wing activist and active participant in the struggle, bearing witness to the minute details of the movement while discerning and explaining its ideological complexity. Without apologizing for the movement’s reactionary elements, the book ably unpacks the diverse political choices that the protestors made.

Au’s central conceit of “the dragon and the goose” guides his nuanced interpretation of Beijing’s relationship to Hong Kong in the book — one in which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long seen the city in coldly economic terms.

“The dragon in Beijing has always treated Hong Kong as the goose that lays golden



Kong’s laissez-faire system and China’s “state capitalism” — complemented each other as “state capitalism protected China from predatorial global capital.” (7)

From the time of Mao Zedong’s reluctance to broach the Hong Kong issue, the city has long been just the bargaining chip for Beijing and the West — left by Beijing to the whims of the British colonial system.

In a sense, Au’s perspective helps interface his own experience growing up in a city formed in tension between colonial powers with that of the new “1997 generation,” the vanguard of last year’s struggle.

This generation grew up in the shadow of the Handover, caught in a double bind: exploited by the colonial and capitalist frameworks preserved by Beijing’s authoritarian state, while thinking the West to be its only alternative.

Accordingly, it responds with its back against the wall only to be condemned by China as the West’s foreign agents. Like Au’s own 1970s generation, the “1997 generation” is another “lost generation” — one that has fought back with full force in all its contradictions.

### Contradictions of the Movement

The book is organized in five chapters — detailing the overview of the movement, its main actors, important events, how political issues have manifested in the struggle, and a summary that recaps the book’s central arguments as well as delineating recommendations for ways forward.

The opening chapter gives an essential context to the rise of Hong Kong localism, how the uprising last year became a mass movement, and why the left has been alien-

ated from the start. eggs, although it also believed that it treated the goose well. That is not how the goose has seen it, however.” (138)

Hong Kong as the “golden-egg-laying goose” to the “dragon” of the CCP has helped open up the Chinese proletariat to exploitative Western markets since the beginning of market reforms in the 1980s. The “two capitalisms” — Hong

ated from the start.

Although not all localists are right wing, Au names a critical aspect often gone unnoted: the right-wing localists have been on the offensive from the end of the 2014 Umbrella Movement, actively smearing the left as ineffectual, laying the groundwork for a whole new generation of activists who are convinced that radical tactics against the establishment must be matched with a crude, inchoate sense of ethnicization and xenophobia. On the other hand, the right also lacked organizational and ideological coherence. The result was a genuine mass movement, propelled by youth and a new generation, that has nonetheless adopted a localist framework inflected for years by right-wing ideas.

Hong Kong’s contradictions are effectively explored in Au’s analysis of the different actors in the movement. For Au, many of the city and its movements’ limitations can be traced back to the CCP’s perpetuation of colonial paradigms.

Hong Kong’s police force, fundamentally unchanged from the British model, “had always operated under a kind of ‘paramilitary internal security model’” (32), and the city’s low political consciousness was wrought by decades of colonial-style education and hyper-capitalist infrastructure. But the “doubly unlucky” new generation “does not enjoy the stability and prosperity of earlier generations,” and has come of age during “a period of offensive after offensive from Beijing.” (43)

The complex and often contradictory motivations and actions of the protesters reflected the various attempts to make sense of the city’s oppression in this colonial context. The nativists’ demonization of Mainlanders plays into the CCP’s trap, allowing it to position the city’s struggle as one of purely racism and “foreign interference,” and masquerading its own role in perpetuating colonial dynamics.

Au points out that localist activist Ventus Lau promotes a deeply conservative vision of independence for Hong Kong against China, just as he has been seen trying to organize Mainland Chinese to support the cause. (55) Localism as a movement has often been seen as formed in response to the perceived failures of traditional pan-democrats’ nonviolent strategy — and

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yet pan-democrats' resources and infrastructure have been pivotal to the movement, especially during the district elections in late 2019.

These contradictions are brought to life by Au's dedication to foregrounding the voices of left-leaning protesters, from long-time organizer Kyun Go to other anonymous youth voices, who can speak with nuance on the events they have witnessed on the ground. Student protesters like Wong Hon-tung spoke of the "chaos and mis-management" during the November siege of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK).

Students and non-student outside protesters often clashed over tactics, and democratic processes slipped away as the situation turned desperate. These debates even spilled into online forums in real time, and for a few days online discourse and on-the-ground action organically bled into one another, as tactical debates, cop-watch Telegram channels, and mutual aid efforts all raged on while the city suffocated from its worst days of teargassing yet.

### Unruly Mass Movement

This detailed overview of events is not purely observational: Au's narrative is a politically rigorous case study in the unruly processes of democratic, mass movement work. Nothing should be uncritically glorified; but as leftists, we bear witness to every contradiction by staying as embedded in the movement as possible.

This ethos informs Au's incisive critique of the movement:

*"(I)t was rare to see actions related to assemblies where people had exchanged ideas or made democratic decisions about future steps to be taken. Even when this did occur, they often ended up quarrelling or splitting up very soon thereafter. The reason for this was less because of inexperience and more because the mainstream among the radical youth was hostile to any idea of assembly, organisation, or democratic decision-making such as voting, believing that these all jeopardised the movement for democracy." (117-18)*

As Au suggests in the text, this is not a new problem in Hong Kong. Even from the colonial period, its social movements are propelled by bursts of spontaneity but ultimately fail to sustain themselves. Au attributes this to the legacy of colonialism, and the lack of history of movement-building and political consciousness.

Custodial politics has characterized almost all aspects of Hong Kong's political society, from bureaucratized unions to NGOs. This movement reacts against that, but has little local inspiration to draw from for an alternative and sustainable kind of mass politics. Organization and process are often conflated with hierarchical thinking, but as Au and other local leftists point out,

there are aspects, like the historic upsurge of new unions, in which the opposition camp may offer a way forward from this bind.

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*There are never total defeats: the masses remember their political experience, and movements have always built upon each other.*

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### Need for Transnational Solidarity

While Hong Kong has become a focal point in a larger geopolitical game between capitalist state elites in the last year, it has also served as a wake-up call for leftists and grassroots movements to rethink easy solutions and paradigms of anti-imperialism, self-determination and transnational working-class solidarity in the 21st century.

The aspiring global hegemon in this "New Cold War" has no pretension to covering up its neoliberal ambitions. Rather than being a counterweight to global capitalism and the forces of imperialism, Xi Jin-ping has become a rising man in Davos, a new kind of steward of the global neoliberal order — a position only reinforced by Trump's erratic, far-right rule and the decline of U.S. hegemony.

China's economic success, in fact, was built off of the backs of the Chinese proletariat. Its rise to power spells the end of the 20th-century dream that Third World solidarity can be achieved without centering working-class leadership and self-determination movements over left-nationalist alliances.

The failure of the Western "anti-war" left to grasp this reality is a disaster for global anti-capitalist movements. What Western leftists fear — that ongoing U.S. aggression on China would create a vacuum for imperialist exploitation, as in Libya — has ironically been the reality for decades, enabled by the Chinese state itself: Hong Kong has become the playground for Chinese capitalists to reap the benefits of Western markets, built on the backs of an increasingly precarious class of citizens and a hyper-exploited class of migrants.

But Hong Kong's complex identity means that one cannot simply apply it into a "national liberation" framework. In fact, more and more liberation movements in recent years have been falling into a similarly ambiguous state, in which self-determination does not always entail a progressive sense of "national independence," from Xinjiang to Puerto Rico. Au's answer to this problem for Hong Kongers is clear and precise:

*"(T)he best way forward is neither nationalism nor independence; we only need to be assertive in our identity and our vision for Hong Kong's self-determination [...] the slogan of*

*self-determination has the benefit of connecting with mainland people if we extend this slogan beyond Hong Kong and encourage the mainland people to pursue their own right to self-determination as well." (144-5)*

In fact, Au's formulation is one that has been reiterated and refined over the years of successes and failures in the Hong Kong social movement. Its earliest iteration was in the pages and pamphlets of the Trotskyist groups in Hong Kong in the 1970s and '80s — perhaps the most ideologically coherent, though weak, pole of the city's little-known radical left at the time. Pioneer Group, of which Au was a key member, wrote similar words in a statement in 1983, a year before the Sino-British Declaration:

*"If Hongkongers can form a movement for democracy of great proportions, and publically aim to return power to all people, that would empower the people of China and Taiwan to struggle in solidarity. Then, the ten billion Chinese would not be swayed by the CCP bureaucracy to oppress Hongkongers' strength, but would be our greatest ally, and fight with us to take back their sovereignty from the state as well."*

Though Hong Kong's sovereign has changed, Pioneer's words remain all the more prescient and relevant. As Au points out in his book, the colonial infrastructure remains constant, and in a sense, the best way to address the greatest limitations of last year's movement is the same strategy that Pioneer advocated — one that Au powerfully re-articulates in the final chapter of his book.

### Tragedy and Hope

From one perspective, Au seems to present a political tragedy, in which the city seems doomed to relive defeat again and again. He emphasizes the same political epiphany that he developed as a young leftist again as the solution, albeit one that falls upon deaf ears once more.

But it is ultimately not a tragedy. Au's Marxist perspective means that hope is not simply a subjective affect or condition, but the result of an objective understanding of the relations of force.

Over the years Au has seen protests, political figures and organizations rise and fall. The attitude that allowed him to persist and stay active in the movement, despite all odds, is the same that propelled him to write the text with perspicuity and vigor.

There are never total defeats: the masses remember their political experience, and movements have always built upon each other. Through the uprising last year, the Hong Kong people have created for themselves an enormous groundswell of resources and experiences — one that the CCP can never fully erase. Au's text is a testament to this reality. ■

# REVIEW

## Method of Mass Murder: Indonesia as Testing Ground

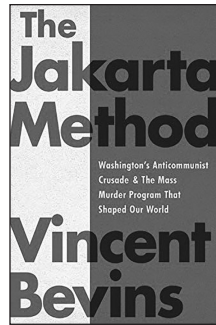
By Allen Ruff

**The Jakarta Method**  
Washington's Anticommunist  
Crusade & the Mass Murder  
Program that Shaped Our World

By Vincent Bevins.

New York: Public Affairs/Hatchett, 2020,

\$28 hardcover.



AT THE START of October 1965, a U.S.-aided and abetted military coup overthrew Indonesia's left-leaning Sukarno government. Not just an account of that tragic episode and the subsequent slaughter of a million or more actual and alleged communists and the horrific imprisonment of another million, veteran journalist Vincent Bevins' *The Jakarta Method* is something far more.

This book recounts how what transpired across the sprawling archipelago nation became a model for U.S.-assisted rightist terror across the Global South. It explores how the blood-drenched annihilation of Indonesia's left provided a blueprint for, in the author's words, a "monstrous international network of extermination" that laid foundations for future U.S.-led capitalist "globalization."

Simply put, the resource-rich and strategically located country of 140 million, deemed too valuable to be left to its own devices, had to be reined in and integrated into the U.S. imperial orbit.

With the Cold War rhetorical threat of an expanding "communist menace" providing the pretext, Washington sought out, trained, and directly assisted the willing executioners at all levels while providing them international cover through a concerted disinformation campaign in the Western press.

### Transgressions Against Empire

The country's first president and a long-standing leader of the national liberation movement that successfully resisted post-World War II Dutch attempts to reinstall colonial rule, Sukarno had to be overthrown.

His major transgressions as a non-communist anti-imperialist were several, as viewed in Washington and CIA headquarters in Langley.

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Among them was the fact that he set out on a course of neutrality as an initiator of the "non-aligned movement." He certainly overstepped by hosting the April, 1955 "Asia-Africa Conference" at Bandung with representatives from 29 decolonizing nations looking to forge "Third World" development paths independent from the Cold

War's East-West binary system of Moscow satellites and U.S.-dominated "Free World" neocolonial dependency.

The "Bandung Conference" drew Washington's attention and led, in 1958, to an unsuccessful CIA attempt to destabilize the regime from the outside that included the arming of outlying-island insurgents and U.S.-piloted air assaults launched from the Philippines. (Striking a familiar note, the operation was exposed when one of the planes was shot down and the American pilot captured.)

When that stratagem failed, U.S. assistance already underway to internal anti-communist forces and regime opponents, most notably in the Indonesian military, increased.

Sukarno's second major offense was that he provided space in his ruling coalition for the public and unarmed Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). By the early 1960s, the PKI was the third largest CP in the world after China and the Soviet Union, with 3.5 million members and a popular base of some 20 million non-members organized into a broad array of popular mass organizations.

### The Overthrow

While Sukarno sought to govern through a delicate balancing act that recognized the country's major power blocs — the PKI, a Muslim establishment, and the military — there certainly was internal opposition. It included old colonial elites alarmed by the nationalization of extractive industries and the redistribution of large land holdings; more conservative anti-communist Muslims opposed to a range of social reforms including women's rights; and elements of the military command looking to expand their own political authority and increased

control over varied nationalized sectors of the economy.

So what happened in 1965 and after? As Indonesia historian John Roosa has put it, "Almost overnight the Indonesian government went from being a fierce voice for cold war neutrality and anti-imperialism to a quiet, compliant partner of the U.S. world order."

It did not come from nowhere, of course, as the groundwork was laid well in advance. Already in the mid-1950s, Indonesian army personnel had begun training at various U.S. bases, most notably at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

By 1965, up to a quarter of Indonesia's Army command, some 2,800 officers, had come to receive not only technical instruction and ideological indoctrination but importantly, Bevins tells us, some intoxicating taste of the "American good life" at off-base bars and clubs.

In addition and continuing through the Kennedy and early Johnson years, on-the-ground U.S. advisors instructed the country's national police as the country became the second largest recipient of police funding, behind South Vietnam.

Such "assistance" provided not only weapons but also the technologies of surveillance, record keeping and communication that would come to play a vital role in 1965 and after.

The catalyst came on the night of September 30 when a group of regime-loyal junior army officers kidnapped and murdered six rightist generals plotting to overthrow Sukarno and impose a military junta. (Five of the six had trained in the United States.)

While the actual role of the PKI in the counter-coup would later become a topic of debate, the immediate response by the military led by the future dictator Suharto was to depose Sukarno and to open a year-long terror campaign that targeted the PKI and all those somehow associated with it, actual or alleged.

Carried out by the army, police, paramilitaries, civilian death squads and Muslim youth gangs, the wave of horrific violence also took aim at the country's ethnic Chinese, rumored to be communist.

Among those targeted by the repression were the members of Gerwani, the country's

three million-strong women's organization.

As part of a U.S.-assisted propaganda campaign to incite anti-communist hysteria, military psychological warfare specialists circulated the story that a satanic, communist, witch cult of emasculating Gerwani women had assassinated the September 30 generals after mutilating and castrating them in some bizarre orgiastic ritual.

As a result, innumerable Gerwani members were rounded up, raped and executed, at times with their entire families, while countless others faced years of brutal imprisonment.

The direct U.S. role in the PKI's annihilation, long minimized or denied, was central. The Pentagon and CIA rushed in logistical support of all sorts, including communication systems that aided in the coordination of the persecution and mass slaughter across the archipelago.

The U.S. Jakarta Embassy's "political officer" provided Suharto's forces with long-compiled lists that targeted for execution thousands of known PKI members in the unions, peasant and student organizations, and among the intellectuals. As Bevins described it:

*"(T)he U.S. government helped spread the propaganda that made the killing possible and engaged in constant conversations with the Army to make sure the military officers had everything they needed, from weapons to kill lists. The U.S. embassy constantly prodded the military to adopt a stronger position and take over the government, knowing full well that the method being employed to make this possible was to round up hundreds of thousands of people around the country, stab or strangle them, and throw their corpses into rivers. The Indonesian military officers understood very well that the more people they killed, the weaker the left would be, and the happier Washington would be..."*

### The Murder Export Trade

Importantly, what occurred was immediately viewed in Washington as a major victory in Asia at a time when far more costly and escalating "boots on the ground" efforts in Vietnam had already long soured.

Bevins goes so far as to argue that while the Vietnam War dominated U.S. domestic politics for many years, "it achieved exactly nothing;" in contrast, the mass killings in Indonesia, done on the cheap, were possibly the biggest "win for the West" in the entire Cold War.

The lessons of the Indonesian "scorched earth" approach, what came to be known as the "Jakarta Method," were well-heeded as the "national security state" ratcheted up support for slaughter of unarmed civilians and backing of authoritarian capitalist regimes elsewhere.

Bevins tells us that some seven years after the genocide began in Indonesia,

mysterious graffitied slogans "*Yakarta viene*" and "*Jakarta se acerca*" began appearing on walls across Santiago, Chile. Postcards marked with the arachnid logo of the far-right *Patria y Libertad* began arriving at the homes of members of socialist Salvador Allende's government.

Foretelling the September 1973 U.S.-backed "General's Coup" and mass arrests, disappearances and killings to come, the cards simply read "Jakarta is coming."

In Brazil during the same period, security state officials plotted their own "*Operação Jacarta*" to execute suspected "subversives." While that plan never materialized, the military dictatorship — in power since the 1964 overthrow of the moderate João Goulart — arrested, jailed and tortured thousands.

The country's "security services" played a key role, along with their Argentinian counterparts, in the U.S.-backed murderous campaign of cross-continent state terror, "Operation Condor."

Clearly, by the early-mid '70s, as Bevins informs us, the "Jakarta Method" had morphed into an international state-terror network under U.S. tutelage.

While researching the proliferation of "The Method" across South America in the '70s and Central America in the '80s (where in Guatemala, the primary target became entire Indigenous peoples deemed "subversive"), Bevins counted a total of 22 countries in the "U.S. camp" where murderous state terror was employed against unarmed, innocent civilians. He actually discovered use of the term "Jakarta" as a code word for such rightist violence in eleven of them.

While the bulk of the Indonesian mass murder occurred within a year of the 1965 coup, arrests and jailings continued for a decade as Suharto's "New Order" regime became an exemplar of an inherently corrupt, crony capitalist state and an IMF-backed "favorable investment climate."

The mass murder also continued as the military, with a U.S. "green light," invaded neighboring East Timor in December, 1975. The resultant 25-year occupation, amplifying the full range of "Jakarta Method" genocidal techniques, led to the death of perhaps a third of the tiny nation's population.

A savvy multilingual journalist who traveled worldwide to uncover the story of "The Method," Bevins interviewed survivors of the horror on several continents. Their stories, interwoven with the historical narrative, bring an extraordinary, human dimension and some glimpse of the long-lasting personal and collective trauma to the account.

### Human Dimensions

In one of the most moving parts of the book, Bevins pays a visit to Magdalena, an

aged woman who, as a 17-year-old in 1965, was picked up and interrogated, accused of being a Gerwani "witch," tortured, repeatedly raped and imprisoned for years.

Her only crime? As a worker in a Jakarta T-shirt factory she, like all her co-workers, became a member of the PKI-associated union association.

When Bevins met her, she was surviving on meager charity and living all alone in a small shack, cut off from her family and ostracized by the local community. Why? Her life was still stigmatized by her alleged association with "communism."

In another passage, Bevins speaks with a witness to the mass butchery and burial on a beach in Bali, a local killing field that became the site of a luxurious resort. The island's tourism boom centered in that very location, we learn, started soon after the violence as the Suharto regime turned to encouraging foreign investment in today's "island paradise."

Toward the end of the book, Bevins recounts his conversation with Winarso, at the time of the interview the head of an organization for survivors of the 1965 genocide. He asked the lifelong activist who won the Cold War.

The man answered succinctly that the United States won; that capitalism had won. Bevins then asked how that took place. Winarso's answer poignantly went right to the heart of it all. "You killed us," he replied.

While it has some minor flaws (the absence of an index being one), Bevins' "Jakarta Method" is important. It should be read by anyone seeking a handle on the nature of the contemporary global system and the ubiquitous violence underlying its construction. ■

### Earle — continued from page 44

It is also, in notable contrast with Justin Townes Earle's previous work, an album that dares to assign blame. The title track, opener of *The Saint of Lost Causes*, treats those cheated and left behind almost like vengeful ghosts, biding their time, waiting for a chance to get their own:

*How many encounters do you ever have  
But again, how many wolves you ever seen?  
You got about as much chance of seeing  
one of them*

*As you do running into me  
Still take nothing for granted  
Might live on the best block in Beverly Hills  
Be sure you lock up tight at night  
'Cause you know poor folks ain't got  
nothing to steal*

*Just pray to the Saint of Lost Causes*

Now the man who wrote these words is himself a ghost. Reports tell us it was a drug overdose. Was he the lost cause? Are we? That's ultimately a question he couldn't answer on his own. ■



# REVIEW

## Charting New Paths: The Comintern in 1922-1923

By Tom Twiss

### The Communist Movement at a Crossroads:

Plenums of the Communist  
International's Executive Committee,  
1922-1923

Edited by Mike Taber; translated by John Riddell  
Leiden: Brill, 2018; Chicago: Haymarket Books,  
paperback edition published 2019, 796 pages, \$50.

IN 1922-1923 THE Communist International found itself in shifting terrain that presented fresh opportunities and new dangers. The clearing of smoke from European battlefields and barricades had revealed devastated economies and exhausted workers.

Years of war and revolution had left European workers exhausted. But by 1922 they were slowly regaining their combativeness in the face of mounting pressure from their ruling classes.

Following two years of fascist terror in Italy, Benito Mussolini's appointment as prime minister was stimulating the spread of similar movements throughout Europe.

Meanwhile, in the heartland of the revolution, Lenin's incapacitation by strokes was opening a struggle for leadership that would lead to sharp reversals of Comintern policy.

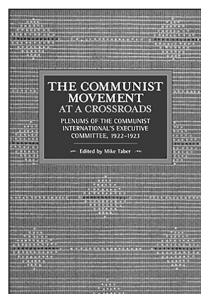
In multiple ways then *The Communist Movement at a Crossroads* is a highly appropriate title for a published collection of Comintern materials from these years. This volume, edited by Mike Taber and translated by John Riddell, is the latest addition to the monumental multi-volume series, "The Communist International Publishing Project," with titles published by Pathfinder Press, Brill, Haymarket and LeftWord Books.<sup>1</sup>

It consists of proceedings (mostly extensive summaries of speeches) and resolutions from the enlarged meetings of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI), translated primarily from the German versions of the official public record.

The enlarged plenums were important gatherings, described as "mini-congresses" by the ECCI's president Gregory Zinoviev, of representatives from the Comintern's member parties between world congresses.

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*Tom Twiss is a librarian emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh. He is the author of Trotsky and the Problem of Soviet Bureaucracy (Haymarket, 2015), and co-author with Dianne Feeley and Paul Le Blanc of Leon Trotsky and the Organizational Principles of the Revolutionary Party (Haymarket, 2014).*



Nikolai Bukharin, Karl Radek and Clara Zetkin, as well as important contributions by lesser-known figures. But the collection is especially valuable for the light it sheds on issues of continuing relevance.

### The United Front

A red thread running through the plenums was a discussion and debate about the united front — a strategy for the unified action of all working-class organizations around immediate demands.

The strategy, which had been implemented by socialists as early as the First International, was resurrected by the German Communist Party in January 1921. In an open letter the KPD called upon other socialist parties and trade unions to join it in demanding higher wages, reduced living costs and workers' defense. That summer the Comintern's Third World Congress endorsed the open letter as a model for campaigns that would enable the working class to struggle for its immediate interests.<sup>2</sup>

Then in December 1921 the First Enlarged Plenum unanimously adopted theses proclaiming that Communist parties of the world must strive everywhere for "unity of [the] masses, as broad and complete as possible, in practical action."

The theses explained that the recent offensive by international capitalism against the living standard of workers had given rise to a spontaneous striving for unity. By championing this impulse, Communist parties could expect to attract broader support from workers and become better situated to expose resistance to unity from the reformists and centrists.<sup>3</sup>

Not everyone in the Comintern welcomed the new approach. Its most vociferous critics were in the leaderships of the French and Italian parties. Representatives of both sections distrusted and resisted collaboration with reformists who had endorsed

Included here are records of the three enlarged plenums from the critical years 1922-1923. Each is fascinating just for the addresses by such leading luminaries of international communism as Gregory Zinoviev, Leon Trotsky,

their respective countries' war efforts and who had shown greater readiness to ally with capitalists than with Communists.

Some insisted that the only permissible united front was "from below" with the masses, not "from above" with the leaders. However, Karl Radek, speaking as majority reporter on the united front, explained to the Second Expanded Plenum, it was necessary to go through the Social Democratic leaders:

*"Anyone who now says 'united front from below' misunderstands the situation. For in order to reach the base, to go to the masses of Social Democrats, we must first get an obstacle out of our path."<sup>4</sup>*

During the discussions in this volume and at the Fourth World Congress, the policy gained increasing acceptance within the Comintern. At the same time, as noted by Taber, it continued to evolve.

By late 1922 Comintern leaders had begun to describe the united front not simply as a short-term defensive approach, but increasingly as a longer-term offensive orientation. Also, by the Third Enlarged Plenum in 1923 they had begun to perceive its applicability in a range of contexts beyond the defense of workers' standard of living, including a united front against war, an anti-imperialist united front in colonial and semi-colonial countries, and a united front against fascism.<sup>5</sup>

One other important application of the policy discussed at the Third Enlarged Plenum was the demand for a "workers' and peasants' government."

Six months previously, the Fourth World Congress had issued a call for the creation of "workers' governments" based exclusively on united fronts of workers' parties.<sup>6</sup> The Third Plenum broadened the class base of the envisioned front to include working peasants in all countries — although for North America the slogan was modified to "workers' and farmers' government."<sup>7</sup>

While urging parties to forge united fronts in all these areas, the Comintern leaders repeatedly stressed the necessary limits of those alliances. Most importantly, they advised parties "to maintain absolute autonomy and complete independence," including the "right and capacity to express . . . their opinion regarding the policies of all working-class organizations," and they

explicitly excluded support by united fronts for capitalist governments and electoral alliances with capitalist parties.<sup>8</sup>

### The Struggle Against Fascism

A crucial related issue that the Comintern addressed in these years was the rise of fascism.

The Comintern briefly discussed the issue at the Fourth World Congress in November 1922, shortly after Mussolini's appointment as prime minister. However, its first serious examination of fascism was in a brilliant report and resolution presented to the Third Enlarged Plenum the following June by Clara Zetkin, the famous veteran of German socialism, collaborator of Rosa Luxemburg, and leading figure in the Communist women's movement. The Communist movement was already well acquainted with brutally repressive rightist regimes. But Zetkin emphasized the distinctiveness of fascism as a mass-based movement of violent terror.

She explained that in Italy and other parts of Europe, the war had brought the collapse of the capitalist economy and bourgeois state, the impoverishment of workers, and the proletarianization of the middle classes. Seeking a way out of the crisis, those most adversely affected should have been drawn to socialism but were demoralized by the failures of the working-class leadership.

Consequently "masses in their thousands" streamed to the fascists, who courted them with anti-capitalist demagogy and promises of salvation by a strong, authoritarian state towering above social classes.

This growing fascist movement was welcomed and supported by the capitalist class as an "extralegal and nonstate instrument of force" that could further subjugate the proletariat, facilitating the reconstruction of the capitalist economy. The movement's shock troops were the fascist gangs that terrorized peasant organizations, unions and parties of the left.

Zetkin called for a united front of all labor organizations and labor parties to organize workers' self-defense against the fascist attacks. She also emphasized the need to challenge fascism, ideologically and politically, by building a communist movement that addressed the needs of the social layers that were drawn to it.

In this regard, she viewed the slogan of "workers' and peasants' government" as especially valuable for combatting fascism in rural areas. At the same time, she stressed the importance of promoting the inspiring world outlook of communism as an alternative to fascism.<sup>9</sup>

Zetkin's report and resolution have been published along with useful supplementary material in a separate Haymarket volume.<sup>10</sup> However, a benefit of reading the report

and resolution in the *Crossroads* volume is that the reader can see the appreciative responses of the other delegates and their remarks on the growth of fascism in their own countries.

One especially significant — and troubling — contribution to the discussion was Karl Radek's notorious "Schlageter speech." Radek began by confessing it had been difficult for him to follow Zetkin's report, for hovering before his eyes was "the corpse of a German fascist, our class opponent," Albert Leo Schlageter, who had been executed by the French.

Schlageter was a member of the right-wing paramilitary German militia, the *Freikorps*, which had carried out acts of sabotage against the French occupation of the Ruhr. After his arrest and execution by the French in May 1923, Schlageter was treated as a martyr by the Nazis and other German rightists. At the plenum Radek similarly eulogized him as a "martyr of German nationalism," and a "courageous soldier of the counterrevolution" who deserved "to be sincerely honored by us, the soldiers of the revolution."<sup>11</sup>

No one at the plenum objected specifically to Radek's tribute to Schlageter, although a Czechoslovakian delegate rejected the appropriation of nationalism on which it was based.<sup>12</sup> However, the German Social Democrats subsequently denounced the speech as an obvious appeal to the Nazis for collaboration.

Radek later explained that his purpose had been to combat fascism politically by showing the petty bourgeoisie that capitalism was the source of their legitimate national grievances. But as Taber has appropriately observed, Radek's approach involved serious dangers, including the possibility that such adaptation to the right could lead sections of the working-class movement to cross over to the class enemy.<sup>13</sup>

### Centralism in the Comintern

An additional concern addressed in the plenums was the accusation that the Comintern was becoming excessively centralized. From the beginning, the Comintern's founders had envisioned that it would be not only democratic, but also significantly centralist in nature. Decentralism, they believed, had been largely responsible for the failure of Social Democracy to uphold its internationalist principles at the outbreak of the world war.

Consequently, the Comintern statutes adopted in 1920 emphasized that the Communist International "must be organized in a far more centralized way than was the Second International," while conceding that the Comintern would need "to take into account the diverse conditions under which each party has to struggle and work,

adopting universally binding decisions only on questions in which such decisions are possible."<sup>14</sup>

By the time of the Third Enlarged Plenum, the Norwegian and Swedish parties had begun to chafe at the "super-centralism" they perceived in the Comintern.

Although delegates from both parties claimed to be strong advocates of centralism, they argued that the Comintern was interfering in issues that were purely local in nature and insisted that centralism should be introduced only gradually in their parties because of their strong federalist traditions.<sup>15</sup> Predictably, their opponents in the Comintern were more inclined to see the international implications of all the issues under discussion.

Zinoviev, while admitting "We should not intervene in local questions," insisted "All the major questions today are international in significance."

Others were even more extreme in their assertions. Arthur Ewert from Germany argued, "[T]here are hardly any issues that have only a national, local significance," and Richard Schüller from the Youth International flatly declared, "All issues before the individual sections are of concern to the International."<sup>16</sup>

However, the Comintern reality seems to have been considerably less oppressive than these remarks suggest. In 1922 both the French and Italian sections refused to participate in a major united front initiative of the Comintern, yet they experienced no disciplinary consequences.

During these plenums, the decisions taken by the ECCI that were related to the policies and practices of individual parties were almost always recommendations, not instructions. Most of the delegates who spoke about the direct involvement by the Comintern in the affairs of their parties testified to the helpful nature of that intervention. Furthermore, the discussions and debates throughout the plenums were remarkably open and freewheeling.<sup>17</sup>

### Paths Not Taken and the Road Ahead

As Taber explains, all the Comintern policies discussed here would be dramatically revised in the years after the Third Enlarged Plenum. On one level, this was the result of the change in leadership that began with Lenin's incapacitation in 1923. More deeply, it was a product of the bureaucratization that was already discussed in the appeal submitted by the Soviet Workers' Opposition to the First Enlarged Plenum in 1922.

The rejection of the Comintern's 1922-1923 understanding of both united fronts and fascism was most evident from 1928 onwards. During the years 1928-1933 (the "Third Period"), the Stalinist Comintern disastrously insisted there was no real

continued on page 43

# REVIEW

## A Life in the Revolution

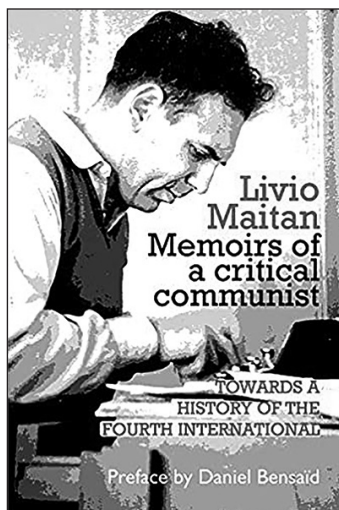
By John Barzman

### Memoirs of a Critical Communist

Towards a History of the Fourth International

By Livio Maitan

Preface by Daniel Bensaid, translated by Gregor Benton, edited with and introduction by Penelope Duggan  
Resistance Books, IIRE, Merlin Press, 2019, 456 pages, \$28.



LIVIO MAITAN WAS born in Venice in 1923; he was politically active from 1943 until his death in 2004. During this period, both the world capitalist system and the bureaucratic countries that escaped its grip generated great discontents, social movements and crises. Unfortunately none of these upsurges was able to establish a society that was democratic and egalitarian in a lasting way.

As a young socialist in postwar Italy, Livio could see the problem as it was crystallizing into the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> When he met the Fourth International in Paris in April 1947, he decided to dedicate his life to making socialist democracy a real perspective for militants searching a way out of the “Washington or Moscow” dilemma. He stood by this commitment all his life.

What was needed, he thought, was not just more brilliant books like Trotsky’s *The Revolution Betrayed*, but a network of militants organized globally and sharing information, analysis and at times, a helping hand.

As Livio joined the fray, the worldwide socialist movement was embodied almost exclusively by states (the USSR, Yugoslavia, China) whose leaders called themselves communist, and large social-democratic parties prepared to manage capitalist states engaged in the Cold War.

Both trends, known as the “traditional leaderships,” expended considerable energy to attract, control to their advantage, and sometimes repress popular protests. They presented themselves to the world as com-

munists and socialists continuing a century-old struggle. Individuals periodically rediscovered, through research or experience in struggles, that the doctrine and practice of these parties were incompatible with the socialism advocated by the founders and leaders of the 1920s. But their discovery was slow, painful, incomplete, often prevented from reaching a wide audience, and could not be tested even on a small scale by practical collective action.

How much faster and deeper would be their learning process if they could meet an organization that transmitted the lessons drawn by others like them and brought comfort and assistance to continue the fight. This was the function that he ascribed to the Fourth International.

### A Global “Collective Intellectual”

In his memoirs, Livio often uses the term “we” for the FI: we decided, we sent, we reacted, we made a mistake.

He does not deal specifically with the issue of the “International” as a collective intellectual formulating the collective will of rational humanity. But as I read page after page, I was led to make an analogy with Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the party as the collective intellectual of the working class and oppressed layers of one country, grasping the totality of the situation and formulating the collective will for the common good.

Can one transpose this concept from the territorial context for which it was meant, to the whole planet? Maitan describes how his international group gathered information both from the press and from militants, followed situations, debated interpretations, produced analyses, tested them, elaborated balance sheets, sent emissaries to verify, published and distributed its findings, coordinated actions, elected and replaced leaders.

Circumstances (wars, repression, demoralization, cultural divisions) do not always make such a process realistic, but it was possible in the years covered by the book, even if sometimes only on a very small scale.

Stretching material resources and human endurance to the breaking point, the international mechanism worked and produced a framework for understanding — and acting on — world reality that is an essential legacy today. For me this is quite different from a collection of radical individuals investigating social dynamics in the context of academia, the news media, banks or official administrations.

There might be intermediate solutions such as circles of intellectuals and militants producing a journal, or a professional journalist being an active member of a revolutionary organization. But what we see in Maitan’s testimony is something different: a person functioning as a leading member of a network of revolutionary groups in 20 to 50 countries, a rare and interesting experience.

Since the 19th century, social movements of different nations have organized international congresses and elected permanent coordinating bodies. Political workers reached out to form the First, Second, Third and Fourth Internationals, each with different functions and forms of organization.

Craft and industrial unions, women’s organizations, civil rights, peace and environmental movements also regrouped beyond national borders. Today Greenpeace, Amnesty International, antiwar coalitions, school strikes to save the planet, all clearly need to coordinate their actions across several countries.

Such international organizations inevitably face the question of determining the basis for representing national delegations, electing international officers, funding common activity, translating not just words but national cultures and experiences to make them understandable to others, settling disputes, rooting out fraud and corruption in their own ranks, finding compromises.

Livio’s story provides many case studies of such problems, the solutions applied and their outcome.

### A Contribution to FI History

The FI had already gone through different phases before Livio joined, and would go through at least three phases during the period described in the book: 1945 to 1968,

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a chain of mainly small organizations hoping for a break; 1968 to 1985, rapid growth leading to a stronger international center; 1985 to 2000, adaptation to setbacks and downsizing.

The author does not pretend to write a full or even skeletal history of the FI in these years, but rather a contribution based on what he found most significant through his participation in leadership bodies and specific assignments. But that is quite a mouthful: he offers detailed accounts of major events, problems they posed for revolutionaries, and the organizational efforts deployed to respond to them.

In the "Eastern bloc" countries receiving sustained attention are the Soviet Union and Russian Federation, Yugoslavia, China, Poland; in the "global south" Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Algeria, Ceylon (Sri Lanka); in the "north" Spain, Portugal, France. In addition, interesting insights on particular episodes concern Czechoslovakia, Germany, Cuba, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Vietnam, Indonesia, Greece, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

There are occasional worthwhile mentions of India, Pakistan, Japan, the United States, Canada, Ireland and Britain. Discussions on the revival of feminist themes appear after 1968 and environmental preoccupations emerge in the 1980s.

The book is spiced with first-hand impressions, such as the qualms of an organization having won parliamentary representation and invited to join a left government (the Lanka Sama Samajama Party of Ceylon 1963-65), or militants having won mass influence in trade unions and peasant leagues and preparing to participate in demonstrations forbidden by the army (Bolivia).

More generally, Livio's specific interests are evident in the analysis of the contradictions of bureaucratized systems (USSR, China, Yugoslavia), the potential and limits of the Maoist and Castroist currents, shifts in "the center of gravity of the world revolution." For a reader seeking to understand the fundamental features of world politics from the end of World War II to the new century, the book provides a framework and many important examples.

### Difficulties of Organization

Decisive events for the relationship of forces between the classes on a world scale are the main but not the only subject of the memoirs. Livio also deals with the difficulties of small revolutionary organizations to function in a pluralist and democratic fashion.

The main source of these problems is identified as the weight of objective factors: the ability of capitalism to overcome its crises, the wealth and power of state bureaucracies, the small numbers willing to prioritize the struggle for emancipation, the effects of enemy propaganda and repression,

the resulting isolation and fatigue of the most enlightened and dedicated militants.

But Livio's story brings out another factor: the social atmosphere and leadership styles that can develop in these groups. For Livio, the FI "mainstream" or "majority" to which he belonged escaped the main deviation of authoritarian or dictatorial regimes. Maitan was part of several teams, one of which was dubbed "the troika": Maitan, Ernest Mandel and Pierre Frank, known for a while in the U.S. Socialist Workers Party as "MMF."<sup>2</sup>

In fact there was no single preeminent leader in this mainstream current. It always brought together representatives of several countries on the basis of pluralism, free discussion, a fair representation and inclusion of minorities in leadership bodies. It emphasized the democratic dimension in democratic centralism.

The only exception took place in 1952-53 when Michel Pablo sought to impose his international line on the majority of the French section, which opposed it. Attempts were made relatively rapidly to repair the ensuing split, but the explosion had set in motion dynamics and bitter recriminations that could no longer be overcome.<sup>3</sup>

Of interest for readers of *ATC* is the fact that despite considerable attention focused on the analysis of the Soviet Union and social transformations in Eastern Europe and China, then Cuba, the FI did not consider "differences over the Russian question" as grounds for a separate organization.

Various analyses of the issue coexisted and evolved within the FI and its sections. Attempts were made to overcome the 1939-40 split in the U.S. SWP between the supporters of Cannon and Shachtman and similar splits in a few other countries.

The issue reemerged after 1989 as the Soviet bloc disintegrated. Even then it was unclear which description best illuminated reality: "bureaucratic collectivism," "state capitalism," "degenerated and deformed workers states," "Stalinism," "bureaucratized societies of the transition." In examining the weaknesses and strengths of each approach, which could best guide promoters of socialist democracy?

### Authoritarian Centralizers

Livio deals most extensively with three cases of authoritarian centralist leaders that emerged inside the FI and then left it: Michel Pablo, Juan Posadas and Nahuel Moreno.

Pablo seems to have developed an authoritarian style not in any national base (Greece or France) but amid expectations in very difficult times (1949-1953) that the International needed a resolute secretary who could step into the shoes of its martyred founder, Leon Trotsky.

According to Livio, this tendency was limited by Mandel, Frank, himself and others

until Pablo became engrossed in material support for the Algerian liberation struggle. Pablo saw it as a potential future base for a much enlarged revolutionary movement, and one centered on the colonial revolution. Reunification with the U.S. SWP proceeded without him; when Pablo left in 1965 he had very little support inside the International.

On Posadas, Livio's account is precious. What comes out is the portrait of a man convinced of his own importance and willing to bully his closest associates and subvert democratic procedures.<sup>4</sup>

Both Posadas and Nahuel Moreno used Argentina as their base to bring other Latin American sections into their orbit and claim to represent the colonial revolution against the allegedly Eurocentric mainstream of the Fourth International.<sup>4</sup> "The concept of the guiding section was present and played out in recurring behaviour and practices, linked to cultural pretensions." (216)

But there are other figures of the same type. In the U.S. SWP, (Jack) Barnes and his group seriously corrupted the internal life of the movement, by making systematic use of the arbitrary category of 'disloyalty' toward the party... (330-331)

Livio discusses only characters that he dealt with inside the FI, but his insights might inspire analogies with attempts to build international organizations by leaders such as Gerry Healey, Ted Grant and Tony Cliff (Britain), Pierre Lambert and "Hardy" (France).<sup>5</sup> Livio believes that participation in a democratic and pluralist International can be a counterweight to "authoritarian temptations." However, this is easier to accept in a small country like Belgium than in a major imperialist center.

In the case of the United States, Livio identifies an argument that underlay the option of both James P. Cannon in 1953 and Jack Barnes in the '70s and '80s: "At its origin lay an idea that was, in itself, incontestable: the fate of the struggle for socialism in the world would be decided, in the last analysis, in the supreme bastion of capitalism, in the United States. This was the origin of the propensity to consider the role of the SWP as primary..." (264)

To me, this argument explains neither the dominant relation which the Barnes leadership imposed on its allies in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Britain, nor the monolithic conformism which it demanded of its own membership, through its twists and turns. But the United States is not one of the subjects on which Livio worked the most during his long career, and one can be thankful for his lucid interpretation of what he did witness.

### For Further Exploration

In his introduction, the author regrets that neither Mandel nor Frank wrote a political autobiography, and announces

that his text will not be a history of the International but a personal testimony.

Besides the omission of Italy, apparently because another book already dealt with that story, important subjects are not developed. Perhaps the FI as a whole did not deal with them extensively, or where the FI did expend considerable time on them, they were not assigned to him. Or perhaps he chooses to gloss over them.

Thus we find very little on northern Europe (Ireland, Britain, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Belgium and Holland), the United States and Canada, important parts of the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, the Arabian peninsula), Japan, India and Australia.

The growing attention given by the FI or its sections to the women's movement, antiwar and ecology issues, immigrant or sub-proletarian sectors, gay movements, long before 2000, is underrepresented. We await the accumulation of memoirs, oral testimonies and archives from different countries, and attempts at synthesis to get a more precise idea of the balance sheet of the Fourth International for that period.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime, Livio's book stresses

some of its fundamental achievements: maintaining a revolutionary Marxist analysis of world reality, detailing the perspective of socialist democracy,<sup>7</sup> overcoming the isolation of revolutionary socialists operating in one country, and producing an analysis of major events in the world since 1945 showing at once their potential for socialism and the obstacles that must be overcome to achieve that goal.

Today, the new generation of revolutionaries are told that a socialist democracy with feminist and ecological values is utopian, and that they must choose between profoundly corrupt and unfair capitalist welfare states or bureaucratic dictatorship on the Chinese model. The recent history presented in Livio Maitan's *Memoirs* shows why it is worth preparing for breaches to open in these two systems and strive for socialism. ■

### Notes

1. He says little about how he radicalized first as Mussolini's fascist regime was collapsing in northern Italy between 1943 and 1945, then in the turmoil that followed. Readers interested in the Italian far left can probably find more in *La strada percorsa. Dalla resistenza ai nuovi movimenti: lettura critica e scelte alternative*, 2002, not yet translated.
2. Livio Maitan, Ernest Mandel and Pierre Frank were

respectively leaders of the Italian, Belgian and French sections. According to Maitan, Michel Pablo (Raptis), a prominent figure between 1943 and 1961, was the first to apply the term "troika" to them in the 1950s, because they stood in the way of his supremacy.

3. The main result was the formation of a dissident current in France which gradually coalesced as "Lambertism" and refused the reunification of 1963. Michael Löwy identifies the problem in his review: "Heroism of reason. On Livio Maitan's memoirs," <http://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article51838>.

4. Posadas had established the Buro Latino Americano (BLA) and Moreno the Secretariado Latino Americano del Trotskismo Ortodoxo (SLATO).

5. Currents known respectively as Healeyism, "The Militant" (Grant), International Socialism (Cliff), Lambertism, Lutte Ouvrière (Robert Barcia). Smaller attempts include the Spartacist (Jim Robertson) and other offshoots. The circumstances of each internal regime's incubation and rise need comparative analysis. "Cult studies" relevant to our subject examine religious and political volunteer organizations focusing mainly on leaders (charisma, transmission, persuasion, managerial skill), but also on followers (transference, self-definition, dedication).

6. For more material on the subject, the introduction by Penelope Duggan recommends the Marxist Internet Archive including the Encyclopedia of Trotskyism On-Line (ETOL), and RaDar (documents in French) and Red Mole Rising (documents in English).

7. See "Dictatorship of the proletariat and Socialist Democracy" adopted by the 12th World Congress of the Fourth International in 1985 (main author: Ernest Mandel), available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/1985/dictprole/>

## The Comintern in 1922-1923 — continued from page 40

difference between Social Democracy and fascism, thereby excluding any alliances with Social Democrats.<sup>18</sup>

Then in 1935, it redefined fascism as "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital," and instructed Communists to form binding alliances even with "anti-fascist" bourgeois parties. All this was accompanied by a deepening centralization that eliminated the autonomy enjoyed by Comintern sections and the openness of Comintern discussions in 1922-1923.

*The Communist Movement at a Crossroads*, along with the other volumes in the series, is an essential resource for studying the history of the Communist movement and its parties. But more than that, it is a valuable tool for those who would apply the lessons of the early Comintern.

For activists in today's United States, Zetkin's analysis of fascism seems especially relevant. Despite commonly heard claims that the Trump administration is fascist, it clearly does not resemble the mass-based movement of violent terror depicted by Zetkin. Nevertheless, it is also clear that among Trump's supporters there are elements of such a movement, that Trump has relied upon and encouraged those elements, and that they continue to be active. *The Communist Movement at a Crossroads* provides some important clues to how contemporary activists can combat such a movement.

Along with a clear translation by John Riddell, the volume has a valuable introduction by Mike Taber that provides essential historical context. It includes an extraordinary collection of notes and a glossary that together identify virtually every individual and event mentioned and that by themselves constitute a major scholarly contribution.

Additionally, the book contains a useful chronology of events that impacted the Communist movement during the years 1921-1924, an extensive bibliography of works consulted, and a comprehensive and very useable index. All in all, this is an important and worthy addition to a remarkable series. ■

### Notes

1. For a complete list of the titles in this series, see John Riddell, "Comintern Project Book List Hits a Dozen," Marxist Essays and Commentary, June 24, 2019, <https://johnriddell.com/2019/06/24/comintern-project-book-list-hits-a-dozen/>.
2. John Riddell, ed. and trans., *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015, 1061-1063, 939-940. For the history of the united front slogan, see Mike Taber's "Editorial Introduction" in *The Communist Movement at a Crossroads*, edited by Mike Taber and translated by John Riddell, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018, 1-49, and John Riddell, "The origins of the united front policy," *International Socialism*, Issue 130, April 5, 2011, <http://isj.org.uk/the-origins-of-the-united-front-policy/>.
3. Taber, 254-264.
4. Taber, 284. See also 137.
5. Taber, 17-18, 219, 256, 605-606, 668. See also John Riddell, "The united front: adoption and application," *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, July 2, 2020, <http://links.org.au/the-united-front-adoption-and-application>.
6. John Riddell, ed. and trans., *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011,

1159-1162.

7. Taber, 414-415, 446, 457, 654.

8. Taber, 260, 361, 355.

9. Zetkin's report is in Taber, 580-606. Her resolution is on pages 664-669.

10. Clara Zetkin, *Fighting Fascism: How to Struggle and How to Win*, edited and with an introduction by Mike Taber and John Riddell, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017.

11. Radek's "Schlageter speech" is in Taber, 613-18.

12. Taber, 512.

13. Taber, 24-27. For other balanced accounts of Radek's speech and the subsequent "Schlageter line" of the KPD, see Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution 1917-1923*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006, 727-730; E.H. Carr, *The Interregnum: A History of Soviet Russia Vol. 4*, London: Macmillan Company, 1954, 179-186.

14. Taber, 538. John Riddell, ed., *Workers' of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991, vol. 2, 770. For a discussion of the organizational principles of the early Comintern, see Taber, 32-36; and John Riddell, "Party Organization in Lenin's Comintern," Marxist Essays and Commentary, Nov. 10, 2020, Part 1, "Defining Democratic Centralism," <https://johnriddell.com/2020/11/08/party-organization-in-lenins-comintern/>, and Part 2, "How Democratic Centralism Was Applied," <https://johnriddell.com/2020/11/10/how-democratic-centralism-was-applied/>.

15. Taber, 431, 437, 468, 537-538, 541, 558.

16. Taber, 477, 545, 547.

17. On the indiscipline of the French and Italian sections, see Taber, 290-291. For recommendations to the Norwegian section, see Taber, 626-632. An exception to the practice of recommendations was the Third Plenum's demand that the Italian section alter its executive body to facilitate a fusion with the Socialist Party. (Taber, 682). For appreciative remarks by delegates about Comintern intervention, see Taber, 466, 543, 545-546, 547, and 557. However, the Swedish delegate Höglund, complained of Comintern interventions in Norway and Denmark. (Taber, 428.)

18. Taber, 22-23. One leading Marxist who continued to apply the Comintern's earlier understanding of both united fronts and fascism was Leon Trotsky. For Trotsky's writings on fascism, see especially Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971.

## The Saint of Lost Causes On the Life of Justin Townes Earle

By Alexander Billet

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, critics would comment on Justin Townes Earle's apparent lack of politics. It wasn't an observation out of nowhere. Justin was the son of fellow recording artist Steve Earle, the "hardcore troubadour," a musician whose proud embrace of socialist politics complicates the widespread (and inaccurate) association of country music with conservative politics.

To be sure, the younger Earle, who died at the age of 38 in August, was his own artist. Where his father's sound has always embraced a rough-around-the-edges folksiness, Justin's songs were a polished blend of country, R&B, gospel, blues, and early rock and roll. Steve's radical parables weren't regular parts of Justin's repertoire. Justin's lyrical stories were always more personal, intimate and poetic.

It would be wrong, however, to say that the younger Earle's music doesn't reflect something of the working-class experience, particularly among young people. Being born to a country music legend didn't guarantee Justin much of anything. He was raised mostly by his mother Carol Ann after Steve left and his parents split. In interviews years later he would talk about being abused and molested (he never said by whom).

Though he would end up playing in and touring with his father's band, he was kicked out after his own addictions turned him into a whirlwind of addiction and destruction. According to him, he was 12 the first time he tried heroin, 16 when he first overdosed.

The phrase "white working-class" is almost used as a slur in American political discourse. Liberals love to trot it out with a wink, a coded phrase for rural draws, MAGA hats and a fanatical love of guns. But then, class is mostly cultural to American liberals, devoid of any real economic meaning.

The disinvestment and immiseration of the American Rust Belt is for the most

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part left undressed. If you want to know why a significant portion of post-industrial America votes for Donald Trump, this is it. It is also the reason for a great amount of despair and

hopelessness, loneliness and isolation.

These are the types of places where an opioid haze is preferable to acknowledging your own futurelessness. Neither Trump nor Biden — who played his own crucial role in the disappearance of American jobs — can offer anything to fundamentally resolve this.

### The Hurt Inside

In a 2019 interview with *Rolling Stone*, Justin said,

*"[I]t ain't a drug company's problem that somebody started taking pills. You know what the problem is? It's something hurt inside them. Something wasn't right inside them. And the world didn't treat them right. They never felt comfortable. And they found something that made them comfortable."*

Of course, he was wrong about the complicity of drug companies. But he was right about the wider setting. A world that fails to meet our human needs is one in which humans are slowly broken.

This is what makes Justin Townes Earle's music resonate. He was a storyteller first and foremost. Given his namesake — Townes Van Zandt, perhaps the greatest singer-songwriter in country music history — he had better be. In interviews he also referenced Woody Guthrie as an influence.

His albums, particularly early ones like *Midnight at the Movies* and *Harlem River Blues*, tapped into an existential displacement that defines young working-class lives; the feeling of being rootless and yet trapped.

The songs' stories will take place in Memphis or New York as often as they do nondescript small towns. No matter the setting or action, there is always a forlorn sense of a larger world that the narrator cannot reach, a more fulfilling plane of exist-

tence always denied us.

Though comparing him with his father remains an unfair way to measure his music, one can nonetheless hear a poignant narrative come out when listening to the music of Steve and Justin side-by-side.

Steve's is the story of post-'60s radicalism, stubbornly holding on even as the prospects of working America are gutted before his eyes. While notions of inherently conservative country music and country people swirl around him, he clings fiercely to those beautiful stories of people struggling for a life worth living.

Justin's music picks up the torch, but in an undeniably millennial manner. Much as he wants there to be something better, his experience tells him otherwise.

He has no reason to disbelieve what his father tells him, but he himself can only touch the things that make him alien in his own home. Through the majority of his albums, we are left wondering what would happen were these exquisitely painful stories to be imbued with a bit more of his father's righteous anger.

### Kicking Against the Confines

In the spring of 2019, Justin Townes Earle released what was to be his last album: *The Saint of Lost Causes*. Again, his protagonists are all kicking against the confines of their own isolation. But there is a greater awareness of the active role his settings play in making existence so intolerable.

"Appalachian Nightmare" takes us from Cincinnati to West Virginia to Tennessee to tell us of a doomed young man overwhelmed with addiction and crime, gunned down after accidentally killing a cop in a robbery.

"Over Alameda" is a story of a Black family leaving the Mississippi Delta behind for Los Angeles, only to find the same segregation and deprivation waiting for them. Two songs, "Don't Drink the Water" and "Flint City Shake It" use the Flint, Michigan water crisis as their backdrop.

This is an album populated by shuttered factories and poisoned wells, desperate people and broken hearts. In other words, it is a profoundly American album, coming from a genre obsessed with its own American-ness.

continued on page 38

restrictions, sometimes violent, although nothing that we know resembling the armed right-wing takeover of the Michigan state legislature building or the kidnap-assassination plot against governor Gretchen Whitmer.

Although protests against closures may be instigated or manipulated by far-right forces, they reflect real popular grievances ripe to be exploited. (Of course, severe economic shutdowns should not be confused with simple common-sense rules about masks and social distancing, the defiance of which is pure-and-simple celebration of pseudo-“libertarian” irresponsibility.)

Lockdowns and quarantines pose tricky political, public health and civil liberties problems. On the one hand, they work: Melbourne, Australia has emerged from a near-total shutdown after 28 straight days of no new cases or deaths.

At the same time, harsh closures inflict social as well as economic damage, and become more difficult to enforce the longer they last and the more they’re repeated. Socialists of all people should be the last to demand expanded repressive government and state powers. That can be the road to Guantanamo, the World War II internment of Japanese Americans, and much else including today’s mass detention of asylum seekers.

The other side of the coin, in a number of Global South nations, is pandemic denial and neglect to avoid economic damage. In Brazil, the policies of Jair Bolsonaro have produced a level of death and devastation second only to the USA. In Mexico president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) has ridiculed the pandemic, with ruinous effect. India’s Narendra Modi managed to combine the worst of both options: declaring a severe lockdown in major cities with barely a few hours’ notice, resulting in millions of suddenly unemployed workers fleeing toward their villages and carrying the infection with them.

What becomes an intractable contradiction — under capitalism with its inherent inequalities and oppression — between public health and basic rights, could be handled quite differently. In a functioning socialist society, human needs would come first. The development and free distribution of vaccines, and of course all medical services, would be top priority. Public health centers would be widely available on the community level, and if lockdown and quarantine measures became necessary they’d be organized with democratically organized mutual aid and solidarity. In that kind of society people would be supported, not isolated, in circumstances of public health emergency.

More fundamentally, the entire system of food production would be transformed. The corporate-agribusiness model that wipes out essential ecosystems for “efficiency” and profit, ripping off small producers in the Global South while poisoning water systems at home with fertilizer runoff and livestock waste and breeding new deadly pathogens in giant factory farms, would be gone. Forests would be protected, not destroyed for the sake of expanding cattle raising and industrial agriculture. Mining would be regulated to provide good working conditions and ensure what is necessary for production.

Right now, for 15-20% of the U.S. population to be facing hunger or the soul-destroying stress of “food insecurity,” tens of millions risking eviction or homelessness, masses of low-income workers and small restaurant owners forced

to choose the risk of illness or financial ruin — while stock market indices reach all-time highs and billionaire fortunes proliferate like toxic weeds — should be unthinkable. But these are products of how capitalist production and markets operate — business not only as usual, but with even more brutality in moments of crisis.

## Emerging Global Crises

Despite vaccines, human society today is increasingly vulnerable to novel pandemics. The misnamed “Spanish flu” was spread globally by the mass troop movements and other consequences of a world war. Compared to that relatively unusual circumstance, today’s world is much more subject to the rapid spread of what previously might have been local outbreaks. For one thing, rapid mass global travel can carry a virus to the corners of the earth before it’s even detected at the source. Second, human incursions into wildlife habitats greatly increase the interfaces for virus spread from animal to human hosts.

Third is a point emphasized by researcher Rob Wallace in his important new book *Dead Epidemiologists*. The conversion of natural, diverse ecosystems to much simpler agricultural or farming zones removes ecological checks on the rapid multiplication and spread of pathogens. That’s why, Wallace emphatically warns, we need to look far “back beyond Wuhan” to consider how much easier it’s become for a virus to jump from a bat to humans, whether directly or through an intermediate animal host.

In addition to destructive agricultural practices, climate change is also expanding the range and reach of pathogens and the plagues they cause. The most destructive of these is malaria, which in 2018 infected an estimated 228 million people resulting in 405,000 deaths. The slow decrease in malaria infections and fatalities over the past couple decades is threatened both by drug-resistant strains and by the enlargement of the disease’s range in a warming climate.

For all these reasons and more, society needs to anticipate a proliferation of outbreaks becoming global pandemics with increasing frequency. At a very minimum, that desperately requires changing the system of just-in-time delivery of personal protective equipment — the harrowing shortages of N95 masks for frontline medical workers being just one example — as well as the deliberate restriction of hospital facilities and the number of medical workers in so-called “normal” conditions to barely what’s needed for profitable just-in-time operations.

To be sure, here in the USA, the world’s sickest society in more ways than one, we have a special aggravating circumstance. The outgoing criminal-in-chief Trump has shown himself fully committed to sabotaging the economy, wrecking the incoming administration’s capacity to address the multiple crises facing the country, and poisoning political life for years to come, as he exits screaming “rigged election!” on his way out.

In addition, Trump has escalated the confrontation with China, the war drive against Iran, and the brutal betrayal of peoples in the Middle East from Palestine to the Kurds to Western Sahara — all of which must be the focus of future discussions. We hold to what we’ve said before, that Donald Trump couldn’t have created this wreckage all on his own, but it wasn’t for lack of effort. ■

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