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AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

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A Letter from the Editors:

Roe v. Wade: Blood in the Water

THE FRONTAL ATTACK on abortion and reproductive freedom in the United States is the cutting edge of the general right-wing assault on democratic rights. And although the *Roe v. Wade* decision has been in effect for almost half a century, access to medical care has always been limited.

The *Roe* decision parallels the 1965 Voting Rights Act, with both under attack from day one. A runaway right-wing Supreme Court has effectively gutted voting rights in a one-two punch and is poised to do the same with abortion rights.

In the case of the right to abortion, the feminist movement's demand has been *legal, free and accessible*. Yet from the very beginning, medical institutions — whether hospitals, medical schools, professional medical organizations, or doctors — rarely viewed the decision as requiring abortion to be incorporated into their medical practice.

Religious institutions and individuals claimed the right of refusal, thus stigmatizing abortion. Even today, fewer than five percent of U.S. abortions are performed in doctors' offices or hospitals. Isolating abortion from mainstream medicine opened the way for the right wing to attack, whether through harassment of stand-alone clinics, intimidation of its personnel or passing legislation at the state or federal level.

Between 1998 and 2009, three doctors who performed abortions were murdered: Dr. Barnett Stepian, Dr. David Gunn and Dr. George Tiller.

Between 1973 and the end of 2021, states have passed 1336 restrictions: limiting methods of abortion, mandating clinics to have unnecessary facilities (TRAP laws), denying public funding, allowing insurance companies to refuse covering abortion services, demanding waiting periods (generally between 24-72 hours and often necessitating two trips), requiring parental consent for teenagers and commissioning unscientific counseling.

For its part, Congress has denied funding abortion for poor women (the Hyde Amendment) and outlawed a medical procedure for late abortions. The Helms Amendment, which prohibits U.S. funding for abortion to family planning services internationally, has been in effect since 1973.

All this legislation is intended to prevent those who are pregnant who want to abort from carrying out their decision. Although it is unclear how many are prevented from doing so, these laws force someone to jump through hoops to obtain one, increasing the hassle and financial cost.

In addition to designing and shepherding through this reactionary legislation, the right has set up a network of phony clinics to entice the unsuspecting with free pregnancy and ultrasound tests. Once there, the person is barraged with false information and pressured into continuing the pregnancy. While there are around about 800 clinics that provide abortions, there are 3,000 phony clinics.

Who seeks an abortion? They are disproportionately Black (25%) and brown (28%). Half are in their twenties, 12% are teenagers. Three-quarters are low income or poor; a majority are already parents. Currently 58% live in states that are considered hostile to abortion rights.

Why do they seek an abortion? In a country that fails to provide sex education, offers so little social infrastructure, has little quality day care or paid leave, 25% of those of childbearing age seek an abortion. Not surprisingly, women living in precarious circumstances are those who feel the need to end an unwanted pregnancy. The reasons are many — but why should lawmakers judge which are compelling? Of course, the right wing's disingenuous professed answer is that it is necessary to "save" women from making bad decisions, one they will regret the rest of their lives. In actuality, the decision has been carefully considered.

This concern is not about saving women but about *controlling them*. It is part and parcel of the right wing's drive for *control over minority populations,* whether by driving abortion underground or through methods of voter suppression, racial gerrymandering, removing books from school libraries or banning "Critical Race Theory."

These are attempts to hide inequality by legislating it away all references to it. How ironic that the right desires to deny the pregnant control over their bodies but speaks of the right to control their own by refusing to be vaccinated. What is "freedom" from vaccinations or mask wearing in the middle of a pandemic? But rules are for them to break or not as they see fit; for the poor the law is written to deny one's humanity.

That's why the right describes Black Lives Matter marches as unlawful riots while the January 6, 2021 invasion of Congress was "legitimate political discourse." Offering no verifiable proof, they maintain that the 2020 election was stolen. This "law and order" gang organizes heavily-funded and possibly armed "convoys" to occupy North American cities and border choke points in the name of freedom.

All Our Rights at Stake

Poll after poll reveals that the right to abortion care actually has *more* popular support today than when *Roe v. Wade* was decided. Despite so many attacks and restrictions, and despite the decision's own flaws, abortion is an established constitutional right.

If that right can be mutilated now, precedent and public opinion be damned, then *no rights are secure* from reactionary assault. For right-wing sharks, getting rid of *Roe* is blood in the water, especially for women and non-binary people.

A Supreme Court ruling stripping a legal *and popular* constitutional right will mark a new step by the emboldened right wing. What then about more recent gains like marriage equality, the fragile advances in transgender rights, or even much older ones like legal access to contraception (which the appalling Amy Coney Barrett hints she might like to explore sometime in the far-out event if a state restricts it)?

Critical Race Theory explores how and why civil-rights and racial-justice gains once considered won for good can be rolled back. It happened in the 19th century's violent post-Reconstruction, white-supremacist counterrevolution and which is unfolding before our eyes today. We could use a "Critical Gender Theory" to help explain how women's

continued on the inside back cover

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Front Cover: This graphic by Oksana Briukhovetska is a contemporary remake of one of a Soviet poster designed to be in solidarity with women of three races — European, Asian and African — but it reverses the order of the women to highlight the role of black women in the world.
Above: Polish women demonstrate their determination to win the reproductive freedom they need.
Back Cover: As a survivor, Darrell Cannon recounts the history of Chicago police torture. Sarah Jane Rhee

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

Teamster Election 2021: New Openings, Real Challenges

By Barry Eidlin

BIG CHANGES ARE afoot in one of the largest labor unions in North America. Last November, following a three-year campaign, the Teamsters United (TU) slate led by Sean O'Brien defeated the Teamster Power (TP) slate led by Steve Vairma by a two-to-one margin in the election for top leadership of the 1.3-million-member International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).

Vairma, head of Denver Local 455, had received the endorsement of outgoing incumbent James P. Hoffa, who did not seek re-election after 23 years in office. O'Brien, head of Boston Local 25, had the backing of the rank-and-file reform movement, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU).

Although the election was not widely reported, even in a year when workers and their unions managed to make some headlines, it could be one of the most consequential events in recent years for shaping the future of the U.S. labor movement. With members located throughout the transportation and logistics sector, Teamsters can exert power all along the supply chain.

That leverage makes them an essential part of any strategy for rebuilding labor's power, including perhaps the biggest challenge of all: organizing Amazon.

But under Hoffa, that power has remained more potential than actual. His leadership has been characterized more by concessions and cutbacks than organizing and fightbacks.

O'Brien and Teamsters United promised something different, a more militant approach to building union power. As they take the helm, can we expect them to deliver?

A Mandate for Change

O'Brien's team takes office with a clear mandate for change. TU won across the board, sweeping the Eastern, Central, Southern, and Western regions by wide margins, from 75% in the East to 57% in the West (TU did not field candidates for the Teamsters Canada positions on the General Executive Board).

Canvassing for Teamsters United.

The margin of victory was much higher for TU among members covered by national contracts like UPS, freight, and carhaul, often upwards of 80-85%.

TU candidates also did much better than TP candidates in their home locals. TU candidates got a combined 91% of the vote in their home locals, representing 171,000 members, while TP candidates got just 66% in their locals, representing 165,000 members. Three TP candidates actually lost the vote in their home local.

Overall turnout was low at 15%, continuing a trend of steady decline in recent decades. By comparison, turnout was 23% in 2001, 18% in 2006 and 2011, and 15.5% in 2016. Not surprisingly this varied by industry, with turnout among members working under nationally negotiated master contracts at over 20%, but well below average among members covered by so-called "white paper" or locally negotiated contracts.

Focusing on aggregate turnout, however, hides the fact that the 2021 election was a tale of two turnouts. The decline from 2016 was entirely a result of the collapse of the Hoffa vote.

O'Brien actually got more votes than the reform challenger in 2016, Louisville Local 89 head Fred Zuckerman: 115,573 in 2021 vs. 96,377 in 2016, a gain of 19,196 votes or nearly 20%. The Hoffa/Vairma vote collapsed, from 102,401 in 2016 to 58,012 in 2021 — a fall of 44,389, or more than 43%.

Looking again at candidate home locals, average turnout among the 165,000 members in locals led by TP candidates was 13%, while the average turnout among the 171,000 members in locals led by TU candidates was 23%. While nobody should be cheering about less than one-quarter of members turning out to vote, TU was able to generate far more excitement and engagement from Teamster members.

TU's Victory: What It Is, What It Isn't

Teamsters United's victory was a decisive rebuke of Hoffa's leadership. After 23 years in power, Hoffa's team had run out of gas. The leadership layer beneath him was thin, leaving bland labor statesmen like Vairma and number two candidate Ron Herrera to pick up the baton.

The Hoffa regime had been in decline for many years, but it was his handling of the 2018 UPS contract that galvanized support for TU and created the conditions for an all-too-rare event in the U.S. labor movement: a situation where a challenger defeated an incumbent regime in a membership election.

After UPS members voted down a contract that entrenched two-tier driver positions among other concessions, Hoffa and his parcel division director Denis Taylor imposed the agreement anyway, citing an arcane section of the Teamster constitution that required two-thirds of voters to reject the contract in cases where turnout was below 50%. UPS members channeled their anger into campaigning for TU, leading to the slate's blowout margins at UPS.

But the results were not just a vote against Hoffa. They were a vote for a different, more militant model of unionism.

While Vairma and Herrera touted their political connections and "smart strategies" that didn't involve a lot of tough talk and table-banging, O'Brien and his running-mate, 2016 reform standard-bearer Fred Zuckerman, openly called for more strikes and more confrontation with employers during the campaign.

"We're going to be a more dynamic, more militant organization," O'Brien prom-

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ised during a September 2021 debate with Vairma in Las Vegas. "We're going to take on the fights."

More than anything, the results represent what former TDU National Organizer Ken Paff likened to "opening a door." It creates opportunities for organizing—but only if members take the initiative. So rather than stifling member initiative, as we have seen under Hoffa, an O'Brien administration is less likely to stand in the way.

Paff emphasized the importance of member initiative because the TU slate is not strictly speaking a "reform" slate. Rather, it's a coalition slate, including TDU-aligned reform elements and others that are less committed.

It's a different dynamic than previous elections, in that part of the opposition slate represents a split from the incumbent leadership. O'Brien himself was elected in 2011 and 2016 as an Eastern Region VP on Hoffa's slate, and three other TU slate members were previously Hoffa-aligned GEB members (three Teamsters Canada VPs will also continue in their positions. They were independent of both slates but endorsed Vairma).

O'Brien is not a TDU-style rank-and-file reformer. Indeed, he was a loyal Hoffa lieutenant for many years. In that capacity, he helped to impose contracts and threatened reform challengers to Hoffa-aligned local union officials, most notably in Rhode Island Local 251. There, in a speech caught on tape in 2014, O'Brien said that anyone running against his ally, incumbent Joe Bairos, would have a "major problem" after the election and would "need to be punished."

The Independent Review Board (IRB), an entity charged with eliminating corruption in the Teamsters, levied a 14-day suspension from all union positions on O'Brien for his actions. O'Brien has since apologized for his actions, saying that he's "not that guy anymore." In the process, he has won over many of those he wronged in the past. This includes Local 251 head Matt Taibi, the TDU-aligned reformer who defeated Bairos.

"He reached out to build unity to take on the employers — and we took the olive branch," said Taibi. "Since then, we've stood shoulder to shoulder to win strikes, organizing drives, and contract campaigns."

In a vote of confidence, Taibi joined the TU slate, and will serve as Eastern Region Vice President. Local 251 voted 91% for O'Brien in the 2021 election.

Unlike many other Hoffa loyalists, O'Brien can also point to a bonafide track record of militancy. In a report on the Teamster election in a freight industry publication, an industry executive noted that "[O'Brien] is feared inside UPS for being a no-compromise hardliner. In any situation involving his local [Boston Local 25], [UPS] felt it had no good way to control him."

He tried to bring some of this fighting approach to national negotiations when Hoffa appointed him Parcel Division director after the 2016 election. But after his insistence on a unifying negotiating strategy that involved including Zuckerman, Hoffa's 2016 opponent, on the bargaining committee, Hoffa fired O'Brien, leading to his break with the incumbent administration.

Since then he's continued advocating a militant anti-concessions approach. He was a leading figure in the "vote no" campaign against the 2018 UPS contract. And tellingly, one of his first actions after winning the 2021 election was to fly out to Seattle to walk the picket line with striking Teamster ready-mix drivers.

TDU and the Necessity of Coalitions

Still, it is fair to ask: why did TDU back such a coalition slate, which includes elements that are far from sympathetic to the aims it has pursued for almost 50 years? Simply put, it was the best available option.

Given Teamster politics in general and the reform movement in particular, a "pure" reform slate was not in the cards — not only in the sense that such a slate would not have had a serious shot at winning, but that there wasn't a large enough layer of reform leadership ready to vie for power.

While it punches well above its weight, as it has for decades, TDU is nowhere near big enough to go it alone. A coalition slate was the only realistic path forward.

Given that O'Brien and Zuckerman were going to run regardless of TDU's position, there were two alternatives to backing TU. The first would have been to run a third "pure" reform slate with the forces available. The second would have been to abstain from the election. TDU leaders recognized that both alternatives were non-starters.

In terms of running on its own, the reform contingent was too small to field a viable slate. Also, such a slate would only have split the reform/anti-Hoffa vote, potentially paving the way for Hoffa's chosen successor.

As for abstaining, the likely outcome would have been the marginalization if not outright liquidation of TDU as a movement. The layer of Teamster members who orient towards TDU would have simply joined up with TU and/or disengaged entirely. It is impossible to see how TDU could have retained relevance in the union without getting involved in the leadership election.

This kind of calculation is nothing new for TDU. Even with Ron Carey in the 1990s, the first and so far only reform Teamster General President, TDU was always a partner in a coalition.

When Carey was first elected in 1991, in the first direct election of top Teamster officials, TDU had a more prominent role. But this was due more to necessity than to Carey's political or ideological alignment with TDU. Carey was a complete outsider, a militant leader of his Queens-based Local 804 who nonetheless voted Republican and had little union experience beyond his home local. With virtually no support among Teamster officials, he had few options for coalition partners, and went with what he could get.

Thanks to heroic grassroots organizing led by TDU, Carey managed to get on the ballot with 15.5 percent of convention delegates backing him. He was able to win in 1991 because of TDU's support, but also because the Teamster old guard split between two competing slates, neither of which fully accepted that there was going to be an election where they would actually have to campaign to win.

In that specific context, Carey was able to prevail with a more reform-oriented slate that included several rank-and-file Teamsters. Once in office Carey remained wary of TDU, and indeed expected it to disband after his victory, having achieved the goal of getting him elected.

He continued to rely on TDU's support, particularly as the old guard dug in and sought to undermine Carey's every initiative. But it would be wrong to view this as a political alignment. It was a coalition.

In 1996 when he ran as an incumbent, Carey found more support within the Teamster officialdom. His electoral coalition shifted, with TDU taking a lesser role.

Carey's new coalition was reflected in his 1996 slate. It still included TDU reformers, but also featured several candidates whose commitment to Teamster reform was questionable at best. Several later ended up getting expelled from the union, and some even went to jail — including one of O'Brien's predecessors as head of Local 25, George Cashman.

Beyond the makeup of his slate, Carey also backed away from TDU-style grassroots campaigning in favor of more traditional big-dollar electioneering. This is what led him to hire the campaign consultants who engaged in the illegal campaign fundraising schemes that ultimately got Carey himself expelled from the Teamsters in 1997 (he was later acquitted of all wrongdoing, but never reinstated).

Despite its reduced role, and misgivings about the new slate, TDU endorsed Carey's re-election bid in 1996. Then, unlike in 1991, he was up against an energized old guard that had unified around its standard-bearer, James P. Hoffa. In a pitched battle, TDU once again played a decisive role in Carey's victory, although the win was overturned due to the abovementioned illegal fundraising schemes.

It was this coalition of TDU-style reformers, sympathetic militants, and old-guard power brokers that was leading the union when Carey orchestrated the 1997 UPS strike, widely recognized as one of the

biggest U.S. labor wins in recent decades.

The point of recounting this history is not to besmirch Carey's legacy, nor to second-guess TDU's decisions in the 1990s. Rather, it is to emphasize that efforts to reform the Teamsters in a more militant direction have always involved coalitions with non-reformers.

Going much further back in Teamster history, well before TDU's time, Teamster organizer and Trotskyist leader Farrell Dobbs spoke of the importance of coalition building in his efforts to build the organizing campaign that ultimately led to the National Master Freight Agreement (NMFA), the contract that transformed the Teamsters into one of the most powerful unions in the U.S.

While never forgetting the importance of the rank and file organizing that helped him transform the Teamsters in Minneapolis, Dobbs recognized that broadening his campaign to build an industrial union in transportation would require working with some experienced Teamster officials who did not share his vision of unionism, to put it mildly. As he recalled:

"There was ample room for contributions from all committee members. Due to their standing within the IBT, older heads could win us allies elsewhere in the movement; they were also able to give practical assistance by drawing upon useful aspects of their past experience. The younger leaders, in turn, compensated for their inexperience in several ways: they contributed energy and militancy to the campaign; they knew the industry and the tricks used by the bosses; and they were close to the union rank and file. In addition, the committee was cemented together by common acceptance of mutually determined objectives, a factor serving to generate a spirit of good will" (*Teamster Power*, 267-68).

While recognizing the limits of drawing historical analogies, we can also recognize the enduring importance of coalition building in the decades-long effort to advance the Teamster reform project.

What To Expect?

O'Brien and Teamsters United take office having already won some important gains for Teamster members at the union's nominating convention last June. Most notably, these include constitutional reforms that:

- Mandate including rank-and-file members on all bargaining committees;
- Guarantee strike benefits starting on day one instead of making strikers wait a week;
- Close the two-thirds rule loophole that Hoffa used to impose the 2018 UPS contract; and
- Ban imposing contract supplements and riders that have been rejected by the membership (these are addenda to the master contract that cover workers in a particular job or geographic area).

Teamsters United failed to pass other constitutional reforms at the convention. These included proposals to safeguard the provision that candidates for international office need support from only five percent of convention delegates to be nominated (Hoffa tried to raise the threshold, a move that would have prevented every previous opposition candidate since Ron Carey from getting on the ballot); require that top officers have at least two years' experience as rank and file Teamsters; and close a loophole on salary caps for IBT staff.

Nonetheless, the reforms that did pass mark a sea change from previous Teamster conventions, when reformers' goals consisted simply of getting their slate nominated, and getting out of the convention physically unscathed. Even in 1996, when Carey was the incumbent, Hoffa had a nearly equal number of delegates focused on derailing the convention. This made any substantive discussion of union business or constitutional amendments virtually impossible.

Constitutional amendments aside, the real test of Teamsters United leadership will begin once they take office in March. An early indicator will be negotiations for the national carhaul contract, set to expire on May 31, 2022 after a one-year extension. This is a contract covering 4,000 Teamsters who get cars and trucks from auto plants and rail yards to dealerships.

While a relatively small contract, carhaul is a core Teamster industry, and known for militancy. When Hoffa negotiated their last contract in 2015, members rejected it by 87%. They then rejected a second deal a year later, and finally ratified a third agreement in March 2017 that eliminated the concessions in the previous deals.

With carhaul members frustrated by management's efforts to implement two-tier wage rates and other contract violations, this round of negotiations will be an opportunity for Teamsters United to make good on their promises of militant, no-concessions bargaining.

Big Test at UPS

But the big test for Teamsters United will be the UPS contract, which expires on July 31, 2023. Now covering roughly 310,000 workers in nearly every community across the country, this is not only the biggest Teamster contract; it is the largest private sector union contract in North America. What happens at UPS will have ramifications for the entire U.S. labor movement.

O'Brien has already set out some key goals for the 2023 UPS negotiations: eliminating the two-tier driver classifications that Hoffa allowed; raising part-timers' starting pay from $14 to $20 an hour; and reining in subcontracting and so-called "personal vehicle drivers," UPS's attempt to "Uberize" its delivery service.

Members are already talking of the need to prepare for a strike at UPS. O'Brien has echoed this sentiment, referencing the $300 million in the IBT strike fund waiting to be used, and promising that "UPS will be the example." In line with the constitutional reforms he fought for, he has also emphasized rank-and-file involvement in negotiations.

A key early indicator of O'Brien's approach to UPS will be his pick for IBT Parcel Division Director — the position from which Hoffa fired him.

Appointing someone with a track record of organizing and aggressive negotiating, perhaps more closely aligned with TDU, could signal that O'Brien intends to put his militant rhetoric into action.

O'Brien has also made clear that he sees the 2023 UPS contract as directly tied to the IBT's ability to organize new workers. As he stated at one of the candidate forums in September, "if we're negotiating concessionary contracts and we're negotiating substandard agreements, why would any member, why would any person want to join the Teamsters Union?"

Nowhere is this question more urgent than at Amazon, the viciously anti-union global retailer that is fast encroaching on UPS's territory in shipping and logistics.

The IBT passed a resolution to organize Amazon at its convention last year, and both slates emphasized this as a crucial task. But O'Brien promised a more militant approach. "I want Amazon to know that the Teamsters are coming for them. We're coming for them hard," he said in October.

Organizing Amazon will necessarily be a long-term project, but it will be impossible without a strong UPS contract. And while it is likely a task for multiple unions, the Teamsters' reach throughout the transportation, logistics, and warehouse industries means that it has a key role to play. O'Brien now has an opportunity to scale up the campaign beyond the warehouse-by-warehouse approach we have seen so far. Along with the UPS contract, Amazon is likely the task that will define his presidency.

Regardless of what O'Brien does or does not do, the ability to continue transforming the Teamsters depends on an active, organized rank and file. That's where TDU comes in, with increased credibility in recent years based on its leadership in organizing the vote-no campaign at UPS in 2018 and helping to deliver Teamsters United's landslide election victory.

Still, cynicism remaining from the 2018 contract imposition specifically, and decades of Hoffa deal-making and detachment more broadly, remain a major barrier to overcome. The opportunity for change in the Teamsters may be here, but Teamsters now face the challenge to make that change a reality. ■

Using Our Tax Dollars for Repression: **Billions for Philippine Military & Police** By John Witeck

A murderous president and his military men: U.S. tax dollars at work. Socialist Project

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES in the United States and around the world are calling for an end to military aid to the Philippines in solidarity with the people of the Philippines. Now finally the U.S. Congress has the opportunity to pass the Philippine Human Rights Act (PHRA), which would suspend aid to the Philippines until the repressive measures and killings are halted.

Representative Susan Wild (PA) has introduced this vital bill and efforts continue to enlist supporters in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate.

The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, the Communications Workers of America, the AFL-CIO, and many other church and community organizations are supporting the PHRA initiative.

Sadly, the Biden administration and U.S. Congress continue to approve billions of dollars to the Pentagon and to authorize funding for military aid to corrupt, authoritarian regimes such as in the Philippines.

In the 2019 federal budget, according to the War Resisters League, 27% of revenues went to military uses ($857 billion) with another 20% ($644 billion) for past wars, including interest on the national debt.

John Witeck, an activist in Honolulu, Hawaii, is a Global Council member of the International Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP).

That pattern continued in 2020 and 2021. That's nearly half of the total U.S. government's budget, leaving much less for human needs and services, unemployment assistance, health care, education, infrastructure repair, and environmental protection during the COVID pandemic.

Especially disturbing and obnoxious are the monies given to governments like the Philippines which are used to repress their citizens. In 2021, nearly $2 billion in arms purchases from major weapons manufacturers — Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Bell Textron and General Electric — went to the brutal and murderous regime of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, and Congress failed to halt these deals.

U.S. direct military aid to Duterte's regime totaled over $193.5 million in 2018, in addition to other forms of military aid. Since 2016, the year when Rodrigo Duterte was elected Philippine president, the U.S. has sent over $550 million dollars in military aid to the Philippines.

During Duterte's term in office nearly 300 Philippine journalists, human rights lawyers, trade unionists, peasant leaders, community organizers and environmentalists have been assassinated. In fact, the Philippines is second globally only to Brazil in being the deadliest country for environmentalists.

Duterte is widely and justifiably vilified for his barbarous "War on Drugs" that is estimated to have resulted in the summary non-judicial executions of nearly 30,000 individuals in poor communities by police and government-sponsored vigilantes.

Militarized Response to COVID-19

Duterte, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has used the crisis to further militarize the country and repress labor and people's organizations, and his police and military have even arrested individuals delivering relief and food to those in need.

This militarization has worsened the public health situation for millions of Filipinos, leading to the jailing of hundreds of political prisoners, many of whom are farmers, trade unionists and human rights advocates.

With Duterte's recent signing of the Anti-Terror Law which he pushed through the legislature, the country is under virtual martial law. The new measure gives huge discretion to Duterte in defining what a terrorist is and imposes severe penalties on individuals and groups targeted by the Duterte regime.

Because of the Philippine government's militarized and repressive response and the lack of financial aid, testing, adequate health care, food and services, the Philippines has one of the highest numbers of Covid-19 cases in the region, and the situation is worsening. International aid and food assistance are urgently needed rather than wasteful military spending.

Urge Passage of the PHRA

In May of this year, Filipinos will elect a new president, but some of the leading candidates, like the son of former Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, are not likely to make any changes in the deplorable human rights situation.

We need to urge Congress to support the Philippine Human Rights Act (PHRA) and to oppose any further assistance to the Philippine military and police. Our tax dollars can be better used for pandemic relief efforts at home and in other countries overwhelmed by the global disease.

This would be a truer measure of national security rather than giving funds to dictators and human rights violators. ■

Successes and Challenges in Poland: *The Women's Mass Protest, 2016-21*

By Justyna Zając

ON OCTOBER 3, 2016, I was about to teach my regular Monday morning class at the University of Warsaw, a day in the life of a college professor. This Monday would be different, though.

When I entered the university campus, I was astonished to see my female colleagues and female students all dressed in black — the color of mourning.

In the afternoon, the vast majority of us left the campus and headed in the same direction — the Castle Square — to join thousands of women and manifest our anger, resentment and resistance. Our main goal was to prevent the Polish parliament from adopting a bill that would tighten the abortion law, already one of the most restrictive in Europe.

Adopted in 1993, the abortion act limited a termination of pregnancy to three instances: when pregnancy was a result of rape or incest, when a fetus showed risks of severe damage or illness, or when the life of a woman was endangered.[1]

The new legislative proposal went further. It imposed a total ban on abortions and equated a termination of pregnancy with a criminal act. Women who had abortion were to face up to five years in prison, and doctors who were found to have assisted with a termination of pregnancy were to face criminal prosecution.

These proposed draconian measures raised women's anxiety and fears over their health and life. Protesters held banners bearing slogans "Besides wombs we have also brains!," "My body, my choice!," "I am, I think, I decide!," "We want doctors, not missionaries!" and "Free choice!"

Despite the gloomy weather, the demonstration lasted a few hours. Similar protests took place in over a hundred Polish cities and towns and attracted more than 150,000 people. Wherever people took to the streets, their anger, resentment and resistance mixed with hope, solidarity and empowerment. Although protests focused primarily on reproductive rights, many women expressed their opposition to marginalization and submission, deeply rooted in the Polish culture.

It was a fight for equality, justice and dignity. The so-called Black Monday, as it became known, was the peak of the first wave of women's protests — "Black Protests" or "Women's Strike." In the months and years to come, Poland would witness numerous demonstrations, marches and rallies, and a wave of public debates and social media campaigns defending and promoting women's rights.

The mobilization of women succeeded. The proposed anti-abortion bill was defeated. Nonetheless, new restrictions were soon to follow.

Tragic Consequences and Feminist Resurgence

In October 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal — highly politicized under the current regime — opined that a termination of pregnancy in the case of fetal anomalies was unconstitutional.

The Constitutional Tribunal's decision has already led to tragic consequences. In September 2021, Izabela, 30, died of septic shock after doctors delayed removing her fetus (diagnosed with congenital anomalies) until the fetus showed no signs of life.

Izabela was one many Polish women who was refused a life-saving abortion. Following Izabela's death, another nationwide protest erupted. Its main motto read "Not One More."

"Women's Strike" activists have continued to mobilize their supporters against restricting women's rights. Even though the nationwide mass protests did not prevent the government from restricting abortion rights, women's mass mobilization has scored at least three victories: it reinvigorated feminism, broke down a myth of the so-called abortion compromise, and called into question the Catholic Church's interference in public affairs.

The year 2016 was when "feminism started in Poland," noted Ewa Majewska, philosopher and feminist activist. Whereas before 2016 women and feminist groups comprised primarily urban educated middle-class and academic and non-profit organizations,[2] in the past five years the women's movement became much more inclusive, interclass and nationwide.

The most recent protests have drawn women from different social and economic classes, representing various political affiliations and religious viewpoints. Although it originated in big cities, social mobilization has now spilled over to small towns and tiny rural areas where street marches, demonstrations and rallies were staged for the very first time.

Many protesters have not identified themselves as feminists or even activists, but shared the same feeling that "enough was enough." Along with the traditional forms of protests, new forms of dissent emerged.

As Elżbieta Korolczuk observed, "of key importance for 'scaling up' of protests was the fact that the mobilization followed the logic of connective action based on personalized engagement, in which communication became an important element of organizational structure."[3]

Social media served as crucial platforms for articulating feelings, hopes and expectations and sharing thoughts, ideas and opinions about gender inequality. Social networking sites, blogs, and websites promoted public debate over women's rights. Social campaigns were organized undr the hashtags #strajkkobiet (#womensstrike), #piekłokobiet (#womenshell), and #polskiepiekło (#polishhell), among others.

Hundreds of thousands of Facebook users joined the best-known groups — Polish Women's Strike (*Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*) and Gals4Gals (*Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*). Facebook and Twitter became particularly important for the women's rights supporters at the time of restrictions on public gatherings imposed by the government in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The "Abortion Compromise" Myth

The women's mass protest greatly contributed to calling into question a dominant narrative on reproductive rights and reproductive health. For almost three decades, the harsh abortion law of 1993 was widely recognized and adopted in Polish public debates under the moniker "abortion compromise." The term suggested that social and

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Taking the message to the Church: "Girls just wanna have rights."

political disagreements over the termination of pregnancy had been settled through compromise and mutual concessions of all interest groups.

In public debate abortion became associated with homicide, killing or murder, and a pro-choice position with evil, immorality or even criminality. Imposed by anti-abortion groups, this narrative became so dominant and effective that even feminist activists believed that the language of discourse was set in stone.[4]

The year 2016 revealed that this was not the case. The legitimacy of the "abortion compromise" was challenged, often described as nothing more than a "myth." Demands for reproductive rights and changes of the existing abortion law grew louder and wider.

The public was reminded that the restrictive 1993 abortion law had been passed in spite of great and bitter political controversies and with a violation of democratic rules. Although in 1992 1.3 million Poles signed a petition demanding a referendum on the abortion law, the referendum had never been held.

One would not need a crystal ball to predict the outcome of a nationwide referendum on abortion. Public opinion polls showed that more than 50% of Poles supported liberalizing abortion policies and the majority believed that abortion should be allowed for social and personal reasons, including "difficult living conditions."[5]

Criticism of Church's Meddling

Despite the episcopate's claim that the Church does not make laws in Poland (a claim that's true on the surface), the Catholic lobby exerted an immense influence on laws regulating reproductive rights. In the aftermath of the collapse of communism the separation between state and church has eroded, and the political power of the Church, especially with regard to influencing social legislation, has grown.

If the truth be told, in post-1989 Poland, it was the Catholic Church that initiated and promoted a debate on abortion. The final version of the 1993 abortion law was significantly affected by the Catholic lobby.

In the years that followed, the ultraconservative Catholic groups lobbied heavily for a total ban on abortion. Their wish became a reality when the parliamentary victory of the right-wing populist Law and Justice (PiS) in 2015 laid a firm foundation for such legal changes.

The 2016 anti-abortion bill was drafted by lawyers representing a Catholic advocacy group ominously named *Ordo Iuris,* Order of Law. As soon as *Ordo Iuri*s, under the guise of citizens' initiative, submitted to the parliament a draft of the "Stop Abortion" legislative proposal, the Church supported it immediately, as did the Law and Justice party.

In many ways, it was a watershed moment. The critics of the bill did not only condemn the proposal itself but also openly criticized the Church and its excessive and unwarranted influence on public life. In fall 2020, in many cities, thousands of protesters disrupted Sunday mass services. They carried banners with slogans "Human law, not ecclesiastical law," "This is war," and "Girls just wanna have rights."

Attacks on churches were unprecedented in a country where a long-standing image of the church as a vital component of Poland's statehood and a bastion of Polish identity had never been challenged or even questioned. The Church, no longer seen as a religious institution of the faithful, was now perceived as a source of unwanted political influence, a *spiritus movens* of abusive laws, and a wellspring of social and political polarization.

In the words of a 27-year-old female student, "the church is a very conservative, antiquated institution that is heavily involved in politics and tries to impose its views on all the people and turn them against each other, dividing them into good and bad."[6]

The Main Challenges Ahead

Looking ahead, there are two main challenges that the defenders and promoters of women's rights in Poland will need to recognize and reckon with: winning the hearts and minds of our compatriots, and gaining political access.

Thus far, the majority of Poles have backed the mass women's protests. According to recent polls, 63% support the social protests sparked by the Constitutional Tribunal's decision to tighten the abortion law. The supporters vary in terms of their political preferences: 87% identify with left-wing political views, 74% with centrist views, and 62% describe themselves as neither on the left nor on the right side of the political fence. While 85% identify themselves as opponents of the government, 62% declare their indifference to the current government.[7]

Despite public support, women's rights advocates have faced a strong pushback from the conservative right-wing groups allied with the Church. Feminist activists and protesters have been depicted as "criminals," "neo-Marxists" and "nihilists" while demonstrations and social mobilization have been portrayed as a sign of a "cultural civil war."

In October 2020, Jarosław Kaczyński — the Law and Justice leader and the undisputed power broker of Poland's politics — openly accused demonstrators of seeking the destruction of the Polish nation and appealed to his supporters to "defend Poland." In response to Kaczynski's appeals, an ultranationalist group formed a "Catholic self-defense" force, a "national guard" to oppose "neo-Bolshevik revolutionaries" and "to stand in the front line of the counter-revolution fighting against extreme-left activists."[8]

State control over public media and growing power of the Church are likely to provide the government with the means to discredit the women's protests among large segments of the Polish population. As the lesson of the so-called abortion compromise teaches us, controlling the political narrative can effectively shape public opinion and marginalize political opponents.

While in 1992, 53% of Poles favored allowing abortion if a woman was facing financial difficulties, this number dropped to 20% in 2020. (Polish society is aging, and the general trend shows that the older one is, the more conservative one becomes.) Moreover, many politicians have little interest in healing social divisions and becoming consensus seekers in a society where debates over reproductive rights can further accelerate conflicts and polarization.

The vast majority of Polish politicians support the "abortion compromise" and,

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A Women's History Month Musing: **Intersectional Feminism** By Alice Ragland

"When feminism does not explicitly oppose racism, and when anti-racism does not incorporate opposition to patriarchy, race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other, and both interests lose."
—Kimberle Crenshaw

AS A BLACK and working-class mom when my children were first born, I spent time in activist spaces and organizations that seemed to have made a conscious decision to ignore the concerns of working-class families and children. Many members seemed to have adapted the neoliberal "it's not my fault you had kids" mentality, self-righteously asserting that they refuse to bring kids into such a messed-up world and creating an unwelcoming and toxic environment for the folks who did have children.

Meanwhile, these organizations did not discuss or advocate for "family-friendly" policies that would benefit the society at large such as family leave, health insurance, a better education system, and affordable childcare.

I've also been involved with environmental and anti-capitalist organizations that ignored racial justice and where members perpetuated racist microaggression after racist microaggression. I've been in sexist and heterosexist racial justice spaces in which women's rights were seen as a "distraction" and in which women were sexually harassed within the ranks.

I'm always disappointed when justice organizations perpetuate one form of oppression while preaching about another. To fight one injustice and practice another is proof that the divide-and-conquer tactics imposed upon us by those at the top are working.

As we celebrate Women's History Month 2022, the terms "intersectionality" and "intersectional feminism" are phrases that we hear more commonly in policy discussions, activist circles, and beyond. Yet often, the roots of the terms are unexamined or even co-opted and whitewashed.

Frequently, we fail to practice intersectionality within our movements. It's important to remember the background, context, and importance of intersectionality and intersectional feminism, which began with a pattern of court cases that failed to grant Black women any legal protection.

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Intersectional Feminism Before "Intersectionality" was a Term

Intersectionality is a framework for analyzing how overlapping aspects of a person's identity result in compounded experiences of oppression.

Women with multiple marginalized identities have long experienced and fought multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. Poor Black women who were domestic workers in the post-Civil War era battled dehumanizing poverty, white supremacy, lack of workers' rights, and sexual exploitation while excluded from white-led labor unions.

Sojourner Truth and, later, Ida B. Wells spoke up against the oppression and exclusion that Black women faced, advocating for Black freedom in general and Black women's right to vote in the midst of a largely anti-Black women's suffrage movement.

In the 1970s, the Combahee River Collective denounced the racism, sexism, heterosexism, and exclusion that they experienced as queer Black women in Civil Rights and feminist organizations. Countless BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) women and gender diverse people have fought multiple oppressions at once while having their unique concerns ignored by mainstream movements.

Legal Roots of Intersectionality

Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989. Crenshaw's prominent career in legal practice, teaching, and research led her to notice a pattern of court cases that failed to offer any legal protection to Black women specifically.

The U.S. legal system is rooted in white supremacy and patriarchy and has never protected Black women or Black people in general. Crenshaw pointed out the specific ways the legal system fails Black women by failing to address the intersectionality of gender and race.

Through her research, Crenshaw highlighted how the law only protected Black women as "minorities" or as "women." Both aspects of an African-American woman's identity were not protected simultaneously; they could not be protected as Black women because African Americanness and femaleness were (and often still are) treated as mutually exclusive.

Crenshaw's work provides examples of Black women who lost legal battles because the courts believed that protecting them as Black people and as women was a form of unfair "super-protection."

In the case of *DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors* (1976), five Black women sued GM because they believed that they faced unfair discrimination as Black women. Because Black women were not hired at the company before 1964, a seniority-based layoff caused all the Black women who were hired after 1970 to lose their jobs.

The plaintiffs could not claim sex discrimination because they were in a unique situation that the white women employees did not experience. However, the court rejected the plaintiffs' attempt to bring a suit as Black women in particular, rather than on behalf of African Americans or women as separate categories.

The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri decided that:

"Plaintiffs have failed to cite any decisions which have stated that Black women are a special class to be protected from discrimination . . . this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both." U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri — 413 F. Supp. 142 (E.D. Mo. 1976)

In another case, *Moore vs. Hughes Helicopter, Inc.* (1983), the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that a Black woman "could not use statistics reflecting the overall sex disparity in supervisory and upper-level labor jobs because she had not claimed discrimination as a woman but 'only' as a Black woman. The court would not entertain the notion that discrimination experienced by Black women is indeed sex discrimination." (Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race & Sex,* 215)

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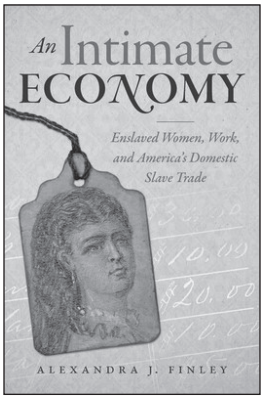
Lives of Enslaved Women

By Giselle Gerolami

An Intimate Economy:
Enslaved Women, Work, and America's Domestic Slave Trade
By Alexandra J. Finley
University of North Carolina Press, 2020,
200 pages, $22.95 paperback.



AN INTIMATE ECONOMY: Enslaved Women, Work, and America's Domestic Slave Trade, by University of Pittsburgh historian Alexandra J. Finley, examines the economic contributions of enslaved women between 1840 and 1861 in Richmond, Virginia and New Orleans, Louisiana where two of the largest slave markets were located.

While the extensive economic studies of this time period have been dominated by men, the economic value of work performed by women has gone unrecognized. The book's focus is largely on domestic and socially reproductive work as well as the sexual economy.

The book is divided into four chapters corresponding to the four case studies Finley is exploring. "Fancy" is about how lighter-skinned enslaved women were marketed for their attractiveness and fertility and looks specifically at the life of Corinna Hinton Omohundro. "Seamstress" shows how women produced the clothing worn by slaves in the slave markets and how well-dressed slaves could command higher prices.

In "Concubine," we learn the remarkable story of Sarah Ann Conner, an enslaved concubine who manages to earn, lose and then regain her freedom. Finally, "Housekeeper" tells the story of the enslaved concubine Lucy Ann Cheatham.

Corinna Hinton Omohundro was the second enslaved concubine of Silas Omohundro, an agent for slave trader Rice Ballard of Franklin & Armfield in Richmond, Virginia.

Purchased as a "fancy" at 14, she contributed to Omohundro's livelihood by providing food and clothing to the slave jail, managing boarding houses and raising her own children. After Omohundro's death in 1864 there was a court battle over his estate, which he had willed to Hinton. The courts, mostly in Pennsylvania where Omohundro owned property, did not accept that Hinton was his legal wife and entitled to his property.

Sarah Ann Conner, a slave in New Orleans, was able to save money for herself by renting, furnishing and then subletting rooms. For unknown reasons, she brokered her freedom purchase through Theophilus Freeman. She lived as a free woman for several years but, when Freeman went through bankruptcy, creditors went looking for hidden property and that included Sarah Ann Conner.

Many legal battles followed and in 1851, the Supreme Court found in her favor. However, her legal problems were not over. She was later convicted of perjury and sentenced to five years hard labor but it is not known whether or not she served that sentence.

She continued renting rooms, had a long-term relationship with a police officer, and eventually moved to Washington, D.C. where she had relatives. She adopted a daughter there and purchased property.

"Sale Suits" and Concubinage

Slave trader Hector Davis regularly paid women for sewing and his ledgers tell an interesting story. Slaves were given "sale suits" for their sale in the slave markets and the sewing was performed by women. By the 1840s ready-made suits were available for men. Northern manufacturers marketed the suits in the south and there were southern manufacturers who also marketed suits. This was the most expensive option.

Another option was pre-cut cloth that just needed to be sewed. The final option was to buy cloth and pay someone to cut and sew the suits. Davis made regular payments to Anna Davis, the wife of one of his agents, for sewing. He also made regular payments to Virginia Isham, an enslaved woman, for sewing. Not surprisingly, he paid Isham considerably less than he paid to Anna Davis.

In one of the author's more notable asides, she explains that although by the mid-19th century sewing was considered a task for women stemming from their "natural" ability, that had not always been the case.

In fact, male tailors dominated and fiercely guarded their trade into the 19th century until simple mantuas became more common and women began making clothing commercially.

Lucy Ann Cheatham was purchased by John Hagan, who brought her to New Orleans where she became his enslaved concubine. She had a daughter who was known as Dolly but who, unbeknownst to her husband, she named Frederika Bremer Hagan after a Swedish anti-slavery reformer.

Lucy had three other boys before Hagan died in 1856. He had emancipated her and his children shortly before his death. He bequeathed to her ten thousand dollars and a small property which was a tiny portion of his estate, the rest of which went to his mother and siblings.

The will was not contested, possibly because of how little Cheatham was given. She ended up in bankruptcy by 1863 but was able to rebuild after the war.

Cheatham had lifelong, meaningful friendships with other women who were similarly situated. There is no evidence that Sarah Ann Conner and Lucy Ann Cheatham knew each other but we find out, in the epilogue, that when Finley went to visit the graveyard where they are buried, she discovered that they are buried beside each other.

Finley consciously chooses the term "enslaved concubine" in order to emphasize the lack of choice in these relationships. She grapples with the issue of love and consent by trying to move beyond the debate to consider the specific realities of the lives of enslaved concubines:

"According to the logic of nineteenth-century contract law, enslaved concubines could not consent to a sexual relationship; yet white slaveholders fetishized their willingness. Faced with severe violence or other punishments, enslaved concubines faced a "choice" that was no choice at all. The men who enslaved them could thus create the appearance of choice for enslaved concubines. Historians must be careful not to interpret enslaved women's survival strategies and lack of options as consent. Trapped in impossible situations, enslaved concubines in the slave trade

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prioritized survival while still resisting in subtle but meaningful ways." (11)

Privileging, Oppression and Resistance

Finley's exposition and exploration of the phenomenon of "fancy" women is possibly the strongest part of this book. "Fancy" women were given expensive clothing, jewelry, gloves and stockings and were meant to approximate white women but were sexually available to white men and could be used and discarded.

From the racist privileging of lighter-skinned enslaved women to the assumptions around the sexual availability of these women to the delusions of consent, this intriguing topic could easily be a book on its own.

The organization of the book is somewhat problematic to the extent that the content of the chapters does not correspond well with the chapter titles. All three women were enslaved concubines who performed domestic work which including sewing. There is not much in the chapter "Housekeeper" about the particulars of domestic work. Only "Seamstress," which focuses on an individual slave trader's logs recording payments to different women for sewing services, is able to develop the named topic. Perhaps it would have been better to tell these women's stories in a different way, rather than trying to assign a theme to sum up their lives.

Without elaborating, Finley dismisses Marx and Engels for "quickly abandoning a materialist inquiry of women and relying on familiar assumptions about female nature." (9) She is kinder to Marxist feminists such as Mary Inman and to other feminist thinkers.

The central thesis of the book regarding the economic value of the work performed by enslaved women is asserted throughout the book but not developed sufficiently. There is heavy reliance on ledgers of transactions by slave owners. What does this information tell us? It's only possible to extrapolate so much.

The women whose lives Finley examines are interesting in their own right, but there is not much connection between what little we know about them and what we might glean about the economic value of the work they did.

Finley deserves credit for choosing to highlight arguably one of the historically most oppressed groups. Instead of focusing on their oppression, she looks at what they contributed in terms of economic, social and emotional labor but also, under the most dire circumstances, at their small acts of resistance which can inspire all of us who are fighting for a better future. ■

Intersectional Feminism — *continued from page 8*

This assumed mutual exclusivity of gender and race has forced Black women to choose between their intersecting minoritized identities: to claim discrimination as women or as African Americans, but not as both.

If they claimed discrimination based on their combination of race and gender, they risked not being protected under the law. These cases prompted an examination of intersectionality not only in the legal sense, but also in the countless other experiences in which people with multiple oppressions are not protected or represented.

Intersectional Feminism

With this background in mind, the notion of intersectional feminism challenges feminist movements that historically centered heterosexual middle-class white women.

Intersectional feminism centers the voices of people who face overlapping oppressions. All progressive social movements should adopt an intersectional feminist framework to ensure representation and amplification of the most marginalized voices.

In our movements, it's important to continuously ask ourselves how we are showing up for people who simultaneously experience racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, neocolonialism, imperialism, ableism, and the myriad other systems of oppression.

Without intersectional frameworks within social movements, marginalized people will feel alienated and excluded, and the movement itself will be weaker.

Audre Lorde said: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained."

Intersectional feminism recognizes that all oppression is connected and that one form of oppression cannot end while another still exists. When we consciously and unconsciously perpetuate one form of oppression while advocating for the eradication of another, we all lose.

In the aftermath of World War II Western European countries were forced to give up their colonies. In response, the USSR produced a number of posters as a way to their assert political and economic difference from imperialism. The poster above expresses international solidarity and friendship with women of different races — European, Asian and African — but the European is placed in the foreground as if to imply she is leading the liberation struggle. The graphic to the right is the work of Oksana Briukhovetska. It is a contemporary remake that alters that perception by placing the black woman is in front, illustrating the role of black women in today's struggles.

Our movements are stronger when we move beyond generic inclusivity principles and dry anti-racist statements without actually doing the work.

A good place to start is to ask yourself: how am I showing up for BIPOC, for queer folk, for gender non-conforming folk? How am I working against anti-Blackness, against sexual harassment, and against environmental devastation decimating the poorest communities?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." In light of this women's history month and beyond, let's keep this principle in mind by actively embodying and practicing intersectional feminism in all of our movements. ■

Challenging the Comfortable

By M. Colleen McDaniel

The Right to Sex:
Feminism in the Twenty-First Century
By Amia Srinivasan
Macmillan: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021,
304 pages, $18 paperback.

AMIA SRINIVASAN'S *THE Right to Sex* is a riveting retelling of feminist theory on sex and sexual liberation. In a collection of essays following a 2014 publication (also titled "The Right to Sex"), Srinivasan asks the questions: "Who has a right to sex?" and "What does it mean to have a right to sex?"

Her 2014 essay was written in response to Isla Vista mass shooter Elliot Rodger's incel ("involuntary celibate") manifesto, which claimed that "hot blondes" must die because they refused to have sex with him, leaving him sexless and alone.

Srinivasan's primary argument in her book speaks far more broadly to the contemporary feminist movement. Srinivasan states that it is not her goal to sit in the comfortable. Rather, she wants her readers to be uncomfortable — perhaps a reflection of recent movements, especially the 2020 BLM uprising, whose messaging centered around the idea that liberation and allyship are uncomfortable.

Srinivasan's primary goal in the book seems to be framing the current state of sexual liberation — not synonymous with a right to sex — in the lens of intersectional feminism. Feminist theory, she argues, is based on women working together to "articulate the unsaid, the former unsayable;"

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Amia Srinivasan University of Oxford

but this theory too often ends up leaving out the particulars of everyday life, instead acting as a perspective "from on high," leaving what I read to be the "Ivory Tower" to tell women about what their lives really mean.

This bold yet credible statement claims that real women don't have time for a theory that comes from on high, nor for a theory with which they cannot relate. Each essay of the book evidences this by pointing out the major gaps in leading feminist theories, which reflect predominantly white and largely either straight or cis-lesbian perspectives.

Addressing Women's Real Lives

Srinivasan's assertation evokes Audre Lorde's many critiques of academic feminists, particularly Lorde's commentary on (white) academic feminists' nasty tendency to avoid differences among women.

Have feminist theorists, or perhaps has feminist theory itself, become so "on high" and removed from real women that we do not want our theory to apply to the real everyday experiences of real women? Or do white, cisgendered feminists not want all women to have the access to share in our understanding of sexual oppression?

Srinivasan concludes that feminism cannot just be about redistributing and taking power, but also must be about what we do with that power. In being a doctoral candidate myself, and therefore frequently exposed to the academic feminists "on high," I can certainly attest to her argument.

I have heard it directly from some academic women's mouths, asking why we should bother sharing the academic literature with the general public when "they do not trust us" or "cannot ever really understand because they do not have the training?"

The Right to Sex is, at its simplest, a challenge to competing feminist theories on sex and sexual liberation in understandable terms. However, at a greater depth, Srinivasan's perspective on sex and desire opens a much broader conversation that contemporary times are demanding from feminist theory. We need a canon that portrays a more meaningful, more applicable truth about our potential (read, "not yet achieved") sexual liberation, meaning one that can be devoted to and practiced by all women.

Throughout these essays, Srinivasan shares how recent sexual movements are not only rewriting politics, but also rewriting and redefining what it means to be a person with sexual desire who also wants to be desired.

In revisiting conflicting feminist theories of the past and present, men's rights activists' arguments, and the individual feelings of real women and men, Srinivasan addresses what a feminist theory of sexuality that applies to all women could look like.

This needed conversation asks, when we look at where feminism has been in moments throughout history, does our theory apply? Can we bring these theories into an intersectional feminism? Does bringing past theories together into conversation reveal something new through an intersectional lens?

I read Srinivasan's answer to be "yes." By this very argument she indirectly writes a new feminist theory canon of sexual liberation — one that applies to real women with many different interconnecting identities.

Who Has a Right to Sex?

Sexual assault is the best place to start answering this question, as it would seem to have the most obvious answer. When asked, the majority of people would say they agreed that rape is not acceptable (except maybe the incels, but we will get to them).

Sexual assault is paradoxical in that most people may agree that rape is bad and causes harm, yet we cannot agree on what qualifies as rape, who can rape or can be raped, nor who gets to be punished for rape.

Therefore we have a system that does not believe white women's accusations, does not count Black and brown women's accusations, refuses to punish white men even when they admit to rape, and believes that Black and brown men who rape are just doing what is expected of them.

To Srinivasan, rape is the assumption of a right to sex. This is why men identified in #MeToo were so infuriated. Their claim to the right to sex was called out and put to trial (not literally of course, because few white rapists go to jail).

A lack of actual punishment for powerful men who are "disgraced but loved, ruined but rich, never to be employed again until they are employed again" (Srinivasan, 31) is a stance from Patriarchy and Capitalism in the Post-#MeToo era that rape may be bad, but that these men do not deserve punishment for it; thus men do indeed have the right to sex.

Of course, as previously stated, Srinivasan asserts that no one has a right to sex. Anyone who has taken Women's Studies 101 knows the irritating necessity of the clause that must always follow this assertion: not even those men who feel entitled to it have the right to sex.

Srinivasan's essays emphasize this clause by juxtaposing men who feel entitled to sex (for example, incels or men who are otherwise not aligned with the norms/expectations of hegemonic western masculinity) with men who do not feel entitled to sex, but who are systemically labeled as sexually undesirable (brown, Black, disabled, fat, gay...).

She asks, "when is being sexually or romantically marginalized a facet of oppression, and when is it just a matter of bad luck, one of life's small tragedies?" (115)

Feminist Discourse on Desire

Srinivasan reminds us that although harmful norms from systemic oppressions determine who is and who is not sexually desirable, these norms do not necessarily determine who is or who is not having sex. Elliot Rodgers and a disturbingly long line of murderous incels to follow never made this distinction.

There is still not a right to sex, although we can call attention to how certain groups of people are not systemically seen as desirable because of the existing oppression (Patriarchy, White Supremacy, Capitalism, Abelism). If only these men could see that their proclaimed involuntary celibacy was drawn up by the same violent masculinity they uphold.

Feminists who read this book may feel that the arguments I've described so far are not at all shocking. Many of us, especially those of us who are subscribed to a socialist publication, may already feel familiar with the argument Srinivasan presents. Admittedly, I felt this way when reading the first essay on sexual assault.

However, Srinivasan dares to go into more murky territory throughout her essays on pornography and student-teacher consensual amorous relationships.

In her discussion of pornography, Srinivasan leans into her insistence that feminist theory must be for all women. She details that feminists have historically been wrongly placed into separate camps: pro-porn or anti-porn. In reality, a close look at these supposedly "opposing" views demonstrated that most pro-porn feminists have not felt that porn was necessarily good, but rather that legislation is not the ideal way to confront the problem that porn poses.

It is indeed this legislation (and the men in power who determine it) that poses a threat to the end of women's subordination. Many of the legal regulations actually harm the women who work in porn, rather than regulate the male-dominated industry and the men who lead it.

Srinivasan points out that the harms of porn are not in the BDSM and kink-oriented porn. The subordination of women is in the cum-shot and the normalization of (some) women's bodies as "fuckable." We have also passed the point of no return in regulating porn — it can and will continue to be made and easily accessed.

Women's sexual liberation, in the time of mass-produced pornography, relies on reclaiming our own desire. Srinivasan states that although it is currently unclear how to achieve it, we are in need of a "negative education" — one that tells young people that "the authority on what sex is…lies with them."

In doing so, we redefine desire. Redefining the bounds and limits of desire, she argues, is where the feminist movement needs a radical pivot.

I have to admit that I felt extreme validation in her argument. For the past few years, I have taught the Psychology of Human Sexuality to undergraduates, and consistently feel the irony of the feminist movement's views on sexual desire and gender.

I spend the entirety of my semester convincing my class that biological sex and gender are two distinct identities, and that in many ways, both are socially constructed.

At the start of biology week, I begin with diagrams of fetal development of genitalia to show my students how similar all of our bits and pieces are, followed by videos of intersex individuals' experiences of being

Polish Women's Protest — *continued from page 7*

taking into account the nature of Poland's domestic politics, it is in their best interest to steer clear of antagonizing the Catholic Church. Although several female MPs from the center-left parties have been actively involved in defending women's rights, they are long on ideals but short on votes.

Defenders and promoters of women's rights need to increase their political representation. There is no other way in a state where grassroots initiatives and movements can impact the legislative process only when their power to lobby is granted as legitimate by the central government, and in a society — chronically dissatisfied with life and lacking the ability to affect the surrounding reality — that expects social and household benefits to be provided by the state.

Without votes in the legislative chambers, "Black Monday" marches and "Not One More" demonstrations are destined to remain just a public display of negative identification *vis-à-vis* the heavy-handed state. The next parliamentary elections in Poland are to be held in 2023 **—** and then, in 2027 and 2031…

But to transform a mass mobilization into an effective legislative lobby, women's rights groups need to bring their influence, manifested in the streets, to bear on the political process. It will be a daunting task considering that the right-wing and center parties have continued to tower over the Polish political scene. ■

Notes

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3. Korolczuk, *op.cit.*, 94.
4. Agnieszka Graff, *Świat bez kobiet. Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym,* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2008), Izabella Desperak, "Antykoncepcja, aborcja i ... eutanazja. O upolitycznieniu praw reprodukcyjnych w Polsce," Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. *Folia Sociologica,* No. 30, 2003.
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forced into binary sexes via genital mutilation surgeries.

Then I get into the binary gender socialization of boys and girls throughout development. The classic Psychology 101 mantra of "everything is influenced by both nature and nurture" guides us. However, when sexual orientation week rolls around, I find myself clinging to the politics I was raised in: "we can't control who we love," "love is love," "I was born this way."

Srinivasan's theoretical argument sets a new path for feminists to forge: *desire is not innate, rather it can be shaped and molded by our socialization and politics.* She poses the question, "Are we first attracted to ways of being in the world, including bodily ways, which we later learn to associate with certain specific parts of the body?" (110)

While Srinivasan is drawing a philosophical question, as a psychologist I will rephrase it to ask, "Is desire also socially constructed?" She gets at an answer to this by drawing on the radical self-love movements from black, fat, and disabled women.

These movements ask "not whether there is a right to sex (there isn't), but whether there is a duty to transfigure, as best we can, our desires." Lindy West for example argues that we must change our perceptions, "looking at certain bodies — one's own and others' — sidelong, inviting and coaxing a gestalt shift from revulsion to admiration." (90)

In my undergraduate Psychology of Women class, a fellow student member of our campus's Gay-Straight Alliance profusely argued "you can't choose to be gay" and stormed out of lecture after my professor described a study of a sample of late-life lesbians who actively chose to be with women over men. I wonder how she would handle Srinivasan's argument that our sexual desires can and do change, sometimes even at will.

Distinguishing Desire from Systemic Harm

Srinivasan points out the "ugly" reality that oppressive systems "[shape] who we do and do not desire and love, and who does and does not desire and love us." (95)

She argues that a feminism that uncovers liberated sexuality embraces the experiences and truths of many queer individuals that "our sexual preferences can and do alter, sometimes under the operation of our own wills — not automatically, but not impossibly either." (91)

This nuance is promising for me as an educator. How can I claim that "nature and nurture" are a balance, but then cling to biological essentialism only in discussions of desire?

In "On Not Sleeping with Your Students," Srinivasan explores bans on student-teacher consensual amorous relationships as a contemporary fight against sexual harassment — a policy I have been pushing on my campus for the past two years of my doctoral program.

Srinivasan shares that some feminists have teamed up with the narcissistic male ego to argue that these policies are merely a control on adult sexual desire and are thus demeaning and moralistic.

Srinivasan critiques professors who argue that their students truly desire them, pointing out that most often, such interpretations are perverse, a pornification of mere student admiration. She argues that students' desire and admiration for their professors are misplaced for the desire to learn and become the teacher.

Challenging a professor who claims his student desires him, Srinivasan states, "Perhaps the student simply admires and wants to be like [him]. Or maybe she doesn't know what she wants: to be like [him], or to have [him]…wherever a student's desire is inchoate…it is all too easy for the teacher to steer it in the second direction." (135)

Regardless of what is in the student's mind, it is the teacher's responsibility to "direct his student's desire away from himself toward its proper object: her epistemic empowerment." (136)

In 2019, a professor at my current university was found guilty of sexual harassment against graduate students.* A letter from the Dean** details that although some of his actions did not violate the policies at my university, he did violate "national standards set forth by [his] peers regarding the norms of behavior to be expected of responsible faculty."

Namely, alongside hostility against one student and sexual harassment against another, he also had a consensual sexual relationship with a graduate student where he "had direct supervision and grading authority."

To Srinivasan, these consensual relationships directly demonstrate the subordination of women and discrimination "on the basis of sex" that is rampant in institutions of higher education.

Similarly to the therapist-patient relationship, there is a commitment that exists in the teacher-student relationship: "The pedagogical relationship might come with certain responsibilities beyond the ones we owe each other as persons." (147)

Yes, we can point to aspects of these relationships that align with definitions of sexual harassment, like a hierarchical power differential between students and professors and the presence of fear that is caused by a professor's ability to change the course of a student's life. But as much as anything, the potential consequences of a teacher-student relationship (which is vastly most often male teacher on female student) changes the very nature of the student's ability to be a student.

Srinivasan asserts that the student's right to be educated is replaced with her teacher's right to fuck her. The very basis of sexual discrimination is "a treatment that reproduces inequality." Here, Srinivasan makes the radical assertion that "the absence of consent isn't the only indicator of problematic sex; that a practice which is consensual can also be systemically damaging." (147)

Even within the context of consensual teacher-student amorous relationships, men benefit disproportionately and women are disproportionately harmed. The professor at my university no longer teaches, but he does still get a paycheck and has an office around the corner from the women he harassed.

Does the risk of upsetting certain feminists outweigh these students' right to an equitable education? As a graduate student, am I wrong to expect that my education is more important than my professors' sexual desire or how they perceive mine?

What We'll Do When We Win

In her final essay, weighing anti-prostitution feminists against the actual needs of sex workers, the incarceration of domestic abusers against the ramifications for poor women who depend on their abusers, and carceral feminism against a truly liberated state, Srinivasan evokes her opening thesis: the need for a feminist theory that is not from "on high."

She states that we are incorrect to say that women still do not have power. Women do have power in many parts of the world — it's just that those women in power are largely white, wealthy, and western.

A feminism that comes from those in power ignores the harms done to the women at the bottom when it seeks to destroy Patriarchy without the lens of those women.

Thus, using the law to ban prostitution in any way (as has been attempted in many countries throughout history) has yet to end prostitution; instead it has made the lives of sex workers more difficult. For another example, some feminists advocate for policing and incarceration, although providing equal access, abandoning Patriarchal standards of gender, and redistributing wealth could prevent crime and abuse.

In doing so, this feminism from on high achieves only the liberation of some women, abandoning the rest as collateral damage. Srinivasan ends with the assertion that as women gain more power, we must continue to turn and follow those who still do not have it. Otherwise, our feminism does not represent real woman at all. ■

* https://www.chronicle.com/article/this-professor-was-accused-of-bullying-grad-students-now-hes-being-banned-from-teaching/?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in

** https://chronicle-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/5/items/biz/pdf/BWatten%20ltr%20Nov%202019.pdf

bell hooks — Fiery Black Feminist

By Malik Miah

A RADICAL FEMINIST, scholar and activist born in the segregated town of Brea, Kentucky, bell hooks died December 15. She was 69.

She rose to prominence during the "second wave of feminism" in the 1970s. It was at the height of the women's rights movement that won important victories including nationwide legal abortion rights, now under fierce attack by the right.

Adopting lower case to stress her writings over her individual status, bell hooks was widely read for her insightful critique of both the white-dominated feminist movement and the male-led Black civil rights and radical militancy of the time.

She was a trailblazer who sought to empower people of all races, classes and genders. She participated in and helped shape ongoing debates about justice and discrimination in the United States.

Reading bell hooks

I first read hooks in the 1980s after the publication of *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981). It was titled after Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman?" speech at the 1851 Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio.

In the 1980s I read bell hooks and other Black feminists differently than I do today. While I agreed with her critique of the patriarchy and the role of gender in class politics, I thought then that her failure to understand the "party question," and the central role of class in everything including gender oppression, was a fundamental weakness in her writings.

I was "blinded" by my narrow Leninist view of the revolutionary party, thinking that hooks and others who did not support or participate in building a revolutionary party or group diminished their other writings. I was wrong.

Today I see issues of class, race and gender, and their intersectionality as key to revolutionary politics. The type of revolutionary organization necessary to defeat capitalism will be specific to each country.

Mixing Personal with Political

On the faculty of Berea College since 2004, bell hooks' Institute was formed in 2014 at the college (Berea.edu/bhc), where she served as distinguished professor in residence in Appalachian Studies.

University of California at Santa Cruz

A poet, memoirist, social critic and scholar, she wrote more than 30 books. Born Gloria Jean Watkins, hooks wanted a way to honor her maternal great-grandmother while opting not to capitalize her name, hoping to keep the public's focus on her work.

She mixed the personal and the political as she examined Madonna music videos, and critiqued Clarence Thomas' Supreme Court confirmation hearing in 1991. She also discussed the representation of Black Americans in film and the nature of love.

Inspiration and Intersectionality

Dr. hooks' brilliant work inspired Black and other women of color as well as many revolutionary Black men:

"Although the women's movement motivated hundreds of women to write on the woman question, it failed to generate in depth critical analyses of the Black female experience. Most feminists assumed that problems Black women experienced are caused by racism — not sexism.

"The assumption that we can divorce the issue of race from sex, or sex from race, has so clouded the vision of America thinkers and writers on the 'woman' question that most discussions of sexism, sexist oppression, or woman's place in society are distorted, biased, and inaccurate.

"We cannot form an accurate picture of woman's status by simply calling attention to the role assigned females under patriarchy. More specifically, we cannot form an accurate picture of the status of Black women by simply focusing on racial hierarchies."

White suffragettes never grasped this point, which is why the victory to vote in 1920 (the 19th Amendment) only applied to white women. Black women were still categorized as Black people first who had few rights.

As hooks explained, Black women always faced not just the oppression of the patriarchy but the national oppression of race. Black female workers suffered triple oppression: their sex, race and class (super exploitation).

The theme of hooks' writings was the intersectionality (although she didn't use the term) of race, capitalism and gender. She described the oppression generatively as *"imperialist-white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy,"* explaining the ability of capitalism to (re)produce, (re)generate and perpetuate systems of oppression and class domination.

Yet since hooks worked as an academic and teacher, many socialists are not as familiar with her importance to Black feminism and the fight against white supremacy.

I enjoyed her critical analysis, especially her explanations of the leadership role of strong Black women. It preceded the current role of Black women in the racial justice and Black Lives Matter movements today.

That leadership by women was present in the antislavery, anti-segregation movements. But it was not fully recognized because of racism and white supremacy.

As for my own thinking, I still believe that a mass revolutionary "party" is needed, but the appropriate form will emerge in the class struggle. What happened in Russia in 1917 was an inspiration but unique. Circumstances different for China (1949) or Cuba (1959).

My view of hooks in the 1980s was somewhat sectarian because she was an academic, not a party builder. Nevertheless, reading her words today shows the importance of strong Black women leader and radical feminism.

She joins the pantheon of great radical Black women and men who fought, and still fight today, to end the system of capitalist oppression in the United States and around the world. ■

Malik Miah is an advisory editor of ATC.

In the Classroom
"Reparations Won" interviews with William Weaver & Lauren Bianchi

In ATC*'s July-August 2021 issue, we reviewed the history of documented, racially motivated police torture in Chicago under the direction of Commanding Officer Jon Burge and the subsequent fight for reparations. We included interviews with principal participants in the struggle to expose the torture and win justice for survivors. Over the course of the struggle, many demands were made on the Chicago City Council. In 2015 the Council passed an historic Reparations Ordinance, first in the nation. It consisted of five major elements: creation of the Chicago Torture Justice Center to deal with the psychological effects of torture and open not only to the survivors but to their families; free access to the city colleges for survivors and their families; monetary compensation to 57 survivors (only $100,000); the construction of a memorial; implementation in all Chicago public schools of a curriculum designed to discuss this history in 8th and 10th grade social studies classes.*

William Weaver

By the end of January 2022, the Chicago City Council unanimously agreed to one of the largest police misconduct settlements the city has ever paid out. Corey Batchelor and Kevin Bailey will receive $14 million to settle lawsuits contending they were physically and psychologically coerced into falsely confessing to a 1989 murder. The detectives involved were linked to the late disgraced police commander Jon Burge. That brings the amount of Burge-related settlements paid by the city to over $100 million, plus millions more in attorney fees.

For ATC *Dianne Feeley and Linda Loew interviewed two public high school teachers about their experience in implementing this Reparations Won curriculum. We thank Will Weaver and Lauren Bianchi for taking the time to share their insights on the opportunities and challenges raised by teaching these units, and particularly while the pandemic was raging. We also thank Jen Johnson, Chicago Teachers Union's Chief of Staff for valuable help in reaching teachers and gaining information about the curriculum. —The editors*

Linda Loew: *How do you use the Reparations Won curriculum that has been developed for the Chicago schools? How many of your students are aware of the history of police torture and the fight that won this curriculum? How have they responded?*

William Weaver: I use the Reparations Won curriculum to teach about voice, social justice, advocacy and community activism. I grew up in the Chicago area so I know and heard about Jon Burge back in early 2000. Reports about the Jon Burge case would come up occasionally over time until the perpetrators of this extensive trauma on the Black community were somewhat held accountable. When the curriculum came about, I and other Chicago Public Schools (CPS) teachers collaborated to get other teachers more interested in the curriculum.

I was excited about the curriculum, but even more ecstatic when I was able to read it and attend Professional Development classes (PD) for it. I was hooked when Darrell Cannon spoke at the PD and that experience led me into joining other colleagues to teach this curriculum. I remember feeling emotionally drained when he told his story, but also very eager to bring such stories that students could identify with into the classroom.

While most students have never heard of the Jon Burge case or the Reparations Won curriculum, they do know about the police brutality and torture that has occurred in their communities and communities just like theirs all around America. Understanding and making connections to events that have occurred in the past through this curriculum creates for students an understanding of the world we live in today. It motivates them to think about how they can use their voice in the best ways they know how.

Many teachers were excited and anxious, some reluctant to teach the curriculum. I collaborated with two other colleagues to provide lessons and resources that teachers could use in the classroom to aid them in creating and preparing for lessons around the curriculum. A lot of it was helping teachers to prepare for teaching about Slavery, Reconstruction, and the prison industrial complex.

I also have to teach a mandated unit on the U.S. Constitution, a requirement that students need in order to graduate high school. We learn about the Bill of Rights and the Civil Rights Amendments in the Constitution before we teach the reparations unit. Students apply what they learned about the Constitution to the problems of policing. Therefore I teach the Reparations Won curriculum at the end of the year.

In our PDs, we also guide teachers through the things

they could anticipate happening in their classrooms, experiences with students who have been victimized by police brutality or have experienced it in their own families. A lot of teachers implement Reparations Won, but I just don't think it was enough to put a dent into schools that really need to take up the task of ensuring that the curriculum is properly implemented.

Protest, Emotions and COVID

I started teaching 10th grade at Kenwood Academy in Hyde Park in 2019 but before that I taught the curriculum at Chicago Vocational High School (CVS) on the south side. Kenwood is 85% African American and maybe 5% white. In 2020, when schools closed due to COVID and we were teaching on Zoom, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd were killed and the nationwide uprisings happened.

Students were experiencing those uprisings in their own backyard and trying to grapple with that. I decided not to teach the curriculum but used that time as an opportunity to implement Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based activities.

Students are taught coping strategies to deal with many emotions caused by traumatic experiences like this and what they may be going through outside of school. Meditation exercises, talking circles, and activities that teach students how to cope with depression, trauma and peer relationships are at the center of SEL learning.

During those uprisings, many of my students took part in protesting for justice. After understanding this, I wanted to help them navigate through all those emotions, because I was going through them too.

The Reparations Won curriculum is a classroom curriculum — it develops a strong classroom community where students engage in discussions on advocacy and resistance. On Zoom, it's difficult to tell what students' emotional status is, while in the classroom, it's much easier to navigate. I didn't want to traumatize students even further, especially with all that was going on in the world. So I included some of the lessons but didn't go full in.

Now we are a year out from George Floyd's murder but still there's just a lot going on. Students are impacted by COVID and there is still injustice going on. I definitely want to be careful in my approach to the curriculum.

This year, I'm excited to just get back into it. Right now, we're still developing our classroom and learning how to have discussions about controversial topics. I really like developing students' ability to engage one another through discussion because when we do get to the reparations part of the curriculum, those discussions are nuanced and respectful.

Dianne Feeley: *Lauren, what's been your experience*?

Lauren Bianchi: I'm a fourth-year teacher and I've been at Washington High School the whole time. The school is 88% Mexican American and only 5% Black. We have some white, European and Arab students. One of the things shaping the way we implement this curriculum is that we often have only one, two, or zero Black students in a classroom.

I teach in southeast Chicago, which has its particular history of pushing Blacks out of the school, where students live in areas that Blue Lives Matter predominates. We have a lot of students who are the children of police officers; a lot of our students want to *be* police officers.

Whenever we're teaching the histories and legacies of racism, we have to be conscious about not putting our Black students on the spot, further traumatizing or isolating them. At the same time, we have to figure out how to connect African American history to students who are not Black.

We need to talk about the unique experiences of people of color, including those who have immigrant experiences. Honestly, it has been a struggle because even in my own training as a teacher, we learned about race through looking at Black/white dynamics.

Last year with the police shooting of Adam Toledo — and some of the more recent high-profile police brutality and police killings of Hispanic people — students now say "Okay, this is an issue that affects our community as well." So we have had to figure out how to adapt this curriculum to our student population.

I did my student teaching at Wells Community Academy in West Town. The teacher I was placed with had taken a Chicago Public Schools Professional Development to learn how to implement this curriculum. And as a social activist, I was super excited to teach it.

Then, as part of a job interview for Washington they asked me to teach a reparations lesson at Wells so they could observe. They wanted to see me instruct students I already had a relationship with. I felt good that the school hired me after seeing me teach a lesson on a controversial topic.

My first year, I taught all sophomores. My second year, I started teaching sophomores and seniors, which I love. I love the contrast and figuring out how to make ideas accessible at the different levels of development.

This is the first year that I'm not going to teach Reparations Won because I teach sociology to all seniors now. I have a unit on crime and criminality. When we talk about mass incarceration, we read excerpts from Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*; I can connect back to what they learned about Burge in the history of the police department as sophomores.

When I came to Washington, U.S. history teachers had not yet integrated the Reparations Won curriculum unit into their classes. I felt it was important to initiate that conversation. Teachers were supportive but the veteran teachers weren't necessarily going to do that without somebody saying, "I think we should do this."

In my experience, it fell on newer teachers to begin the conversation about implementing it — and it has been taught for the past three years at Washington now with 10th grade U.S. History students.

Every year I asked sophomores, "How many of you learned about this in middle school?" This is something that is supposed to be implemented both in the eighth and tenth grades, but I know it's not. Not even all teachers know about it. A handful of students every year say, "Oh, yes, I remember learning about this in middle school." But the majority will say "No, I've never learned about this before."

Addressing Traumatic Topics

DF: *As someone who taught in Harlem during the 1964 uprising, I had to figure out how students needed to talk about what they had witnessed the night before, I'm wondering how personal some of your classroom discussions became.*

LB: When we discussed Michelle Alexander's book students were upset by the scope of mass incarceration. We talked

about how many are mentally ill but there is no medical system to support them so they are warehoused.

Some students felt empowered to talk about how their families had been impacted by incarceration. They have been grappling with how family members and friends have been stolen from their communities. They are often survivors of state violence.

As social studies teachers we signed up to teach the hard stuff and the content can be traumatic. There's always this tension between how students need to grapple with the dark history, but it needs to be done in a way that is safe and empowering, in a way that we're challenging those systems and can imagine the world we want to live in.

We do our best to address issues of race, gender, and class in our curriculum but important things still get left out, such as disability rights. What we teach is always a work in progress and we adapt, based on current events.

Lauren Bianchi

But in many ways schools are structured in general to police students, not to treat them as full human beings. For example, my school locks the bathrooms during passing periods. That means a student who needs access because they are menstruating finds the door locked and may bleed through their clothing.

How can I have a safe space to discuss the legacy of racism if the school is treating students in humiliating ways?

DF: *Will, how do you provide space so that students can discuss what they may want to reveal about themselves and their families?*

WW: At the beginning of the year, and throughout, I establish Talking Circles. This is a discussion technique that I use in my classroom because it develops trust. Indigenous communities have used it as a way to give everyone a voice and develop trust. By the time I start teaching Reparations Won, they often reveal their own experiences with police brutality or the criminal justice system.

The first time it happened to me was when one young lady revealed that her father was killed by a police officer some years before. He was shot in the back but the officer was never held accountable. In telling her story the young lady broke down in class. I was there to provide emotional comfort and support for her.

This was an especially revealing moment because she was noticeably quiet throughout the year. The experience told me a lot more about her and made me more cognizant of how to lead a discussion, and what to do afterward. From then on I was definitely up to get her the help she needed by making sure to do regular check-ins and watching her progression in class and seeing her communication with her family.

Because she took a risk in revealing that trauma to her classmates, it created a deeper sense of community. That's all I want for my classroom. I just want to teach and to show students how a community can develop not only in this small space but in their own homes, and other spaces.

Beyond that, I want to make sure that students know who they can go and talk to about these things too. So, I do ensure that students have the know-how to reach out to people inside and outside of the school community.

Schools Without Police

LL: *WBEZ, Chicago's public radio station, just reported on the 50 Chicago public schools that voted to keep the police out, and the difference that it's made. But if that decision is not backed up with redirecting the money the district saved on police by hiring more social workers and implementing more programs that can help in de-escalating conflicts, how can schools deal with the conflicts that inevitably arise with teenagers? What is your experience?*

WW: I think the school building is much more positive without police presence; students don't want to come to school and feel like they are being policed every second of the day. Many already feel this when they are outside of the school building.

Teachers have become more conscious about the need for Social-Emotional Learning. That is what we went on strike for a few years ago. Instead of providing students with intimidating measures, we should be proactive in our approach to prevent violent behavior by resourcing our school with more teachers, counselors, and social workers. To do otherwise is sending the message that students don't deserve such resources.

If we provide students with environments like this, they benefit because they're able to talk about their issues with people they trust. Situations don't escalate to a point where we need to call anyone into the classroom to mishandle students.

It's a plus when teachers de-escalate and have the resources to do so. Police being out of the school allows for nuanced methods of teaching, learning and coping. Teachers in our school building and others have definitely taken that on.

A lot of students in many white communities don't experience police in their schools. A lot of my students want the same resources that these communities are getting. "If they don't have police in their schools, why should we have police?"

If it's necessary to put resources into communities around those schools to ensure that there's safety in the school, so be it. If it takes not having those police in schools to prevent more trauma, so be it. Having trained community members who students are familiar with as security in our schools is more effective than officers who don't know our students. That should be the norm.

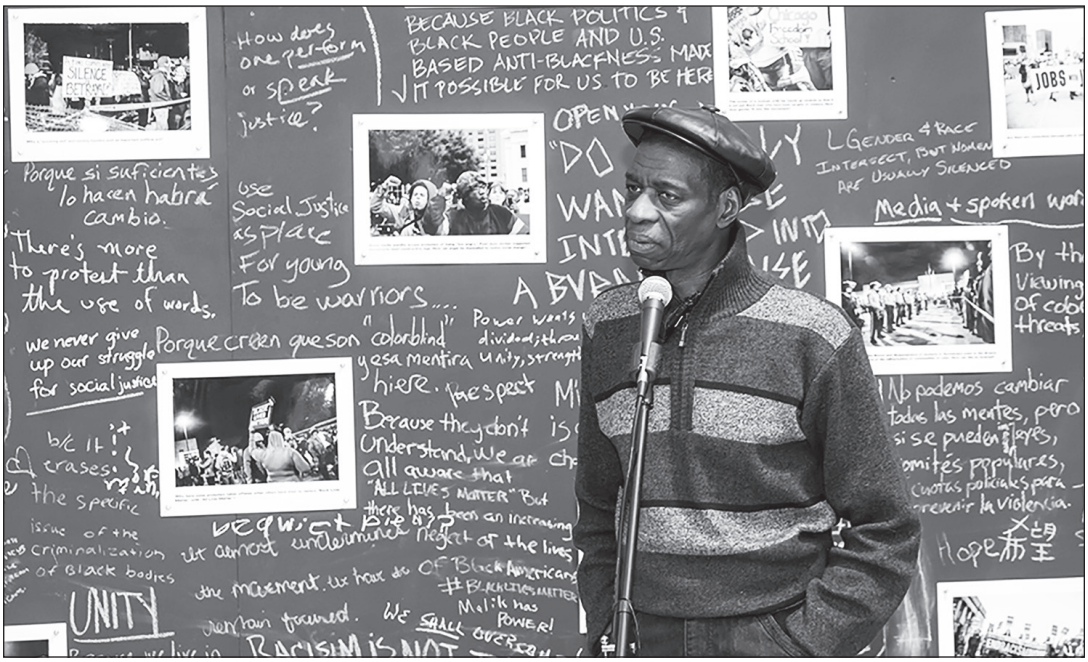
It's about fairness. I grew up in Evanston and Skokie, I don't remember having the in school experiences that students today have with School Resource Officers (SRO), where students are cuffed and walked out of school in front of their peers.

If white students can have the right not to be policed

in these ineffective ways, why not our students of color?

LB: In 2020 we removed the police from my school. This was achieved by a vocal number of students, parents, and teachers who won over the majority of Local School Council members to remove SROs from our building.

The moment was right. We were able to say, "Look at the uprising happening in the streets, look at what's happening in our community. Do we actually think police presence is going to help students have a positive, safer experience in school?" We won that, and it remains a positive experience. It has been transformative.



Torture survivor Darrell Cannon served close to 24 years in prison before being exonerated and released. Survivors keep the record of Chicago's "underground" torture machine from being buried again.. Sarah Jane Rhee

There definitely have been some fights. I can't say that there have been more fights than there normally would be before the pandemic. I have a friend at another school who has said they're struggling with student-to-student conflict and stuff from the neighborhood getting brought into the school.

Last week, there was some horrible fight at Roberto Clemente, which was one of the schools that voted to remove SROs. Apparently, police were called. Even though they don't have police officers working in the building anymore, police were called. I believe at least two students were arrested. All the students poured out of the classrooms. It was ugly.

At Washington, we're a divided staff. We have a lot of the newer teachers in the building, and some veteran teachers. It's not just a generational divide or who lives in the neighborhood and who doesn't. There's a divide in our staff among progressive teachers, anti-racist teachers, some far-right-wing folks and then some who don't necessarily see teaching as political or see a curriculum as being connected to what's happening in society.

Without those additional resources, it leaves room for criticism like, "Oh, these fights are happening because the police were removed." That's pretty absurd because there are fights in high school. There's tension in our society.

Being a teenager is hard. Students have been at home for almost two years during a global pandemic and are now back in schools that are dirty, under-resourced, and, as a result, are unsafe. Of course, there's going to be tension, but that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with whether or not there's police officers in the schools.

I feel safer in the building knowing that I don't have to worry about my students getting arrested. I fully trust the teachers and the unarmed security officers in the building to de-escalate because we are the people that actually know the students, who have relationships with them, and can meet them on a human level if there's a conflict.

I will also say that two teacher representatives on our local school council went to a recent Board of Ed meeting and said, "The schools that removed the police in 2020 have not been given the funding back to hire additional staff that aren't police officers."

But the schools that removed SROs in 2021 did get the money back. It's an absurd punishment that doesn't really make any sense, especially because the policy was reversed. It seems like it's going to take a lot more advocacy to get that money back, which is why I was excited to see that coverage.

I think CPS is being pushed in the direction of police-free schools and of support for restorative justice along with justice-based alternative models of discipline and support. It's going to clearly continue to fall along the lines of which schools get support. It's no secret that CPS is incredibly unequal in terms of school funding.

Meeting Torture Survivors

DF: *Could you speak about the torture survivors coming into your classroom? When do you do that in the curriculum? How has that worked for you?*

WW: Before the survivors visit my class, students read several stories from the curriculum about them. Through these stories, students understand how it impacts the survivors' families, the community, and how it impacts those survivors.

I've had Darrell Cannon come in towards the end of the curriculum. While I was at CVS, I was able to have him in our library, where he spoke to both our students and, virtually, with a class from Taft. I collaborated with another teacher and her class from Taft. It was a fantastic experience.

Students knew about Darrell Cannon before he even came in; that was a plus. They were connected to him and it was a very emotional experience — a lot of them cried. You could see visible anger. But by the end of his presentation, they were able to see his resiliency, where he is now, how he fought

back, and how hard the community fought to get justice for him and others.

After he spoke, they went up and thanked him. They see this common man, once a teenager, involved in gangs, "a knucklehead" as he put it, but he was kidnapped, wrongly accused and brutally tortured into a confession. I think it brings them back to lessons that I do early in the year about slavery and resistance.

Students also examine the Constitution, Civil Rights amendments and Reconstruction where the common man, the community, rises up and fights against white supremacist ideas. They make those connections. It was a very enlightening experience and extremely rewarding for me to read the letters they wrote to Darrell Cannon.

DF: *Was that a follow-up activity to write to the survivor?*

WW: It was a follow-up activity that not only gives me an idea of what students learned, but it's an emotional release for them. It also helps me gauge their socio-emotional well-being. Then we do the final assessment.

I know at the 8th grade level they have a town hall, but for the high school students' final assessment they have a choice between designing a memorial or writing a letter. For the memorial design, students brainstorm about the Torture Justice Memorial. They are provided examples with what the city came up with, and then they are to design their own.

In writing the letter, students determine if they want to write to a parent, police officer, or students who might be on the fence about the teaching of the curriculum in school. This part of the curriculum is very enlightening as well because I get to see how students learned and understand how the curriculum impacted their ability to use their voices to become social justice advocates.

DF: *Lauren, what activities do your students do?*

LB: When I taught sophomore U.S. history with the Burge curriculum we also did it as the last unit of the year. I like that it has that connection to current events. I always start the curriculum by asking, "What's the most recent high-profile police brutality case in Chicago?"

We start there and then we go back and ask questions like, "How did we get here?" "Why did this happen?" "What's the history of the relationship between the police department and citizens in Chicago?" I try to do that as an attention grabber.

I'm glad to hear that that's been Will's experience, too. I do think it's a great way to end the year because there is more discussion and it is community based. Instead of giving students a multiple-choice test or a big essay, the assessment is more of a creative and advocacy-based project.

I like the memorial project. We've given students the choice to design a physical monument, an art or music piece, or they can write an encyclopedia article about what they think would be important for future generations to learn. Then if they do the physical, the drawn-out design, they write an artist statement on why they designed it in the way that they did and their goal for the piece. That's been positive.

Over the last couple of years we've also had Mr. Darrell Cannon speak. We had him speak in person the first year. Some students were moved to tears. Some students wanted to go say thank you and shake his hand and talk to him afterward. They said, "I can't believe that you survived this and you're still here and you're still connecting with things that give you joy."

Then the last two years we heard him virtually. Once I went to Mr. Cannon's place to help him set up Google Meet. He told me, "I have to drink Pepto-Bismol before I do this, but I want to do it. I get upset when I have to relive this, but I feel like that's part of my purpose, that I need young people to know what happened so that it doesn't happen again."

We have this important relationship with Mr. Cannon. He was tortured at an off-the-grid "black site" on the east side. [At "black sites" the Chicago police reportedly conducted interrogations where suspects were restrained, threatened and tortured. The southeast side one where Cannon was tortured cannot be far from the school's neighborhood. Homan Square, another detention center used by the Chicago Police Department, has often been compared with the CIA's offshore "black sites." Many victims have since given testimony on the military techniques used. More than 7,000 people had been through the Homan Square complex after they were detained but before they were officially processed. —ed.]

We value our relationship with him. We want to help him achieve his goal of sharing his story. We always try to pay him for his time, especially the fact that he has to go through this traumatic experience to do it; teachers pool our money.

When you're bringing survivors in — as well as people from my grandparents' generation — sometimes they have their own meaning about what happened. For example, Mr. Cannon has said some things that I don't necessarily agree with about the younger generations of activists. So I would also consider maybe having him speak along with other torture survivors. That way we can hear different experiences and evaluations.

LL: Hearing both of your experiences, when they are similar and when they are different, I'm wondering what can be done to strengthen the Reparations Won program. What institutions and support programs exist, either within the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) or the CPS, to help implement the Reparations Won curriculum?

WW: CTU has been incredibly supportive of getting this curriculum off the ground and running. They select teachers who are interested in providing their knowledge about the curriculum and spreading it across CPS. I developed a working relationship with two teachers. The three of us — I as a Black man, Dave as a white man, and Myra as a Latina — make an effective team.

That dynamic was helpful in reaching our fellow teachers. We invited torture survivors into our professional development sessions, not only to get teachers acclimated to the curriculum but to plant the idea about bringing people into the classroom to talk with students about the experiences they read about in the lessons.

I think that's an impactful part of the curriculum. I'm always adamant about bringing other people's stories into the classroom and hearing their experiences. I think those are the facts, right.

If you do have pushback from teachers in the professional development classes, having survivors present provides another level of understanding to those who don't think the curriculum can work in a classroom. With the help of CTU it's

been a plus to have survivors there.

I try to do everything in my classroom to keep up to date with the curriculum, to make sure current events are addressed, and take it upon myself to ensure that the story of Black and brown communities in Chicago gets told. That's the most important thing to me. I know over the last two years it has been difficult to put together professional development courses. I've done a couple over Zoom, but things have slowed down. I'm hoping that more can happen in the future.

How can we get every school to teach the Reparations Won curriculum? The Constitution is a mandated requirement. I want to get to that level with this curriculum. It's just as important as the Constitution. Whatever it took for us to teach the Constitution and make sure that students complete their projects and pass the Constitution exam so they could graduate, should be the model for Reparations Won.

With Critical Race Theory (CRT) being attacked, it's going to be a lot more difficult to implement. When it comes up, I know people will be there to try to shoot it down. That's my fear right now. It's another uphill battle so we have to be innovative about how to get around these criticisms.

Students Seeing Themselves

I also use the 1619 Project materials as a way to teach other perspectives so that our Black students can see themselves through a different prism: of enslaved people who pushed America to be great, not one of victimhood, but of survival. This is the truth, and it needs to be told!

Students wonder about the poor conditions that many citizens often experience in a "great country" — so we address the unfairness of a system — whether we are talking about affordable housing, access to health care or mental health. How does this system create traumatic situations in which people develop post-traumatic stress?

I show a short clip about Kalief Browder [A high school student, he was held at the Rikers Island jail, without trial and mostly in solitary confinement between 2010 and 2013 for allegedly stealing a backpack. Two years after the charges were dropped and he was released, he hanged himself. —ed]. We talk about the human aspect, what humans deserve and who should be held accountable when people are abused in this manner.

LB: I agree that CTU is supportive; it's actually one of those few spaces where CTU and CPS have collaborated in a positive way. But at the same time, I still think it's on individual teachers to seek out that professional development. It's still very uneven because there are some schools where it's being taught — and it's a really positive experience — and other schools where it's just not being taught.

I don't necessarily know what the answer is. It's been my experience that anti-racist or progressive educators or activist teachers find each other. Most of our time is focused on what's happening in our classroom and with our students. But there are places we can go. The Chicago Teachers Union has a Human Rights Committee, which I'm not a part of. I am part of the Climate Justice Committee, where we discuss solutions to environmental racism as workers in school buildings made toxic by lead, asbestos and mold.

One of the caucuses in the union, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), held a Teach Truth Day of Action, where CTU members publicized why and how we teach about racism, oppression, liberation and freedom in our curriculum.

That doesn't mean we're not going to feel those attacks just as people in more rural or isolated cities do. There's something like over 30 states that have now passed laws opposing bringing up racism. North Dakota just passed a law that bans teaching systemic racism in the legal system. That's pretty wild.

I hope that as CTU members we can collaborate to collect the reparations lessons that teachers at various schools have developed. CPS's Office of Social Science and Civic Engagement can also help us update the curriculum, which is always shifting to meet the needs of our students.

I guess that's the nature of curriculum and something I think a lot about as a newer teacher. Most of what I'm creating is going to need updating over the next few years. The original curriculum was partially a response to the 2013 Black Lives Matter movement. Now we have to add George Floyd and Adam Toledo to the curriculum.

I also support moving to mandating the reparations curriculum. There is also similar legislation that requires elementary school students learn about LGBTQ history and rights. I've gotten some pushback from other teachers when I say, "We need more requirements because these things aren't being taught." I have sophomores that never got to learn about LGBTQ history or sophomores who never learned about slavery, to be honest.

Some teachers respond that teachers need full autonomy. They say, "If we have these requirements, aren't we taking away freedom of educators to design curriculum?" We can respond that this curriculum is an antidote to the anti-CRT attacks, since we have seen what a positive impact the Reparations Won curriculum has had. It has had a transformative impact as teachers and students grapple with these issues.

We're still free to adapt the curriculum. Nobody is coming in and saying, "Did you teach the second lesson in this way?" We do need to democratically decide some curriculum requirements.

WW: This curriculum is so important! Lauren mentioned that North Dakota passed that law about teachers being unable to teach social justice. I think it's the rural and suburban white communities that need it the most because Black children, whether or not we discuss in the schools how police target Blacks, they're going to get that education at home, in their own communities and on social media.

Whether it's taught in school or not, they live these unjust experiences with police and the justice system; they're the most targeted so they've got to be prepared. It's white students who really need to know the truth about the country we live in through this curriculum. If we want a better world for all people, then all of us have to be taught the truth about our history.

Denying the truth doesn't erase it. The reason I'm teaching this is not only for students who look like me but to urge other communities to take this on in their own communities and discuss it. It's going to impact them one way or the other.

Schools need to better prepare students for this kind of a world, a world that is fair, equitable and more tolerant. This can't be done if students are oblivious to their history. ■

From Corbyn to Starmer:
The Labour Party's Quest for the Past

By Kim Moody

WITHIN A WEEK of Tony Blair's New Year's Day induction into the Most Noble Order of the Knights of the Garter, the United Kingdom's most prestigious order of chivalry, a million Britons had signed a petition demanding the knighthood be withdrawn.

Another knight rode to Sir Tony's aid: Sir Keir Starmer, Knight Bachelor (Kt) and leader of the Labour Party following the demise of the left-wing Jeremy Corbyn. "I don't think it's thorny at all — I think he deserves the honour," Starmer unashamedly told British television.[1]

Sir Keir Starmer, Labour Party leader.

In his public persona, Sir Keir represents in many ways a poor rescuer of Blair and his legacy. Largely regarded as lacking the charisma and political content expected of party leaders, his 46% approval in the polls in June 2020, after being elected party leader, was hardly inspiring. By May 2021, much worse, only 17% of those polled thought he was doing things well, while 65% thought he was doing badly.

Only the endless self-destructive scandals and missteps by Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson (still unfolding as we go to press — ed.), revealed since the fall of 2021, had finally put the Labour Party ahead of the Tories in December 2021 by 39% to 32%. But Starmer's personal rating was still a mere 28% positive to 51% negative. His usefulness to the Labour Party center and right wing, however, runs deeper.

As for Blair, the memories of Iraq and his fake intelligence "Doggy Dossier" that sent troops there, the fragmenting of the National Health Service, the private financial initiatives that threw many of its hospitals into deep debt, and the preservation of Margaret Thatcher's anti-union laws during his tenure as Prime Minister (1997-2007) remain too strong and "thorny" for too many people to see anything noble.

But Starmer's embrace of Tony Blair is more than a symbolic bow to the disgraced former Prime Minister and his centrist "Third Way," "New Labour" political legacy. A late November reshuffle of Labour's shadow cabinet (top policy spokespersons) was widely viewed as "a ruthless shakeup… accelerating Labour's shift to the centre under his (Starmer's) leadership."[2]

Underlying the move to resolute centrism in the post-Corbyn Labour Party was the return of Yevette Cooper, a New Labour stalwart under Gordon Brown (prime minister 2007-2010). At the same time, Starmer sought to establish himself and Labour in the eyes of capital as the safe alternative to erratic Tories. Starmer addressed the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) to assure industrial capital he would "never spend money just for the sake of it" and promise "stable government."[3]

Labour now holds regular Zoom meeting with Britain's five leading business organizations. This culmination of Starmer's seemingly low-key reign was, in fact, just one of the more visible or at least publicized acts in what amounts to a brutal attempt to erase the six years of the party's left trajectory under Jeremy Corbyn, and thoroughly isolate the party's political left. With its bans, witchhunts and *autos de fe*, it was truly a 21st century counter-reformation.

Reform and Reaction

Jeremy Corbyn was elected party leader in 2015 by 60% of the membership vote with more than three times the vote of runner-up Andy Burnham. He survived an organized "coup" in the form of a (non-binding) vote of no confidence by 172 to 40 Labour Members of Parliament (MPs), and in June 2016 was re-elected by 62% — despite efforts of the party bureaucracy to disqualify thousands of potential Corbyn voters by what they sometimes called a "trot hunt."[4]

Programmatically as well as stylistically, Corbyn's election moved the floundering Labour Party well to the left on the social democratic scale. More a reform than a revolution politically, it nonetheless saw party membership double to over 564,000. Its vote increased in the 2017 parliamentary elections by three-and-a-half-million over 2015, a significant portion of the working class vote returned to Labour, and the far right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was virtually destroyed.

Although Labour fell short of victory by little more than two percentage points, it deprived the Conservatives of their majority and was the best return Labour had seen in decades.[5] But this upward trajectory of Corbyn, the party's left, and its radical direction were too much for the party's center and right members of parliament and the party bureaucracy, The counter-reformation was on.

Long before Starmer became leader of the Labour Party

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and initiated his campaign to destroy Corbyn and the party's left wing, the party bureaucracy joined the center and right of the Parliamentary Labour Party in the effort to get rid of Corbyn. Journalist Owen Jones, in his sympathetic but critical account of the Corbyn years, described the party bureaucracy and its actions:

"These officials were Labour's equivalent of the civil service; they were expected to serve whoever the membership had elected with strict, rigorous impartiality. Instead, they acted as a hostile political faction, conspiring and plotting not only to bring down their leadership, but even wishing ill on the party's own electoral prospects."[6]

In fact, things were actually even worse than that.

The "Antisemitism" Purge

In the spring of 2020, an 851-page report to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on the problem of antisemitism in the party, prepared under then Corbyn supporter General-Secretary Jennie Formby, revealed among many other things that the party's bureaucracy hoped and worked to defeat Corbyn in the 2015 leadership election. Most extraordinarily, it even wished for a defeat of the party in the 2017 general election in order to discredit Corbyn.

Drawing on staff emails, WhatsApp messages, and other hard evidence, the report concluded that senior staff and others "openly opposed the party leader." This carried over to the 2017 election "when many staff including senior staff made it clear that they did not want Labour to win the general election, while other staff were 'working to rule' and hiding information form the Leader's office."[7] The report was leaked to the press soon after completion.

The fondest hopes of these subversive bureaucrats were dashed by the significant gains Labour made in the 2017 general election. The counter-reformation, however, simply took another direction. This was the "antisemitism crisis" that began in March 2018 when MP Luciana Berger demanded to know why Jeremy Corbyn had praised a mural by the American artist Mear One in London's East End that clearly displayed antisemitic tropes.

Berger herself had been the victim of numerous antisemitic messages and threats, although most as it turned out not from Labour Party members. Corbyn's staff tried to argue that Corbyn was just defending public art which was being threatened. That didn't wash, and the Labour affiliated Jewish Labour Movement joined the attack on Corbyn that would last for the next two or more years.

The question of antisemitism in the Labour Party is a difficult one, because it *does* exist and there was a history of it in the party as Owen Jones and others on the left have documented and even the leaked Labour report affirmed.[8] Yet for some, support for Palestinian liberation and criticisms of the state of Israel for racism are seen as antisemitic in themselves.

Corbyn, a strong supporter of Palestinian rights, became the target of a relentless campaign that attempted to associate him and his leadership with antisemitism. One does not need to deny the reality of antisemitism to argue that much of this campaign was motivated by opposition to Corbyn and his politics by the party's right.

Indeed, prior to 2015 when Corbyn became leader, the leaked report stated that the bureaucracy's Governance and Legal Unit (GLU), which handles disciplinary issues, "appears to have done only small amounts of work relating to disciplinary cases." In fact from 2015 to February 2018, the bureaucracy including the GLU did very little on antisemitism cases.

The 2021 Labour Party conference passed a pro-Palestinian motion.

What the leaked report shows, however, was that antisemitism was used as a factional tool. In fact, when the party's leadership and bureaucracy came under the pro-Corbyn direction after Formby took over as General-Secretary in the spring of 2018, it did a far more aggressive job of investigating and disciplining cases of antisemitism than under those who were his main attackers.[9]

Even before that, Corbyn intervened to get the GLU to act more quickly on antisemitism cases. At times this became so "zealous" that some on the left felt Corbyn showed an "alarming willingness to throw good people under the bus."[10]

The antisemitism campaign directed against Corbyn, however, was far from limited to internal factionalism. It raged publicly in the mass media and on the BBC in the form of a highly one-sided documentary. It drew in major leaders of the Jewish community and generally demonized Corbyn and even the Labour Party as a whole among British Jews, who had already left the Labour Party in large numbers.

There can be little doubt that this high-profile campaign, along with a confused position on Brexit and by this time disarray among the Corbyn forces, played a role in the disastrous losses Labour faced in the 2019 general election.

These included the loss of 2.6 million votes and 30 seats compared to 2017, many of them long-time Labour seats in the so-called "Red Wall" of the North. It also lost virtually all of the gains in working-class voters made in 2017. Some Labour MPs bolted the party openly, while wealth-and-business-backed money flowed into Boris Johnson's campaign.

That Corbyn made mistakes in the antisemitism crisis and in the 2019 election is beyond doubt, particularly in proposing to open the door to another vote on Brexit. But

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the most remarkable fact is the degree to which Labour MPs and party bureaucrats had been willing to discredit the party as whole in order to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn once and for all.[1] This effort didn't end there.

Starmer and Labour's Inquisition

With the support of the party's right, center and big funders, Keir Starmer handily won party's 2020 leadership election against Corbyn ally Rebecca Long-Bailey and centrist Lisa Nandy by 52%, partly on the promise to continue Corbyn's programmatic policies. Starmer had been in Corbyn's shadow cabinet although he was one of those who resigned in preparation for the "coup."

Any advocacy of a left policy, however, soon disappeared as Starmer studiously avoided policy statements of any kind. Even supporters began to complain that he didn't seem to stand for anything other than not being Jeremy Corbyn.

His attempts to define his leadership notably in a document written just before the 2021 party conference, which contained seven references to "public-private partnerships" and none to public ownership, and his speech at the conference were notable for their lack of policy content.[12]

More recently Starmer opted for patriotism, an assuring speech to British capital's leaders, and finally after the New Year offered the nation(s) a "contract with the British people" meant to distance himself from the open corruption of Tory Prime Minister Boris Johnson and re-establish "trust" in government — that is, Starmer's hypothetical government.[13]

Beneath all the lawyerly evasion and bland persona, however, was a ruthless campaigner determined to dislodge Labour's left-wing root and branch. Imposing a regime of internal discipline that would have been the envy of Jesuit founder Ignatius Loyola on so faction-ridden an organization as the Labour Party was, of course, not possible. Discipline, banishment, and isolation were the fate only for the party's left.

As party leader, Starmer wasted no time in banishing heretics. In June 2021, Rebecca Long-Bailey was dismissed from his shadow cabinet for alleged antisemitic remarks. In October, Starmer "removed the whip" from Corbyn, suspending him from the Parliamentary Labour Party. The excuse was that Corbyn had said the extent of antisemitism in the party had been "dramatically overstated for political reasons," a statement as true as it was unacceptable to the new leadership.

Shortly afterward Starmer-appointed General-Secretary David Evans banned MPs and party members from discussing Corbyn's suspension at party meetings. The pro-Corbyn organization Momentum found that 20 Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) had passed resolutions in support of Corbyn, Eighteen demanded that the suspension be withdrawn, and four called for the "right to political debate." The leadership ruled at least 16 of their motions out of order.[14]

In July of 2021, Labour's regional office shut down the London party conference because the conference arrangements committee chair Kathryn Johnson criticized Starmer.[15]

The Starmer apparatus also took charge of numerous Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) or their annual meetings in order to shut down possible opposition. This was done in the Bath CLP when the party's South West Regional Office took over. But as a report in *Labour Briefing* states:

"This takeover is not limited to Bath, but has been repeated across other constituencies, notably Bristol West, with co-ordinated messaging and regional officers taking over AGMs (Annual General Meetings), ignoring the rulebook and weak justifications of wrongdoing by EC (Executive Committee) members.[16]

CLP chairs and secretaries in Bristol, Nottingham and elsewhere have also been suspended by the party apparatus.[17]

Disciplinary cases examined by the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) had already risen under Corbyn, but when Starmer acolyte David Evans took over in mid-2020 they soared and expulsions leaped from two a month under Formby to 20 according to NEC data, while fewer were referred for further review by the party's National Constitutional Committee.[18] Among those expelled was film-maker Ken Loach for the sin of supporting others he considered unfairly expelled.[19]

Starmer crowned his attack on party democracy at the 2021 conference with an attempt to roll back the one-member-one-vote system of electing the party leaders to an electoral college system. This would have given the Parliamentary Party disproportionate influence and limited candidate access by raising the required percentage of MP support from 10-25%. Union intervention helped defeat the electoral college proposal, but the MP endorsement level was raised to 20%.[20]

A Hollow Movement in Decline

The absence of any mass upsurge of outrage and rebellion against this regime by the seemingly huge numbers of Corbyn supporters is explained largely by the disappearance of Corbyn's mass support among the membership that had flooded the party between 2015 and 2016.

The net result of Starmer's counter-reformation was a drop in members from 552,835 in April 2020 when Starmer became leader to 430,359 in July 2021, the last time the party published membership figures, for a net loss of nearly 123,000 members.[21]

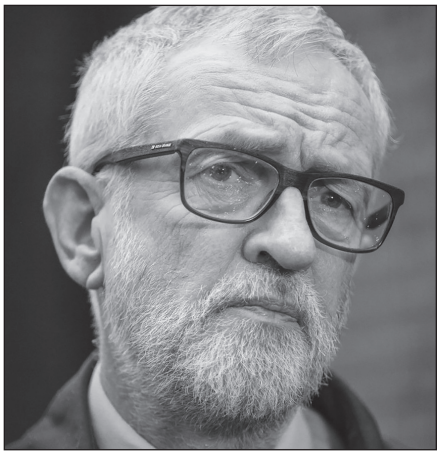
Furthermore, the fact that the membership in the April 2020 leadership election was only about 11,000 fewer than at the height of party membership in 2017, tells us that it was Starmer's subsequent rule that brought membership down, not even the disastrous 2019 general election that spelled the end of Corbyn's leadership.

But there was more to this than a simple drop in numbers. You Gov polls in mid-2021 revealed a turnover of membership between January 2020 and June 2021. Those with a positive view of Tony Blair were replacing pro-Corbyn members. Four months before Starmer took over, 71% of members had a positive view of Corbyn, while only 37% thought well of Blair. By June of 2021, Corbyn's positive respondents had fallen to 53%, while Blair was up to 55%. Responses to the poll revealed 36%

hadn't voted or weren't eligible to vote in the 2016 leadership election.[22]

Another indication of the weakness of Corbyn's active support was the difference in the number of "Registered Supporters," those who paid £25 in order to vote in the 2016 and 2020 leadership elections. These were not regular party members and simply registered as individuals to vote one time.

In 2016, 183,000 people signed up to vote as Registered Supporters, of whom 70% or 128,000 voted for Corbyn. His total vote was 313,209, so 41% of his 62% majority vote in 2016 came from these Registered Supporters. In the 2020 election where Corbyn wasn't running, only 13,626 people bothered to pay the £25 as Registered Supporters, 10,228 of whom voted for Starmer.



Jeremy Corbyn, left-wing, former leader of the Labour Party

In other words, Corbyn's support in the leadership elections had rested heavily on voters who were not regular party members and about 170,000 of whom apparently disappeared between 2016 and 2020.[23]

Another difference was that in 2016 nearly 100,000 "affiliated members," mostly members of unions, voted by 60% or 60,075 for Corbyn, while in 2020 only 76,068 such union members voted with 53% or 40,417 for Starmer. Only 16,970 voted for Corbyn supporter Rebecca Long Bailey. Thus, there was also a drop in working-class support for the left in the 2020 election.[24]

Working-class membership in the party, in fact, had declined over a long time. In 2017, one survey showed that only 23% of actual members worked in working-class occupations, mainly blue collar and low-paid as defined by the British occupational classification scheme.[25]

The decline in working-class support during the Starmer era was further indicated by the disaffiliation of the Bakers Union and significant reductions in contributions to the Labour Party by UNITE, the UK's largest union, and the Communications Workers Union.[26]

That the party itself, and therefore, much of Corbyn's support, came largely from individuals who played little or no role in party affairs is reflected in the low and falling indicators of active participation according to a major study of party participation.

Of those Labour Party members polled, only 29.7% had actually attended a party meeting in 2015. By 2017 it was down to 6.9%. Membership had doubled, but even minimal participation had fallen by more than four times.

The new Corbyn supporters were not involved in contesting internal party power. Those who "stood for office within the party organization" from 10.9% in 2015 to 1.7% in 2017. Even participation in general elections, the one thing party members were usually mobilized to do, actually fell.

The percentage of those who attended a public meeting during the two elections fell from 31.4% to 25.1% from 2015 to 2017. Those who canvassed "face-to-face" dropped from 36.5% to 26.8% and those who stood for public office fell from 9.1% to 2.2% from 2015 to 2017.[27]

Corbynism had not been an organized or activist movement for most of Corbyn's backers. As such it was no match for the party bureaucracy and the Parliamentary Labour Party that have long dominated the party's structure and still do today.

Electoralism, Parliamentarianism, Passivism

There have been many critiques of the problems and mistakes made by Corbyn and his inner circle, not least its top-down organization. But the real culprits here, as in past Labour Party rebellions on the left, are the twin pillars of social democracy: *Electoralism* and Parliamentarianism.

By *Electoralism* I don't mean participating in elections *per se,* but the belief or practice of seeing elections as the primary activity of party members and as the road to reform. Similarly, by *Parliamentarianism* I don't mean seeking legislation *per se,* but the practice of parliamentary or legislative activity and maneuver as the sole legitimate means of social change and, hence, the domination of the party by elected officials rather than members.

In this mode of politics, members and supporters are limited to being mobilized at election time and under the best circumstances being able to vote on party leaders. Together, these twin pillars of social democracy represent a politics of passivity as opposed to the self-activity of the working class in the actual class struggle, electoral or otherwise.

These are the historical norms and practices of social democracy and the basic reason behind the universally recognized decline of membership involvement and working-class support for most social democratic parties over the last few decades. The transformation of social democratic parties in the post-World War II period — from parties that, at least in theory, sought socialism by gradual parliamentary means to those that accepted capitalism as the framework for reforms — was analyzed in the 1960s by Hal Draper.[28]

The British Labour Party, however, *never even* debated reform versus revolution, discussed mass strikes as a means of winning demands let alone taking power, and has never had a significant Marxist current like some social democratic parties at one time or another.

It does not advocate, much less organize, mass action outside of election mobilizations, not even the sorts of symbolic one-day general strikes occasionally called by European parties. Its socialism was never more than a fairly generous welfare state and, for a time, a few bureaucratically nationalized industries.

The Labour Party's shared idea of taking power is limited to winning a majority in parliament, with Britain's state bureaucracy and military having more constitutional independence than even those in the United States. Nor has it ever opposed the monarchy despite the crypto-republicanism of some of its left-wing members. No major left faction in the Labour Party has ever challenged these electoral and parliamentary norms — including Corbyn and Corbynism, or Tony Benn and Bennism previously.

Even Momentum, the Corbynista movement's activist

organization outside the Labour Party, which does engage in active campaigns around issues and rose to 40,000 or more members at its height in 2019, focused mainly on national and local (Council) elections and internal leadership contests.

As its founding statement put it, "Momentum supports the Labour Party, and works to increase participation and engagement in the party to enable it to win elections and enter Government."[29] By March 2021, while it still acted as a pressure group on Labour policy, it had fallen to 20,000-30,000 members with little influence in the party it supports.[30]

Lessons for America

That the priorities of electoralism and parliamentarianism work against grassroots organization, mass mobilization and direct action is illustrated by the entire history of the Labour Party. This has meant that structurally and in practice the party's parliamentary delegation and bureaucracy dominate and determine policy.

For socialists in the United States attempting to get elected and work through the thoroughly capitalist Democratic Party, which has *no members or democratic structure of any sort*, even in comparison with the degraded state of the British Labour Party, matters are even more dire.

Among other things this has meant that socialists elected to Congress who have attempted to move the Democratic Party to the left have been forced to abandon their original reform programs such as the Green New Deal and Medicare-for-All. They end up supporting Joe Biden's far more inadequate reforms in the fight against not even the Republicans, but the Democrat's own right wing and spineless center.

Where members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) or candidates they have endorsed have had some state-level electoral success as Democrats in New York State, they appear to be learning to see marginal gains as real victories and aggressive district case work as equivalent to worker self-activity. Gestures of friendliness from the likes of Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer and former New York Mayor Bill DeBlasio seem to represent signs of legitimacy.[31]

One can only say, "With friends like these…." Since there is *no* Democratic Party membership and the centers of party power are far above the local level, DSA in some places has taken on some of the functions of the party itself. Along with that comes the danger of becoming a sort of adjunct of the party, tied more closely to Democratic electoralism and parliamentarianism than even Momentum is to those of the Labour Party.

For U.S. socialists, the lessons of the Corbyn movement, the first in decades to challenge the Labour Party's long-standing centrism and neoliberalism, are surely that the combination of electoralism and parliamentarianism are a recipe for demobilization and top-down organization.

Without independent mass democratic grassroots working-class political organization, self-activity, and direct action, the movement for socialism will become trapped in the morass of money-driven elections and parliamentary maneuvers domīnated by party elites and the sometimes distant, sometimes immediate voice of capital within the very party they have embraced. ■

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Working for the Revolution:
The Movement, the Plants, the "Party"

By Dianne Feeley

IN 1967, WHEN I was invited to join the Socialist Workers Party's youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance, I didn't hesitate. I was ready to join an activist political organization. I'd already worked as a teacher in African-American schools in Harlem, set up a Headstart program with the Child Development Group of Mississippi and been arrested in anti-Vietnam War direct actions.

The SWP group was an interesting mix of older trade unionists who had cut their teeth in an earlier radicalization and younger members who were based on campus. One older comrade was a child during the Paterson, New Jersey Silk Strike where she heard Elizabeth Gurley Flynn speak. During World War II she led the seamen's party fraction.

Three were painters active in Painters Local #4, whose leader, Dow Wilson, had recently been assassinated rooting out the mob. A couple active in the antiwar coalition were both trade unionists — he was a longshoreman, she a member of the clerical workers union. Most had weathered the Cold War. They had a wealth of socialist experience and were eager to discuss a variety of issues with younger members.

A younger woman was a librarian who would go on to help organize a union at her workplace; a comrade who just transferred into the branch was a teamster. (He later left to come out as gay and organized the successful gay bar boycott of the anti-union Coors corporation.)

Such experienced comrades might have been valuable mentors for labor activism. Yet in the SWP/YSA, few younger members were encouraged to find working-class jobs. Instead, we were to stay on college campuses where we could continue to organize antiwar actions including leafleting military bases, organizing mass demonstrations, and kicking ROTC and other military research programs off campus.

We also built labor contingents, women's contingents, and African-American and Chicano contingents to the big antiwar actions. In Fall 1968, I was the office manager for the GI-Civilian March for Peace, which was led by active-duty GIs.

I began graduate school at San Francisco State the previous spring, but my assigned purpose was to help build a YSA presence. That semester ended with a sit-in at the Administration Building where we contacted Columbia University strikers and felt very much a part of a worldwide movement of youth.

Eventually the administration called the police; after much discussion we voted to leave rather than face arrest. However, the police were eager to try out their paraphernalia and started to attack us. Fortunately night classes were letting out, so the crowd interfered with their plan.

That fall the Black Student Union with other Third World organizations raised 15 demands, challenged the administration to a debate and when administrators stupidly walked out, the strike was on. Over the course of a five-month strike, white activists coordinated with the Third World Strike Committee to build support for their demands.

We had community groups, parents and unions joining our picket lines and rallies. We had a mutual-aid pact with striking oil workers in Richmond: we would go to their picket lines while they came to ours. Over the course of the strike, about 850 of us were arrested but we won several demands, most importantly, a School of Ethnic Studies, which exists today.

Feminist Upsurge

By the late '60s the new feminist movement took off through consciousness-raising groups and conferences. Comrades eagerly participated in discussions about sexism and how that related to class and race. We began studying not only with Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* but devouring Simone Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Although the term "intersectional" hadn't been invited yet, we discussed how the relationship of racial and sexual oppression was braided into capitalism's class structure. I particularly remember the intense discussion at one of the SWP's Friday Night Forums where we analyzed Kate Millet's just released *Sexual Politics*.

When Betty Friedan called for women "to get out of the kitchen and into the streets" to celebrate the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage (August 26, 1970), we were active in building coalitional demonstrations around the demands of "Free 24-hour childcare," Equal Pay for Equal Work" and "Free Abortion on Demand."

WE ARE CONTINUING a series of articles written by leftists who, under the direction of their socialist organization, took working-class jobs in order to root themselves and their organizations deeper into the U.S. working class. In recent years, an emerging generation of socialist labor activists has become keenly interested in the history of that experience, and lessons to be learned for today.

The Democratic Socialists of America's Labor Committee (DSLC) hosted three panels in early 2021 to investigate what previous generation of socialists who took working-class jobs had done. Their responses became the preparatory readings for the panels and are the basis for these articles.

This issue features Dianne Feeley, a retired autoworker and editor of ATC, *and Mike Ely who worked as a communist activist within the coalminers' wildcat upsurge.*

The series will continue in our next issue. ATC *would like to thank the DSLC members who worked on pulling this series together, Steve Downs and Laura Gabby. — The Editors*

During this period, I was asked by the party to join the National Organization for Women, where I organized on reproductive rights, the Equal Rights Amendment and put together a series of classes. NY NOW would have 20-30 new people show up at a monthly meeting, so it was important to incorporate them into one of NOW's standing committees. Otherwise, they would disappear. (Similar to what DSA chapters face today.)

A Late Turn to Industry

Summarizing this 10-year period, I'd describe the YSA/SWP as a Trotskyist organization that combined socialist propaganda (literature sales, running for public office, holding forums) with mass work.

But as the '70s rolled along, especially with U.S. troops pulling out of Vietnam and the U.S. Supreme Court legalizing abortion with the *Roe v. Wade* decision, our two biggest nationally-coordinated campaigns drew to a close. The SWP leadership then projected building community-centered branches. Too localized but requiring long-term commitments, they quickly fizzled.

When I had attended my first SWP convention, I sat in on the labor fraction meeting. Although there were interesting reports about the comrades' work in auto, steel and the teachers' unions, there was no orientation for newer members. Yet this would have been the ideal opportunity to organize younger comrades to move into these jobs and to be mentored by comrades already rooted there.

Certainly, there was coverage in the party paper, *The Militant,* about labor struggles. By the mid-'70s these included coal miner strikes and campaigns for more democratic unions — where we had comrades — in rail and steel. Throughout, SWPers carried out strike support work and paid attention to winning working people, and where possible their unions, to join in antiwar, women's rights and Black demonstrations — but it wasn't until 1977 that the SWP made its turn.

When you compare the SWP's move to those of other socialist organizations, the SWP's decision came quite late as the '70s wave of labor action was declining. But based on the successes of getting comrades into steel and rail, the leadership issued an all-out call two years later to go into an expanding number of industries: airlines, auto, textiles, mines.

This became known as "the turn within the turn." Comrades who had jobs in public sector unions were urged to leave for a more industrial union. Even comrade teachers, social workers, librarians, and state office workers who held office in their unions were urged to resign to become miners or railroad workers.

For a two-year period, I was a member of the SWP's National Committee and was able to see the top leadership team up close. At one plenum they called on the youth group to abandon the campus, saying that the campus radicalization had dissipated.

Since I'd recently run as the SWP candidate for governor of New York State and spent time campaigning on campuses, I knew that couldn't be true. In fact, on campus I could sell 100 copies of *The Militant* within a couple of hours. Campus anti-apartheid divestment campaigns were in full swing.

The SWP leadership said we needed now to get industrial jobs because a pre-revolutionary situation was developing. I was willing to accept that premise and conclude that maybe it was necessary to leave campus because we couldn't carry out both labor and campus work. However, I was disturbed by the leadership's motivation.

Before we heard the report, other National Committee members told me it wouldn't work in their branches but after the report, when I encouraged them to speak, most told me they'd been convinced. How could they have been convinced by such a misleading analysis?

I thought that members were duty bound to raise questions. I spoke against the motivation of the proposal and therefore voted against it despite supporting implanting ourselves in key industries. Henceforth I was viewed with suspicion. Subsequently I realized that's what had happened to the "Proletarian Orientation Tendency," who had proposed a more modest turn a few years earlier.

Working in Auto

Although I had a bout with breast cancer and was almost 40, I applied for a job at the Metuchen, New Jersey Ford plant about 50 miles from New York City. I wasn't sure I'd be able to pass the physical, but I did.

I worked second shift. It was a 10-hour day, and eight hours every other Saturday. Although most of the workers lived in New Jersey, I was able to arrange a ride — the round trip ate up another four hours of my day — with Haitian coworkers who lived in Brooklyn.

My first job was a Charlie Chaplin experience. I had to tear off two different sizes of butcher paper lined with masking tape and wrap them around parts of the car's body before it was painted.

If I didn't stand in the right spot as I ripped the paper, the tape would slide off. I'd lose my rhythm and be chasing after the car as it traveled down the line, 57 cars an hour. I'd also have to be prepared to replace the rolls without missing a car.

Later I had a job where the line varied between automatic and standard motors. With automatics I had more work, so if there were too many in a row it was hard to keep up. When I asked around, I learned there had been a 1949 strike over just this issue. The grievance was settled with management agreeing that if a job was overloaded, they would slow the line or provide a worker with extra help.

Of course, I had to show I *couldn't* do the job. This is difficult because one's instinct is to work faster. I had to maintain the same pace and as the automatics kept coming, I'd have to let one or more go. The "pick-up" guy would then run to my station and help me through the patch of automatics.

I tried to organize others on the line to join me in keeping the same pace, but not all were affected by the difference in motors, and others were too intimidated. Nonetheless they encouraged me to call the committeeman and eventually

management came and watched as I let motors go. I won the right to additional help but was disappointed I couldn't organize others.

The SWP fraction — at one point 23 of us in a plant of about 2000 — wasn't interested in my problem or how I won. We did not study the contract as a baseline to better the conditions we faced. Initially I'd supported the idea that we should be "talking socialism" with coworkers, assuming that would come out of organizing around the situations we faced.

We did attend union meetings but our leadership mostly commented on larger political events, not about shop-floor conditions. Nor were we to consider running for any union position. All that was "reformism." Our job was to interest coworkers in socialist ideas and sell copies of *The Militant*.

There were a group of Maoists working in the plant when we arrived. They had a small caucus and put out leaflets about shop-floor issues. They attended union meetings and put the bureaucrats on the spot. I admired their energy and would have liked to talk with them, but I knew I wasn't supposed to do that and, unfortunately, never did.

Equal Rights and Civil Rights

Because the UAW supported the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, this was a campaign that SWPers were able to build through the local's Women's Committee. Women were 10-15% of the work force and recent new hires. Most were single Black mothers who worked the second shift. They'd nap a few hours, then get their children fed and off to school in the morning. Some were fortunate to have family members to help, but most struggled through the week on little sleep.

Our committee set up a table at the plant gate and talked to coworkers about the importance of the ERA. We even organized a union bus to an ERA rally in Richmond, Virginia in support of its passage.

Before I worked at Ford in Metuchen, I'd written about why socialists should support the ERA and debated the well-known right-winger Phyllis Schlafly, as well as a Communist Party member (they later changed their position). But then I'd been focused on what the ERA would mean for women.

Now I was talking to mostly male coworkers about why *they* should support the ERA. These discussions deepened my understanding of how the patriarchal system functions: men as well as women are forced into gender roles. For them, it is that of "breadwinner." They are supposed to risk their health and even their lives to "bring home the bacon" for their families. Men aren't supposed to be emotional, and given the lengthening of the workday, often miss day-to-day parenting.

I consider the work SWP members carried out in the local's committees our best work. In fact, the most intense experience I had was a weekend bus ride that the region's Civil Rights Committee took to North Carolina after five civil rights leaders, members of the Communist Workers Party, were killed by the KKK.

A majority on our bus were Black workers who grew up in the South. They told stories of why and when they, and other members of their families, came North. To add to the tension, on the way home the bus was tracked by right wingers on CBs. We did not feel safe in stopping for dinner until we were over the border.

Another time the UAW Region held a conference where Tony Mazzocchi, a leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, spoke about the need of the working class to have our own party. I and other SWP autoworkers in attendance hoped within a decade we'd have a full-blown Labor Party. Over the years Mazzocchi tried to assemble one, but unions were too tied to the Democrats to make a break.

Occasionally there was a broad action that the SWP supported and that fraction would encourage coworkers to attend. In our work to shut down nuclear power plants, I remember inviting coworkers to attend a mass picket at the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant. But it was unrealistic to get workers from New Jersey to travel on a Sunday to Long Island for a demonstration.

Failing to Lead

In 1980, the local learned that the other Ford plant in New Jersey was shutting down and some of the Mahwah workers would transfer to our plant. But our newly elected local union leadership opposed the transfer. They said that *our* temporary workers — mostly Blacks, women and youth — would be laid off and replaced by old white men who should retire.

Suddenly everyone was asking questions about what should be done. I said we as the union should fight for a reduction of hours. Why should we be working 50 and 58 hours a week while others had no work? What about reducing the hours of the work week to 30 or 35?

But when we got to the SWP fraction meeting, the chair said we should avoid being drawn into the discussion. Our task was to sell *The Militant*.

That seemed crazy to me: workers were asking for our advice! That's the whole point of Trotsky's transitional program! It proposes radical solutions to everyday problems and opens the door to an alternative.

Another comrade raised the idea that we should demand that the UAW hold a meeting with all autoworkers in our region and discuss the situation. Comrades challenged him: "What could we say?"

Why not challenge the right of corporations to close a plant? What about advocating the right to a job and cutting the work week? Even if such a meeting would never be called, workers would be discussing alternatives to corporate decisions and union acquiescence.

Most of the comrades angrily dismissed the proposal, calling those who embraced suggestions "reformists." I left the meeting shaken by the heat of the discussion, but determined to continue conversations with coworkers.

At the following fraction meeting, the chair proposed that we demand our local call a special meeting! One comrade dared to ask how that differed from the proposal shot down the previous week. I realized that when the national leadership heard a report, they decided it was necessary to offer a response. But they couldn't use the ideas members suggested — proposals came from the party *leadership,* not the ranks.

Of course the moment quickly passed. The local was placed in receivership, its leadership removed from office. The regional director chaired the next union meeting and while questions could be raised, no motions would be entertained.

Temps were laid off and the Mahwah workers — who turned out to be mostly African Americans who had built a militant United Black Brothers caucus in their local — transferred in. They were great to work with!

Summing Up

I am no longer convinced that for the SWP leadership, the turn to industry had much to do with deepening the party's working-class roots. If my hunch is correct, then what was the turn about?

I believe it was the result of disorientation once the big campaigns that had built the SWP of the 1960s were over and there was nothing of scale to replace them. It was a challenging period, where the radicalization wasn't growing like wildfire and where the populist outpouring that produced the Iranian Revolution was being hijacked by religious fundamentalists. Instead of having the confidence to open a discussion about this complex reality and how to adjust to this new period, the SWP leadership tightened up.

Industrialization was not intended to build rank-and-file democracy on the shop floor or in the party. Instead, it became a test. If a member wasn't willing to find a job in an industry the party prioritized, then they weren't "cadre," and there wasn't a place for them. Or as one comrade, who had known me for years, remarked at my trial — for "freelancing in the women's movement" — that if I'd been with Che in the mountains, he would have known what to do with me. The thought that someone I knew regarded me as an enemy to be liquidated chilled me!

What had happened to the rebellious youth who had joined the YSA/SWP?

I suspect it's a case of the frog being boiled in water. The process of transforming a relatively healthy organization into one with a membership that doesn't ask questions took place over a period of time and around different issues.

Once we had discussed and debated political questions, but by the early 1980s those discussions had pretty much disappeared. When I'd query comrades, I found they frequently begged off, saying they didn't know enough to comment. Another time I praised the work of the International Socialists, who built an effective unemployed committee. Comrades were scandalized that I could find the work of other radicals important — as if we were the center of the world!

My deviance was marked, my influence diminished and I was expelled. That happened to others as well. Still more quietly withdrew, whether remaining socialists, becoming active in their union in a way they couldn't as members, or developing more of their personal life. We were all viewed as people who had betrayed the movement.

Those who stayed adjusted to the leadership's zigs and zags. They put their faith in "the party," and I suspect that any doubt might threaten the meaning of their life's work.

A Postscript

More than a decade later, I moved to Detroit to help in the founding of a new socialist group, Solidarity. Eventually I got a job at an axle plant where another member worked and where I spent the final 10 years of my work life.

We thought about political ideas we could raise at work, whether from mulling over the day's news or from a struggle in the plants. Often I had about 10-15 seconds to make my comment — then it was my job to listen. Once, when I posted an article about spousal abuse in the women's locker room, a janitor stopped at my workstation within a half hour to reveal years before she'd been abused. We became a team, alert to other women who might need help.

With another member of Solidarity, I organized support for the long Detroit newspaper strike and initiated a number of campaigns, sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. Through the Women's Committee, I organized a campaign to commit the union to raise childcare in our next contract.

A group of us visited day care centers and surveyed the membership. I learned about the problems parents and grandparents faced daily. One young woman couldn't drop her child off until the center opened at 6 am. She then drove above the speed limit to work, punching in just minutes before the line started at 6:30. A number of workers had disabled children they had to pick up shortly after work so last-minute overtime left them scrambling. Unfortunately, union negotiators quickly dropped the childcare demand.

For the 2003 contract, the national UAW leadership was prepared to settle for two-tier wages "to keep plants open." Given this, Administration Caucus members blocked any attempt to get a motion passed for the local to order "No Two-Tier" buttons. I put out a leaflet calling for button contributions and suddenly found coworkers handing me one dollar and five-dollar bills. We made 2,000 buttons and got approximately 50 people in the various plants and shifts to distribute them.

At the beginning, a few workers said "Two-tier doesn't affect me." Others saw the injustice of working next to someone who didn't have our wages or benefits. One of my coworkers remarked, "Voting for two-tier allows target practice on your back. They'll fire you and hire two for the price of one."

In the end, while our local voted against the two-tier contract, it passed in the other locals. We learned that the UAW leadership encouraged the rumor that our local would arrogantly vote two-tier down because we weren't in danger of having our plant closed and didn't care about those in danger. While the union's song is "Solidarity Forever," the leadership badmouthed us to win a wretched contract.

Some people tell me I "sacrificed" my life by industrializing. While I reject the SWP's sectarian approach, I think it is necessary for socialists to root ourselves in working-class jobs, building caucuses and organizations that can provide the experience and skills we need to advance class consciousness.

My life has been enriched by these experiences. Because I worked in plants with a substantial African-American work force, I see how systematic racism functions on the job and follows us home. When I worked at the Ford plant, I said I could identify, blindfolded, whether a worker was Black or white if they just told me where they lived. Whites mostly lived in the suburbs, Blacks in Newark and Haitians in Brooklyn. Our neighborhoods are markedly different.

UAW retirees remain active in our union. This fall I leafleted, called, emailed and texted UAW members, urging a vote for directly electing our top UAW officers rather than continuing to use the delegate system corrupted by the Administration Caucus.

We won that referendum — now we move forward to further democratizing our union. That means not only building accountability in our finances but also in how we negotiate contracts. The UAW tradition is that the membership is kept in the dark until the contract is ready. Other unions have open

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Young Reds and the 1970s

Miners' Right to Strike Committee

By Mike Ely

I HAVE TWO stories to tell.

The first is about a massive wave of militant working class struggle.

For 10 years, between 1969 and 1979, coalminers in the United States waged relentless class struggle centered in southern West Virginia. Their weapon was the wildcat strike — thousands of illegal walkouts broke out at hundreds of scattered worksites. They built into explosive nation-wide strikes spread by picket movements.

The movement's opening shot was the 23-day Black Lung strike in 1969 when 40,000 miners walked out and forced West Virginia's legislature to recognize and compensate Black Lung disease.

Something new and determined had broken free in the coalfields. After World War II, hundreds of thousands were driven into unemployment by mechanization. They lived through a bitter powerlessness — imposed by the industry's slump and exploited by their union's corrupt gangsters.

For 20 years, almost no new miners were hired. Then by the mid-1960s, an aging generation needed to be replaced. The new workforce, many of them Vietnam vets, bristled with a rebellious fuck-you attitude. They simply weren't willing to live as their parents had.

Young militants met outrages by mine operators with countless walkouts across southern West Virginia. The corporations responded with a flood of federal court injunctions. Judges ordered miners back to work and threatened heavy fines and jailing for continued defiance.

The networks of militants refused to give up their wildcat weapon. They defied injunctions — and increasingly spread their actions to new mines. By the mid-'70s, local strikes over grievances turned into a much larger fight against all injunctions, fines and jailings.

Miners rallied to a new demand: *Their right to strike had to be recognized — by contract, the legal system, and their own union leadership.*

In the summers of 1975 and 1976, miners waged two countrywide strikes against federal injunctions and jailings. The walkouts pulled out 80,000 to 100,000 miners — behind this demand for the right to strike. These "right to strike" strikes were marked by shootings, jailings, *de facto* martial law in some areas, attempts to organize scabbing, and intense anticommunist hysteria in the press.

The upsurge culminated in a bitter 111-day contract strike during 1977-78. Miners defied everything thrown at them — including President Carter's Taft-Hartley injunction.

This decade-long miners' upsurge was raw, illegal, violent, and seemingly irrepressible. It was marked by amazing solidarity and heroic sacrifice. It forms the largest, most sustained wave of working class militancy in modern U.S. experience. Yet it remains virtually invisible within both scholarly labor history and leftist memory.

My second story is about communist cadre within that upsurge:

The Revolutionary Union was a communist organization, born around the Bay Area, that grew explosively across the country by 1970. The RU rejected the gray, conservative model of the Soviet Union. We drew our inspiration from the stormy struggles of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The RU rejected "lesser evil" electoralism and organized militant support for the Black Panther Party.

The core idea animating the RU was to create conditions for a socialist revolution in the United States — including a new vanguard communist party, a hard-core revolutionary workers' movement, and broad alliances with many different progressive strata and struggles.

We joined to take revolutionary politics deep into the working class. Once RU went national, it redistributed its young communist cadre — shifting them from campuses and counterculture centers. We sent teams of organizers deep into industries where the '60s movements had rarely reached.

By late 1972, six RU cadre arrived in southern-most counties of West Virginia. Two years later, a second cohort took up work in the mountains further north, just below Charleston. Our Maoist crew came to play an influential, sometimes leading, role among the miners.

We helped give the movement structure, common demands and an uncompromisingly radical thrust. Meanwhile, our cadre injected their internationalism, anti-racism and dreams of socialist revolution far and wide within the whirlwind.

I'm writing a book-length treatment of this experience. Let me share a short sketch here.

Dreams of a Revolutionary Workers' Movement

By 1970, U.S. polls estimated that over three million people consciously wanted a revolution. Over a million students considered themselves "revolutionaries."

We had a serious movement but not nearly enough to seriously go for power.

Repression was hitting the Black Liberation movement hard. Many of us became convinced that the revolution urgently needed to be spread into new corners of society. In particular, we were determined to seek out radical elements within the multi-racial working class and help them become the leading component for our future revolution.

About 10,000 young radicals of diverse trends resolved to go into the working class.

My partner Gina and I were 20 when we headed for West Virginia. We had organized for militant antiwar and Black liberation actions since high school. We left college after the Kent and Jackson State shootings — and helped organize white working-class youth around Panther-style politics.

Gina worked in the Post Office, then in a Midwestern lens factory. I had a job first in a sweatshop shoe factory, then in a steel forge. After joining the RU, we worked closely with the Black Panther Party for a year — producing a joint community newspaper and studying communist theory.

Other comrades arriving in West Virginia had their own distinct experiences. Some had been radicalized in the Peace Corps. Others had experienced Appalachia as part of the VISTA program.

One comrade had been tried for sedition in Kentucky. Another had been a grunt during Nixon's invasion of Cambodia who then joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). With the RU, he helped organize a radical caucus and walkout in Post Office terminals.

In short, our RU cadre had early experiences with working class struggle plus some initial training as communists.

As we arrived, we obviously knew big things had kicked off in the coalfields. The black lung strike won its demands three years earlier. The rank-and-file upsurge left the UMWA's Boyle regime weak and exposed.

When the Labor Department imposed a government-supervised election, a hastily assembled reform coalition, Miners for Democracy (MFD), won a lopsided victory. Arnold Miller, a retired rank-and-file miner, became the new union president.

What we couldn't know was that we were entering a tornado of struggle that would escalate, year by year, for a decade.

Our RU coalfield project defined its goals using a passage from Lenin:

"The Party's activity must consist in promoting the workers' class struggle. The Party's task is not to concoct some fashionable means of helping the workers, but to join up with the workers' movement, to bring light into it, to assist the workers in the struggle they themselves have already begun to wage."

We did not intend to adopt whatever politics were spontaneously dominant among the workers. The key phrase for us was "bring light into it." By light, we meant revolutionary politics. We said among ourselves, "Bringing Marxism-Leninism to the working class is bringing it home."

In other words, our project's ultimate goals weren't building some "fighting union movement" for reform demands. We were communists seeking to connect a section of working class radicals to the world of anti-racist, internationalist, revolutionary politics. The plan intended to transform both the working class and the existing revolutionary movement.

We dove into the picket cores of the wildcats. We joined the Black Lung Associations. We conducted class-conscious agitation wherever we worked and much more.

Structures of Struggle

The miners' upsurge was launched by militants elected to the lowest levels of the union structure.

In each county, there were several mines with highly militant leading cores. Local union leaders are all working miners — who take time from work to confront the mine managements over grievances.

The militant mines struck often over injustices. Each night, local news would announce new injunctions ordering a return to work at this mine or that.

Increasingly, such local cores also led wider networks from surrounding mines. They could summon a picket movement to spread and sustain wildcats when they went regional.

In some ways, the once-comatose UMWA had already been reborn a "fighting union" by the late 1960s, at least within the grassroots networks built among the younger workers. Many miners expected the new MFD officials to provide a unifying, central leadership for the next emerging fights.

So it was a shock to many that Arnold Miller and most new officials soon launched their own hostile attacks against wildcat strikes and the militants who led them. Within a couple of years, these new UMWA officials were actively organizing scab movements. They were making secret backroom deals with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association. And they tried to expel communists from the union.

This bitter outcome of this MFD experience is important for today's radicals to understand: The MFD's takeover remains the single most successful rank-and-file insurgency ever within a major industrial union. This reform movement elevated genuine rank-and-filers into every level of union office. Rank-and-file conventions democratized the UMWA national and regional constitutions in every conceivable way. (I was a delegate at one.)

Yet in the end, the top union structures again showed up on the battlefield as enemies of miners' demands and actions — just as Tony Boyle's gangsters had.

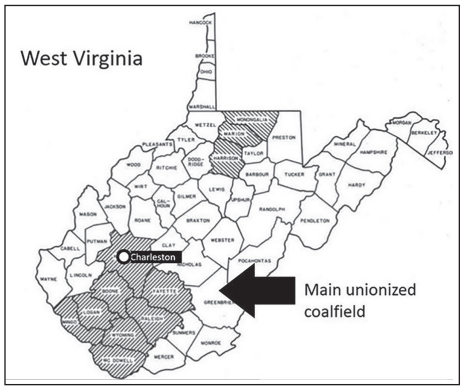
That's a sobering experience for anyone who expects that overturning corrupt union cliques and democratizing union structures will naturally produce fighting unions *and* foster conditions for promoting socialism.

The problem is not that Arnold Miller had been a fake militant or that personal flaws caused his betrayal. The truth is that this new union leadership was plopped into the existing post-World War II framework of collective bargaining — where trade unions are required to limit demands to wages and benefits at contract time.

Union officials are legally required to enforce uninterrupted production. To compel their compliance, the apparatus of collective bargaining gives the state power to punish and even destroy union structures that don't control the workforce.

Federal authorities actively supported reform in the UMWA. They didn't do this to hand the coal miners' movement a new "fighting union" leadership. They allowed the black lung activist Miller to replace the exposed murderer Boyle so that a new officialdom would have enough legitimacy to rein in the miners.

Ironically, the most positive feature of the reform UMWA leadership proved to be its profound weakness. The union hierarchy remained split into hostile cliques. There was no coherent top-down structure capable of enforcing discipline on the workers.



The year 1974 saw several significant strikes. The statewide Great Gas Protest by 20-30,000 miners was the first strike we participated in. After a major shooting, the governor caved in and dropped his hated gas rationing rule.

Battered by escalating strikes, the BCOA doubled down. More court injunctions showered down on locals. Fines and jailings were increasingly carried out. In the middle of this, the Miners Right to Strike Committee (MRTSC) was born.

The MRTSC and Communists

By 1974, the *ad hoc* structure of the early wildcat movement was running up against its own limitations. Loose networks had previously sent out pickets whenever larger strikes were needed. The picketing relied heavily on miners' famous solidarity with anyone who showed up asking for help.

But now, the authorities were actively targeting the most militant local crews with heavy reprisals. This produced a churn among the militants. Some respected leaders stepped back when threatened with prison. Some considered careers in the democratized union structure. Other fighters stepped forward to take their place.

Meanwhile, the picket movements were demonized by hysterical media campaigns. And the new UMWA leadership was betraying militant hopes.

The militant networks now needed a more sophisticated ongoing form of rank-and-file organization. It was not enough to have local officials leading one-off strikes from the shadows. The rank-and-file needed common long-term demands. They needed a recognized voice that could articulate a radical narrative among the miners themselves and then a larger arena of public opinion.

In important ways, "the crown lay in the gutter." The cadre of the RU stepped forward to organize this new kind of organization. By mid-1974, our members were well embedded among District 29's militants. Several respected activists came up with a petition demanding the right-to-strike — and invited us to join the planning. Their idea was to force the UMWA leadership to demand the legal right to strike in the 1974 contract negotiations.

Our RU leadership recognized the emergence of this demand as an important, maturing step for the struggle. We embraced their plan. And so we united with a dozen or so leading militants to form the Miners Right to Strike Committee (MRTSC).

Next came a fascinating debate within this new organization over exactly what the focus should be.

Was the goal mainly a new grievance procedure that included a local right to strike? Or did miners really need an open-ended right-to-strike that included large political issues — like Black Lung disease, outrageous state policy, or….?

Some miners assumed that federal injunctions were caused by company bribery, so they proposed that money be gathered to "reverse-bribe" the corrupt judges. We argued against this scheme — because it dangerously misunderstood how the capitalists actually controlled their legal system.

And a bigger question was raised: Should the MRTSC be focused mainly on inner-union contract discussions? Or did we expect to spread walkouts when locals were attacked — creating strikes for the right to strike itself?

We communists supported making demands for the immediate contract negotiations — but we were convinced that the MRTSC needed to be prepared to escalate if and when our contract demands were spurned.

The MRTSC was also a way we communists brought in some much-needed methods from the larger revolutionary movement. For example, wildcats had not previously produced leaflets explaining the issues behind big strikes. The very idea of using leaflets were controversial at the beginning — but soon proved its value.

The MRTSC produced broadsheet and manifestos during wildcats and at key moments during contract showdowns. Later we also organized press conferences, informational pickets, and car-caravans to new areas.

The RU's organizational plan was to build "intermediate workers organizations" (IWOs) that would become cores of struggle that were "intermediate" between trade unions and our communist organization.

Our goal was never to "take over the unions." Our RU cadre didn't run for local offices. Our intent was to build a class-conscious, organized, country-wide force that could independently lead campaigns around cutting-edge political struggles, including structural racism, imperialist war, class-wide economic demands and ultimately power.

The MRTSC was quickly hooking up with militant local leaders one area after another within West Virginia. A new cohort of RU members started holding separate committee activities in District 17. Close supporters formed a third MRTSC in northern West Virginia, around Morgantown.

This MRTSC structure soon proved different from the previous shifting coalitions among local officials. It developed its own membership directly among active miners who weren't as bogged down by local union responsibilities. The MRTSC contained no district officials or union staffers — though sympathetic folks at all levels slipped us inside info.

Within a few years, the national RU had developed political work in most basic U.S. industries. By 1977, we attempted to form a countrywide "National United Workers Organization" (NUWO) — that would bring together city-wide IWOs and early industry caucuses.

The MRTSC affiliated itself with that NUWO effort, at least on paper. Several of us toured the U.S. promoting the NUWO.

I went on a speaking tour through the Deep South — from Greensboro to New Orleans.

Applying the Mass Line

Our ability to anticipate the great potential of this right to strike demand flowed from our application of the Maoist "mass line" concept.

The mass line starts with the insight that the masses of people must be themselves involved in making changes. With the people, seemingly impossible things can be achieved. Without connecting deeply to the people, small groups can accomplish little on their own.

This meant we needed to deeply investigate the felt needs among the people. The mass line then calls for synthesizing those scattered, spontaneous ideas we uncover with our own communist understandings about long-term goals. Taking the synthesized demands and analyses back out among the people enables the masses to recognize and embrace such plans as their own.

We recognized the "right to strike" demand as an important new creation of the most militant workers. We helped rework the idea, to break it free from UMWA contract confines, and free it to become a unifying demand inspiring mass struggle.

Our organizational plans were also informed by the mass line. We understood that the masses of people are inevitably quite diverse politically. And Maoism sorts such diversity into the categories of the relatively advanced, the intermediate and the backward. Our key organizational method was to unite the relatively small number of the advanced to win over the broad intermediate layers, and isolate the die-hard backward.

In short, we were working for an ongoing organized unity between communists and the advanced that could emerge as a new material political force — one that could actually influence and lead the broad intermediate in struggle.

Through that process, we could together neutralize hard-core backward forces among the workers (including corrupt company tools, hyper-conservative religious types, and active racists).

This Maoist mass line rejects the logic common within some left projects of confining our own political work to whatever could be immediately and easily understood by the intermediate.

The MRTSC became our main framework for uniting with the advanced among the miners to lead others in broad struggle against the system. At the same time, we needed to pursue our own work for the larger cause of communist revolution, especially among the advanced, but also in popular ways among the wider public.

This method required us to ask: "Who are the advanced? How do we identify them and connect with them?"

The early RU adopted a verdict that the advanced were active workers who developed the trust and leadership of their co-workers in the course of day-to-day struggles, even if such mass leaders may initially have significant backward and even anti-communist views.

Proceeding from that, we initially assumed that the militant cores of the wildcat strike movement would be where the advanced workers gathered. That's why we had come.

Our experience quickly challenged these assumptions.

My partner and I lived in McDowell County where some large mines employed significant numbers of Black miners. Those mine locals (including my own) were often led by long-standing, heavily Black union cliques.

When I attended my first late-night strike rally, I got a look at the hundreds of militants kicking off the 1974 Gas Protest. I suddenly realized that the rally was all white. We were seeking to connect with the most powerful upsurge of workers in the country, and for some still-unknown reason, Black miners were simply not present within its active core.

Everywhere else in the United States, Black people had long formed the driving, advanced edge of radical politics, exemplified by the Black Panther Party and Detroit's revolutionary Black autoworkers.

It was inconceivable to us that the advanced workers of southern West Virginia could possibly be all white — or that Black miners were somehow all among the intermediate.

Our early practice challenged our organization's preconceptions. One moment drove this home.

As the 1974 gas strike became tense, a couple of men staggered into our late-night picket meeting badly beaten. They said a few Black miners had pistol-whipped them at Gary's cleaning plant and then gone in to scab.

Some men within the picket meeting started shouting that we should go a nearby Black pool hall and fuck everyone up. One drunken voice shouted, "Time to go get the n*ggers."

The rally had cracked open. One second we had this ferocious strike movement against the government, a split second later, it threatened to spin off a racist lynch mob!

The future of this movement obviously hung in the balance. Miners around me mumbled they were leaving if things went that way. I was the only comrade there that night, so I thought, "Fuck it. It's up to me."

I jumped on the back of a pickup and shouted that this racist plan was against everything we should stand for. It would destroy our struggle for years to come. Then I added I was going down to defend that poolhall — with anyone willing to go with me — and that we would shoot anyone attempting to attack the place.

The air suddenly went out of the racist loudmouths. The larger crowd fell silent for a moment. Then strike leaders went back to assigning pickets.

This was an eye-opening event for us. Clearly there were politically advanced, intermediate, and also quite backward workers present at all levels in the wildcat strike movement. And we now understood there must be significant advanced forces in the Black coal camps that were not currently present in the picket movement.

The active and advanced workers were not the same thing. They overlapped and coexisted within the picket movement. But we had to make distinctions for our strategic purposes.

The national RU's practice was running into similar experiences. In the coalfields, we pursued our work among the miner-militants at the core of the wildcat strike movement. But we also developed revolutionary political projects that were not directly tied to the strike movement.

We organized public May First celebrations, starting in 1975, around revolutionary demands. We promoted May Day driving car caravans of 10 or 15 trucks through the coal camps, decked out with loudspeakers and banners.

We launched a bimonthly communist newspaper, the

Coalfield Worker. We launched campaigns of internationalist solidarity — including a speaking tour of ZANU guerrillas from Zimbabwe in southern Africa. We brought miners and active women to meet revolutionary Iranians at West Virginia engineering colleges.

And we carried out postering and graffiti celebrating socialist achievements in Maoist China, and then exposing the capitalist restoration that followed.

We developed a loose division of labor along gender lines. Male comrades were working in mines and pursuing the MRTSC as a main area of work. Female comrades took the lead in our political campaigns, including producing and selling the *Coalfield Worker.*

Meanwhile, most of us were quite open and enthusiastic about our communist politics, with neighbors, co-workers, miner-militants, and (after a time) in public rallies and media interviews.

Revolutionary Outreach vs. Counter-Revolution

Within months of the Gas Protest, the miners movement faced a sudden crisis.

Charleston's school board approved progressive new textbooks — which explored human experiences remote from cultural conservatism of many West Virginian coal camps. A militant movement rose to reject the schoolbooks. Influential fundamentalist churches mobilized against incursions of Black thought, women's liberation, sexual freedom, abortion, and anything associated with progressive change.

Preachers decked out in three-cornered hats picketed mines along Cabin Creek. This pig strike started to spread through District 17 mines surrounding Charleston. Almost immediately, miners around the state contacted the MRTSC, asking if we should all join this strike. After all, the standing rules were: if a brother miner asks for help, you give it.

The newly-founded Heritage Foundation, new Religious Right networks, and the Klan sent cadre in to shape and lead this Textbook Protest. Suddenly, our still-fragile miner network collided head-on with organized counter-networks promoting rightwing cultural wars.

We successfully convinced our miner contacts to help to prevent this reactionary strike from spreading. But we also needed to publicly counteract this ugly eruption of racism, patriotism and fundamentalist religion. The MRTSC simply did not, at that point, have the common understandings needed to take the lead.

Our comrades in Beckley formed a close coalition with a radical group of Black veterans. Together we produced a newssheet exposing the Textbook Protest. It was widely circulated in the strike zone, among miners generally and in Black communities. I believe it helped contain that reactionary strike to one small area near Charleston.

RU and MRTSC members also crashed rallies in Cabin Creek where we denounced the whole anti-textbook thing, and physically confronted Klansmen.

Clearly the "traditional" miners' respect for picket lines had limitations when controversial political issues were involved. The workers needed a class-conscious core to help identify which causes deserved support and which didn't.

This episode gave us valuable insights about the views among our contacts regarding white racism, religion, women's equality and more.

The Sexual Apartheid of Coal Camps

Appalachian coal fields imposed severe inequality on women. Coal operators hired only men for the mines (until the late 1970s). Male miners enjoyed the social life, close camaraderie and income of mine employment. Women were often confined to domestic drudgery, financial dependency, plus church activities. Men and women lived in separate worlds. Male supremacy and even wife beating were typically justified with Bible passages.

We communists tackled the creative challenge of involving women in both the struggle of employed miners and larger radical politics (including the liberation of women).

Meanwhile, this sexual apartheid impacted our own outlooks and relationships in ways we had not anticipated. Our comrades all held strong belief around women's liberation. But, we were now in a world where the dramatic actions of male miners spontaneously took center stage.

Our fierce and sophisticated female comrades found themselves "on the outside looking in." The male supremacy of the surrounding society crept into the outlook of male comrades and even tore at our marriages.

As the RU initiated explicitly revolutionary political work, our female comrades took the lead and also served as overall RU leadership. My partner Gina was an elected leader in the local Black Lung Association and helped organize a protracted militant struggle of mainly-Black women hospital workers.

Anti-communist Hysteria: Impact & Lessons

The moment our RU cadre emerged as strike leaders during the national 1975 "right to strike" wildcat, the authorities launched a ferocious anti-communist campaign to wipe us out. FBI's mouthpiece-columnist Victor Riesel published a nationally syndicated exposé. He fingered individual comrades by name and crafted anti-communist talking points for reactionaries to repeat.

For the next years, campaigns of hysterical lies regularly erupted on the front pages of coalfield newspapers. One local daily printed a photo of me meeting publicly with a dozen miners. Reporters went to each person in the photo demanding that they denounce me or explain their support for communism. An editorial declared that I deserved a "bullet in the head."

Top UMWA leaders launched a national campaign to denounce wildcats, the MRTSC, and communists. At one national convention, reactionary delegates demanded that the union use its anti-communist clause to expel us.

A federal judge sent two comrades to prison for distributing leaflets in defiance of his anti-strike injunction.

The LaRouchies held a press conference (as a non-existent "Labor Party") and denounced the MRTSC as agents of Britain seeking to destroy the American coal industry. Coalfield press headlined the absurd claims.

Teams of Moonies cruised beer joints across southern West Virginia distributing a tract denouncing coalfield communists as enemies of God.

This protracted, red-baiting hysteria repeated one refrain over and over: the moment miners realize that there were communists among them, they would instantly turn on us — force us to flee or die.

Police attack Revolutionary Union cadre leading miners' right-to-strike march of thousands in Charleston, August 25, 1975.

I think the authorities truly believed this. It had been their COINTELPRO experience during the McCarthy period.

The red-baiting did unleash knots of rightwingers to launch violent attacks on our comrades and close supporters. Comrades experienced late-night death threats. Carloads of drunk rightwingers took potshots at comrades' homes.

Several comrades were jumped and beaten. One had his front teeth knocked out. A bomb blew up the garage of one couple. One close supporter suffered a nervous breakdown and had to be hospitalized. Everyone around the RCP and MRTSC lived with a real danger of assassination.

I was, with another comrade, leading a daytime strike rally of about 400 miners in a roadside park. Four men showed up waving a noose and shouting it was time to "kill the communists." We took them on and refused to back down. After an intense standoff, they got no support from the crowd and left.

The local newspaper published a lurid lie: that one of us had been hoisted by the noose. The rope broke and we supposedly ran for our lives. Their lie was reprinted across the country.

Here is the important truth: *The authorities simply failed to drive us out.*

The MRTSC continued to operate through all the confusion and raw terror. We organized rallies and press conferences during the strikes. MRTSC literature was distributed on a coalfield wide scale. We expanded our networks of collaborators. We went on to play a prominent successful role in the looming 1978 contract strike.

The coal companies never succeeded in firing any of our communist comrades — though they tried over and over.

The Miller clique was unable to carry out our expulsion from the UMWA.

Why did they fail?

First, the authorities never grasped how open our cadre had been about communism — circulating communist materials everywhere we went. When the FBI "exposed" us, everyone around us in communities, mines, and the MRTSC already knew what we stood for.

Second, I'm proud to say that our cadre proved extremely tough and optimistic. Only one comrade dropped out and left.

Third, the authorities were stuck in the McCarthyite '50s. They never understood how much more conscious and alienated the miners of our '60s generation were than their parents.

Fourth, most important, it became clear that many thousands of people took actions — often unseen and anonymous — to protect us from being crushed. They did this from their own political viewpoints, not usually from ours. Many supported the intense resistance we were helping to lead.

Gina and I felt as if we were "stage-diving in the dark." Living under threat, we launched ourselves out into the darkness over and over. We experienced the eerie, wonderful feeling of being held up by countless unseen hands.

One example: A local church started attacking my home and family. Our tires were slashed. Friendly neighbors were threatened. Things were escalating toward violence.

Then two Pentecostal preachers who I'd worked with asked to address the church. From the pulpit, they made a passionate defense of Gina and me, our work and our motives. The congregation split in two. And the attacks stopped.

I learned these details only much later. Much was happening under the surface — all across the coalfields.

Our communist project recruited some independent radicals who had also entered in the mines.

One young coal miner who joined had been the bodyguard for Arnold Miller during his MFD election and then worked with the United Farm Workers in California. These broader experiences that helped fuel his attraction to communist politics.

But in general, that leap from militant trade unionism to revolutionary communism proved difficult for even our closest, long-time co-conspirators.

Over the decade we worked closely with many non-miner progressives — who formed the Miner Support Committee (MSC) during the 1978 contract strike. About 50 people actively built the MSC including radical lawyers and academics. They created a free clinic for strikers and raised funds to print full-page "Vote no!" ads in coalfield newspapers.

We also formed an alliance with farmers from the American Agricultural Movement — who showed up with tracker-trailer convoys packed with food for hungry strikers.

At the same time, the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party, the renamed RU) and its many IWO groupings organized classwide support for the miners across the U.S. building toward a national support march through Charleston.

Endgame

The story of how the upsurge ended can't fit here.

The very short version is that monopoly capital rules society. The U.S. industrial heartland was plunged into rustbelt devastation as capital restructured itself globally.

When the ruling class concluded they couldn't tame or crush the miners, they gradually shifted half of coal production to distant western strip mines. Appalachian coalminers were hit with massive layoffs immediately after the 1978 strike. And when the full impact of that sank in, the miners' organized resistance drained away.

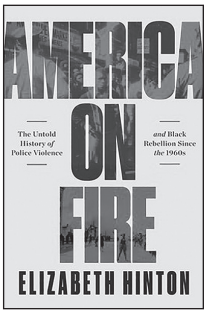
Our strikes and struggles keep our oppressors from reducing us to a "mass of broken wretches" (as Karl Marx puts it). And, at the same time, that resistance can serve as a valuable school of war — helping us to prepare and carry through the actual overthrow of this heartless system. ■

See Cosmonaut interview with Mike Ely at https://cosmonautmag.com/2021/08/communists-and-the-miners-upsurge-with-mike-ely/. His email is mike.ely.0501@gmail.com

REVIEW

Times of Rebellion By Micol Seigel

America on Fire:
The Untold Story of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s
By Elizabeth Hinton
NY: Liveright, 2021, 416 pages, $18.95 paperback (forthcoming).



ELIZABETH HINTON BEGINS her magisterial *America on Fire* with no flames at all. A seemingly opposite scene, the determined serenity of the lunch counter sit-ins, provides her introductory tableau, dexterously staging the argument.

These famously nonviolent protests, clearly directed at identifiable policies, are often set as the converse of unrest called "riots" and described as "senseless," supposedly lacking in political objective or explicable grievance. Not at all, Hinton shows.

With devastating detail, Hinton places the urban explosions of the late 1960s and early 1970s in relation to the failures of officials to respond to the demands of nonviolent protest. This context shows "riots" to be obviously and immediately responding to legitimate grievances and provocation, reinforced by citing people involved who unambiguously articulate this relation.

While the specifics of Hinton's field-changing argument regarding police violence, popular agency, and shifting cycles of protest are noteworthy, an essential launching point involves the ubiquity of rebellion.

Drawing on records from the U.S. Senate and Brandeis University's Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, Hinton amasses a tremendous count of Black rebellions from 1964 to 1972 — and lists them all in a 25-page, single-spaced appendix. "Every major urban center in the country burned" (2) in those years, Hinton writes, demolishing the claim that such unrest could have been in any way exceptional.

To explore this volatile landscape, Hinton focuses on several smaller cities, noting but not centering the major urban centers that have received so much ink from other scholars (Chicago, Los Angeles, Newark, New York). In Aliquippa, Cairo, Carver Ranches, Decatur, Kalamazoo, Jersey City, Salisbury, Yanceyville, York and other lesser-known hot spots, Hinton finds patterns that reframe the last 50 years of U.S. history.

Police Provocation & Municipal Suicide

The first shift in perspective that Hinton accomplishes involves the role of police in provoking urban protest. Over and over, unrest followed acts of police violence committed in the course of everyday policing activities.

Police would interrupt street baseball games or kids hanging out in parks, couples on dates or young people in transit in their neighborhoods, things they allowed white youth to do without intrusion.

People would object and altercations would ensue. Police would then call in backup while the crowds opposing their presence also swelled. Anger would burst from buckled chests and cities would burn.

With the same regularity of rhythm, officials would proclaim their ignorance about the sources or sparks of protest, blind to then-recent events — which Hinton has no trouble unearthing even half a century down the line. Showing those shrugs of public figures to be crucial contributions to the discourse of "senseless violence," Hinton attacks the notion that people were responding to trivial slights or less.

Policing was rotten in small-town America, south and north, just as in the larger cities where police violence has been well-documented. People were responding specifically and directly.

State-sanctioned anti-Black violence was (and is) not limited to the police. The intensity of violence on the part of non-police whites emerges plainly in Hinton's account. One resonant case study is Cairo, Illinois, where white people preferred municipal suicide to sharing power.

Civil rights activism flourished in Cairo from the beginning of the decade. Activists held sit-ins and picketed; white supremacists beat them up and stabbed them.

Activists switched tactics, bringing lawsuits to desegregate the swimming pool and roller rink. They won. African American skaters attempting to make good on their legal win by entering the rink were attacked with baseball bats. The owner of the pool filled in his facility with concrete rather than allowing Black bathers to enjoy it.

White violence increased again after Black protest blazed in 1967: whites pointed rifles at people from cars, allowed dogs to menace children on their way to school, and shot from a levee atop the Mississippi river down into the housing projects where the city's African American residents concentrated. Steep decline over the years that followed made every Cairo life a little meaner.

Unequivocally, Hinton writes: "the sustained violence against Black people in Cairo in the past decade [the 1970s] led to the slow death of the city consumed by its own racism. Everyone lost" (196) — though as always Black people suffered more.

Unemployment surged, three times worse among African Americans. Racist businesses subject to boycott failed and folded; downtown never recovered. Even the contested roller rink closed. Whites who could, fled.

Cairo today is a shadow of its former self, all vital organs severed from the body politic by the white refusal to allow anything good to come to their Black neighbors.

White Retrenchment, Mass Incarceration

While Cairo may have been extreme in having white residents shooting directly into Black housing projects, the pattern of white retrenchment was nationwide. All over the country, cities choked as whites chose inaction over resource redistribution, ensuring the continuity of rebellion and retaliation.

What was built in the wake of protest was not what the Kerner Commission (appointed by Lyndon Johnson following the 1967 rebellions — ed.) and the slew of similar commissions and committees organized to study and respond to protest recommended — opportunity, education, housing and health infrastructure — but the carceral systems of policing, prison and social repression. Mass incarceration is a product of domestic counterinsurgency.

This is another stunning reframing of recent U.S. history. It involves seeing the rebellions of the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of a terrible cycle. The cycle began with America's failure to respond to the demands

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conveyed through nonviolent protests.

What some call "riots" were Black collective responses to that lack of will. Police response to the "riots," misunderstood as such, provoked further rebellion — not only directly, but indirectly by anchoring the social inequality that underlay unrest.

Rather than implement effective social reforms, then, the country at every level of scale chose to buttress punitive measures, first and foremost by expanding police numbers, material, and role in public life.

Hinton's conclusion is incontrovertible: the carceral system — that has ravaged the families of the American poor and working class, particularly in Black, brown and rural communities; that has hollowed out urban life, exacerbated housing crises, sent poverty sky rocketing, fed opioid and meth crises in rural communities and crack and other health threats in cities and suburbs; that has torn children from parents, deskilled the U.S. workforce and decreased life expectancy overall — is the equivalent, on a grand scale, of the destruction and decline city fathers chose for Cairo.

Past and Present

Linking mass incarceration to "the draconian police ethos born in the 1960s and 1970s in response to mass violence" (3), Hinton adds the ideological to the overly empirical "pipeline" argument (that police feed incarceration by arresting people — a line of causation I have been too willing to accept).

This much more robust view of why fortifying police brought about hyper-incarceration strengthens the other nexus she establishes in the book, the join between police violence 50 years ago and its ongoing expression today.

Ours is a perfect vantage point from which to look back, just after the wave of anti-policing protests following the 2020 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Readers today are (hopefully) poised to embrace the conclusions Hinton's narrative reveals, insights about policing that hold well beyond the period of the 1960s and '70s.

The most important of these, I think, is that policing is both the recipient of the resources the nation chose not to devote to reversing structural racism, and the axis of the state violence required to maintain that inequality. Hinton sees the full gamut of racist systems, including residential, educational, health-oriented, political, economic and interpersonal; but policing, she aptly reasons, sustains and underlies them all. "Defund the police" takes on rich new dimensions in this perspective.

Hinton's point about police as the essence of both direct and indirect state violence contains a devastating critique of liberalism. The liberal hope that goodwill and gradual change will sweep away a vestigial viewpoint has been unwarranted, Hinton clearly shows.

But liberals were not just benignly misguided. Recall that Kerner and his fellows famously proposed broad and progressive reforms, all of which were abandoned when "ultimately they backed the police." (172)

Hinton argues that this follows directly from the ways Kerner-style liberals then and since understand Black people and protest. Despite seeing the socioeconomic roots of many national problems, they pathologized African Americans, understanding racism as Black perception or projection, as white people had from *Plessy* to Daniel Moynihan.

Liberals were unable to challenge the framing of Black insurgency as "riots" even when they found the underlying discontent legitimate, because they accepted the notion that the violence was an outburst of spontaneous, irrational, ultimately counterproductive emotion. Hinton here reinforces the argument she and others have made before, that liberals are as guilty as conservatives in producing the conditions we face today.

Liberals essentially agreed with conservatives that Black protest was a form of mass criminality, yet refusing to see lynching and other forms of white mass violence as such.

Crumbling Liberal Architecture

Liberalism suffers another blow in Hinton's discussion of the architecture of racial violence — the literal architecture, in the form of housing projects built to great fanfare during the New Deal. By the 1960s, they were crumbling miserably, having deteriorated into forms of state violence themselves.

Black people well understood how housing projects, to which Hinton devotes an early chapter, comprised "the infrastructure of racial oppression" (49), especially (as in Cairo) when they could contrast Black shelter with the better-preserved facilities in which poor white people lived. No wonder housing projects, particularly their administrative offices, were often targeted when the burning began.

"Both the punitive and social welfare arms of the state weighed on housing project tenants," Hinton explains. "As sites of concentrated poverty, housing projects gave residents good reasons to rebel." (68) *Any nostalgia for the liberal welfare state should be dispatched by this compelling history.*

Hinton ends by bringing the story up to date: In summer 2020, protests "in response to state-sanctioned violence" rocked some 2400 U.S. cities. (288) The George Floyd insurgency belongs fully in the tradition of the long Black freedom struggle, though the protests have changed in fifty years.

Protest in the 1960s and 1970s was rooted in political and economic inequality but sparked by the policing of everyday life. In the 1980s, rebellions were triggered less by quotidian policing and more by exceptional police violence, and their target shifted to the entirety of the criminal justice system.

Today's movement, Hinton observes, faithfully embraces the traditions of militant nonviolent protest. It uses both direct-action civil rights movement tactics and critiques of systemic racism developed by thinkers associated with Black Power. (289)

That analysis lets activists today directly address the ways "policing and incarceration in America anchor totalizing systems of political and economic oppression" and highlight the "structural shortcomings" of liberal reform. (291)

Today's protests now include many white people and often happen in white cities, Hinton continues, placing them in the legacy of urban insurgency and thereby effectively answering the dismissal of non-Black activism as illegitimate outsider interference.

Technology such as cell phone videos has made the denial of violence less tenable, but the forces of retrenchment still forestall systemic change. What now gets called the "movement for Black lives" must navigate this new terrain established by its (predecessors') victories as well as by the ways racism has evolved to contain them.

Nonviolence and Violence Entwined

With rebellion front and center, the picture Hinton paints foregrounds the reasons for and role of violence. State violence in material and direct form will not go unanswered. Nonviolence is provoked by and powerful due to the violence all around it.

Nonviolence and violence are "entwined forces," a point Hinton proves repeatedly. The sit-ins with which she began perfectly illustrated this relation. *The lunch counter protests were nonviolent only on one side.* That is, the people sitting in Woolworth's may have been so, but those trying to roust them were most decidedly not.

Nonviolent protest drew white refusal in a range of violent forms, all of which continue — material, economic, state-sanctioned but delivered by white vigilantes, via prisons and in the form of police. So too, Hinton warns, will violent rebellion, until….

What? Alas, Hinton pulls her final punch. Until the nation no longer leans on police power to buttress material conditions beyond police control, she writes.

Yes, that is one possible stopping point. This considered (and successful) play for accessibility, strategic though it may be, shirks the full ambitions of the tradition of insurgency Hinton has documented in this wonderful book.

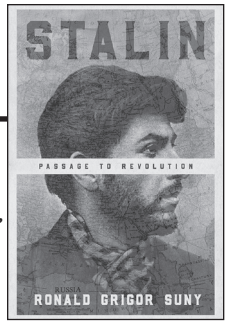
This radical tradition reaches for something far beyond the capacity of the U.S. nation-state, liberal at its absolute best, defined by police power in its essence. Readers who so choose can draw another conclusion from the material carefully collected and deftly offered up in these pages. ■

REVIEW

The Making of a Revolutionary:
New Light on the Young Stalin

By Tom Twiss

Stalin: Passage to Revolution
By Ronald Grigor Suny
Princeton University Press, 2020.
857 pages, $39.95 hardback; $29.95 paperback.



"Consider the improbability of Ioseb Jughashvili, a small, wiry child whose affections circled around singing, wrestling, poetry, Georgian Orthodoxy, and nationalism, who could have died from typhus or Siberian frost or a well-aimed bullet, but who was lifted through adversities and reversals to the pinnacle of power in a faltering revolutionary state" (705).

IT IS THE first leg of this improbable journey that is recounted by Ronald Suny in his recent massive biography of the young Stalin — a work for which the author has justly received the prestigious Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize. Suny, the William H. Sewell Jr. Distinguished University Professor of History at the University of Michigan, is a prolific scholar who has written extensively on the history of the Soviet Union and especially on the South Caucasus.[1]

It was Suny's focus on that region, together with his deep interest in "Marxism, and especially the damaged and distorted history of Russian social democracy and particularly Bolshevism" that first drew him to this project over 30 years ago.[2] But it was the subsequent opening of archives in Russia and Georgia and the recent availability of memoirs that enabled the completion of this remarkable study.

In a historiographical essay at the end of the book, Suny notes that many Western biographies of Stalin have concentrated almost entirely on psychology in their elusive search for the single key that would explain their subject's drive to power and brutality. Others, focusing largely on context, have failed to take Stalin's emotional and intellectual development seriously.

Avoiding both extremes, Suny explores Stalin's psychological evolution, treated as "the interplay between the boy from Georgia's developing character and the social and cultural environments" through which he moved. (4) What he has produced is more than a biography; it's a rich political history, informed by Suny's own socialist sympathies, of the development of the socialist movement in the South Caucasus and throughout the Russian empire at the beginning of the last century.

Youth and Radicalization

Suny's account begins in 1879 with the birth of Ioseb (Soso) Jughashvili to the poor Georgian shoemaker Beso Jughashvili, and his religious wife Keke Geladze, in the small village of Gori. Initially sickly, young Soso grew to be athletic, especially adept at wrestling and boxing as well as singing.

From an early age he knew the abuse of an alcoholic father. Many biographers have seen this as decisively shaping Stalin's later development. But for Suny, an even greater influence was Keke's indomitable ambition which, combined with her son's significant abilities, achieved Soso's admission to the Gori church school and then to the Tiflis Theological Seminary in the Georgian capital.

Through his first two years at the seminary the deeply religious Soso consistently earned high marks while simultaneously writing poetry for nationalist Georgian journals. However, Suny observes, "the Tiflis Seminary proved to be as much the crucible of revolutionaries as for priests." (61)

With the other Georgian students he suffered the contempt on the part of the Russian priests for his Georgian language and culture, and discrimination for his peasant status and provincial origins.

Consequently, in his third year Soso was drawn to study groups for the reading of forbidden literature, including the works of Marx and Engels. Quickly, his commitments shifted from religion to revolution, and he affiliated with the underground Social Democratic movement.

Activism, Exile and Escape

With his expulsion from the seminary in 1899 — allegedly for missing his final examinations — Soso expanded his activities as a professional revolutionary, meeting regularly with workers in conspiratorial centers in Tiflis and organizing new centers in the steamy port city of Batumi. He also wrote articles for socialist papers, helped set up clandestine printing presses, advised striking workers, and organized demonstrations.

His performance in these activities received mixed reviews. Suny notes that those who worked most closely with Soso perceived him to be "a man of the people, simple, direct, and deeply committed to the workers." (169)

But his radicalism and outspoken criticism of the leadership increasingly brought him into conflict with the Marxist veterans, and especially their leader Noe Zhordania. To them, Jughashvili was a reckless intriguer. From Suny's account, aspects of both images seem to have been accurate.

An indication of Soso's recklessness was his vigorous advocacy of a demonstration outside the Batumi prison in March 1902. In the ensuing massacre 13 workers were killed and dozens more wounded. The demonstration also resulted in Jughashvili's own apprehension by the police and exile to eastern Siberia.

This would be the first of six exiles he would experience, and his subsequent escape in January 1904 would be the first of five — a testimony to the porousness of tsarist Siberian exile.

Bolshevism, Revolution & Armed Units

On his return to the Caucasus, Soso — who was calling himself "Koba" after the hero of a Georgian novella — found a Social Democratic organization rent by factionalism. The Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) in 1903 had divided into Lenin's Bolshevik majority, which advocated a party "more closely identified with the organization of Social Democratic professionals," and Julius Martov's Menshevik minority, which "wanted the party identified with the labor movement more broadly." (187)[3]

Within Georgia a large majority of socialists, including Koba, initially endorsed the Bolshevik position. Suny tells us that for Jughashvili this was almost inevitable considering his "elevated sense of the role of leadership in the generation of political consciousness." (202)

In the following years the Georgian Mensheviks succeeded in winning over

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the majority of Social Democrats, largely by convincing workers that the Bolsheviks advocated dominance of the movement by intellectuals. However, Koba stuck with the Bolsheviks, devoting considerable energy to the party struggle, and emerging as a leading figure within his faction.

In most biographies of Stalin, the turbulent period of the 1905 revolution and immediately after has appeared as a "blank space." Suny demonstrates, however, that in these years Koba was fully engaged in the inner party struggle while writing extensively for the Bolshevik press and leading a clandestine armed band.

In that period both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks in the Caucasus organized armed combat units of workers and peasants to resist the attacks of the army and police. Over time, these metamorphosed into guerilla bands that carried out assassinations of enemy officials and robberies to finance the struggle.

Koba certainly helped organize both robberies and assassinations. However, Suny argues that his involvement in the most notorious of these actions — the sensational robbery in Tiflis of the state treasury — was only "peripheral." (364)

Baku and the National Question

In light of the Menshevik domination of the party in Georgia, in June 1907 Koba relocated to Baku (the present capital of Azerbaijan — ed.), the oil center on the Caspian Sea. There, the revolutionary upsurge of 1905 had opened possibilities for a legal labor movement.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, many party activists plunged into open labor activity. However, veteran "committeemen," including Koba, resisted this trend, and continued to focus on underground work, including factional infighting. Koba's abrasive style, questionable methods and intense competitiveness generated tensions within his own faction, but his efforts helped win Bolshevik dominance in Baku.

Ultimately, the successes of the labor movement drew even Koba into trade-union activity. Suny notes that these years were among the few in which he involved himself directly in the daily economic struggles of the working class. But the experience seems to have affected him greatly and to have influenced his position regarding debates within the broader party.

In this period "liquidators" among the Mensheviks argued for abandoning underground work, while "recallists" among the Bolsheviks were rejecting work in legal institutions and demanding a recall of their delegates from the Russian Duma.

As an underground veteran, Koba immediately opposed liquidationism, but he also enthusiastically joined Lenin in advocating full use of all legal opportunities "from the floor of the duma and the trade unions to cooperative societies and burial funds." (426)

Koba's activity in the Caucasus ended abruptly with his arrest in March 1910 and exile again to Siberia. But after his release, a broader arena opened when in early 1912 he was coopted by the Bolshevik leadership to serve on the Central Committee.

Assigned to serve as a roving agent working with local activists throughout Russia, he also assisted with the editing of the new Bolshevik paper *Pravda* while writing for it and other publications. It was at this time that the pseudonym "Stalin" — or "man of steel" — first appeared in the pages of *Sotsial-Demokrat*.

Following another arrest and escape, Stalin was assigned the additional duties of organizing the Bolshevik elections to the Duma and guiding the activities of the Bolshevik deputies. By January 1913, he "had joined the inner circle of the Bolshevik faction" and was now "one of Lenin's chief lieutenants." (505)

In that capacity he was assigned by Lenin to write a major statement on the problem of nationalities. At this time the "national question" was hotly debated by socialists throughout the empire and internationally.

Socialists on the far left opposed any concessions to nationalism; groups on the right subordinated the struggle for socialism to national needs; and between the extremes were those who advocated national cultural autonomy. Rejecting all these positions, Lenin advocated regional autonomy and the right to self-determination — including the right to secession — for all national groups.

This was the position that Stalin defended in his "Marxism and the National Question." The work was later depicted by Trotsky as wholly inspired by Lenin, written under his supervision, and edited by him — an evaluation that for Suny, though "ungenerous," captured Stalin's "intellectual, if not editorial, indebtedness to Lenin." (531)

Exile, War and 1917

Stalin's final arrest in late February 1913 and four-year exile removed him from the leadership of the Bolsheviks and their debates concerning the First World War. Suny notes Stalin's own antiwar and internationalist position, but suggests he did not fully support Lenin's radical call for Russia's defeat.

If so, it was one of several issues on which he disagreed with Lenin. Another was his position regarding the Provisional Government in 1917.

Freed from exile by the February Revolution, Stalin returned to Petrograd where he took a seat in the Bolshevik Russian Bureau. There, while expressing distrust of the Provisional Government, Stalin advocated pressuring it to end the war — a position at odds with Lenin's opposition to any support for the government whatsoever. But Stalin quickly came around to Lenin's position.

Because Stalin was not prominent in the public arena during the revolution, he was dismissed by the Menshevik historian Sukhanov as a "gray blur." Beyond that, later biographers have even characterized him as "the man who missed the revolution."[4]

Suny makes a strong case that this seriously understates Stalin's significance. Although he was neither a popular orator nor a great strategist, his contributions in 1917 were major. These included key articles in the Bolshevik press, a variety of important political assignments, his responsibilities in crucial negotiations, and perhaps most significantly his pivotal role as the central leader of the Bolshevik party during the summer of 1917 when Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky were in hiding or jail.

Seeds of Stalinism

The historian Stephen Cohen once observed that the Bolshevism of 1917-1928 "did contain important 'seeds' of Stalinism," but also "other important, non-Stalinist seeds," and that the 'seeds' of Stalinism "are also to be found elsewhere."[5]

Likewise, we might say the personality and politics of Stalin in 1917 as described by Suny contained many different seeds, only some of which contributed to the growth of the noxious weed we know as Stalinism.

It would take years of decisions, actions, events and influences to nourish those seeds and destroy others. And it would take a variety of additional factors, external to Stalin, to promote that development.

That is another story — one we hope Suny will write. Elsewhere he has stated, "Maybe, if I live long enough, I'll write the second volume. We'll see. *Inshallah*."[6] *Inshallah* indeed. ■

Notes

1. Suny's previous major works include *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918* (1972); *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (1983); *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (1988, 1994); *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (1993); *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (1998, 2011), and *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (2015).
2. "Event: Stalin: Passage to Revolution," Wilson Center, April 12, 2021. (https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/stalin-passage-revolution)
3. Subsequently, deeper strategic differences emerged, with the Mensheviks advocating a partnership between the working class and the liberal bourgeoisie to bring about the bourgeois democratic revolution, and the Bolsheviks calling for a proletarian-peasant alliance for a more radically democratic bourgeois revolution.
4. The expression is from the title of the biography by Robert M. Slusser, *Stalin in October: The Man Who Missed the Revolution* (1987).
5. Stephen F. Cohen, "Bolshevism and Stalinism," *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation,* edited by Robert C. Tucker. (New York, 1977), 12.
6. Chris Maisano, "How Josef Stalin Became a Bolshevik: An Interview with Ronald Suny," Jacobin, May 29, 2021. (https://www.jacobinmag.com/2021/05/stalin-ronald-suny-book-interview-passage-to-revolution-georgia-russian-revolution).

REVIEW

Revolutionary Journalism from the Front:
A Russian Civil War Chronicle

By Kit Adam Wainer

The Hammer and the Anvil:
Dispatches from the Frontline of the Russian Civil War, 1918-1919
By Larissa Reisner, translator Jack Robertson. London: Bookmarks Publications, 2021, Order from https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk.

THE HAMMER AND the Anvil brackets 100 pages of Larissa Reisner's eyewitness reports from the Red Army front from 1918 to 1919, when the author covered the Russian Civil War for Bolshevik newspapers, with essays about Reisner and an excerpt from Trotsky's autobiography describing the same events.

Reisner had lived parts of her early life in Germany and eastern Europe, and was a dedicated Bolshevik when the Russian Revolution broke out when she was only 22.

Although it is a short work, it is difficult to read *The Hammer and the Anvil* without feeling a sense of profound tragedy over a talent lost at such a young age. Reisner had great literary potential and a knack for revolutionary journalism. All of that disappeared when she died of typhus in 1926 at the age of 30.

Reading her news dispatches, the reader is struck with her literary abilities. She fused her reportage with poetic devices to capture both the events that were newsworthy and the feelings they evoked in those on the scene. On the eve of the Red Army retreat from Kazan, an early Bolshevik setback, she writes:

"It's a strange feeling to be moving about in an unfamiliar building with windows and doors slammed shut knowing full well that a battle to the death is about to take place in this godforsaken hotel. It's a racing certainty that someone will be killed, some will survive, some will be taken prisoner. At such moments, all the words and all the rationalizations that help preserve your presence of mind go out the window. All that remains is an acute, penetrating sorrow — and underneath it, barely perceptible, a disorienting question: whether to flee or stand your ground. In the name of what? Face screwed up, choking with tears, the heart reiterates: stay calm, don't panic, no humiliating exodus." (36-37)

The Red Army, along with much of the population of Kazan, fled to Sviyazhsk in 1918. However, Reisner suspected that her husband, the Bolshevik Fyodor Fyodorovich Raskolnikov, had been taken captive by the conquering Whites and she attempted to return to Kazan to free him.

When a White officer recognized her she fled with the help of a horse-pulled cab driver who sympathized with the Reds. The Russian poor, she wrote, "saved people like me, humbly and resolutely, just like they saved thousands of other comrades scattered all over the Russian highways." (62)

The Red Army soon regrouped at Sviyazhsk, also along the Volga river and just south of the critical city of Nizhny Novgorod. At Sviyazhsk Reisner observed the attempt to fuse military discipline with revolutionary culture.

"Not being average became the norm. It became obligatory for all. That meant adopting the best, most brilliant tactics conceived by the masses in the most intense and creative moment of the struggle. Whether it be a major or minor issue, no matter how difficult or confusing — such as the division of labor between the members of the Revolutionary Military Committee — or the quick, friendly gesture, with which a red commander and his soldiers are expected to greet each other, on equal footing, even though both are running somewhere on business — all this had to be witnessed first hand, memorized, and then reintroduced into the masses for general use. And when it didn't work, it creaked or was confusing — the problem needed to be assessed, addressed or coaxed along, like a midwife would do during a difficult labor." (80)

Up Close Descriptions

Reisner's reports will not suffice for those who want a comprehensive picture of the Russian Civil War. However, she does offer poignant descriptions of what the war looked like up close.

She brings to life working-class townsfolk who supported the new Bolshevik government and highlights the terror the White armies inflicted on the population. But the reader who has read nothing else about the civil war will have difficulty contextualizing the stories she poetically conveys.

Nor does this work address modern debates about the early Soviet republic or the early Bolshevik debates about military structure and strategy. At one point, however, she offers some insight into her own thinking on the question of capital punishment and the treatment of deserters.

At Sviyazhsk the Red Army, under Trotsky's personal guidance, was preparing a counter-attack on Kazan. The Whites then launched a powerful preemptive counter-strike nearby, killing civilians and livestock. Ironically, the Whites ultimately overestimated Red strength at Sviyazhsk and retreated when they might have dealt a fatal blow.

Before that moment there was panic among the Red ranks and several Communist Party members fled. The Communist deserters were captured, tried and executed. Thinking aloud about whether their lives should have been spared she opines:

"To begin with, the whole army was saying that the Communists were cowards, that the law didn't apply to them, that they could desert with impunity whereas an ordinary Red Army soldier would have been shot like a dog …

"In the eyes of the entire army, which was preparing to make such a great and bloody sacrifice for the Revolution, this would not have been possible if the Party itself, on the eve of the Kazan assault — in which hundreds of soldiers would inevitably be killed — had not made clear that it had the courage to apply the hard-hitting laws of fraternal discipline in the Soviet Republic to its own members." (76-77)

In *The Hammer and the Anvil* Reisner did not spell out her thinking beyond that. Marxists today who are interested in exploring the questions of what revolutionary ethics might look like under a revolutionary democratic regime will not find persuasive arguments in this collection. Nonetheless, Reisner's observations open a window into the thinking of at least some Bolsheviks on the scene at the time.

The Hammer and the Anvil opens with a useful essay by Judy Cox on Reisner's short

continued on page 42

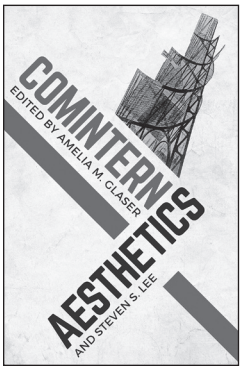
Kit Adam Wainer is a longtime activist within the United Federation of Teachers in New York City and a member of the Movement of Rank and File Educators.

REVIEW

Art Overcoming Divisions

By Matthew Beeber

Comintern Aesthetics
Amelia M. Glaser and Steven S. Lee, editors. University of Toronto Press, 2020, xxi + 563 pages. $95 hardcover.



IN 1919 THE Soviet avant-garde artist Vladimir Tatlin designed a monument to the Third (Communist) International, a grand, slanting helical tower that was also intended to house the Comintern's headquarters in St Petersburg.

The structure was never built, but its design endures as a symbol for the meeting place of aesthetics and politics, and for the unrealized dream of world Communism.

It is fitting, then, that Tatlin's Tower serves as the central figure of Amelia Glaser and Stephen Lee's collection, *Comintern Aesthetics*. The volume brings together a wide range of scholars on literature, visual art, film and performance produced during and after the years of the Communist International (1919-1947).

Like Tatlin's Tower — and like the artist Ai Weiwei's 2007 rendition of the tower, discussed in the introduction — *Comintern Aesthetics* carries a message of hope, an optimism for the possibility of a better world.

While the popular view of the influence of Soviet Communism on cultural activity emphasizes top-down political control and artistic judgment in accordance with a revolution gone horribly astray, the essays in this volume document a more complicated story.

While a drive toward centralization and repression was increasingly present in both the USSR and the movement it led, it was by no means totalizing. Cultural workers in different parts of the world adapted, interpreted and sometimes subverted official policies to meet their own needs. They continued after the Comintern's demise to persist with artistic forms they thought would free humanity from exploitation and oppression.

The volume as a whole, a collection of academic essays — each with its own argument relevant to its sub-field — makes several key interventions into discussions of world literature, aesthetic categories such as realism and modernism, and the historical legacy of the Comintern.

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

Beyond the Center-Periphery Model

Over the last 20 years or so, studies of world literature have been heavily influenced by various iterations of "world-systems theory." A broad and complex collection of ideas within the realm of sociology, world systems theory — as most notably articulated by Emmanuel Wallerstein — offers an understanding of global capitalism premised on the relationship between centers and peripheries, metropoles and colonies.

Proponents of world-systems theory within literary studies, such as Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti, have adapted the center-periphery model to discussions of world literature. For Casanova, for example, Paris was in many historical periods the center of the "World Republic of Letters," sometimes but not always aligning with the political or financial world "center."

Such models help us to understand how Eurocentrism continues to operate within the literary realm, as work from the periphery (post-colonial or so-called third world literatures) is either dismissed or acknowledged based on its ability to adhere to conventions defined and maintained by cultural elites in the metropole.

But as powerful as such models can be, they can have the unintended effect of reifying and reinforcing European cultural dominance. In recent years, critiques of center-periphery models have mounted, showing that they obscure the rich networks of cultural transmission occurring between peripheries, and not just between periphery and center.

Recent scholars have argued that the networks produced by periphery-to-periphery exchanges are key to growing power in the Global South in ways that are not mediated through the European (or American) metropole.

Comintern Aesthetics joins this discussion, positing an alternative world system, one centered on Moscow and the Comintern rather than on the capitalist world centers of the West. By "eschewing models of world literature that, by typically foregrounding the West, tend to mirror the flows of capital and empire," the collection allows for new and productive conversations between what may seem unlikely artistic contexts.

Toward this end, part one of the book, "Space, Geopolitics, Networks, Translation," addresses several unconventional literary-geographical configurations. Katerina Clark writes about cultural transmission between Berlin, Moscow and Shanghai in the wake of the 1927 Shanghai massacre.

Snehal Shingavi addresses a different triangulation, between England, India and Russia. Harsha Ram writes of the enduring Soviet avant-garde utopianism present in the work of the Russian Futurist artist Velimir Khlebnikov.

Other essays in the section address the influence of Soviet art forms on the films of the Spanish Civil War, Brazilian modernism, and literatures of South East Asia. By assembling these essays, the volume enacts its goal of "remap[ping] world literature and culture from the perspective of world communism," de-centering the West to produce an alternate model for understanding world literature.

Unsettling the Modernism/Realism Divide

Literary scholars tend to distinguish between two major aesthetic modes of the 20th century. Modernism is typically defined by experimentation, abstraction and difficulty; on the other hand, realism tends to employ unstylized or "straightforward" prose to describe an objective reality.

This stylistic rivalry has a political dimension, since the modernism/realism divide maps — albeit imperfectly — onto another perceived dichotomy, between art and propaganda. In both of these binary pairs, the academy tends to exalt the former, valuing the aesthetic experimentation and abstraction of the modernist avant-garde while often disparaging realism — and the subset of Soviet Realism in particular — as didactic, propagandistic, bad art.

While it may be obvious that these categories are far from air-tight — in addition to coming with their own set of historical baggage — the modernism/realism distinction remains a key organizing principle for

literary studies that is surprisingly tricky to escape.

The second section of *Comintern Aesthetics* seeks to destabilize this divide. The set of aesthetics it tracks "encompasses multiple forms and contexts, and exceeds both the realism-versus-modernism debate and the East-West binary grafted onto it during the Cold War."

Stop Thief!

IN A BRAZEN act of theft, president Joe Biden signed an executive order to seize $7 billion in Afghanistan's government funds frozen at the New York Federal Reserve Bank since the Taliban took control of that country.

The action threatens to completely collapse Afghan's tottering banking system, destroy what's left of its economy, and plunge millions of its people into starvation.

Half the money is to be allotted to pay court judgments for compensation to family members of victims of the 9/11 attacks — some of whom are expressing outrage over being paid by funds stole from innocent Afghans who had nothing to do with murdering their loved ones.

The other half is supposed to go to humanitarian relief for Afghanistan — but it's entirely unclear how, and how much, of that $3.5 billion will reach people on the ground. *The Guardian* (February 11, 2022) reports:

"The process is likely to be long and messy, with advocates and some 9/11 victims arguing that the Afghan assets should all go to help the Afghan people who are facing mounting hardship.

"The money — which includes currency, bonds and gold — mostly comes from foreign exchange funds that accumulated over the past two decades when western aid flowed into Afghanistan. But it also includes the savings of ordinary Afghans, who are now facing growing violence and hunger with the economy and rule of law in freefall."

Meanwhile, an epidemic of measles is breaking out in a population already weakened by hunger, with ninety-eight percent facing food shortages.

It is difficult to imagine a policy more cynical and vicious — or more short-sighted, since the near-inevitable results of economic collapse will be an explosion of drug trafficking, political chaos, and terrorism with impacts on the whole region.

For updates and a petition campaign addressing this critical emergency, visit the women-led campaign website https://unfreezeafghanistan.org. ■

Building on a long tradition of Marxist aesthetic theorists such as Ernst Bloch, Berthold Brecht, and more recently Fredric Jameson, the volume solves — or rather "side-steps" — the modernism/realism divide by defining realism as capacious enough to include both.

In Jameson's words, realism is not a discrete "artistic and formal category" but rather an "idea governing the relationship of the work of art to reality itself, characterizing a particular stance towards it." In other words, an aesthetically experimental work (think of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*), is no less a work of realism than a typically "realist novel" — say, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Both attempt to render reality, albeit with vastly different aesthetic strategies.

Collapsing the modernism/realism divide allows the volume to discuss a much broader set of works under the aegis of their Comintern-inspired aesthetics. Jonathan Flatley discusses Langston Hughes — typically associated with experimental poetics — in terms of his Soviet-inspired documentary theater (such as his play, "Scottsboro Limited") and what Flatley calls his "Black Leninism."

Amelia Glaser shows the way that Yiddish poetry of the Spanish Civil War straddles and destabilizes the divide between experimentation and realism. Nariman Skakov discusses the very concept of the "boundary" through the works of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Through these and other essays the book argues forcefully for the need to jettison the modernism/realism divide as a dated construction which prevents the larger category of Comintern artistic production from coming into view.

A Communist *Ecumene*

The third section of *Comintern Aesthetics* focuses on works and artistic practices beyond the temporal boundary of the Comintern itself. This section evinces one of the volume's key theses — that Comintern aesthetics and the revolutionary promise they represent endure today.

From Cold War material, such as Alice Childress' columns in Paul Robeson's magazine *Freedom*, to contemporary Chinese street performance, the essays of this section address the myriad ways that the Comintern influenced and affected cultural production transhistorically.

In the penultimate chapter, Katie Trumpener brings us back to Tatlin's Tower, the top floor of which was to house radio equipment, in her discussion of media workers exiled in post-World War II East Berlin. Evgeny Dobrenko writes on the transition from the Comintern to what became known as the Cominform in 1956.

These essays bring the volume into the present, asking (and suggesting some answers) as to what Comintern aesthetics might look like today.

Comintern Aesthetics's three sections each trouble or dissolve a categorical distinction, whether the center/periphery of a world-systems-inspired approach to world literature; the modernism/realism divide in 20th-century aesthetics; or temporal categories such as pre- or postwar.

In each case the volume attempts to supplant our current organizing principle with another: the cultural world of the Communist International. As a result, the volume enacts what Kris Manjapra has called the "socialist global ecumene," a broad and diverse set of artists, works, and institutions organized — perhaps loosely — around the goal of revolutionary socialism.

Manjapra uses the term *ecumene* here in its secular sense: the most broad and inclusive version of a social or political formation (from the Greek, ecumene referred to the totality of the known world). Indeed, as its introduction suggests, the volume's many contributions share more of a revolutionary "feeling" than anything else.

Comintern aesthetics are not necessarily an identifiable set of aesthetic practices, but rather the cultural production born of a revolutionary spirit — a spirit which seems to be shared by many of the contributing scholars, as well.

In its very ecumenical practice of inclusion (the volume verges on six-hundred pages) *Comintern Aesthetics* succeeds in articulating a broad and amorphous cultural formation and offers a mode of a literary-historical organization alternative to capital. ■

A Russian Civil War Chronicle — *continued from page 40*

life. It continues with a short essay titled "The War Against the Bolsheviks" by Jack Robertson, who also translated Reisner's reports.

College and high school teachers may find this chapter useful because of the quotations it provides highlighting the anti-semitism both of the White officers and their Allied supporters in the west.

The book concludes by reprinting the chapter on the events at Sviyazhsk and Kazan from Trotsky's *My Life*. This inclusion was likely intended to show that Reisner's account tracked with that of the Red Army's top commander. It also contains a handful of synopses of the lives of some lesser-known rank-and-file revolutionaries who played parts in the sagas Reisner describes.

Reisner's reports compiled in this collection indicate a sharp mind and impressive tential. Hers was one of many lives cut short by war and disease. One wonders what she might have accomplished if given the chance to grow intellectually. ■

Mike Parker (1940-2022) By Dianne Feeley

Mike Parker speaking from the floor at a Labor Notes Conference. https://jimwestphoto.org

AFTER MORE THAN 60 years of labor and revolutionary socialist activism, Mike Parker died after battling pancreatic cancer. Probably best known for his critique of the corporate restructuring of work with the introduction of "team concept," just-in-time production and lean production methods, he made a number of contributions beyond these labor-management cooperation schemes.

If there was one thread that consistently ran through the decades of Mike's life, it was his belief that working people can transform our lives as we work together to eliminate exploitation and injustice. This belief was wedded to the recurring theme that workers must democratically control their own organizations.

Mike was one of four sons whose parents were members of the Socialist Party in Cleveland. When he left home for the University of Chicago, he joined the small Young People's Socialist League as well as the Student Peace Union, the largest U.S. student organization at that time. As a leader of the SPU, he highlighted the need for democratic decision making, researched the U.S. arms industry and opposed nuclear weapons.

Mike's activism came from his analysis of capitalism and how understanding its dynamics was necessary for a successful social transformation. He encouraged organization, which meant a newsletter, an office, a solid financial base and campaigns that could reach out to a larger milieu. As the civil rights movement developed, Mike as well as fellow SPUer Bernie Sanders were arrested in a Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) demonstration in Chicago. (In 1964 his brother Jerry participated in Mississippi Freedom Summer.)

Dianne Feeley is an ATC *editor and retired autoworker.*

A Socialist Vision Drove His Activism

As an activist, Mike was interested in educating and building a broader and deeper social movement; as a socialist, he was interested in mentoring and recruiting people to an alternative vision of a cooperative society.

Given the political climate over those years and the various debates that took place within a socialist framework, his organizational affiliations evolved from YPSL to the Independent Socialist Clubs and then to the International Socialists when the IS was founded in 1969. Mike was a leading member throughout the history of the IS, including a mentor role for its youth group, the Red Tide, in the 1970s.

By the mid-1980s as the radicalization of the '60s and '70s receded, several small socialist organizations and a collective came together in 1986. The new organization, Solidarity, saw itself as a possible bridge to a regroupment of the revolutionary left further down the road. More recently when the reinvigorated Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) came together out of Bernie Sanders' campaigns, many Solidarity members, including Mike, became dual members.

From Student Activism to Industry

When Mike enrolled as a graduate student in political science at the University of California, Berkeley he joined Campus CORE. Their contribution to the Bay Area desegregation struggle was recruiting the bulk of those who joined the pickets, sit-ins, "shop-ins" at Lucky supermarkets and "bank-ins" at the Bank of America.

The university administration introduced rules against tabling on campus. Although the rules applied to all campus groups, they were aimed squarely at dampening the civil rights wildfire. To enforce the rules, the A\administration called in the police.

The result was the Free Speech Movement and the first successful student strike since the 1930s. Mike served on the FSM executive committee, participated in mass demonstrations including the 1967 Stop the Draft Week in Oakland and the United Farm Workers boycotts. As a member of the newly formed Peace and Freedom Party, he spearheaded its work to build an alliance with the Black Panther Party.

By the early 1970s, the International Socialists sought to take jobs in key industries. Mike, with his partner Margaret Jordan, moved to Detroit. Over the next 30 years, he worked as an electrician in a number of auto plants. When the economic recession hit at the end of the 1970s, many IS members, including his brother Bill, were laid off not just for months but for years. This new reality, combined with Reagan's dismissal of air traffic controllers who dared to stay out on strike in 1981, shook workers' confidence.

As the IS analyzed this dramatically new period, Mike and others decided one concrete step they might take was to build a monthly magazine that reported labor actions across industries. This could be a network for militant workers of various political or non-political backgrounds.

Labor Notes' original masthead called for "putting the movement back in the labor movement." Launched in 1979, the project has expanded to publish books and to hold workshops and conferences along with its magazine and website.

Mike was a supporter and contributor from the very beginning, serving on *Labor Notes*' board until his death in January. It will be strange not to have him — and Margaret (who died of cancer two years earlier) — present at its upcoming conference.

When Mike got laid off, he worked for a contractor installing robots and developed his thinking about how unions needed to prepare for the new technology being introduced into the workplace. Testing his experience in discussions with other workers, he concluded that management's "Quality of Work Life" (QWL) training was an attempt to get workers to work more intensely by tying the success of the company to their future. This maneuver aimed to cut workers' ties to fellow workers and to their union.

Mike also devoured corporate literature and by 1985 produced the *Labor Notes* book *Inside the Circle: A Union Guide to Quality of Work Life.* He worked with *LN* staffer Jane Slaughter to develop schools for unionists to explain and oppose the corporate "Team Concept" agenda.

He and Slaughter went on to co-write *Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept.* Still later he co-wrote *Democracy Is Power: Rebuilding Unions from the Bottom Up* with *LN* staffer Martha Gruelle. And when working at Chrysler's Sterling Heights Assembly Plant where his younger brother Bill was president, he put out a shop-floor newsletter, *Meatballs* ("you get no bread with one meatball" as the Depression-era song goes). (Another brother, Bob, was an officer of his Steelworkers local.)

Mike Parker could be summarized as a "jack of all trades," combining electrical skills with speaking, writing, organizing and mentoring. This included his setting up the Solidarity and Labor Notes computer networks and then turning them over to other techies. He spent a lifetime strategizing possible steps that socialists and activists could take, whether it was within the union movement or in independent political formations like the Richmond Progressive Alliance. He built a full life with his partner and was there for her when she was sick. They parented Johanna Parker, whose contribution to Labor Notes conferences is as an interpreter.

Mike was relentless about maintaining his health, walking on his treadmill 365 days a year. A year ago, when doctors informed him that he had a maximum of one year left, he never stopped focusing on political work. He managed to work up until a day before he entered hospice and died.

Although writing did not come easy for him, Mike managed to get his analysis down in articles and books. He was able to do all this with generosity and humor.

He encouraged socialists to join the labor movement by finding jobs they could enjoy doing over a lifetime, as he had done.

When talking to a neighbor about George Floyd's tragic death, Mike said he wouldn't mind dying if it could have such an impact on others. His life and work *has* altered lives. He has been a mentor and inspiration to a new generation of young DSA members who have adopted his analysis of democracy and the need for a fighting labor movement as a school for socialism.

Remembrances of Mike include Dan La Botz in *New Politics*, Gay Semel in *Jacobin*, Alexandra Bradbury in *Labor Notes,* and an entire edition of the Richmond Progressive Alliance's *The Activist.* ■

The Movement... — *continued from page 23*

negotiations and report-backs so if there is the need to go on strike, the membership is prepared.

But beyond fighting to end two-tier wages and benefits, and beyond launching organizing drives in unorganized plants, it's necessary to have a larger picture of the industry in which we work. The restructuring of the auto industry has led to a massive decline in the work force, which will accelerate as corporations produce electric vehicles (EV). What's our plan to build a sustainable and safe industry? How can we blunt the corporate drive to pit workers in one plant against another? Why are we driven to depend on overtime?

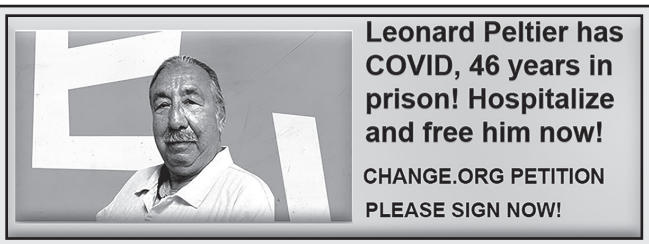
Hopefully in opening this discussion, we can challenge a market-driven system that has brought us to an environmental crisis. The reality is that EVs may reduce reliance on fossil fuels, but they still require a huge infrastructure that includes mining, parking spaces, refueling stations and more. That requires more energy than the world can afford.

Instead we could produce the buses, trains, trolleys and trucks we need for a free, high-quality and safe mass transit system that replaces the individual car. I'd like to see the new UAW organize restructuring committees to consider how we can contribute to environmental sustainability. ■

Thanks to You!

MANY THANKS TO the loyal and generous readers who made the fund appeal for *Against the Current* a huge success, raising a total of $9646 as of Super Bowl week, when our annual secular holiday seasonal fundraiser closes.

We'll keep working to bring you the best possible magazine of socialist politics and analysis, both in print and online. The advances of the right wing, war dangers, and environmental collapse make this a critical moment. Down with the pandemics of COVID and capitalism! ■



Free Leonard Peltier Now!

AMONG THE HALF million prisoners in the U.S. carceral state suffering from COVID-19 is Leonard Peltier, "the longest-held Indigenous political prisoner in the United States," write Janene Yazzie and Nick Estes (*The Guardian*, February 2, 2022).

Pelter was convicted in the 1975 killing of two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge, South Dakota Indian Reservation. He's been imprisoned since 1977 and now confined in a Covid isolation unit. Two co-defendants were acquitted on grounds of self-defense; the government long ago conceded it dies not know who shot the agents; and a leading prosecutor in the case, James Reynolds, "wrote to Biden last year asking the president to commute Peltier's sentence…According to Reynolds, the government had lied, deceived, used racism and faked evidence to sentence Peltier for two consecutive life terms in prison."

Internationally people and organizations have been working to get Peltier released. He is considered by the American Indian Movement, Amnesty International and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to be a political prisoner.

Peltier, now 77, suffers from diabetes, hypertension, heart condition and abdominal aneurism in addition to COVID — for which he's been denied a booster shot, according to Yazzie and Estes.

To add your voice to the demand to stop this outrage and free Leonard Peltier, visit the defense committee website (https://www.whoisleonardpeltier.info/) for updates and a change.org petition for his release. His family wants him home!

(See Efrén Paredes, Jr.'s report on COVID in Michigan prisons at https://againstthecurrent.org/covid-19-inferno-engulfs-those-caged-in-michigan-prisons/.)

most basic personal and social rights are never guaranteed under a patriarchal capitalist order.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act has been effectively overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Roberts. First, in 2013 the Court gutted the formula that demanded those states and localities with a history of racial discrimination pre-clear any changes. Second, in 2021 the Court allowed discriminatory procedures not provably *motivated* by discrimination.

Back in 2013 Roberts claimed that discrimination was no longer the problem it had once been, but since these rulings, hundreds of polling stations have been closed, early voting has been shut down, redistricting progresses with abandon and state legislatures vote themselves power to overrule a vote they don't like. The John Lewis Voting Rights Act, which would restore the heart of the Voting Rights Act, remains stalled by the Senate filibuster.

Roberts, who voted with the Court minority against allowing the brutal Texas anti-abortion law to take effect, now appears to be worried that the monster he's helped create may undercut the Court's very legitimacy.

Indeed, in view of the emergency facing the reproductive rights movement, the legitimacy of this Court — in both its present stacked, reactionary composition and in its anti-democratic appointment-for-life institutional character — stands exposed.

President Biden's Supreme Court nomination (pending as this issue goes to press), will not change its hard-right majority composition. But the confirmation hearings will undoubtedly heighten the bitter fight over abortion rights with the Republican attempt to prolong the debate until their hoped-for November takeover of the Senate.

Global Perspective

Wherever racist movements and reactionary religious authority are on the rise, abortion rights are restricted with horrific effect on women's lives. When those forces are in retreat, women's rights — ranging from scientific sex education, quality day care, adequate housing and parental leave to freedom from sterilization abuse, domestic abuse, sexual assault and femicide — move forward.

While legal abortion is more than a dozen times safer than childbirth, it is estimated that worldwide 25 million undergo illegal abortions annually. This results in 23,000 deaths and many more who suffer complications. Sixty-six countries have either a total prohibition on abortion — such as El Salvador and Nicaragua — or allows it only to save the parent's life, as in Brazil or Nigeria.

In El Salvador, if authorities suspect a person is responsible for terminating or supporting the termination of a pregnancy, they can receive a maximum prison sentence up to 30 years. In the first decade of the 21st century, at least 26 Salvadorans women who had miscarriages or self-aborted were convicted of aggravated homicide.

Mexico recently decriminalized abortion although feminists are still battling the shaming they often face in seeking abortion, shockingly even from health professionals. The Center for Reproductive Rights points out that over the last quarter century, 60 countries have liberalized laws on reproductive rights.

In the Republic of Ireland a 2018 referendum, repealing a constitutional amendment that conferred the "right to life" of the unborn, passed with a 66% majority. This decisive vote came from the combination of a movement in the streets with the dramatic cases of pregnant girls and women unable to get the help they needed.

Although the Irish government had attempted to soften the constitutional amendment, the 2012 death of 31-year-old dentist Savita Halappanavar revealed its lethal consequences. She suffered a miscarriage, but a physician at University Hospital Galway was afraid to perform emergency surgery as long as there was a fetal heartbeat. Halappanavar ended up dead from severe sepsis.

Over the last year or so, Poland has also seen two deaths of pregnant women in similar circumstances. A vibrant movement opposing repressive laws is challenging the authoritarian government and even bringing their message to the church's altars. Meanwhile they aid those needing to end their pregnancy by arranging transportation out of the country or providing information and pills so they can safely self-abort.

Unfortunately, there are a few U.S. women who self-aborted or suffered miscarriages and were arrested, jailed and convicted. Most are women of color. If *Roe* is eviscerated, many more will be prosecuted for infanticide or manslaughter like their Salvadoran sisters.

Throughout the world, whether the right-wing and authoritarian government is in charge, or whether there is a more liberal agenda, society feels it is necessary to have special rules for abortion procedures. Instead, we assert that abortion is a medical procedure and needs no special set of rules.

Escalating Conflict

Some pundits ask why there can't be a "reasonable compromise" on abortion rights. Actually, there has been too much "compromise" over the decades since *Roe,* as the right wing — and frankly, some liberal centrists — have implemented restrictions.

True, 91% of all abortions take place before 13 weeks, but why should the door be shut on the 9% unable to schedule an appointment early enough, make the necessary arrangements, get the money together or discover an unforeseen problem?

The right's great propaganda victory came with the passage of the federal law banning a medical procedure for the handful of late-term abortions that *only* happen in cases of medical emergency or extraordinary tragic circumstances. What all the laws and regulations do is create the conditions where abortion is less accessible and more costly.

The end of *Roe* either officially or in practice under the current malignant Supreme Court majority will not end the struggle for reproductive justice. There will be defiance by multiple means, including assistance to women in need of abortion, speakouts, demonstrations, pickets, and civil disobedience.

There's simply no room for retreat or even a simple hold-the-line program. Instead, it is time to assert the dignity in all reproductive decisions and society's obligation to support those decisions. Anything less is a deadly injury to women and a menace of multiple injuries to all. ■

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