

AGAINST THE **CURRENT** A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

**FIGHTING APARTHEID:**  
*Oscar Hernández on the Past as Present*



**Bureaucracy, Emigration and Broken Lives**

◆ KRISTIN FEREBEE

**Review Essay: Abolishing Antisemitism**

◆ ALAN WALD

**Colonial Myth, Reality and Modernity**

◆ ROB CONNELL



# A Letter from the Editors

## Slouching Toward November

FACING THE HIDEOUS specter of a second Trump presidency, the operational leadership of the Democratic Party — that is, the party mega-donors — ultimately took the reins and pushed aside its all-too-visibly declining incumbent standard-bearer. From the voting base on July 21 came the instant response: “Free at last, free at last thank God Almighty (and Covid), we’re free of Biden at last!”

In this issue of *Against the Current*, we present three opinion pieces on tactical voting options for socialists in November (these were drafted before Biden’s withdrawal and slightly updated for publication). We won’t summarize those here — nor are we interested in the syrupy sentimentality over Joe Biden’s “selfless legacy” coming from one side, or the vilification coming from the other.

As our readers will already know, whatever grades may be assigned to Biden’s handling of the economy or NATO or immigration, trade policy or anything else, on Israel *and Gaza it’s below F-minus: G for Genocide*.

In this respect at least, the none-too-soon end of Biden’s candidacy is a partial victory for the pro-Palestinian solidarity struggle — those “uncommitted” primary votes, the college encampments, the sit-ins and local resolutions demanding ceasefire. It’s not that the ascendancy of Kamala Harris in itself solves anything, or that her own record on Palestinian rights is any better on substance. But the movement for Palestine has moved the needle of public opinion and shown that the catastrophe in Gaza can’t be shoved back into the twilight.

The International Court of Justice ruling on the illegality of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank — although international law in practice does not apply to Israel, due to the permanent U.S. dispensation — is also a helpful embarrassment for Washington’s enabling of ethnic cleansing.

Will Arab and Muslim communities so rightly enraged by the Biden enabling of Israel’s genocide, despite Harris’ complicity, be prepared to give her at least a hearing? Can she show enough decent compassion for the Palestinian people’s unending catastrophe — if not an alternative policy that’s desperately required — that they might listen? Too soon to predict, but it might make the difference in Michigan and perhaps the national outcome.

### The Road to Monarchy?

Mostly, however, we want to focus here on the condition of U.S. politics that have brought us to the present moment of slouching toward November’s “existential” election.

The Republican Party shows the spectacle of a well-oiled and lavishly funded cult, the providential gift of an attempted assassination having elevated Trump to demigod status. A substantial sector of billionaires and corporate elites have come over to Trump, and the monarchist Supreme Court majority’s “immunity” ruling overtly paves the way for the coronation of King Donald I.

This time, Trump’s royal court would be the far-right cadres of Project 2025, who may have made the mistake of going too public with their Christian-supremacist agenda and plans for mass deportation camps, tax cuts and civil service purges. Trump of course hasn’t read the 900 pages of Project 2025’s plans — but his own announced economic policies of massive tariffs and permanent tax cuts for corporations and billionaires would be both inflationary and ruinous for the budget and the population.

By the third year of Trump’s term he’d be older than Biden is now and his alt-right protégé J.D. Vance would be poised to run for a full two terms. Vance’s statements about “cat women” taking over political life, it must be said, are stunning even by MAGA standards. And Trump’s unhinged comment at the Christian-nationalist Turning Point rally

informed attendees that “you’ll never have to vote again” in the event he’s elected. (*New York Times*, July 26, 2024)

In this climate, the threat is clear and present: the actual destruction of even the flawed democratic structures that have evolved under the ambiguous rubric of the U.S. Constitution.

The Trump-Vance agenda includes open cheerleading for Israel’s Gaza genocide and rampant ethnic cleansing of Palestine — along with indifference if not active support for Russia’s drive to turn Ukraine into another Gaza. (In this respect, at least they’re consistent.)

Whatever the outcome this November, four years from now the United States along with the rest of the world will be experiencing climate-change disasters of magnitudes we can barely imagine now. The restoration of full-scale death-to-the-environment Republican policies would go a long way toward making the global crisis irreversible.

With Biden’s stumbling candidacy, the Democratic leadership’s apparent incapacity to remove him had turned by mid-July to a mixture of paralysis and panic. His nick-of-time withdrawal left no option except the instant pivot to Kamala Harris.

The vice-presidential choice of Minnesota governor Tim Walz adds a touch of Midwest popular liberalism, in contrast to the appalling J.D. Vance specter. It didn’t risk sacrificing a Senate seat (as selecting Mark Kelly from Arizona might have done) — and most important, at least for cosmetic if not substantive policy purposes, it avoided nominating someone tied to longterm support of Israel’s longterm ethnic cleansing and genocide in Palestine.

As *Against the Current* will go to press shortly before the Democratic convention, it’s an open question whether the campaign can sustain the cohesion, unity and energy to defeat Trump. It certainly won’t lack funding!

At its core, of course, the same corporate agenda remains. In any case the Democrats’ ability to deliver on promises to restore abortion rights, expand environmental protections or anything else would be dim at best in what are likely to be closely divided Houses of Congress, quite possibly with either or both under Republican majorities.

These short-term projections, however, get nowhere near the full depth of the U.S. political crisis.

### Paradoxically Speaking

The Republican Party, contrary to widely promoted nonsense, is in no meaningful sense a populist, let alone a “workers’ party.” As much if not more than ever it’s a party of plutocracy, privilege and unrestrained corporate greed. Yet astonishingly it captures a large working-class vote, both  
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*Back Cover:* Amílcar Cabral, guerilla war strategist.

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

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## Elect the Harris-Walz Ticket: Why Socialists Must Defeat Trump

By Dan La Botz

WITH VICE-PRESIDENT Kamala Harris now the Democratic Party candidate, there was first a sigh of relief and then a burst of enthusiasm among Democrats. Many Democrats now say, “we just might be able to win.”

After President Joe Biden’s disastrous performance in his first debate with former president Donald Trump, followed by the failed assassination attempt, which many of his evangelical followers took to be the result of divine intervention, it seemed that there was no way to stop Trump from winning the presidency.

It was a terrifying thought, since most of us on the left in the broad sense fear that should he win, we would enter a period of authoritarianism, the anteroom to fascism. That is why many of us believe we must vote for Kamala Harris.

And she could win. Kamala Harris’ entry into the campaign, which only began on July 21, has been phenomenal. In the first couple of days there was a Zoom call with 40,000 Black women supporters.

Democratic Party leaders, donors, and influencers quickly rallied to Harris, whose campaign united the Democratic Party. In a week or so she raised about \$300 million, holding huge rallies of incredible enthusiasm and as large as Trump’s rallies. She chose the liberal Tim Walz as her running mate. As I write this on August 10, the *New York Times*/Sienna Poll found that Harris led Trump by five or six points in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, three battleground states where before President Joe Biden had been trailing.

The prospect of electing the first Asian and first Black woman to the presidency of the United States has excited many sectors of the Democratic Party base and independents. Many women are thrilled to support a candidate who might be the first woman president. Black people too are excited to support a woman who identifies as a Black candidate, and young voters are now more energized. Many South Asians are also excited about her candidacy, though they represent only one or two percent of all voters.

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### On the 2024 Election: Three Views

*WE PRESENT HERE three perspectives on options for the left in the November U.S. presidential election. The authors are members of Solidarity who gave opening remarks in a June 30 session for members and friends of the organization. The views expressed are their own.*

*The discussion was held after the infamous Biden-Trump debate, but of course prior to the attempted assassination of Donald Trump, the Republican convention, and the escalating appeals within the Democratic Party for Biden to “pass the torch” which gained new momentum in the face of Biden’s July 17 COVID diagnosis.*

*This issue of Against the Current goes to press shortly before the Democratic convention in Chicago.*

Let me say that I remain, like virtually every member of Solidarity, committed to the idea that we must create an independent working-class political party with a socialist program — although as we know from the experiences of the Labor Party (of the 1990s), now defunct, and the Green Party, the political rules of the game make it extremely difficult to do so.

I do not believe, as DSA does, that the left should have a strategic orientation to the Democratic Party. I believe that decades of attempts to reform or realign the Democrats have failed and there is little likelihood of success in the future.

Nevertheless, because of the threat of authoritarianism that Trump represents, I believe today, as I argued back in 2020 when I supported Biden, that we must back the Democratic Party candidate, Kamala Harris.

### On the Record

Yet, while I believe we should vote for Harris, it is not because she is in any way progressive. Some Democratic Party progressives argue that voting for Harris is itself progressive, because she is a Black/Asian woman. While I, like many Americans, would like to see a woman of color as president, we should have learned from the experience of Barack Obama that being a person of color does not necessarily mean that one has more progressive politics.

And the role of women such as secretar-

ies of state Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton made it clear that gender does not dictate politics. Both implemented U.S. imperialist policies.

In fact, Harris has never been one to stake out progressive positions and fight for them. She has never been on the cutting edge of any progressive policy. Much like former president Barack Obama, to whom she is often compared, she has carefully avoided political controversy. She administered and voted in her previous offices, whether as attorney general of California, U.S. senator, or vice-president, as a moderate.

Vice-presidents historically have never presented their own views, and neither did Harris. On domestic policy, she fully supported Biden’s liberal economic and social programs, the most significant in half a century. The most notable were the American Rescue Plan Act (\$1.9 trillion) to support business and workers during COVID, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (\$1.2 trillion) and the Inflation Reduction Act (\$369 billion) to deal with climate issues.

In immigration policy, she had a mixed record as California attorney general, and as vice-president she fully supported Biden’s policies on immigration and regulating the border. These policies violate U.S. and international law by making it impossible for many to enter the country and seek asylum, create obstacles, detain and expel others without due process, while leaving many hanging in legal limbo for years.

While assigned to get to the roots of the immigration problem in Latin America, particularly in the northern triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) — a thankless and impossible task since it means somehow correcting the results of decades of U.S. warfare, neoliberal policies, corrupt authoritarian governments, and the proliferation of cartels and gangs — she could do little but smile and give a little aid to some NGOs.

Harris has been an outspoken defender of abortion rights, the first high-level elected official to have the courage to visit an abortion clinic. There is no doubt that her defense of reproductive rights has won her a large following among women. Yet this is a defense of a federally protected right — the

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# Advancing Our Own Politics in 2024: Socialist Support of the Green Party

By Howie Hawkins

AS SOCIALISTS, HOW should we approach the 2024 presidential election? The two major parties, ideologically capitalist to their cores, present us with a choice between a neoliberal corporate militarist and a neofascist criminal maniac.

As I write this (July 7), Democratic leaders and donors are fighting over whether to replace Biden after his shockingly bad debate performance on June 27. But a younger, more vigorous candidate will still be a tribune for the neoliberal and imperialist policies of the Democratic Party and its big donors in the corporate power elite.

The answer to the question of “who is the lesser evil” is easy: the Democratic corporate centrist is the lesser evil to Trump, the wannabe rightwing dictator. But does that mean socialists should support the Democratic candidate to stop Trump?

I think Hal Draper had the right answer to the lesser evil question in his 1967 essay, “Who will be the lesser evil in 1968?”

Looking at the cases of progressives who voted for the lesser evil conservative Von Hindenburg to stop the fascist Hitler in 1932 Germany, or for the liberal cold warrior Johnson to defeat the conservative cold warrior Goldwater in 1964 America, Draper said:

*“The point is that it is the question which is a disaster, not the answer. In setups where the choice is between one capitalist politician and another, the defeat comes in accepting the limitation to this choice.”*

In both cases, the lesser evil carried out

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*Howie Hawkins is a longtime Green Party activist and its 2020 presidential candidate, and also a member of Solidarity and the Ukraine Solidarity Network (the new USN website is now live: <https://ukrainesolidaritynetwork.us>).*



what progressive voters for the lesser evil feared that the greater evil candidate would do. Von Hindenburg put Hitler in power by appointing him German Chancellor. Johnson massively escalated the war in Vietnam that his progressive voters feared Goldwater would do.

Draper advised socialists that “you can’t fight the victory of the rightmost forces by sacrificing your own independent strength to support elements just the next step away from them.”

## Trumpism Normalized

Biden beat Trump in 2020, but that didn’t beat Trumpism. Instead, Biden has normalized and legitimized Trumpism. He has constantly pursued bipartisanship with the party that tried to overthrow his 2020 election. Biden and other Democratic leaders have compromised with the far right, embracing many of the racist and repressive anti-immigrant policies of Trump and the MAGA Republicans.

Biden approved 50% more oil and gas drilling permits on public lands than Trump did in the first three years of both administrations. On international affairs, Biden has expanded Trump’s trade war with China, and continued Trump’s Cuba policies of tightening economic sanctions and absurdly designating it a “state sponsor of terrorism.”

Even before the present Gaza genocide, the Biden administration continued Trump’s anti-Palestinian policies, maintaining the U.S. embassy’s move to Jerusalem, promoting the Abraham Accords to normalize relations between the Arab kingdoms and Israel without justice for the Palestinians, and imposing no consequences for Israel’s continual expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank.

The expanded weapons supply and intelligence coordination with Israel for its war on Gaza makes “Genocide Joe” a full partner in the slaughter and its consequences.

Yes, Trump would be even worse. But I contend that the best way for socialists to use their vote is to support the most positive independent alternative to this madness that is on the ballot.

The best way in the presidential campaign to fight the right is to build progressive social movements and independent left politics by voting for the Green Party’s Jill Stein campaign for President. The risk that Stein votes will “spoil” the election for Biden and elect Trump exists, but is very low.

Whatever happens in the presidential election, going forward we should prioritize working to change the electoral system to ranked choice voting and proportional representation to enable the independent left to win its fair and proportional share of representation and power in government.

If Trump is elected, it is vital that we mount a visible and vigorous public opposition to the repression and reactionary social, economic, environmental and foreign policies that Trump and his Project 2025 playbook have promised.

## Critical Support: Jill Stein’s Campaign

Jill Stein’s campaign is giving voice to the demands of the social movements we want to build. Her leading issue now is calling for a ceasefire, and an end to U.S. arms to Israel until Israel stops its war on Gaza and moves away from apartheid and occupation and toward a political accord with Palestine.

Stein was arrested on April 28 supporting the students at the pro-Palestinian encamp-

ment at Washington University in St. Louis. Her campaign is where Palestinian solidarity supporters who won't vote for who they call Genocide Joe can use their vote as their voice of dissent.

Stein's campaign gives voice to the most progressive demands of popular social movements, and conveys to activists in those movements that the Green Party is with them while the Democratic Party is not.

In the climate movement, Stein is expressing the demand of the climate movement's left wing, including the Green Party, for an Ecosocialist Green New Deal featuring the large measure of the public ownership and planning that is needed to coordinate and execute the complexities of a rapid transition to 100% clean energy and zero carbon emissions.

Stein is also supporting a socialist program for universal health care. She is calling for a National Health Service that fully socializes health care assets and democratizes the delivery system, going well beyond only socializing payments through National Health Insurance, or Medicare for All.

These kinds of progressive and socialist positions on domestic policy are stated throughout her online platform, which is consistent with the Green Party platform that defines the party as ecosocialist.

### Wrong on Ukraine

I believe, however, that our support for Stein should be critical, principally due to her position opposing aid to Ukraine, which is as hypocritical as Biden's is on Israel. Both talk about supporting human rights, democracy and international law, but Stein makes an exception for Russia's war crimes against Ukrainians just as Biden makes an exception for Israel's war crimes against Palestinians.

Stein's Ukraine platform plank only says, "Stop fueling the war between Russia and Ukraine and lead on negotiating a peaceful end." She has given that position more content in interviews, where she calls for an end to U.S. arms to Ukraine for its self-defense and invokes the Minsk Accords as a model for a land-for-peace settlement where Russia keeps the Ukrainian lands it has occupied.

Stein has articulated this position from the first day of Russia's full-scale invasion through a cringe-worthy July 3 interview with *Newsweek*, where she said the war in Ukraine

is "very much of our own making."

Like too many campists among pseudo-socialists and pacifists, she condemns Russia's invasion but immediately pivots



As the Green Party's presidential candidate in 2024, Jill Stein outlines a socialist program for universal health care.

to blaming the United States and NATO for "provoking" Putin. The second part of that non-sequitur, which is one of Putin's rationalizations for the war, in no way transforms Russia's war of aggression into a just war of defense, but that is the implication.

Stein has never spoken with, or acknowledged the views of, progressive activists in Ukraine and Russia with whom she

should be an ally, including the Green Party of Ukraine; Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) and the Russian Socialist Movement, democratic socialist organizations in Ukraine and Russia respectively; and Ukrainian feminists, anarchists, LGBTQ people, environmentalists and trade unionists.

All these movements call for solidarity from the western left in the form of support for military and economic aid for Ukraine, sanctions against Russia, cancellation of Ukraine's unjust foreign debt, and freedom for Russia's anti-war protesters and other political prisoners. Stein has never articulated any of these demands.

The Green Party is divided on Ukraine. The national committee narrowly voted 48-44-8 in October 2022 to call on the United States to end arms for Ukraine and sanctions on Russia. However, from the many communications I receive from rank-and-file Greens as the 2020 Green presidential candidate and an advocate for Ukraine solidarity within the Green Party, I believe the majority of the Greens' grassroots base supports Ukraine, as do the majority of progressive-minded Americans, according to opinion polling.

The position of Stein and the national committee are out of line with all the other Green parties of the world, which support Ukraine.

### Other Campaigns?

What about the other independent candidacies on the left? The only two with any modicum of support are Claudia De la Cruz of the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and Cornel West, who is running an independent campaign. Both have similar platforms to Stein, including on Ukraine.

PSL claims it will be on the ballot in over 20 states. West is struggling to make the ballot on even a dozen states. Stein will be on upwards of 40 state ballots.

PSL's campist support for authoritarian governments like North Korea, Eritrea and Syria puts PSL outside the realm of broad non-sectarian left politics aimed at building a mass party. If authoritarian one-party states are what American progressives are told is socialism, they will not support it.

West sought the Green Party nomination from June until October 2023. He then decided to strike out on his own, saying he wanted to go directly to the people instead of having to campaign within the Green Party to win delegates state by state for the Green presidential nominating convention.

His decision was baffling, because he had no serious competition for the nomination and walking away from Green Party's existing ballot lines and volunteer base for ballot petitioning in other states meant walking away from ballot access in most states.

An important difference between the Green and Cornel West campaigns is that West is running a one-off campaign around his own candidacy, whereas Jill Stein's campaign is helping to maintain and build the Green Party as an ongoing independent progressive alternative to the two-corporate-party system.

After polling in the 3-4% range in 2023, Stein and West have settled down to the 1-2% in recent months in most polls, although they both got a 1% bump immediately after Biden's June 27 debate debacle.

The pressure for a lesser-evil vote to defeat Trump will only intensify as the election approaches, so we can expect the Stein and West vote to continue to decline. Since West will not be on many ballots, much of his vote is likely to transfer to Stein.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr, who is running on many rightwing Trumpian themes with a family name that invokes Kennedy liberalism, has been averaging around 10% in recent months, with a 5% bump up after the debate.

Most polls showed Kennedy drawing votes about equally from Trump and Biden. These numbers for independent candidates are not likely to determine who wins the national popular vote, but could affect the Electoral College outcome in one or more battleground states.

With most of the left and broader progressive movements including labor unions giving support to the Democrats, they are taking their own voices and demands out of the election. When the left and its demands disappear from the campaign, our identity as a distinct alternative disappears from the consciousness of the public, including activists in progressive movements who should be part of an independent socialist left.

The whole political dynamic moves to the

right as the centrist Democrats take progressive voters for granted and appeal to more conservative voters.

So balancing out all these considerations, I believe socialists should support Jill Stein's Green Party campaign in order to promote independent left politics as the alternative to this rightward dynamic that flows from lesser evil voting for the Democrats. I see it as a vote to support the Green Party, as the only national independent party on the left, more than as a vote for Jill Stein as a candidate.

### Spoiler Risks and "Safe States"

The risk that Stein votes will "spoil" the election and elect Trump is very low. The outcome and thus the Electoral College votes are not in doubt in 44 safe states (including D.C.).

The election is competitive in seven battleground states — Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. So a vote for Stein in the safe states should not be controversial for socialists who advocate independent left politics.

In the battleground states, many on the left feel that they must hold their nose and vote to block Trump.

Although I disagree with that choice, I am not going to spend much effort on trying to dissuade people in those states who want to vote defensively for the Democratic ticket. I would just state that I am voting for the Green Party in order to express my support for an alternative to the two-corporate-party system that gives us such miserable choices.

I do think we should warn that Trump and today's Republican Party are a neofascist danger to democracy with their authoritarian, racist, misogynist, xenophobic and violent pronouncements and actions.

We should be realistic and credible by acknowledging that the Green vote could conceivably be the margin of difference in the Electoral College. It is not a risk in the 44 safe states, but it *could* happen in one or more of the seven battleground states.

Most Green voters are Green voters, not wayward Democrats. Most Green voters are irreparably lost to the Democrats. They are a hard core of about 500,000 judging by party registration figures and votes in the last three presidential elections.

Most Green voters are disgusted former Democrats who found that the Democrats fought against them on issues they care deeply about, from universal health care and affordable housing to climate action and ending U.S. wars of aggression, from Vietnam to Iraq to Gaza. The Democrats have lost these Green voters for good.

The claim that Stein cost Hillary Clinton the election in 2016 doesn't hold up in light of the facts. The 2016 exit poll showed that if Stein had not run, 61% of her voters would

not have voted, and only 25% would have voted for Clinton, with 14% voting for Trump.

Plug those numbers into the three states where the Stein vote was bigger than the margin of difference between Clinton and Trump — Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania — and Trump still would have won those states.

The 2024 election hinges on whether the Democrats can mobilize their majoritarian base to the polls despite the party's vapid centrism. The Trump base is smaller, but more energetic, enthusiastic and committed.

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## *Ranked choice voting is on the ballot in November by initiative petitions in six states.*

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### Reforming a Spoiled System

The Electoral College is also a much bigger factor than the Stein candidacy. Biden won the popular vote in 2020 by over seven million, by 4.5% with an absolute majority of 51.3% to Trump's 46.8%.

If as few as 21,462 votes in Arizona, Georgia and Wisconsin had flipped from Biden to Trump, the electoral vote would have been tied. The presidential election would have been thrown to the House for a one-state, one-vote decision where Republicans controlled a majority of 26 state delegations.

The Republicans have only won the popular vote once in the 36 years since 1988. The only way in the 21st century that Republican presidents have been first elected — George W. Bush in 2000 and Donald Trump in 2016 — was by the Electoral College after losing the popular vote.

One would think that the Democrats would realize they have a problem, and campaign to eliminate the Electoral College. Stein cannot be blamed for the anti-democratic Electoral College. Her platform calls for its abolition and replacement by a national popular vote using ranked choice voting.

This brings up why I believe we should prioritize changing the electoral system to ranked choice voting and proportional representation, to enable the left to win its fair and proportional share of representation and power in government.

The Electoral College illustrates the problem of the winner-take-all election system that produces a two-party system that marginalizes challengers of the left as "spoilers."

We have an answer to the spoiler problem: ranked choice voting for single-seat executive offices like the President, and proportional ranked choice voting in multi-seat districts for proportional representation in legislative bodies.

By eliminating the "spoiler problem," and in its proportional form also eliminating ger-

rymandering, widespread adoption of ranked choice voting is a reform that can replace the exclusionary two-party system with an inclusive multi-party system.

The good news here is that we are making these changes at an accelerating rate. In 2000, there were just two municipalities that still used proportional ranked choice voting (also known as the single transferable vote), a legacy of Progressive Era reforms from the 1920s to 1940s when two dozen cities enacted proportional ranked choice voting.

By 2020, there were two dozen jurisdictions using ranked choice voting. Today in 2024 there are over 50 jurisdictions, including two states, and several cases of proportional ranked choice voting, including Portland, Maine and Portland, Oregon.

Ranked choice voting is on the ballot in November by initiative petitions in six states — Alaska (repeal), D.C., Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and Oregon. Ranked choice voting is on a streak of 27 straight wins in ballot measures.

Ranked choice voting is a reform we are winning. Whatever one's views on how to vote for president in 2024, I hope we can all agree that we should support the movement for ranked choice voting and, within that movement, advocate for proportional ranked choice voting for legislative bodies.

### Building Resistance

The other thing I hope we can all agree on is that if Trump wins, we must immediately build and sustain mass public opposition to the repressive and reactionary policies of his administration.

After 9/11, social movements evaporated, most notably the rising global justice or alter-globalization movement against corporate-managed international trade and financial institutions. People were fearful and demoralized in the face of repressive legislation like the PATRIOT Act and the widespread jingoism in support of wars of revenge and regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In this absence of opposition, the Bush administration had two years to build support for its Iraq invasion before an opposition began to mobilize.

We cannot afford a similar delay in opposition as a Trump administration begins its promised persecution of political opponents, purge of thousands of civil service workers, deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants, big tax cuts for the rich paid for by deep cuts in social programs, acceleration of fossil fuel exploitation and global warming, federal ban on abortion, and many other reactionary policies.

We will need to make such measures, which are not what the large majority of Americans want, politically impossible to implement due to mass opposition in the streets and every possible public forum. ■

## What Question Are We Answering? By Kit Wainer

AS VOTERS, REVOLUTIONARY socialists will face the same choice as all other voters in the United States this November: which candidate is the lesser evil, which one represents the greatest threat?

Socialists, however, are not mere atomized voters. We are trying to popularize a critique of capitalism and build a mass movement for socialism.

In that context it is difficult to see how urging support for the Democratic ticket helps. In very specific ways, it will more likely obstruct efforts that socialists are making to encourage the growth of the most vibrant movements in the United States today.

Most revolutionary socialists understand that key to the construction of a socialist movement is strengthening and rebuilding social protest movements. Rank and file movements within organized labor, new labor organizing projects, feminist movements, the Black Lives Matter wave, and, today, the Palestine solidarity movement, are the most likely source of new activists who can form the basis of a new socialist left.

By challenging austerity at work, laws limiting reproductive rights, police brutality, or U.S. support for the genocide in Gaza, activists quickly bump up against the limits imposed by the capitalist state. Some of those will be attracted to the project of building a revolutionary socialist alternative to capitalism.

A discussion of what socialists should say about the 2024 elections — and to whom we should say it — should begin from that starting point. The question, therefore, should not be whether Trump represents a unique historic threat but *what we should say to movement activists* with whom we are in contact in order to build the revolutionary project to which many of us have devoted most of our lives.

For the moment, it is worth concentrating our attention on how the question of the 2024 elections is being discussed in two key movement sectors: Palestine solidarity and organized labor.

### Palestine Solidarity

There is generalized contempt for Biden and the Democrats among large sectors of Palestine solidarity activists. This time, it is not just extreme leftists denouncing the Democratic president. Jewish Voice for Peace and other activists have interrupted Biden fundraisers and protested outside Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's house.

Several columnists have raised alarms that young progressives and Arab voters might not turn out for the president in November. That the term "Genocide Joe" has become so commonplace speaks volumes.

Socialists did not create this disdain for the President. A wide cross-section of the most vibrant movement in the United States has come into conflict with the Democratic Party and many activists see its leadership as an enemy.

Were this not an election year, many socialists would recognize in this moment an opportunity to engage in dialogue with a wide range of activists, and to draw larger conclusions about the nature of the Democratic Party and the capitalist state in the United States.

We wouldn't need to argue with fellow activists about why relying on Democrats is a trap. So many have come to that conclusion based on their own experiences. Instead we would want to work with them to generalize together about the broader implications of the conclusions they have already drawn.

Anyone advocating support for the Democrats in November will face a dilemma. When in conversations with Palestine solidarity activists who cannot bring themselves to vote to continue the genocide, should we argue that they are wrong? That the conclusions they are drawing about the Democratic administration are invalid, or that they should temporarily set aside their revulsion?

That argument might earn the Democrats a few votes, but it will also cut socialists off from most activists in this arena.

While it may seem implausible at the moment, based on past history it is at least possible that a wing of the movement will emerge that advocates toning down the criticism of Biden-Harris administration until after the election — to find a way to denounce Israel without embarrassing the U.S. president. That would likely entail ending the

encampments and protests against government leaders.

It would certainly require calling off any effort to protest outside the Democratic National Convention. In short, it would most likely lead to the weakening of the Palestine solidarity movement.

If we believe that the revival of mass movements is key to the growth of a new socialist current in the United States, it is difficult to imagine how we could advocate the weakening of the Palestine solidarity movement.

### Labor and the Election

Most union officials will endorse and campaign for the Democratic ticket. In most cases the question will not be debated at any union body to which members have access. Unions will tell their members whom they have endorsed and encourage them to sign up to help the campaign.

One of the unions' goals will be to show that they can mobilize their own members to campaign and vote. In the minds of most union leaders, that ability makes them valuable allies to Democratic politicians.

Therefore, those union members who want their union to support the Democratic ticket will not have to win a political fight. They can sign up for any number of campaign activities that their union leaders are already planning to organize. Even for many rank and file organizations, the 2024 elections will not be a priority because those who want to stop Trump will have no qualms with what their union leaders are doing. Rank and file organizations can focus on internal union matters.

Socialists in the labor movement will have to pick and choose their battles. Anyone who is or has been a workplace union activist knows how difficult it can be to get co-workers to commit even minimal amounts of time to union activism. Getting a member to take on one small project often requires significant effort.

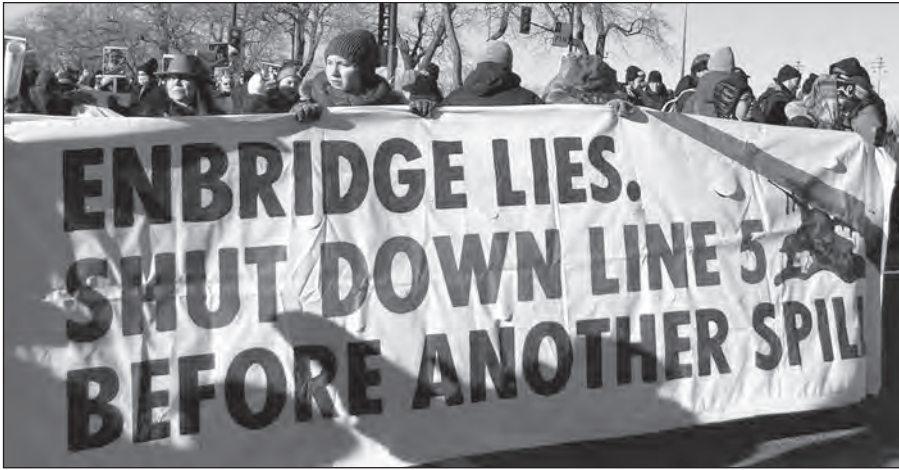
Getting members to be active in their unions or rank and file organizations should be higher priority than convincing them to vote for or against someone in November.

For union activists, however, the question will be about more than voting. They will have to decide whether it is better to spend

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*Kit Wainer is a retired New York City school teacher who was the United Federation of Teachers Chapter Leader for his school for 21 years and has been active in the rank and file opposition within the UFT since the late 1980s.*





*Climate justice activists, including Indigenous people, demand that the oil pipeline that runs underneath Lake Michigan before a major spill fouls the Great Lakes.*

Again, if the priority is to rebuild the movements, it would seem inexplicable to stop doing so, even if for only a few months.

Campaigning for the Democrats is not just a draw on activists' time. It also requires political compromises. Democratic mayors, governors and presidents have been in the forefront of pursuing anti-labor policies such as free trade deals or education reform. It is difficult to imagine how one can urge union members to vote to elect Kamala Harris without also refraining from critical analyses of Democratic policies.

In the recent past, for example, two different New York City Democratic mayors have attempted to strip public sector retirees of important health care protections and compel them to switch to a Medicare Advantage (aka Medicare C) plan. The leaderships of several city unions, the United Federation of Teachers in particular, have been complicit with this attempt.

Currently, the Democratic mayor Eric Adams appears inclined to significantly reduce health insurance benefits for working members as well. Normally, this would be an opportunity to engage in conversations about why the DP is committed to such painful neoliberal policies. It would seem contradictory and probably impossible to have such conversations with union members while also urging them to campaign for the Democrats.

### **Movements Derailed**

There is a long history of social movements being derailed over the perceived need to support Democratic politicians. When President George W. Bush launched the Iraq War in 2003, it sparked the largest antiwar movement the United States had seen since the early 1970s.

As the 2004 elections approached, however, many movement leaders and activists decided the priority was to defeat Bush and elect John Kerry, the Democratic candidate. An antiwar movement was particularly embarrassing for Kerry because he had not yet

turned against the war.

There was no specific decision to end antiwar protests. However, as key movement activists shifted their energies toward the election campaign, the movement lost steam and there were not enough activists left to keep it going. Although the war became even more unpopular after 2005, the protests never recovered their pre-2004 size.

Similarly, after the election of Donald Trump, a massive women's movement emerged under the banner of the "Women's March." Millions protested Trump's inauguration all over the United States.

While the protests continued for months and new activists got involved, Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi skillfully attracted many key leaders to the idea of using the momentum of the anti-Trump "resistance" to win a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives in 2018.

That election resulted in returning Pelosi to the speakership and the swearing-in of the first members of the progressive "Squad." But the protests fizzled. And instead of returning to Women's March organizing, many activists prioritized the 2020 presidential elections instead.

Part of the problem is that movements cannot just be revived at will. Activists cannot return from a hiatus of election campaigning and expect to find the movements they left behind. Movements rise and fall. Socialists need to prioritize extending the upward trends and solidifying as much as possible those who get activated.

We also need to be there, organizing, to have any chance of convincing activists to become active socialists. Leaving the movements, in order to join Democratic election campaigns, means abandoning that priority.

### **The Trump Threat**

The resurgent ascendance of Donald Trump does represent a dangerous threat that socialists should not ignore. It is most likely the consequence of two separate developments.

The first is a generalized despair over the failures of both political parties to improve the standards of living of the majority of the working and lower middle classes since the onset of what Michael Roberts calls the "Long Recession," which began around 2008.

The same forces that produced the intense desire for change during the 2008 elections have led more recently to discouragement and anger. Among sections of the middle classes and professionals, this has heightened the appeal of explicitly racist and classically national-socialist solutions, i.e. anti-immigrant, anti-"bourgeois," and implicitly antisemitic messages.

These voters make up the "base" of the Republican Party in the sense that they dominate among Republican primary voters. Republicans running for any office need to appeal to those voters and echo their views if they want to become the Republican nominee.

The second factor is the slow-moving demographic shift which is making the country less white, increasing the pool of voters the Democrats take for granted.

This process has not moved as quickly as the Democratic leadership had hoped. Many Democrats and election analysts believed this shift had already progressed to the point that it made Hillary Clinton's election in 2016 inevitable. The reality has been more complicated.

The growing sections of nonwhite voters have had lower propensities to vote, and some have been blocked by racist voting restrictions. There is even some evidence that some men of color have shifted toward Trump. Nonetheless, the Republican demographic base is still shrinking and this change has turned Georgia, Arizona and North Carolina into swing states.

After President Obama's reelection in 2012, the Republican National Committee commissioned a post-mortem analysis in which it argued that the Party needed to improve its messaging to non-white voters. That was probably never a realistic strategy.

Trump has shown instead that Republicans can counter that trend by doubling-down on the mobilization of angry middle-class white voters and increasing their turnout, even if their share of the total electorate is slowly shrinking. His strategy is probably the party's most logical choice -- it is why so many other Republicans have thrown away the dog whistle and resorted to more explicitly racist messaging.

It is also why even more traditional Republicans such as Mitch McConnell, whose top priority is regaining a Republican majority in the Senate, always return to the Trump fold. It is despicable but a smart election strategy both for primaries and for general election turnout.

Nikki Haley might have had more eager

corporate supporters, but she likely would have faced an enthusiasm problem among the voters she would need to win in November.

Even after Trump is gone, the Republicans will not easily return to Reaganite, neoconservative messaging. “Chamber of Commerce” Republicans are not as electable under current conditions as are alt-right MAGA politicians. And if the party can’t win elections it will have difficulty attracting capitalist support.

Therefore, it is likely that in most elections in the near future we will see Republican can-

didates who represent semi-fascist threats, even if Trump is vanquished or imprisoned in 2024.

### Looking Forward

Any assumption that we can take a political detour for this one election, then return to an orientation of trying to revive mass movements and build a revolutionary socialist alternative from among activists there, is unrealistic. Much more likely is that socialists will have this same discussion in 2026, 2028, and so on.

## Why Socialists Must Defeat Trump — *continued from page 2*

right to choose an abortion under certain circumstances that has now been lost. It is a fight to restore the *status quo ante*, not a new progressive position. One won’t expect her to fight for free abortions on demand or free day-after pills to all who ask for them.

Harris also get credit for Biden’s support for the United Auto Workers and its successful strikes in the fall of 2023, which she is now taking advantage of as she speaks to UAW audiences.

In foreign policy she completely supported Biden’s backing Israel and its war on Gaza, supporting Ukraine against the Russian invasion, and opposing China’s rival imperial ambitions. Harris’ reputation for being more progressive regarding Israel is based on statements like one she made a few days after her meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu:

*“What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating. ... The images of dead children and desperate, hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time — we cannot look away in the face of these tragedies.”*

Then she added, “I will not be silent.” Okay, but she has not said how she would change U.S. policy, if at all.

Yet, though she is a mainstream Democrat with all that implies — a supporter of American capitalism and imperialism, a person dependent on the banks and corporations, one who will become commander in chief of the world’s largest and still most aggressive military establishment — we should vote for her because the alternative is far worse.

### The Threat

Donald Trump’s character and his psychology are well known. He is a narcissist, selfish, acquisitive. He succeeded through his reality show “The Apprentice” in making himself first a household name and then a national, charismatic figure. He has a brilliant ability to read the minds of his followers and to make himself beloved by them. He holds misogynistic, racist and xenophobic views and has projected them and normalized them in American society. He has used fear to speak to the insecurity of white people and to

evoke latent attitudes and feelings of resentment toward women, Black and LGBTQ people and Latines. If hostile attitudes were not already present, he has instilled them.

In this way Trump has built up a mass following among tens of millions, about two-fifths of the American people. While not easy to measure, he has the backing of a large percentage of white working-class voters, including many union members. Over the last eight years, Trump’s personal political views have come to coincide with the ideology of white Christian nationalism. He has very strong support from the white Evangelical churches and their largely working-class congregations.

His allied rightist organizations, such as Miller’s America First Legal, Kirk’s Turning Point USA, and Michael Flynn’s America’s Future have received millions of dollars from the Bradley Impact Fund. He has won the backing of far-right militias and extreme rightwing groups such as the Oath Keepers and the Proud boys.

Most important, he has completely taken over the Republican Party, given it greater discipline, and moved it to the right. He, from above, has been constructing a far-right political movement and party that is extremely dangerous.

We learned between 2016 and 2020 how Trump would govern. Then he did not yet have a political team and only limited influence in the Republican Party. Yet he carried out some of the most significant attacks in decades on American democracy and on the working class.

First, in 2017 he passed a \$2.3 trillion tax cut that dramatically affected the distribution of wealth in the country. He appointed three rightwing justices — Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett — to the U.S. Supreme Court, which then overturned

Revolutionary socialists should evaluate the 2024 elections in light of a larger strategy for building a socialist movement and ultimately ending capitalism in the United States. If the priority is to elect Democrats in every election for the foreseeable future, it is hard to argue that it also includes building mass movements which will inevitably clash with Democratic leaders.

If, on the other hand, the priority is to build the movements, that is where our focus should be and we shouldn’t take our eyes off that prize. ■

*Roe v. Wade*, ending federal protection of abortion rights. He pulled the United States out of the Paris Climate Accords.

There were also many other attacks on the social programs and federal regulations that benefitted the American people. We should not forget that he was also responsible for hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths during the COVID pandemic because he failed to follow the scientific information, encouraging people to ignore and resist proper health practices such as masking and avoiding crowds.

In 2020, he denied that he lost the election and worked to subvert the counting of the votes and the certification of Biden. On January 6, 2021, he organized an insurrection and attempted coup to install himself in power.

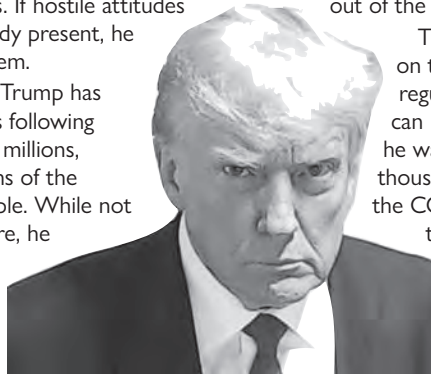
The threat upon taking office in 2025 is that Trump and his advisors plan to substantially remake the U.S. government, a plan made easier now by the U.S. Supreme Court’s subsequent rulings.

### The Reality in 2024

We all wish that there were a credible working-class, leftist political party that represented an alternative. But unfortunately, there is not.

Professor Cornel West’s campaign has been a chimera, it has never materialized. The Green Party holds many progressive positions, but its candidate Dr. Jill Stein mimics Russian dictator Vladimir Putin’s positions with his war on Ukraine. Still, some might want to vote for the Greens to defend the principle of independent political action, *but it cannot and should not be done in swing states* where it might contribute to a Trump victory.

Socialists should from now until November support the Harris-Walz ticket, not because they represent a significant progressive alternative, but because it gives us four more years in our democracy — such as it is — to organize social and political movements to fight for the working class and the oppressed and raise the ideal of democratic socialism. ■



# New Wave of “Stop the Killing” Protests: Sonya Massey Killed by Illinois Police

By Malik Miah

POLICE ONCE AGAIN show their true colors: shooting in the face and killing a 36-year-old Black mother, Sonya Massey, in her own home in Springfield, Illinois. On July 6 Massey called 911 for fear of an intruder, and became the victim.

A police videocam (released to the family 11 days later) from the other deputy on the scene showed when the two cops entered Massey’s home. Deputy Sheriff Sean Grayson, with a long record of abuse, fired shots that hit Massey in the face.

The savage nature of the killing was not revealed immediately. Typically, an internal police review occurs first, and the police officer is put on paid leave. Not this time.

The police union, as expected, filed a grievance protesting Grayson’s arrest and termination. However, under intense community pressure, the union later announced it would no longer challenge the charges.

## The Timeline

News media from *USA Today*, CNN, *The New York Times* and Illinois papers including *The State Journal-Register*, gave a clear timeline of what happened hour-by-hour July 6 and afterwards:

Around 12:50 a.m., two Sangamon County Sheriff’s deputies, including Sean Grayson, were called to a home in the 2800 block of Hoover Avenue in an unincorporated part of Woodside Township for a possible intruder.

No intruder was found. Court documents filed by prosecutors said Massey appeared to be “calm, possibly unwell, and non-aggressive.” In fact, the footage shows Grayson and another deputy speaking calmly with Massey in her home — at which point she goes to the stove to turn off a pot of boiling water and the situation escalates.

Three shots are heard and after a few seconds of silence, one deputy said, “shots fired” and called for emergency medical services. The implication was that Massey shot first, even though she had no gun.

Massey was taken to the hospital where she died. The case was referred to the Illinois State Police Sheriff.

On July 8 an autopsy revealed that Massey had died from a gunshot wound to the face. Even before the Massey family saw the body



camera footage on July 17 they hired national civil rights personal injury attorney Ben Crump and called for a probe into the hiring of sheriff’s deputy Grayson. He had worked at six different law enforcement agencies in four years, and was charged with driving under the influence twice.

camera footage on July 17 they hired national civil rights personal injury attorney Ben Crump and called for a probe into the hiring of sheriff’s deputy Grayson. He had worked at six different law enforcement agencies in four years, and was charged with driving under the influence twice.

## Indictment and Protests

On July 12, a two-hour protest at Sangamon County Building demanded the release of body camera footage and transparency in the case. More protests took place on July 15-16.

On July 17 Massey family members reviewed the body camera footage and mentioned that Sonya had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Later Massey’s father, James Wilburn, said he had initially received conflicting information from law enforcement:

*“I was under the impression that a prowler had broken in and killed my baby. Never did they say that it was a deputy-involved shooting until my brother read it on the internet.”*

As protest rallies continued, a Sangamon County grand jury indicted Grayson on five counts, including three charges of first-degree murder. He surrendered to the police and was later terminated by his department. At his July 18 court appearance Grayson plead not guilty to the charges and the judge denied his petition for release.

Protests continued. After about 200 supporters rallied at the Springfield NAACP Building, authorities announced that body camera footage would be released to the public on July 22.

## “Crime Against Humanity”

On July 19 Massey’s funeral was held with Crump eulogizing Massey, predicting that the bodycam footage would “shock the conscience of America,” similar to images of Emmett Till, a teenager whose lynching in 1955 galvanized the Civil Rights Movement.

Nearly two weeks after Sonya Massey was murdered, Sangamon County finally

released the body cam footage to the public as protesters marched in Massey’s memory.

Ben Crump announced that the U.S. Department of Justice opened an investigation into the case. Then DOJ held a community meeting where a panel of nine county officials, including the sheriff, led off with apologies. The audience of 500 demanded action, not mere words.

Both the governor and lieutenant governor met with the family, and Vice President Kamala Harris spoke with them and issued a statement calling the death “senseless.”

The fact that the state police and county moved quickly to fire and prosecute Grayson also shows the impact of the Black Lives Matters movement. Such a fast-moving response to a police officer killing a Black person is rare. It took the horror of a video to show the criminal police actions.

*But unless the meetings and demonstrations continue, there will be no change.*

July 28th National Day of Mourning rallies occurred in New York, Los Angeles, St. Louis and Washington DC, as well as in Illinois. Other communities held “Remembering Massey” vigils, including in Kansas City, Missouri; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and Wilmington, North Carolina.

The Massey family, including her two teenage children, have been to as many as they can. They seek justice and desire to end the killings. Almost 1200 people shot to death by the police were in 2023, and each year the count is higher!

## Abolish and Replace!

Tahir Duckett, a civil rights lawyer and activist and executive director of Georgetown Law’s Center for Innovations in Community Safety, noted in a July 24 essay for *The New York Times* the broader context of the killing and police “reforms”:

*“The death of George Floyd in 2020 drew public outrage and calls for a wide variety of police reforms. There is still a lot we don’t know about the Massey situation, including if she was experiencing mental distress. But the killing of Ms. Massey is a cold reminder of how little has changed in the years since.”*

Justice for victims of police violence and killings will require much more than reforms that have been stalled so far. Policing as it exists must be abolished and replaced. ■

Malik Miah is an advisory editor and regular ATC columnist.

## Greenwashing India's Occupation of Kashmir

# The Indus Water Treaty

By Mohammad Ebad Athar & Mona Bhan

RISING TEMPERATURES, EXPERTS argue, will cause substantial changes to the trans-Himalayan Indus River System by 2050, and lead to water scarcity, erratic droughts and floods, loss of biodiversity, and deleterious impacts on 300 million people in India and Pakistan who depend on its rivers for sustenance.

To minimize these impacts, experts recommend climate-proofing the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), a treaty that was brokered by the World Bank in 1960 to avert water wars between India and Pakistan over their shared transboundary rivers. The treaty allocated the three Eastern rivers of the Indus River basin — the Sutlej, Ravi and Beas — to India, and the Western rivers of the basin which included the Jhelum, Chenab and Indus, to Pakistan.

But scholars have argued that the allocation of the rivers was a diversionary tactic, meant to undermine Kashmiri sovereignty in the international dispute over Kashmir's contested territory.<sup>1</sup>

The IWT reconciled significant legal concerns with water rights through technical-engineering resolutions, a concessionary approach that erased any meaningful and

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*Mona Bhan is a professor of Anthropology and the Ford-Maxwell Professor of South Asian Studies at Syracuse University. She is the author of "Counterinsurgency, Development, and the Politics of Identity: From Warfare to Welfare?" and "Climate without Nature: A Critical Anthropology of the Anthropocene" (with Andrew Bauer). With her colleagues from the Critical Kashmir Studies Collective that she helped co-found in 2013, she has co-edited "Resisting Occupation in Kashmir," "The Routledge Handbook of Critical Kashmir Studies," and the "Palgrave Handbook of New Directions in Kashmir Studies." She has also co-edited special issues of the Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law (2017) and Critique of Anthropology (2020).*



Indus river and tributaries. [Sutlej misspelled as Satluj] Kmhkmh CC BY 3.0

long-lasting conversations on equitable and sustainable water-sharing approaches in the sub-continent.

The Indus Water Treaty ended up privileging India and Pakistan's sovereign control over Kashmir's rivers, while making it impossible for Kashmiris to exert their legal and political rights over critical river resources. That legacy continues in current debates about climate proofing the IWT.

*Kashmir exists in the crosshairs of climate change and Indo-Pakistani geopolitical tensions. Climate-proofing the IWT, we argue, will only serve to greenwash India and Pakistan's extractive control over the Indus River Basin.*

### Mother India in Labor

On July 8th, 1954, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave an impromptu speech at the opening ceremony for the Bhakra Canal. He praised the canal's construction noting that "Mother India is in labor" and "producing things big and small."

Awed by his country's ability to construct such a large-scale infrastructure, Nehru compared the project to "the noblest temples, Gurdwaras, churches and mosques to be found anywhere.... I feel more religious minded when I see these works," he proclaimed.<sup>2</sup>

Several months later, at the official inaugu-

ration ceremony for the Bhakra-Nangal dam, Nehru's remarks still articulated wonder and pride for the project. The Prime Minister thanked and congratulated the engineers and foreign advisers involved in the construction, but he also devoted a significant portion of his speech to "all the people," acknowledging "their hard toll and sacrifice."

Reminding the crowd to "remember them and all those who have put their sweat and blood" into the dam's construction, Nehru implored India to "befriend the river Sutlej." Laying down concrete as part of the ceremony, he exclaimed how the dam was "one of the great victories over nature."<sup>3</sup>

Nehru's celebratory language and the sacredness attributed to the dam camouflaged the Indian state's colonial appetite for Kashmir and its rivers, a Muslim-majority territory over which both India and Pakistan claimed sovereignty.

The popular imaginaries of dams as India's modern-day temples aligned well with Hinduized narratives of the river Indus as a male warrior God, and of the Indus and Kashmir as cradles of Hindu civilization.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the ceremonies and Nehru's remarks omitted some key stakes. In the early 1950s, Pakistan was entirely dependent on the waters of the Indus, which flowed through India and Kashmir before reaching Pakistan. During his July remarks, Nehru did not mention how India, without Pakistan's knowledge, withheld the flow of the Sutlej River to Pakistan "in order to accumulate a good head of water for the opening ceremony."<sup>5</sup>

This not only contributed to an increased anxiety in Pakistan that India would take control of the entire basin, but also impacted Pakistani farmers who relied on that water supply.

But the second and perhaps most significant consequence of this state building effort was how it further subjugated and silenced Kashmiri sovereignty over the Western rivers of the Indus Basin — Jhelum, Chenab, and the Indus — portions of which flow through Jammu and Kashmir.

As India remained invested in building the Indian state through dams, it was simultaneously cementing its colonial control over the disputed territory of Kashmir, whose unpop-

ular Hindu ruler had provisionally acceded to India in 1947.

Although Nehru had promised Kashmiris that a UN-mandated free and impartial plebiscite would allow them to choose their own political fate, a series of interventions, including arrests and detentions of dissident Kashmiris, clamping down of free press, and the election of pliant client regimes, scuttled people's rights to self-determination.

At the same time, the IWT became an instrument to dilute Kashmiri sovereignty over their land and water.

While the Indian state celebrated the construction of the Bhakra-Nangal Dam in 1954, control over the Indus River basin remained unresolved. Pakistan feared that the Bhakra Nangal project was part of a larger Indian objective to take full control of the basin's water. The Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Air Force anticipated that "the summer of 1954 would be a most dangerous time as regards war with India."<sup>6</sup>

Taking stock of this escalating situation, the British framed the Indus dispute as potentially "more dangerous than Kashmir," claiming that the coming conflict in conjunction with Kashmir would further contribute "to a prolonged stalemate" over the political future of the disputed territory.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, avoiding war in 1954 was paramount for the British, even at the expense of Kashmiri self-determination. The British believed that a negotiated settlement for the Indus dispute would serve that purpose.

### The IWT Negotiations and Kashmir

The IWT was negotiated throughout the 1950s; as early as 1952 the British Foreign Office and the World Bank agreed that India and Pakistan should be dissuaded from negotiating along legalistic lines and instead encouraged to keep the deliberations at a technical level.

For example, when Pakistan hired the renowned American lawyer John Laylin to assist in its negotiations, Eugene Black, the lead American negotiator for the World Bank, advised Laylin against influencing the Pakistanis "along stiff and legalistic lines."<sup>8</sup>

Rather, Black believed that "if this business can be left to the technical experts under the tactful management of the International Bank and with the prospect of some hard cash from the Bank for development if agreement can be reached, the discussion should go fairly smoothly."<sup>9</sup>

The World Bank maintained it was of paramount importance to "reach an equitable agreement about the division of present water resources" and that to achieve this "it would be necessary to provide, partly at India's expense ... extensive water storage in Pakistan."<sup>10</sup>

We might ask why both the British and American negotiators pushed for technical solutions in the Indus dispute despite the



*In 1953, during the construction of the Bhakra dam, Prime Minister Nehru visited the site.*

little progress that was made "in finding a solution either to the financial or to the engineering difficulties."<sup>11</sup>

Why were technical solutions favored over legalistic ones, especially when Pakistani and Indian attitudes reflected a "right to water" approach? Majed Akther argues that American negotiators such as David Lilienthal and Eugene Black saw the Cold War development of the Indus River basin as the means to avert war between India and Pakistan.<sup>12</sup>

Here the context of impending war in 1954 remains important. The British realized that the "settlement of the Canal Waters dispute" was "becoming increasingly urgent since if it remains unsolved it will go on adding to the friction between India and Pakistan." "If it were solved," the British argued, "the resulting release of tension would be considerable, and this would provide a better atmosphere in which to try to settle the Kashmir problem."<sup>13</sup>

Daniel Haines argues that although the Kashmir issue and the Indus dispute were inextricably linked, the Americans and British had to disentangle Kashmir from the river dispute — and working with technically based solutions while trying to avoid legality did just that. Crafting an international management scheme for the Indus relied on relegating the question of Kashmir's political future as indeterminate.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, water was political and "truly a matter of life and death" for Pakistan and India, but was considered apolitical when discussed in relation to Kashmir.<sup>15</sup>

As negotiations continued, international management schemes that relied on technical

solutions found it difficult to reach a compromise between India and Pakistan. Indeed, the Indus dispute still lingered as of January 1, 1959, with India and Pakistan having failed "in negotiations (to find a compromise) in their dispute over the use of the Indus River."<sup>16</sup>

While the World Bank's reputation took a hit for failing to resolve the dispute, so too did the UN Security Council, which had tried unsuccessfully to settle the conflict throughout the 1950s. For the UN Security Council, the Indus dispute was an "undignified wrangle" and "damaging both to relations between India and Pakistan and to the prestige of the Security Council."<sup>17</sup>

The British Commonwealth, alongside the World Bank and the Security Council, therefore attempted to "dissuade the Pakistanis from pursuing the idea of staging another row on Kashmir" by assuring Pakistan of the Commonwealth's "readiness to consider" making "a reasonable financial contribution to the implementation of a settlement."<sup>18</sup>

These international institutions strived for a resolution to the Indus dispute and attempted to avoid a "row" over Kashmir. Although the two issues were entangled, for peace between India and Pakistan, Kashmir had to be extricated from the Indus dispute discussions. The question of Kashmiri sovereignty and self-determination had to be avoided.

### International Law and Its Limitations

The IWT is often framed as an international peace treaty that mitigates a large-scale war between India and Pakistan. However, while both states' sovereignty over the Indus

is protected and affirmed, Kashmiri legal rights are completely ignored.

As Fozia Lone observes, the treaty ignores the detrimental effect of non-participation on Kashmiris' right to self-determination and sovereignty over their natural resources.<sup>19</sup>

When examining the treaty itself, this erasure is blatant. The principal actors, according to the treaty's preamble, are "The Government of India and the Government of Pakistan," both of which are "equally desirous of attaining the most complete and satisfactory utilisation of the waters of the Indus system of rivers."<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the text of the treaty, the Kashmir issue is *never* mentioned nor is people's sovereignty over waters located in Jammu Kashmir recognized.

This erasure operates beyond merely excluding Kashmir from formal international legal structures. As Mona Bhan argues, the IWT, and the subsequent construction of multiple dams along the Indus River basin in Jammu and Kashmir, allows the Indian state to assert its sovereignty over the disputed territory.

In other words, dams become tools of occupation for the Indian nation-state that are legalized by international mechanisms such as the IWT.<sup>21</sup>

In their work on the Mekong Basin, Chris Snedden and Coleen Fox illuminate how river basin institutions in the region manipulate discourses of cooperation in the creation

of legal arrangements that are motivated by geostrategic aims.<sup>22</sup>

Like the IWT, the 1995 Mekong Agreement sets out to equitably distribute the Mekong waters to the basin's principal actors (the riparian states along the basin) but also legalizes the ability of those states to utilize dams in counterinsurgency strategies, as is the case in Thailand with the Pak Mun dam.<sup>23</sup>

The IWT's and international law's routine failure to affirm Kashmir's sovereignty and right to self-determination over resources located within its territory has resulted in significant consequences for the region. Massive Indian infrastructural investments and dams have transformed Kashmir's landscape, displaced indigenous communities, and led to substantial changes in local weather conditions.<sup>24</sup>

Yet the IWT does not acknowledge environmental risks, and contains no mechanisms to combat the increase in earthquakes, floods, and avalanches as result of increased dam infrastructure.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the IWT contains no provisions to address the predicament and proper compensation of displaced communities. Although international legal frameworks such as the 1962 UN Charter on the "Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources" and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirm a people's permanent sovereignty over their natural resources, India continues to invest in water infrastructures

that undermine Kashmiri sovereignty.<sup>26</sup>

## The Hindu Right and the IWT

At 5:30 am on September 18, 2016, armed militants attacked an Indian army base at Uri in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, close to the Pakistani border. A heavily forested area, Uri is crisscrossed by the Jhelum River and several other streams of the Indus River basin. Seventeen Indian soldiers were killed in the attack.

The Indian director general of military operations, Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh predictably denounced the militants as "foreign terrorists, supported and sent by Pakistan." Mohammad Nafees Zakaria, a spokesman for the Pakistani Ministry for Foreign Affairs, denied Singh's allegations, instead asserting that India was trying to divert attention away from its oppression of Kashmir.<sup>27</sup>

For those observers familiar with the Kashmir dispute and Pakistan's and India's role within it, the Uri attack presents a familiar story in which attacks aimed at the Indian occupation of Jammu and Kashmir are framed by the Indian state as Pakistani-sponsored and sanctioned terror acts, with Pakistan denying Indian allegations, and Kashmiris left to deal with the subsequent consequences.

On the surface, it seems like the Uri attack would have nothing to do with India's and Pakistan's long-standing dispute over control of the Indus River basin. Yet Uri's

continued on page 16

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## Bureaucracy, Emigration and Broken Lives: A Narrow Gate

By Kristin Ferebee

A FEW MONTHS before I traveled to the Spanish town of Portbou, my friend Rashid confessed that he wanted to kill himself.

Rashid had been my student at the American University of Afghanistan when I lived and worked in Kabul. He had stood out immediately in the classroom on account of his exceptional linguistic gifts — I often remarked that he could rattle off complexities of English grammar that I, with my PhD. in English, would have to think hard about — and because of his exceptional graciousness.

He was a gentle man and a genteel one, even by Afghan standards of politeness. He was easy to talk to. I liked him a lot.

After the fall of the Afghan government during the U.S.-coalition withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, Rashid reached out to me.

His sister, a British resident, and her two daughters, who were British citizens, had been trapped in Kabul by the Taliban's speedy ascent and were struggling to escape. The British government had promised their evacuation but, in the wake of the Hamid Karzai International Airport bombing that month, had ceased communication with them and seemed to have no interest in their case.

(It would later emerge, via a Foreign & Commonwealth Office whistleblower, that the British evacuation of Kabul had been marked by a state of almost total dysfunction, overseen by a minister who spent much of the lead-up on holiday and a staff who did not speak Afghan languages and could not operate the computer systems being used.)

There were, at that time, no commercial flights out of Afghanistan, but it was too dangerous for the family to stay in Kabul. Rashid had decided to help them cross the land border to Pakistan and try to board a commercial flight there.



Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920 Oil color in transfer and water color on paper. The following year it was purchased by Walter Benjamin, who saw it as symbolizing the Angel of History.

### Perilous Crossing

At the time, I was working with other volunteers to try to coordinate rescue efforts for U.S. allies. I told Rashid what I knew: that it was difficult, even with valid visas, for Afghans to cross into Pakistan, and whether or not you would be admitted largely depended on the temperament of the border guard, not to mention the size of the bribe that you could afford to pay.

This turned out to be true: the first time that Rashid and his family tried to cross, Pakistani border guards slapped and humiliated Rashid in front of his nieces before turning the family away. The second time, the family were luckier: they reached Islamabad, and I was able to help raise the more than \$1000 required for Rashid's sister and her children to travel to the UK.

But the effects of the experience lingered. I talked to one of Rashid's nieces, later, in England. Her mother was so paralyzed by anxiety that she could not leave the house; the other daughter was constantly sick, for reasons that no one seemed able to diagnose.

Rashid himself wrote to me, dwelling on the shame he had felt when the border guards hit him. In Islamabad, where he shared a single room with four other Afghan refugees, he developed terrible stomach ulcers for which he could not afford medication.

He briefly tutored another refugee family in English, but he was not legally allowed to work. He was being supported by donations from the aid community, but as the West lost interest in Afghanistan, these became fewer and fewer.

### Visa Rejection

In 2022, Rashid was accepted to an American university with a scholarship. But when he applied for a U.S. student visa, he was rejected. "You have not demonstrated," the rejection letter read, "that you have the ties that will compel you to return to your home country after your travel to the United States."

Rashid's father had been trained in the United States to work for an American government agency that operated counter to the current government of Afghanistan, and Rashid himself had attended a USAID-funded university whose campus the Taliban had targeted in 2016. Under the Taliban, their family lived in terror.

It is difficult to imagine, under these circumstances, what evidence Rashid could have provided that would have convincingly demonstrated an intent to return.

We had heard that student visas were more likely to be granted in a different Pakistani consulate, so Rashid journeyed there. But there, too, he was rejected — this second rejection all but ensuring that he would never be granted a U.S. visa.

Slowly, it became clear to him that the future was a foreclosed destination. He was technically entitled to Priority-1 (P1) refugee resettlement in the United States, but Pakistan was failing to process these resettlement claims, and the only other country that would readily issue visas to Afghans was Iran.

The longer he stayed in Pakistan, the more he risked deportation back to Afghanistan. It was around this time that he started wanting to die.

### Recalling Walter Benjamin

Portbou, a Mediterranean resort town located just past the border between Spain and France, is known primarily for two things: its spectacular beaches and the suicide of the philosopher Walter Benjamin.

On September 25, 1940, on the upper floor of a rust-colored slice of building in the center of the town, Benjamin swallowed an

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overdose of the morphine tablets that he had been prescribed for a heart condition. He was 48 years old. He died later that night.

These days, tourists can walk the same route that Benjamin took when he came to Portbou on foot over the Pyrenees, fleeing Nazi-occupied France. When I visited on an excursion from an academic conference at the Universidad de Alcalá, I found the trail signposted and scenic. The vegetation is dusty, pale green, peninsular; at many points, you can see the crawling sea.

The cemetery where Benjamin is buried, on the far side of Portbou, is similarly lovely. Hannah Arendt said of it that it was “one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen in my life.”

Benjamin had hoped to reach Portugal and depart thence to the United States, which had issued him an entry visa. He had transit visas for both Portugal and Spain, but could not obtain exit paperwork from France and so had crossed the border illegally. The Spanish border police informed him that he would therefore be deported to France the following morning, where the Nazi-allied Vichy government would detain him.

He had been interned once already in the Versuche prison camp, near Paris. In 1942 his brother would die in Mauthausen, and had Benjamin been deported from Portbou, it is likely that this would have been his fate.

Since 1994, there has been a memorial to Benjamin in Portbou: an immense piece of art by the Israeli artist Dani Karavan. Or, rather, it is a memorial inspired by Benjamin and dedicated “to the memory of the anonymous,” since as Benjamin wrote, “[t]o honor the memory of anonymous human beings is harder than honoring the memory of famous ones.”

The memorial is set into the side of a cliff and takes the form of a narrow staircase descending towards the sea — one which the climber can never actually exit, since the last steps are barred by a pane of impenetrable glass.

### The Torture of Idris

In August 2021, I had reconnected with my former student Idris, who was desperately trying to secure evacuation for his family.

Previously, I had known Idris mostly as a charming class clown with a habit of inventing ever-more-outrageous excuses for late assignments. (Once, memorably, he had tried to convince me that the Taliban had kidnapped his uncle during finals week.)

In 2021, he texted me a jittery narration of his attempts to enter Hamid Karzai International Airport. In the last days of the U.S. evacuation it was controlled by the Taliban and only unpredictably accessible. At one point, he was beaten by Taliban guards at a checkpoint. He sent me a photo of his back and shoulders, swelling up with black contusions.

I didn’t know how to respond. *Why did you send me this?* I wanted to ask. I was not yet familiar then with what I would come to recognize as the urgent need for someone, anyone, to bear witness.

It was as though he was not sure if his suffering was a form of madness — as though he questioned if he might have been an ant that dreamt it was a man, and only with my acknowledgement did the confirmation come: *No, you’re not crazy. You are human. You are human; you should not be suffering like this.*

Idris and his family were not evacuated. For the next year and a half, they held out hope of some kind of rescue, but it became increasingly clear that this hope was ill-founded. His father had worked for a large international NGO, but it appeared that this did not entitle him to any kind of aid or evacuation.

Idris’s university was evacuating students from Kabul in small, limited bursts, but the Taliban’s increasingly grim policies against women had driven them to prioritize the evacuation of girls.

Like Rashid, Idris was qualified for U.S. P1 refugee resettlement through the university, but in order to start this process he would have had to travel to a country that was processing this paperwork. The only two countries that semi-reliably issued visas to Afghans, Iran and Pakistan, were therefore not options.

Idris was effectively trapped in a prison without walls or a name; or rather, a prison whose transparent walls were the global security state’s lines of partition and containment.

And the truth was that, even if Idris had reached a country where his P1 paperwork could be processed, he would have faced a dehumanizing, multi-year wait.

I had seen this already: Nasrat, another former student of mine, had been evacuated by an NGO to the United Arab Emirates — a country where his P1 application could be processed — in late 2021. I talked to him a year and a half later. He was still in Abu Dhabi’s International Humanitarian City, a bleak facility where refugees lived like inmates.

The NGO that had evacuated Nasrat had stopped returning his emails. No one who worked at the refugee center seemed to have any information about his case.

In August 2022, desperate Afghans at the Humanitarian City had staged a protest, demanding that the United States take action to speed visa processing. The protest did not seem to have had any effect, and in April 2023, a SIGAR report would estimate that for the United States to process all existing Afghan Special Immigrant Visa applicants (a category whose processing broadly supersedes that of P1) would take approximately 31 years.

I remembered Nasrat as a sweet, earnest, rather vulnerable boy who was extremely

close to his large Pashtun family and meticulous about his schoolwork. Now he was isolated from his family, with few friends in the center and no computer or books.

He had gained weight; he looked bleached and sick. It seemed to him, he said, like only God cared what happened to him. He spent most of his time lying on his narrow bed, using his mobile phone to listen to recitations of the Koran.

### The Breaking Point

Meanwhile, in Kabul, something had started to fracture in Idris. “It is like I lost my self somewhere,” he wrote to me. “It breaks me. I don’t know how to get through it. I never thought I would be this hopeless in my life.”

He had recently been stopped and harassed by a Taliban street patrol who had demanded to read his phone messages and emails; ever since, Idris had become paranoid, convinced that Taliban were following him in unmarked cars.

He obsessively tracked which areas of the city the Taliban were targeting for house-to-house raids, watching for signs that they would come to his house and arrest him. Sometimes he was so overwhelmed with sourceless terror that he could not bring himself to leave his room, even if it meant he would go hungry.

He was still attending online classes, but he was deeply depressed and did not expect to survive the year. “You know I have big dreams,” he wrote, “but staying in this hell will kill me. I am lost. All doors are closed to me.”

### What Happened to Torpekai

In her 2009 collection *Frames of War*, the theorist Judith Butler asks the question: *When is life grievable?* Butler suggests that the valuation of life is possible only under conditions in which that life would or could be grieved if lost.

I find this a vexatious formulation because, in fact, refugee lives are often grieved. In 2015, poetry was written about the death of the Kurdish Syrian refugee child Alan Kurdi, who drowned when his family tried to cross the Mediterranean in a small boat. In March 2023, a few news articles mourned the loss of the Afghan journalist Torpekai Amarkhel, who, like Kurdi, drowned trying to cross the Mediterranean.

But in the 17 months before her death, Torpekai — a tough, quick-witted woman whose impressive resume included working as a TV news anchor and in public affairs for the UN — had tried desperately to find a path to safety.

She had been extraordinarily fortunate in securing a visitor visa for Turkey, which was not possible for most Afghans, but she had no way to extend this visa and nowhere else to go. She was in contact with international colleagues from the UN, who tried to help,





Afghani journalist Torpekai Amarkhel (42) was one of 60+ asylum seekers who died last year when their boat capsized en route to Europe. Twitter: Kabul News

but it quickly became clear that all conventional visa pathways were closed to her.

Somewhere in the Mediterranean water between Turkey and Italy, not so very far from the beach where the Benjamin memorial's exit is barred by a pane of glass, death subjected Torpekai to a transformation.

Prior to her death, the apparatuses of NGO and state had investigated and deemed her life a bad investment. The qualities that would make her death grievable — her bravery and defiance, her intelligence, her successful career, her perceived vulnerability as a Muslim woman — were not considered, while she was still alive, to have any value.

Only at the instant of death did her life accrue value, at the moment when it ceased to make uncomfortable material demands. Grief, after all, costs us nothing. It is cheap and very convenient to mourn the dead.

### Adolfo Kaminsky: Selective Memorial

A few weeks before Torpekai's death, obituaries in international newspapers had mourned the loss of Adolfo Kaminsky, whose remarkable life story had achieved international renown through a 2016 *New York Times* short film called *The Forger*.

An Argentinian Jew living in France at the outbreak of the Second World War, Kaminsky joined the French Resistance as a teenager. Between 1941 and 1945, his work forging documents for the Resistance saved the lives of 14,000 Jews.

The same obituaries that lauded Kaminsky's work during and just after the Holocaust buried all but a passing mention his long and energetic postwar life. He was devoted to forging documents for a wide range of people resisting colonization and oppression.

Kaminsky worked extensively with Algerian insurgent movements fighting for independence from France, with South and Central American liberation struggles, revolutionary movements in Africa, anti-apartheid activists in South Africa, and Americans seeking to

escape the Vietnam draft. He came to vigorously reject the young State of Israel when he saw its racism towards Arabs, and refused to even visit, much less accept citizenship.

Perhaps the outsized emphasis on Kaminsky's wartime heroism at the expense of his other actions reflects the Holocaust's immense cultural weight. I suspect that Kaminsky's postwar life also raises uncomfortable questions.

After all, what the obituaries delicately elide is that Kaminsky was a criminal. ("Of course everything I did was illegal," he says in *The Forger*.) The most accurate term might be *people smuggler*, an occupation that has come to be intensely vilified.

It is troubling to think of Kaminsky as a people smuggler because he so obviously does not deserve vilification. If we think of him this way, we are forced to consider the possibility that what he did during the Holocaust was also people smuggling.

Kaminsky himself, after all, saw his life work — both during and after the Holocaust — as characterized by a profound continuity. It was, he told Adam Shatz for the *London Review of Books*, "a long, uninterrupted resistance" against "inequality, segregation, injustice, fascism, and dictatorship."

He described to his daughter, who wrote his biography, how his ideological commitment to free movement had emerged from his own traumatic experience of precarity in the age of the nation state: when his family immigrated to France from Argentina during his childhood, they were initially deported to Turkey.

Kaminsky's younger sister, conceived in Argentina but born in Turkey, was denied both Argentinian and Turkish citizenship, trapping the family in a legal limbo. "It was then," Kaminsky recounts, "that I really understood the signification of the word 'papers,' those indispensable documents that allow you to move legally from one state to another."

After the end of the war, in spite of his work for the Resistance, he once again found himself facing deportation from France.

Discussing his choice to become involved in smuggling displaced people to postwar British Palestine, Kaminsky says:

*"I was strongly in favor of the idea that every individual, especially if they were persecuted and their life was in danger, should have the right to move freely, to cross borders, to choose where their exile should take them."*

He conceived of his mission, in other words, as one that was about saving any people, all those people, whose lives were imperiled by an inhumane apparatus against which no argument could be admitted.

I mean life here in the broadest sense — not merely the biological body that even in the camps was sometimes allowed to endure, but that immaterial fingerprint that marks us as creatures who exceed our bodies, who reach forwards into the future, fragile and gorgeous and infinitely generative. Or, perhaps, as creatures not unlike the Angel of History that Walter Benjamin envisioned in the well-known essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" written just before his death.

### Benjamin's Vision

The Angel of History is a figure driven further and further from Paradise by the winds of a storm that it cannot control or master. It cannot see its destination; it faces backwards, towards a past in which suffering is heaped upon suffering.

The accumulated weight of all this misery does not resolve itself into progress. We do not stand upon a tower made of the past, nor will it ever elevate us above some more savage condition. We cannot have faith, in other words, that the machinery of history is propelling us in the "right" direction.

Benjamin believed in a liberatory future that could only arrive through a miraculous, "messianic" moment — a paradoxical moment in which what has been impossible becomes possible, a moment that breaks through the seemingly inexorable boot-march of our history.

For Benjamin, writing in France in 1940, such a moment must have been hard to envision. And yet he argued elsewhere in the "Theses" that our lived present, the "time of the now," is always "shot through with splinters of messianic time." At any second, it is possible that our world itself might crack open and reveal itself to be stranger and more merciful than we had imagined, because "every second of time was the narrow gate through which the Messiah might enter."

When I imagine Benjamin at the end of his life, I imagine him hoping against hope for that moment when the impossible might become possible — when it would occur to some officer at the Spanish border that he could simply choose not to perform what

the law demanded. When he would opt out of the machinery of injustice and accept the only, unbureaucratic argument that Benjamin could offer: *I know it is the law, but I want to live.*

And there is a chance that, for the other refugees traveling alongside him, Benjamin's death engendered just such a moment. An abrupt reversal of the official position on 26 September allowed them to remain in Spain as guests.

However, it seems more likely that this reversal was attributable to the large bribe that one of Benjamin's fellow travelers, Sophie Lippmann, had hastily assembled and paid to one of the border guards. The apparatus of bureaucracy merely ground on, indifferent to the lives it was consuming — or worse, aware that that a certain quota of flesh was requisite for its continuing smooth function.

So we are left unsatisfied, troubled by visions of an impossible future and by the certainty that it was possible for one brief moment — that the latch of that narrow gate was in our hands.

In the future where we did not hold the gate shut against him, the Messiah slips through that sunlit portal, Walter Benjamin emerges shaken from the Hotel de Francia the next morning; he walks out into the

Catalonian sun; he stands at the unbelievable edge of the Mediterranean and gives thanks that he has lived to set his eyes on these blue waters, waters that have yet to swallow their cargo of dead.

### Flowers for Rashid

In the "Theses," Benjamin imagines the past as a field of flowers that struggle to turn their faces towards some sun of liberation that (through, he writes, some "secret heliotropism") they sense though they have never seen it. If you sit long enough in the cemetery on the hillside in Portbou, you can watch heliotropism in action. The blind faces of yellow flowers search for the sun.

I texted Rashid a picture of the flowers. It was spring; the riot of color was amazing in this place where I was allowed to be and he was not.

As I turned away from Karavan's memorial, I could see from its depths that last thin

small splinter of sun — the place where light entered from the Mediterranean coast, though nothing else could enter. It grew smaller and smaller, until it was a mere glint. And then it was gone.

*POSTSCRIPT:* As of July 2024, the American University of Afghanistan was able to evacuate Rashid to Qatar, where he is still waiting for his P1 resettlement. Idris decided to risk traveling to Pakistan in the hopes that his P1 resettlement would be processed. He is still waiting there. That same month Agence France-Presse reported that more than 44,000 Afghans who have been approved for U. S. resettlement are currently waiting in Pakistan.

Nasrat gave up hope of being resettled in the United States. In 2023, he applied for and received an Australian humanitarian visa. He is now pursuing permanent residence there and hopes that his family might be able to join him someday. ■

## The Indus Water Treaty — *continued from page 12*

position along the Jhelum River became significant in the aftermath of the attack. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a meeting to discuss the future of the IWT, declared that "blood and water can't flow together."<sup>28</sup>

Modi threatened to punish Pakistan diplomatically for its perceived involvement in the Uri attack by taking advantage of its geographic position along the Indus to cut off water flows into Pakistan. Modi essentially suggested that India violate the terms of the IWT and exert its full sovereignty over the Indus.

Modi's infamous "blood and water cannot flow simultaneously" comment and the suspension of the Indus Water Commission meeting echoed previous arguments for isolating Pakistan diplomatically and legitimizing India's "rightful" capture of water flowing into Pakistan. These comments contribute to growing Pakistani anxieties that India will act on its threat to cut off water flows into Pakistan.

Pakistan's Advisor on Foreign Affairs and Security, Sartaj Aziz, responded to Modi's call for India to block "Pakistan's" water by calling it an act of war. Pakistan's Indus Water Commissioner, Jamaat Ali Shah, responded by stating "What should we believe of what the Indian PM says: ending poverty or blocking flow of water into Pakistan. This is open economic terrorism."<sup>29</sup>

Writing in *Pakistan Today*, Abbas Hasan cautioned that "the recent threat emanating from India not to honor the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) is a threat to Pakistan's source of life and must be taken seriously."

Hasan further argued that "Unless immediate measures are taken we will be risking the source of life in Pakistan."<sup>30</sup> In an attempt to resolve this issue, Pakistan repeatedly sought out World Bank mediation in the

Court of Arbitration.<sup>31</sup>

Kashmir, Pakistani pundits argue, remains the "jugular vein of Pakistan," and any threat to "Kashmir's accession to Pakistan" would significantly harm Pakistan's economy and viability as an independent nation.<sup>32</sup>

### Climate Devastation and Kashmiri Rights

India and Pakistan's competitive sovereignties over the Indus basin ignore the devastating impacts of climate change on the future of the entire subcontinent.

While the IWT did not anticipate climate-induced changes in the basin, more recently experts have urged that the IWT must "evolve" in order to confront climate catastrophes, which could trigger extreme water scarcity, uncertain floods and droughts, unprecedented heat waves, migrant crises, and even a nuclear war in the sub-continent.<sup>33</sup>

Such reasoned arguments as Betsy Joles outlines to protect "the second-most overstressed aquifer in the world" by renegotiating the terms of the IWT run counter to Modi's belligerent policies. We worry, however, that the outcomes are very similar for Kashmiris who find their rights and claims to their rivers ignored once again, this time under the pretext of environmental protection and impending climate disasters.

Such seemingly progressive demands to renegotiate the IWT must account for the rights of indigenous Kashmiri communities over their rivers and water bodies.

A just and meaningful "path to sustainability and stability" cannot ever be paved without accounting for the erasure of Kashmiris from the terms of the Indus Water Treaty. Nor can concerns of ecological health camouflage dominant political and economic interests of two nuclear powered states.<sup>34</sup> ■

## The Left in Venezuela's Crisis

THE CRISIS IN Venezuela has reached fever pitch in the wake of the industrial-scale fraud perpetrated by the Maduro regime in declaring his "reelection." The state apparatus is now in open war against the population, even while the danger of imperialist intervention grows.

The *Venezuelan Voices* website presents news and analysis from Venezuelan Left and independent activists to the English-reading public. This perspective challenges both pro-intervention mainstream distortions as well as the Maduro regime's versions of the economic disaster and political repression.

For a discussion of the range of strategies discussed by the Venezuelan left in the midst of the crisis, check out the *Venezuelan Voices* website.

In addition, the *International Viewpoint* website has posted an important article by Yoletty Bracho, "Everyone knows what happened." She concludes:

*"The international left can play their part. Our comrades and the Venezuelan people as a whole need our support. Calling for respect for democracy is undoubtedly the best way forward in this situation.*

*"Everyone knows what happened, including our comrades who are now seeking to build a political space worthy of the name. We owe it to the popular struggles of which they are the spokespersons."* ■

# “No Fist Is Big Enough to Hide the Sky”: 100 Years of Amílcar Cabral

By B. Skanthakumar

ANTI-COLONIALIST AND anti-imperialist, party organizer and guerilla warfare strategist, diplomat and publicist, revolutionary theorist and internationalist, Amílcar Cabral was among the most original Marxists of the 20th century.

Amílcar Lopes da Costa Cabral was born on September 12, 1924 in the town of Bafata in Portuguese Guinea, wedged between what was then French Guinea and the French colony of Senegal, in West Africa. His parents hailed from Cape Verde (Cabo Verde), an archipelago of impoverished islands in the North Atlantic, some 450 km west of the African mainland.

Under Portuguese rule, the Cape Verdeans were regarded as “civilized” because they spoke Portuguese, were of Christian faith, and adopted western dress. They were classified as *assimilado*: the people in-between the white settler-colonial regime and the black African population, including in the colonial administrative service in Guinea-Bissau.

As a child, Cabral moved with his family to Cape Verde; his schooling was in conditions of economic hardship. Belying its name, far from green the islands are semi-arid. Uninhabited until the 15th century, the Portuguese claimed the territory, strategically located on the transatlantic maritime route for the slave trade in Brazil and the Caribbean, and later for whale-hunting.

They settled inhabitable areas with whites, and brought captive West Africans to work the land. By the mid-20th century, 69% of the population was deemed *mestiço* (i.e. mixed heritage). The despoliation of its natural resources, through deforestation and over-grazing, was accompanied over five centuries by periodic drought followed by devastating famine, triggering waves of emigration as far afield as New England.

In Cabral's own youth, the droughts of 1941-43 and 1947-48 led to anywhere between 30,000 and 45,000 deaths; he experienced the former personally.

It is not surprising that in 1945 when Cabral secured a scholarship to the University of Lisbon in the imperial capital, he chose to study agronomy with a particular interest in soil science.

Portugal had been under fascist rule since 1926. There was little democratic space and

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*Amílcar Cabral at the 1964 Cassacá Congress.*

the Left conducted its activities clandestinely. It was in Lisbon that Cabral would meet and form political ties with African students from other Portuguese colonies. Some of them, like Agostinho Neto and Mário de Andrade (from Angola), and Eduardo Mondlane and Marcelino dos Santos (from Mozambique), would become leaders of the freedom movement in their countries.

## Becoming Anti-Colonialists, and More

Their circle studied socialist writing from Brazil, as well as on the African-American experience of racism and deprivation in the United States. They also read and discussed the assertions of Négritude in Francophone Africa via Aimé Césaire (of Martinique) and Léopold Senghor (of Senegal), from which they would later critically distance. They were in contact with the illegal Portuguese Communist Party that operated in secret through broad organizations such as the youth wing of the Movement of Democratic Unity (MUD-Juvenil).

Upon graduation, Cabral joined the Lisbon Agronomic Station, where he conducted research in southern Portugal, a region of stark poverty and not coincidentally highly unequal ownership of land.<sup>1</sup>

In 1952 he chose to return to Guinea to lead the Agronomic Center in Bissau. The following year, taking advantage of his official role, Cabral conducted the first Agricultural Survey of Guinea.

He used this opportunity to travel widely across the mainland territory, to familiarize himself with its topography, economy, the

diversity of its peoples and their practices and customs. This immersion in the reality of this land and its inhabitants would later contribute to his important political text, “Brief analysis of social structure in Guinea.”

His activities attracted the attention of the colonial administration, which banned him from living in Guinea. Unable to work or operate there, he joined a private company based in Angola, where he undertook studies on soil conditions and agricultural production.

Over the course of 1955 and 1956, while in Angola, Cabral participated in the formation of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). This underlined his Pan-Africanist vision of solidarity and unity as well as his intransigence against colonialism and imperialism wherever it manifested itself: in Congo, in Cuba, in Palestine, in South Africa, in Southern Arabia, in Vietnam.

On a secret visit to Bissau in 1956, Cabral and five others including his half-brother Luís founded what became the African Party of the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) on September 19. While these pioneer members were of Cape Verdean origin, they were committed to the liberation of Guinea-Bissau too. Other nationalist organizations were from Guinea-Bissau, usually based on personalities and ethnicities, and opposed to union with Cape Verde.

## Driven to the Countryside

Initially the underground party attempted to organize among the miniscule working class, and the urban poor in mainland Guinea. When dock workers at Pidjiguiti Quay in Bissau took part in peaceful protest on August 3, 1959, the colonial regime brutally suppressed them, massacring 50 and injuring over 100 in just 20 minutes.

Shocked by this cruel loss of life, and realizing their weaknesses, the PAIGC switched to mobilizing in the countryside. The leadership at this point were intellectuals from the Cape Verde islands.

They were strangers to the Guinean hinterland, away from its towns that they knew better. This is where Cabral's study of peasant society, including its cleavages along ethnicity and religion, and contradictions including land ownership, gender relations, and socio-political organization, proved invaluable.

If, as Cabral and his comrades concluded, the urban working class was too miniscule

and unready for revolutionary change, did this mean that the peasantry would substitute for it? No. The peasantry was the main “physical force” of the liberation movement, but was not “a revolutionary force.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, in the absence of a national capitalist class, the petty bourgeoisie — located between the colonial state and the colonized masses — is most likely to wield the functions of state power after decolonization.

This intermediary class, from which many leaders of revolutionary movements across time and space have emerged, has two roads before it, Cabral suggested. They could surrender to their natural tendency to become bourgeois via class location in the state bureaucracy and as compradors servicing foreign capital in commercial relations. Or be reborn as a “revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people.” These conflicting choices are the dilemma of the petty bourgeoisie in the national liberation struggle. In a famous phrase, Cabral summed it up as “to betray the revolution or to commit suicide as a class.”<sup>3</sup>

After some years of preparation with funds, light weapons, and combat training from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and China, the PAIGC launched its armed struggle on January 23, 1963.<sup>4</sup> Later, Cabral succeeded in negotiating assistance in the form of sugar, tobacco, and uniforms from Cuba, followed by military advisors and medics; and food, clothing and medicine from Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. The enemy was of course far better armed and resourced, supported by its NATO allies particularly the United States and West Germany, and spewing napalm.

However, before and during the military campaign, Cabral was clear that the political fight was his priority: to breach the “wall of silence” built around Portugal’s subjugation of African peoples.<sup>5</sup> He tirelessly traveled to combat the ideology of “lusotropicalism”: Portuguese colonialism as adaptive to the people of the tropics and neither racist or exploitative.

Cabral was a man of action but also a critical and creative thinker. As his friend Basil Davidson reminded us, “Thought and action, he never separated that sequence, just as he never changed its order.”<sup>6</sup>

### Return to Our Own History

It was not colonialism that carried the colonized into history as was claimed for it. Rather, colonialism was an interruption in the history of the people. “In taking up arms to liberate ourselves,” Cabral reminded his audience, “we want to return to our history, on our own feet, by our own means and through our own sacrifices.”<sup>7</sup> As to when history begins, it could not be contingent on the emergence of class and therefore class struggle, as this would condemn societies



*In Havana for the Tricontinental Congress, Cabral relaxing with Fidel Castro.*

<http://casacomun.org/cco/visualizador/?pasta=05360.000.022>

without class relations, to be people “living without history, or outside history when they were subjected to the yoke of imperialism.”<sup>8</sup>

Instead, he argued it is the “level of development of productive forces ... [that] is the true and permanent motive force of history.”<sup>9</sup> The objective of national liberation becomes the liberation of productive forces grabbed by imperialist domination. This enables the self-determination of the once colonized to progress to a higher form of economic, social and cultural existence. That transformation in the level of productive forces and their system of ownership, in short, the mode of production, is what is called “revolution.”

Additionally, Cabral had to grapple with the messiness of armed struggle where those bearing arms can become oppressive of those in whose name they claim to be fighting for: At the first Party congress in Cassacá in February 1964, the guerilla units that had operated autonomously were merged into a people’s army, under the control of the political leadership.

He reminded the party leaders and the cadre alike that “we are *armed militants* and not *militarists*” (emphasis in the original). He cautioned them to “Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories. ...”<sup>10</sup>

The Cassacá Congress also marked an important outward turn in the direction of prefigurative politics. The PAIGC began creating institutions for people in liberated areas, conveying a promise of what independence and freedom ought to mean: schools, health centers, elected tribunals, people’s stores where goods could be bartered. Farming

food crops for subsistence, artisanal production for skilled work, and the nurturing of small industries were encouraged.

Base committees were formed in liberated areas through popular election from a party-list. Five members were elected, two places being reserved for women, and each assigned an area of responsibility.<sup>11</sup> This structure was crafted in far-from-ideal conditions of war not peace; and in the absence of political competition. However, it was also a first experience and education in participatory democracy.

In one of continuous injunctions to the cadre for their political orientation, he urged them to “[r]emember always that the people do not fight for ideas, for things that exist in the heads of individuals. The people fight and accept the necessary sacrifices in order to gain material benefits, to live better and in peace, to experience progress, and to guarantee the future of their children.”

Slogans and demands, no matter how good and important, are “empty words and without significance for the people if they are not translated into a real improvement in their living conditions.”<sup>12</sup>

As a theoretician and strategist of national liberation, Cabral was insistent that “those who lead the struggle must never confuse what they have in their head ... with the specific reality of the land.” Whatever ideas we have from what we read or what others tell us of their own experience he underscored that “our feet are planted on the ground in our land.”<sup>13</sup>

Foreign military advisors often sought to transplant their battlefield approaches to the war against the Portuguese in Guiné but Cabral resisted them, expressing “reserva-

tions about the systematization of phenomena.”<sup>14</sup> He saw it as an error to mimic the experiences of others, since these were based on their unique geographical, historical, economic and social conditions.

At the first Tricontinental Congress in Havana in 1966, he cautioned that no matter how similar the case and identical the enemy, “national liberation and social revolution are not exportable commodities. They are ... a local, national, product — more or less influenced by (favorable and unfavorable) external factors, but essentially determined and conditioned by the historical reality of each people.”<sup>15</sup>

### Culture as Resistance

Culture is the other front of resistance and struggle for Cabral. It is both shield and sword. “Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people’s history and a determinant of history.”<sup>16</sup> It is in his view the dynamic expression of social relationships, principally those between humans and nature, and between humans as individuals, groups of individuals, strata and classes.

However, culture to him was never essentialist nor static. It contained both positive and negative features. It ought to be forged by, and not only feed into, the movement for national liberation. He was careful to differentiate what he meant by culture from that to which the indigenous colonial elite was attached or what was imagined and invented by colonial diasporas.

Cabral was killed on January 20, 1973, aged 48, in Conakry, capital of the Republic of Guinea, which shares a land border with

Guinea-Bissau. That is where the PAIGC leadership operated in exile. His assassin was someone he knew, a fellow militant.<sup>17</sup>

However, as Cabral himself had predicted, aware of the imperialist-inspired plots against his life stretching back over a decade, his death did not derail the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, which was finally declared on September 24, 1973.<sup>18</sup> By then two-thirds of Guinea-Bissau was controlled by the PAIGC.

Moreover, the politico-military campaign he directed in Guinea-Bissau, along with those of liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique, directly contributed to the overthrow in Portugal of “the most long lived fascist State in history ... and the end of the oldest colonial empire in the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Fourteen years of anti-colonial wars in Portuguese Africa triggered the “Carnation Revolution” beginning with the overthrow of the dictatorship by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) in Lisbon on April 25, 1974. The new regime soon began the transfer of power in the African colonies to the liberation movements.

What is meant by the “liberation of the people”? Informed by the experience of neo-colonialism that followed “independence” and the venality and tyranny of the postcolonial elite that assumed power, Cabral insisted that it is more than the expulsion of colonialists, the hoisting of a national flag, and the playing of a national anthem:

*“It is the liberation of the productive forces of our country, the liquidation of all kinds of imperialist or colonial domination in our country, and the taking of every measure to avoid any new exploitation of our people. We don’t confuse exploitation with the color of one’s skin. We want equality, social justice and freedom.”<sup>20</sup>*

Why do we return to Cabral in a different time to his? Recently, Ochieng Okoth invokes him among others, to advocate “a new mode of anti-imperialist politics” by way of four combined maneuvers.<sup>21</sup> These may be adapted as follows.

First, to retrieve the promise of a post-imperialist world embedded in national liberation or anti-colonial Marxism, from a critical reading of its experience. The struggle for freedom cannot stop with the ejection of colonialists and imperialists; but must grow into an attack on the social and economic mechanisms initiated by imperialism.

Next, to engage with the critique of political economy. Without properly unmasking the relations and processes of domination, we cannot make sense of subordination within the international system and within states.

Third, by basing ourselves on historical materialism to understand the motion and dynamics of social change; and the deployment of hierarchy and difference in class societies. *To change the world, we need the theory and method to interpret it.*

Finally, to revive internationalism through anti-imperialist solidarity across movements be they in the Global North or Global South. To see our struggles as interconnected, while respectful of their specificities.

In all this and more, the life and work of Amílcar Cabral is exemplary. ■

### Notes

1. The wretched world of 20th century Alentejo day laborers to whom Cabral dedicated his dissertation, is magnificently fictionalized by José Saramago (himself the son of landless peasants) in *Raised from the Ground* (1980). Trans. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Harvill Secker, 2012).
2. Amílcar Cabral, “Brief analysis of the social structure in Guinea” in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* by Amílcar Cabral. Trans. and Ed. Richard Handyside (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1969), p. 61.
3. Amílcar Cabral, “Presuppositions and objectives of national liberation in relation to social structure” in *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*. Trans. Michael Wolfers (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 136.
4. For a fascinating reconstruction of the dynamics of these relationships, see Natalia Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation: The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).
5. Amílcar Cabral, “Foreword” to Basil Davidson, *The Liberation of Guiné: Aspects of an African Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 9.
6. Basil Davidson, “Tributes to a Fallen Comrade,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* (Los Angeles), Vol. 3, Issue 3 (1973): 11-30, p. 13.
7. “The nationalist movements of the Portuguese colonies” in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* by Amílcar Cabral, op. cit., p. 78.
8. “Presuppositions and objectives of national liberation in relation to social structure” in *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, op. cit., p. 124.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
10. “Tell no lies. Claim no easy victories ...” in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* by Amílcar Cabral, op. cit., p. 87.
11. Lars Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau. A Study of Political Mobilization* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974), pp. 124-132.
12. “Tell no lies. Claim no easy victories ...” in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* by Amílcar Cabral, op. cit., p. 86.
13. “To start out from the reality of our land – to be realists” in *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, op. cit., pp. 45 and 44 respectively.
14. “Practical problems and tactics” in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* by Amílcar Cabral, op. cit., p. 141.
15. “Presuppositions and objectives of national liberation in relation to social structure” in *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, op. cit., p. 122.
16. Amílcar Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture” in *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral*. Ed. Africa Information Service (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 41.
17. The received version that the killing was orchestrated by the Portuguese secret police (the PIDE), having infiltrated the PAIGC and turned some Guinean cadre against Cabral, has been challenged by Antonio Tomás, *Amílcar Cabral: The Life of a Reluctant Nationalist* (London: Hurst & Company, 2021), pp. 187-199. While affirming the longstanding intent and past attempts of Portuguese fascism to physically eliminate Cabral, Tomás places greater weight in this sadly successful instance, on the schism between PAIGC cadre from Guinea-Bissau and their Cape Verdean leadership.
18. The union between Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde broke on November 14, 1980, cracked by the unresolved tensions within the PAIGC.
19. Robin Blackburn, “The Test in Portugal,” *New Left Review* (London), 1/87-88 (September-December 1974): 5-46, p. 5.
20. Amílcar Cabral, *Our People Are Our Mountains* (London: Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola & Guiné, 1972), p. 8.
21. Kevin Ochieng Okoth, *Red Africa: Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics* (London: Verso, 2023), p. 16.

### Solidarity with Ukraine!

UKRAINE’S MILITARY STRIKE into the territory of the Russian Federation has developed as we prepare to go to press. Its intended scope and prospects are not yet clear. What’s certain is that it caught Russia’s army and president Putin off guard, changing the psychological trajectory of the war at least in the short run.

From the beginning of Russia’s full-scale annexationist invasion in 2022, *Against the Current* has joined with other progressive and left voices in support of Ukraine’s struggle for self-determination, its right to receive weapons from any available source, and cancellation of its foreign debt.

Those efforts must be redoubled at this critical moment. Ukraine’s survival remains at risk as Russia continues to bomb its critical civilian infrastructure. As 70% of the country’s electrical grid has been destroyed, replacing it is an essential task.

For information and updates, we urge our readers to visit the website <https://www.ukrainsolidaritynetwork.us> ■

## Four Decades of Anti-Apartheid University Struggles: The Past Is Present

By Oscar Hernández

STUDENT ENCAMPMENTS ARE springing up in U.S. universities and now (May, 2024) here in Montréal. They are denouncing apartheid in Israel. They are demanding an end to Israel's war against Palestine. They want their universities to divest from Israel.

Apartheid. Divestment. *Déjà vu*. Today's protests awaken memories from 39 years ago and move me to share personal experience and ways the past is present: then, the brutal legacy of colonialism in South Africa, now a similar legacy in Israel and Palestine.

In the spring of 1985, I was a 25-year-old physics grad student at Harvard. Then, Nelson Mandela was in prison, considered a terrorist by South Africa and its Western backers. Rum-maging through my pile of mementos, I found handwritten descriptions and musings from those moments.

My class notes, you could call them. One passage conveys a story I had heard during my years organizing:

*"When former South African political prisoner Dennis Brutus was breaking rocks on Robben Island 20 years ago, a warden asked him how he could be so stupid as to think he could defeat the apartheid government. Dennis Brutus said to him: 'How do you know you can never lose' Quickly the warden replied, 'America will never allow it.'"*

Israel must feel the same as it bombs Gaza and organizes pogroms on West Bank Palestinian villages. But while the U.S. policy and its Western allies support Israel, much of their populations are repulsed by the blatant hypocrisy. My 1985 manuscript continues:

*"...American corporations do not want to see the fall of the white minority government. And our universities invest in these corporations, not because our university presidents are*

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Harvard Commencement Protest, 1985.

*immoral, but because universities are part of the corporate system."*

Spring 1985 started with student sit-ins and occupations demanding divestment. I remember the urgent discussions among anti-apartheid Harvard students. Should our campus movement join the growing civil disobedience protest? Our support for this earned us the label of the "radical" caucus.

With each passing day, events moved more students to support an occupation. Reverend Jesse Jackson came to speak at Harvard, and then at a rally in support of the Columbia University occupation. A National Day of Protest against apartheid was set for April 24.

Harvard's Southern Africa Solidarity Committee (SASC), formed in 1978, was won over. We planned the occupation of 17 Quincy Street — one business day to occupy the Harvard Corporation headquarters, a fitting compromise with the initially reluctant.

In the swirl of discussion, we realized that the administration, unsurprisingly, had recruited informant(s). We moved delicately. Meeting the night before our April 24 action, we aired our reasons, and proposed to decide only on a list of candidate sites.

### Entering Harvard Corporation Offices

Early on the morning of the 24th we went to our pre-action meeting dressed "nicely"

(so as not to appear too student-like). A small group had been delegated to choose a site from the list. One person had become visibly uncomfortable during the previous night's meeting and was absent that morning.

We walked to 17 Quincy St. from different directions in small groups. Evan carried a large, empty box. A particularly well-dressed Jen rang the door and announced a delivery. The double doors would have to open wide. Jen stalled with small talk while we arrived. We all began to pour in through the vestibule.

*"As I walked thru the second doorway, the officer grabbed me with one of his outstretched arms. I went limp and sat on the floor. The guard's preoccupation with 165 pounds of dead weight allowed many people to go by without even touching the guard."*

About 40 students entered the Corporation offices at 9:15 am on April 24, 1985. We introduced ourselves, explained why we were there, and pledged to leave at 5 pm. At the disciplinary hearing that followed, staff and administrators from 17 Quincy St. confirmed that protestors were generally courteous and civil.

When "the Chief of Harvard Police arrived and was told of the students' procedures and guarantee to leave at 5 pm, [he] commented, 'I can live with that.'... Promptly at 5 pm, having vacuumed the area they had occupied, the protestors left the building, as they had promised." (Harvard University Committee on Rights and Responsibilities, Report on Incidents at 17 Quincy Street, April 24, 1985, and at Lowell House, May 2, 1985.)

The occupation was a public opinion success, leading the Harvard Conservative Club to invite New York City Consul General for South Africa Abe S. Hoppenstein for a meeting in Lowell House's Junior Common Room (JCR) on May 2.

He was greeted by a loud protest that continued to be heard during the meeting, so they cut the meeting short and escorted Hoppenstein to a waiting car. But as my notes record:

*"Ben jumped out and laid down in front of Abe's car. A bunch of us joined in. Abe left*

his car and went back to the JCR. Most of the people went and stood in front of the doors to the JCR. ... for two hours..."

Hoppenstein finally left the meeting room inside a huddle of Conservative Club members and Harvard Police who seemed to relish knocking down and stepping on the protestors blocking the path.

"The security guards grabbed Ben's throat and lifted him off the ground. Zach said they tried to smash his head into the concrete and so he ran over and placed his arms under his head."

Our final anti-apartheid protest of the Harvard school year occurred on commencement day, June 6. We organized a funeral procession with black coffins on the sides of which were written "Shoot this is a funeral," "Racism kills," "A Harvard investment."

Surrounded by police and security, we were forced out. Ann, a physics postdoc friend of mine, mentioned to me sometime later that she saw our procession in the film *The Return of Ruben Blades*.

### Social Justice Struggle vs. "Order"

The social justice struggle in 1985 went beyond the university anti-apartheid movement. In the United States the Pledge of Resistance was a national group formed in 1984 in response to the threat of a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua.

Just five years earlier, Nicaragua had ousted the U.S.-supported dictator Somoza, and the new Sandinista government brought in a mixed economy with agrarian reform and a literacy campaign. People signed the pledge to nonviolently resist U.S. aggressions towards Nicaragua and the rest of Central America.

In 1985, bills were pending in the U.S. Congress that would provide aid to the Contras, the armed opposition that carried out attacks on Nicaraguan civilians from its bases in Honduras. On May 7, 1985, as members of the Pledge, we occupied the J.F. Kennedy Federal Building in Boston, Massachusetts to demonstrate our opposition to those bills.

My Harvard friends and I were among the 569 people arrested, held overnight, and charged the next morning. Eventually the charges were dropped, and we did not need to appear in court after our May 8 hearing.

Harvard University, however, held disciplinary hearings for the aforementioned incidents. We were accused of violence, when in fact they used violence against us. Eleven students were formally admonished for the 17 Quincy Street occupation. In the Lowell House incident, the University was particularly critical of "those protestors who, in effect, imprisoned a guest at the University."

Fourteen students were charged and in the end 10 required to withdraw from the University. This requirement was suspended with the warning that in the event of further misconduct, the suspension would be

nullified, and they would really be required to withdraw.

Police forces in 1985 were not as heavily armed as now. To use heavy weapons once required calling the national guard or the army. Today's militarized police forces routinely brandish terrorizing weapons against divestment protests.

On May 1, 2024 counter-protesters violently attacked the encampment at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The next day police brutally dismantled the targeted encampment. Hours later, U.S. President Biden supported the police action: "Order must prevail."

On that same day, with pro-Israel counter-protesters threatening the McGill encampment, Quebec's premier François Legault said, "The law must be respected so I expect police to dismantle these encampments."

Pro-Palestine protesters at McGill's encampment wore masks over concerns about retaliation, harassment and blacklisting from pro-Israel groups such as the website Canary Mission.

Backlash against student actions calling for divestment from Israel is a testament to their importance. Let us remember that the protests of 40 years ago succeeded, leading hundreds of universities to divest.

McGill became the first Canadian university to divest from apartheid South Africa in 1985. The U.S. enacted the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, adding to international pressure on the South African government to negotiate with the "terrorist" Nelson Mandela. The negotiations led to Mandela's unconditional release in 1990, the dismantling of apartheid, and ultimately to Mandela's election as the first Black president of South Africa in 1994.

It is therefore very significant that on December 29, 2023, South Africa sued Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the crime of genocide against Palestinians. Let us also appreciate Nicaragua's March 1, 2024, suit against Germany at the ICJ under the Genocide Convention for arming Israel.

The Nicaraguan case was opened by Carlos José Argüello Gómez, who led Nicaragua's ICJ case vs. the U.S. in 1986. Then, the ICJ held that the U.S. had violated international law by supporting the Contras and by mining Nicaragua's harbors.\*

In the face of these charges, we can imagine Netanyahu and his right-wing colleagues repeating the same brag that Dennis Brutus heard from his South African prison warden: "America will never allow it." Yet they should also keep in mind U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's quip, "It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal."

\*Editors' note: The United States simply ignored the ICJ's ruling. Today's Nicaraguan regime, despite the "Sandinista" label, is far different from the popular revolutionary government of the 1980s.

### Epilogue, July 15, 2024

This article was finalized in the first days of May 2024. On May 14, the *Harvard Crimson* published an abridged version. That same day, Harvard Out of Occupied Palestine negotiated a peaceful end to their encampment in Harvard Yard with the University President. As part of the agreement students that had been placed on involuntary leave would be reinstated.

Yet a few days later, Harvard announced that 13 pro-Palestine protestors were suspended and not allowed to graduate, and this in opposition to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences recommendation and efforts that they be allowed to do so. More than 1100 undergraduates signed a petition urging Harvard College to overturn its decision.

During Commencement ceremonies, the Harvard President was booed at the end of his address whereas students who went off script during their speeches received a standing ovation for supporting "the 13 undergraduates that will not graduate today." Then more than 1000 people walked out of the Commencement ceremony, again in support of the 13 students. On July 23 Harvard finally conferred diplomas on 11 of the 13.

On July 10, at 4 am, a private security agency hired by McGill University began the forced dismantlement of the student encampment. This was done in close collaboration with the City of Montreal police and the Quebec Provincial police.

McGill described the encampment as "a heavily fortified focal point for intimidation and violence, organized largely by individuals who are not part of our university community." Anyone who had visited the encampment, as I did, could see how blatantly false McGill's statement was.

McGill said that "people linked to the camp ... engaged in antisemitic intimidation." Their ostensible proof of this had been rejected by Quebec courts on two separate attempts during the hearings to get an injunction against the encampment. On the other hand, McGill has never made a mention of Palestine in any of its communications or court filings against the encampment, nor do they acknowledge the systemic anti-Palestinian racism that this omission entails.

Some campuses in North America have already announced their autumn protest dates. Rapper Macklemore's "Hind's Hall" summarizes it all very well:

*The people, they won't leave*

*What is threatenin' about divesting and wantin' peace?*

*The problem isn't the protests, it's what they're protesting*

*It goes against what our country is funding  
(Hey) Block the barricade until Palestine is free*

*(Hey) Block the barricade until Palestine is free ■*



# Cause at Heart: Socialists and the Abolition of Antisemitism

By Alan Wald

People pay their respects at a memorial to the victims of a mass shooting in front of the Tree of Life - Or L'Simcha Congregation in Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on November 4, 2018.

Photo daveynin from United States, CC BY 2.0

“...the anti-Semite is inevitably a negrophobe.”  
—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952

Written in Honor of Noam Chomsky

## Safety Through Solidarity:

A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism

By Shane Burley and Ben Lorber.

Brooklyn: Melville House, 2024. 375 pages. \$19.99 paperback.

## Zionism: An Emotional State

By Derek J. Penslar

New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023. 321 pages. \$21.30 paperback.

## The Threshold of Dissent:

A History of American Jewish Critics of Zionism

By Marjorie N. Feld

New York: New York University Press, 2024. 279 pages. \$30 hardback.

## Tolerance is a Wasteland:

Palestine and the Culture of Denial

By Saree Makdisi

Oakland, California: California University Press, 2022. 228 pages.

\$29.49 hardback.

## Colonizing Palestine:

The Zionist Left and the Making of the Palestinian Nakba

By Areej Sabbagh-Khoury

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023. 348 pages. \$75 hardback.

## I. The Latest Form of Jew-Baiting

FOR DECADES, a bogus accusation of antisemitism was tolerated by too many people as the two-bit rhetorical ruse of pro-Zionists to shield their nationalist project from scrutiny by

Arab and especially Palestinian anti-colonial challengers in the Middle East.

In the United States, it also served to divert attention from criticisms of evidence of Israeli state racism, occupation, and expansionism, critiques articulated by small Marxist groups and found in books by noteworthy intellectuals such as the Jewish linguist Noam Chomsky and Palestinian literary scholar Edward Said. The aim was to manufacture a consensus in intellectual life by marginalizing opposition.

Over the last decade, this gravely misguided stratagem of ostracization was reworked to put a new generation of anti-Zionist political candidates in the crosshairs of more conservative rivals in elections. With the growing popularity of British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, and U.S. congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, it was a line of attack that grew ever more frequent and more pronounced in the public sphere.

Then came October 7, 2023 and a metamorphosis that would make Ovid salivate. This evil genie of slander, long loosed from its bottle, was instantaneously hijacked by more powerful and reactionary forces and reshaped for their own needs.

In April 2024, the revamped falsehood hit peak cringe when televised to millions as the leitmotif of the House of Representatives Hearings on Antisemitism. There it operated as gonzo demagoguery servicing the Congressional friends of the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory,<sup>1</sup> some of whom are also arms-length fellow travelers of Holocaust deniers Nick Fuentes and Ye (formerly known as Kanye West).

Liberals were intimidated, and the brains of viewers were scorched by a fiery stream of false and misleading claims.

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Most gushed from the mouth of MAGA flamethrower Rep. Elise Stefanik — an internet troll disguised as a politician.<sup>2</sup> In a mind-boggling feat of political alchemy, antisemites became the ones defining “antisemitism.”

The chief accusation was against young protestors opposed to the Israeli-U.S. collateral murder in Gaza — students of many ethnicities but who were disproportionately Jewish and mostly anti-Zionist.<sup>3</sup> These demonstrators were supposedly guilty of Jew-hatred, one of the most odious forms of racism, according to the vanguard of Right-wing Republicans.

Such a branding of anti-racist activists as “antisemites” was mainly achieved through unreliable misconstructions and inflations of fringe behavior. After each hearing, these ran in the press as an endless loop of allegations without fact-checked evidence.

The same genre of intellectual and ethical malpractice reverberated among panicky administrators at colleges and universities and quickly became routine. Thanks to the browbeating of these mostly covering enablers by wealthy corporate types who are donors and regents, the news is filled with inflated and embellished concerns about “Jewish safety.”

The reference point for this is mostly to elite campuses such as Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, and Harvard, where Jews are very well represented among the faculty, administration, and student body.<sup>4</sup> While few of these alarmist allegations pass the smell test, they are repetitively used to bureaucratically quash dissent even as fidelity to “academic freedom” and “free speech” are synchronically proclaimed with straight faces.<sup>5</sup>

In part because of the extensive documented history of confronting antisemitism, Jews have been disproportionately present as activists and leaders in radical movements.<sup>6</sup> The past two decades have witnessed the considerable growth of organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now that are pledged to conduct the fight against antisemitism in solidarity with the campaign for Palestinian rights.

As I write, Jewish students are conspicuous among those who have been physically assaulted by police on campus, and Jewish faculty are prominent among those excluded from academic positions — not on scholarly merit but due to their non-conformist political views.<sup>7</sup>

And just like that, antisemitism-baiting has become the latest form of Jew-baiting.

Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now have been prominent in campus encampments including the nearly month-long one at the University of Michigan.

## II. Social Justice Activism as “Jew-hatred”?

Simultaneously, a Right-wing campaign led by sanctimonious play-actors and abetted by centrist liberals, some of them Jewish, is manipulating accusations of alleged Jew-hatred to roll back progressive advances in education for people of color and women.

George Soros (born György Schwartz), a billionaire Jewish Holocaust survivor, is a primary target in nothing less than a classic antisemitic conspiracy theory. Having given most of his fortune to the Open Society Foundations, Soros is depicted as a puppet master financing the Gaza ceasefire demonstrations and promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) activities.<sup>8</sup>

Other claims of collusion between an academic Left that is substantially Jewish, and a rise in Jew-hatred, are amply visible in the media. For example, *New York Times* columnist Bret

Stephens puts the blame for Jew-hatred on scholarly fields associated with anti-racism: “the real problem lies with some of the main convictions and currents of today’s academia: intersectionality, critical theory, post-colonialism, ethnic studies and other concepts that may not seem antisemitic on their face but tend to politicize classrooms and cast Jews as privileged and oppressive.”<sup>9</sup>

There are even some Jewish publications, such as *Tablet*, linking Left-wing social activism as a whole to “the current climate of antisemitism on college campuses”:

“Whether wearing a hijab or a Star of David, SJP [Students for Justice in Palestine] anti-Israel activists are not simply freaks who demonstrate in favor of Hamas. They are mainstream products of the monoculture of the academic left. They are similar, indeed identical, to the social justice, Black Lives Matter, climate, gender, decolonizing, and woke activists who have been wreaking havoc on the U.S. and tearing apart our institutions for years.”<sup>10</sup>

To future generations, the persecution of those who should be honored, and the incendiary manipulation of hyperbolic concerns about Jewish safety on campuses to disempower people of color, will certainly seem abominable. Yet the alarmingly reactionary implications of the new normalization of the duplicity around “Jewish safety,” coexisting with the literal “genocide denial” perpetrated by the same people, can hardly be overestimated.

This is practically a Defcon 1 moment, as we are on the brink of a whole new era, possibly a global shift toward chauvinistic nationalisms, and the coming days are crucial. Authentic antisemitism from the Right is escalating, even as we mostly read journalistic analysis of “Left antisemitism” — with anecdotal lunacy continuously dialed up as click-bait. The Right is exploiting Israel’s problems and manipulating many Jewish-Americans for its own reactionary and antisemitic agenda.

**T**rying to counterpose “Jewish safety” to those working for social progress around race and gender is a sure way to make Bret Stephens’ fear of Jews being seen as “oppressive and privileged” come true.

Even with the imminence of Right-wing parties coming to power, sham accusations of Jew-hatred are playing a role in driving a wedge between Jews and the Left that is all the more disconcerting as they are spewed out by known antisemites in MAGA and the National Rally party (formerly the National Front in France, which has fascist roots).

Meanwhile, much of the U.S. Jewish establishment is in an alliance with some of these dangerous elements for the aim of policing opinion (especially of young Jews) in respect to maintaining a false narrative of Israel’s history and security needs. To be sure, Jews are not to blame for antisemitism, but individual Jews and organizations can collaborate with antisemites out of perceived selfish short-term needs.

This is a maneuver that goes back for decades, as socialist Peter Seidman noted in a pamphlet on *Socialists and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism* published in 1973: “The desire of the Zionist leaders to win the support of U.S. imperialism for the Jewish state in Palestine is what caused them to act in ways [in the 1930s] so detrimental to the real needs and interests of the Jewish people.”<sup>11</sup>

Among the most sickening examples today is the embrace of Christian nationalists who fetishize support for Israel due to their belief in the country’s key role in “The End Times,” at

which Jews must control Jerusalem and then choose between conversion or death — which means the annihilation of Judaism.

At the same time, these spiritual heirs of the KKK regard Jewish people as “the worst of the worst” because of paranoia about George Soros and their fantasy that Jews are behind the growing threat of immigrants, gender equality, and people of color.<sup>12</sup> Another example of a dangerous alliance with antisemitism is that of Amichai Chikli, Israel’s Diaspora Affairs Minister, who backs National Rally leader Marine Le Pen for president of France.<sup>13</sup>

Any confusion as to the definition, actual causes, and real targets of Jew-hatred will hinder the obligatory task of uprooting antisemitism wherever it appears. Militant socialists understand that the rise of racism in general — and not the (mostly justified) criticisms of the Israeli state — is the foremost enemy of Jewish safety.

We must find our own forms of abolishing antisemitism, independent of groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Taking the lead in this effort, in our press and in social movement activism, we must provide conceptual clarity and effective tactics that reach out. Our object is to convert people who presently have little understanding of the vile history of Jew-hatred as well as the unconscionable treatment of Palestinians.

Let’s be clear: Just as the European Right is out to set European Jews and Muslims against each other, so the U.S. Right is aiming to use Jews for the same purpose regarding the social movements of people of color as well as discrediting efforts to halt the genocide in Gaza. Both this development and actual antisemitism must be contested at once.

To help untangle the existing confusion, there are five new books, all far above mid, one of which can help us name and locate antisemitism as it relates to the present, and the others which provide evidence for *the necessity of anti-Zionism as part of the same struggle*. That is to say, in the present context we can most effectively counter antisemitism in connection with defeating Zionism (along with other forms of racism and discrimination).

In what follows, I will not provide a soup-to-nuts assessment of each book; there is considerable overlap among them, and some matters are expounded where I lack expertise to offer a useful appraisal. Instead, I will spotlight the components that are most worthwhile in examining how and why the abolition of both antisemitism and Zionism are presently intertwined.

The first two volumes, by Jewish authors Shane Burley/Ben Lorber and Derek Penslar, are of a more general character, providing probing and insightful surveys of the complicated landscapes of antisemitic and Zionist ideas and activities. The last three, by Jewish author Marjorie N. Feld, and Palestinians Saree Makdisi and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, are comparatively focused and treated more briefly.

These home in on the historical counter-narrative of admirable U.S. anti-Zionist thought at which accusations of antisemitism have long been trained; the Zionist propaganda strategy of “denial by affirmation” to mask the history of Palestine/Israel so that U.S. citizens (especially Jews) end up supporting a system in contradiction to their basic values; and the devastating analysis of the failed attempt to reconcile socialist ideals with nationalist practice in the colonization of Palestine.

Together the five volumes provide footholds of information and argument that help make sense of the true locus of antisemitism and the deceptive character of Zionism. In that sense they help explain why socialists follow Frantz Fanon’s warning about the bond of hatred between the antisemite and the “negrophobe.”

We do not define the enemies of social justice by any ethnicity, religion, nationality or physical features; only by their opposition in practice to the quest for a way of life that ensures universal equal rights, security, freedom of expression, and workers’ control over production — which we call socialism.

### III. Danger on the Right

One never-to-be-forgotten event underscores many critical features of antisemitism’s most pernicious and present form. On the morning of Saturday, 27 October 2018, white nationalist Robert Bowers posted an instructive message on an alt-right social networking service just before advancing toward Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life Synagogue: “HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.”<sup>14</sup>

The bearded, heavy-set, 46-year old white man then fired a Colt AR-15 semi-automatic rifle and three Glock .357 Sig semi-automatic pistols for twenty minutes, killing eleven and wounding six Jewish worshippers at the morning Shabbat services.

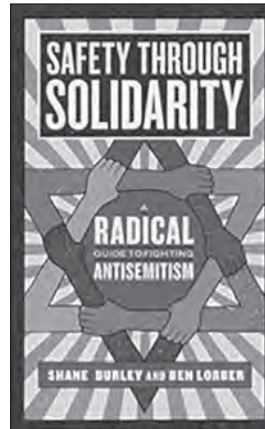
This atrocity clearly underscores how antisemitism is now back in the center of U.S. racism. For a while it seemed as if Jew-hatred had been significantly displaced by Islamophobia, but as Right-wing forces have strengthened around the world, antisemitism has also revived.

Bowers’ was not merely a personal act born of a Jew-hatred from “time immemorial.” It was the outcome of a current culture rife with conspiracy theories, the pillar of antisemitic beliefs and ideology. Burley and Lorber’s *Safety Through Solidarity*, the product of two committed activists and researchers of U.S. fascism and antisemitism, is more than an unerring guide to this most threatening aspect.

In 355 pages the authors take hold of the entire subject of antisemitism and attack it from every side. Theirs is a tome that includes the history of antisemitism as it progressed from pagan Roman times to the Christian era to the rise and consolidation of capitalism. At that point antisemitism, evolving from a religious to a racial basis, was undoubtedly part of the ideological fabric of reactionary and oppressive movements in society.

Then the authors pursue its persistence all the way through its uses in the Red Scare and its continuation in white nationalist movements and the Christian Right. What comes through above all is that, although antisemitism has persisted for centuries, its roots are social and historical.<sup>15</sup> This means that, like other forms of modern racism and oppression, it can be understood, fought, and changed by political action.

That point is critical, because the alternative strategies — such as relying on powerful protectors or conquering another’s



land to build an imagined fortress of security — have brought us to the present moment of crisis. Jews who are justifiably worried about persecution and violence are bitterly divided among themselves in a way that increases the danger from the Right.

The book is held together through a rather loose narrative arc that works effectively in providing both finely reported history and sometimes intimate accounts that tell the personal stories of individuals (including the authors). Despite the rather agonizing topics, Burley and Lorber maintain a cool, unruffled analysis, summarizing their main points in a cogent way for a general audience.

As one might expect of relatively younger militants, Burley and Lorber propose a frankly “intersectional” methodology to combat Jew-hatred, inasmuch as it is one kind of oppression interlocked with others. Thus, the battle to extirpate Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, antisemitism, and all types of ethnic and gender discrimination must be addressed as a collective project.

This does not mean that all modes of bigotry are interchangeable. The authors are explicit that oppressions do not function that way; compared to African Americans, “at this historic moment, Jews do not face structural levels of police violence, poverty, and other commonly understood effects of state-sponsored institutional racism as Jews.” (45)

Nevertheless, Jews can be subject to hate crimes and personal prejudice, and the authors embrace the tradition of Jewish Marxists and socialists committed to the strategy expressed in the title of their book, “safety through solidarity.”

#### IV. Quandaries on the Left

Burley and Lorber are far from oblivious to the Left’s own quandaries. The text cites instances of antisemitism that have episodically appeared in radical circles: ugly statements by Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon; post-World War II purges in the Soviet bloc where “Zionism” was a stand-in for “Jew;” and the appearance of dubious “anti-Zionist” figures such as Gilad Atzmon (an Israeli-born British saxophonist and author who has expressed openly antisemitic views) and Alison Weir (a U.S. journalist whose antisemitic subtexts are more veiled), both of whom were repudiated by the Jewish Left.<sup>16</sup>

The book also enunciates a harsh critique of the manner in which some on the Left responded to October 7: “On social media and at some rallies across the country, some activists uncritically celebrated Hamas’ overall attack as ‘resistance,’ minimizing Israeli civilian victims into a homogenous category of ‘settlers,’ unworthy of solidarity or support.” (206)

The most disturbing episode, however, may be Lorber’s revelation of the pain and shame he felt at a radical political meeting where blatant antisemitic statements were made promoting conspiracy theories: “They painted a picture of an immensely powerful multi-tentacled global Zionist adversary, working behind the scenes to stir up anti-Blackness and global repression.” (179)

Complicating the matter was that the audience, which was universally opposed to antisemitism, didn’t seem to *recognize* these remarks for what they were; Lorber “worried that if he named antisemitism, he would be accused of defending Israel’s oppression of Palestinians.” (180)

Of course, the experience he recounts is similar to those

of any one of us who have been in a pro-Israel audience — or even just among friends and family! — and feared objecting to obviously false claims about Palestine because that would elicit denunciations of oneself as an antisemite or self-hating Jew.

Nevertheless, this element of intimidation in Left culture, whether from ignorance or knee-jerk defensiveness, must surely be eliminated if we are to have a movement that effectively moves toward the future we want.

**M**ost antisemitism (as opposed to insensitivity) on the Left is probably either at the level of the individual or at the margins, but vile notions about global Jewish conspiracies must still be politically defeated by socialists. The relationship between the United States and Israel, for example, is not dictated by the Israel Lobby (which of course includes the seven-million strong Christians United for Israel) but is a self-interested collaboration between two capitalist states.

Naturally the socialist Left cannot follow the Zionists’ script in defining antisemitism, any more than it can regarding their command to “condemn Hamas” — when the Israeli state firstly requires condemnation for its human rights violations of a far greater magnitude.

Still, we need to figure out our socialist method of rigorously differentiating between an actual Jew-hating slogan or action (such as “Hitler was right!” or harassing a person simply because they appear to be Jewish), and the plethora of ignorant, ultra-Left, provocative, and even deeply stupid behaviors that have always appeared in radical movements.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, there is a hurdle for radicals in dealing with those among us who are not just disagreeing on facts but unable to perceive the same reality — for example, those who proclaim the need for “peace” in the Middle East in a manner that implies political capitulation by the weaker population.

And there’s a “both-sides-ism” approach that doesn’t work in Palestine when there are vast differences in the situations of oppressors and the oppressed. Talk of “two states for two peoples” may sound good in the abstract, but not if one ignores the serious danger that the Palestinian one will end up a reservation or a prison camp.

Of course, complicating any discussion of solutions is the widespread misperception that the religion of Judaism and the nationalist movement of Zionism are virtually one and the same. This simplified melding exists even among those who recognize that the majority of Jews don’t live in Israel and have zero intention of responding to calls to “return” (known as “making Aliyah”) to what is depicted as their rightful homeland.

Students beguiled by that conflation are certainly going to feel discomforted by current protests and will misinterpret militant slogans and chants as threatening. Although such emotions are part of the source for overblown claims about “safety,” they should not be callously dismissed. Shane and Lorber have a chapter on “Generations of Trauma” that points to the mistake of belittling Jewish experiences.

Moreover, this false merging of Judaism and Zionism leads to the canard that transforming the Israeli ethno-state into a modern democratic one is code for eliminating the Jewish population. It’s now a standard talking point usually combined with the claim that Israel is somehow being “demonized” and “singled out” in a manner tantamount to antisemitism.

Yet socialists aim to be consistent in opposing state forms that are not to the benefit of the entire population. No doubt

the Chinese regime regards our socialist denunciation of its own colonial-settler policies against the Uyghurs as similarly “demonizing.” Likewise, the antisemitic and reactionary leaders of Iran hold that our support for the domestic movement of young people to overturn the authoritarian state system of the Iranian theocracy means the destruction of Iran or its people.

What *does* singularize the student protests against Israel is that the United States is financially and militarily backing Israel’s genocidal actions, while holding it up as a model democracy.

How one should address all this has not yet been effectively resolved, a requisite for serious political dialogue. Anger and frustration are understandable, and their expressions will occur. Yet is hardly helpful to defame ill-informed people by snarling “Zionist” or “Israeli apologist” as an epithet in situations when a bridge might be built, so that united mass action around a principled demand can occur.

Even when confronting self-professed mainstream Zionists, arguing too aggressively only makes people double down instead of rethinking with the unfortunate result that bullying, intimidation and shaming spread quickly within the Left itself to eventually silence all questioning. No one wants to be trapped in a room with a jack hammer.

Guidance in such matters is among those areas where I find some weaknesses in the Burley/Lorber book. In addition, there can be a surfeit of platitudes regarding vague political terminology. The authors are in support of “Progressives,” although it is not clear what this means in terms of politics (socialists, liberals?).

Also, they call for “justice for Palestine” and “struggling for a better world” without explaining what that entails, which seems necessary if one is to convince people that de-Zionizing Israel is in the interests and security of Jews as well as Palestinians.

Probably there needs to be more discussion about the matter of Palestinian resistance, because having an armed resistance *is a right*, under international law. Then again, without repudiating a just struggle, it is common sense that all acts of resistance are neither effective nor ethical. The Palestinian Left is far from monolithic and there is much to be learned from hearing a variety of perspectives.

Moreover, the challenges of dealing with nationalism in political movements can’t be hedged. Nationalist movements of the oppressed have a very different dynamic from nationalisms of the oppressor, and socialists support the former even while promoting internationalist ideology. But history shows retrograde ideas and practices (often including antisemitism) are frequently present in all forms of nationalism.

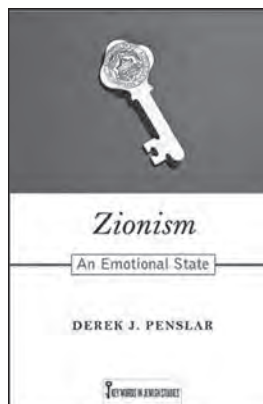
Likewise, the Burley/Lorber volume might have said more about the expression of grief and horror about the treatment of Israeli civilians on October 7. Whether or not Hamas turns out to be responsible for every single atrocity attributed to it (certainly debatable at this point), such feelings of human compassion need not take away from the grief and horror felt at the Israeli state mass murder that ensued.

Nevertheless, the volume is replete with many deeply observed insights, careful and respectful judgments, measured analysis, and certainly a passionate critique of fascism and settler colonialism. The authors are not afraid of expressing uncomfortable truths, and they know that trying to win a debate by simply shoving one’s politics down other people’s

throats is a prelude to an authoritarian culture.

## V. “Political Emotions” and “Zionism Reconsidered”

Some ways of arguing against Zionism are more effective than others. Penslar’s *Zionism: An Emotional State* is an unusual examination that considers the passions that drive supporters and antagonists, both of whom fall into diverse groups. The author is an American-Canadian who is Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard University.



Penslar is no Marxist, and has professed a love of the Israeli state, yet his 2024 appointment to co-chair Harvard’s Presidential Task Force on Combatting Antisemitism caused an uproar. This was initiated by billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman and taken up by troll Stefanik, who denounced Penslar for “despicable antisemitic views.” His crime was that he had described the Netanyahu government’s West Bank policy as “apartheid.”(18)

What’s appealing about Penslar’s book is his search for less polemical ways to address Zionism and colonialism; he convincingly argues that there is no basis for denying that Zionism is colonialism but also no grounds for seeing it as a pure form. To me, this seems consistent with the views of Columbia University scholar Rashid Khalidi, one of the most informed Palestinian critics of Zionism, who stated in a recent interview with Tariq Ali:

“Israel is not a typical settler colony, by any means; it’s also a national project, with a significant Biblical dimension, and a refuge from persecution. No other settler colony was a refuge from persecution to such a degree — the Puritans and other religious dissidents, like the Quakers, who came to North America, certainly experienced repression, but not on the same scale.”<sup>19</sup>

My impression is that Penslar himself does not take a very clear side on this issue.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, his analysis should help readers see why Zionism came to be considered as an invading force in the Middle East. This was the main cause of anger at the Jewish ethno-state, especially during 1948 and after when violent acts by Israeli Jews toward Palestinians were white-washed by systematic coverup and falsifications.

Penslar explains why Zionists, even if secular, are generally marked by a feeling of intrinsic loyalty to the state of Israel due to a history of European antisemitism. The upshot is feeling a need to defend Israel’s virtue, and also that a destruction of the protecting state will happen unless there is “defensive” action against all perceived threats.

That is why exposure of atrocities by the Israeli military and settlers, presently in the form of an open-ended license to kill on an industrial scale, seems to have negligible impact.

Penslar’s analysis involves the role of emotions in the campaign to resettle Jews in what is regarded as their Biblical homeland. His argument is somewhat similar to philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s view that emotions are a critical form of knowledge and a way of reasoning:

“Emotion is a component of cognition, and there is no contradiction or even divide between emotions and ideas. Ideas are

sustained interpretations of experience in terms of beliefs and values.” (9)

Thus, the book is a study in political emotion, tracking the evolution of the emotions (emotional state) Zionism has aroused over time, since its origins in the late 19th century, and up till recent decades.

Probably the most constructive aspect is his revelation of Zionists’ self-understanding of their project, critical to those of us who wish to better understand what we are opposing. This is elaborated in chapters on “Staging Zionism” and “Zionism as Colonialism,” and developed up to the present in “Zionism to 1948” and “Zionism Since 1948.”

All this is achieved with nuance, balance and elegance of expression, not to mention impressive academic rigor. In concise, pithy, and sensible prose Penslar crafts a cogent and revealing account of how Zionism and anti-Zionism inflame powerful emotions that are characteristic in debates about nationalism in the modern world.

A work of strenuous and intelligent exegesis, alert to paradox and the telling detail, this book will probably not satisfy partisans of any camp, but it surely expands our knowledge and understanding.

Where Penslar is less substantial is in his treatment of the actual history of anti-Zionism. Edward Said gets a page or two, but Martin Buber is never mentioned, Hannah Arendt (author of the prophetic 1945 essay, “Zionism Reconsidered”)<sup>21</sup> is cited only twice in passing, and Noam Chomsky only once.

The Soviet Union is discussed a bit, but there is nothing about various Communist Parties and not a single reference to the Jewish Leon Trotsky, who made the following memorable prophecy in July 1940:

*“The attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine can now be seen for what it is, a tragic mockery of the Jewish people. Interested in winning the sympathies of the Arabs who are more numerous than the Jews, the British government has sharply altered its policy toward the Jews, and has actually renounced its promise to help them found their ‘own home’ in a foreign land. The future development of military events may well transform Palestine into a bloody trap for several hundred thousand Jews. Never was it so clear as it is today that the salvation of the Jewish people is bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system.”<sup>22</sup>*

Happily, there exists a growing number of new studies showcasing a history of many valuable critiques of Zionism in the United States, although not all of these earlier efforts were embedded in the kind of socialist politics necessary to address the crisis we have inherited.

## VI. Return of the Repressed

This record of discord is superbly illuminated by Marjorie N. Feld’s *The Threshold of Dissent*, which follows in the wake of the publication of two other outstanding studies, Geoffrey Levin’s *Our Palestine Question: Israel and Jewish American Dissent, 1948-1978* (2023) and Jonathan Graubert’s *Jewish Self-Determination beyond Zionism: Lessons from Hannah Arendt and Other Pariahs* (2023).

Written with dramatic verve and backed up with a plethora of evidence, Feld, who is Professor of History at Babson

College, covers some of the same ground as Levin and Graubert, but encompasses a much longer narrative sweep in her book.

Moreover, *The Threshold of Dissent* has unique value in demonstrating that the current slurring of anti-Zionism in U.S. culture as Jew-hatred is part of a long tradition that has now given birth to a confusion: one that puts Jews in greater danger than ever before even as it facilitates the U.S. government’s collaboration in a genocide that is transforming Israel into a pariah state.

Her genealogy begins in the early 20th century and moves to the present in four long chapters that are sandwiched between an Introduction and Conclusion followed by a Coda. It is a disturbingly powerful narrative but filled with close and penetrating observations that are expressed moderately in tone — even as they are far from that in content.

Feld’s initial focus is on the early 20th century Reform Movement. This is followed by the mid-century activism of William Zuckerman (1885-1961) and his *Jewish Newsletter*, the 1960s anti-colonialist and Black Freedom Movement, and the appearance of the now defunct New Jewish Agenda (a progressive Jewish organization) in the 1980s.

A capsule summary of her story is that anti-Zionism in the United States emerged from the mainstream, although not always for the same reasons as those of Marxist-internationalists, but was incrementally marginalized over the decades. These moments are connected and contextualized with extensive commentary by a scholar who writes with historical acuity and human sensitivity.

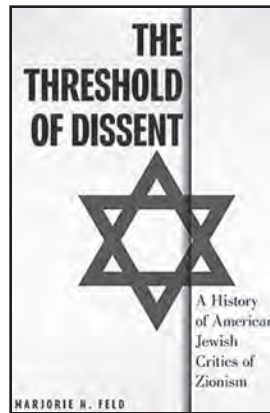
What may capture special attention of the contemporary reader are the accounts of individuals and groups that prefigure our own experiences of the past several years. Long before 1948, many anti-Zionist and non-Zionist critics saw numerous problems that would vex the Israeli state and lead to the current calamity and divisions.

Even after the Nazi Holocaust, the American Council for Judaism argued that the United States and Britain needed to increase immigration of Jewish refugees and that “Palestine should be ‘neither a Jewish state nor an Arab state’ because it is a ‘Holy Land, sacred to Christian, to Jew, and to Moslem alike...it is not and can never become, a land which any race or religion can justly claim as its very own.” (31)

Zuckerman, a journalist with a Leftist past, was particularly impressive for his understanding that, if fighting racism and fighting antisemitism in the United States are part of the same struggle, then the Zionist establishment is full of hypocrisy when it comes to Palestinians: “How can the American Jewish Congress and other outspoken Zionist organizations honestly fight segregation in the South, if opposition to integration of Jews with non-Jews is the basic principle of Zionism?” (80)

Page after page of Feld’s inspiring book is filled with arguments to the effect that fighting racism consistently is what will make Jews safer, not abetting Right-wing resistance, and that embracing Israel was more about enabling nationalist colonialism than supporting Jews because ethnic nationalism in power had led to supremacist aggression.

The book also showcases how individuals can politically evolve given exposure to information, even if not on Marxist



principles. This was the case with journalist I.F. Stone.

Like many with a fellow-traveling Communist background, Stone was a one-time partisan of the Israeli side in the 1940s, but argued differently in the *New York Review of Books* in 1967:

*“How we [Jews] act toward the Arabs will determine what kind of people we become: either oppressors and racists in our turn like those from whom we have suffered, or a nobler race able to transcend the tribal xenophobias that afflict mankind.”* (107)

**T**he danger of repression is another major theme — especially from the constant Zionist efforts to marginalize leaders and organizations professing anti- and non-Zionism in the post-World War II era through the present.

In 1973, a course at Tufts University by Marty Blatt innocuously called “Zionism Reconsidered” was invaded by the Jewish Defense League and denounced in the Boston press as “a grievous affront to the Jewish community.” (134)

When the Jewish organization Breira (“choice”) was formed in 1973 to express disagreement with Israeli occupation of the West Bank, “Jewish leaders [led by the ADL] launched campaigns indicating that Breira members, like the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization], were ‘dedicated to the destruction of the Jewish state.’” (144)

In part, Feld’s book is the sad story of what happens to communities that do not permit meaningful dissent, told meticulously with a clarity of thought and shrewdness of diagnosis.

## VII. Resisting Zionism

Feld unmask the half-hidden history of opposition to Zionism, but there remains the need for an explanation of why the U.S. public has been largely unable to recognize the profound contradiction between what is claimed about Israel and its actual record. How is it possible that a state that has committed major violations of human rights can be celebrated as a model of tolerance?

UCLA English and Comparative Literature Professor Makdisi’s *Tolerance is a Wasteland* may strike some outside of academia as exhaustingly relentless and perhaps hyperdense at times, but it is the work of a witty and allusive maestro at the height of his powers.

Makdisi, a nephew of Edward Said, displays a rare multi-disciplinary talent that punches a gigantic hole in the very heart of fables about the reality of the Zionist project. He writes cerebrally, as if each sentence were a performance, and knows how to craft a lapidary phrase with an enviable ear for the *not juste*, as some of the following phrasing in quotations will demonstrate.

In four central chapters — Sustainability, Democracy, Diversity, Tolerance — he braids politics, theory and cultural criticism in a coolly devastating takedown of how a very specific form of *denial* is at work in the operation of the Zionist myth through reframing and inversion, whereby the virtues of liberalism are ardently embraced to obscure what would be unacceptable to most people in the United States.

As the book jacket accurately explains, through the “white-washing, greenwashing, and pinkwashing of colonial violence” the Israeli state partisans offer “curated perceptions that make this massive project of cognitive dissonance possible.”

One of the most effective gambits in Makdisi’s calm and methodical response to the battering ram of Israeli state propaganda is his insistence that most U.S. Zionist supporters are actually decent and well-meaning people; they would not support Israel’s state practice if they could see what it actually is, including the *Nakba* (“catastrophe”) that began in 1948 but still goes on.

To make Israel appear as if it did *not* come into existence as a minority ruling a majority, values are pronounced that occlude what has and is happening, and the mind-numbing repetition of mantras (such as “Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East”) “helps us willingly to suspend our disbelief.” (50)

Surely a grotesque example of Zionist hubris was the construction beginning in 2004 of a Museum of Tolerance to address global antisemitism — a museum that intruded into a centuries-old Muslim burial site:

*“Only a profound form of denial could enable the placement of a monument to Zionism-as-tolerance on an ethnically-cleansed graveyard. After all, not many people would knowingly endorse the desecration of a cemetery; but who would not want to support tolerance?”* (17)

This is a book filled with endless observations about the paradoxes of Zionist perception: how can it be that Israel serves as a caretaker for Jews everywhere, but not its own actual citizens? With all its military might, why does Israel still feel insecure? How can resistance to ethnic cleansing be regarded as intolerance?

There is an extraordinary discussion of how apartheid operates in the Israeli state and the land it occupies, as a racism in practice that avoids overt racist language.

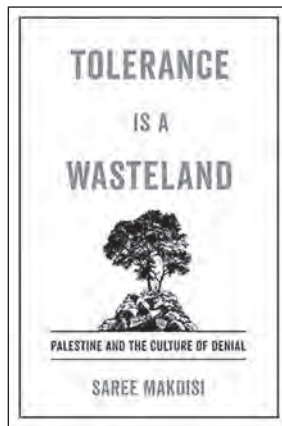
Another feature of Makdisi’s scholarship is that he is the clearest among all the authors of the books surveyed about the political direction he favors.

*Tolerance is a Wasteland* was published before 7 October 2023, which has obviously reconfigured the current political conjuncture. But at the time of publication, he was optimistic about the growth of BDS (the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement) that “emerged from the terrain once dominated by older Palestinian formations, notably Hamas and Fateh.”

He clearly favors its simple demands of “an end to the military occupation of Palestinian territory; the elimination of racial discrimination within Israel; and the right of return of those Palestinians ethnically cleansed from their homeland in 1948, along with their descendants.” (144-5)

The BDS movement, although officially “agnostic” as to whether these objectives can be obtained in one state or two, makes it clear that the “violent enterprise” of Zionism must be abolished. In Makdisi’s view this actually makes the case stronger for “the establishment of a single democratic and secular state encompassing the territory of historical Palestine, a position that I personally support.”

Such an approach, he believes, has shifted the “conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians from a confrontation between an occupying power and an armed national liberation movement to a confrontation between a people demanding



equality and rights and a state representing grotesque inequality....” (145)

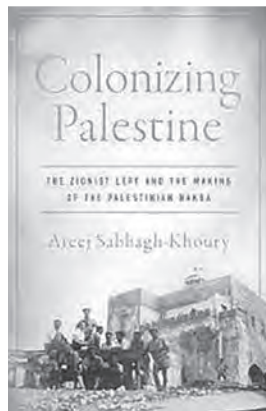
This movement from an Algerian paradigm (armed resistance to occupation) to a South African one (one-person-one-vote), he speculates, may have both greater international appeal and is more threatening to the ethno-state regime itself.

Such a forthright consideration of alternatives to the Zionist state are necessary for the development of strategy, tactics, and education aimed at dismantling colonial privilege, and the transformation of the region into a society in conformity with 21st century norms of democratic citizenship.

For those of us educated over the years by Palestinian experts on the Left like Edward Said and Rashid Khalidi, the challenge is to formulate a perspective on the future that allows two nationalities (Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish), along with others, to live in harmony and equality. This includes the expression of national rights that do not take oppressive state forms.

### VIII. The Past is Not Past

Further illumination can be achieved by understanding why 1967 isn't ground zero for grasping the current crisis, or even 1948. That point comes through brilliantly in Areej Sabbagh-Khoury's *Colonizing Palestine*. To claim that fighting antisemitism and Zionism are linked struggles, it is critical to explain why the Palestinian past cannot be left to the past, and the *origins* of the Israeli state must be confronted.



Zionist propaganda, now heightened by the events of 7 October, depicts Palestinians as inherently violent Jew-haters who cannot be dealt with rationally. More than ever, we must urge that people listen to the voices of Palestinians in explaining that it is the very ideology of Zionism, including socialist variants, that is responsible for a century of intentional dispossession.

The scholarship of Hebrew University Sociologist and Anthropologist Professor Sabbagh-Khoury, like that of Makdisi, should be at the top of the list.

Her formidable Introduction (46 pages) and six chapters cover the origins of the colonization process; the interaction of socialist kibbutz settlers (Hashomer Hatzair, Young Guard, a labor Zionist secular Jewish youth movement founded in 1913<sup>23</sup> with Palestinians; and how the settler colonial “memory process” represented the events leading up to and including the 1948 *Nakba*.

What may be a surprise to some readers is that Sabbagh-Khoury's research places “the kibbutz movement squarely in the colonizing of Palestine and shift[s] our understanding of the Zionist movement from its origins in Europe to its interactions with indigenous Palestinians.” (45)

It was these Labor Zionists who were originally bi-nationalists, not the Zionist Right, who “configured the social and political relations of settler colonization that would set a path dependency [historically-produced resistance to change] of hierarchization and violence.” (45)

Although the socialists may have seriously intended to uplift their Arab brothers and sisters, their practice became collab-

oration in the defining features of the Zionist nation-state: replacement, dispossession and removal, and discrimination.

Here Sabbagh-Khoury makes a crucial point about terminology: “comparison [with other settler colonial projects] is a vital element of my analysis, not to argue for absolute equation of Zionism or the State of Israel with other settler colonial histories, but to trace patterned ways of doing and thinking and its relation to other cases termed settler colonial.”

Moreover, she emphasizes that using settler-colonialism as a “diagnostic analytic category” is aimed at describing encounters and transformational processes that turned into structures that favored Zionist settlers and denied indigenous sovereignty: “it does not refute Jewish religious and historical connections to what they term Erets Yishra'el.” (10)

This prefigures a moving conclusion addressing the present: “Palestinians continue to live in their homeland. They are planning with their (relatively few) anti-colonial Jewish-Israeli comrades a decolonized sociality, taking inspiration from and further stimulating global anti-colonial movements for justice.” (272)

This 348-page book is not exactly a beach read, but one finds rare intelligence and imagination in its conceptualizations as well as tenacity and resourcefulness in research. In her account of how the initial Zionist pioneers thought about and interacted with indigenous Palestinians, she has produced a beguiling and brilliantly unsettling work that subjects the history of socialist Zionists to searing scrutiny.

With exquisite craftsmanship and a many-layered style, she has gone beyond an impressive archive of primary sources to inhale a massive number of books. This is without doubt a signal intervention that is an emotionally honest reckoning, impressively learned, and with a splendidly original analysis.

### IX. Zero Tolerance

The myths of the past about the Zionist record must give way to the realities of the present so that Jew-hatred can be addressed directly. Both forms of persecution, Zionism and antisemitism, are seen by socialists as appreciably products of class society, and the indispensable combat for the abolition of antisemitism cannot mean any support to the ongoing deprivation and suppression of another people.

The current situation, wherein a claim of “Jewish safety” is strategized to put a target on Jewish and other Left-wing defenders of Palestinian rights as the source of Jew-hatred, is worse than merely a world-class snipe hunt.

As Gilbert Achcar has pointed out, “the accusation of antisemitism has become a weapon in the hands of neo-fascism.”<sup>24</sup> In using Jews as a shield to beat back radical movements for change, the Right aims to blame Jews as the antagonist of social justice. This opens the door to all sorts of antisemitic prejudices and clichés, such as the belief that Jews have a unique relationship to power and are privileged.

We can't let anyone be fooled. This instrumentalization of “Jewish safety” is poison to the fight against antisemitism. Socialists must vigorously contest it, especially among the parts of the Jewish community that we can reach, and the five books considered in this essay can be a springboard to the creative thinking still required to overcome entrenched positions.

As long as we socialists are divided over whether abolishing antisemitism is a priority, and whether it must be linked to anti-Zionism, we will not be able to impose a counter-narra-



Jewish Voice for Peace

tive to the dominant one at this time. Consequently, we must create a political culture in which we will be able to stand together to make it quite clear that the social movements are not antisemitic ones, and that socialists are the frontline allies of all those contesting racial and other inequalities.

It means zero tolerance for any antisemitic actions threatening the Jewish community as well any hate-filled actions aimed at our Palestinian and Muslim communities. It also means fighting for social and economic justice side-by-side with Palestinians and all menaced groups, although one cannot be intimidated from proposing more effective strategies.

Our solidarity is social and built organically from the ground up. It is solidarity, first of all, with people, not states, and socialist Jews today should act toward Palestinians like those few but honorable "righteous among the nations" who assisted victims of the Nazi extermination. This will be the way in which socialists reintegrate the fight against antisemitism within the broader battle against racism. ■

### Notes

1. The conspiracy theory in Europe and the United States that liberal elites (mainly Jews) are trying to replace white people with people of color who will vote for them and destroy the traditional, nationalist culture.
2. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/dec/11/elise-stefanik-antisemitism-congress-trump-upenn-resignation>
3. The most useful short introduction to the current situation in Gaza and the need to end complicity in crimes against humanity is Gilbert Achcar, *Israel's War on Gaza* (London: Resistance Books, 2023).
4. See: <https://theintercept.com/2024/03/28/safety-college-columbia-stanford-antisemitism-israel-palestine/#:~:text=Right%2Dwing%20GOP%20culture%20warriors,have%20slaughtered%20over%2031%2C000%20people>
5. See: <https://againstthecurrent.org/university-of-michigan-president-ono-the-pepper-spray-gang/>
6. See: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc209/jewish-revolutionaries/>
7. See: [https://www.democracynow.org/2024/6/18/raz\\_segal\\_university\\_of\\_minnesota](https://www.democracynow.org/2024/6/18/raz_segal_university_of_minnesota)

8. See: <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2024/05/16/far-right-uses-antisemitic-george-soros-trope-attack-campus-protests>
9. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/25/opinion/jews-ivy-league-antisemitism.html>
10. See: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/liberal-jews-deluded-themselves-palestine-antisemitism>
11. Peter Seidman, *Socialists and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism: An Answer to the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), 31.
12. See: [https://forward.com/opinion/630042/steve-bannon-christian-nationalists-jews/?utm\\_source=The+Forward+Association&utm\\_campaign=e8d587dbbd-AfternoonEditionNL\\_%2A%7CDATE%3AYmd%7C%2A\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-878b15fee9-%5BLIST\\_EMAIL\\_ID%5D](https://forward.com/opinion/630042/steve-bannon-christian-nationalists-jews/?utm_source=The+Forward+Association&utm_campaign=e8d587dbbd-AfternoonEditionNL_%2A%7CDATE%3AYmd%7C%2A_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-878b15fee9-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D)
13. See: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/far-right-le-pen-would-be-excellent-as-french-president-says-likud-minister/>
14. See: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/why-the-tree-of-life-shooter-was-fixated-on-the-hebrew-immigrant-aid-society>
15. The latest theoretical work on antisemitism from a Marxist point of view can be found in the double-volume "Marxism and the Critique of Antisemitism," special issue of *Historical Materialism*. The Introduction is online at: <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/article/marxism-and-the-critique-of-antisemitism/>
16. See David Finkel's informative critique of Atzmon: <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc157/p3542/>
17. In regard to developing effective strategies for mass movement-building in the face of 1960s ultraleftism, two of the most helpful resources are: Peter Camejo, *How to Make a Revolution Plus Liberalism, Ultraleftism, or Mass Action* (Chippendale, Australia: Resistance Books, 1999 ) and Fred Halstead, *Out Now: A Participant's Account of the Movement in the United States Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Pathfinder, 2001).
18. See: <https://stefanik.house.gov/2024/1/stefanik-statement-on-harvard-s-continued-failure-to-protect-jewish-students-unacceptable-appointment-on-antisemitism-task-force>
19. See: <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii147/articles/the-neck-and-the-sword>
20. See the thoughtful interrogation of Penslar's approach to colonialism and Zionism by Joshua Cole: [https://www.academia.edu/13072235/\\_Derek\\_Penslars\\_Algebra\\_of\\_Modernity\\_How\\_Should\\_We\\_Understand\\_the\\_Relation\\_between\\_Zionism\\_and\\_Colonialism\\_in\\_Ethan\\_B\\_Katz\\_Lisa\\_Moses\\_Leff\\_and\\_Maud\\_S\\_Mandel\\_Colonialism\\_and\\_the\\_Jews\\_Bloomington\\_IN\\_Indiana\\_University\\_Press\\_2107\\_](https://www.academia.edu/13072235/_Derek_Penslars_Algebra_of_Modernity_How_Should_We_Understand_the_Relation_between_Zionism_and_Colonialism_in_Ethan_B_Katz_Lisa_Moses_Leff_and_Maud_S_Mandel_Colonialism_and_the_Jews_Bloomington_IN_Indiana_University_Press_2107_)
21. See the excerpt from "Zionism Reconsidered" reprinted in *Against the Current*: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/atc/534.html>
22. See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/jewish.htm>
23. Retired Stanford University History Professor Joel Beinin has written in a number of places about Hashomir Hatzair; see for example, "'Knowing Your Enemy, Knowing Your Ally: The Arabists of Hashomer Hatzair' (MAPAM)," *Social Text* no. 28 (July 1991):100-21.
24. See: <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8581>



## What Exactly Does It Mean to Vote?

# Lenin's Perspective — Part 2

By August H. Nimitz

PART ONE OF this essay, in ATC 231, July-August 2024, highlights the key kernels of wisdom that Marx and Engels bequeathed about the revolutionary employment of the electoral and parliamentary arenas, and the lessons Lenin distilled about the more than decade-long Bolshevik experience in their application for proletarian ascent for the first time. Part Two purports to make an original contribution to Marxist political theory by, first, putting a label on what Marx, Engels and Lenin concluded and, second, making a case for the political currency of such a label.

### A Conceptual Innovation: "Voting Fetishism"

"I KNOW VOTING feels inadequate right now: just hear me out." That plea titled a *New York Times* op-ed at the height of the massive George Floyd protests in summer 2020 penned by Democratic Party operative and then rising star in the organization, Stacy Abrams.

She begged with the protestors to abandon the streets and turn their attention to the November elections to make sure Donald Trump would not be reelected. "Voting," she asserted, "is the most important thing you can do." (*NYT*, June 4, 2020)

Abrams, however — regardless whether she actually believed that — was engaging in and/or enabling what the political philosopher Raymond Geuss calls "wishful thinking."<sup>1</sup> For Lenin, less charitably, "crass stupidity, or else sheer deception of the workers."<sup>2</sup> But what exactly does it mean to vote? Realist "conceptual innovation," what Geuss proposes, may provide the answer.<sup>3</sup>

Voting comes from the Latin word, *votum*, to make a vow; for example, votive candles. That's essentially what we do when we vote. To confuse it with the exercise of political power, as so many like Abrams are wont to do, is to make a claim, as Geuss explains, that flies in the face of reality.<sup>4</sup>

What I propose is to give a label to Lenin's realist critique of the belief that "extremely important political matters" could be solved "merely by voting."<sup>5</sup> To actually think so — to complement Marx's and Engels's "parliamentary cretinism" and in the spirit of Marx's critique of bourgeois ideology — is to be afflicted with "voting fetishism."

To vote is to exercise an important democratic right, often won in struggle or the threat of struggle, to register a prefer-

ence for either a candidate or a particular policy. To exercise political power is to impose one's will, to get someone or some group of individuals to do something that they otherwise would not have done. Nothing could be more foreign to exercising political power than an action that takes on average less than a minute and is done individually, at least in the ordinary sense of political voting.

To believe otherwise is to engage in voting fetishism, a form of wishful or magical thinking. Registering a preference should never be confused with exercising power — two very different verbs and, hence, actions.<sup>6</sup>

As part of a new research project, investigators have sought to measure "the quality of political representation" by how often Congressional representatives deliver on the preferences of their constituents. "Overall," they report, "we find that citizens get what they want only about half the time."<sup>7</sup> Again, registering a preference for something should not be mistaken for its realization.

The first time this writer tried to vote, in 1964 in Jim Crow New Orleans, for the lesser of the two evil presidential candidates, I was denied that democratic right owing to how I looked, my skin color. Four years later, it was possible for me to exercise that right there.

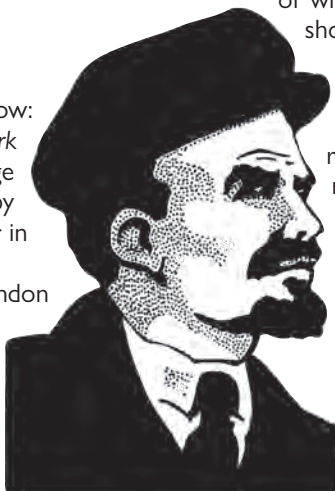
How to explain? It was exactly because people who look like me, and our allies, had been in the streets during that interval imposing our will — exercising power.

Voting therefore, contrary to Stacy Abrams, is *not* the most important thing to do. More important is what it takes to actually exercise the right to vote. How else to explain why those who once couldn't vote got the right to do so?

Though the concept of voting fetishism that I'm proposing is arguably original, does it have utility in any way in making sense of politics?<sup>8</sup> Exhibit A, I contend, is the Bolshevik triumph in 1917-1919, one of modernity's singular and most consequential moments.

Exactly because of Lenin's realist understanding of the electoral and the concomitant parliamentary process — the bequest of Marx and Engels — he was successful in realizing his vision. He had thus been inoculated from that all so common affliction to which his Right Socialist-Revolutionary opponents had succumbed and, hence, his success.<sup>9</sup>

Lenin's summary claims in 1919-1920 about Bolshevik triumph were not, it's to be emphasized, self-serving hindsight or the making of virtue out of necessity. Again, of utmost importance, he previewed in 1906 the strategy that he by and large later employed.



V.I. Lenin.

Lisa Lyons

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Voting fetishism, owing to its language, has the potential utility, as labels can, for bringing quick clarity and sobriety to the essence of the political process: the actual exercise of power with all that matters.

Raymond Geuss, who seeks to wean political philosophy away from its normative/ethical bent and toward the actuality of politics, particularly, its power dimension, considers — not surprisingly for readers of Part One of this essay — Lenin to be a paragon of political realism. Most exemplary about Lenin, Geuss argues, was his penchant for and ability to hone in on what he calls the “who whom” question, effectively, “Who (does) what to whom for whose benefit?”<sup>10</sup> In other words, as Geuss underscores, the sense of “partisanship” that Lenin brought to “the class struggle,” and complemented by his understanding of “timing in political action.”<sup>11</sup>

Though it is unlikely that Geuss was familiar with Lenin’s 1919 article on the Constituent Assembly elections, specifically his concluding 10 theses, the ninth of them captures his points perfectly:

*“To achieve victory, the proletariat must, first, choose the right moment for its decisive assault on the bourgeoisie, taking into account, among other things, the disunity between the bourgeoisie and its petty-bourgeois allies, or the instability of their alliance, and so forth. Secondly, the proletariat must, after its victory, utilise this vacillation of the petty bourgeoisie in such a way as to neutralise them, prevent their siding with the exploiters; it must be able to hold on for some time in spite of this vacillation, and so on, and so forth.”<sup>12</sup>*

Contrary to Geuss’s claim that Lenin had “no theory” about timing, what he offered in the ninth thesis, along with above quoted comment in 1918 about how the soviet elections in September and October in 1917 informed the Bolsheviks about when to take power, comes awfully close to being one.<sup>13</sup> That Lenin ended his article with a set of “theses” lends credence to the point.

Not to be forgotten, lastly, is the tenth thesis, namely, about voting in the revolutionary party itself. Democratic centralism for Lenin enabled, to employ the language proposed here, the majority not only to register its preferences but, most importantly, impose its will, that is, exercise power.

## Consequential Lessons from Elsewhere

While Marx and Engels were being initiated into electoral politics, abolitionists on the other side of the Atlantic, where universal white male suffrage had uniquely long been in place, were grappling, as noted in Part One of this essay, with the lesser/evil electoral conundrum. For the abolitionist leader and former slave Frederick Douglass the priority was emancipation in order that most Black men, namely, those who resided in the slaveholding South, would be able to exercise the right to vote for the first time. “Slavery is not abolished,” he declared shortly after the surrender of the Confederacy, “until the black man has the ballot.”

A year later, as the Reconstruction process was underway, “give to,” he demanded, “every loyal citizen the effective franchise — a right and power which will be ever present, and [it] will form a wall of fire for his protection.” Suffrage for Douglass was “the keystone to the arch of human liberty.”<sup>14</sup>

A one-time Georgia slave owner but loyal Unionist had a different opinion about what was required to reconstruct the South. Together with Black activist Aaron Bradley, a Boston migrant, Charles Hopkins sought to forge an alliance of poor whites and the once-enslaved to confiscate plantation lands and redistribute them amongst the toilers themselves.

Hopkins, who knew the former slave-owning class better than anyone, was prescient in November 1865 in an interview. “Give a man a piece of land, let him have a cabin of his own upon his own lot, and then you make him free. Civil rights are good for nothing, the ballot is good for nothing, till you make some men of every class landholders.”<sup>15</sup>

Subsequent events tragically confirmed Hopkins’s forecast. Except for Thaddeus Stevens in the House of Representatives, and perhaps Charles Sumner in the Senate, no other liberal voices in the North, including Douglass’s, championed what Hopkins and Bradley sought to realize.<sup>16</sup>

The consequences of the failure of a land reform for the formerly enslaved became painfully clear to Douglass decades later. How to explain, he asked in his 1893 autobiography, why Reconstruction had been overthrown and the Jim Crow regime established?

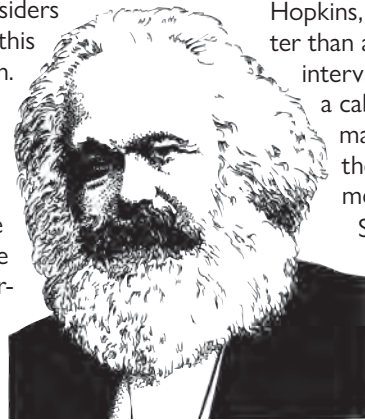
*“I will tell you. Our reconstruction measures were radically defective. They left the former slave completely in the power of the old master ... To the freedmen was given the machinery of liberty, but there was denied to them the steam to put it into motion ... They were called free but left almost slaves. The old master class was not deprived of the power of life and death which was the soul of the relation of master and slave. He who could say to his fellow-man, ‘You shall serve me or starve’ is a master and his subject is a slave. This was seen and felt by Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner and leading Republicans; and had their counsels prevailed the terrible evils from which we now suffer would have been averted.”<sup>17</sup>*

Douglass, afflicted with voting fetishism, had mistaken the democratic right to vote with the actual exercise of political power and apparently recognized, when it was too late, the error of that assumption.

**M**arx, on the other hand, would have understood the import of Hopkins’ warning about the nexus between power and private property. “Communism,” as he and Engels explained in their *Manifesto* almost two decades earlier, “deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation.”

So long, in other words, as former slaveowners continued to own their plantations they would have “the power to subjugate” the formerly enslaved. “You shall serve me or starve,” as Douglass later admitted about the power of property. Sometime in 1917 Lenin wrote, “in politics, it’s not intentions that count, but deeds, not good intentions but facts, not the imaginary but the real.”

To be fair to Douglass, Marx had another head start advantage on the abolitionist when chattel slavery ended in 1865. Fifteen years earlier, the 1848 Revolutions clearly and soberly revealed the limits of the ballot. In June 1848 (see Part One of this essay), thousands of the Parisian proletariat were slain for staging an insurgency.



Karl Marx.

Lisa Lyons

The termination of the world's first unemployment program, instituted by the first iteration of a social-democratic government, the one that issued from the February Revolution, provoked the uprising. That same government ended the program as well as organized the slaughter.

Many if not most of the slain, no doubt, had recently voted in the April/May elections for the Constituent Assembly, the first elections — at least in any major country — conducted on the basis of universal manhood suffrage. The irony *could not have been more instructive.*

“Universal suffrage,” Marx declared two years later in his first balance sheet on the French edition of the European Spring, provided “the terrain” for the proletariat’s “revolutionary emancipation, but by no means the emancipation itself.”

Though valuable, the ballot was only a means for proletarian liberation and not the end. But the subsequent constitutional establishment of universal male suffrage, Marx argued, created an inherently unstable political situation in France.

“The fundamental contradiction of this constitution . . . consists in the following: The classes whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate—proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie — it puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage. And from the class whose old social power it sanctions, the bourgeoisie, it withdraws the political guarantees of this power. It forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment help the hostile classes to victory and jeopardize the very foundations of bourgeois society. From the first group it demands that they should not go forward from political to social emancipation; from the others that they should not go back from social to political restoration.”<sup>18</sup>

Suffrage for the proletariat, at least in that moment, was, therefore, incompatible with the constitutional inviolability of the private ownership of the means of production.

Something had to give, and Marx was prescient. Two months later France’s parliamentary representatives of its bourgeoisie, no longer fearful of an insurgent Parisian proletariat, effectively ended the world’s first experiment in universal male suffrage. The slaughter and the end of universal suffrage, Marx contended in his more famous balance sheet, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, paved the way for the end of France’s Second Republic in 1852.

The real world of politics, Marx argued, taught that working class access to the ballot was not to be mistaken for the actual exercise of political power as long as bourgeois property relations prevailed.

It’s doubtful, however, that even if Douglass had known of Marx’s realist insight about suffrage, he would have embraced it. Though adamantly opposed to “property in persons,” Douglass never ceased his liberal endorsement of the sanctity of private property.<sup>19</sup> Tellingly, it was the “counter-revolution of property,” both “North and South,” explained W.E.B. Du Bois in his Marxist-inspired *magnum opus*, that brought Reconstruction to a bloody end.<sup>20</sup>

## Limitations of the Ballot

Almost exactly a century later during the Second Reconstruction, the reality of the ballot challenged the Frederick Douglass of his day. In the last year of his life Martin Luther King, Jr. declared on several occasions that racial equal-

ity in the United States would require “a radical redistribution of economic and political power.”<sup>21</sup>

King didn’t live long enough to elaborate on his epiphany but a speech eight months before his assassination suggests the trajectory of his thinking. To the American Psychological Association in September 1967, King chided recent political science research which concluded that “voting is not the key that will unlock the door to racial equality because ‘the concrete measurable pay-offs from Negro voting in the South will not be revolutionary.’”

Other research about the North had also concluded that owing to ‘the structure of American politics as well as the nature of the Negro community, Negro politics will accomplish only limited objectives.’ King commented on these findings:

*“If their conclusion can be supported, then the major effort Negroes have invested in the past 20 years has been in the wrong direction and the major pillar of their hope is a pillar of sand. My own instinct is that these views are essentially erroneous, but they must be seriously examined.”*<sup>22</sup>

Like Douglass, then, King too seems to have suffered from voting fetishism. But less than a week before his assassination, King, as if channeling the latter-day Douglass, offered his explanation for why the ballot had not been the expected panacea for racial equality.

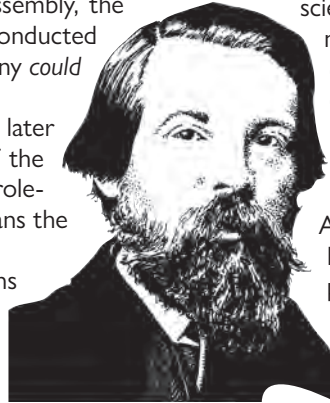
*“In 1863 the Negro was told that he was free as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation being signed by Abraham Lincoln. But he was not given any land to make that freedom meaningful. It was something like keeping a person in prison for a number of years and suddenly discovering that that person is not guilty of the crime for which he was convicted. And you just go up to him and say, ‘Now you are free,’ but you don’t give him any bus fare to get to town. You don’t give him any money to get some clothes to put on his back or to get on his feet again in life.”*<sup>23</sup>

Had Douglass been alive to hear King’s complaint, discomfort would likely have been his reaction. After all, little did he do, if anything, to ensure that the once enslaved be “given any land to make [their] freedom meaningful.

Unlike Douglass, King, the social democrat, however, was open to limited nationalization of private property. But in another speech in the last year of his life, August 1967, he made clear what that *did not* mean.

It’s worth reproducing in full what he had to say to the responsive audience at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, according to the full transcript, given that in some quarters today the claim is made that at the end of his life King had become a revolutionary with his call for “a radical redistribution of economic and political power.” King demurred.

*“Now, don’t think you have me in a bind today. I’m not talking about communism. What I’m talking about is far beyond communism. (Yeah) My inspiration didn’t come from Karl Marx (Speak); my inspiration didn’t come from Engels; my inspiration didn’t come from Trotsky; my inspiration didn’t come from Lenin. Yes, I read [the] Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital a long time ago (Well), and I saw that maybe Marx didn’t follow Hegel enough. (All right) He took his dialectics, but he left out his idealism and his spiritualism. And he went over to a German philosopher by the*



Frederick Engels.

Lisa Lyons

name of Feuerbach and took his materialism and made it into a system that he called 'dialectical materialism.' (Speak) I have to reject that."<sup>24</sup>

The civil rights leader, apparently, rejected the Marxist project — at least as he understood it at that moment — and, thus, a revolutionary road to racial equality, not unlike Douglass. Indisputable about King's political trajectory in his last years was the reality of a political system rooted in the private ownership of the means of production that sobered him about the limits of voting — what Lenin's realist understanding of elections teaches. Whether King would have eventually embraced, unlike Douglass,<sup>25</sup> the revolutionary implications of that sobriety, we'll, alas, never know.

**N**inety miles away at almost the same time that King joined the fight for the Second Reconstruction, a project to abolish social inequality had recently begin in a Caribbean country where, as in the United States, racial slavery once prevailed.

The armed attack that Fidel Castro led on July 26, 1953, was in response to the March 1952 *coup d'état* that overthrew an elected government, carried out by one-time Cuban president and general Fulgencio Batista. After 25 months of guerrilla warfare that culminated in a mass strike of more than a million Cubans on January 1, 1959, Batista's dictatorship was finally overthrown. Within two years, Cuba's working class effectively constituted its new ruling class.

At first glance, Lenin's strategy for employing the electoral/parliamentary process for proletarian ascent — again, only as a *means rather than as an end* — was inapplicable in Cuba's case where armed struggle proved determinant. But a close read of his 10 theses in his 1919 "Constituent Assembly Elections" article says otherwise.

Rather than rely on an election to determine majority will, "let the revolutionary party first overthrow the bourgeoisie... [and] then gain the sympathy and support of the majority of the non-proletarian working people by satisfying their needs at the expense of the exploiters" — the *fifth* thesis. Elections, as Engels once taught, were an invaluable "thermometer" to take the temperature of the class struggle to determine *when* to employ armed struggle.<sup>26</sup>

Lenin previewed his perspective in 1906, namely, the employment of the parliamentary arena to determine "the right moment for an insurrection . . . to prepare for a military offensive" for "the overthrow of the autocratic government and the transfer of power to the revolutionary people." What transpired in Cuba between the first of January 1959 and the end of summer 1960 was, I contend, the essence of Lenin's strategy without the electoral/parliamentary trappings.

Three decades later on the anniversary of the beginning of that process, Castro explained what had taken place.

"How did our people become a socialist people? It was the revolutionary laws more than words, preaching, or reasoning that made our people socialist. When rents were cut, which profoundly affected the interests of those landlords, the entire people supported the measure. When the agrarian reform was carried out the entire people supported the decision. The interests of the workers

were taken care of. Social justice was implemented with a strong hand from one end of the country to the other. For the first time in our country's history, the state and the government ceased being on the side of the rich and put themselves on the side of the poor. When the vast majority of our population saw that the government resolutely attacked the interests of the rich and the bourgeoisie to support the people, little by little all those lies and that whole anti-socialist and anticommunist campaign came tumbling down like a house of cards. In this way a new political thinking, a true political awareness was created among our people."

Armed with state power, the new Cuban government began within months of the overthrow of the old regime, as Lenin would have put it, "satisfying" the "needs" of the toilers "at the expense of the exploiters." Therefore, when it came time for them to defend their gains with the most efficacious kind of voting, their feet, they enthusiastically did so — not unlike what Russia's workers and peasants did four decades earlier in successfully defending their conquests against the Western-backed White counter revolutionary armies. The mercenaries that Washington backed in 1961 to overthrow the new government, the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion, were soundly defeated in less than 72 hours.

The newly enfranchised toilers — substantively and not just formally with their newly won social rights — were able to do something more profoundly consequential than merely registering their preferences. Rather, they were exercising power, imposing their will in defense of their revolution.

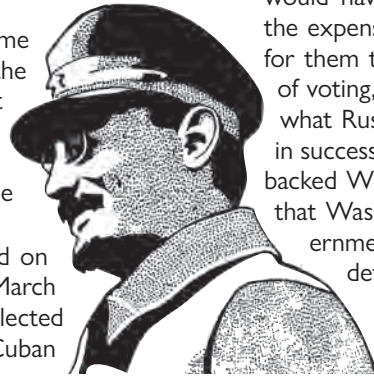
Exactly because what occurred in Cuba was done without knowledge of the Bolshevik road to power makes its outcome all so significant. The two most consequential, arguably, revolutions of the twentieth century were done in a remarkably similar way: the armed overthrow of the bourgeoisie followed immediately by measures to win over most of the toilers by "satisfying their needs" — the essence of Lenin's fifth thesis.

The process that Castro led never employed the electoral/parliamentary arenas to take power. To do, as Lenin had done — the political education and "count[ing] forces" to determine the most opportune moment to wage armed struggle — was excluded under Batista's dictatorial rule.<sup>27</sup>

But even if that option had been possible, Castro was right to think, as Lenin had pointed out in the fifth thesis, that taking power via the electoral road was "the rare exception in history and even in such an exception the bourgeoisie can resort to civil war, as the example of Finland showed."<sup>28</sup> Castro could have pointed to at least three examples in Latin America in which Washington's CIA was involved, between 1948 and 1973 — Colombia, Guatemala, Chile — in either preventing the election of, or overthrowing, democratically-elected progressive governments.<sup>29</sup>

Noteworthy in the latter two was the failure of the progressive forces once in office to "overthrow the bourgeoisie, break the yoke of capital, and smash the bourgeois state apparatus" and then move "rapidly to gain the sympathy and support of the majority of the non-proletarian working people by satisfying their needs at the expense of the exploiters." The failure to do so facilitated the counter-revolutionary forces.

To recognize what happened in Cuba is not to make virtue out of necessity. Numerous opportunities did exist in Cuba and elsewhere in the hemisphere to do what Lenin advocated.



Leon Trotsky.

Lisa Lyons

The efficacy of the revolutionary process could have been enhanced had those opportunities been taken advantage of. It also would have lowered the human toll that came with the fetishization of the guerrilla road to power, as in Colombia.

Tragically, the precious lessons that Lenin bequeathed were unknown — owing to the betrayal of both Social Democracy and Stalinism — to radicalizing youth not only in Cuba but those elsewhere who were later inspired by Cuba's example.<sup>30</sup>

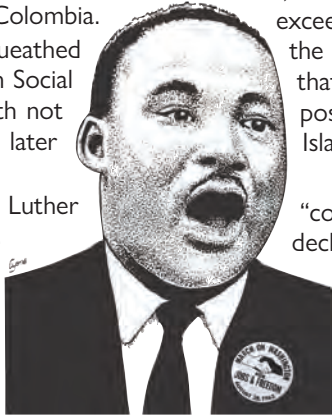
Sobered by the limitations of voting, Martin Luther King, Jr. had an epiphany at the end of his life. For the first time he clearly stated that only the "radical redistribution of economic and political power" would ensure racial equality in the United States. That's exactly what had taken place about five years earlier in Cuba.

For Cubans of African descent, the results of the "radical redistribution" were unprecedented, opportunities available to them they had never had. Nothing was as consequential for that achievement than the new government's abolition of private ownership of the means

of production.

Coupled with eliminating barriers to education and health-care, Afro-Cubans made advancements that qualitatively exceeded those of their distant relatives 90 miles to the North — and continue to do so.<sup>31</sup> No wonder that a vanguard layer of African Americans responded positively to what was in progress on the Caribbean Island, requiring King to issue a warning.

In the same speech in which King rejected "communism," Castro's guerrilla road to power, he declared, would not work in America. "Only through parliamentary activity," the not-so-subtle message, could radical social transformation be achieved in America. Social democracy à la Kautsky, hence, accurately describes King's politics at the end of his life if not before.



Martin Luther King, Jr. Lisa Lyons

King could be forgiven — perhaps — for thinking that there was no alternative to the "parliamentary road to socialism." Just as for progressive forces and aspiring revolutionaries in

## Notes

- Geuss, "Realism, Wishful Thinking, Utopia," *Political Uses of Utopia*, eds. S.D. Chrostowska and James D. Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
- Lenin Collected Works (LCW)*, 30: 265-67.
- Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 42-50.
- Geuss (2008) points out that what someone like Abrams may be doing here is ideological, the misrepresentation of political reality for political ends, the co-optation, as in this case, of a mass movement into the mainstream political process (50-55).
- LCW*, 30: 265-67.
- I recognize that those who vote may do so for reasons other than the intent to exercise power, for example, to be a good citizen — the answer to "the paradox of voting" (see W. Phillips Shively and David Schultz, *Power and Choice* [Langham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022], 252-53).
- Jacob S. Hacker and Jonathan D. Cohen, "GDP and the Dow are Up. But What About American Well-Being?" *Wall Street Journal*, April 27-28, 2024.
- I'm indebted to my colleague, political economist James Hollyer, who thinks that the concept is original, first introduced in my 2014 *Lenin's Electoral Strategy*, vol. 2 (NY: Palgrave Macmillan), 182 — thus, three years before Noah Rothman's "The Left's Voting Fetish," *Commentary*, May 23, 2017.
- See, Part One, ATC #231, 34-35 for details.
- Geuss, 2008, 25.
- Ibid*, 29-31.
- LCW* 30, 274.
- See Part One, ATC #231, 34.
- Nimtz and Edwards, forthcoming, 209, 231.
- Robert Braxton, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Georgia, 1865-1870: Charles Hopkins, Aaron Bradley, and the Union Leagues*, M.A.Thesis, Georgia State University, 2023: 89. Braxton's Thesis, as of this writing, is being readied for book publication.
- Eric Foner notes "Bradley emerged as one of the few black leaders from the North to become actively involved in freedmen's land struggles," *Reconstruction* (New York, 1988: 290. Though Wendell Phillips, as early as 1863, supported land confiscation and redistribution, that demand, in his mind, took a back seat to voting rights by the time the 15th Amendment was ratified. See James Brewer, *Stewart Wendell Phillips* (New York, 1986): 247-94-
- Henry Louis, ed. *Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1994: 932-3. See Philip Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1955: 32). For the "heavily edited" speech included as an appendix in Douglass's *Life and Times*, see Gates 1994: 925-37. For the contemporaneous account of the speech and details about the version included in *Life and Times*, see John Blassingame and John McKivigan *The Frederick Douglass Papers* (New Haven, Conn., 1991: 562-81)..
- Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW)*, 10: 45, 79.
- And perhaps for good reason. See "Frederick Douglass, Slum Landlord?" *New North Star*, 2023:5.
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Ch. XIV <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umn/reader.action?docID=5824856&ppg=509>
- Southern Christian Leadership Conference leadership meeting at Frogmore, South Carolina, May 1967: King 1967b and online at <https://kairoscenter.org/mlk-frogmore-staff-retreat-speech-anniversary/>. See also, King's interview with NBC News in May 1967, King 1967a and online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xsb3a7K-8>. As well, his speech to the SCLC Convention in Atlanta in August 1967, Washington 1991, 245-52.
- <https://www.apa.org/topics/equity-diversity-inclusion/martin-luther-king-jr-challenge>. That none of the researchers who King cited ever bothered, it seems, to discuss their

findings with him speaks volumes about the then academy and political science in particular.

- <https://www.dc1968project.com/blog/2018/3/31/31-march-1968-mlk-speaks-at-national-cathedral>
- <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/where-do-we-go-here>. This seems to be the transcript of the entire speech. Other versions omit the details reproduced here as, for example, Howard-Pitney, 154. The speech is conspicuously absent in Peniel E. Joseph's *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr*, but it provides evidence that King did read what he claimed when a student at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, Joseph 2020, 60. Membership, past or present, in the Communist Party USA was incompatible, King made clear in a letter to Jack O'Dell, with a staff position in his network. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/19/us/jack-odell-dead.html>
- On Douglass's rejection of the Marxist project, see August H. Nimtz and Kyle A. Edwards, *The Communist and the Revolutionary Liberal in the Second American Revolution: Comparing Karl Marx and Frederick Douglass in Real-Time* (Leiden: Brill 2024), Appendix A.
- See Part One, 31.
- At the time of Batista's coup in March 1952 Castro was a National Assembly candidate of the Orthodox Party, thus precluding a future electoral career for him.
- LCW* 30, 273. For details about the Finnish events, see note 81, 552-53.
- In 1948 in Colombia, events that the 20-year old Castro actually witnessed, 1954 in Guatemala, and 1973 in Chile.
- To understand why see Joseph Hansen, "The seven errors made by Che Guevara (1969)," *Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution: A Marxist Appreciation* (New York, 2023): 323-32.
- See Nimtz, "Natural versus Social Phenomena: Cuba and the Lessons of Katrina." *The Black Scholar*, Winter 2006, Vol. 36, No. 4: "Why There Are No George Floyds in Cuba," *Legal Form* (Blog), June 17, 2020
- <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1920/1115-debs-why-not-stronger.pdf>
- <https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1911/danger.htm>
- Nimtz, *The Ballot, the Streets or Both: From Marx and Engels to Lenin and the October Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019)
- The author's "The Bolsheviks Come to Power," *Science & Society* (Oct. 2017), purports to be a corrective.
- Lenin's 10 theses in the 1919 article are included as an appendix in the book (Appendix H) but their significance gets lost in a welter of other details in the main text. Appendix I consists of the 1920 Comintern Theses on Parliamentarism which is exclusively about "revolutionary parliamentary," that is, how communists should conduct themselves once elected to parliaments and other bourgeois representative bodies.
- An important topic about Debs that can only be mentioned here was his failure to see the need for a Bolshevik-like combat party — exactly the point Lenin makes a case for in his 10th thesis in his 1919 article. In the opinion of critics like Farrell Dobbs, *Revolutionary Continuity, 1918-1922* (New York, 2007: 163-65), Debs could have sorely benefited from that advice.
- Neither foe nor friend, as far as I can tell, has ever done so. In, for example, the third volume, *Revolution Besieged, 1917-1923* (Chicago, 2012: 36-37) of Tony Cliff's "friendly" homage to Lenin, the theses merit about a page and a half but without any reference to Lenin's 1906 article that previewed his argument. In foe Robert Service's three volumes, *Lenin: A Political Life* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1985-1995), nary a mention.

Latin America, their cohorts to the north knew nothing about Lenin's "revolutionary parliamentarism."

Debs, whose four Socialist Party presidential campaigns became the template for most subsequent socialist-like electoral campaigns in America, embraced, to his credit, the Bolshevik Revolution to the end. "I need not say," he famously wrote from prison in 1920, "that I am heart and soul with our Russian comrades and the Soviet Republic. Lenin and Trotsky are colossal figures and their marvelous achievements have struck terror to the ruling class and inspired the workers of all the world."<sup>32</sup>

But informing, alas, Debs' understanding of the Marxist position on how the working class should take power was Kautsky's "catechism," wisdom, that is, before the Bolshevik ascent in 1917.

Debs had been insistent, also to his credit, as he explained in a 1911 speech, that socialist campaigns should not simply be about "a bait for votes," "vote-seeking for the sake of votes" but rather for "a means of education. . . [a way] to register the actual vote of socialism, no more no less . . . Voting for socialism is not socialism any more than a menu is a meal."

Exactly for those reasons, Socialist Party campaigns needed to be honest about its politics in order to make clear how it differed from "capitalist parties."<sup>33</sup> Marx, Engels, and Lenin would have been in agreement with all that Debs said, including his realist sensibility about the ballot.

But missing in Debs' admonishments was any indication of how elections would lead to the "dictatorship of the proletariat," namely, the working class in power, imposing its will as Lenin would have expressed it. By omission, therefore, Debs ended up subscribing to Kautsky's parliamentary road to socialism nostrum.

This author's *The Ballot, the Streets or Both?*<sup>34</sup> purports to present a comprehensive account and defense of Lenin's electoral and parliamentary strategy. Unlike for Social Democracy, both arenas, it argues, should be only, as for Lenin, a *means* rather than an end for proletarian ascent. "Revolutionary parliamentarism" as opposed, in his language, to "reformist parliamentarism."

The kernels of wisdom that Marx and Engels bequeathed in the "Address of 1850" — elections as a means to an end, to do political education and "to count their forces" — informed, the book also argues, Lenin's perspective. But in making that case, the book tends to short-shrift the end that Lenin sought: *the overthrow of the bourgeois state in order to ensure the rule of the proletariat*. This was exactly what was missing in Debs' Kautskyst-informed understanding of the electoral/parliamentary process.<sup>35</sup>

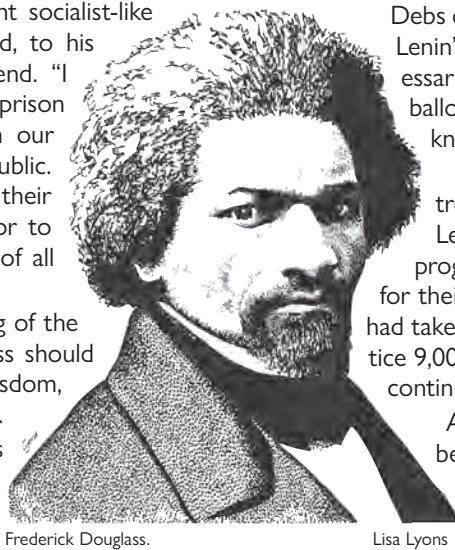
A reread of *The Ballot, the Streets or Both?* reveals that amidst all the rich details about Lenin's electoral and parliamentary activities between 1906 and 1917 there were two all-so-rich dots I failed to connect. Specifically, Lenin's preview of his revolutionary parliamentary perspective in 1906, namely, Duma work as a means "to prepare for a military offensive," and his 1919 theses about the same task, the indispensable continuity that informed the Bolsheviks and, thus, explaining their success

in leading the working-class ascent to state power for the first time anywhere in the world.<sup>36</sup> That's the intended key take-away for those who are inspired to do the same.

Debs can surely be forgiven for not knowing about Lenin's revolutionary parliamentarism and its necessarily concomitant realist perspective about the ballot. How Debs would have responded had he known can only be a subject for speculation.<sup>37</sup>

This essay is probably the first serious treatment, in any language, that connects Lenin's theses to Marx's and Engels's historical program. Most importantly, it offers evidence for their continuing validity.<sup>38</sup> Independent of what had taken place in Russia, they were realized in practice 9,000 miles away and four decades later — with continuing consequences.

As well as presenting what is intended to be an original Marxist perspective on the suffrage, this essay corrects, hopefully, an unintended rendering of communist politics by the author about how the proletariat can employ the electoral and parliamentary arenas. Both were, as the *Communist Manifesto* puts it, "weapons" the bourgeoisie had once employed for its ascendancy that the proletariat could do the same for itself. ■



Frederick Douglass.

Lisa Lyons

## Genocide Normalized? By David Finkel

THERE ARE ENDLESS "ceasefire talks" rumors, but no ceasefire in Gaza. There are plentiful words from Washington and especially Kamala Harris that "too many civilians have died," but the slaughter — and destruction of what's left of Gaza — continues.

As U.S. media coverage shifted to the twin circuses of the election and the Olympics, it became increasingly hard to avoid the sense that the U.S.-supplied-and-enabled Israeli genocide is becoming normalized. That's an incredibly dangerous development. Although happening mostly off-camera and away from prime cable network commentary, the unfolding reality in Palestine and Israel should be deeply shocking — far beyond the hugely undercounted quasi-official 40,000 death toll.

You'd think that U.S. journalists would be stunned by Israel's systematic killing of over 100 of their Palestinian colleagues, many deliberately target in their homes, along with their families. Whatever U.S. reporters' feelings may be, they're apparently not allowed to voice them on air.

At an Israeli detention facility called Sde Teiman in the West Bank, it's been revealed that 44 prisoners, including captives from Gaza, have died under conditions of malnutrition, medical neglect and physical torture. Nine Israeli soldiers were taken into custody for questioning. In response, rightwing mobs — including Knesset members and even ministers in the governing coalition — broke into the facility where the soldiers were held, attempting to "rescue the heroes."

The penetration of the genocidal mentality into the Israeli army and reserve units certainly helps account for the killing of over 600 West Bank Palestinians in the 10 months since last October 7. Militant Palestinian resistance also appears to be growing.

At the same time, prime minister Netanyahu is renewing his "judicial coup" project to take control of the court system — the issue that brought tens of thousands of protesters into the streets of Israeli cities every week before October 7 changed everything.

While U.S. media are consumed with speculation over an "all-out Middle East regional war," the largely ignored story is that the slaughter in Palestine continues and quite predictably feeds straight back into Israeli society's slide toward semi-fascism and theocracy. ■

# REVIEW

## Colonial Myth, Reality & Modernity By Robert Connell

### Born in Blackness:

Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War

By Howard W. French

W.W. Norton (Liveright). 544 pages.

2021 hardback, 2024, paperback \$19.95.

HOWARD W. FRENCH'S *Born in Blackness* provides a sprawling, 500-page account of the fateful engagement between Europe and "Sub-Saharan"<sup>1</sup> Africa, laying out the argument that their twinned and tragic history set the foundations for the modern age. (3)

French constructs the main narrative arc of the story by recounting a broad sample of the historical scholarship on this multifaceted subject, threaded through with the experiences and insights of his own travels across the Atlantic World, often personally visiting the sites most prominently featured in the book.

The narration keeps an active pace and, relatively free from the conventions of purely academic historical writing, is able to walk the reader through an otherwise labyrinthine story with an elegant focus that avoids becoming too bogged down with data and minutiae.

Nonetheless, the vastness of the subject matter covered in the book is such that this review will focus mainly on elaborating the political economic dimensions of French's analysis. I choose this emphasis because, while marketed as a history of the African diaspora and Atlantic World, *Born in Blackness* is as much a history of labor, both challenging and extending traditional Marxist views on the origins of the working class by centering the indispensable role of enslaved workers in the rise of capitalism and the empires that fostered it.<sup>2</sup>

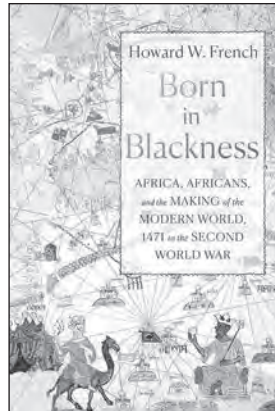
Thus, in offering an implicitly historical materialist view of the intersections of slavery and capitalism, French follows through on historian Stephanie Smallwood's prescient imperative to "put the enslaved human herself at the center of our analysis of the commodity form."<sup>3</sup>

### Colonial Narratives

Ultimately, the book incites its readers

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to reconsider dominant narratives and much received wisdom about how the last 600 years unfolded via the supposed advances of Europe and marginality of Africa in the Atlantic World.

Classroom

lessons and traditional studies on the subject usually present this history as variations of the following tropes: beginning in the late 15th century, European seafarers, harnessing the most advanced nautical technology of the time while possessing a spirit of creativity and initiative unique to their cultures, launched an era of exploration exemplified by Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of the New World. (1-2)

Going from victory to victory, the *conquistadores* forged vast empires on the backs of the invariably primitive societies they encountered, all of whom were awed and cowed by the overwhelming superiority of European commodities and armaments.

From the vantage of empire, Europe would further expand its global lead in thought and ingenuity, so we are told, inevitably paving the way for the industrial revolution. If Africa is mentioned at all in such narratives, it is usually only discussed as a source of slaves and/or a mere stepping stone in the Portuguese quest to reach India, the supposed prime objective of European exploration.

French's book exposes such hagiographies for the myths that they are, and in so doing stands as an important review of more recent and emerging scholarship that re-center Africans and their diasporic descendants as indispensable and decisive actors in the rise of European hegemony.

This book is all the more timely given the unfortunate persistence of the flawed and still-prevailing colonial historical narrative. Popular historical consciousness still understands pre-colonial West, Central and Southern Africa as isolated places devoid of history before sustained contact with Europeans. (70)

Indeed, this was a long-held consensus

among Western academics that continues to have strong influence today; certain public intellectuals, echoing the discourse of "civilizing missions" and the "White Man's Burden," still argue that colonialism benefited the continent despite any regrettable violence entailed.<sup>4</sup>

### Africa's Global Influence

It is fitting then that French begins his expansive historical narrative in a medieval West African polity that was greatly influential across three continents, the Mali Empire.

Mansa Musa, King of Mali during the height of its power in the early 14th century, is well known for his epic sojourn in Cairo and pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324. Sitting atop some of the largest known gold deposits in the world at the time, the immense wealth of Mali allowed Mansa Musa to expend and gift so much gold on his journey that he singlehandedly caused the price of the metal to plummet in the Middle East. (30)

Mansa Musa's otherworldly largesse cemented his legacy as perhaps the wealthiest person in history. Word spread fast, and news of the existence of an empire with immeasurable riches electrified European royal courts, who were themselves emerging from multiple disastrous crises.

Prime among these was the Black Death pandemic, which in the 13th century had killed between one-third and three-fifths of the population of Western Europe. This depopulation event contributed to a dramatic loss of output in local silver mines which, combined with the loss of access to gold normally acquired from North African traders, created a severe balance of payment crisis for European feudal regimes. (50)

It is little wonder that European monarchs saw opening direct trade relations with a land of fabled wealth as the solution to their problems. As it turned out, it would be the Iberian powers of Portugal and Spain most well-placed to make good on this dream, with their adaptation of Arabian sailing technology and cartography allowing for trans-oceanic travel.

Even here, the Europeans did not have a distinct advantage or insight that gave them an inevitable edge over any other societies at the time. French notes that Chinese Ming Dynasty expeditions under Admiral Zheng He, Malay explorers of the Indian Ocean, and indigenous navigators of the South Pacific had already accomplished marvelous feats of discovery by the time the Iberians began to

sail down the west coast of Africa in the 15th century. (37-38)

In fact, French recounts the intriguing possibility that, a century and half before Columbus, Mansa Musa's own predecessor may have perished leading a Malian fleet attempting to cross the Atlantic in search of new trade opportunities. The failure of this endeavor possibly sparked Mansa Musa's own famous overland travel to the Arab world as another means of establishing new trade routes and alliances.

The point here is that medieval states invariably had a desire to secure and expand lucrative trade routes for scarce commodities and resources. French persuasively argues that it was the desperation for West African gold that sparked and motivated the Iberian "Age of Discovery," rather than the popular myth that reaching Asia was always the main objective. (38-39)

By the time the Portuguese finally reached what they would call the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) in 1471, the Mali Empire was in decline, but the Europeans still had to deal with the local kingdoms as equals and even with supplication.

Despite finally finding the proverbial "River of Gold," almost nothing the Portuguese brought to trade was new to West Africa, and at best they would make their profits filling local shortages in African manufacturing capacities and raw materials.(75)

French thus also debunks another myth of European superiority in the early days of Atlantic exploration: that Europeans had overwhelmingly superior or irresistible trade goods. As such, returns of gold fell short of Portuguese expectations, although the windfall was still transformative for the Portuguese economy with additional knock-on effects across Europe.

Furthermore, during this period Portugal succeeded in beating their Spanish rivals in a military struggle for monopoly over gold and trade in West Africa, a defeat that French argues spurred the Spanish to later support Columbus' mission as an attempt to make up for the loss of access to African wealth. (81-82)

### From Gold to Plantation Slavery

A major pivot for Portuguese dealings in Africa, and indeed the development of European imperialism as a whole, was the 1482 founding of the Elmina ("the mine") fortress on the coast of present-day Ghana. (79-80)

Although most infamous as a major embarkation point for enslaved captives during the transatlantic slave trade — now standing as a museum and memorial site that includes the "Door of No Return" through which the captives passed on their way to slave ships anchored offshore — the etymology of the castle's name reveals its original purpose as a conduit for African gold.



Slavery was critical to plantation agriculture — and the world economy. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en>)

At last, with a permanent outpost in on the West African coastline, the Portuguese would be able to accumulate and ship gold in much greater quantities and frequencies, fulfilling their dream of becoming among the wealthiest societies in Europe. This, in turn, would lay the foundation for another economic revolution, the mass production of sugar using enslaved labor:

*"Framed at its simplest, gold had led the Portuguese to slaves, and slaves drove the expansion of a lucrative new industry, sugar, which would transform the world like few products have in history, and in doing so would also produce one of history's greatest human tolls."* (66)

The human cost of slavery, the implication of both European and African elites in its expansion, and the still-unfolding social and ideological repercussions of this most dehumanizing form of subjection are increasingly being addressed in a growing corpus of academic literature. Here, French excels at incorporating into his narrative the latest research and scholarly debates therein.

In particular, French recounts the oft-ignored chain of events that saw 15th century Iberian experiments in sugar cane production in Madeira and the Canary Islands, worked by captives directly kidnapped from the shores of West Africa, metastasize into the foundation of a new mode of production that would accelerate European economic integration and lift the entire continent out of its long, medieval stagnation.

It was in this period that Elmina, sitting astride the Gulf of Guinea as the main entrepot of gold flowing into Europe, would become the catalyst of the Atlantic slave trade in the mid-16th century.

French's central argument in describing this world-historic pivot is that the development of the racial order that would influence the socio-economic structure of every New World colony is as much a story of São Tomé as it is Elmina. It was in this small, 330-square mile island in the Bight of Biafra at the east-

ern boundaries of the Gulf of Guinea where the plantation model of enslavement would reach its final, terrible form. (122)

In São Tomé, at the dawn of the 16th century, the Portuguese would systematize the basic organizational structure, inputs and logistical requirements for the mass production of sugar as a global commodity, a production chain experienced by the enslaved as an unremitting regime of kidnapping, terror and brutality.

The ethical abyss into which European societies plunged themselves for the pursuit of profit is laid bare, but the economic impact was similarly consequential. In the plantation system, larger concentrations of workers were used for the production and processing of sugar than any analogous endeavor in Europe up until that point. (116)<sup>5</sup>

Similarly unprecedented were the highly specialized roles and the intensive and regimented division of labor of the plantations, which were usually under the control of private enterprises.

The planting, harvesting, pressing, boiling and further refinement of sugar cane is highly time-sensitive and requires the efficient synchronization of labor and inputs necessitating a vertically-integrated commodity production chain that anticipated Taylorism and the modern assembly line. (206)

### Foundations of Industry and Finance

The multiplier effects of the plantation sugar industry, that is, spinoffs and ancillary businesses, gave rise to entirely new economic sectors and, as a newly affordable commodity available to all, laid the foundation for mass consumerism with profound consequences for European trade, labor productivity, leisure and health. (167)

Later in the history of slavery, the age of "Big Cotton" in the American antebellum period would similarly lay the foundations for global finance capitalism and modern business management. (393, 409-10)



French thus builds his case that the origins of both modern capitalism and industrialization are found in these proto-factories predicated on enslaved labor.

Over 200 years before the mechanization of English textile production, French argues, plantation slavery with all its interlocking nodes of globalized trade set the spark for industrial capitalism to emerge in Europe, enabled by both the wealth generated from sugar and the new and novel processes of (forced) labor organization therein.

Yet the historical and political consequences plantation slavery stretched still further. In their drive to purchase more and more enslaved captives to work the sugar plantations of São Tomé, and after 1500 in the new colony of Brazil, the Portuguese changed their diplomatic stance toward West African states.

In what would later become a *modus operandi* of colonialism the world over, the Portuguese shifted away from the mutually respectful trade relations forced on them by a relatively equal balance of power, and moved to foster divisions and warfare between African polities in order to fuel conflicts that would enslave increasing numbers of Africans, most of whom were prisoners of war.

Furthermore, the 17th century saw increasing competition among European states as the Dutch, English and French, driven by their own imperial ambitions, mounted a long series of wars against Portugal and Spain (which were united between 1580 and 1640 as the Iberian Union).

It was through this prolonged conflict, a quasi-world war, that French argues the modern European state was forged.

### The Making of Imperial States

The dominant historical narrative is that, for better or worse, the rulers of European polities created uniquely powerful states that gradually became more capable than any of their peers and rivals, thus allowing European empires to subjugate much of the world in the modern era.

While not denying this simple historical fact, French complicates this story by extending sociologist and political scientist Charles Tilly's maxim that "war makes states," arguing that the perennial intra-European conflicts and competition for colonies and slaves required the building of more capable states.

Rather than any uniquely-European social ingenuity or political wherewithal, it was the constant military preparation and waging of war that catalyzed the increasing organizational scale and complexity of civil institutions and statecraft.

For the benefit of the state's extractive power, manpower mobilization and force projection, new social contracts emerged that further expanded a citizen's duty to their state and vice-versa. As such, empire-building

in the Atlantic World was the crucible of the modern European state, not the other way around. The centrality of slavery to this dynamic is evidenced by the immense military and human sacrifices these states would expend in preserving their advantages in the plantation economy and slave trade.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, we arrive at among the most insidious and socially damaging outcomes of European colonial conquest: the racialization of chattel enslavement. In the 1440s, the Portuguese began their first, tepid slave raids on the coastline of newly-explored West Africa in order to feed the labor needs of their new, first-generation, sugar mills in Madeira.

According to French, this was the moment that the black skin color of the captives began to be associated with the supposed barbarity of Africans in European eyes which, combined with medieval Christian religious doctrines justifying the enslavement of "pagans," provided a juridical rationale for slavery. (69-70)

Although mainstream histories no longer justify slavery, the persistent popular myth of European superiority in the late medieval period continues to cloud and obfuscate the reality of the founding of the slave trade in public discourse.

The idea remains that Africans were somehow "stateless brutes" bereft of the means for collective defense such that, however regrettably, their societies were naturally or inevitably vulnerable to European predation.

The realities on the ground facing the Portuguese belied their own burgeoning racist beliefs: West Africans were, in fact, organized under kingdoms and formal chieftaincies governed by laws that were eminently able to defend themselves from Portuguese slave raiding — not only successfully repelling such attacks, but also imposing standards of conduct on the Portuguese through diplomatic pressure.

In the face of this, Prince Henry the Navigator was forced to halt all slave raiding in 1448. (71) However, many of these same West African polities, long-enmeshed in the Trans-Saharan Arab slave trade, were more than willing to sell slaves to the Portuguese so long as it was on their own terms.

### A Racialized System

With the rise of the São Tomé plantation model and its replication in the New World, Black complexion became the common marker of what was an otherwise ethnically-diverse labor force,<sup>7</sup> and thus the most convenient identification of slave status, where one's own skin automatically betrayed you as a slave and impeded escape. (125-6)

This technique of domination, predicated on the growing exclusivity of West Africa as a source for captive workers, ensured that the process of chattel enslavement at the dawn

of modernity in the Atlantic World was firmly racialized.

Here, French is quite correct in identifying the mobilization of human phenotypic difference as an essential part of the confluence of slave labor, global trade, industrial technology and colonial geopolitics that established the plantation system.

However, a discussion of the pre-modern ideological roots of Black subjection is surprisingly lacking from his analysis. The reader is left with the impression that the association of Blackness with servitude emerged specifically from the Portuguese exploration of West Africa. Yet historical research indicates that Europeans adopted Arab attitudes, mobilized within their own slave trade, linking Blackness with servitude.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the racist biblical myth of Noah's curse of Ham serving as justification for the perpetual enslavement of Black Africans is a trope found in all Abrahamic religions.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the association of the color black with sin and the Devil stretches back into early Christian culture.<sup>10</sup>

As such, in his otherwise expansive historical narrative, French misses an opportunity to articulate how traditional, religiously-bound conceptions of human difference and hierarchy were reproduced as anti-Black racism by the political economic and colonial dynamics of capitalism in its emergent period.

### Persistent Resistance

Returning to the unifying idea of the book, that the enslavement of Africans was the very "fulcrum of modernity" (394), the story would not be complete without centering the resistance of Africans and their descendants.

Africans migrating and being moved in chains is a narrative motif that threads through the book. On every step of this path, Africans ceaselessly fought back against their subjugation and enslavement, whether through the activities of their own polities to temper and limit the slave trade, or through personal actions of the enslaved to conduct sabotage or work slowdowns on the plantations, and also escape (marronage), rebellion, and revolution.

French elaborates these through three main examples: the diplomatic and military attempts of the Kingdom of Kongo which, albeit itself complicit in the slave trade, unsuccessfully attempted to restrict Portuguese colonialism in the 16th century; the Haitian Revolution at the turn of the 19th century; and the 1811 German Coast uprising in present-day Louisiana, the largest slave uprising in U.S. history.

In all these cases Africans and/or their creolized descendants demonstrated great capacities for organized leadership, strategic planning, visionary ambition and a keen understanding of their enemies, all the more impressive given the arduous conditions of

their struggle. (360-2) Furthermore, the contours of African slave resistance demonstrated a practice of freedom emergent from the Black experience itself. (337-8)

Here, especially given the book's theme of alternative pathways of history and modernity opened by Black struggle, it would have been greatly beneficial to his analysis had French discussed in more detail some of the new social formations that did emerge on the relatively rare occasions that Africans were successful in their uprisings.

In this respect, the socio-political developments of Maroon societies offer a rich terrain of investigation, of which the Maroon polity (Quilombo) of Palmares in Brazil is among the most consequential.

Organized as a complex, sovereign state on the fringes of the plantations in the present-day Brazilian state of Alagoas, Palmares existed for most of the 17th century as a bastion of freedom for the enslaved who managed to escape their captivity.

Practicing a form of social organization for the collective security of ethnically diverse communities adapted from the former Kingdom of Kongo in present-day Angola, Palmares held out until it was finally destroyed by a Portuguese onslaught in 1694.<sup>11</sup>

Most intriguingly, the population also consisted of indigenous people, Europeans and "poor free immigrants of all racial backgrounds" indicating that, whatever unknowns remain about Palmares, the society provided a life of freedom at least as compelling as the Portuguese Empire, even for people who were already free.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout his book, French demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the interdependence between the enslavement of Africans, European economic prosperity, the geopolitics of empire, and the foundational role of Portuguese colonialism therein, distilled in the formula "without Angola no slaves, without slaves no sugar, without sugar no Brazil." (165)

As such, it is a noted absence from his

analysis of slave resistance that for most of the 17th century, a hundred years before the Haitian Revolution, Brazilian Maroons harnessed distinct ideologies of freedom and multiracial citizenship born from African diasporic political experience.

More incredible, this alternative social vision was institutionalized within a state formation able to wage protracted armed struggle against a preeminent European power, thus undermining the white supremacist ideological and political foundations of the plantation system as a whole.

We can only wonder how the history of the Atlantic World would have unfolded had Palmares survived.

### Erasing the Erasure of Africa

Nonetheless, despite any absences or gaps in *Born in Blackness*, inevitable for any single volume attempting to cover 600 years of history, French succeeds remarkably in his overarching goal of contesting the "diminishment, trivialization, and erasure of Africans and of people of African descent from the story of the modern world." (3)

Through his persuasively woven narrative, French shows how it was the resilience and mental fortitude of Africans, their muscles and sinews, their adaptability, perspicacity and will to survive that positioned Black people as the harbingers of modernity and as powerful actors who made history, albeit under conditions not of their choosing.

The book is all the more impressive for covering such complex and expansive themes in a linguistically clear, efficient manner indicative of French's journalistic background, accessible to a general audience and knowledgeable non-specialists alike.

Finally, though not a stated objective of the book, *Born in Blackness* stands as an excellent primer on the importance of the movement for reparations. Although no single dollar amount could ever repay the unquantifiable sacrifice endured by Africans and their descendants in the building of

the modernity, the fact that Africa remains underdeveloped due to colonialism, and that the institutions and social hierarchies born in slavery still exist today in the Americas, make it imperative for anti-racist politics in the Atlantic World to demand comprehensive accountability and reparations.

Historical justice for Africans and their descendants remains as fraught and necessary a struggle as ever;<sup>13</sup> let this book stand as a reminder of why that fight is inextricable from the revolutionary work of building a new world. ■

### Notes

1. "Sub-Saharan" is a term, itself descending from more openly racist nomenclature, that should properly be jettisoned for its conceptual uselessness in encompassing such a vast and diverse region of the world. Following journalist Max de Haldevang's critique of the term, this review will use more accurate geographical markers to denote African regions. See: <https://cgt.columbia.edu/news/morris-larkin-still-use-term-sub-saharan-africa/>
2. For an analysis of the debate on racial capitalism within Marxist theory, see: Foster, John Bellamy, Hannah Holleman, and Brett Clark. 2020. "Marx and Slavery." *Monthly Review*, 96–121. [https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-072-03-2020-07\\_9](https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-072-03-2020-07_9)
3. [https://www.bostonreview.net/forum\\_response/stephanie-smallwood-what-slavery-tells-us/](https://www.bostonreview.net/forum_response/stephanie-smallwood-what-slavery-tells-us/)
4. See historian Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatshehi's article on whitewashing colonialism: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/2/26/colonialism-in-africa-empire-was-not-ethical>
5. At the apex of sugar cane production in the 18th century Caribbean it was not uncommon for plantations to have 2000 or more enslaved workers, a scale that British factories would not reach until the mid-19th century. (177)
6. To bring up one of the more memorable examples of European leaders knowing full well that the source of their power was grounded in slavery, French philosopher Voltaire noted that, in the wake of the Seven Years War with England in 1763, it was better to trade all of French Canada (which he derided as a "few acres of snow") for the comparatively minuscule plantation island of Guadeloupe.
7. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the dynamics of creolization that French extensively explores in his book. Suffice it to say that by "creole," French means "a distinctly new class of culturally and frequently racially mixed people who were the literal offspring of these sorts of [Afro-European] intercontinental contacts." (139)
8. Blackburn, Robin. 1997. "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 65-102. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2953313>
9. Goldenberg, David M. 2017. *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
10. Blackburn, 92.
11. Anderson, Robert Nelson. 1996. "The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 545–66. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00023889>
12. *Ibid.*, 559. For a more extensive treatment of the debate surrounding the socio-political contours of Palmares, a polity which left none of its own documentary evidence, see: Schwartz, Stuart B. "Rethinking Palmares: Slave Resistance in Colonial Brazil." In *Critical Readings on Global Slavery*, edited by Damian Alan Pargas & Felicia Roşu, 1294–1325. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004346611\\_041](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004346611_041)
13. Indeed, at the time of writing this review, there is an ongoing debate within the Portuguese government on reparations for its role transatlantic slavery and colonialism: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68916320>

### C.L.R. James on Race and Plantation Slavery

"(West Indians) wanted not only their freedom but to remove their masters and make themselves masters of the island..."

"Liberty means something to us that is very unusual. There were many generations of slaves in Africa, of that we are quite sure...But when we made the Middle Passage and came to the Caribbean we went straight into a modern industry — the sugar plantation — and there we saw that to be a slave was a result of our being black. A white man was not a slave..."

"(A)nd therefore in the history of the West Indies there is one dominant fact and that is the desire, sometimes expressed, sometimes unexpressed, but always there, the desire for liberty; the ridding oneself of the particular burden which is the special inheritance of the black skin. *If you don't know that about West Indian people you know nothing about them.*

"They have been the most rebellious people in history and that is the reason. It is because being a black man he was made a slave, and the white man, whatever his limitations, was a free subject ... able to do what he could in the community."

—C.L.R. James, from "The Making of the Caribbean People" (1966), in his collection *Spheres of Existence. Selected Writings*, Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980

# REVIEW

## Turning Left in the Heartland

### Forgotten Populists:

When Farmers Turned Left to Save Democracy

By Steve Babson

Mission Point Press, Traverse City, Michigan 2023, 65 pages with graphics, 8 x 11, \$14.95 paperback.

WHEN RETIRED DETROIT labor educator, author and union activist Steve Babson became exasperated by the casual use of the term *populism* to include both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump he decided to compile a short history with graphics, noting:

*"Populism' in today's a-historical rendering has become little more than a handy pejorative, a Halloween costume of dangerous and hidden potentials, used to vilify rowdy commoners when they challenge favored elites . . . many pundits will address any protest against elite opinion in the same scary costume. 'They must be populists! Circle the wagons!'" (48)*

*Forgotten Populists: When Farmers Turned Left to Save Democracy* aims to set the record straight by telling the story of the great revolt that was the Populist movement in the 1880s and '90s. It is a concise, popularly written narrative of an important chapter, and perhaps lost opportunity, in U.S. history.

The Populists arose as a movement of reform in the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction, a time that became known as the Gilded Age. Enormous profits had been made during the War by railroads and other industrial barons.

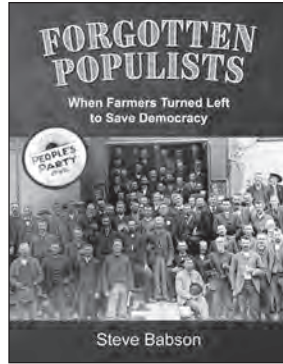
Nearly three-quarters of the nation's wealth was owned by only nine percent of U.S. families. But most of the country was made up of farmers. Two out of every three people were engaged in agriculture.

It was a time of enormous immigration. As millions poured into the country, while many joined the emerging industrial working class, more headed west and took up farming. These farmers found themselves at the mercy of railroads and industrial corporations.

An important component of the economy was its being tethered to gold, in Babson's phrase. A gold standard for currency, modeled on the system used in the British Empire, kept money expensive — too expensive for farmers.

The farmers themselves favored a silver standard and the issuance of paper "green-back" dollar bills backed by the Government, not metal. The farmers relied on loans every

*Lyle Fulks is a retired labor organizer and member of Solidarity.*



year to buy seed, feed, and equipment. Whether or not money was expensive was a kitchen table issue on the farm.

### Organizing for Survival

By the 1880s the

farmers began to organize themselves and some 10,000 local Farmers' Alliances were created. These were organized by a phalanx of circuit riders and covered much of the South and Midwest.

Soon a set of policy proposals began to precipitate from the farm crisis. A prominent idea was called the Sub-Treasury plan. This would allow farmers to temporarily store a harvest and based on the warehouse receipt they could qualify for publicly financed loans. Loans would also be made available to farmers utilizing the value of their land at low rates.

The Populists also proposed replacing privately owned National Banks with Post Office savings banks. With proposals like these the Farmers Alliances began to run candidates for public office and those candidates began to win. By 1892 a national Peoples Party was being organized. Babson reports:

*"Fifty populists won election to Congress from 16 states. Seven of them served in the U.S. Senate. A third of these congressmen were engaged full- or part-time in agriculture — four times more than the rest of Congress — and half had some college education. North Carolina, Oregon, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado all elected Populist governors. Populists and their allies passed legislation that included votes for women (Colorado and Idaho), the 8-hour day for state workers, regulation of railroads, and expansion of voting rights to include referendum and recall." (31)*

With their power base in the South and West, the Populists were nevertheless still unable to establish themselves across the country. Even in their strongholds they had to contend throughout the South with Democratic Party-inspired violence, voter suppression and fraud.

Still, the Populists looked forward to the 1896 elections to spread their support wider

By Lyle Fulks

across the country and deepen alliances with the labor movement. Sadly, none of that came to be.

### Strategic Error and Decline

The Populists made a fatal error in the run-up to the 1896 elections. Confident that the two capitalist parties would both nominate "goldbugs" (the name applied to supporters of the gold standard), the Populists determined to wait until the major parties announced their tickets.

That seemed a reasonable enough calculation given that the capitalist class was largely united behind gold — but not entirely. The Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan, an acknowledged reformer who opposed the gold standard. Bryan took the nomination after denouncing the money lending class who wanted to "crucify humanity on a cross of gold."

What would the Populists do at their convention — run independently, or endorse Bryan? Babson recounts:

*"The outcome was settled when left-wing Populists failed to persuade Eugene Debs to accept the party's nomination — Debs being the only 'name' candidate who might have matched Bryan's appeal at the party's nominating convention. After a riotous campaign marked by physical brawls between opposing delegates, the People's Party voted to endorse William Jennings Bryant — the Democrat — for President." (37-8)*

Bryan would turn to the silver mining companies to finance his campaign. Bryan rejected the Populist policy program, especially the Sub-treasury proposal which he had long opposed. The Populists found themselves out-maneuvered as the Democrats absorbed the Populist voters.

Supporters of conservative Republican William McKinley swamped the country with a massive anti-Populist-themed campaign which not only successfully won the election but would also go a long way to destroy the Populists.

After 1896 the populists would never recover. The Peoples Party collapse was as sudden as its rise. Babson notes that in 1896 there were some 1500 newspapers that championed the Populists, by 1904 there were only 25.

### Movement's Social Impact

Among the strengths of *Forgotten Populists* is the way that Babson weaves into the

continued on page 44

# REVIEW

## The Case of Israel:

# Universities Weaponized

By Michael Principe

### Towers of Ivory and Steel:

How Israeli Universities Deny Palestinian Freedom

By Maya Wind

Verso, 2024, 278 pages, \$29.95 paper.

ALL TWELVE OF Gaza's universities now lie in ruins, destroyed within the first 100 days of Israel's ongoing military assault. According to a United Nations report, as of April, Israel had killed thousands of students and teachers as well as 95 university professors.

These numbers are undoubtedly higher at this point. The authors of the report further stated that "it may be reasonable to ask if there is an intentional effort to comprehensively destroy the Palestinian education system, an action known as 'scholasticide.'"

At the same time, on university campuses across the United States and around the world, student led protests and encampments calling for the end of investment in and aid to Israel, as well as a free Palestine have faced repression and violence instigated by their own administrations as well as local and state police.

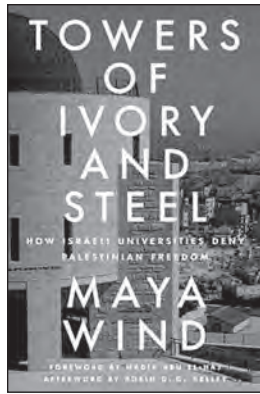
Maya Wind's extraordinary book *Ivory and Steel* was published in January 2024 and written before these recent and ongoing events. As a reader, one gets a near constant sense of temporal dislocation. The book reads as written in the moment, as if to explain why and how education of Palestinians and education about Palestinian liberation struggles would come under attack.

Wind is a Jewish-Israeli citizen, now a Killam Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Her citizenship status allowed her access to Israeli state and military archives that would be unavailable to others.

One suspects that after this book's publication, she will not be given such access in the future. The evidence she compiles for each and every claim is overwhelming and damning of the supposed "liberal" educational institutions in Israel.

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### Serving Settler Colonialism

Wind shows how Israel's universities have been central to the Zionist settler-colonial project from the beginning. Three institutions, beginning with the founding of Hebrew University in 1918, were designed to advance the Zionist movement's territorial aims well before the creation of the state of Israel.

Also, prior to the 1948 war, the leading Zionist militia created a Science Corps to develop the military capacity to aid in the mass expulsion of Palestinians. Each university hosted and supported this project, serving as military training grounds and storing weapons in university buildings.

Wind documents in great detail how Israeli universities continue to "sustain Israeli settler colonialism, military occupation, and apartheid..." as well as being complicit "in the ongoing violation of Palestinian rights as recognized by international law." (16) She does this both by narrating in detail particular disturbing and telling incidents, as well as by accumulating a massive amount of empirical evidence.

The book is divided into two parts, "Complicity" and "Repression." Wind begins part one by outlining how the fundamental structure of academic disciplines, including archaeology, Middle East studies, and law explicitly serve Zionist ends.

Led by Hebrew University, Israeli archeology kicked into high gear in 1967 immediately following Israel's occupation of Palestinian Territory. There are now over 2600 antiquity sites in the occupied West Bank, overseen by the state and staffed by university archaeologists.

Wind documents how the development of these sites has gone hand in hand with military occupation and settler expansion. These sites are often managed by Jewish settler organizations, regularly confiscating Palestinian land in the process, sometimes even constructing parks where tourists can learn about the Jewish history of the area.

Wind cites substantial evidence that this history is the result of bad archaeology, with evidence of Muslim and Arab presence in the

region destroyed or undocumented. Furthermore, she documents the large-scale theft of Palestinian owned artifacts in violation of international law.

These include most famously the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were held at the Palestine Archaeological Museum in East Jerusalem until 1967 when the Museum was seized by the Israeli military.

Israeli archaeologists continue to work on digs in the Qumran caves, where the scrolls were discovered in 1947, in what's now the occupied West Bank — appropriating, studying and displaying additional scrolls.

While most international journals refuse to publish research based on illegal excavation, the Israeli academy has manufactured its own self-enclosed academic infrastructure for research and publication.

### Legal "Innovation" and Orientalism

Within legal studies, Wind shows that Israel has been an "innovator" when it comes to international law. Thus she reports that Israel, in order to "sidestep available legal frameworks, ... argued that it was engaged in what it defined as 'armed conflict short of war,' requiring a new conceptual framework, while also going beyond the traditional distinction between combatants and noncombatants to create a third category: 'persons who appear to be noncombatants but may potentially interfere with Israeli military operations — in reference to Palestinian civilians.'" (35-6)

In this context, philosopher Asa Kasher worked with Major General Amos Yadlon to produce a code of ethics for the IDF legitimizing, among other things, disproportionate killing and targeted assassinations. Israeli academics have successfully promoted these ideas internationally where, like other urban police tactics, they've been picked up by the United States and others.

While Middle East Studies programs are common at major universities, Wind shows how these programs in Israel, amongst the earliest founded at Israeli universities, have been intertwined with state interests and military and surveillance practice. She reports that "this form of expertise is termed *Mizrahanut* (Orientalism, literally translated)," concerned with what the state calls "the other side." (44)

From the beginning, many involved in this academic study of "the other" also held

positions in the security establishment. The Dayan Center, attached to Tel Aviv University, is such a place. Wind reports that it produces memos, journals, and books that “promote racialized tropes about ‘jihad’ and what they routinely call a ‘death worship culture’ in Arab and Muslim societies...”

Wind cites many instances, e.g. Bar-Ilan University Middle East Studies professor and former military Lieutenant Colonel Mordechai Keidar speaking “on Israeli radio to argue that deterrence of a Palestinian insurgent can only be achieved if ‘his sister or mother will be raped.’” (48)

The teaching of Arabic as a “foreign language” is similarly militarized, offering courses tailored for the military. With only three per cent according to Wind of Jewish-Israelis speaking Arabic, the language and its study in university settings is functionally a tool of the security state.

### Built on Ruins

Wind convincingly shows that Israeli universities “were designed as regionally strategic outposts for the Israeli state’s territorial and demographic project.” (59) Hebrew University’s West Jerusalem campus, for example, was built on the ruins of a Palestinian village destroyed in 1948, though the institution’s official narrative indicates that it was built on a “rocky deserted hilltop.” (63)

The university received state funding to employ professional librarians, who trailed soldiers to collect books from Palestinian libraries and private homes, amassing 30,000 books during the war. Another 40,000 were collected in the early 1950s, though more than 26,000 were destroyed, judged “‘inappropriate’ for containing ‘material against the state.’” (64)

Adding insult to injury, Wind reports, some books were sold back to Palestinian schools. Many Palestinian families have since sought to retrieve their books, though their names have been intentionally erased and their efforts have been futile.

With Israel’s 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem, Hebrew University’s Mt. Scopus campus located there was rapidly expanded on a monumental scale with a tall tower dominating the skyline to symbolize, in the words of its lead architect, “I am here, and you cannot remove me.” (66) Palestinian properties in the area continue to be seized, homes demolished, and residents policed.

Wind reports similarly on other Israeli universities. The University of Haifa, with its own 31-story tower soaring over the city, was established in the only area of Israel where Palestinians constitute a majority, specifically to advance “Judaization” of the region. Jewish-only settlements have since expanded in the area, while Palestinian construction has been limited.

Wind describes similar situations else-

where in Israel and at Ariel University in the occupied West Bank, where students are also given academic credit to serve as guards for illegal settlements. (83)

Israeli universities offer over fifty programs of study designed jointly with the military and security apparatus. Wind shows that propaganda or what is in Israel called *hasbara*, holds a comfortable place at these institutions. The University of Haifa houses the Comper Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of anti-Semitism and Racism, which provides academic credit and scholarships for research in combating Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) and the academic boycott of Israel.

Scientific and Technological research at Israeli institutions, Wind shows, are close to fully incorporated into the military and intelligence establishment. Hebrew University runs two degree programs that largely feed the Israeli Intelligence Corps, especially Unit 8200 which heavily surveils the Palestinian population and is “responsible for amassing all intelligence transmission, including phone calls, text messages, and emails.”

This information (financial problems, sexual orientation, medical treatment needed by a loved one, etc.) is used to strong-arm Palestinians into collaboration with the military.

As one Israeli soldier-whistleblower reported, “If you need urgent medical treatment in Israel, the West Bank or abroad — we were looking for you. The state of Israel will let you die before it will let you go for medical treatment without giving information about your wanted cousin.” (104)

### Repression and Revelation

The book’s Part Two, “Repression” begins with a substantial analysis of policing and censorship of research and teaching at Israeli universities, practices that have always been in place but intensified in recent times.

Wind reports that with the declassification of many government documents in 1978, several researchers (dubbed the “new historians” including internationally known scholar Ilan Pappé) challenged the official history regarding the founding of the state of Israel.

Wind describes how this work was met with extreme hostility both inside and outside the academy, leading to these documents being reclassified. In case after case, critical academics have either left the Israeli academy or in some cases decided to toe the line.

Pappé himself left for the University of Exeter in 2006. (Pappé’s own account of the growth of repression and reaction at the University of Haifa is presented in his 2010 book *Out of the Frame. The Struggle for Academic Freedom in Israel* — ed.)

The timeliness of Wind’s book again shows itself insofar as we can note the continuity of intimidation of those who try to speak the truth about Israel, shown by

Ilan Pappé’s detention and interrogation by U.S. federal agents this May upon flying into Detroit.

As Wind reports, “The list of untouchable subjects in Israeli universities has only expanded with rising far-right influence and political power over the past two decades. Most recently, almost any critique of the military or of Israeli soldiers has become taboo on Israeli campuses.” (118)

In 2018 much of this was codified in an academic code of ethics to which philosopher Asa Kasher (author of the IDF code of ethics) contributed. Essentially, “politics” is banned from the classroom. Here “political” means anything that might be construed as at odds with the official state Zionist narrative.

The ultra-Zionist group Im Tirtzu has large student membership on all of Israel’s campuses and helps to monitor and police the academic community. Hebrew University even offers student credit for participation in the group. (129)

### Barriers to Education

Palestinian students have many obstacles placed before them. Since its inception, the education of Palestinians has been a problem for the Israeli state. Wind documents how discussions occurred regularly among state and education officials over whether “properly” educating Palestinians might be a way to control them versus the danger of producing educated radicals.

In any case admission of Palestinian students has been historically limited. Telling is a proposal made by Shmuel Toledano, then the prime minister’s advisor on Arab affairs, at a 1968 conference where he advocated for education of Palestinians, especially women, on the basis that it would lower the Palestinian birth rate, “the demographic issue” being the one that should be prioritized. (149)

Those Palestinian students that do make it to university are heavily policed on campuses that are fully Jewish in their identities. Student organizations are routinely banned, students suspended, and events sponsored by Palestinian students canceled and labeled “security threats.”

When students at Ben Gurion University wished to hold a protest over the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu-Akleh in the West Bank, the administration initially gave permission to hold it in a closed classroom. (160) One can’t but be reminded here of the recent testimony before Congress of Columbia University president Minouche Shafik, demonstrating the “balanced” view that student demonstrators at Columbia who wanted to chant “From the river to the sea...” should do it somewhere people don’t have to hear them.

Higher education in the occupied territories has faced its own sequence of restrictions and attacks. Before 1967, students in

these areas traveled to universities across the Middle East, to the Soviet Union, the United States, and elsewhere. Because such travel was restricted with the military occupation, Palestinians had to form their own system of higher education.

Wind documents in case after case how, from the moment of the founding of Palestinian universities, each institution was perceived as a potential site of Palestinian resistance and hence monitored, attacked and bombed.

Today's destruction of universities in Gaza is a continuation of ongoing practice. Wind writes: "In offensives on the Gaza Strip, the Israeli military has repeatedly targeted Palestinian universities and colleges in aerial and land strikes, killing and injuring students, faculty, and staff. The strikes continually destroy campus infrastructure, which is rebuilt and then again devastated." (176)

Again, Wind provides so many examples occurring over such a long period of time, that she more than justifies her statement: "With Palestinian education regarded as a threat to Israeli rule, Palestinian universities are defined as military targets." (178)

Palestinian student groups are regularly labeled terrorist organizations and student leaders arrested. Again, Wind details many instances. In December 2019, Birzeit University student council president Shatha Hassan

was arrested in the middle of the night and held for five months without charges being brought.

In another case, in January 2022, a military raid on a student council meeting led to the arrest of five people and the wounding of one with live ammunition. (187) The list goes on. But as Wind emphasizes, so does the brave struggle of Palestinian students even in the face of violence, detention and torture.

Wind concludes that a reckoning with the role Israeli universities have played in Palestinian oppression is "overdue." After Israel's brutal and genocidal attack on Gaza, one hopes that international pressure will mount to force this reckoning.

### Broadening the Perspective

While Wind fully accomplishes her task of showing "How Israeli Universities deny Palestinian Freedom," the completed text also reaches beyond itself. In her brief epilogue and in an Afterword by Robin D. G. Kelley, the analysis is extended and universalized.

Going beyond Israel, Wind reports that across three continents Anglo settler states developed institutions of higher learning through appropriation of 15 million acres of Indigenous lands: "These settler states used the lands to either build or finance their institutions of higher education, which became

known as land-grant universities, termed 'land grab universities' by Indigenous peoples." (194)

In the United States today, of course, even small movements internal to the university seeking to confront this legacy would fuel current rightwing attacks on education. Kelley's Afterword engages with these recent attacks, both more broadly and specifically with regard to the Palestinian question.

While Wind writes that Israeli faculty have largely, when they are not active defenders of state policies, chosen to remain silent about these policies, Kelley makes the same claim regarding liberals in the United States. He writes, "Liberal silence, not just the Zionist lobby" explains how states have passed laws demonizing BDS and criticism of Israel as antisemitic.

Kelley emphasizes that part of the lesson we can draw from Wind's book is that colleges and universities everywhere are crucial sites of power and struggle. States and ruling classes are fully aware of this. At the moment, students are recognizing their power and attempting to make enough noise to disrupt liberal silence. One can only hope that the current protests on campuses will continue and extend to further political engagements and radicalizations. ■

## Turning Left in the Heartland — *continued from page 41*



Cartoon of farmer losing his corn to the landlord, money-lord, railroad magnate and politician, *The Representative*, 1895.

history of the Populists the story of their impact on women, African Americans, and the labor movement. Each was affected by the Populist movement and the Populists affected each.

Babson quotes one Texas populist "Ladies! Listen! We have no right to vote, but we have the right to talk, thank God."

Some 250,000 women joined the Party. Susan B. Anthony attended the 1894 Kansas State Party convention that endorsed women's suffrage. Indeed, it was the Populists who brought women's suffrage to Colorado and Idaho.

The Populists often hoped for an alliance with the labor movement, at this time largely embodied by the Knights of Labor. The Knights combined the economic and political program and activities of trade unions with the organizational scheme of secret benevolent societies like the Masons or the Oddfellows.

But the Knights moment came in the late 1880s and by the mid-'90s was a shrunken shadow of its former self, and faction ridden to boot. The potential for a Farmer and Labor alliance as the basis for a powerful reform movement evaporated.

The story of Populists and African Americans is a more complex one. Babson tells us that "It would be the new party's opening to African Americans that made it especially unique." Camp meetings, picnics and barbeques were organized for Black farmers. White and Black were welcome at Party rallies, although seating was separate.

More advanced Populists argued, in effect, for political equality but not for social equality. Any equality enraged the Southern Democratic elite, and the imposition of Jim Crow laws went hand in hand with voter suppression and violence against Populists, Black or white. (29-30)

By Election Day 1896 the Populists were in a downward spiral. They were outmaneuvered by the Democrats and victimized

by Democratic Party violence and electoral fraud on the one hand, and on the other by the Republican campaign of fear-mongering that painted Bryan as a dangerous Populist. The movement's moment slipped away.

Babson concludes by tracing the use of the term "populism" in American political theory and usage.

"Even fascists were said to be 'populistic' because they championed the same polarizing style of political rhetoric: one in which the 'common people' are urged to oppose a 'corrupt elite.' This anti-elitist phrasing is supposedly populism's defining feature." (47)

Babson wants the record set straight about the true populists of U.S. history. While this is a brief text, the author supplies extensive endnotes that provide references to the vast scholarly literature. And although rural America today is completely changed, "The Gilded Age still echoes in our time. By 2017, three men, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Warren Buffet, owned more wealth than 160 million Americans." (50)

The numerous illustrations in both black-and-white and color are a valuable addition to the text. They highlight the ordinary people who animated this extraordinary movement. Babson's book is the story of the farmers who stood up for themselves and for democracy. *Forgotten Populists* is a fine introduction to this movement and this moment. ■

union and nonunion.

That Includes for example an estimated half of working Teamsters, which explains why Teamster president Sean O'Brien turned up to speak at the Republican convention, leaving delegates a bit unsure what to make of his denunciation of companies' and "both parties'" trampling on working people's rights. (To be sure, they got over it quickly enough.)

On the other side, UAW president Shawn Fain doubled down on the union's early endorsement of Biden, then instantly and predictably came out for Harris. What's regrettably missing in each case is an open, democratic discussion within the unions' memberships about whom they would support, including possible third-party options — the kind of healthy activating process that's urgently needed as we increasingly witness a reckoning moment for the future of labor and progressive politics.

While the working-class Republican vote is certainly disproportionately (not exclusively) white, this cannot be attributed *solely* to racism, Christian fundamentalism, the appeal of Hulk Hogan or other glib conventional explanations, although these are real factors. The plain fact — as we aren't unique in pointing out — is that both capitalist parties for four decades have embraced a gospel of globalization, deregulation and technocracy that left behind huge sectors of the population, abandoned whole regions of rural and smaller-town America, and widened inequality to the most obscene levels.

We might add here that these are generally the communities most heavily impacted by climate-induced disasters, while drill-baby-drill politicians spew contempt on any programs ("Green New Scam") or regulations that might alleviate the slide toward ecocide.

Housing, access to education, medical care, food security and hopes for a decent future are slipping away from tens of millions of people. A shocking proportion of U.S. households (37% by some accounts, although the statistic's meaning is contested) would scramble to meet a \$400 emergency expense. It's not so much a question of absolute poverty as one of deepening anxiety, insecurity and fear that naturally gave rise to resentments that can be readily manipulated by rightwing opportunist fake-"populism."

None of this is exactly "breaking news." Bernie Sanders has been talking for decades about the ravages of policies that enrich "the billionaire class" and "the one percent" at the expense of the great majority. Reverend William Barber of the New Poor Peoples Campaign eloquently appeals for a multiracial movement drawing on the reality that a majority of the poor and insecure in America are white.

The Democratic Party is institutionally uninterested in the moderate social-democratic reforms that have made Bernie Sanders overwhelmingly popular — Medicare for all (single-payer health care), free public college tuition, stopping corporate welfare. Still less is the Democratic establishment prepared to embrace Rev. Barber's movement in the streets.

In the absence of appeals to genuine pro-worker and yes, authentic populist solutions, false and even crazy explanations arise — not spontaneously, but from the bottomless lagoon of the rightwing conspiracy industry: inflation is rampant (in fact it's easing), crime is skyrocketing (actually it's falling, despite weekly mass shootings), the border crisis is Biden's creation (it's 100% bipartisan), illegal immigrants are bringing

a crime and drug wave, and voting in droves (they aren't, of course), and on and on.

Facing the most anti-labor, plutocratic and anti-civil rights Republican Party in at least 80 years, the Democrats can only turn to the stereotypical "suburban moms" to compensate for the erosion of their labor voting base and weakening of support in other sectors, especially the critical and growing Latine communities.

Ever since the unhinged Supreme Court *Dobbs* ruling, the Democrats have been able to ride a wave of energy for abortion rights, which may save them in 2024 as well. African American women, who were essential to Biden's 2020 election, will provide a critical base of support rallying around Kamala Harris. Trump's obscene questioning "when did she *turn Black?*" signals how dirty the attacks will become.

### **Crisis for the Left**

Again, we are not talking a stand here on the voting options discussed in the opinion pieces in this issue of *Against the Current*, on which we'll welcome readers' thoughts. Here we will comment briefly on a perennial issue vexing the left in this country.

In our previous issue (#231, July-August 2024), Part One of historian August Nimtz's extensive exploration of "What Does It Mean to Vote?" (the second part appears in this issue) lays out a lesson that Karl Marx learned as long ago as 1850: the working class and the revolutionary party should never subordinate its independent electoral expression to supporting a liberal or lesser-evil bourgeois choice.

That is excellent guidance, then and now. Sadly, in the United States of America, the most politically backward country in the "developed" capitalist world, *there is no working-class party of any stripe* — small, medium or large, reformist or revolutionary or anything in between. Nor is there a populist or mass movement party on the immediate horizon.

Politics in the United States, with some local exceptions, remain trapped in the Republican and Democratic capitalist duopoly. The Green Party is a progressive option, which still represents *potential* rather than class-based reality.

Breaking from the grip of the two capitalist parties is partly a task for the socialist left, but will depend more critically on the emergence of mass social insurgencies of labor and oppressed people's communities.

The outcome of the November election may, or may not, stave off the immediate prospect of a full-blooded far-right presidency with its sickening consequences for democratic rights in the United States, for any hope of environmental policy, for forces of democracy and social justice in many parts of the world.

What will not change are the enormous inequalities that are choking our society, the ever-expanding military budget, and escalating tensions with rivals for world imperialist domination and always present apocalypse.

We see in today's upsurge in solidarity for Palestinian freedom — as we've seen before in the struggles for marriage equality, Queer and trans rights and the response to racist police brutality — that organized movements from below do make a difference in politics. Whether in resistance to Trump's semi-fascism or in confronting another Democratic administration, our movement-building responsibilities remain paramount. ■

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